d20 system

Sword & Sorcery

MONTE COOK PRESENTS:
MASTERING
IRON HEROES

A RULES EXPANSION BOOK

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Malhavoc Press

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IRON HEROES

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INTRODUCTION:

RUNNING ACTION FANTASY

Welcome to Mastering Iron Heroes, *a guidebook to running* Iron Heroes *campaigns. This book is meant as a companion piece to the* Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes *variant player's handbook. It looks at game play from the DM's viewpoint, with an eye toward implementing the new rules and material from* Iron Heroes *into a campaign.*

Mastering *Iron Heroes* seeks to enrich campaigns in three ways. First, whenever possible, this book provides new options and ideas for existing rules. No two DMs run their games in an identical manner, and this book tries to account for that fact by offering new options, rules variants, and ideas for how to implement the rules in a campaign. For example, Chapter One provides alternate rules for generating a character's ability scores depending on the nature of your campaign.

Second, this book expands on some of the concepts given in *Iron Heroes*, particularly magic. Chapter Six even contains guidelines and rules for using magic items in *Iron Heroes*.

Finally, *Mastering Iron Heroes* tries to place as many rules as possible within the context of your campaign world, regardless of the form it takes. Commentary for new rules or variants discusses how a change alters the nature of the game and how best to apply it.

If *Iron Heroes* is a new game engine, think of this book as your owner's manual. It takes a step back from the raw mechanics and shows you how to tinker with the basic game experience and modify it to fit your vision of the game.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

Mastering Iron Heroes consists of seven chapters and one appendix. Here's what you'll find in each:

Chapter One: Abilities. This chapter discusses ability scores and presents several variants for creating characters. These variant rules make it easier to create a campaign with a specific flavor or tone by allowing players to create characters that better match the power level or basic theme of the campaign.

Chapter Two: Characters and the Campaign World. This chapter details ideas for juggling the character options from *Iron Heroes* to fit your campaign. It gives suggestions for customizing the story elements of the character classes, restricting PC options to characters from specific regions in your campaign world, and so forth. The basic idea behind this chapter is that it's much easier for players to grasp your campaign world if their characters have a clear, easy-to-understand place within it.

Chapter Three: Character Classes. This chapter presents character classes for the DM's use. It covers the *Iron Heroes* versions of the aristocrat, commoner, expert, and warrior, along with a new concept: villain classes. A villain class is a handy tool for creating a powerful NPC to oppose the player characters. Rather than go through all the steps needed to create a foe for the group, you can build one using a villain class. The villain class focuses on the few key abilities that a bad guy needs to oppose the party. It cuts down on the details that aren't crucial for a villain.

Chapter Four: Combat. This chapter looks at combat in terms of designing fun, challenging places for the characters to engage their enemies. It introduces zones, which help you

create interesting battlefields, and provides samples organized by terrain type. Whether you want to run a fight in the desert or in the mountains, this chapter gives you the tools needed to build a fun encounter.

Chapter Five: Treasure, Rewards, and Experience. This chapter looks at the role of treasure in *Iron Heroes*. In a game that removes magic items as a reliable source of power, money takes on a much different purpose. The characters no longer must save their cash for a powerful new magic weapon or wand. Instead, they can spend it on lavish homes, bribes, and other useful features. This chapter also provides advice on other kinds of rewards and on granting experience points.

Chapter Six: Magic and Magic Items. This chapter provides rules and advice for magic items in *Iron Heroes*. It focuses primarily on the mechanics for creating items, since most magic devices are unique items in *Iron Heroes*. Magic swords, armor, and other items tend to extract a terrible cost from those who wield them. An adventurer might use a magic item for a short time, but if he grows to depend on it, he might lose his life or soul along the way.

Chapter Seven: Campaign Options. This chapter is a toolkit designed to show you how to make small changes to the rules to create enormous differences in the tone and attitude of your campaign. It focuses on the rules for experience points (XP). By rewarding different actions with XP, you can shift the basic focus of the game to almost anything you want. A traditional monster-hunting game awards XP for defeating foes, but in a game where intra-party conflict, thievery, and greed reign supreme, a DM might award XP based on how much gold a character acquires.

Appendix: Importing Game Material. Finally, the appendix offers suggestions for DMs on how to convert material from other games for use in *Iron Heroes*.

Bonus source material and ideas to augment the information in *Mastering Iron Heroes* appear on Monte Cook's website. To find the links to these free web enhancements, visit the book's product page online at the following address: <www.montecook.com/MasteringIronHeroes>.

This sourcebook is protected content except for items specifically called out as Open Game Content on page 3. For full details, please turn to page 94. Open content is not otherwise marked in the text of this book.

USING THIS BOOK: DMS

Mastering Iron Heroes' primary purpose is to help guide you through the process of running and managing a campaign. *Iron Heroes* uses the same core rules as other d20 System games you've played, but its changes and additions are significant enough to alter the game's character noticeably. If you apply the same strategies and ideas to *Iron Heroes* that you use in other games, the game might not turn out exactly the way you want. In most cases, the changes are obvious. In other cases, it helps to consider the issues that come up.

