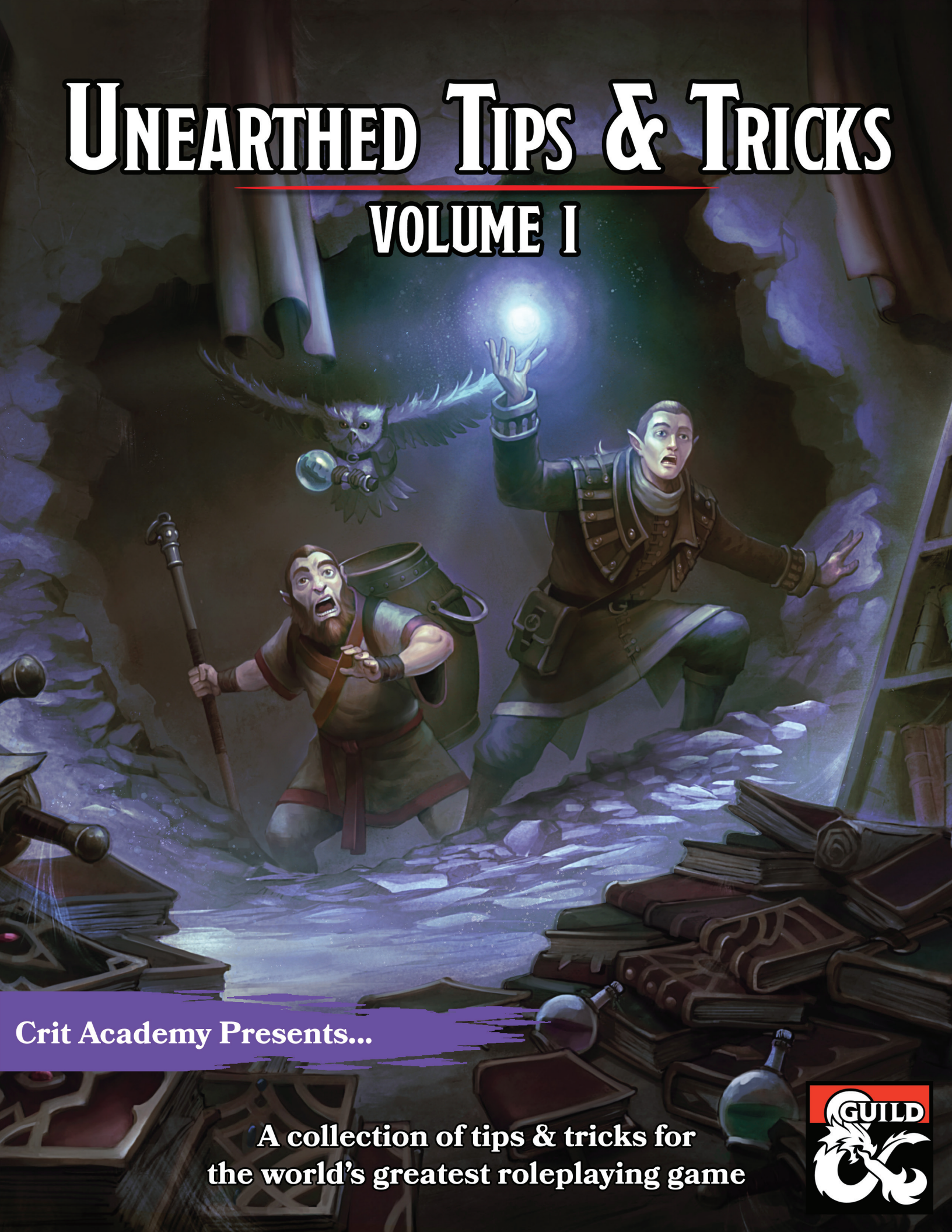


UNEARTHED TIPS & TRICKS

VOLUME I



Crit Academy Presents...

A collection of tips & tricks for
the world's greatest roleplaying game





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INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome, hero! Thank you for taking the time to check out our collection of Unearthed Tips and Tricks or UTT's. You may be asking yourself, "What in the nine hells is Unearthed Tips & Tricks?" Well, for that we must take you on a journey deep into the confusing labyrinth of our minds. Unearthed Tips & Tricks is a collection of concepts and ideas from our podcast: Crit Academy. Crit Academy was born of an idea. We believed there was a need for a resource that players and DMs could listen to that would provide valuable information, guidance, and inspiration, but was also a fun and entertaining listening experience.

We decided that we would need a nice layout that appealed to all of our listeners (lovingly named Crit Nation). Our show launched with three different segments, each with a different goal and source of inspiration. The three segments ended up really fitting well together.

In our first segment, "Let's Talk About Blank," we discuss topics sent to us by Crit Nation. We discuss one of the rules or deliberate a situation that a player is struggling with. You can think of this as the bread of our podcast sandwich. We love these submissions as every table is different! We enjoy a healthy debate, so encourage those who have a differing opinion to contact our complaint department. There you'll find someone to review your disagreement; the waitlist is long, however, so attaching a \$5 payment can expedite your complaint to the front of the line (wink). In all seriousness, Crit Nation responses give us the opportunity to learn about problems that others experience. This allows us to come up with a solution long before we actually experience the problem.

Our second segment is our main topic. This is the meat of our podcast sandwich. We discuss rules, roleplaying techniques, and the work of various special guests from the D&D community. Our most popular and recurring topic, Class Analysis, involves a step by step elaboration of class options, features, and mechanics. We talk about how we envision the classes working and how we re flavor them to give them a more unique feel.

After long nights at the Brainstorm Inn with

several pints of our favorite Bourbontoe ale and a hearty meal of fresh bread and cheese, we decided on what we believed to be ideas that anyone could use to enhance their gaming experience. The final segment of our podcast was born: Unearthed Tips and Tricks. This is the special sauce that makes our podcast sandwich taste its absolute best. The goal was a bit more brazen as it required us to delve deep into our creative juices and introduce new concepts and ideas for Crit Nation.

Our goal is to bring new and reusable content for you to use. What kind of content do we want to hear? What things do we wish we knew when we started? What are some lessons we've learned over the years that we could pass on? What are our favorite aspects of D&D? We decided to build the segment around several different things. It started with our favorite player and DM tips and tricks - advice we've learned over many years. Then we moved to character concepts; we all love compulsively building characters, right? We offer fun and interesting ideas that you could use whether or not they were optimized. We added magic items and tools that could be used to enhance our characters' and villains' uniqueness. The next step was to comment on the lifeblood of the roleplay game: encounters. Finally, we're a huge fan of custom monsters, but it's massive work to take on completely customizing them and ensuring they are well balanced. When we run our games, we prefer to use existing monsters as templates. We add new features to make them a little special compared to their Monster Manual counterparts. Thus, our monster variant was added to round off our UTT's.

This book is a compilation of some of our show's first UTT's. They're a summary of the discussions we've had together. We want players and DMs to be able to flip open a section and get inspiration for their game. Remember, our UTT's are designed to inspire you. When you find a concept you like, make sure to add your own flair to enhance them, mold them, and nurture them until you make them your own.

If you enjoy our content and wish to check out our show visit www.critacademy.com. Follow us on facebook and twitter @critacademy, or email us at critacademy@gmail.com.



CHARACTER CONCEPTS

We all love creating characters. Some players would argue that character creation is the best aspect of D&D.

Whether we are watching a new personality evolve as we put them through complex trials and tribulations, or dropping a character into a morally ambiguous situation to work out what decision they would make in that situation, the process is always a pure joy. Keep in mind, characters change and evolve as a campaign carries on. When you pick your character concept, ensure they are a bit flexible, and leave room for growth.

Some players prefer to build a purely effective character. Making a character for effectiveness alone is known as optimization. These players may not have as much interest in personality and development, and that is a perfectly acceptable form of play. Either way, we have to pick a starting point, and, for some, that can be difficult. The following section contains a large list of character ideas. Some options require a specific class or race, while others do not. Keep in mind you can change these in most cases to fit your needs and playstyle. When choosing a character concept for inspiration, be sure to add your own special flair to help bring them to life.

EPISODE 1: LONG LIVED

Age is a commonly overlooked part of character creation. Ancient characters may know much more about the world than younglings, but they see the world through an outdated lense. This character is a ridiculously old, elf druid. He's stopped counting, or forgotten, exactly how old he is. Most folk know him as the 'senile old man,' but, over many centuries, he's stored more knowledge than most could ever hope to possess.

This character can be a fun NPC to add flavor to a scene, but he can also bring a unique dynamic to your party as a PC. This character likely won't take instruction well from his younger allies, but he can provide useful information regarding the lore of the world. He remembers events that transpired centuries ago - long before the other PCs were even born! Not only that, but he might take credit for things that seem timeless to other characters: like 'that shillelagh spell that all the druids use these days.'



You might play this character in a campy fashion, having him refer to ancient dragons as ‘young whippersnappers,’ or you might awe and inspire with solemn descriptions of the layout of towns as they were centuries ago. The elf could be senile, or he could simply have given up on keeping track of the mundane events that pass him by.

If you want to play this character, your race should be an elf (as they can live up to 750 years). Your class should be druid because at 18th level druids gain the “Timeless Body” feature; this means that for every 10 years that pass the character only ages 1 year. Since elves reach adulthood at 100, you’re looking at a maximum age of 6,600 years old!

EPISODE 2: THE UN-FAMILIAR

The un-familiar is a powerful mage who has been polymorphed into an animal that is commonly used as a familiar (such as an owl or toad). This curse keeps her trapped in a beast form, and she’s been searching for a way to break the spell ever since. She is so ashamed of her form that she has come to live vicariously through the bodies of others. She accomplishes this by using mind-control to force her victims into doing her bidding. The people she steals become the wizard, and she disguises herself as their familiar whilst secretly running the show.

As each body starts to get more and more worn out, it might be necessary to source a new physical form. You’ll have to ditch the body somewhere secret, and pick up a replacement in a suitably sneaky fashion! You’ll also have to come up with a reason for your frequently changing appearance. For example, you might claim to be a shifter.

Once the party discovers the truth, they might be faced with a moral dilemma. How do they feel about you stealing people from their lives? Are you using the party to find a cure for your curse, or do you enjoy their company?

There’s two ways to go about playing this character. The first is to make them a high-level spellcaster. Casting dominate person with an 8th level spell slot allows it to last for eight hours, giving you plenty of time to go about

your adventuring day. You can use this spell to have your body act out the actions you would take in combat, including the vocal and somatic components of any other spells you cast, but be careful not to break concentration!

If you want to play this character at lower levels, your best bet is to talk with your DM beforehand and work something out with them. It could be that your character has a magic item that lets them control certain creatures, or maybe your DM might just say that you have a natural ability that lets you do so. In either case, when and where it can be used should be left largely up to the DM, so your ability doesn’t seem too overpowered. Lastly, you could just use your abilities as flavor-text and work with your DM on what happens if the familiar is destroyed (you might roll on the short term madness table or do something similar). Perhaps the mind control effect doesn’t wear off for a while, and the destruction of the familiar is the character retreating into a pocket dimension until he can return.

CHARACTER
CONCEPTS



EPISODE 3: WIZARD DEBT

When thinking of a backstory for your wizard, consider how they managed to afford their arcane tuition. Perhaps they still owe a lot of money to their kingdom or to a patron who holds it over them. Do they intend to pay back the money, or will they just stay away long enough for their benefactor to forget?

Do you still owe the Academy hundreds of gold pieces for all that time you spent slaving over scrolls and manuscripts? Do you feel like you wasted your time staring at those dusty pages with nothing to show for it but debt? Well, you're not alone. There are hundreds of other wizards just like you. You've spent years poring over tomes, taking tests, and completing challenges, and for what?! Just to be stuck for the rest of your life, paying them as a thank you? Pfft. Forget that!

Obviously you need to start figuring things out on your own. You may end up blowing up and losing a few limbs, but it's better than being a financial slave to the kingdom! It's robbery! You'll end up having to take to adventuring to make the money to pay them back, or else you'd be avoiding harassment from the kingdom's officials.

All wizards do it: they say they're out for adventure and to learn new things. We know they're just running from their kingdoms so they don't have to pay the bill.

EPISODE 4: DEPRESSED MEDIC

Most people imagine a healer as being an altruistic, friendly cleric who is always looking for the best in people. What if, instead, they follow their own definitions of good and evil and only help or aid people that they feel are truly worthy?

This character was once a combat medic, but he was discharged from the military when it was discovered he suffered from severe depression. After his discharge, he began seeing evil everywhere, and he took up a mighty maul and vowed to rid the world of evil wherever he saw it. If he caught a thief, he'd break a hand or two so they couldn't thieve again. Not everyone agrees with his methods, so he's not always welcome in every party.



EPISODE 5: DRUNKEN MASTER

The concept of a Drunken Master isn't anything new - it's an archetype for the Monk class and has existed in fiction for decades. But why stop at Monks and martial artists? Any character can be an example of a Drunken Master; all it takes is to have them act in unexpected ways, stumble around to catch opponents off guard, and make it look like their deft maneuvering is an accident. Maybe your Wizard begins to cast a spell, but he trips and falls at the last second sending a "Firebolt" directly into the opponent's sneering face. A fighter could move to stab an enemy with his sword, but instead he slips the blade (and the hand holding it) harmlessly past the enemy's chest to grab them in a bear hug and slam them onto the floor.

Just take the idea behind the Drunken Master - unpredictable, confusing footwork, and clever application of reactionary combat - and apply it to any class or character type you want. You can even talk with your DM about reskinning common weapons (such as a club or a short sword) into barroom staples (like a wooden stool or a shattered bottle) to let you fight with weapons you're proficient in while still sticking to the theme.

EPISODE 6. BREAKER OF THE 4TH WALL

Imagine it. One day you're packing up your D&D books and heading off to your weekly gaming session, but on the way some sort of magical explosion occurs. Next thing you know, you're dodging horse-drawn carriages and being yelled at by elves and dwarves trying to push their way past you. Could it be? Could you have somehow been... pulled into the game?

Imagine playing a modern-day person from the real world who has been transported into a D&D campaign. On one hand, everything - magic, dragons, gold, and treasure - is new and exciting to them. On the other hand, the "character" knows that the world is fictional, and they have no clue how to get back. Also, no running water is going to get real annoying real fast.

What class is your character? How do their abilities from "real life" translate in-game? Maybe they're a bard, and by singing real-life

songs they can produce insane magical effects. Maybe they're a Cleric and they gain their divine power not from their devotion to a god, but their devotion to the game that they know they've been transported into. This character concept probably lends itself more easily to a less serious campaign, but with a bit of work it could bring some unique flair to any group.

EPISODE 7: LEGENDARY SMITH

Lots of players make characters who craft their own gear, but imagine if your character was more than just an ordinary craftsman. What if it was their life's goal - or, better yet, their destiny - to prove that they're the best craftsman that ever lived?

There's a few traits that can aid this cause. Maybe whenever your character goes to a new city, they search for the most prestigious and skilled smith in the area and challenge them to a competition of skills. Maybe, after exhausting every effort to improve their natural skill, they multiclass into Wizard so that they can begin to imbue their creations with magical power. For this character, crafting is more than just a hobby or even a profession. It's their life; it is everything they are.

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EPISODE 8: TITLE COLLECTOR

It's common for your character to have a host of accomplishments that they've added to their reputation. Imagine if your character took this to heart and insisted that they receive the praise and acclaim they deserve.

Every time you achieve something noteworthy, keep track of your exploits (either in-character or out). When introducing yourself, don't simply announce yourself as "Rondok." Instead, you are "Rondok, Slayer of Kings and Dragons, Breaker of Worlds, Defender of Nations, Liberator of Slaves, Bane of Demons, Banger of Women..." Keep a list if you need to, and make sure to announce every single title as often as possible. You can't let even one commoner forget who you are and why you should be praised!

You might even find yourself specifically seeking out quests that you know will bring you a worthwhile title. Sure, you could rescue the princess, but you already rescued a princess a while back and it would seem gauche to use the same title twice. There's that portal to the Abyss that needs to be closed; it's a bit more dangerous, but hey, it'll get you a new title...

EPISODE 9: MERRIC BOURBONTOE

Merric Bourbontoe was a halfling monk who became a world-renowned ale brewer. His ale was said to be so good that people would break into his brewery and steal it. In order to defend himself, Merric taught himself to fight, and once he could fight he became an adventurer to help support his brewery.

At every tavern Merric encountered he would ply his wares. He'd talk himself up, and educate everyone about the virtues of his delicious Bourbontoe bourbon. He'd even supply free drinks whenever he was victorious on a quest. Eventually other adventurers (other players in other campaigns) would ask for Bourbontoe by name, and tavern keepers would attract customers by advertising that they had the best Bourbontoe in the land.

Merric Bourbontoe was a specific character, but you can follow in his footsteps - so to speak by making your own character with a clearly-defined niche in the world (such as creator of a unique product, practitioner of a unique trade,

and so on) that makes an effort to bring their craft or product out into the world. Before you know it, other players in other campaigns will be asking for your product wherever they go!

EPISODE 10: UNWITTING NOBLE

You've received some terrible news: your family, nobles of the highest pedigree living in the capitol, have just been executed by the king. According to the public reports, they were accused of treason for attempting a coup. You know this is untrue, so you've been journeying across the land to drum up support against the unjust regime that would assassinate an innocent noble family and slander an honest bloodline in such a way!

However, as it turns out, your family WAS attempting a coup, and the king's execution of them was just. You don't know that. You'll probably find out some day, but only at the end of a long campaign of political intrigue. Work with your DM to bring about this reveal. You may even want to consult the DM before creating your character (away from the rest of the players) so that it will be kept secret from the rest of the players until the moment when the final reveal happens. It may require a lot of buildup to make it work, but this background can provide a unique twist to the typical Noble character background.



EPISODE 11: THE MIME

The battle begins, and the bandits begin to close in from every direction. The fighter readies her blade, the cleric grips his holy symbol, and the wizard clutches his staff, but the bard reaches behind his back and pantomimes grabbing an invisible rope to toss at the nearest foe. Suddenly, the foe's body contorts: his arms become stuck to the sides of his body as he stares down in disbelief. The bard gives the "rope" a tug, and the foe jerks forward. He's barely able to keep his balance, and the rest of the bandits look around in confusion giving the party just the edge they need to attack!

The Mime is essentially just a re-flavoring of the Bard, but they turn their Bardic Performance into a pantomime rather than music. Vicious Mockery is a great spell to get creative with. What better way to deal your psychic damage or cause your foe to miss their next attack than by pretending to choke your foe from the other side of the room? This character concept could even work for a character who is unable to speak; they could use their pantomime out of combat as their primary means of communication. Have fun with it!

EPISODE 12: CONVERTED ORC

The storm season has begun, and a family is trying desperately to make it to the next city before it gets too dark. As the roads devolve into rivers of mud, the family hears a cracking sound and their wagon sinks into the muck. The front axle is broken. Just when they thought things couldn't get any worse, they look to the horizon and see their worst nightmare: a savage orc with a blade strapped to his back. He stalks along the road towards them, and he is silhouetted against the sky and momentarily illuminated by a nearby lightning strike. As they reach for weapons and fear this orc will slaughter them all, the brute waves a greeting. Rather than draw his blade, he grabs hold of the broken axle and helps drag the wagon over the hill towards town.

This character concept doesn't have to be an orc. Any type of normally-savage character (orc, ogre, violent tribal humans, etc.) would do. This character had some moment of awakening that

caused them to change their ways. Maybe they were hit by a curse from an enemy spellcaster that addled their brain. Maybe they found an intelligent sword that holds the spirit of a paladin that urges them to be a better person. Maybe they simply befriended a child and the young one's innocence and optimism has become infectious. Whatever the case, this character is making an effort to help people rather than hurt them. Sometimes they help travelers who are waylaid on their journey. Sometimes they help defend a town from bandits or others of their own kind that seek to destroy. Maybe a flood is coming, and they help build barriers to keep the town safe. Whatever the case, the people around them may feel apprehensive towards them at first, but eventually they will grow to love and support the character as they prove themselves.

The Converted Orc could be a PC, and their moment of awakening could be the jumping-off point for a campaign. Or they could be an NPC, and the players might be the first people to see them as a potential ally. Whatever you do, this character is a great opportunity to break some stereotypes and show players that not all monsters are monsters.

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EPISODE 13: PERSONAL SPACE

Have you ever known a person who simply had no concept of personal space? They get way too close when talking to you, they reach in front of your face to grab things, they take some of your food without asking, and so on?

This is that person. There isn't much to this character concept mechanically, but it leaves the doors wide open for roleplay. Maybe your character is a grappler and grapples other characters without even realizing it. Maybe they like to use the Shove action to move other people out of the way. They could have a high Intimidate skill because nobody wants to be around them, or they could have high Persuasion because they're good at getting people to do what they want through their... force of personality.

EPISODE 14: OBLIVIOUS OBSERVANT

The adventurers are walking through the dreaded Tomb of Horrors. They slowly make their way from room to room being careful not to fall victim to one of its legendary deathtraps. While the rest of the party is investigating a big, green, demonic face carved into the wall, the bard decides to take a breather by leaning up against a wall. Suddenly, the wall swivels open and leads to a new passageway! A few moments later, a trap is triggered and poison darts start firing from the walls themselves. The bard, however, doesn't notice because he just bent down to wipe a scuff mark off of his shoe, and the darts harmlessly fly overhead.

The Oblivious Observant is a character who, despite his stats indicating that he may be very good at Perception, Investigation, History or so on, is completely oblivious and often notices clues or solves problems through sheer dumb

EPISODE 1S: MASTER OF WEAPONS

We've all seen the fighter who specializes in one specific sword, passed down through his family line for generations. With that sword, he's unmatched in combat, and he will avenge the death of his grandfather and save the land from evil. Imagine if, one day, he runs into something that's immune to slashing damage, or it destroys any weapon that touches it. That fighter is going to be in a tough spot, isn't he?

This character concept is the opposite. Rather than focusing on using one weapon, this character focuses on using ALL weapons. Longsword? Check. Crossbow? Check. Light mace? Check. Ransur? I don't know what that is, but check. Siangham? I don't think that exists anymore (or ever, historically speaking) but sure, check. If you can kill an enemy with it, the Master of Weapons wants one and probably has proficiency with it. Simply owning the weapons isn't enough, too. The Master of Weapons is going to use their weapons whenever possible by swapping out weapons every round and even supplying extras for party members that were disarmed or had their weapons destroyed by an ooze or lava worm.

Why is the Master of Weapons so obsessed? It could just be that they want to be prepared for every situation, and having multiple weapons of various damage types and ranges is a good way to accomplish that. It could be something as lofty as having a life goal of someday owning one of every type of weapon in the world or wanting to train in every fighting style that exists. Whatever the case, you can always tell when the Master of Weapons is near because of that unique jangling of a dozen different weapons rubbing against each other. The party's home base is sure to have an entire wall decorated with thirty different varieties of one-handed d8 slashing weapons.

luck. When you succeed on a roll (be it a skill check, saving throw, attack roll, whatever) you can re-flavor the result so that instead of doing something on purpose, you do it because you were distracted by something you saw. Avoiding a fireball might involve you tripping over a rock as the fire passes over you, or maybe you found out how to deactivate a trap because you were picking your nose and wiped it off on the switch that controlled the hall of spinning blades.

If your character has a high stat modifier on your character sheet, that doesn't mean they have to be skilled in-game. A success on a roll is a success, so work with your DM to find fun ways to play out those successes. You might even want to hide some details of your character from the rest of the players. Imagine if, halfway through a year-long campaign, you find out that it was all planned out by the player ahead of time!



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CONCEPTS

EPISODE 16: MONSTER RIGHTS ACTIVIST

You've been hired to clear the local mine of kobolds, so you pack up your weapons and armor and head off with your adventuring party. After you slay kobold after kobold, you kick over a crude barricade and raise your weapon with the intent to kill, and you see a clutch of baby kobolds cowering in fear behind their wounded mother who is guarding them with her body. Are you going to kill them, or are you going to let them go? After all, they're just monsters... right?

The Monster Rights Activist is a character who seeks not to slay monsters but to find a way to coexist with them. Not all monsters be they humanoids, or aberrations, or magical beasts are mindless killing machines. Many of them have hopes, dreams, social structures, and so on. Who are we to say which ones should or shouldn't die? How do we know WE aren't the monsters?