If you already have an *Iron Heroes* campaign in progress, Chapters Three through Six provide a good overview on new rules and ideas that you can incorporate into your game immediately. A few highlights include:

Combat Rules: Chapter Four provides plenty of support for *Iron Heroes*-style combat. It introduces combat zones, tools you can use to create interesting environments. Zones are stunts that the DM adds to encounter areas for PCs and monsters to use. This chapter also provides rules for various terrain features.

Wealth Feats: These optional rules allow the characters to build up political and social influence, hire retainers, and purchase property using the wealth they gain through adventures. The wealth feats are designed to make it easier to keep track of money and manage it with a minimum of bookkeeping.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Mearls has worked as a freelance roleplaying game designer since 1999. This prolific writer maintains a high volume of work without compromising quality, which has won him a place on many gamers' lists of favorite designers. Buoyed by positive reaction to his first d20 works, he went on to produce material for leading RPG publishers, including AEG, Atlas Games, Decipher, Fantasy Flight, Fiery Dragon, Goodman Games, Mongoose Publishing, Necromancer Games, and others. His previous Malhavoc Press titles include *Legacy of the Dragons and Book of Hallowed Might II: Portents and Visions* (both with Monte Cook), *Mystic Secrets: The Lore of Word and Rune, The Book of Iron Might, Ruins of Intrigue,* and *Transcendence.* His work also appears regularly in *Dragon®* Magazine. He has recently joined Wizards of the Coast as a roleplaying game developer.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Nashville artist **Jeremy Jarvis** attended New York's Pratt Institute as a Fine Arts major, intending to work in comics upon graduation. He did survive Pratt, but the desire to pencil comics had been slapped from his hand by his dark, demanding mistress: watercolor. Jeremy is known for his tongue-in-cheek attitude, his eye for detail, and the tragic ability to render that detail in unforgiving watercolor. He has illustrated widely in the fantasy and gaming industry, and his work has been included in The Spectrum Awards and The Society of Illustrators' prestigious Annual Exhibition. Visit his website at <www.jeremyjarvis.com>.

Born in 1972 in Leeds, England, our interior artist **Kev Crossley** learned early on that a monster lived in the abandoned house down the street—after that, he saw monsters everywhere. He drew monsters all the way through school, then went to art college and university, where he was told not to. After he got a job in computer games, people started to pay him to draw monsters. Moral? Art college and university were a waste of time. Check out more of his work at <www.kevcrossley.com>.

MALHAVOC PRESS

Malhavoc Press is game designer Monte Cook's d20 System imprint devoted to the publication of unusual magic, creative monsters, and evocative game elements that go beyond traditional fantasy. Malhavoc Press products exhibit the mastery of the d20 System rules that only one of its original designers can offer. Coming soon, look for the *Iron Heroes Bestiary,* also by Mike Mearls.

Current titles are available to purchase in either print or electronic (PDF) format at <www.montecook.com>.

Magic Items: One of the themes of *Iron Heroes* is that magic is dangerous but sometimes useful. The rules for magic items show you how to apply that principle to swords, armor, and other gear.

NPC Classes: The NPC classes, along with the sample villain classes, are designed to make NPC generation fast and easy. By simply picking a level, generating ability scores, and selecting equipment, you can create an opponent for the characters in minutes.

If you haven't yet started an *Iron Heroes* campaign, then Chapters One, Two, and Seven provide everything you need to get your game off the ground. *Iron Heroes* is designed to be portable to a variety of different types of settings, from lands of high adventure to the backstabbing adventures of common criminals to fish-out-of-water stories of barbaric warriors in a strange, civilized land.

Chapter One shows you how to tinker with the ability score generation rules to create characters appropriate the campaign you want to run. Chapter Two provides some basic ideas for meshing *Iron Heroes* with your vision of the campaign. It looks at classes and traits and discusses how to merge them with your setting into a coherent, compelling whole.

Chapter Seven provides tools for shaping the game through subtle rules changes that create radical differences in game play. By altering the experience point system to change which actions earn the characters experience, you can encourage the players to pursue different strategies in the game. This sort of change transforms *Iron Heroes* from a game of heroic combat to one of duplicitous scams and double dealing, or a game where the characters pursue a specific goal, such as overthrowing the monarchy.

USING THIS BOOK: PLAYERS

For players, *Mastering Iron Heroes* provides useful tools to expand your understanding of the game and extend your characters' abilities in new directions. The wealth feats give gold and jewels a tangible, mechanical benefit for your character. The rules for combat show you how terrain can play an important role in a fight, while the guidelines for magic items show you the sort of "treasure" you can expect to find in a dragon's hoard.

CHAPTER ONE:

ABILITIES

Ability scores are the backbone of any character. They provide bonuses (and penalties) that apply across a variety of situations, from skill checks to saving throws to combat. Thus, a character's starting scores have a tremendous impact on his or her success.

As a result, the ability score generation method you allow the players to use has a major effect on your campaign. Player characters who start with high ability scores are more capable than average across all levels, while the reverse is also true. The default method given in Chapter One: Abilities of *Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes* produces characters that are more powerful than normal compared to other role-playing games. That may or may not work for your campaign.

This chapter presents a series of alternate ability score generation methods. Each one includes commentary and advice on how and why it works.

ALTERNATE ABILITY SCORE GENERATION METHODS

The standard system presented in *Iron Heroes* gives players a lot of flexibility to sculpt the characters they want. The maximum allowed score of 18 is well within their grasp. The alternate methods presented here focus not only on creating characters with a higher or lower range of scores, but also on alternate methods that place greater emphasis on the campaign world or the main storylines in your campaign.

MODIFIED POINT~BUY

The core system presented in *Iron Heroes* yields characters that are at least competent in every area. By varying the number of points the players have available, the minimum starting score, and the maximum scores they may purchase, you can alter the basic spread of ability scores.

Lower Minimums: Lower minimum scores force the players to trade off weaknesses in some areas with the strengths they gain in others. Under the standard system, players start with a 10 in each ability. If you drop this starting value to 8, players must spend points on each ability score to avoid incurring a penalty on checks, saves, and so forth.

This change means the players might have to accept penalties to areas that aren't important to their characters. This

burden provides an added challenge to the game, and it also emphasizes the range of abilities in the party. The character with a high Wisdom and many ranks in Spot and Listen becomes more important if no one else in the party could afford to invest points in Wisdom.

Changing the base scores from 10 to 8 makes the characters less heroic and makes specialization a better option. If players want to gain a bonus in many skills, they have to spend a significant number of points on bumping multiple scores from 8 to 10.

Altered Point Total: Changing the total points that the players can spend on ability scores is another easy way to alter the game. The standard rules given in *Iron Heroes* grant 24 points for purchasing ability scores. Increasing this total results in a more heroic game with tough characters, while decreasing it makes the game deadlier, more dangerous, and grittier.

Point Total	Description
16	Players must decide between several good scores or one high score.
20	Most characters have one high score and two good scores.
24	The default setting.
28	Characters have two high scores and several good scores.
32	Characters have multiple high scores.

You can combine these changes with a decrease to the starting scores to give the players more options while forcing them to weigh the benefits of having a few good scores and a few bad ones. The standard rules give you a +0 modifier as a starting point. Knocking that into a penalty while granting more points creates a clear distinction between a specialist with one very high score and several penalties and a character who has a bonus in every ability.

Ability Priorities: This variant rule is complicated, but it can prove useful if you want to emphasize diversity among the characters. It forces every character to specialize in one ability at the cost of others.

Before assigning points to an ability score, players must rank each ability in importance from 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important. They gain a modifier to the total cost of an ability based on the rank, and they apply this modifier after deciding the total number of points to spend on an ability.

Rank	Cost Modifier
1	Reduce the cost for this ability by 2.
2	Reduce the cost for this ability by 1.
3	No change.
4	No change.
5	Increase the cost for this ability by 1.
6	Increase the cost for this ability by 2.

If you spend no points on an ability, don't apply the modifier. This method rewards high scores in the abilities given a rank of 1 or 2, while punishing high scores in rank 5 or 6 abilities. This method becomes particularly useful if you combine it with a reduced starting value for each ability, such as 8.

RANDOM METHODS

Some DMs prefer the luck of the die to determine a character's basic ability scores. Die roll methods trade predictability and fairness for speed and excitement. The simple matter is that, sometimes, it's fun to play a character with random abilities. It encourages players to try out classes they might otherwise avoid, and there's a certain thrill to rolling ridiculously high scores. On the other hand, thriving with a character who has average scores is a challenge to even the most experienced player.

In addition to the die methods you might be familiar with already, try these other variations.

Basic Random Method: Roll 4d6, drop the lowest die, and add the remaining dice. Repeat this process six times, and assign the resulting scores to your abilities as you wish.

Luck of the Dice: Follow the basic random method, but assign the scores generated to the abilities in order. For example, the first total that you roll goes to Strength, the second to Dexterity, and so on. This method is a good way to introduce a random element to class selection, since you have no control over where you assign scores.

Die Pool: Under this system, you start with a total of 24 dice to spend on ability scores. Assign a number of dice to an ability score, roll that number of d6s, and total the three highest results for your ability score. You must assign at least one die to each ability score.

Die Placement: Roll 24d6 and write down the results. Assign three results to each ability, summing them to determine the total score. Drop the six results that are left over.

METAGENERATION METHODS

A metageneration method is a set of rules that you can apply to any of the ability score creation systems. Each of the following options allows you to introduce new bonuses and penalties into the mix. These modifiers are based on a variety of factors, from your world's background to the style of play you want to emphasize in a particular campaign.