A Monster Rights Activist could be of any race and class, and there doesn't even need to be a unifying method of how they do what they do. They might focus on subduing enemies rather than killing them (either by knocking them unconscious in melee or by casting spells to paralyze them or put them to sleep), or they might try to go against the rest of the party by sneaking ahead and warning monsters that an adventuring party is coming. If they can get a family of gnolls to a safe place before someone comes through and kills them all, then they consider that a job well done.

EPISODE 17: "MY" ADVENTURES

Imagine you find yourself in town on downtime between adventures. While there, you pass by a tavern and hear a familiar voice from within. Stepping inside, you see one of your companions, Gilbert the bard, surrounded by locals as he tells a heroic story about slaying a red dragon and saving a princess from certain doom. You remember the adventure well; you have a huge scar across your back from one of the dragon's claws, and if it weren't for you, Gilbert would have been swallowed whole. Gilbert hasn't noticed you, so you lean against the door jamb listening to the tale. Then you begin to notice that not all of the details line up. You were the one that killed the dragon's henchmen, but Gilbert is saying he did it. The party Cleric untied the princess and got her to safety, but Gilbert is attributing that to him as well. You're shocked to hear about how HE saved YOU from being swallowed by the dragon!

You clench your fists and start making your way towards him to interrupt his story and get Gilbert to set the story straight, but then he starts telling another tale - a tale of fending off werewolves in a faraway forest - and you remember him telling you that story when you first met. In fact, that story was the entire reason you brought him into the party in the first place! You begin to realize... Gilbert's no stranger to stealing people's stories.



This character concept is about someone who constantly tells tales of martial prowess and clever thinking, but they often mix the details up a bit so that most (if not all) of the glory goes to the storyteller rather than the person who actually performed the feat. While these tall tales can be used maliciously, to steal glory and to fool followers into buying drinks and giving gifts, this can also be used as a clever tactic to conceal one's identity and throw off would-be assassins and spies. The rogue, for instance, might not want stories of his unscrupulous dealings becoming public, but if he changes up some details and attributes those dealings to the party fighter, then there's an easy scapegoat if and when consequences start piling up. At that point, the rogue can be ready with an escape plan, having expected this all along.

EPISODE 18: SPELLS FROM A HAT

Being a spellcaster is a lot of work. You've got so many spell slots, so many spells known and/or in your spellbook, and you have to prepare them ahead of time. How are you supposed to choose when you don't even know what's going to happen that day?

The solution: Spells From A Hat! Write out your spells on individual slips of paper and put them in a bag (or a hat, if you have one). When it's your turn and you want to cast a spell, reach in, grab a spell, and pray to your character's deity that it turns out to be a good one!

Maybe there's an injured kobold that's about to run away, so you whip out the hat, reach in, and cast... FIREBALL! Not only did you obliterate the kobold, but you're in the forest and now it looks like some trees are on fire. Whoops... Maybe your ally is wounded and you're the healer of the group, so you come over, speak some words of healing, and cast... THAUMATURGY! Now you can shrug at your wounded ally with glowing eyes and magnified voice

while they ask why you didn't heal them.

Obviously this character concept isn't meant to be balanced or even effective in combat. This concept can usher a player into needing to get more creative with solutions. You must find a way to utilize any spell, in any situation.

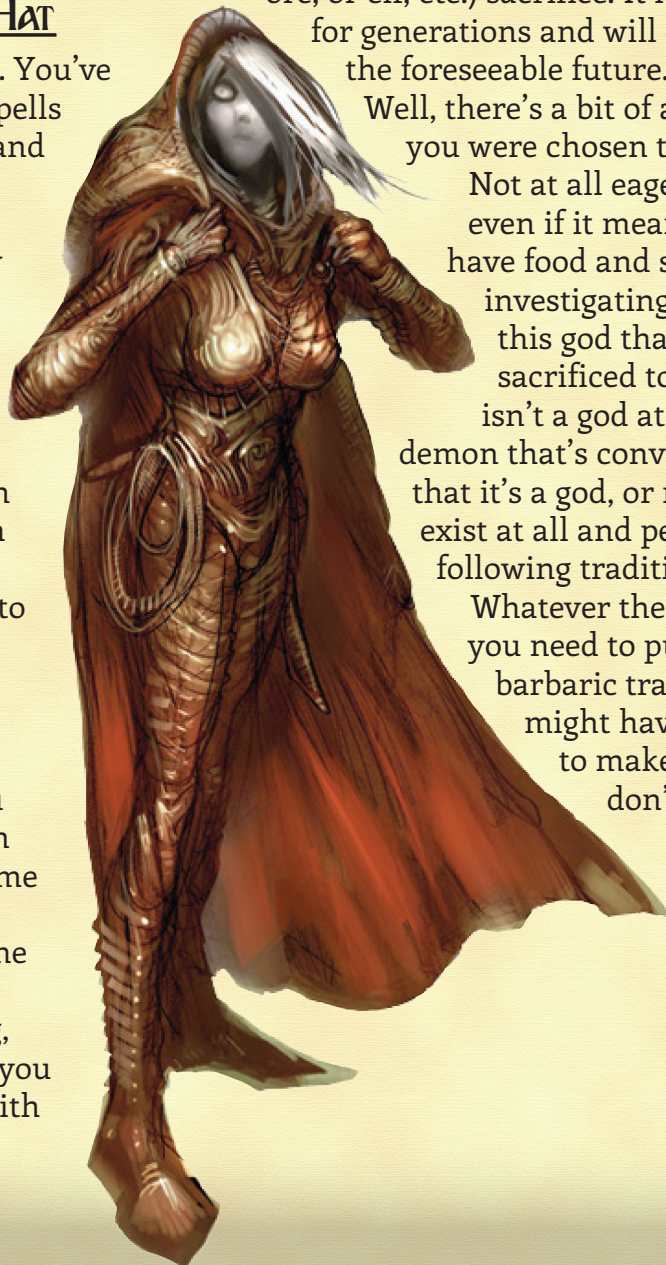
EPISODE 19: THE CHOSEN

Your character has lived all their life in a village or region that has long revered a deity that watches over the land. When the harvest is bountiful, the god is praised for its benevolence and people celebrate. When the winters are long or the rivers flood, the god is angry. When those times come, the people of your village perform a sacrifice to this god. Not just any sacrifice - a human (or orc, or elf, etc.) sacrifice. It has been tradition for generations and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

Well, there's a bit of a snag. This year, you were chosen to be that sacrifice.

Not at all eager to be killed, even if it means your family will have food and shelter, you began investigating... and it turns out this god that people have been sacrificed to over the years isn't a god at all. Maybe it's a demon that's convinced the villagers that it's a god, or maybe it doesn't exist at all and people are just following tradition.

Whatever the case, you know you need to put an end to this barbaric tradition, and you just might have to kill a demon to make it happen... if you don't get killed first.



EPISODE 20: PUN-ISHER

The party is fighting a vicious pit fiend, and its raw power is starting to tip the balance in the demon's favor. Then the sorcerer lifts his magical staff, begins chanting words of power, and summons mana from the weave and shapes it into his next spell. He points his staff at the devil and causes a blast of freezing energy to erupt from his fingers. The beast is covered in frost and rooted to the ground. As the effect finishes, the sorcerer puts on his Goggles of Night and says...

"Chill out."

The Pun-isher is less of a character and more of a bit of flair that can be applied to an existing character. The monk might punch enemies while offering to "lend a hand". The druid can tell everyone, "Bear with me" while using their Wild Shape ability to become a brown bear. You don't have to stop at PCs, either; an armorer might offer PCs the chance to "Check out my wears." Keep in mind, of course, that while these sorts of puns can add some fun to a light-hearted campaign, they might not quite fit in a serious campaign.



EPISODE 21: MY DAYS ARE NUMBERED

Long ago, you were given a chance to see beyond the veil and learn that which no man should ever know: the nature of your own death. Maybe you were almost killed in your youth, and when you were at the brink a voice told you that your time would come at the end of a blade under the full moon. Perhaps a fortune teller grabbed your arm and stared at you through milky eyes, telling you of a red-haired man who would end your life with poison from his signet ring. Maybe a family legend has been passed down for generations saying that every first child would die by drowning, and you're the oldest of your siblings.

Whatever the omen, your character knows how or when they're going to die (or possibly both). How would you expect such a character to act? Maybe they're incredibly bold; they feel no fear from any danger because they know it isn't their time. They could spit in the eye of a beholder, laugh in a dragon's face, and walk right up to an undead warlord and challenge it to a duel. After all, they know how they're going to die, and it's not from a beholder's eye ray, a dragon's fiery breath, or an undead warlord's blade. Or maybe, instead of being incredibly courageous, they're incredibly paranoid. After all, omens tend to be vague and cryptic, right? Maybe that "red-haired man" refers to the dragon, whose horns resemble slicked-back hair? Maybe "at the end of a blade" refers to the peninsula where the dragon was roosting. Perhaps your character has an irrational fear of water because of the prophecy passed down through their family.

Then again, maybe the prophecy was a complete fabrication by a poor beggar who was trying to earn some coin by making up predictions on the street, and the only reason your character wasn't disintegrated instantly by the beholder was because your character's boldness threw it off-balance. Maybe you're better off not knowing.

EPISODE 22: GIANT DWARF

You've heard tell of the clan of dwarves currently traveling across the lands, and rumor has it they're coming to your town. When they arrive, you see their silhouettes off in the distance: all short, squat, and bearded... except one? One of their party is tall, slender, and he appears unable to grow more than a scraggly goatee, but the rest of the party refers to him as a dwarf. When you try to point out that he's not a dwarf, all of his clansmen quickly gesture you to stop talking, and insist that he is, in fact, a dwarf like any other.

This character is, plainly put, a human (or some other non-dwarf race) that thinks he's a dwarf. Maybe he was orphaned as a child and grew up with dwarves, maybe he's suffering from a mental disorder that makes him see himself as a dwarf, or maybe he actually is technically a dwarf but he has an incredibly bizarre series of birth defects that make him grow tall and skinny and less hairy than normal. Whatever the case, any claim that he is not truly a dwarf will likely be met with frustration, anger, and hostility. After all, he's just a tall dwarf, and his mother told him his beard should be coming in any day now!



CHARACTER
CONCEPTS



EPISODE 23: LOST THEIR FORTUNE

Before the campaign began, your character was extremely wealthy. However, due to circumstances for you to determine, your wealth has been lost. Maybe your family's estate was destroyed in a natural disaster, and you're left on the streets with nothing. Maybe you were blackmailed by a rival (either for something you did, or something you've been framed for). Maybe your family used your fortune to back the previous king, and a coup has caused an upset that has torn away your status.

The reason this can be interesting is that the nature of your fall from grace can be a hook for an entire campaign. The DM could build numerous encounters around finding the evidence that's being used to blackmail you, and your end goal could be to bring your rival to justice. Perhaps the previous king is still out there, and he's mustering forces to take his throne back by force. The more interesting your character's backstory, the more the DM can use it to make an interesting game!

Just remember: if you do get your fortune back, don't let it go to your head.

EPISODE 24: LAST OF THE BLOODLINE

You're the last of your kind. Maybe you're the last living blood relative of the deposed king, and you've been hunted down by the new ruler's knights so none would challenge his reign. Perhaps you're the only living member of a clan sworn to keep watch over a dormant portal to the abyss, and as your family's numbers have dwindled, you've begun to feel a deep, dark rumbling coming from the remains of the portal. Maybe you're the last of an order of dragon hunters, but the dragons have been hunted nearly to extinction. The other hunters have all abandoned their duty, and now, rumor has it, the dragons are back.

Whatever your "kind" is, you're part of a group of people with a long and storied history, but no others remain. You have lived a long and lonely life, and the way you view your calling and your origin is going to determine how you go forward. You could be proud of your family line, and you would let none besmirch the honor of those who came before. You could curse the order that bore you, swearing to cut down any

who might try to resurrect the old ways. Do you have any belongings from the past? Perhaps you've held onto family heirlooms or a guild insignia indicating the organization you once represented? Do you keep those belongings in a prominent place, or do you hide them, hoping none will ever find out who or what you are?

Work with your DM when designing your character to work out exactly who your character is and who they once were. They could be from a family or organization that the DM already established in the campaign world, or they could be from a group that you've created but no longer exists (except you). Together, you can come up with something that will have reaching impact across the campaign.

EPISODE 2S: FOR HONOR!

For you, honor is everything. If you don't treat your adversary as fairly as you would treat your own comrade (even while your adversary is trying to kill you), then your existence is pointless. Fear is a disease, and cowardice is a moral failing. You will never stab someone in the back, you will never kill an unarmed foe, and you will never challenge an opponent who is outnumbered. You want to face your opponents on as equal of footing as possible, and you will follow your code of honor even when your life or the lives of your allies are at risk.

While you might expect this type of an archetype to belong to a Fighter or a Paladin, there's no reason it couldn't apply to just about any type of character. A Rogue might be a bit tricky, but anything else should work. Maybe your character is a Sorcerer who only uses their magic to facilitate a fair fight. Maybe you're a Druid who views honor as a part of nature and one of the laws of the universe. Perhaps you're a Bard whose honor is their livelihood, and you enjoy the spectacle of a duel and the consistency of character as it would appeal to an audience.

Honor is a way of life, so go live it!



CHARACTER
CONCEPTS

MONSTER VARIANTS

Everyone knows that monsters exist in the world. The villagers and heroes tell tales of their encounters, draw images, create warning signs, and plaster posters of the dangers that lurk on every tree or building. We have scavenged the lands and spoken with villagers, merchants, and young adventurers to gather information on the anomalies among these creatures in the hope of building a compendium of these strange monster variants.

Throughout all of D&D history, very few Dungeon Masters are happy with the options they have in their collection, no matter the size. As world creators, we often times end up coming to the same conclusion: not all monsters are the same. We know there will be variations either from a flavor stand point (some of your kobolds might be green while others are a mix of blues and reds), or from a mechanics stand point (different hit points or different weapons and armor). We often only have a few stat blocks available to us for specific creatures, so we inevitably end up doing a bit of homebrew.

Custom creations can be fun, but it is also a difficult balancing act. We here at Crit Academy decided long ago that there is no reason to hold ourselves back from adding features to existing monsters to ensure they shine and stand out. We have, for years now, just made simple changes that can bring a breath of fresh air to your favorite creature as well as catch those experienced players by surprise. We found that giving a monster class features, feats, or even other monsters abilities is a great way to do that. It's much easier to keep a monster within its CR range this way, as well. Sometimes the effects may need the damage dice changed to ensure you don't make it significantly harder... unless, of course, you're trying to (muahahahaha). We hope you enjoy our monster variants.



EPISODE 12: KOBOLD SLINGER

These clever little kobolds have experimented with a collection of different concoctions. They pour their elaborate mixtures into small glass baubles and fling them at their foes.

KOBOLD SLINGER

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 5 (1d6 - 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8(-1)	14(+2)	9(-1)	8(-2)	7(-2)	9(-1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the kobold has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Pack Tactics. The kobold has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the kobold's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Sling. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Special Shots (1d4/Day). The kobold slinger uses one of the following options, using the Sling attack as a baseline:

Putrid Shot. Target must succeed a DC 12

Constitution saving throw or have disadvantage on attack rolls. The target can repeat the saving

throw at the end of each of its turns, ending

the effect on itself on a success and becoming

immune to the putrid shots effect for one hour.

A creature with no sense of smell is immune.

Fire Shot. The attack does an additional 2 (1d4) fire damage. Flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried are ignited.

Glue Shot. The target must succeed at DC 12 Strength saving throw or become restrained. A target may use its action to attempt to break free on a successful DC 12 Strength(Athletics) check.

MONSTER
VARIANTS

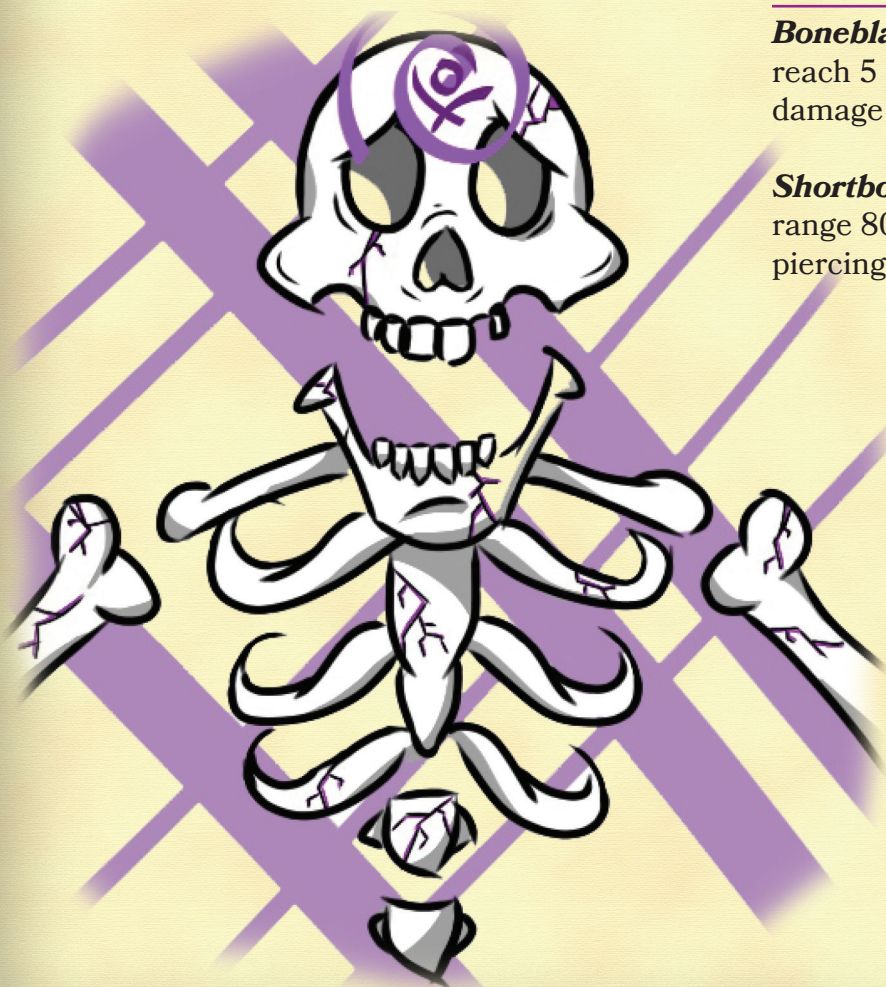


EPISODE 13: BONESHARD SKELETON

These skeletons have had destructive magic imbued into their limbs. An arcane sigil can be seen somewhere on their clattering frame, like a carved tattoo pulsating with power.

Undead Traps. These creatures are the result of a dark magic user infusing them with a magical trap in the hopes that, if some adventurer manages to best them, they will be caught unaware. The trigger is set to release when the last semblance of dark energy that brought it to life extinguishes.

Hidden Malice. The arcane symbol on the boneshard skeleton is often hidden by scraps of armour or clothes, making them a hidden menace. If a character fails to notice the symbol and destroys the skeleton, they are caught in the death burst of the undead monster.



BONESHARD SKELETON

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+3)	7 (-2)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Death Burst. When the skeleton dies, it explodes in a burst of bone shrapnel. Each creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Actions

Boneblade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

EPISODE 14: THE CROWD PLEASER

Gladiatorial combat is one of the most common forms of entertainment around. For some, it's not all about the blood and gore. For some, it's about the performance, the cheer of the crowd, the chant of the fans, and the glory that comes with success.

Egotistical Fighters. The crowd pleaser gets the most out of her engagement when the crowd is yelling and shouting her name. A rush of adrenaline and vigor comes over the crowd pleaser, allowing her to wash away the exhaustion of the fight and to rally at the voices of the crowd.

Dangerous Fighters. Despite their love of the crowd, don't underestimate the fighting skill of a crowd pleaser. They might seem like they're just in it for the glory, but a crowd pleaser is still a dangerous and deadly fighter.



THE CROWD PLEASER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +5, Con +6

Skills Athletics +10, Intimidation +5

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Brave. The crowd pleaser has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the crowd pleaser hits with it (included in the attack).

Showboat. When the crowd pleaser hits with a melee attack, it can forgo an attack to make a DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check, on a success, the crowd pleaser can spend a number of hit dice up to a maximum of its CR to regain hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. The crowd pleaser makes three melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. and range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11(2d6+4) piercing damage, or 13(2d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Reactions

Parry. The crowd please adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the crowd pleaser must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

MONSTER
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EPISODE 18: HARASSING GRASSY GNOLL

Gnolls who find themselves to be physically weaker than their kin will often try to find new and inventive ways to help out their more brutish brethren. They choose to sharpen their minds and focus on their ranged techniques.

Hidden Assailants. They often prefer to hide in the brush, trees, or behind anything that can help keep them hidden and protected from their foes.

Distraction Tactics. Through experimentation, they've learned to create small attachments to their arrows. These attachments often create a loud noise on impact, a quick blinding flash, or a rancid smell. They will use anything that can cause a quick distraction long enough for their allies to gain an edge in combat.



HARASSING GRASSY GNOLL

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (hide armor)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	10 (-0)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Gnoll

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Rampage. When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

Superiority Dice. The gnoll has two superiority dice, both of which are d6. These die are used to fuel its distracting shot maneuver. A superiority die is expended when the gnoll uses it. The gnoll gains the expended superiority dice when it finishes a short or long rest.

Distraction Shot. When the gnoll hits a creature with a ranged weapon attack, it can expend one superiority die to distract the creature, giving its allies an opening. The gnoll adds the superiority die to the attack's damage roll. The next attack roll against the target by an attacker other than the gnoll has advantage if the attack is made before the start of the gnolls next turn.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

EPISODE 16: HEXING URD

These rare flying kobolds are infused with innate magic. While they are often physically weaker than their common counterparts, they have wings to keep them out of harm's way. Although their physical prowess is lacking, they use their flight and magic to place debilitating curses upon their enemies, lace their taunts with subtle magic, or create illusions to distract their foes long enough to grant their allies an opening.

HEXING URD

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 7 (3d6 - 3)

Speed 30 ft., flying 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-1)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)

Senses darkvision 60ft, passive Perception 8

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the kobold has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Pack Tactics. The kobold has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the kobold's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Innate Spellcasting. The kobold's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *minor illusion*, *vicious mockery*

3/day: *bane*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage.

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EPISODE 17: CACKLING ZOMBIE

These creatures look aesthetically similar to any other zombie save for a subtle, dark-brown vapor which escapes from their mouth and nostrils. This strange gas is the result of dark magic users experimenting with raise dead spells and materials infected with disease. As a result, these zombies have become a disease themselves. Their incessant cackling sends an eerie shiver down the spine of most who hear it as they slowly shuffle and stammer their way through the dungeon. If not caught and dealt with quickly, the cackling fever can quickly infect an entire small village.

Unknown infection. Due to the nature of cackling fever, adventurers who are infected may not be aware for many hours after infection, allowing them to return to their favorite inn or tavern and spread the disease through a village or city. The disease can quickly escalate and result in a full blown outbreak. If the area is a trade hub, it can easily be spread to nearby areas, causing a region wide epidemic.

CACKLING ZOMBIE

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 5 (2d6 - 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	3 (-4)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Immunities poison

Senses darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands languages it new in life, but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5+ the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Cackling Fever. When the cackling zombie takes damage it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 5 (1d10) psychic damage and becomes incapacitated

with mad laughter for 1 minute. The zombie can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the mad laughter and the incapacitated condition on a success.

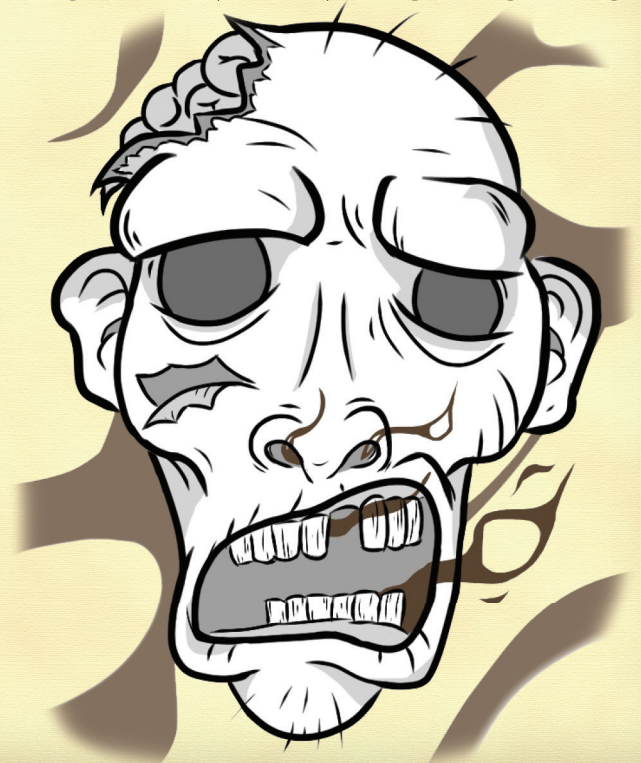
Any humanoid that starts its turn within 10 feet of the zombie in the throws of mad laughter must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or also become infected with the cackling fever. Once a creature succeeds on this save, it is immune to the mad laughter of that particular infected creature for 24 hours.

The symptoms manifest 1d4 hours after infection and include fever and disorientation. The infected creature gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed until the disease is cured.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature can make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the DC for this save and for the save to avoid an attack of mad laughter drops by 1d6. When the saving throw DC drops to 0, the creature recovers from the disease. A creature that fails three of these saving throws gains a randomly determined form of indefinite madness, as described in the DMG on pg 259.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.



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EPISODE 18: GOBLIN NAPPER

These goblins, often thin-framed and lanky, take to mastering the ability to keep their presence hidden from their foes. They craft specially made equipment that are covered in leaf and grass-like fabrics in order to blend into their surroundings. This makes them difficult to spot. From their hidden location, they use magically enhanced darts to put their unsuspecting foe's into a deep slumber. They often become a favorite of their tribe leaders as they can easily capture slaves without the normal risk generated by combat.

GOBLIN NAPPER

Small humanoid (goblin), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 7 (2d6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Goblin
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Nimble Escape. The goblin can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Actions

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Napping Blowgun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 25/100 ft, loading., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage. This dart sends the creature into a magical slumber. Roll 5d8; the total determines if the creature is effected. If the targets hit points must be equal to or lower than the total rolled. The creature falls unconscious at the end of their next turn. The effect lasts for 1 minute or until the sleeper takes damage or someone uses an action to shake or slap the sleeper awake.

Undead and creatures immune to being charmed are immune to this effect.



EPISODE 19: DRAMERA

This horrific beast is the result of Demogorgon's attempt to create more interesting creatures when he was summoned to the material plane. It is the combination of three young dragons into a single, multi-headed monstrosity. Its three heads each provide a different danger: the red spews gouts of flame, the brass can knock out an elephant with its ghastly breath, and the ghost white can batter its foes with a barrage of hail. The beast has been left with a lesser intelligence due to the melding of the minds, but it is still a ferocious hunter. Its preferred hunting method is to swoop down from the sky and knock out its prey, then drag it to its lair. It loves to toy with its prey, often severely wounding it and letting it writhe in agony before finishing it off.

DRAMERA

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 116 (12d10 + 50)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	4 (-3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages understands Draconic but can't speak

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The dramera makes three attacks: one with its bite, and two with its claws. When its breath weapons are available, it can use the breath in place of its bite.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 +4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dramera's red head exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 31 (7d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Sleep Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dramera's bronze head exhales sleep gas in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious for 5 minutes. This effect ends for a creature if the creature takes damage or someone uses an action to wake it up.

Ice Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dramera's white head exhales an ice blast of hail in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The ground in the affected area becomes difficult terrain. Any creature who enters the area or starts its turn in the area must succeed a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

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EPISODE 20: KAMIKAZE KOBOLD

These kobolds are rumored to be the most dangerous of all. They have been raised to believe that there is no greater honor in one's life than to die for their master. In doing so, they will be granted an opportunity to meet with Kurtulmak, their great deity, and spend their after life with all their hopes and dreams a reality. They don't fear death. Instead, they welcome it. They have cleverly created a volatile black powder mixture from minerals found in their master's lair. They fill up barrels or bags with this concoction.

Explosive Saboteurs. They use a spring loaded trigger filled with flint and tinder to trigger an explosion that rival's that of powerful wizards. Since their life is forfeit, they aim to position themselves near as many people as possible (sometimes voluntarily leaving themselves open to attack). Buildings made of wood or straw are likely to be completely destroyed by the blast of a Kamikaze Kobold within.



KAMIKAZE KOBOLD

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 5 (2d6 -2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-1)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 2 (200 XP)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the kobold has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Pact Tactics. The kobold has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the kobold's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Dead Man's Switch. When the kobold's hit points drop to 0 the powder keg action happens as a reaction if it hasn't already been used.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Sling. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Powder Keg. The kobold releases the trigger sending out a massive explosion centered on the kobold. Each creature in a 20 foot radius sphere around the kobold must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 8d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

The fire spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried.

Unsecured objects that are completely within the area of effect are automatically pushed 10 feet away from the kobold, and the effect emits a thunderous boom audible out to 300 feet.

EPISODE 21: CARRION SPY

These surreptitious stealthy spies specialize in incapacitating their foes. Their world is filled with espionage and information gathering.

Professional Spies. Carrion spies are often hired to seek out dark secrets for blackmail, gather evidence to convict a guilty person, or plant evidence to frame the innocent. Regardless of the job, when the task requires a more subtle approach than simply assassinating the target, these are the spies you hire.

Carrion Coated Weapons. When taking on a task, carrion spies coat their weapons in carrion crawler poison. In the event they are detected during the job, they can incapacitate a foe with little to no effort. This allows them to quickly escape before the effects wear off. The poison of a carrion crawler is deadly as it can paralyze those who come into contact with it.

Poison Fanatics. Some carrion spies are so obsessed with the creatures from which they harvest poison that they breed them to make even more potent venom. Some even go so far as to take poison themselves so that they become immune to its effects.

CARRION SPY

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Investigation +5,

Perception +6, Persuasion +5, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages any two languages

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the carrion spy can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The spy deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the carrion spy that isn't incapacitated and the carrion spy doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Carrion Coated Weapons. The spy's weapons are coated in carrion crawler poison. When the carrion spy hits a creature with an attack, the creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The poisoned creature is paralyzed. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect itself on a success.

Actions

Multiattack. The carrion spy makes two melee attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

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EPISODE 22: THE SUNDERER

This furious warrior focuses its efforts on stripping away the effectiveness of their foes defenses. Whether they're cutting straps that hold armor together, bashing shields away, or just knocking its opponent off guard, they're tactic is to reveal a weakness in the enemies defenses long enough for them or their allies to exploit it and land a powerful blow.

Armour Breakers. Some sunderers have perfected the technique of breaking armour. They are capable of smashing apart shields and armour for good, slowly disassembling them with each hit.

THE SUNDERER

Medium humanoid (any race), any chaotic alignment

Armor Class 13 (hide armor)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (1)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually common)

Challenge 2 (400 XP)

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the sunderer can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Sunder Armor. When the sunderer uses its reckless feature and hits a target in medium or heavy armor. It creates a momentary chink in the targets armor, the next weapon attack on the target can score a critical hit on a 19-20 roll.

Actions

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target, *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.



EPISODE 23: YOUNG KRAKEN

These slimy beasts are a constant reminder of the dangers of the open sea for merchants and fisherman alike. These massive underwater creatures have a large, conical, arrowhead, dinner-plate sized eyes, and a nasty four foot talon like beak on its underside. Surrounding the beak are eight or more tentacles. The large collection of tentacles have suckers running down their length which are used to latch onto their prey. Due to their deep-sea habitation, they aren't often seen. The only warning a seafaring vessel may have before its pulled under the crushing waves is the inky black discoloration of the water surrounding it.



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YOUNG KRAKEN

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 52 (8d10 + 8)

Speed 10 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	5 (-2)	11 (+0)	4 (-3)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages -

Challenge 2 (400 XP)

Hold Breath. While out of water, the young kraken can hold its breath for 1 hour.

Underwater Camouflage. The young kraken has advantage on Dexterity(Stealth) checks made while underwater.

Water Breathing. The young kraken can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 16). The young kraken has 5 strong tentacles, each of which can grapple one target.

Ink Cloud (Recharge after short or long Rest). A 20 foot-radius cloud of ink extends all around

the young kraken if it is underwater. The area is heavily obscured for 1 minute, although a significant current can disperse the ink. After releasing the ink, the octopus can use the Dash action as a bonus action.

Fling. One large or smaller creature or object grappled by the young kraken is thrown up to 30 feet in a random direction and knocked prone. If a thrown target strikes a solid surface, the target takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it was thrown. If the target is thrown at another creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

Legendary Actions

The young kraken can take 1 legendary action, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The young kraken regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Shipwreck. While underwater, the Young Kraken can spend its action to ram itself into a nearby ship. All creatures on the ship must make a DC 14 Dex save or fall prone. Anyone within 5 feet of the edge of the ship, however, are knocked overboard instead of falling prone.

Fling. The young kraken uses its Fling.

EPISODE 24: EVEROT SHRUB

When remaining motionless it is indistinguishable from the greenery around it. Its large, five-sided blue and red leaves make it recognizable to only the most seasoned of adventurers. Most travelers often stumble into it without even realizing it, releasing its toxic pollen. The effects of the pollen don't appear until an entire day after the incident, so victims are often completely clueless as to the cause of their gradual loss of sight.

EVEROT SHRUB

Small plant, unaligned

Armor Class 9

Hit Points 10 (3d6)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	7 (-1)	10 (+0)	9 (+0)	10 (+0)	5 (-2)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances piercing

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Eye Rot. This creature releases a variation of the sight rot disease. A creature who ingests the pollen from this plant gains a painful infection that causes bleeding from the eyes which eventually blinds the victim. The spores are released into a 15-foot cube in the area

around the shrub either by high winds or rustling caused by contact.

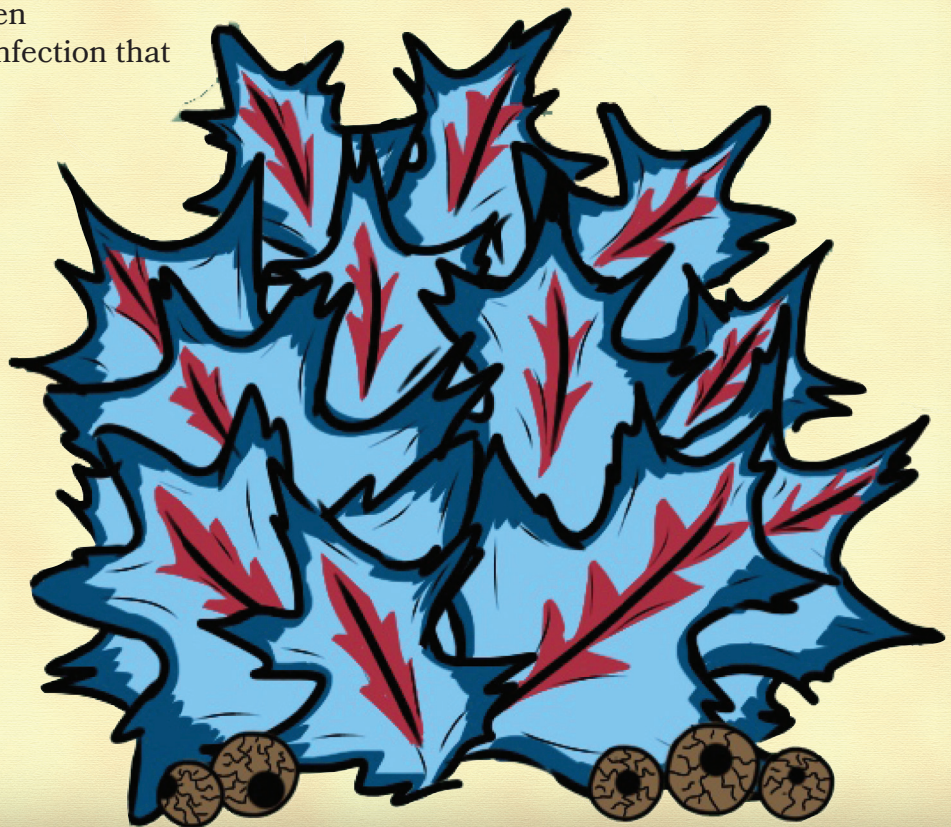
The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected. One day after infection, the creature's vision starts to become blurry. The creature takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls and ability checks that rely on sight. At the end of each long rest after the symptoms appear, the penalty worsens by 1. When it reaches -5, the victim is blinded until its sight is restored by magic such as lesser restoration or heal.

Eye rot can be cured by using a rare flower called Eyebright, which grows in some swamps. Given an hour, a character that has proficiency with an herbalism kit can turn the flower into one dose of ointment. If one dose is applied to the eyes before a long rest, the disease will not worsen. After three doses, the ointment cures the disease entirely.

False Appearance. While the eye rot shrub remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal shrub.

Actions

Rake. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 (1d4 - 1) slashing damage.



EPISODE 2S: DRAGOON

The dragoon is a knight who specializes in the hunting and slaying of large flying beasts (dragons in particular). Their coalition was formed in ancient times when a dragon attacked their homeland. A lone warrior stood, staggering in her boots. She climbed to the highest point she could find. There, she waited for the dragon to pass below during its next onslaught. Bleeding out, she used the last of her strength and jumped off the highest tower, falling with speed that matched that of a meteor, and crashed into the dragon removing its head with a mighty halberd. In honor of her heroism, the Dragoons were founded. Dragoons carry halberds and specialize in magic-enhanced jumps and dives to generate enough force to penetrate even the thickest dragon hide.

DRAGOON

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 52 (8d8+16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language(usually common)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brave. The dragoon has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Innate Spellcasting. The dragoon's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). The dragoon can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:
3/day: *jump*

Dragon Dive. If the Dragoon makes an attack while falling, he can use his training and momentum to convert the falling damage into bonus damage. Add 1d6 for every 10 feet falling. The dragoon ignores fall damage from up to 20 feet or lower.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragoon makes two melee attacks.

Halberd. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

Leadership. (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, the dragoon can utter a special command or warning whenever a non hostile creature that it can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the dragoon. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the dragoon is incapacitated.

Reaction

Parry. The dragoon adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the dragoon must see the attack and be wielding a melee weapon.

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ENCOUNTER CONCEPTS

Every D&D game is built around encounters. An encounter is a created scenario by the DM that is placed in front of the players to tell a story through the lens of a collection of varying challenges. In our encounter concepts we share thoughts and ideas on scenarios that could really spice up your game and challenge your players in a multitude of ways. Your players could be thrown in a morally ambiguous situation where there maybe not be a clear cut “right” answer, they could discover they were working for the enemy, or they could use diplomatic reasoning to mend a rift between two adversaries to fight a larger threat. This section is chock-full of unique ideas, and we hope our encounters will spark your creative side and ensure you give your players an experience they will never forget.

EPISODE 1: WALL-RUNNING ASSASSIN

The players are tasked with stopping an assassin before he is able to kill his mark. However, as they locate the assassin and begin pursuit, the party realizes their quarry is craftier than they assumed; the assassin is able to run along walls and ceilings to escape!

Following the assassin will prove difficult (requiring Athletics checks or clever teamwork to overcome obstacles and barriers on the way), but even when they engage in combat, fighting an opponent who is standing upside-down above them can throw them off balance! The players may take disadvantage on attack rolls due to the difficulty of attacking someone on the ceiling, or maybe the assassin has advantage due to being so familiar with his own ability.

It’s important to keep in mind that, in this scenario, the assassin’s goal is not to kill the players, it’s to kill his mark. If he sees a way to escape, he’s going to do it. If he is able to kill his target, think about the repercussions: will the city guard believe that a group of mercenary adventurers fought a masked assassin that was walking along the ceiling?

Maybe. Maybe not.

EPISODE 2: THE INNOCENT

In this scenario, a rash of murders has been wracking a community. People are turning up dead left and right, and a serial killer or some kind of deadly monster is suspected. The players are hired to investigate and find the killer, and when they follow the clues it turns out that the killer... is a young child who seemingly has no knowledge of how or why the murders have been taking place.

The Innocent might be mind-controlled by a powerful enchanter or possessed by a demon. Maybe the child simply has some kind of supernatural power paired with insanity that causes them to murder. Whatever the case, the party has a moral conundrum to deal with. The town might want the child killed; they did commit these murders, after all. However, would a Lawful Good Paladin see the child as guilty, or would they try to keep the child safe from those that wanted blood? Even if they’re able to determine that an outside source is to blame, how do they keep the child safe while also finding the enchanter or searching a way to exorcise the demon? What if, in the end, it turns out that the child itself IS actually the responsible party can the players justify slaughtering a child?

As a DM, you should play up the difficulty of these decisions as much as possible. Make the players feel like no matter what choice they make, it’s the wrong choice. Sometimes, life’s problems don’t have an easy answer that makes everyone feel good in the end, and this is one of those problems.

EPISODE 3: HIGHWAYMAN & CHAMBERMAID

The players have been traveling along the road, and they encounter a family whose wagon wheel has broken leaving them stranded miles from the nearest crossroads. When the players stop to help (or just stop to trade information), WHAM! The “family” turns out to be a group of highwaymen who set up an ambush to separate travelers from their money. Alternatively, the party reaches town after a harrowing adventure, and they decide to relax by spending the night at a brothel or inn. When they wake up, their hired companions have disappeared, as have

their coin purses!

This encounter can fit into nearly any situation. The party gets robbed by someone unsuspecting, and now they have to find out what happened and (hopefully) retrieve the stolen property. There can be dozens of reasons for the theft: maybe the highwaymen actually are a family that was down on their luck and had to steal in order to make ends meet. Maybe the chambermaid was hired by an existing enemy of the party, and this is all part of a plot to intimidate the players into giving up their adventure. Putting your players into a situation where they've lost something is a great way to put them on unfamiliar ground and pull them in the direction you want the story to go.

EPISODE 4: THE CHAOTIC ESCORT

For this encounter, the players' goal is to protect and deliver an individual with an unexpected chaotic power: a wild magic surge that occurs at inopportune moments. The individual themselves can be pretty much anything, but you want them to be something unassuming and ordinary: like a young child or an inexperienced noble. The catch is, whenever they get stressed - like, say, when bandits attack or if a sudden storm makes the road hazardous - their innate uncontrollable magic takes effect.

Whenever something triggers it, roll on the Wild Magic Surge table from the Sorcerer class description. An otherwise straightforward

encounter with some bandits might become just a bit harder when the escort suddenly engulfs themselves in a fireball or randomly teleports to and from the Astral Plane. The carriage you're traveling in might not look so great after the escorted individual suddenly enlarges to giant size and bursts through the roof during a sudden downpour.

EPISODE 5: RETRIEVE A STOLEN ITEM

This encounter runs like a familiar fantasy trope, but with a little bit of a twist. The players are hired by a down-on-their-luck merchant or noble to retrieve an important artifact or heirloom that was stolen. The players investigate and track down the thieves. When they're apprehended, however, the thieves insist that they bought the heirloom fair and square or that it was theirs to begin with; they might even have the documentation to prove it.

Instead of a simple and clear goal - retrieve stolen goods - they are forced to investigate further, or pick which side they believe in. Either the artifact was stolen and the thieves were able to falsify documents to back up their claim, or the merchant or noble was attempting to trick some unwitting heroes into stealing some new wares for him under a pretense of rightful ownership.

After all, they can't both be telling the truth, can they?

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EPISODE 6: BURROWING PARASITE

Nothing seems out of the ordinary; the players encounter a monster or hostile NPC, and a fight breaks out. But, when they come to blows, the players realize that the creature they're fighting is host to something much more insidious and dangerous than they expected!

It may or may not be visible, but the enemy is infested by a colony of horrifying, flesh-eating parasites. The foe could be a mummy covered in ravenous scarabs, a skeleton filled with squirming green worms, or a psychic beast carrying invisible parasites seeking out a new host so they can spread their contagion. When a player strikes the enemy with a melee weapon, or when they are struck by an unarmed attack or natural weapon from the enemy, one of the parasites latches onto the player and begins burrowing into their flesh. From there it will slowly work its way toward the player's heart. The player might take damage each round, the parasites might take control of the player's faculties (treated like a Dominate Person spell), or it might outright kill them after a certain number of rounds.

There are numerous ways a player might be able to deal with the problem. Certain spells could neutralize the parasite (such as Lesser Restoration), a high enough Medicine check could allow a companion to cut the burrowing creature out before they kill the new host, or perhaps the only option left would be to lop off the body part containing the parasite before it nears center mass. Depending on the party's level, dealing with lost limbs can be their own challenge. In any case, remember that the difficulty of this encounter comes not from the enemy themselves, but from the parasites they leave behind.

EPISODE 7: KAMIKAZE MAGMIN

Magmin are an enemy from the Monster Manual that come from the Elemental Plane of Fire, and one noteworthy feature from their statblock is that, upon death, they explode and deal damage to anyone around them. For this encounter, the Magmin function slightly differently: instead of exploding on death, they explode on contact. The encounter involves an enemy spellcaster - maybe an evil warlock or a cleric of a deity of chaos or destruction - who has created several portals around the city. Hordes of magmin are running through these portals and causing havoc.

The encounter forces the players to not only kill the enemies and eventually shut down the portals, but also to mitigate collateral damage as much as possible. The magmin could be destroying the city all around them by setting buildings on fire each time they explode. They could be destroying sections of a dungeon as the players fight a greater foe, causing sections of floor to become impassable as the fight rages on. Imagine fighting a menacing dragon when every round you're being forced into a smaller and smaller portion of the room!

As for actually dealing with the magmin themselves, players should use their imaginations to come up with tactics that might slow down or hinder the magmin (such as with ice magic), or stop the enemy spellcasters from being able to maintain the portals that summon them. Just remember:

watch out for fireballs!



EPISODE 8: THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

While walking along through a dungeon, the party enters a room that is pitch black with magical forces suppressing all light sources, even darkvision. Shortly after they enter, they hear the doors on either side of the room immediately slam shut at which point the lights come back on. Of course the sight before them is not a welcome one: the walls are covered with spikes, and the center of the room sports a large, raised dais. On one end of the dais is a skeleton chained to the floor, and on the opposite end is a pedestal bearing a large sigil and a floating metal rune in the air above. The rune changes to show a countdown, and as the numbers count down, the walls begin to close in.

When a player places their hand on the pedestal's sigil, the countdown resets and the walls halt and return. A passage carved into the dais reads, "Death is the only way out" or something similar. Canny players might surmise that the only way to survive is to shackle a party member and let the walls close in on them. The trick here (and the meaning of the carved passage) is not that a player must be sacrificed, however. Instead, the only way out is to just let the trap activate. Just before the walls get close enough to crush or impale the party, the mechanism stops, the walls recede to their starting position, and the doors in and out of the room unlock themselves.

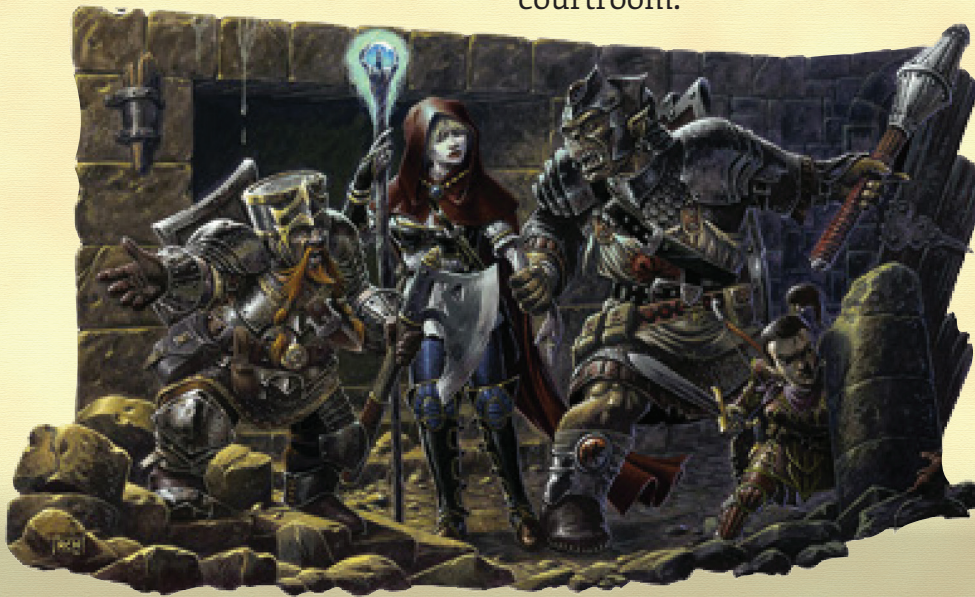
If players ask specific enough questions, feel free to give them clues that might indicate this fact. The moving walls could have left scratches on the floor, but the scratches have never gone beyond a certain point, for example.