CAMPAIGN~BASED GENERATION

The *Iron Heroes* rules are intentionally written to encompass a basic style of play without dictating the exact details of the campaign world. You can use *Iron Heroes* to run a game where the characters are criminals battling rival gangs and cartels, mercenary warriors who spend as much time engaged in political maneuvers as in those of the battlefield, and so on. The campaign-based generation rules allow you to reward players for creating characters that are a good fit for the game you want to run.

RULES

Under a point-buy method, players receive a discount to the total cost of abilities that are important to the campaign. When determining the total cost of an ability, subtract 2 from the total.

If you use a random method, the players must keep track of the die result for each d6 and the score that results from the sets of rolls. For example, if a player rolls 4d6 and drops the lowest, he should note that the 14 he rolled resulted from 4d6 rolls of 2, 3, 5, and 6 (3+5+6=14).

Then, when assigning a result to an ability that you have determined is key to the campaign, reroll the lowest die result and calculate the total once again. In the example above, the player would reroll the 2. If he then rolled a 4, he'd drop the 3 (the new lowest number) and replace it with the 4, for a total of 15 (4+5+6).

Note that the random method is much more likely to turn a mediocre score into a good one. In general, this rule works best with a point-buy system.

Usage

You should use this method to emphasize the importance of a single score based on your conception of the campaign.

- Strength is a good choice for a game that focuses on combat.
- Dexterity improves defense and a variety of stealth skills.
- Constitution makes the characters tougher.
- Intelligence grants more skills.
- Wisdom improves skills such as Survival.
- Charisma makes every character at least somewhat competent in social situations.

The key strength of this variant is that it allows the players to spend fewer resources on abilities that they need for basic survival. As a result, they can give more attention to the unique abilities that distinguish each character. In general, it's a lot more fun to spend resources on talents that give the players new abilities than on talents they need to avoid being a hindrance. If everyone needs a good Dexterity score, you force the characters to spend some of their limited resources on an ability that gives them basic competence. Thus, they have fewer points to spend on abilities that they *want* as opposed to those they *need*.

Setting~Based Generation

The barbarians of the Ice Teeth Peaks are renowned for their toughness, while the warrior women of the Dalgati Plains are the world's greatest tacticians. Just as a character's place of origin might determine his clothes, his weapons, and his religious beliefs, so too can it affect his basic abilities.

The setting-based generation method rewards players for modeling characters who fit the typical traits of their home region. This method is best for games in which the campaign setting plays a vital role in bringing the action to life. It also provides an easy way to demonstrate to the players the differences between your campaign world's regions.

Rules

If you use a point-buy method, give the players a discount on abilities that their home region is known for. Reduce the total cost for such an ability by 2.

If a player's home region has an ability that runs counter to its defining characteristics, increase the total cost of that ability by 2.

If you prefer a random, dice-based method, use the method for granting a bonus detailed under "Campaign-Based Generation," above.

When you assign a result to your home region's penalized ability, reroll the highest die result and calculate the total again. For example, if you roll 4d6 and come up with 2, 3, 5, and 6, reroll the 6. If the new roll is a 3, the ability score would be 11 (3+3+5).

Usage

Obviously, you need to assign abilities that offer bonuses and penalties to each region of your campaign setting. If you do assign a penalty anywhere, it's best to assign one to all regions to keep things balanced. You should also consider keeping at least a few regions free of modifiers, particularly if you use penalties, for players who prefer balanced ability values. More importantly, the world should reflect the modifiers you impose upon it. Nonplayer characters from regions with ability score modifiers should illustrate the characteristics you wish to emphasize.

Story~Based Generation

Some DMs like to encourage the players to adopt vivid, unique personalities for their characters. However, this story-based generation method requires tremendous DM adjudication. Use it only if you talk to the players first and they're interested in this method. These rules reward the players for roleplaying, but not everyone is comfortable adopting an imaginary persona. On some nights, a player might be too tired from work or class to have the energy needed to portray his character. Use this rule only if everyone in the group is enthusiastic about it. Otherwise, save it for a different game.

Rules

During character creation, players gain a bonus to one ability and a penalty to another by creating defining personality or physical descriptions for the character that explain the modifiers. These descriptions must be obvious enough that players can portray them during the course of the game.

For example, a player might take a penalty to Strength because her arcanist is sickly and weak. During the game, she might complain (in character) about various ailments, gripe about swimming through cold water to sneak into the baron's keep, and so on. In contrast, she gains a bonus to Intelligence because of her many years of study as a sage. When she talks over the plans for infiltrating the castle, she mentions historical events, obscure myths and legends, and other trivia that reflects her knowledge.

Usage

As an option, you can carry this idea further by having the players judge each other's performance. If you choose, at the end of each game session, the group can vote on whether each player accurately portrayed her character. These votes should occur in secret, and neither the DM nor the player being judged get to cast a ballot—only the other players vote. If a majority of votes go against a player, she suffers a –10 percent penalty to experience points earned for the session.