EPISODE 9: THE COURTROOM

Not all encounters have to be combat encounters. In this case, the encounter comes as a direct result of something that's happened previously. Perhaps a player has attempted some unsound tactics in combat, and, as a result, some civilians or innocents were killed or injured. Maybe they failed a save against an enemy's mind control, and while under thrall they assassinated a prince and caused two countries to go to war. Maybe they didn't do anything wrong at all, but a witness thinks that they did. Whatever the case, they have been brought to court to be tried for their crimes.

While in court, witnesses are brought to testify for or against the player. Depending on your players' roleplaying skills, you might assign NPCs to your players, and give them notes in secret detailing a particular NPC's goals and motives. One player might take on the role of a bereaved parent who witnessed their child cut down by the PC's actions, while another player might be an NPC who was bribed by a villain to give false testimony against the party. This can give great opportunities for players to flex their roleplaying muscles and put on an emotional and powerful performance. It also lets players feel the repercussions of the types of actions that generally get brushed off by most players and DMs in favor of keeping the story moving. If you want your world to feel like a living, breathing place with all actions having consequences, then send a player to the courtroom.

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EPISODE 10: THE FOG TROUPE

The players are hired to stop a group of bandits that have been attacking trade caravans and noble carriages passing through the nearby woods. The party adventures out, intent on finding the bandits and bringing them to justice. However, as they investigate, they find some details they weren't expecting: the poor and downtrodden folk love the bandits and praise them for their generosity at every opportunity. As it turns out, these bandits - calling themselves the Fog Troupe - have been stealing from corrupt nobles, redistributing the stolen wealth to the poor, and fighting against unjust taxation. While these bandits appeared to be villainous at first, it now seems that they are a strong force for good.

The players are left with a decision to make: Do they let the bandits go? Do they join their cause and become fugitives in the process? Do they do the job they were hired to do and fight the Fog Troupe to bring them to justice? This kind of decision could spur conflict between players of different ideologies. What seems to be a clear and understandable issue when seen in an animated movie becomes a much more difficult decision when your own livelihood and freedom are at stake!

EPISODE 11: MURDER MYSTERY

The players are invited to a lavish dinner at a noble's mansion (possibly as a reward for a previous job done). Many people of renown are in attendance, and everything seems to be going splendidly - until the host turns up dead. The heroes must find out who committed the murder by investigating clues, following red herrings, cross-checking alibis, and exploring secret passageways. If they can't find out who killed the host (and where, and with what weapon) then they may become suspects themselves!

A murder mystery can take many different forms; don't feel constrained to the stormy mansion-secret-passageways staple everyone expects. The murder could happen on a ship while the party is traveling from port to port. The party could've been told to meet a quest giver in a room at the inn, but, when they arrive, all that they find is a puddle of blood.

Make the players use their skills (both in character and out). Try to involve the big dumb fighter as much as the crafty rogue or wizard. Maybe - if a player was looking to make a new character anyway - have a party member be the victim (with the player's permission, of course). Whatever you do, make sure to throw plenty of red herrings at your players to keep them guessing, and have a strict deadline so that the tension keeps right up until the end. If necessary (or if you just want to) watch some classic murder mystery films as inspiration!

EPISODE 12: THE SLUDGE PIT

Two opponents are pitted against each other on a narrow platform over a pit of sludge. Their hands are tied behind their backs, and their goal is to knock their opponent off the platform into the pit below by any means necessary! Perhaps they are prisoners, forced to perform for a king and his court. Maybe they're simply bar patrons that had too much to drink, and one challenge led to another and now they're facing off over the sludge pit.

Whatever the case, the opponents will have to use their creativity, their might, and their agility to knock their opponent off without falling into the pit themselves! This can be simply resolved with a multitude of contested checks. Be sure to give advantage and disadvantage for clever descriptions that the players come up with. This is meant to be a fun and lighthearted laugh. Encourage them to get as ridiculous as they can (eg. head butt to the face, knee to the groin, or even bite an ear).

EPISODE 13: THE WADE IN THE WATER

Rather than a fully fleshed-out encounter, this idea is more of an environment for you to use. Simply put, set an encounter in an area of waist-high water like a swamp or flooded building. In addition to making movement difficult, the water poses lots of other potential threats. There could be hidden dangers such as enemies lurking under the murky surface; traps and hazards hidden under the water; or random holes for players to fall into. Enemies might sneak along the sunken ground, pop up, grapple a player character, and then hold them underwater to drown them. Spells like Water Walking, Water Breathing, and Freedom of Movement get a real chance to shine in this scenario.

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EPISODE 14: THE GLADIATORIAL ARENA

You've been locked up in a cell for the last few days, and you're certain that your death is coming any day now. Your dread turns momentarily to relief as you're led out of your cell into fresh air and sunlight, but then suddenly the roar of an immense crowd surrounding you on all sides turns your relief back to dread. You're tossed a rusty sword as a gate closes behind you, and you see your opponents: half a dozen other prisoners that are willing to kill in exchange for their freedom. The cheering crowd gets louder, and you wonder what it would take to make them chant your name.

This is an environmental encounter that can contain any variety of opponents you like. Instead of fighting in a dungeon or a forest or other typical locale, you're a gladiator (or group of gladiators) in an arena, fighting for the adoration of a captive audience. Every time a player describes their action in combat, the DM can have the audience react. If they react favorably, then the player gets benefits. If a player simply says, "I attack the enemy in front of me," then the crowd might shout their distaste or throw rotten vegetables at them. An answer like: "I hold my rusty sword behind me, so my opponent can't see it. Then, I get up close and I feint right, but duck left, catching my boot on his to make him trip. As he stumbles, I bring the sword out from behind and drive it straight toward the chinks of his armor" could still be a standard attack (with an elaborate description), but the DM can grant the player an Inspiration die (ranging from a d4 to a d10, depending on how impressive the description was) which they can use to add to any single d20 roll during the rest of the encounter.

After all, having the crowd chanting your name can give one hell of a rush.

EPISODE 15: TIME WILL TELL

The adventurers are gathered together before a grieving mother and father. It seems that something terrible has happened: someone, or something, has spirited away their infant child in the dead of night. The parents briefly witnessed the kidnapper, but they've lost their memory of what happened after. The heroes are asked to find out what happened to the child, and return the babe safely to the parents.

The party tracks down and confronts the kidnapper, ready to slay or subdue a criminal to bring them to justice, but it's not quite so simple.

The would-be kidnapper is in fact a powerful mage who claims that premonitions have shown him that soon a great calamity will befall the land and subject the world to what he calls "The Dead Days". He has seen that this child is going to play a pivotal role in the upcoming calamity, and by devouring this child, the mage can save countless innocent lives and possibly stop the calamity altogether.

The players are then faced with a choice: do they return the child safely to its parents (possibly fighting and killing this mage in the process), and potentially subject the world to a great calamity? Or do they let this mage devour a child to prevent loss of life, leaving the child's parents to mourn the loss of their kin? How are the players going to determine whether the mage is even telling the truth? Assuming this prophecy is true, could there be ways to prevent the cataclysm that don't involve killing an infant? Only time will tell.



EPISODE 16: ONE OF A KIND

The players are hired to investigate the disappearance of a town's cattle. After some investigation, and maybe a stake-out or two, they witness a shocking sight: an incredibly rare albino griffon swoops in, grabs a cow, and takes off with it. After some tracking, the heroes are able to locate its lair while it feasts and are left with a choice: should they kill this rare creature or leave it be?

A DM can replace the albino griffon with any monster (even a homebrew creation) that would be incredibly rare within the game world. You could even present something that is literally one of a kind (such as the last of a given species). The intention is to make the players have to choose between causing a species to go completely extinct or letting it continue living its life to preserve its existence. If the players aren't sure what decision to make, feel free to have NPCs sway them in both directions. The creature's kind may have been hunted to extinction due to rare and valuable reagents harvested from their corpses (griffon's blood, flumph's teeth, etc.), so killing it could be very lucrative; however, a local Monster Rights Activist might be campaigning to save this creature's life, and killing it might end up having legal and environmental repercussions.

In the end, it's up to the players to decide what to do, so make sure it's a difficult decision!



EPISODE 17: UNDERMOG'S DAY

The party arrives in town just in time to celebrate Undermog's Day, so they stay at the local inn the night before. The day of the holiday, they meet NPCs, they make purchases, spend time at the inn, and do what adventurers do. The next morning, they wake up and everything seems... familiar. People they met the previous day don't recognize them; the purchases they made are gone; and everyone is celebrating the holiday - again.

After seeing event after event happening exactly like it did the previous day, the party attempts to leave town, but they are stopped by some unknown force (either directly, as by a magical wall of force, or indirectly, as by a storm or barricade on the road or some other mundane force that coincidentally keeps them from leaving). The next morning, the holiday happens yet again, and there seems to be no obvious cause or exit. They are trapped in a time loop.

The exact circumstances that created the time loop, as well as potential solutions to end it, are up to the DM to determine.

Maybe the players aren't the only people in the loop. Maybe the loop has actually been going on for years, and there's one NPC who has been stuck in it from the very beginning. Maybe a powerful spellcaster saw a cataclysm approaching the town, and she cast an epic spell to buy her more time until she could figure out a way to stop the cataclysm. The PCs are going to be the key to solving it all, or they will threaten to make matters worse.

Whatever you do, watch that first step - it's a doozy!

Submitted by: Aurican's Lair:
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EPISODE 18: THE CALL OF THE SIREN

The heroes are traveling on a ship, and on their journey they have to pass through uncharted waters. On the way, everyone starts hearing the most beautiful music they've ever heard. Before they can figure out what's happening, the ship veers off course. The captain (either an NPC or one of the players who failed a Wisdom saving throw) has started steering the ship towards a misty island surrounded by rocky cliffs! As the ship gets close or possibly after it crashes into the rocks dark shapes start looming in the mist. The music is continuing, and it is getting louder. As the dark shapes get closer, the source of the music shows itself: Sirens!

The party is lured to a dangerous location by a group of sirens that have enchanted them and brought them near with their hypnotic song. How the players deal with this type of encounter is going to depend on who remained unaffected and how the unaffected characters tend to deal with problems. If the party Barbarian is unaffected, for instance, she may simply beat the affected characters unconscious and lock

them in the brig until they come to their senses. A clever rogue might shove wax in his ears to make himself immune (at the cost of his own hearing). A wizard or sorcerer might just try blasting the sirens with fireballs in the hopes that it stops the music.

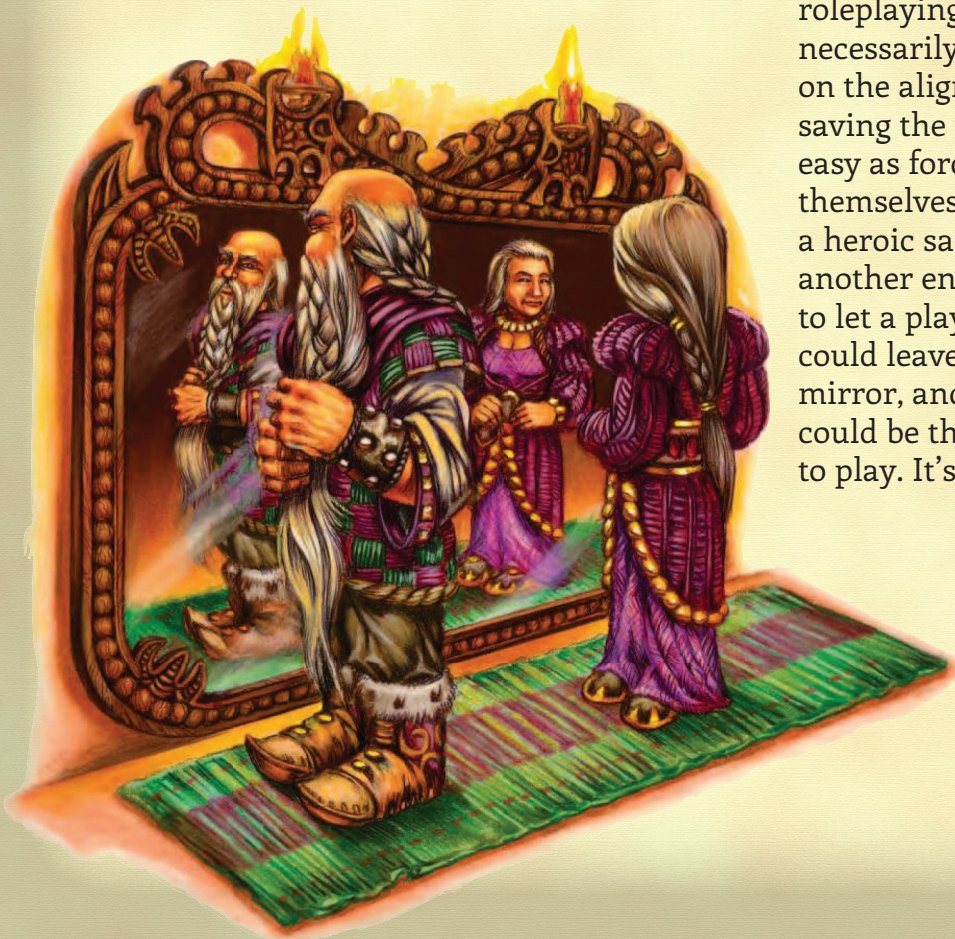
What do the sirens look like? They might look like beautiful humanoids from far away, but up close their skin might be hanging off their bones in strips. Maybe they take the form of the viewer's deepest desire, and this leads some characters to realize things about themselves they never knew. Different characters might argue about what they are due to different pairs of eyes seeing them as different creatures. Maybe the source of the music isn't even a creature at all; a powerful artifact hidden on the island could be responsible for the hypnotic music. Use this encounter to really play around with your players' expectations, and try to get some roleplaying out of them!

EPISODE 19: RAISE

The party is in a town that is currently under attack from an invading force, and the town is greatly outnumbered and surrounded on all sides. When all looks hopeless, one of the town elders comes up with a plan. There exists an ancient tome in the catacombs beneath the chapel that, if retrieved, would allow them to raise all of the town's dead to fight off the invading army. Some of the elders agree, but others protest, refusing to let their loved ones' remains be defiled simply to become weapons of war. When it seems that there cannot be a consensus, it comes down to the players to make a decision: will they go into the catacombs to retrieve this tome and raise the town's dead to fight, or will they defend the town themselves?

The important thing to keep in mind when running this encounter is that you want to make sure that there are NPCs that both support and oppose whatever decision the PCs' make. Play up the moral quandary. This isn't necessarily about whether or not raising the dead is good or evil, but about which half of the town will be against you. Do the ends justify the means? Will they live long enough to find out?

That's up to you and your players!



EPISODE 20: MIRROR IMAGE

The party enters a room devoid of furniture or adornments save for a standing mirror near the opposite wall. While it might look like an ordinary mirror at first, the party quickly realizes that there is someone else reflected in its face! A man, looking haggard and terrified, is pounding on the other side of the glass with bruised fists. By reading his lips, it is clear that he wishes to be rescued.

At the top of the mirror, engraved into the frame, is a magical glyph. A creature that touches the glyph immediately finds themselves trapped on the other side of the mirror. In a reversed copy of the room they were just in, but they are all alone and the man that was inside the mirror has now taken their place. He explains (to the rest of the party) that he was tricked into swapping places with a demon and has been trapped in that mirror for days, weeks, or even years. The party then has to decide what to do with this freed individual and how to free their ally without getting trapped too!

This encounter can lead to some interesting roleplaying because the man in the mirror isn't necessarily evil or bad in any way. Depending on the alignment or proclivities of your group, saving the trapped party member might be as easy as forcing an innocent victim into trapping themselves or having a party member perform a heroic sacrifice by taking their place. This is another encounter that could be used as a way to let a player create a new character. They could leave their old character behind in the mirror, and the man originally trapped in it could be the character that they really wanted to play. It's up to you!

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EPISODE 21: THE EMBEDDED PUZZLE LOCK

The party comes across an elaborate lock on an ancient door deep inside a dungeon. The rogue grins, walking up to the lock, and admires the craftsmanship of the numerous lettered dials adorning its face. She grabs one of the dials and gives it a turn, expecting to spend a few minutes poking at the lock every which way. Suddenly she's knocked to the floor as a burst of sparks erupt from the mechanism. The cleric, casting a heal spell to resuscitate her, offers a suggestion:

"Maybe we should try and find the answer instead of just guessing."

The embedded puzzle lock is a puzzle where the players have to solve some sort of a code in order for it to open. The code could be letters represented on dials, numbers on a series of combination wheels, shaped stones that have to be arranged in the right pattern, or any brain teaser you could think of. Unlike most puzzle locks, an incorrect solution will result in the solver getting hit by a magically resetting trap. Even if there's only a few dozen possible solutions, a party won't be able to just sit there and attempt each one until they get it right. Instead, they'll have to search for clues, and solve the puzzle through exploration and skill checks instead of just rolling until they get a high enough number.



EPISODE 22: EUPHORIC GAS

The party is traveling through a dungeon, and they've just opened a new chamber that hasn't been opened in centuries. As the door opens, a puff of dust blows into the corridor and causes all of the party members to cough and sputter for a moment. Shortly after, the party rogue begins laughing hysterically, leaning up against the wall with the largest smile on his face. Then, the wizard begins to scream and point at the ceiling before running to take cover under a nearby doorway. Meanwhile, you're standing there with no clue as to what your allies are doing or what they can see that you can't.

Euphoric Gas is an element that you can add to a dungeon, a trap, or even an existing encounter to make it just a little bit scarier. When the gas goes off (wherever the DM determines it came from), all creatures in a 10-foot cube must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom save, or they will be unable to take reactions

for one minute. Additionally, roll a d6

every round for each affected character. On a roll of 1-4,

the character can take no actions, and they will spend their turn running in a random direction (avoiding difficult and hazardous terrain). On a roll of 5-6, the character cannot take actions and cannot move, but they're granted another save to resist the effect.

You might describe an affected creature as fleeing in terror, chasing after a glowing butterfly, paralyzed by fear, or sitting down in a warm meadow oblivious to their surroundings.

If they're affected by Euphoric Gas while already in combat... well, at least they'll go out with a smile on their face. Hopefully.

EPISODE 23: GOBLIN DIPLOMACY

The players are hired to investigate (or just randomly stumble upon) a brutal war being fought between two tribes of goblins. They've been warring between themselves for some time, and now their feud is starting to bleed over into the civilized world. Trade routes are being cut off, travelers are being waylaid or killed, and the local government doesn't know how to deal with the problem.

That's where the party comes in. They can choose to deal with the goblins peacefully (infiltrate each group and set up a parlay between the leaders, pose as a goblin deity to tell them to set aside their differences, unite them against a common enemy, etc.), or they can choose to deal with them by force. Whatever option they choose, you should make sure there are good and bad consequences. If they unite the goblins, they might gain some powerful allies in the future, but at the same time, the united goblin force becomes bigger and stronger and starts spreading to other areas of the world. If they choose to kill all of the goblins, it solves the problem and makes the area safer, but eventually a bigger, badder threat will show up to fill the void.

As the DM, you should try to make the feud between the tribes fit the tone of the campaign. In a dark, gritty campaign, it could be that the two tribes were once one tribe until a bloody coup left two goblin brothers at each other's throats. In a more light-hearted campaign, maybe the leaders of both tribes found a funny hat lying on the road one day and now they're fighting over who gets to wear it.

EPISODE 24: PENDULUM CORRIDOR

The players are chasing after a group of goblins that have taken up residence inside a dungeon. The party engages the goblins in a long corridor, but, to the players (and possibly the goblins) surprise, the corridor contains a deadly series of traps. The traps might get set off by one of the players stepping on an unseen pressure plate, or they could get activated by a goblin trying to create a distraction.

While the trap is active, giant swinging pendulum blades begin swinging back and forth down the hallway, spaced out every five feet. The exact nature of the traps (the damage, the save/skill DCs, etc.) is up to the DM to determine. A carefully-timed traversal of the hallway could easily get a player across without too much danger, but they're currently fighting a group of goblins. They don't have the time or the focus to carefully bypass each trap. Instead, each round they have to make Dexterity checks to bypass each individual blade (they might get advantage if they are within melee range of an enemy). The goblins are certainly going to fail these checks and get killed as the fight goes on (possibly in grotesque or amusing ways, depending on the tone of the campaign), but as they're killed, their bodies fall to the floor making traversal even more difficult than it already was. You might be able to run across the hallway in one turn to reach the switch to deactivate the trap, but not if every ten feet there's corpses creating difficult terrain!

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EPISODE 2S: AN IDOL THREAT

The party is hired by an old sage to go on a quest to retrieve an ancient idol, and he pays the party half of the bounty up front. The idol is said to belong to a cult of darkness, and stories about it describe the statue as having priceless gems mounted in its eyes. The party goes on its way to find the idol and return it, but on the way they run into a rival historian who also has knowledge of the idol. When he learns the players were sent to retrieve it, he makes a counter offer: when they find it, remove the gems from its eyes and sell them to him. Then return the idol to the original quest giver.

This encounter can create all different kinds of conflict within the party. They've already

received payment for the quest, so are they going to go back on their deal? If they don't agree to the second deal and try to complete the quest as planned, the rival historian could hire his own band of adventurers to get the gems which would lead to more clashes as the quest goes on. Perhaps the old sage gets the idol in the end, and it turns out he himself is looking to harness dark power from the idol. If the players find out about this before it happens, will they confront the old sage before giving him the idol, or will they just shrug and take his money?

There's lots of different points in this encounter that can lead to issues between the players. Play those up, and let the players figure things out for themselves!



MAGIC ITEMS

In the fantasy world of D&D, regardless of the setting, there is one constant that drives adventurers to delve into dark, damp dungeons...phat lootz! While collecting gold is fine and dandy, the real prize of any hoard are the mystical items that can be found. The items of power left behind by powerful beings: they are often rare, and they can be a distinguishing feature of many adventurers. Consider Thor and his hammer, Mjolnir, or King Arthur and his sword, Excalibur. These magical weapons weren't just tools that they used; they became iconic aspects of these champions, and your magic items should be just as acclaimed. In Fifth Edition magic items are much rarer than in past editions. In fact, the game was designed around not needing them. This makes it all the more important to have unique items for your heroes. Below you will find a list of over twenty magical items with varying uses. We here at Crit Academy prefer fun and utility above optimization, thus, few of our samples are all about power. We hope that you can find a fun and creative use for these items and that they end up becoming symbols of a character. You might even encourage the hero who wields them to give them a unique name.