Be careful calling for a vote. If your group shies away from roleplaying and you think they'd end up having to vote frequently, you're probably better off dropping the whole idea. Furthermore, it can cause friction if a player feels that she roleplayed well but receives the XP penalty anyway. Just as some players enjoy combat while others prefer solving puzzles, acting and roleplaying aren't for everyone. Don't use the vote option to ram your preferred style of play down the throats of players who don't like it.

ABILITY SCORES AND NPCS

Generating scores for nonplayer characters is a little trickier than it seems. Sometimes, you can get away with simply assigning appropriate scores as you see fit. However, you should use the same generation method that the players use when you create NPCs that they will face in battle. Otherwise, the NPCs may have an unfair advantage in higher-than-normal ability scores.

Of course, this can prove troublesome if you use a random method for ability score generation. In this case, it's probably best to take into account the characters' scores when creating a villain. Since *Iron Heroes* uses many opposed ability checks, base attack checks, and skill checks, it's important to keep a villain's ability scores in the same range as the characters' scores.

CHAPTER TWO:

CHARACTERS AND THE CAMPAIGN WORLD

Character traits, restrictions, and background color are handy ways to introduce marked differences between adventurers who hail from different regions of the campaign world.

This chapter talks about adapting *Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes* to your campaign setting. It steers away from rules, instead focusing on the process of adding unique spins to the rules to give them a flavor that is distinct to your game.

TRAITS

In terms of game design, traits serve as a replacement for character races in other roleplaying games. Since *Iron Heroes* assumes that the characters are humans, the traits take the place the normal abilities and advantages granted by a player character race.

When it comes to your campaign world, traits are a powerful tool for bringing flavor to the setting—they represent a close connection between a character's abilities, his region of origin, and his talents. The best setting elements have a clear, compelling effect on the typical game session. They serve to make it clear that the game takes place in your setting, not someone else's.

TRAITS BY REGION

Most of the background traits in Chapter Two of *Iron Heroes* grant a character a benefit due to his upbringing or native region. A character with the Jungle Born trait obviously comes from a different area than one with City Rat. The question becomes, where are those regions in your game world? By linking traits to areas in your setting, you give the characters a sense of where they belong.

Some of the traits are easy to map to the setting. A character with City Rat hails from an urban area, though such a broad categorization does little to give a PC a precise link to the world. You might notice that the traits linked to a type of environment offer multiple abilities. When a character gains the trait, he picks one of those talents. You can map these abilities to specific regions of the game world to create a tighter link between an option and the area that a character hails from.

For example, the Arctic Born trait has three different options: bear's toughness, ice water veins, and wanderer at the edge of creation. If you assign one trait to each of three different arctic regions, you create a divide between areas that otherwise might be lumped together. The key consideration in this case lies in creating a good reason for this divide. Not only should the players find a place for their characters in the world, but they also should understand what that place of origin means for their PCs. The next section goes into this concept in more detail.

BRINGING REGIONS TO LIFE

While mechanics can give a character a place in your world, what effect does that have on the game? It's one thing to have a note on a character sheet that says a PC comes from the kingdom of Vesta. It's another if that relationship has a real effect on the game. Whenever you work on your campaign world, think about the effects it will have on a game session. If a tenet of the setting never comes up in play, fails to affect the players' attitudes toward their characters, or has no impact on how they roleplay, the world doesn't have a measurable impact on the game.

The same applies to a character's area of origin. If it has no effect on play, what's the point of doing the work to bring it into the game?

One of *Iron Heroes'* important features is its reliance on clearly defined character traits that are simple and obvious. Roleplaying an *Iron Heroes* character is all about taking a few traits and playing them to the hilt. Bring the same attitude to bear on the campaign world.

To extend this parallel to the setting, create a few simple "traits" that embody each region. If you can list them as one- or two-sentence bullet points, the players should be able to grasp them easily. When you start the game, don't worry about making each player see and understand the defining qualities for every region. Instead, they should have a clear grip on the typical characteristics of their homeland and the region where the campaign begins.

For example, the barbarians of the World's Edge Peaks are renowned for their ferocity in battle and their skeptical attitude toward civilized lands. They are also a pious people who built their culture around worship of Tarus, lord of the mountains. Many of the adventurers among them serve as mercenaries for a few years, building up a small fortune before returning home to establish themselves as chieftains of their people.

Here are three defining traits for the barbarians' region:

- Tarus gave us all the lore we need. Civilization has nothing that we require, but we'll take the gold, jewels, and wealth the lowlanders offer us.
- A man can trust his sword and his clan. Beyond that, keep one eye open and one hand on your blade.
- If the warriors of the lowlands had any skill, their lords wouldn't hire us out every spring.

These three traits are likely to come up in every adventure, particularly in the interactions between the characters. A hunter from the World's Edge Peaks might poke fun at the armiger's reliance on his armor, swear oaths on Tarus' name, and naturally distrust those he meets on his travels.