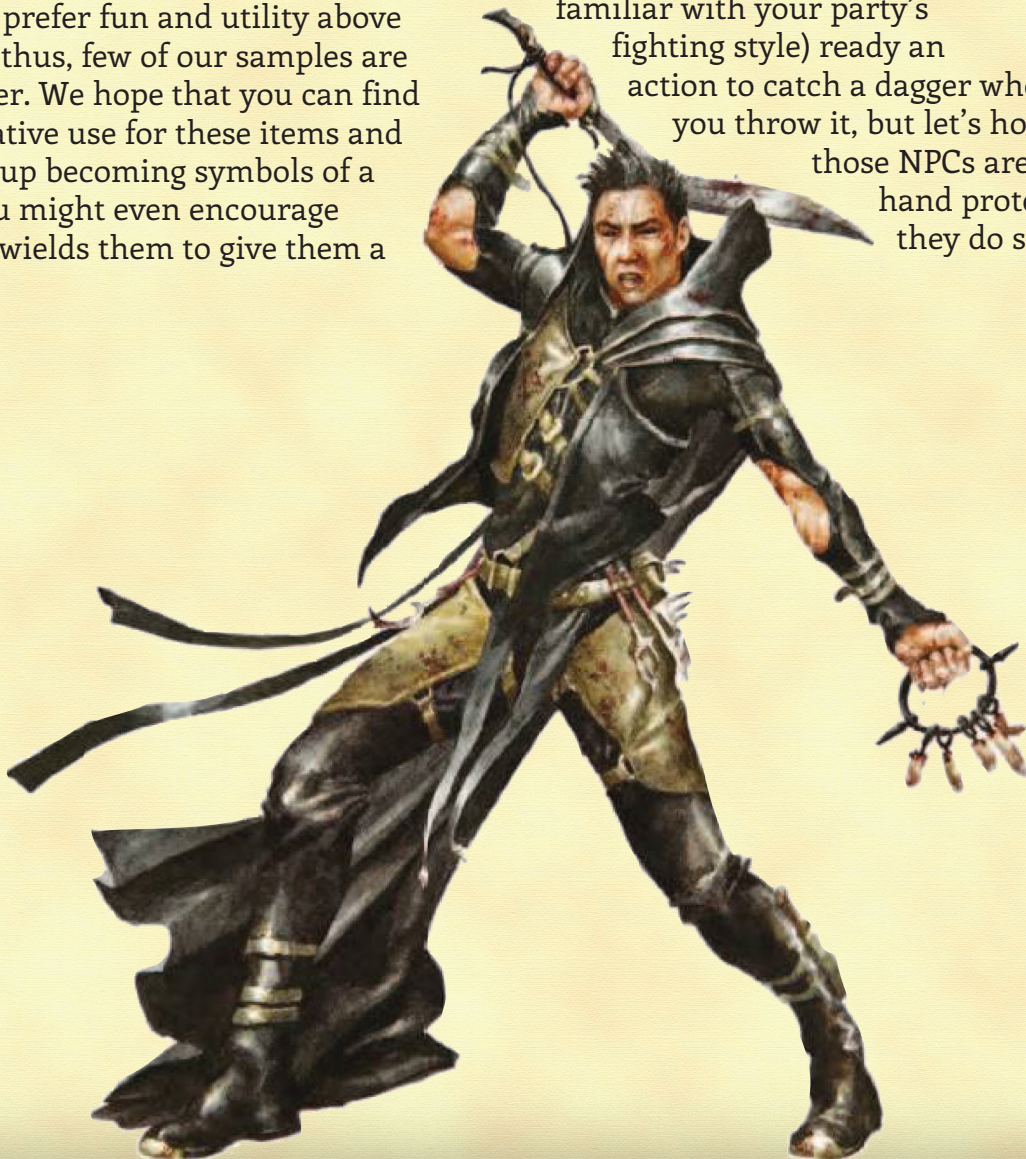
EPISODE 1: BOOMERANG DAGGERS

Melee Weapon (Dagger), Uncommon

The Boomerang Daggers is a set of daggers with curved blades. When thrown, Boomerang Daggers will return to the hand of the owner at the end of the turn they are thrown.

Have you ever created a thrown-weapon master and been in the middle of combat with nothing left to throw? Never again! The Boomerang Daggers are a set of daggers with curved blades that, when thrown, come back to the thrower like a boomerang. You will be able to throw your daggers with impunity without worrying whether you'll run out, and you can even use them in creative ways. You could throw a dagger with one hand, then stab an opponent with another dagger before catching the first.

Some DMs might have crafty NPCs (especially ones who are familiar with your party's fighting style) ready an action to catch a dagger when you throw it, but let's hope those NPCs are wearing hand protection when they do so...



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EPISODE 2: THE IMMOVABLE HAMMER

Melee Weapon (Light Hammer), Rare

This Hammer has a button on one end. You can use an action to press the button, and cause the hammer to become magically fixed in place. Until you or another creature uses an action to push the button again, the hammer doesn't move (even if it is defying gravity). The hammer can hold up to 8,000 pounds of weight. More weight causes the hammer to deactivate and fall. A creature can use an action to make a DC 30 Strength check, moving the fixed hammer up to 10 feet on a success.

Additionally, this hammer allows the wielder to knock the target prone on a critical hit, and keep them immobile for as long as the hammer is activated. If a creature uses its action to examine the hammer, the creature can determine that there is a button on the handle with a successful Intelligence (Investigation) check DC 14. If the creature discerns the hammers trick for what it is, they can use an action to press the button and remove it.

This hammer is built around an existing magic item: The Immovable Rod. The creator of this item took an ordinary hammer, dismantled it, and replaced the haft with an Immovable Rod, allowing the wielder to activate its Immovable quality by tapping a button on the grip.

The uses of this hammer are as limitless as the wielder's imagination - you can use it to barricade a door, to give a player an anchor to tie a rope to so they can swing across a pit, to aid in climbing by giving another handhold whenever one is needed, and so on.

EPISODE 3: THE POWER POLE

Melee Weapon (Quarterstaff), Rare

This staff has four charges. Charges replenish after a short rest. This staff, upon spending a charge, will grow double in length giving the weapon the reach property. The staff, once extended, will return to its original length at the end of your combat turn. When used out of combat, the staff will remain extended for one minute. This staff is activated upon calling out its command word. Attacking with the extended staff requires the wielder to use two hands. For anyone familiar with the classic Chinese story Journey to the West (or the popular anime based on it, Dragon Ball), this item should seem familiar. It's a basic quarterstaff (or a spear), usable as a weapon or as just a walking stick. The specifics of how this works can vary depending on the DM. Maybe it only functions for one round at a time, or maybe it has a certain number of charges and those charges recover at dawn every day. Maybe it can shrink as well as extend, for ease of carrying. You might even allow it to extend to greater distances, allowing players to span a pit or activate traps from the other side of the room. Players can come up with all sorts of uses for an item like this.

EPISODE 4: SENSU BEADS

Wondrous, Rare

The Sensu Beads are a magic item that can store and channel healing spells. At any point, a spellcaster with the Cure Wounds or Healing Word spells prepared can expend a spell slot of 1st, 2nd, or 3rd level to cast the healing spells into a bead. At any point thereafter, any character may spend an action to cast the stored spell from the item, casting it at the level of the spell slot cast into it.

A bead can only carry one spell at a time, and once the stored spell is cast the bead will be free to store another spell.



EPISODE 5: SPOOL OF INFINITE ROPE

Wondrous Item, Rare

This spool magically dispenses exactly the right amount of rope when you need it. As long as the rope is connected to the spool, there is no limit to how long of a rope can be unspooled from it, and the spool's size will never decrease. However, if the rope is ever cut any unspooled rope will disintegrate after 24 hours.

Most adventurers start their quest with a standard-issue spool of fifty feet of hempen rope, but have you ever needed more than that and not had enough on hand? Maybe you're at the top of a canyon and need to send some rope to the bottom. Maybe you're trying to tie up an entire gang of bandits. Maybe you woke up inside a sprawling labyrinth and need something to help you keep track of where you've been. Whatever the reason, the Spool of Infinite Rope will undoubtedly become indispensable to your adventuring party.

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EPISODE 6: CLEAVING GREATAXE

Melee Weapon(Greataxe), Uncommon

When using the Cleaving Greataxe, any attack that drops an opponent to 0 Hit Points can carry excess damage to another enemy within reach. Subtract the hit points of your first target from the damage dealt, and automatically deal this damage to the second target.

This red-tinged greataxe has a wicked-looking serrated edge. As you slice the killing blow into your enemy, you feel a sudden burst of speed from the blade itself and it continues slashing through the air to cut into the next foe within reach!

EPISODE 7: TOME OF BLOOD MAGIC

Wondrous, Rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

Have you ever needed more spell slots? Have you ever felt like you would be willing to do anything to get more?

...Care to make a deal?

The Tome of Blood Magic is a magical spell book full of ancient secrets of dark power. The names of many powerful wizards and sorcerers of yore are scrawled in the back. Any character with the ability to cast spells and the Ritual Caster feature (or a similar class ability) can augment their spellcasting ability by attuning themselves to the Tome of Blood Magic. An attuned character can use a bonus action and choose to allow the tome to absorb their vitality and spend any unspent Hit Dice to recover a spell slot equal to half the number of Hit Die expended in this way rounded down. For example, spending four hit dice allows the user to recover one 2nd level spell slot.

This power comes at a price, however; if a caster dies while attuned to the Tome, their soul is trapped inside the book, and their name will be added to the list in the back.

EPISODE 8: AMULET OF MOCKERY

Wondrous, Rare (requires attunement)

This item can speak, read, and understand all languages. It can hear and see out to 60 feet, and it often follows a chaotic neutral alignment. The amulet of mockery often seeks to humiliate as many creatures as possible, no matter the situation. This amulet can be used to cast vicious mockery as a bonus action once per day. This effect cannot be used again until the next dawn.

“Your mother was a kobold!”

Just as the adventurers were kneeling before the king after rescuing his daughter from the bandits that kidnapped her, the shrill insult was heard echoing throughout the chamber. Everyone looked around awkwardly, unsure of where the voice came from or who said it. Just as it seemed the situation might be able to smooth itself out, the voice spoke again.

“You heard me! Her face was as ugly as her backside was massive!”

That day, the adventurers were carried away to the dungeon, all the while insisting that none of them had slung the insults. Their gear was taken and sold to fill the coffers; including an unassuming amulet that would soon be insulting its new owner.

The Amulet of Mockery is controlled by the DM, and it insists on shouting insults at inopportune moments (perhaps while the wearer is trying to sneak past an enemy patrol or befriend a haughty noble). Sometimes, in moments of great distress, the Amulet of Mockery has been known to cast the Vicious Mockery spell on enemies, insulting them for poor form or just commenting on their looks or weight. Some would consider the amulet a cursed item; however, no method of uncursing it has yet been found.



EPISODE 9: DARKVISION GOGGLES

Wondrous, Uncommon

Do you enjoy playing humans, but constantly find yourself in a party full of elves or orcs who feel at home in the darkness just as in the day? Are you constantly bumping into low-hanging stalactites on your trips through the underdark? Are you sick of knocking over furniture when searching for your chamberpot at night?

Get yourself a pair of Darkvision Goggles! Simply put, they are a pair of magical goggles that grant the wearer Darkvision out to 60 feet as well as seeing through magical darkness up to 15 feet. Never embarrass yourself in front of a Drow patrol again!

EPISODE 10: THE PIERCER OF HEAVEN

Melee Weapon, Very Rare

When you heft this gold-plated greatsword, you feel an energy within that courses through your hands and coalesces with your own life energy. You feel, if even for a moment, like you and this massive blade are one being, brimming with untapped power. While wielding the Piercer of Heaven, you have a powerful ability to funnel your own life essence into the blade to create devastating blasts of arcane power that arc through the air at your opponents.

As an action, the wielder may spend a number of hit die equal to half of their level rounded down. The blade releases a powerful destructive force from its swing. All creatures in a line 60 feet long and 5 feet wide from you must make a Dexterity saving throw with a DC of 14. Roll the number of hit dice sacrificed. Your attack does force damage equal to that number. A creature takes normal damage on a failed save and half as much on a successful.

EPISODE 11: THE HEALING BOW

Melee Weapon, Very Rare

The savage beast is bearing down on you and your party, the swords have been clanging, and the spells are being cast. Right as the fighter gets slashed across the shoulder by the monster's vicious claws, you reach back and grab that bow

you just found, eager to find out what it does. You nock an arrow, pull back, and let it loose, but right as you were about to fire, the clumsy wizard bumped into you! You look on in terror as the arrow flies through the air, straight past the monster, and square into the fighter's chest. However, for some reason, the fighter doesn't seem hurt. He has an arrow sticking out of his chest, but if anything, the wound on his shoulder seems... smaller? You make a note to get this bow identified next time you're in town.

The Healing Bow is a bit of an odd item. It's a standard longbow, but whenever you hit a target with an arrow fired from it, it deals two different effects to the target. First, it deals 1d6 damage. Then, the arrow glows with a green light and the target gains 1d12 temporary hit points.

A risky item to use, this bow often ends up being intentionally fired upon allies in times of need. However, every now and then, it ends up doing more harm than good. Is it worth keeping, or should you get rid of it?

That decision is up to you.

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EPISODE 12: EARRINGS OF

TELECOMMUNICATION

Wondrous item, uncommon

The rogue scouts ahead of the party, looking down over the cliff at the enemy encampment. She needs to get information back to the party, but her allies are half a mile away, hiding. She has no way to send word, so she sneaks away and meets back up with them before formulating a plan (spending valuable time in the process). Couldn't there be a better way to communicate?

Elsewhere in the world, the party's home base is under the looming threat of an inactive portal recently created by a cabal of necromancers. The town's defenders, a party of adventurers, have gone off to quest in search of an artifact that can close the portal, but, unluckily for them, the portal opened days before they were set to return! How can the town get word in time?

Why, they could use the Earrings of Telecommunication, of course!

These magical earrings always come in a pairs. Each pair, when worn by two separate creatures, may communicate with each other over vast distances. The earrings have the same functionality as the Sending spell, except their communication lasts up to one minute. Each use of this communication costs one charge. A pair of Earrings of Telecommunication have 4 charges, and they regain 1d4 every day at dawn.

Give one to the party scout, and keep one back at camp. That way you can keep up with every update as it happens. If you have to leave your home base and travel far, just leave one with a trusted confidant who can use it to reach you while you're away. Communication has never been easier!

EPISODE 13: MAGESLAYER WEAPON

Melee Weapon (Any) Very Rare

This is a magical enhancement that can be applied to any weapon, and the effect that it has is a simple one: a Mageslayer Weapon ignores the armor bonus granted by any magical effect (such as the Mage Armor, Barkskin or Shield spells). This simple effect causes a Mageslayer Weapon to be incredibly deadly against any enemy spell casters who rely on spell armor.

In addition to the mechanics, however, this item can have some serious roleplaying implications. How would Mageslayer Weapons be viewed by other characters? Would a nation run by a Magocracy look kindly upon people wielding such weapons, or would owning a Mageslayer Weapon be grounds for arrest? Maybe the instructions for crafting this type of weapon was lost during the great Magus wars, and only recently has an evil warlord unearthed the recipe. Perhaps he plans to use it to destroy the cabal of altruistic spellcasters that have plagued him for years. The players could be tasked with not only finding the Mageslayer Weapon recipe, but destroying every such weapon they find so that the enchantment can be eradicated from the world.



EPISODE 14: ELIXIR OF LOVE

Potion, Rare

After drinking this elixir, the drinker must make a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or fall under its spell for 1d4 hours. While affected by the elixir, the drinker is treated as if Charmed (as per the Charm Person spell) by the first person it sees after imbibing. The Charm effect grows more and more intense as the effect nears the end of its duration. Various strengths of the Elixir may exist. Some may have higher save DCs or longer durations. Some tales even tell of a witch who brewed an elixir of love so potent that it was said to make the drinker fall in love permanently.

This elixir has many obvious uses: from kindling a love that was never meant to be, to enchanting an aged noble so that he will sign away his fortune to you. However, it's important to remember that (unless you've persuaded the aforementioned witch to aid you) the effects WILL eventually wear off, and the affected person will remember everything that happened during the elixir's effects. If they are able to figure out that the effect was magical and that you were responsible, expect repercussions. Use at your own risk!



EPISODE 15: THE HOWLING HALO

Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement)

The Howling Halo is a magic ring that, when worn, allows the wearer to use the Druid's Wild Shape ability once per day. However, when using it, the wearer turns into a specific form: a wolf.

While this item is fairly simple in its function, the DM can feel free to change any of its features to fit the campaign. Instead of a wolf, this item might allow the wearer to turn into some other specific creature - even ones that a Druid of that level might not normally be able to turn into - such as a bird, an ooze, or a spider. In this way, a DM can put this ring in a place where the creature it grants access to will be given an advantage in completing the current quest. Imagine if the players are sent on a quest to hunt a legendary golden stag. On their hunt, they find the corpse of an orc wearing this ring, and when a player puts it on, they become the golden stag they were sent to hunt!

EPISODE 16: THE CLOAK OF VIGOR

Wondrous Item, rare (requires attunement)

From the outside, this cloak looks like an ordinary, sturdy all-weather cloak. However, when worn, its magic becomes apparent: the inner lining is incredibly plush, and it feels as soft and thick as a fine mattress wrapped in silk sheets. The wearer feels like they could wrap themselves up and get the best sleep of their lives even on hard ground as long as they were wearing this cloak.

Whenever the wearer gains the benefit of a long rest, they regain an extra Hit Die, and they recover two levels of exhaustion rather than only one.

MAGIC
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EPISODE 17: THE PLUMMETING POUCH

Wondrous, Uncommon

The Plummeting Pouch is an unassuming canvas satchel with a thin string hanging off one side that is worn around the waist, resting just below the wearer's stomach. If the wearer finds themselves falling any distance and they are conscious and able to take reactions, they can spend their reaction to activate the pouch by pulling on the string. When activating the pouch, roll a d20; on a roll of 2 or above, the satchel opens and releases a huge canvas parachute that grants the wearer a slow fall effect identical to the Feather Fall spell. On a roll of 1, the parachute fails to open. The slow fall effect lasts until the wearer lands safely on a surface, at which point the Plummeting Pouch must be removed in order to easily move around without dragging the parachute behind them. A Plummeting Pouch may only be used once, as the act of releasing the magic damages the mechanisms that kept it contained.

While a wearer has the parachute active, a creature with a ranged weapon may attempt to

damage the parachute by making an attack roll against an AC of 10. A hit reduces the potency of the slow fall effect, causing the wearer to take damage on landing as if they fell ten feet. Multiple hits stack, increasing the damage on landing by ten feet per successful hit.

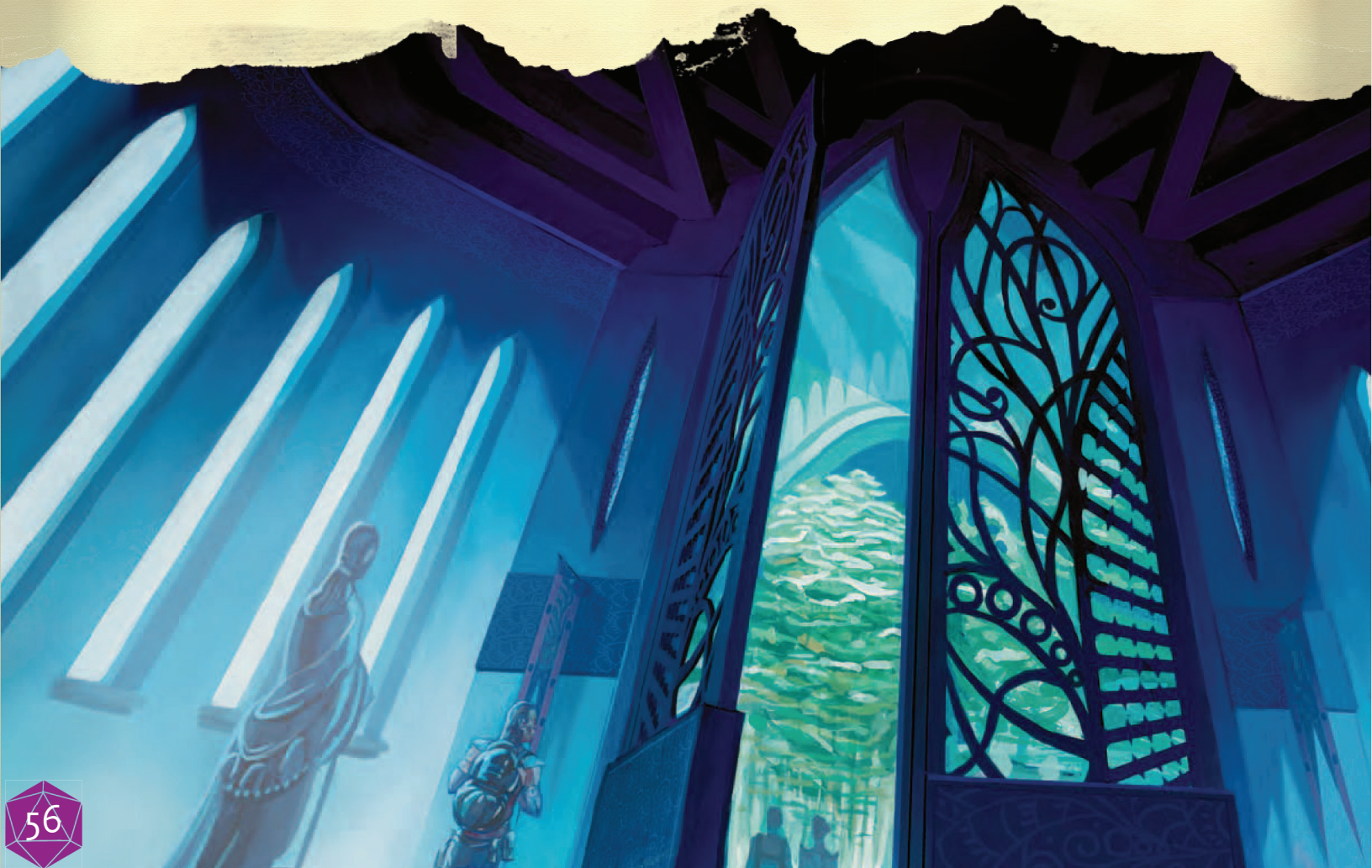
EPISODE 18: THE MYSTIC TOP HAT

Wondrous, common

“And for my next trick...”

This slightly shabby-looking top hat can be worn like any other top hat (though it is a bit oversized no matter what creature tries to wear it). If the command word is said when it is held in one hand, the holder may reach inside the hat and pull out a creature! This functions like a Find Familiar spell, but with a casting time of one action and a duration of 24 hours. The hat's magic functions in this manner once per day.

There is one important note, however: a familiar pulled from the hat is randomly chosen with each casting, and there is no guarantee that the creature will be friendly towards the summoner.



EPISODE 19: THE HOOKSHOT

Wondrous, uncommon

You've been making your way through a perilous dungeon (slaying bats, crushing skeletons, and dodging bladed traps that shoot past you) all because the prince has been locked away by the evil sorceress. You've found a map of the dungeon, a magical compass that leads to the evil sorceress' lieutenant, and a giant key that will open the lieutenant's chamber. With a small key you picked up earlier, you open up a giant chest which glows from the inside. You hear ethereal music playing in the room as you heft yourself up over the lip of the chest, reaching in to find...

...The Hookshot!

The Hookshot is a metal tube containing a length of chain with a bladed hook on the end. The wielder may spend their action to make a ranged weapon attack against an object or creature up to fifty feet away. On a hit, the hook either lodges into the target (in the case of an object) or it deals 1d6 piercing damage (in the case of a creature). As a bonus action, the wielder can command the hook to return instantly. If the hook is lodged into an object light enough to be carried by the wielder, then the returning hook brings the object with it. Otherwise, it pulls the wielder to the hook, instantly moving them to the location of the hook. This movement provokes attacks of opportunity.

EPISODE 20: GAUNTLETS OF MONKEY

GRIP

Wondrous, uncommon

While wearing these gauntlets, an object held in the wearer's grip cannot be taken or dropped involuntarily. They are immune to any effect that disarms, and an object held in hand cannot be taken via Sleight of Hand or even through an opposed Strength check. When it comes to holding things securely, the wearer of these gauntlets is unbeatable. You also gain advantage on all Strength (Athletics) checks to climb.

EPISODE 21: POTION OF SWIFT ACTION

Potion, very rare

In your hand you hold a glass vial, inside of which a silvery substance seems to be moving and swirling on its own. While it's in your pocket, you can feel it vibrating as if it's impatient and wants to be used.

When consumed, the substance in the vial grants you the ability to take a sudden, momentary burst of speed. The drinker can use the fighter's Action Surge ability, granting them an extra action, which can be used for anything they would normally be able to do in an action. This ability can be used only once, and it must be used within five minutes of drinking the potion or the magic of the potion is wasted.

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EPISODE 22: THE DANCING VIOLIN

Wondrous Item, common

This old and battered violin looks out of place in any high-society function, but when you study it up close, you realize the dents and scuff marks are signs of wear and use. The violin has clearly been used by an aficionado for many, many years. How it got here is a mystery, but when a violinist picks it up and begins to play, you can't help but dance.

This violin has a maximum of 4 charges and regains 1d4 charges at dawn. By expending a charge and taking an action to play it, all other creatures in 120 feet who can hear the music in range must succeed a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or fall under the effects of the command spell to dance. Creatures who cannot hear or be charmed are immune to this effect. The effect continues for as long as the violin continues to be played, with another save being granted each round the effect continues.