This method creates stereotypes that are easy to play to, but remember that they're just guides for bringing character and flavor to the game. Don't use them to limit the players' creativity.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to creating basic stereotypes for a region, it also helps to break down the key historical and cultural traits into easy-to-digest bits. Details tend to bog down the game. You can apply the same process given above for roleplaying traits to the region's history. Create three simple descriptions that cover the region's past, present, and potential future. This short list gives the players a clear idea of where their characters hail from, what happened there recently, and what problems the region faces.

NONHUMAN CHARACTERS

Adding races such as dwarves, elves, and halflings to *Iron Heroes* is relatively easy. You can freely add Level Adjustment +0 races, but more powerful creatures can introduce magical abilities that disrupt the game.

When creating such characters, replace their access to traits with the benefits of their racial advantages. In other words, nonhumans don't gain traits. As an optional rule, you can allow half-humans, such as half-orcs and half-elves, to select one trait.

Under this optional rule, you can also let human characters select a bonus feat at 1st level, +4 skill ranks at 1st level, and +1 skill rank per each additional level in place of choosing two traits. These benefits represent humanity's flexibility when compared to elves, gnomes, and other folk.

THE CLASSES IN THE CAMPAIGN

Finding a place for the character classes in your campaign requires only as much effort as you want to put into the process. Some DMs prefer to work with the high-level details of the world. They care little for how the classes work in the context of society, only that they exist as adventuring options. Other DMs like to customize the character classes or modify their backgrounds to better fit the world.

CLASS RESTRICTIONS

By applying the advice given above for traits to classes, you can create an even more dramatic link between a player's character and his place in the world.

Certain classes could be available to characters who come from a restricted list of regions. For example, all berserkers in your campaign might be members of the radical wing of a powerful worldwide religion. These berserkers practice self-flagellation to atone for their sins, and they seek adventure in the name of their god. A player who wants to take the berserker class has a clear picture of his character's place in the world.

It's possible to take this idea too far, though, especially if you restrict the classes too much. Some players come to the game knowing what they want to play, and if their ideas don't fit your world, they might be disappointed. Thus, restricting classes usually works best if you provide three or more options for players to choose from.

On the other hand, some players are more flexible when it comes to fitting their characters into the game. You can allow them to pick the feats, skills, and class they want, and then use those choices to determine their characters' backgrounds.

DROPPING CLASSES

Some classes might not fit your vision of the game world. If you run a game set in a sprawling, crime-ridden metropolis, the berserker and the armiger might not work well. One of

Iron Heroes' strengths is that the class system is robust. Since any character can take any skill, and you don't have to worry about the party's access to magic, almost any combination of four classes creates a viable party. The only situation where the class mix of the party proves troublesome is if everyone plays the same class. In that case, the PCs might step on each other's toes because they all excel in the same areas.

If you decide to drop classes from the game, be sure to indicate this choice to the players. After all, no one wants to come to the table with a character concept that the DM has taken out of the game. You should also make this decision with an eye toward the campaign world. Sometimes, it makes sense to restrict or remove a class as a player option, but you should do so with good reason.

The following campaign models show how altering the list of available classes changes the game.

Barbarians in Civilization

One common motif in fantasy is that of barbaric outsiders venturing into civilization for the first time. In this campaign model, the PCs enter wondrous lands far from their homes in search of gold and glory. The cultures they encounter might be strange even by the standards of the typical fantasy world. After all, part of the game's fun lies in the interaction between uncouth barbarians and "civilized" folk.

In this game, a few classes might be off limits. For example, the armiger's reliance on heavy armor conflicts with your vision of the barbarians as technologically stunted. Furthermore, the executioner might not fit with your idea of the barbarians' simple, direct culture of war.

Other classes may or may not fit in, depending on your campaign. For example, the thief might be too subtle or cowardly for a barbaric game, but it also covers the concept of a trickster. The arcanist covers the archetype of a barbarian shaman, particularly if the players treat spellcasting as appeals to a totem spirit or ancestor god.

As you can see, sometimes modifying the background color of a character class is better than simply cutting it from the player's options.

Scheming in the City

In this campaign model, the characters are thieves, criminals, and mercenaries in a decadent civilization whose best days are long gone. The characters seek to make it rich, usually through crime. However, these PCs are no mere gang of thugs or toughs. They raid temples to ancient gods, penetrate the king's palace in search of the royal jewels, and pull off similarly epic heists.

Stealth plays a major role in this game, to the point that any character who lacks ranks in Move Silently and Hide is at a severe disadvantage in many adventure ideas. The background for this game also suggests that the PCs are likely to start off poor, desperate, and eager. The arcanist might be a bad choice for the game, since a spellcaster's quest for spiritual and mystical insight might clash with the idea of the characters as thieves and mercenaries. The armiger could be at a disadvantage because of his reliance on armor. On the other hand, both of these classes make excellent candidates for villains. The characters might have to sneak into a powerful spellcaster's abode, while a heavily armored opponent serves as a nice contrast to their reliance on speed and stealth.