Submitted: Game Masters Stash

EPISODE 23: VIAL OF BLINDING

Potion, uncommon

You find a globe-shaped glass vial that fits easily in your hand. Inside the container, two liquids slosh around, staying separate despite being contained together. Where the two liquids touch, the substances glow brightly, and if you stare too long at the roiling mixture it leaves lightning-shaped spots in your vision. Rather than being consumed like most potions, this item is used by vigorously shaking up the liquids contained within before throwing the bottle up to 60 feet away.

Upon shattering, the combined liquids create a sudden explosion of light which blinds every creature within a 15 foot radius until the end of their next turn (unless they can succeed on a DC 15 Constitution save). A creature that knows the effect is coming can avert their eyes as a reaction, granting them advantage on the save. Creatures who have no eyes are immune to this effect.

Legends tell of a more powerful version of this spell that, in addition to creating a blinding flash, creates a cacophonous roar that deafens affected creatures in addition to blinding them.

EPISODE 24: THE SAILOR'S DREAM

Wondrous, common (requires attunement)

Stories tell of a far-away island where the natives decorate themselves with magical tattoos. While you're out on an adventure, you find yourself in an area reminiscent of the tales, and decide to get yourself a souvenir. One of the locals imprints an image of a smiling, seductive man or woman on your skin, and when the light is just right you could swear you saw the image wink at you. It's only when you're back home flirting with an interesting individual in your local tavern when you hear a voice speaking to you; to your shock, the tattoo is talking!

The Sailor's Dream is a sentient tattoo of an individual of any race or gender that is pleasing to your character. It can speak to you and keep you company on lonely days at sea, even giving advice when trying to set up a potential romantic encounters. However, this isn't always a good thing. Its advice might not always be appropriate (too forward or shy, etc.), and over time, it might grow too attached to you (no pun intended). It might be jealous of people you're spending too much time with. Each tattoo has its own personality and goals, though those goals may be a little... two-dimensional (again, no pun intended). If you and the tattoo are getting along, you'll have a friend who'll never leave your side (literally). If you scorn your tattoo, however, beware the consequences.

Submitted by: Aurican's Lair
www.auricanslair.wordpress.com

EPISODE 25: BOOTS OF THE BRASH

Wondrous, Uncommon (requires attunement)

These boots were created by a mage who would read tales of strong heroes and deadly adventure. Since he was not strong, fast, or brave himself, he made these boots to grant the wearer the power to perform immensely powerful kicks. The boots have 5 charges, and they regain 1d4+1 charges at dawn. As an action, the wearer may spend a charge to perform a kick. The kick grants the wearer a +10 bonus on their Strength check to break or move an object, and it adds 3d6 damage to any object damaged by the kick. If used against a creature, treat the kick as an unarmed attack but with an added 3d6 bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 10 feet.

It's said that the mage that created these boots made them to help him become the strong, brave hero that he always longed to be. However, his first "quest" had him kicking open the door of a bandit's lair, only to be shot down by the ruffians hiding inside.

Submitted by: Game Masters Stash

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DM TIPS

Lets not deny it. Being a Dungeon Master is tough work. You are in charge of developing a story, roleplaying NPC's, running monsters in combat, and adjudicating the rules. The amount of work can sometimes be very challenging. Over years of play you begin to pick up little tricks and techniques that help you improve your skills at running the games and entertaining your friends. What if you could just pick up an ancient tome with a plethora of that knowledge compressed and stored in short, concise segments that are easy to memorize and reference? Well now you can. Our DM tip section is similar to a bag of holding packed to the brim with tips to help you deliver the best gaming experience you can. While not all of our tips will be for everyone, and some may sound like they come from another plane, we encourage you to try them. Find those that work for you, and shape and adjust them to fit at your table.

EPISODE 1: FREE SPEECH PHASE

Think of your favorite intense battles in popular fiction. The hero and villain lock swords, and they taunt or plead with each other between sword blows. The villain begins monologuing as the battle moves from one phase to another.

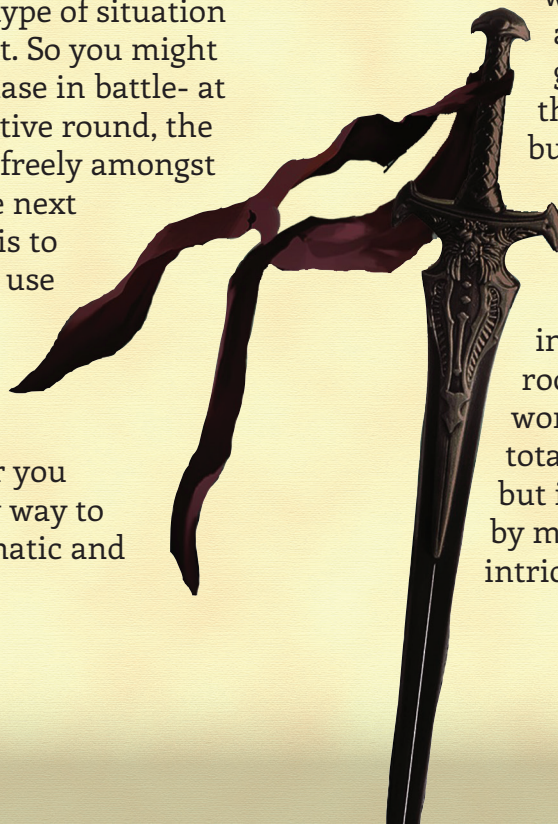
The current Dungeons & Dragons ruleset doesn't exactly allow for this type of situation to happen smoothly in combat. So you might try implementing a special phase in battle- at the end or start of every initiative round, the players (and NPCs) can speak freely amongst themselves before starting the next round. The players can use this to discuss tactics, the villain can use this to challenge the players or ridicule them and their beliefs, or you can have NPCs providing commentary on the events so far. Whatever you use it for, it's a quick and easy way to make your battles more cinematic and memorable.

EPISODE 2: EVOLVING WEAPONS

Finding magic items in D&D is a lot of fun; not many people will argue that. However, not all DMs like giving them out often - some want them to be rare and significant whenever they appear. Rather than giving out a +1 sword, and then later giving out a +2 sword so the player can chuck out that old +1, what if you gave out items that grow and develop as the players perform epic feats of courage?

Imagine a hero who is gifted a sword forged by a fabled blacksmith who has passed away. Later, when he uses that sword to slay a red dragon terrorizing a town, something different happens. Maybe, with the final blow, the hero pierces the dragon's heart, bathing the sword in its blood. After the great beast is slain, the hero lifts the sword and finds that the blade shines with an unearthly power. Its blade has become supernaturally sharp. Through killing this red dragon, the sword has become +1! Then, later on, the player uses the sword to kill a powerful ice giant that was trying to freeze the continent through an arcane ritual. Upon striking down the frozen giant, the hero finds the sword's blade has become supernaturally cold, and now it functions as a +1 Frost Brand!

As a DM, you can let players' weapons, armor, staves, and all kinds of magic items evolve as they level up. The item might be an ordinary weapon that becomes magical as it is used to perform feats of greatness. It might be an item that already has a storied past but has been long forgotten, and as the players uncover its past it becomes a legendary artifact when it was originally used as a doorstop in the shopkeeper's storage room. It lets DMs put a lot more work into fewer items to keep the total number of magic items low, but it also keeps players interested by making each item a deep and intricate character all on its own.



EPISODE 3: WHO'S THAT MONSTER?

Imagine this: the players are on an expedition to chart an unexplored region of the jungle. On the way they pass a cave, and they decide to check inside for a possible shelter against the rain. The DM tells the players to roll for initiative, and when the first round begins, the players hear, "You hear a noise from the shadows, and the Medusa hiding behind a corner pulls out a bow and fires at you!" One player might immediately perk up and say, "Oh, a Medusa? They can petrify you with their gaze, so I'm going to close my eyes and attack blindly."

In this scenario, several mistakes were made. If the players have never encountered a specific monster and/or they have no reason to know what the monster is, then saying the name of the monster (as it appears in the Monster Manual) can be a mistake. It'll clue experienced players into recalling information that they might not have in-game. Even if the player is trying not to metagame (i.e., use outside knowledge in-game) it can still make the game harder for them because it'll force them to put themselves in danger to avoid metagaming. Either way, it's a lose-lose for the player.

Instead, don't refer to monsters by their names unless the characters have a way of knowing what they are. Try referring to them by their appearances. A Medusa might be "a scaly-skinned woman with snakes slithering around her face." Trolls might be "rubber-skinned giants with nasty claws." If a stalagmite whips out a tentacle to attack a player, calling

it a Roper will probably clue in savvy players to start attacking the stalagmite. If you just say that a tentacle whips out to attack, the players might make think there's a monster hiding behind it. If a doppelganger had taken the place of an NPC, you surely wouldn't start off the session by saying, "The doppelganger walks up and speaks to you," would you? Of course not! You'd play on the knowledge that the characters have so that the players might not suspect anything until it's too late.

The players can make skill checks to identify monsters, but that information shouldn't be offered up immediately or without request. Once the players encounter the monster for the first time, feel free to let them know any information they need during the next encounter, as is appropriate.

EPISODE 4: OVERPOWERED MONSTERS

Let me ask a question: how often do your players run away from combat?

Probably not very often. Escape may not always be an option but chances are your players probably never run away because they're used to monsters always being an appropriately-levelled challenge for their party. While this isn't a problem in and of itself, it can engender an attitude within your players that will make them feel like their only option in any case is to just keep attacking.

If this is something you would like to change, then the first thing you can do is to stop keeping combats appropriately-levelled! Throw a legendary monster at your party that is far, far too high of a level for your party to defeat. Don't necessarily have it run in and kill the party a TPK is rarely fun and it might make your point a bit too well but let the players see it (and make skill checks to determine whether they know how impossible of a fight it would be) so they can decide to avoid the encounter if they wish. This will teach your players that they aren't the biggest fish in the pond, and if you make this a semi-regular occurrence then it will constantly remind them that running from combat is always an option.

DM TIPS



EPISODE 5: FIGHTING SMART AND DUMB

When was the last time you had your kobolds set traps for the players? Do your enemies prioritize healers and spellcasters in combat, or do they just attack the closest foe? Have you ever had enemies gather information about the players before engaging so that they know what sort of tricks to expect?

Your NPCs and monsters don't simply have to be a pile of hit points and melee damage. Look at the enemies' intelligence scores - are they smart? Stupid? A smart foe is as deadly as they are prepared, so have your high-intelligence monsters set traps, coordinate attacks, train minions, and so on. They might prepare protections against the players' most common spells and attacks, or lure them into traps using treasures they know the players are looking for.

Don't forget the stupid enemies either! They can have just as much depth as intelligent enemies. A low-intelligence monster might not fight until death and instead choose to flee. Conversely, they might not realize escape is an option, so they might keep fighting until their dying breath! If a high-Challenge Rating monster has low intelligence, they may use sub-optimal tactics or they might be easy to fool or avoid. It's up to you if you want to award less experience in such a case.

Whatever the case, you want your monsters to feel like living, breathing, dynamic characters; using their intelligence is a great way to do it!

EPISODE 6: ROLL WITH IT

You're running your players through a dungeon, and one of the players says he wants to search for secret doors. You know there aren't any secret doors, but you tell them to go ahead and roll anyway so as not to reveal that there are none. However, the player rolls a natural 20. What to do?

You could put a secret door there that wasn't supposed to be there. It doesn't have to be hiding treasure or something good; it could easily lead to a different part of the dungeon that you weren't sure how to fit into the adventure. Maybe it's locked, and now you can have the players find a key in the evil wizard's pocket which will open the door. Maybe the

door hides a secret that will lead into the next adventure.

Whatever the case, when a player wants to do something you didn't expect (particularly a skill check when one wasn't necessary), try to roll with it. Tell them to roll, and while they're rolling think about what you could add to the adventure that would make good use of the player's idea. It can be good to reward players for clever thinking even when it wasn't necessary because it will reinforce the idea that clever thinking can produce results. If you're always shutting players down when they do something unexpected, it can make them think that trying new things is a bad idea.

You can even use players' ideas as a way to add new features to an adventure! Let's say the players are talking amongst themselves about who might be behind the series of murders in town, and one of them mentions how that creepy shopkeeper gave them a weird look. Meanwhile, you were planning on having it just be a random gang of orcs that wandered through. Go ahead and roll with it; if the players' idea is more interesting than yours, don't hesitate to swap out the players' idea for what you had planned. Not only will it result in a better game in the end, but it will make the players feel satisfied that they were picking up on the clues you were totally putting out the whole time!



EPISODE 7: POPULATE YOUR ROOMS

The players are searching through a dungeon, and the room they just entered is a 10x10 square with a door leading in and leading out. They go to the next room, and find another 10x10 square with a door leading in and leading out. The next room is the same, and so on, and so on.

As you can expect, this can get boring really fast. Empty rooms are never interesting. Think about what these rooms were and what purpose they served. Was this room a kitchen? A weapon storage room? A latrine? Describe the features of the room: an empty rack on the wall, a shelf with a few crumbling books, a locked chest (that may or may not be empty), all of these details are incredibly simple to add. Not only that, but you can use these details to foreshadow upcoming events or provide a clue as to how to bypass traps or defeat the enemy.

So populate your rooms, even if the room isn't relevant to the story.

EPISODE 8: GIVE NON-TREASURE REWARDS

Getting treasure is awesome, but treasure comes and goes. If you complete a quest for the king and receive 1,000 gold pieces, that's cool, but what if, instead, you're granted a title? Or maybe a plot of land? What if a parade is arranged in your honor? Non-treasure rewards can be so much more interesting and life-altering than another thousand gold. Titles can be something that exemplifies your character's traits (such as "Champion" or "Archmage"), and plots of land can be turned into strongholds and/or businesses (which could then generate more income for your players in the long run). Parades or feasts in your honor can be great plot hooks and can lead to plenty of adventures in the future!

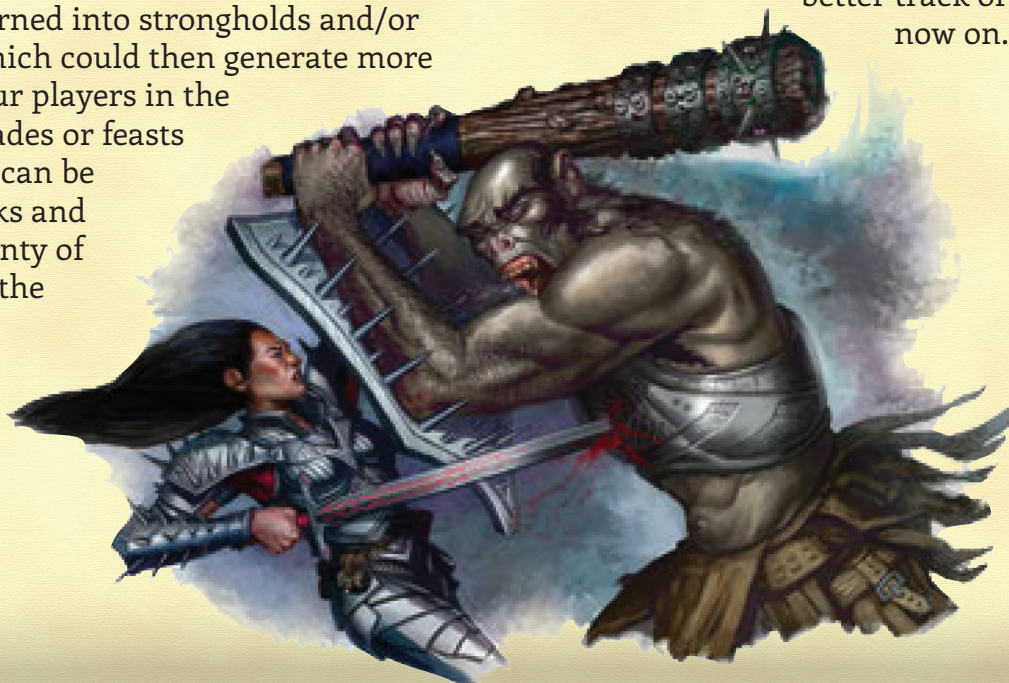
EPISODE 9: ERR ON THE SIDE OF THE PLAYERS

You're running an encounter, and the players are losing. You're trying a new monster, and it turned out to be way more powerful than you thought it would. You don't want the campaign to end in a TPK, especially if it's because you misjudged the monsters' stat block, so what to do?

The answer: err on the side of the players. If you made a mistake, do whatever is best for the players. If you made the encounter too difficult, then maybe just knock off some of the monsters' hit points so that they'll go down sooner. Maybe have a bigger monster show up and chase the smaller monsters off, leaving the players for dead. As long as you don't make a habit of pulling out a deus ex machina on your players, I doubt anyone is going to mind getting saved by the DM once or twice (and that's if they even realize it's happening).

If there's a reason the players should have taken damage or something and you forgot about it, then do whatever is most beneficial for them. If you forgot to have them make a save last round, then find some reason for why they didn't have to. Don't ever have a player take damage or make a save retroactively (unless it's something that benefits them.). Use the mistake as an opportunity to make sure that you keep better track of things from now on.

DM TIPS



EPISODE 10: PRE-GAME UPDATES

Communicate with your players outside of the game! There's lots of ways this can happen:

1. Set up a date/time reminder for upcoming sessions
2. Use Facebook or some other social media messenger to communicate between games
3. Make food arrangements ahead of time so you don't need to spend valuable session time
4. Give a short recap of the previous session to keep players ready to play
5. Have your players make magic item wishlists so you know what treasure to allocate
6. Have your players come up with character goals and desires so you can incorporate them into upcoming adventures

The more communication, the better!

EPISODE 11: CLASSES FROM A HAT

Do you ever feel like your players are always playing the same types of characters (one player always plays the big strong fighter, one player always plays the nimble rogue, one always plays the healer, etc)? Here's an idea that will liven things up, and add some random chance to your game: Classes From A Hat!

Simply put, make a bunch of character concepts, put them in a hat, and have the players draw them. Whatever they draw, that's their character. You might have fully-fleshed-out characters in the hat, or maybe a simple framework so the player can fill in the details. You might have a race/class/background combo already assigned together, or you might want to have different hats for each category (one for races, one for classes, one for backgrounds, etc.). You might even want to have the players make the characters and then put them in the hat so each player has a different player's character!

Now, obviously you might not want to do this for a full campaign, but for a one-shot it can really change things up and force everyone to try something new. The players might even realize they like their new characters so much they want to turn it into a campaign! Try it out, and have some fun with it!

EPISODE 12: GUIDING NPCs

Let's be frank: Dungeons & Dragons is a complicated game, and it can be difficult for new players to know what skills will be necessary for an adventuring party. Will the players know to bring a source of healing? Do they know to keep watch at night? Do they get frustrated when they hit a dead end after missing some of the more subtle clues in the adventure? You could just tell them what they need to know, but maybe there's a better way.

Enter the Guiding NPC! Give the players an NPC that offers to act as their guide (for a share of the treasure, of course). This NPC is well-versed in the ways of adventuring. They can offer tips to the players to keep them safe, to watch their back, and to make sure the adventure runs smoothly. Don't ever let this NPC outshine the players in combat. The NPC should either hang back at all times, or provide a very small amount of support. Whenever a puzzle or a roleplaying encounter takes place, they're there to serve the players and to help the DM usher things along if absolutely necessary.

If it feels appropriate, feel free to kill off the NPC or have them leave the party. If the players grow attached, a heroic death can leave a lasting impression. If the NPC simply leaves, they can be a recurring character that the players can consult for advice as they grow in experience.



EPISODE 13: DON'T TAKE ANY S#!T

Rules disputes are bound to come up from time to time. Nobody knows the game perfectly, and even if they did, they don't cover every possible scenario. Sometimes you have to make a judgment on the fly, either because there isn't a rule for what's happening, or because you don't like the rule that's in the book. You're the Dungeon Master; deciding the rules is not only your privilege, but your responsibility.

Not everyone understands that, and there's going to be times when a player doesn't like a ruling you made. They might argue with you, or try to change your mind about how you ruled it. While you should definitely take your players' wants and needs into consideration when you make a ruling, at the table your word is law; once you've made a decision, the players have to stick to it.

If a player tries arguing with you about a rule or a judgment call at the table, shut them down immediately. You're the DM, and you made your call. Nobody wants to set aside time from their busy schedule to sit at a table where people are arguing about rules all night. When a dispute happens, it's your responsibility to make a ruling and move on. You might want to talk to the disputing player after the session is over to hear what they think, but under no circumstance should you let them undermine you at the table.

This is a team game and you're all there to have fun, but the group chose you to be Dungeon Master and it's your job to be the final arbiter of the rules. If a player is unhappy with your DMing style, then let them try running a game at a future date to see if they like it.



EPISODE 14: TAX THE RESOURCES

Do you ever feel like your party has way too easy of a time with the final boss of a dungeon? Do you constantly see the players using their highest-level spells during almost every battle, especially during the climactic encounter? Do you have trouble bringing down players because they always have too many hit points and spell slots?

Chances are, you're not taxing their resources enough. Spell slots and hit points are limited resources, and encounters (both combat and non-combat) are meant to drain these resources. If the players are at full HP and have all of their highest-level spells when they reach the final boss, then it's no mystery if the fight is over too quickly!

One of the easiest ways to tax resources is to impose a time limit on the adventure. If there's nothing stopping the players from going back to town and resting, then they're going to do exactly that. If there's no reason they can't spend two weeks clearing out the dungeon, then be glad they're not spending three! However, if an evil necromancer's ritual must be stopped before midnight, then the players will be forced to go through the entire dungeon in one go. They won't be able to constantly replenish their resources, and the final fight is bound to be a climactic one.

Another way to tax resources is to force players to spend them in unusual ways. A stressful or tiring slog through a desert or swamp might sap players' Hit Dice, for example, and a magical lock might require a spellcaster to harmlessly discharge a certain number of spell slots into it to pass (and the lock resets if they leave and come back)! Have some fun coming up with interesting ways to turn renewable resources into keys to make your dungeons more interesting and meaningful!

DM TIPS

EPISODE 15: THE CUT SCENE

The players have completed their quest, defeated the demon, and closed the evil portal. They're traveling back to town to sell their recovered treasure, and recuperate from the adventure they've just completed. As the players start flipping through the rulebooks to level up and pick out magic items, the DM gets their attention. Suddenly, the story is not following the characters; it's following the dark sorcerer that summoned the demon. He's apologizing to the demon prince master he follows, and he is vowing to succeed next time, lest his soul be torn from his body. Meanwhile, back at the table, the players are looking at each other uneasily. They've realized that their quest may not be over just yet.

Cut scenes are commonplace in movies and video games; there's no reason they can't work in tabletop games as well. Take the opportunity to show the players a bit of what's going on behind the scenes. They could find out what happened to that magical sword they sold to the shopkeeper, or they could see what's happening back home while away on a quest. You can give the players plot details they might never have gotten otherwise, and you can show them that there's more going on in the world than just what happens to their party. You'll need to be careful and talk to your players about using metagame knowledge. If you show a cut scene of a new ally secretly being a villain, it would be poor form for the players to have their characters suspect that ally without any in-game justification. A group of mature players shouldn't have much difficulty compartmentalizing their information.

When done well, cutscenes can enrich a game and make it feel more like a cinematic experience rather than just a game. However, when done poorly, they can derail a campaign and make it hard for players to play their characters. Use them wisely!

EPISODE 16: S#IT HAPPENS

The battle has been tense. The party has taken some serious damage, and the spellcasters are all out of spell slots. The Big Bad Evil Guy is wounded, but he's still standing. The party fighter raises their weapon to make one final attack that will end the fight, and... misses. It's okay, better luck next time. Then the Big Bad goes to attack... Uh-oh, Natural 20. The damage is at its maximum. Everyone at the table is whipping out their calculators scrambling to figure out if there's any Temporary Hit Points they forgot to incorporate but it's no use. You just killed one of the player characters. Everyone loved that character, and the player had lots of plans for that character's future.

While you can probably spend all day beating yourself up over it, don't. Misfortune is part of the game. If it wasn't a possibility the game wouldn't be as fun. If a player character dies as a result of an unlucky dice roll, then that's just how it is. It isn't your fault, it isn't anybody else's fault, it's just how it is. Conversely, if the players completely destroy a villain you'd spent a long time working into a future campaign, don't worry about it. You can come up with something better. If the PC died, that player can make a new character, or the party can pool their money and get that character raised. As long as the players had a chance to run, then the encounter wasn't unfair. When the dice fall a certain way, there's nobody that needs to feel bad about it.

Don't go out of your way to kill a player character, but don't go out of your way to avoid it, either. Let the dice fall where they may, and whatever happens, you and the rest of the players will find a way to make the best of it. The fighter might come back with a new lease on life, or maybe the player will choose to start taking levels in Cleric because they saw the divine and now can't go back to hitting things with a sharp stick. Who knows, maybe that fighter's death will turn out to be the best thing that happened to them.

EPISODE 17: THE EXTRA ENCOUNTER

You've planned out an epic adventure for your players, and you've got lots of challenges, puzzles, and encounters meant to tax every remaining resource the entire party possesses. You've been planning this adventure for weeks, and you can't wait for everyone to show up and get started.

Then you get a text. One of the players can't make it. Pulse pounding, you get another saying the same thing from a different player. Before you know it, half of the party (or more) can't make it, but the rest will be there and are eager to play. Or, maybe they all make it to the session- but when the adventure starts and they're about to set out on the adventure, they suddenly and unanimously decide they want to go somewhere you hadn't planned anything for. What are you going to do?

Have an "In Case Of Emergency" folder stashed away with your gaming gear. A few pages of encounters, some plot hooks, some puzzles, anything that you can take and slot into an existing campaign whenever the session you had planned can't happen for whatever reason. There's lots of potential resources online that you can access at your leisure, so take a little bit of time and some forethought to save some generic material so that you can have something to do whenever you get thrown off your schedule. Players are going to go off the rails sometimes, and life always finds a way to get in between you and your planned adventure. Plan accordingly, and have something ready for whenever you need it!

EPISODE 18: USE TRAPS

"I check this room for traps."
Nothing.
"I check THIS room for traps."
Nothing.
"I check THIS room for traps!"
Nothing.
"Why did I even play a rogue?"

How often do you use traps in your game? Maybe you should be using them more. There's a reason dungeons and tombs typically still have treasure in them: because everyone who tried taking it before didn't survive long enough. You should try to use traps in your games more often! Not only are they interesting, but they let players use certain abilities (like Danger Sense and Fast Hands) that otherwise wouldn't be as useful.

Remember, traps don't have to be something that the rogue deals with while the rest of the party sits back and stares at their fingernails. Throw traps into combat encounters. Disarming a trap is way more tense when there's a squad of orcs running at the party. Traps don't even have to be damaging-

they could set off alarms or cut off exits or destroy treasure. Try to incorporate your traps into the environment where they're located.

Dwarven traps might be incorporated into stonework and door mechanisms, but goblin traps are more likely to be built into floors with natural materials. Kobold traps are typically poisoned, and they could incorporate elements (fire, ice, acid, etc.) according to the type of dragon that they're related to! Traps can come in an infinite number of varieties, so use them!



DM TIPS

EPISODE 19: PLAN FORWARD

The players have just sat down for tonight's session, and you're walking them through the beginning of the adventure. Let me ask: what's on the agenda next session? Do you know what awaits them at the end of the dungeon, or were you planning on finding out between this session and the next? What about after this adventure is over; what will the next quest entail? Is there an overarching plot, and, if so, do you know roughly what that plot is or where it will be going?

While you should never have everything set in stone, you should always have a plan for what's going to happen in future sessions. You don't have to know what'll happen four or five sessions from now, but you should definitely know what's going to happen next session. What if the players find a way to skip your dungeon? What if they trick the guards into escorting them directly to the boss at the end? Do you have that part planned out, or were you hoping to have an extra week before that came up? Next week you might be swamped with work, and you might not have time to prepare as much as you hoped. Do it now to make sure it gets done!

The overarching plot of the campaign is also something you should be thinking about. The plot should be able to go wherever the players want to take it, but the further ahead you're planning, the earlier you can start planting seeds for events that will happen later. How much greater will that late-campaign plot twist be when the players realize you've been foreshadowing it since they were level 3? If you try to foreshadow something and it never comes to fruition (like if the players go off in a different direction than expected), then they probably won't even notice the discrepancy. Still, if it pays off, it'll be awesome. So plan ahead!

EPISODE 20: SET THE ATMOSPHERE

"You enter an empty 10x10 room. What do you do?"

Vs.

"The wooden door creaks as it opens, and a sliver of light pierces across the uneven floor until it hits the rough cobblestone wall ten feet away. Somewhere nearby you can hear dripping; a damp smell hits your nostrils, and you can taste the mildew in the air. The room appears otherwise empty, but the prickle of hairs standing on the back of your neck makes you feel otherwise."

There's a lot more to a roleplaying experience than simply data. Try to get your players to feel like they're actually in the game. Give your descriptions enough oomph to stimulate all of the players' senses, and use that to get them more invested in what's happening. Atmosphere doesn't even have to stop at sensory input. What kind of vibe are the characters getting? Having to land the killing blow on a demon-possessed innocent child might seem easy if you just say, "Okay, the enemy is in front of you. Are you going to attack?" Instead, try to tug at their heartstrings by saying, "For a moment, the child seems lucid. She immediately starts to cry, and you can hear the sorrow and pain behind her wails. You begin to wonder if you can really do this, but then you notice the evil grin hiding behind her eyes..."

As the DM, you are the players' window into what the world looks, sounds, and feels like. So open up and let them in!





EPISODE 21: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

You're frustrated with your players because none of them engage in the game world. None of them give interesting descriptions to their attacks or spells. Their energy level is always low, and you notice them checking their phones all the time. They take forever on their turns in combat, and you don't know what to do!

Let me ask a question: are you leading by example?

How energetic are you when you're describing the game world? Do you add an exciting and interesting flair to enemies' attacks and spells? Do you find yourself glancing at your own phone right before getting upset at players for doing it? Do you plan out enemies' turns in combat, or do you wait until it's their turn to start looking at their stat blocks?

Do your players joke around and constantly talk out-of-character in a campaign that you wanted to be serious and gritty? If you want it to stop, then lead by example. Don't joke around with them, and keep your attention on the game as much as possible. The more you play the game the way you want it to be played, the more the players will take your lead and do the same.

EPISODE 22: FESTIVALS!

As a DM, it's important to kill your PCs. Before you kill them, however, let them have a little bit of fun!

Plan out festivals for the players to take part in. Remember to give your festivals a reason and a theme - harvest, solstice, flood season, etc. - so that the players feel like the event exists in a living, breathing world. Describe how the local populace prepares for the festival. Describe the decorations, the vendors selling goods, and the performers that are arriving to try and make some money during the celebration. Try to plan out events that will happen during the festival (eg. parades, competitions, speeches from the local governor, and so on).

The festival could be part of an adventure. Perhaps something is stolen during the festival, and the players need to retrieve it. Maybe an evil wizard is planning an attack on the city during the big harvest feast. Even though festival conflicts can be fun, consider having a festival just for the sake of having a festival. Let the players enjoy their well-earned rest. Let them roleplay, let them have fun by enjoying the fruits of a fleshed-out game world. You never know how much you'll appreciate some fun downtime until you get it!

DM TIPS

EPISODE 23: INTERRUPT YOUR PLAYERS

Now, the title for this DM tip is a bit misleading. You don't want to interrupt your players, but you want to interrupt your player characters. Are the player characters taking a long time to work out the plan for ambushing the enemies on the road ahead? Have the enemies show up early, or ambush the players instead. Are the players having a long conversation with an NPC in a tavern, and you want to break up the flow to get everyone's attention? Have a brawl break out and see how the players deal with it. Best of all, interrupt your players while they're resting. If the players can take a short rest any time they want by just saying "we rest for an hour" without any fear of interruption, then there's no reason for them not to do so. Instead, have some enemies show up while they're taking a short rest. While they're resting in the inn at night, have a thief show up to steal from them. They'll be in a position to stop the theft, but they'll be unprepared and they'll have to solve the encounter without all of the resources they typically have.

Have enemies show up while the spellcaster is performing a long ritual. Remember, if an ability takes a certain amount of time to use, that length of time is pointless if there's no chance of anything disturbing it. What difference does it make if the casting time is one minute vs. one hour vs. one day if it's all going to boil down to "okay, we cast the spell, what happens now?" By interrupting players during events like these, you reinforce the importance and variety in the rules by reminding players that different abilities have different costs.

Of course, don't interrupt your players all the time. If you do, it'll get predictable and annoying. Instead, do it once in a while, usually at a time when it'll have the most impact.

EPISODE 24: REINFORCE STATEMENTS

Player: I'm gonna kill the stupid kobold.

DM: Okay, you slit his throat with your dagger. His head falls to the side lifeless, and blood runs down his cloak.

Player: Oh wait, I don't want to do that. I wanted to ask him some questions first.

DM: Then you shouldn't have killed him!

Do your players ever say something, and then try to take it back once they realize the consequences of that action? Do they ever jokingly say their character is going to do something terrible, but then claim they were just kidding or talking out-of-character?

Don't let them! If they said they did it, they did it. If they're able to "take back" actions whenever they don't want to deal with the consequences, then there might as well not be any consequences. If they joke about slapping a noble, have a guard arrest them for assaulting a noble in broad daylight. Sure, sometimes they'll claim they were speaking out of character, but if you want to keep the flow of the game going don't let them speak out of character unless they explicitly state they are doing so before they're doing it. At times it might seem like you're being vindictive or trying to lawyer them into making a mistake, but that's only if the consequences are always bad. Sometimes doing something off-the-cuff can lead to worthwhile events that wouldn't have happened otherwise. If the player really does want to slap the noble (if the noble is, say, being a total dick), then maybe them saying it out-of-character can lead to something good when they actually do it.

Don't abuse this tip (you'll know better than me if your players are joking or talking out-of-character at any given moment), but keep in mind that sometimes you should stick to it and reinforce a player's statement instead of letting them flip-flop around all they want.

EPISODE 28: INCIDENTAL REFERENCES

The party is locked in combat with a group of bandits, and the paladin's turn comes up. He proudly proclaims, "Do you not see the sigil emblazoned on my armor? It marks me as a member of the Defenders of Light, the protectors of these lands for centuries!"

Now, in this case, you raise an eyebrow because not only were the Defenders of Light not a part of the campaign that you had determined ahead of time, but you never even realized the player was a member of any kind of order (or even that they had a symbol on their armor). Still, what if it was all true?

Whenever a player takes on a bit of worldbuilding while playing their character (making up NPCs, referencing places or organizations, etc.), try incorporating the things they've said into the game. In the above-mentioned example, maybe the next time the players are in the area a frantic commoner runs up to the players, recognizes the paladin as a Defender of Light, and begs him to save his family! Perhaps members of another faction, the Creators of Darkness, show up in town one day to declare war on the party because they harbor one of the Defenders of Light in their midst.

Letting players create the world along with you, even if it's just through off-handed dialogue, can help the players feel like the world they're in is a collaboration instead of just one person's story. It will help them feel more invested in the world and the people in that world. If possible, take those incidental references and run with them!



PLAYER TIPS

Often times, we as players can take for granted the massive amount of work that the DM puts into the game. In the end, we don't spend much time thinking on what we can bring to the table. D&D, and roleplay games in general, are group storytelling experiences. That means, just like the DM, there is a lot of prep you can do to help bring the game to life. Character creation is often considered the biggest part of the players collaboration to a game, but that is far from the truth. Everything you do in game and out of game adds to this fun and wonderful experience. In our Player Tips chapter, we offer guidance, tools, and techniques to help you become more engaged in the world you're helping to create. Some of these tips may seem like common sense to some, but they might trigger light bulb moments for others. We want you to have the best gaming experience possible, regardless of the game being played. We have gathered many juicy tidbits from various great roleplayers, but, when it comes right down to it, there is one player tip to rule them all! Don't be a Dick. You can avoid dickitude by...

EPISODE 1: DOING STUFF

As a DM, the worst feeling in the world is when you describe a scene and then look around the table only to hear crickets chirping because the players are sitting there, staring at you, waiting for someone else to do something.

When you're a player, engaging with the game is your most important job. Remember that your character has goals. When you enter a town, do you wait for the DM to describe every noteworthy location before moving along with your quest, or do you immediately start looking for the nearest tavern? When inside the tavern, do you simply say, "I order a drink and find a table in the corner" so you can wait for someone or something to come to you, or do you seek out an NPC that your character would want to speak to or keep an eye on?

The DM will do their best to provide you with options, but remember that there are always more. If you're just waiting for the DM to list off a bunch of choices, then you're putting all the work on the DM. Instead, offer suggestions off the bat. Take the initiative to search for clues or do things that your character would do; you'll find that the game will go from being one-sided to being a collaborative story as a result.

Your character should always be doing something. Think about your past, goals, and what your character wants to achieve both now and in the future. All of these should inform what your character is doing at any given moment.



EPISODE 2: COME PREPARED

If a DM came to a table and had nothing prepared for the session, you'd know it. You'd have to sit around waiting for them to flip through books, and whenever they got the adventure going they'd have to constantly check books to see how abilities and spells worked - it would probably seem like everyone's time was being wasted. Preparedness isn't just essential to DMs. As players, you should arrive at a gaming table with as much prepared as possible. This can articulate in lots of ways, including:

1. Bring your character sheet! Nobody wants to sit around waiting for you to re-make your character because you forgot yours at home.
2. Bring your dice and pencils! Oftentimes other players will have extras for you to borrow, but you shouldn't need to borrow from them. You have just as much of a responsibility as everyone else to keep the game running smoothly.
3. Remember where you left off last session! A good player might even take notes during one session to help them remember what they were doing, so next session the game can just immediately hit the ground running.

As the mantra goes, don't be a dick. Everyone is taking time out of their busy schedules to show up at the table, not just you. Accidents happen you're going to forget your supplies or be unprepared once in a while - but if you're actively trying to keep it from happening, it'll happen less. I guarantee it.

EPISODE 3: DESCRIBE CHARACTER ACTIONS

"I move here, I attack."

"I cast Magic Missile. Eight damage."

"I'll make an Athletics check to climb the wall."

All of these are perfectly acceptable ways of playing the game, but they're not very interesting. As a player, you have an entire world in your mind that you can use to enrich your game play. Think of the earlier examples, but imagine if they sounded like this instead:

"I run around the enemy and duck under their blade by sliding across the floor. As I slide past, I stab my rapier at their side, aiming for the spot where their armor connects under their arm."

"I chant my magic words and whip my hands out in front of me. Three glowing skulls of arcane energy erupt from my fingertips, streaking across the room. They split apart to strike the ogre from every direction."

"I run up to the wall and jump, kicking off the windowsill for leverage as I pull my way up the tattered curtain.

From there, I use the irregular flagstones to help me climb up the wall."

While some people might think those are a bit wordy, anyone can agree that those sound more exciting than simply saying, "I attack". Some DMs might even give players Inspiration for coming up with interesting descriptions for their abilities, but I wouldn't count on it.

Regardless, the game is more fun when you put more work into making it fun. How would you enjoy a kung-fu movie if all the characters would only walk up and punch one at a time?

PLAYER
TIPS

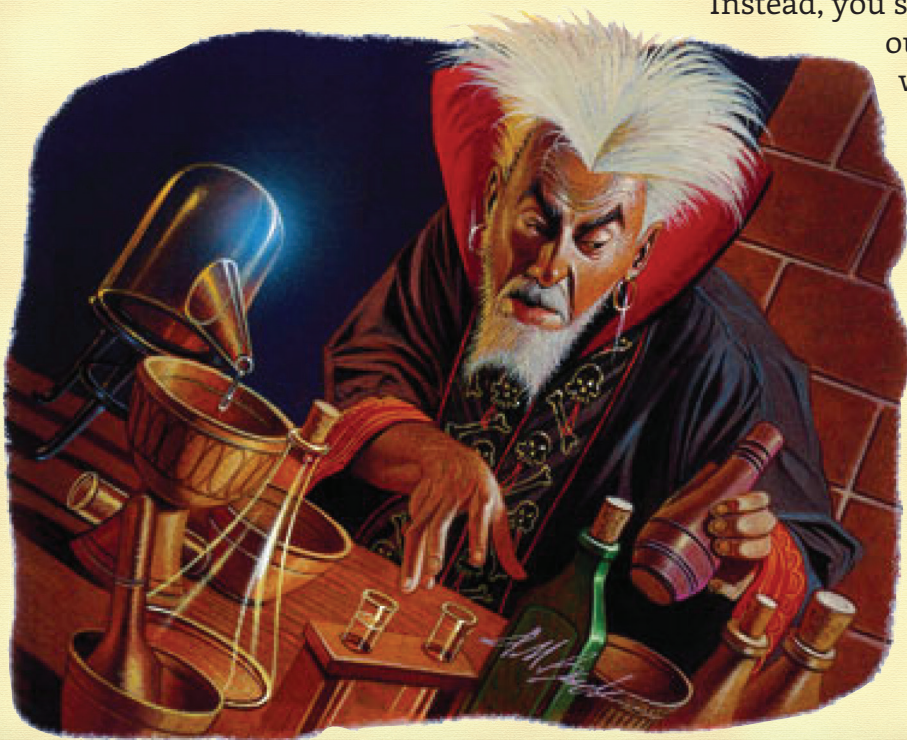


EPISODE 4: HOW DID YOU LEARN THAT?

Your party is hired to track down and kill an evil green dragon that's been terrorizing a village. Remembering that your character is a Ranger with the Favored Enemy: Dragons ability, you proudly proclaim that you will lead the expedition!

Think about that for a second. Why does your character have that ability? Were your parents killed by Dragons? Were you part of an ancient order that was tasked by the gods with eradicating dragons from the earth? Do you hate dragons, or do you just hunt them as a profession? How many of them have you killed? If you do hate dragons, does this hatred extend to dragonborn or half-dragons of other races? Did your character spend years learning what sort of spoor or tracks dragons leave behind, or do they have a supernatural ability to sense where a dragon has been recently?

These sorts of questions can really flesh out your character and give you inspiration for new ways to play the character. Also, it doesn't have to stop at abilities like Favored Enemy. Who taught your fighter to properly wield a sword? Who was the original caster that developed the Fireball spell that you've used to great effect? Who taught you the ins and outs of lockpicking? Think about these questions to make your character feel more real!



EPISODE 5: TAKE THE HOOKS THE DM GIVES YOU

Your characters are sitting in a tavern when an old man in a dark robe beckons you into the corner. Rather than speaking to the old man about the mysterious map he's found, you decide to take your drink and go elsewhere (oblivious to the DM's confused stare). Once you've finished your drink, you step outside and hear screams coming from the thoroughfare and roars of the scaled beast flying around town breathing fire! But, hey, you were hoping to go apple-picking today, so you ignore the screams and go off on your own way. Then, your god appears in the clouds before you and commands you to go on a quest to retrieve a lost artifact, but you say no thanks and keep walking. Meanwhile, the DM has thrown his hands up, packed his books, and left the game.

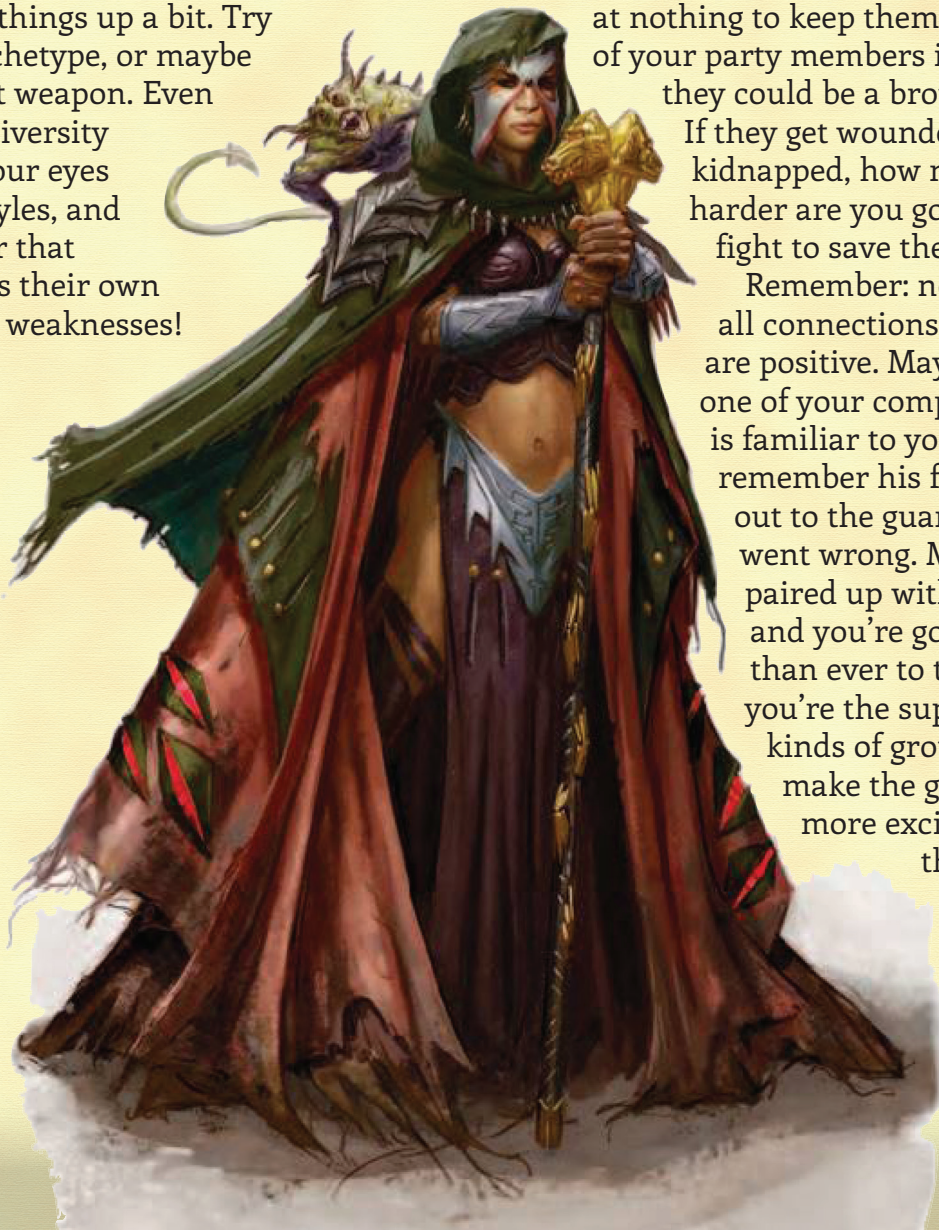
What went wrong here? I'll tell you: you didn't take the DM's hooks for the adventure. Forget about the character for a moment. You came to the gaming table to go on an adventure. When the DM gives you a hook for an adventure, instead of thinking, "Would my character want to go on this adventure?" you should be asking, "Why does my character want to go on this adventure?" Whether or not you're going to go adventuring shouldn't be in question.

Instead, you should use the adventure to flesh out your character, and come up with a reason why you would be interested if one doesn't arise. If you can't think of a reason why your character would go on an adventure, then make a new character that would go on the adventure. Leave your old character behind to be an NPC.

EPISODE 6: DIVERSIFY YOUR CHARACTERS

We all know this type of player: they're playing Throg the Barbarian after their previous character - Throg the Barbarian - died in combat. Before that, Groth the Barbarian was killed by an unlucky crit. Before that, Gorth the Barbarian was killed in the party's first encounter with a Roper in the Underdark. Every time they make a new character, it's the same character with a different name.

Now, there's no reason to force people to play a character they don't want to play. If someone really, really likes playing Barbarians, then they should feel free to. However, if you want to be a great asset to your party, try playing different characters each time. Instead of an up-front melee character, try playing a ranged fighter, a spell-slinging sorcerer, or a heavily-armored healer. If you just can't tear yourself away from playing a Barbarian again, at least try to change things up a bit. Try a different archetype, or maybe use a different weapon. Even a little bit of diversity might open your eyes to different styles, and you'll discover that every style has their own strengths and weaknesses!



EPISODE 7: BUILD GROUP CONNECTIONS

Your party have been given an adventure. You're following a mysterious map given to you by an old man in a dark robe that you met in a shadowy corner of the tavern. When you get out on the road and a fight breaks out, you're all going to be relying on each other for your lives. What if a dragon swoops down and grabs one of your companions? Are you going to chase after the dragon to try and save your ally's life, or are you going to shrug and say, "Too bad for him. Let's go back and get a replacement."