This model shows that even if you disallow a class for the characters, it can still play a useful role as a villain or NPC class. Think of classes not only in terms of the game setting you've created, but in terms of the actions and the types of adventures that your campaign will emphasize. If a class is a poor fit for them, don't be afraid to remove it as an option for the players.

PLAYER INPUT

This chapter has talked about casting various player options in light of the DM's campaign world. In most games, this paradigm makes sense, but sometimes allowing the players to have creative input into the campaign world draws them into the game and makes a more enjoyable experience for everyone. This concept doesn't work for every campaign, especially if you set your *Iron Heroes* game in a world that you've already fleshed out, but it can help when you have a new setting or one that hasn't been developed too much.

GROUP WORLD CREATION

In the "group world" option, each player takes responsibility for fleshing out one portion of the world, including creating a map and a background. The area each player creates should serve as the homeland for her PC, allowing her to develop her culture along with her character. With the creative load shared between the entire group, the DM has to do far less preparation.

If you create the campaign world in this manner, the players should keep in mind that the DM has final say over some aspects of the setting. For example, it isn't fair for one player to decide that all people from her character's home region can fly or shoot lightning bolts from their eyes. The DM should assign several basic topics to each player, such as government, religion, and the area's recent history. The players should stick to those topics and work together to create a shared history if their regions border each other.

SHARED WORLDS

Part of the fun of this process lies in creating a true shared world, with each member of the group not only creating part of the world but also running adventures there. In this case, each member of the group has complete control over her region, but the group as a whole decides which rules from *Iron Heroes* to change. For example, if you agree that every character uses the standard amount of gold to purchase starting equipment, nobody should create a region where the typical adventurer receives more or less unless the group unanimously agrees.

This arrangement allows each person's creativity to run free without worrying about trampling the DM's planned adventures or story arcs. When the campaign starts, you can alternate DMs based on the location where the adventure takes place. Each member of the group might run three or four sessions before handing things off to the next DM. A DM's character acts as an NPC but doesn't normally take part in an adventure. The action should focus on the current players and their characters, not on the DM's character.

With this method, everyone gets the chance to run a game and engage in world creation without committing to an entire campaign. In three or so sessions, you should be able to run a single, long adventure. Of course, nothing prevents one DM from running most of the adventures, with others jumping in whenever he needs a break.

When you run a game in this way, each participant retains complete creative control over her region of the world. She runs the adventures set there and develops its history. If an event would have repercussions beyond the borders of a DM's territory, the group as a whole should unanimously support the decision. If anyone objects, it's best to preserve everyone's creative freedom by nipping world-spanning events and story arcs in the bud.

To make things easier, a shared world campaign can focus on episodic adventures rather than a continuous game. For example, one adventure might have

the characters escorting the high priest of Apollo to a deserted isle so he can destroy an evil artifact. The characters must battle sea monsters, demons, a cunning sorceress, and other foes. The next adventure, run by a different DM, might take place a year later, when many of the characters from the first adventure reunite to prevent a recently unleashed demon from leveling a town high in the northern mountains. The players can fill in the details of what their characters have been up to, while PCs that haven't seen play in a while can advance in level to catch up with the rest of the group. The skipped time gives you a good excuse for why the characters are all at the same level and how they managed to travel from one region of the world to another.

Creativity on the Fly

Sometimes, working out all the details of the game world before you start stunts your creativity. Rather than commit to the details of a region before the game starts, allow the players to flesh out their characters' homelands in response to actions in play. This can lead to unexpected developments, especially if the players pull details out of thin air without thinking about how they fit into the world as a whole, but it also makes the game far more flexible. Sometimes, interacting with others in a shared creative environment spawns ideas that are more fun and interesting than when you work in a vacuum.

When players create ideas on the fly, they should ensure that the new details are germane to the action. For example, the weapon master Mbenga and his thief companion Darla sneak into the gardens outside a baron's palace. There they spy a panther stalking through the trees. Mbenga stops in his tracks.

"Panthers are sacred to my people," he whispers. "I cannot raise a weapon in anger against one, even if my life is at risk!"

This example is a bit extreme, but it illustrates the type of cultural detail you can add to a game as play progresses. Mbenga's player might note further that his people consider

panthers to be heralds of their god of war. What was a simple encounter now becomes more challenging, because violence is no longer an option. This scene makes the important traits of Mbenga's culture more compelling and memorable.

In comparison, if you as the DM created that detail ahead of time, it would be up to you to work it into an adventure. With all the other preparation needed for the game, the detail might have been lost in the mix.