When you're playing a group with a bunch of random people who just met, chances are you aren't going to be invested in what happens to the other members of the group. However, what if two of the party members used to serve under you in the city militia? They'll probably follow your orders more closely because they know that if something goes wrong you'll stop at nothing to keep them safe. Perhaps one of your party members is very close to you; they could be a brother or a sister.

If they get wounded or kidnapped, how much harder are you going to fight to save them?

Remember: not all connections are positive. Maybe one of your companions is familiar to you because you remember his face as he ratted you out to the guards when a heist went wrong. Maybe you've been paired up with a long-time rival, and you're going to work harder than ever to try and show that you're the superior one. These kinds of group connections make the game feel so much more exciting and personal than just meeting up in a tavern and going on an adventure with strangers.

PLAYER
TIPS

EPISODE 8: SHARE THE DM'S WORKLOAD

Do you ever feel like battle takes forever? Does the DM ever seem flustered, or maybe mix up details while trying to keep the game running smoothly? Try offering to help share the workload!

Offer to keep track of initiative. If the DM is behind a DM screen, and is constantly having to stop and move miniatures, move them yourself! Work with the DM to track experience, or keep a list of treasure gathered, or even something as simple as packing up books or cleaning the battlemat. Being a DM is a lot of work-rewarding work, but still work- and anything you can do, no matter how small, will help lighten the DM's workload and make it easier for them to keep the game running smoothly.

If your DM has been having a rough week and is struggling to keep all of those plates in the air at the gaming table, maybe- and this is a big one, so don't take it lightly- offer to run a game session yourself, and give the DM a chance to sit back and be a player for once. That'll help the DM have a different experience they probably don't get very often, and it can be a refreshing change for your group to try something a little different! (Also, it'll surely give you a better appreciation for the work that your DM puts in!)

EPISODE 9: CHARACTER BUILDING AWAY FROM THE TABLE

Have you ever packed up your books after the session was over, and then gone home and wished you didn't have to wait until the next session to play some more? Have you ever had a fun moment between two characters that didn't quite get fleshed out enough at the table? Have you ever just had the urge to roleplay your character, but you're at home by yourself?

Build your character away from the table! Start an email chain between yourself and the other players, in character. Write out a journal from your character's perspective. If the last session ended with the characters taking a few days to rest in town, make a list of things your character is doing (or wants to do) during the downtime. Doing these sorts of exercises not only works your roleplaying muscle, but it also might help you develop new motivations and new ideas for fun things to do at the table. Next time your group gets together you'll have all sorts of new fun things to tell the other players that will make it more fun for everybody!





EPISODE 10: KNOW YOUR ACTIONS

You're sitting at the gaming table, and it's your turn. You look over your character sheet, you flip through your spell cards, you debate a few actions, and eventually you decide to simply attack the closest target. You roll your attack, you roll your damage, but then you remember something else you wanted to do with your Bonus Action. Then you open up the book, you flip through to look at your class abilities, you remember that the ability was detailed elsewhere, flip a few more pages, and so on...

...All the while, the entire group is waiting for you. Your turn only took about three or four minutes when all was said and done, but you're one of five players (plus the DM). If everyone else takes as long as you did, that's around twenty minutes per round (not counting the DM and all of their monsters). Your combat encounters could easily end up taking several hours to just fight for a few rounds!

There's many factors that cause combat to take longer than it has to, and one of the biggest factors is players not knowing what they're going to do until their turn comes around. It's understandable to a point; you probably have a lot of actions, and what you do is often going to depend on what happened immediately before

your turn. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't be thinking about your turn before it comes around.

At any given moment, you should have some sort of a default action for your character. Attack the nearest target if you're a Fighter, cast Eldritch Blast if you're a Warlock, throw out a Cantrip if you're a Cleric or Wizard, and so on. Then, if your turn comes around and you're not prepared, save everyone else the time and just go to your Default. "I can't remember how this spell works, so I'll cast Sacred Flame this round and I'll look up the other spell in the meantime."

If you have a few spells you're likely to cast, read up on those spells when it isn't your turn so you know how they work. If you have a magic item you might use, have the page open so you're ready to go if you need it. Know your weapon damage. Know how many attacks you're able to make. Know what actions you have at your disposal so you can easily pick one when the time comes. If you can't decide, go back to your default until you can make a decision. Everyone's time at the table is valuable (including yours), so try to use it wisely.

PLAYER
TIPS

EPISODE 11: SHIFT THE FOCUS

You're a great roleplayer. Of course you are! When a situation comes up in-game you're always among the first to come up with a reaction from your character, to start looking for solutions to problems, and to engage in the campaign world around you. The DM only needs to give you an opportunity to shine and you'll shine your brightest. Great, right?

Well, not everyone is as great of a player as you are. Other players might not be as seasoned as you, and maybe they keep quiet and follow the leader rather than take charge themselves. While this isn't necessarily a bad thing - everyone starts somewhere - you might want to try and encourage other players to engage in the world more. There's a lot of ways this can be done: maybe you can ask the other player (in-character, preferably) what they think about a given course of action. Maybe you can tell them your plan and ask for ways to make it better. As long as you're incorporating the other players into the action, they'll be encouraged, and they'll feel more confident about participating on their own.

Before you know it, they'll be the one helping newer players engage in the game world!



EPISODE 12: DON'T METAGAME

The player characters are out on their first adventure, and they're learning about the magical and dangerous world that they live in. While traveling through a swamp, they encounter a hulking humanoid with vicious claws and rubbery skin. The fighter leaps forward and slashes at the beast, impaling it right through the chest. However, victory turns to dismay as the humanoid's wound starts to close and it lurches forward to attack! The party wizard begins casting Ray of Frost, when one of the players pipes up:

"Use Firebolt instead. This troll has regeneration, and fire is its weakness."

What just went wrong here? Well, a player used information that their character wouldn't have in order to gain an advantage. That's called "metagaming," and it's generally frowned upon. In this scenario, nobody in the party had knowledge of trolls or how their regeneration functioned, so specifically calling this information out was metagaming.

Metagaming is a tricky issue because you can't exactly erase knowledge that you, the player, have, and you shouldn't be penalized for being more experienced than someone else. Even so, there are ways to mitigate metagaming by working it out in-character. Instead of simply urging a fellow player to use a specific tactic, try to work with the DM to see if your party might have that information. Offer to make skill checks (Nature, Arcana, etc.) to see if your character has studied the monster in question, or - if your DM allows it - say that your character used to go hunting in these parts and they were told by the locals to bring along a torch in case trolls showed up. If your character typically used fire anyway, then don't worry about it. Just keep doing what you were doing.

Metagaming is going to bother some DMs more than others, so try to work with them to help the game run smoothly. It never hurts to run an idea by the DM before doing it in-game. If you don't know if your character would know or do something and you're afraid of metagaming, just ask! Your DM will surely appreciate the question over you just acting on it without bothering to check.



EPISODE 13: DON'T BE A RULES LAWYER

I'll just put this out there: knowing the rules front to back isn't a bad thing. I'll also say that while the DM should usually know the rules better than everyone else, oftentimes they don't. Sometimes they might make a judgment call that goes against the rules, and there's nothing inherently wrong with pointing out a rule when the game veers away from them.

However, many DMs make a conscious decision to veer away from the rules for various reasons. Maybe they don't like that rule, and they want to play it differently. Maybe the scenario they have in mind works better with a little tweak to the rules; that's their right and theirs alone. While it's perfectly fine for you to know the rules and even to offer up a page number when the DM is unsure, once the DM makes a ruling, that's it. It's now your responsibility as a player to follow that ruling, whether you agree with it or not, and play as if that was the rule printed in the rulebook.

Now, don't get me wrong. If this bothers you you can bring it up to the DM away from the table. Once it's been addressed and ruled by the DM, don't bring it up during the game session. Just don't. Instead, play the game as adjudicated. Once the session has concluded, take the DM to the side (or send an e-mail, make a phone call, etc.), and explain to them why the ruling

bothered you. A good DM will take the players' thoughts and concerns into consideration, but if the DM decides to stick with the previous ruling, then that's it. You shouldn't bring it up again, even if it bothers you. If it only bothers you a little, then over time you'll get used to it. If it's a deal-breaker, then you might want to consider finding a new group. It's not that it will be impossible for you to enjoy the game, but a strong rules disagreement might be a symptom of a difference in expectation between players. If that's the case, then it might be in everyone's best interest for you to find a game that's better suited to your expectations. The old group will be able to play the game as they were, and you'll be able to enjoy the new group without constantly butting heads with the DM.

Remember: never argue with the DM about rules at the gaming table. The rest of your friends took time out of their busy schedule to play a game, not to listen to you argue about something that they probably couldn't care less about. You can try and use your knowledge of the rules to help the DM run their game more smoothly, but, again, once a ruling has been made, that's it.

-Yours truly, a self-admitted
Rules Lawyer

PLAYER
TIPS



EPISODE 14: SHARE LOOT

Have you ever been in a group with a player who insists that they need every piece of treasure - from the magical armor to the magical weapon to the magic ring and the magic cloak - AND they also expect a share of the coins? Don't be that player.

Treasure should always be divided up as evenly as possible, even if that's a bit difficult to discern at times. Sometimes the treasure will include magic items that are clearly best-suited for certain characters. The magical Thieves' Tools might provide a great benefit to the Rogue, and the +2 greataxe will do more damage in the Barbarian's hands than the Wizard's. Even so, just because an item is best-suited for your character doesn't mean that it shouldn't be included when evenly distributing the treasure. If you take a valuable item, then you should also take a smaller portion of the cash from the hoard. If there's an uneven amount of treasure that is suited for your character (e.g. a chest containing a magic staff, a magic spellbook, and almost nothing else) then consider taking some of the magic items your character already has and putting those into the pot so that another player can use them. You could take the staff and spellbook, for example, and then give your Ring of Protection to the party Rogue to bolster her Armor Class.

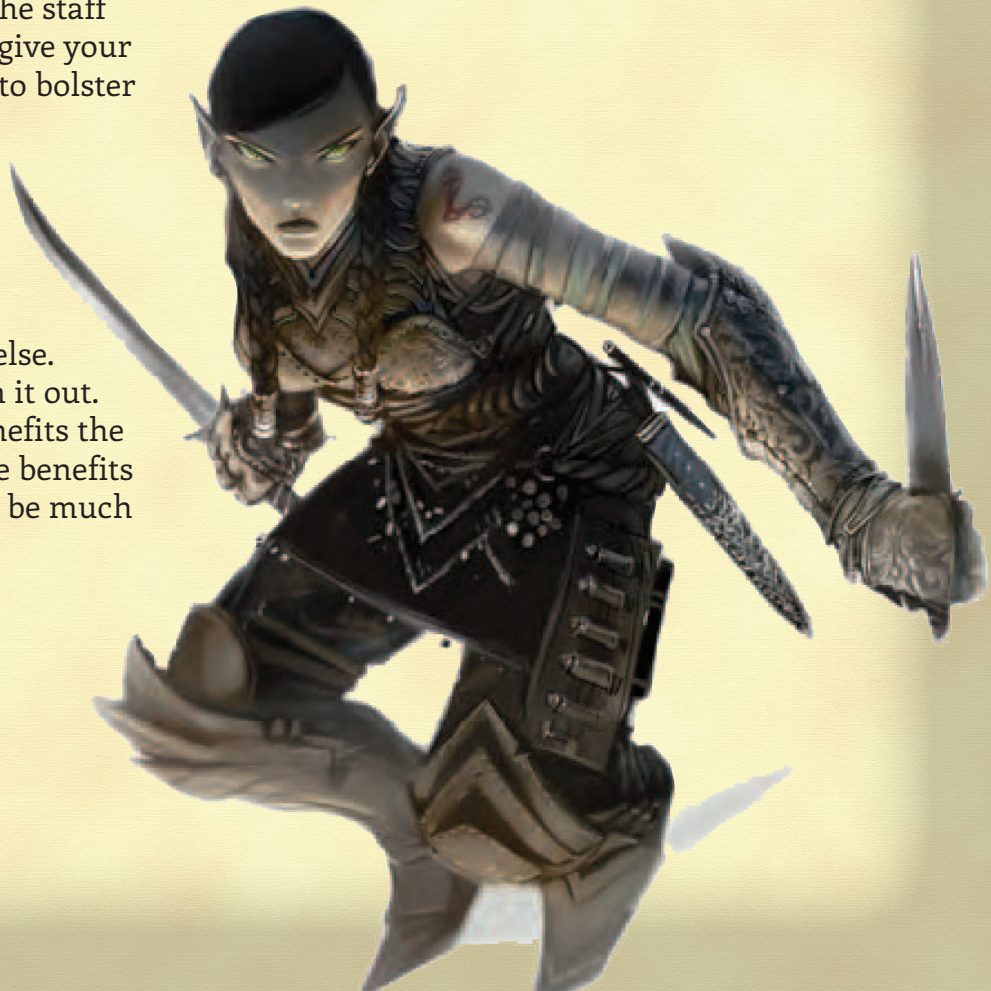
It's not always necessary to stress out over counting each and every gold piece to make sure everyone gets an even share, but try to keep an eye on whether or not you've been getting more treasure than everyone else. If you are, try to do something to even it out. A benefit to one member typically benefits the whole group, but if you can spread the benefits out so everyone has something, you'll be much better off.

EPISODE 15: READY YOUR ACTIONS

How often do you ready your actions? Maybe you ready them in combat, but how often do you ready them out of combat?

Readying can be an incredibly powerful tactic when used well. Enemies that hide behind cover to attack can be foiled by readying an action to strike them when they pop out to attack. A rogue is at their most deadly when attacking with an ally, so if no allies are adjacent to your target, readying an action until an ally joins you will let you gain Sneak Attack when you'd otherwise have to wait a round. You could even do something as simple as keeping your weapons drawn when searching a dungeon, so you can ready an attack if something comes around the corner. Just be careful; what comes around the corner might not be an enemy!

It's important to note, of course, that if you set a trigger for your readied action and that trigger never occurs, then your action was wasted. In fact, if you ready a spell and the trigger never occurs, then that spell slot is wasted along with the action you spent to ready it! For this reason, be extremely careful when readying any spell higher than a Cantrip!



EPISODE 16: KEEP YOUR DRAMA AWAY

FROM THE TABLE

You're having a terrible day. You got written up at work, your bank account is overdrawn, you got a flat tire this morning, and you left your wallet at home so instead of lunch you had to get by with an old packet of crackers you found under the microwave. The only thing that can cheer you up is your D&D game, so when you walk into the room and see all of your friends around the table flipping through rulebooks, the first thing you do is... complain about your day and unload all of your baggage on them. Right?

Wrong!

Gaming with your friends is a great way to blow off steam, but remember that it's not your personal therapy session. I'm sure your friends will be willing to help you out if you need something, but they all left their problems behind so that they could be at the table and have a good time. You should try to do the same. Use D&D as a way to get your mind off of the stresses in your life instead of using it to ruminate in them. If you have an issue with a fellow player, talk to them before or after the game; don't bring it to the table.

If you're worried about something going on tomorrow and there's nothing you can do about it today, then leave that stress at the door. The only thing you should be worrying about at the gaming table is how much HP you have, whether to use that potion, and who's chipping in for pizza. When you walk in that door, you should be focused on having a good time and helping your friends have a good time - nothing else. If your elective pastime is as full of stress as your workplace, then something went wrong!

EPISODE 17: TAKE PICTURES

Playing D&D is more than just a game, it's a social event! When you play, you are (hopefully) hanging out with your friends in a familiar space and having a good time. Every once in a while, snap some pictures! Some documentation every now and then will give you something to look back on at later times that can remind you of the fun times you had playing D&D with your friends. Candid pictures, pictures of the battle-mat covered in intimidating miniatures, pictures of a player or DM acting out something that's happening in-game, all of these moments can be fun snippets of an exciting time in your life that you'll probably look back on fondly! Not only that, but photos can have a functional purpose too. If you have to end a session in the middle of an encounter, a picture of the battlefield can help everyone keep track of where the PCs were and what was happening when the session ended.

Of course, take the other players' privacy into consideration when taking pictures. If someone doesn't want their picture taken, or if they don't want you to share those photos on social media, respect their wishes. Most of the time that shouldn't be an issue, so go ahead and document all of the fun times you had! I guarantee you whenever life rears its ugly head and you have to stop playing with that group for whatever reason, you're going to wish you had taken more pictures or had more memories to look back on!

PLAYER
TIPS

EPISODE 18: SHARE YOUR STORY

If you're like me (and you may or may not be), you tend to go overboard when writing your character backstories. After all, it's way more fun to play a character when you know how they learned that language, why they have that personality trait, and how they got that scar. If you haven't already, give that character backstory to your DM! It may not be something you want the rest of the party to know (at least not until you've been with them a while and you find yourself around a campfire where you can tell everyone about your journey), but if you give it to the DM, then they can use your backstory as future plot hooks. How awesome would it be to encounter an NPC rival that you created for your backstory as opposed to just some random enemy that the DM came up with?

There is just one important thing to remember: if you're going to write a long character backstory, remember to leave room for growth. Nobody, unless they're on their deathbed, is done growing as a person. Everyone learns from their experiences, and they will continue to learn from the experiences they haven't had yet. Your character is the same way; the end of your backstory isn't the end of the story, it's the end of the prologue. Your character should continue to grow in character as they grow in level.

EPISODE 19: USE TERRAIN TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

You're in the tavern trying to get some information when the dwarf in the corner decides you've been asking too many questions, so he walks over and smashes a bottle over your head. As you get back up, your party joins you in the fight, as do the dwarf's allies. In this tavern, with tables, chairs, curios and baubles hanging from the ceiling, bottles sitting on the bar, stairs going up and down, and people all around you, the fight becomes... well, everyone is simply attacking with their equipped weapons. Yawn.

Instead, how about this:

knock over tables and use them as cover. Grab a chair and smash it over the dwarf's head. Light one of those bottles on fire, so it explodes in a thug's face! Run up the stairs, then, when an enemy follows you, kick them back down! Use the environment around you to gain an advantage you wouldn't have had otherwise. This doesn't start or stop at taverns; grapple enemies and impale them on stalagmites. Grab some beakers off of the alchemist's lab shelf and toss them into an enemy's face. When the dragon is chasing you around its lair, distract it by tossing a handful of gold in its face as you look for somewhere to take cover. Use your imagination! You're playing D&D, not a video game! The sky's the limit!



EPISODE 20: SET TRAPS

The orc squad came around the corner, all four brutes sniffing the air.

“I know I smelled elves,” their leader snorted, “they can’t be far!”

The party, a mere thirty feet away, is huddled behind a boulder. They’re gripping their weapons in fear and anticipation. The rogue, however, had a grin on her face.

“Hey uglies!” She jumped out from behind the boulder, balancing a dagger on one outstretched finger. “Looking for me?”

The orcs roared and charged, weapons drawn. One of them fell into a disguised pit trap, getting impaled by spikes at the bottom. Two got crushed by a swinging log trap that was set off by their leader whose foot landed on a magical

glyph that froze him in place. The elf put her face in front of his, mirroring his frozen snarl.

“Grab the rope, guys,” she called back. “We’ve got some questions this guy can answer...”

Who ever said enemies were the only ones allowed to set traps? Not me! Next time you’re in an enemy stronghold, try and find a spot where you can lay down tripwires, dig a pit trap, or create any other kind of trap to catch enemies unaware. This is going to be a little bit more difficult for you because players tend to be the aggressors (whereas enemies tend to be the defenders), but with a bit of foresight and some creativity, even you can start setting traps! Just remember where you set them. The last thing you want is to sneak into an enemy base and get yourself stuck in your own pit trap.





EPISODE 21: READ THE DAMN RULES

Do you know what your character's abilities do? Do you know how much damage your weapon does or how your attack bonus is calculated? If your game takes place in an established setting, do you know what city your character lives in or what the surrounding area is? Do you constantly find yourself not following the plot of your game because it's referring to people or places or things that you don't understand?

Read the book! That's not meant as a reprimand or a criticism, but it's shocking how many players don't bother to actually read the book (preferring to coast on knowledge conveyed to them by their DM). Maybe you don't own a Player's Handbook for whatever reason that's fine. You can get the 5th Edition D&D basic rules for free on Wizards of the Coast's website, and reading it from beginning to end shouldn't take more than an hour or two at most. When you understand how the game works, how your abilities work, and so on, the game will run so much more smoothly. You won't need to constantly ask other people how to do something you want to do; you can just do it, and your DM will love you for that!

So take a little time and read the rules!

EPISODE 22: GIVE THE GAME YOUR FULL

ATTENTION

Do you check your phone while playing D&D? Do you sometimes have small side-conversations while the DM is describing a scene? Do you constantly interject with off-topic movie quotes or reference some TV shows or a movie you saw instead of focusing on the game?

First off, nobody's perfect, and things like this happen to all of us at some point or another. Just try to remember: when you're at the gaming table, you should be focused on the game. Everyone at the table is taking time out of their busy schedule to be there, so if your turn comes around and everyone has to wait for you to figure out your action because you weren't paying attention, then you're using up other people's time. I'm sure you wouldn't appreciate it if someone else did it to you, so show courtesy to your other players (and your DM) by paying attention.

Like I said before, distractions get to us all at times. If you're having a bad day and you don't think you'll be able to pay full attention, just mention it to your DM at the beginning of the session. Maybe he can give you an easier role for the session, maybe you can just kick back

and be a spectator that day, or maybe you can just go on and play as usual. At least you will have shown that you care enough to tell the DM in case it might be a problem. A little bit of consideration goes a long way.

Remember: we're all people! Let's have a fun game together!

EPISODE 23: ENHANCE YOUR RITUALS

When you cast rituals in your game, do you just say, "Okay, I cast this spell as a ritual. Ten minutes pass, what happens?" You might, because lots of players do that. Why not put in a little bit of work to make your rituals meaningful and exciting?

When you cast a ritual, describe what your character does. Do you draw out arcane glyphs on the floor and light candles to focus the magical energies? Do you take out your spell component pouch and sprinkle some bone dust on your head while crushing the skull of an enemy under your boot, or do you perform an ancient dance using your arcane focus as an extension of your body? What are the visual effects of your ritual? What does it sound like? What does it smell like?

These aren't necessary when playing a ritual caster, but imagine how much more immersive the game will be when you describe all of these sights and sounds to the other players. If you feel like it, you could even bring an actual book to the game (maybe something in another language, or a book of rhymes or poetry) and read a line each time you cast a spell. The more work you put into your spells and rituals, the more exciting and memorable they'll be!

EPISODE 24: DON'T SPLIT THE PARTY!

When the party goes to the right, do you constantly insist that your character goes to the left? If so, why? Let's be honest, sometimes you're just trying to steal the spotlight, or you're trying to be contrarian and go against the group just because. Splitting up for no good reason is bad for several reasons: not only is it easier for both parties to get attacked at a disadvantage, but it forces the DM to divide their attention meaning neither group gets the DM's full attention anymore. If there's a good reason for

this to happen, then that's fine the DM has probably planned it out ahead of time but when it happens just because one player wants to go against the grain for whatever reason, then it leads to problems. Imagine being part of a gaming group where one player is constantly demanding that half the session be all about them. That's a problem!

That's not to say this should never happen. If your character has some shady dealings that they need to take care of apart from the rest of the group, that can be a great addition to the game if it's done well. If you know that's what you want, then you should get together with the DM on your own time to work out what's going to happen. Don't take up more of the group's time than is necessary!

EPISODE 25: MAKE YOUR CHARACTER

STAND OUT

Does your character have any particular mannerisms? Any catch phrases? Anything that they do that might set them apart from the average person?

If not, then create one! Make your character stand out. Give them something that they shout when landing a finishing blow on an enemy, a distinctive suit or armor, or something that they do with their hands while lounging at the tavern. If your character is often fiddling with a deck of cards, bring a deck of cards to the gaming table and incorporate it into your playstyle! Come up with unusual exclamations your character can work into their dialogue, like "By Merlin's Beard!" whenever something shocking happens.

Your character is yours and yours alone, so you should have something fun to make them stand out just a little bit more! It's your character - have some fun with it!

PLAYER
TIPS

FINAL THOUGHTS

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