Giving the players more narrative control lets them contribute to the game in new and imaginative ways. Remember, though, that with such narrative power comes the responsibility to keep the game enjoyable for everyone. It might be fun to declare that your character can't take on a particular opponent, but it also could make the game less fun for the other players and the DM. When you add an element to the game, make sure it doesn't bring the action to a screeching halt. In the example above, Mbenga's player might wait to see if he can get past the panther without violence. The peaceful path might be riskier or harder than simply attacking the animal, but the game can continue. However, if the DM had expected Mbenga to fight the panther and hadn't prepared for other courses of action, the player's choice could derail the game.

This option isn't for every group. It's best suited to players and DMs who are used to coming up with ideas on the fly. Everyone should feel comfortable dealing with a sudden change in the game. This sort of creativity works best if the players aren't self-conscious about breaking the game.

Finally, consistency is still important under this model. As players flesh out the PCs' backgrounds and homelands, they should take notes. The DM and other players might build on what one person creates, and it isn't fair to change facts without telling them. You might reveal that a detail was a lie or myth, but don't do so after a player added another feature to the game under the assumption that your detail was true.

CHAPTER THREE:
CHARACTER CLASSES

The character classes form the foundation of Iron Heroes. *They dictate the roles available and help determine how each player approaches the game.* Iron Heroes *does little to infuse each class with details specific to a particular world or setting. Instead, such work is left to you as the DM to fill in. Aside from the basic premises outlined in* Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes, *you're free to create a setting and its character types without the rules getting in the way.*

This chapter looks at *Iron Heroes'* NPC classes, which are designed for use by the common folk the characters meet in their travels. It also introduces *villain classes:* progressions of abilities and talents that you can use to quickly create antagonists for your adventure. The villain classes allow you to build an opponent who provides a worthy challenge to the player characters in a few minutes. Rather than go through the entire process of creating a foe from the ground up, you can use a villain class to pick out a few core talents and generate statistics.

VILLAIN CLASSES

This chapter presents three sample villain classes: the type I demon, the dreaded sorcerer, and the warleader. A villain class is designed with three basic concepts in mind:

1. As a DM, you don't have infinite amounts of time to create antagonists for your game. A player might be able to spend an hour or two creating a detailed, high-level character, but you might need to create several NPCs in that hour. The villain classes are designed to make that fast and easy.

2. The core character classes are designed with the assumption that each player has to keep track of only one character. Thus, they're detailed and have many abilities that require intense management. A DM may have to juggle several NPCs and monsters during an encounter. Villain classes present a few core abilities that are much easier to track in battle.

3. Villains can break the rules. While the player character classes must be balanced against each other, a villain needs only to be balanced against the party as a whole. A villain doesn't have a level. Instead, he has a Challenge Rating, just like a monster. The villain classes present options for Challenge Ratings from 1 to 20, though most have a narrower range due to their abilities.

You might need to get used to the idea of villain classes, since they're different from the regular classes. People can't study in schools to join villain classes, and player characters can't take levels in them. Instead, they're a pure game conceit designed to give DMs a flexible toolset for creating nonplayer characters easily.

Remember that, while player character classes offer many options, DMs don't need that same level of detail. Too many details can make it hard to create NPCs and keep track of their powers and abilities during an encounter. A villain need only present a viable challenge to the characters based on their level and the villain's Challenge Rating. How he arrived at that CR doesn't matter to the system as long as he makes a good opponent.

Villain classes treat several elements in a slightly different manner than normal character classes do.

Abilities: A villain class comes with a set of ability scores for each Challenge Rating. You can modify them based on the villain's race if he is nonhuman. If you change the scores, be sure to note the alterations to the rest of the villain's abilities.

Intelligence doesn't change a villain's total number of skills or the ranks spent on each. The villain classes simply assign skills rather than use an equation to compute total ranks available.

Feats: Villain classes assign feats to the villain based on his total Challenge Rating. You can substitute feats as you wish, but the given package is designed to make the villain easy to use and effective without change. Villains may have the same, fewer, or more feats when compared to a monster with the same Hit Dice. This is an intentional decision to sculpt the villain's abilities.

Skills: Villains have a number of skills with ranks determined by their total Challenge Rating rather than Hit Dice. You can swap skills freely, but in most cases, the villain's skills are chosen for a specific reason.

Hit Dice and Hit Points: To make this easier on you, the villain has a given Hit Dice and hit point total at each Challenge Rating. You should not alter this value unless you're confident that the change fits your vision for the villain. Keep in mind that a villain's Hit Dice total doesn't determine his maximum skill ranks, total feats, and other abilities.

Base Attack and Base Defense: These two abilities progress according to the villain's total Challenge Rating.

Class Abilities: Most villain classes have a few talents that scale with their Challenge Rating. These abilities are designed to replace most of the intricate abilities that a player character class may possess. For example, the dreaded sorcerer has an arcane bolt that replaces the usual spread of attack spells.

DEMONIC BRUTE

The weakest of all demons, yet still mighty by mortal standards, demonic brutes are simple creatures that rely on physical power to overcome their enemies. They come in a bewildering variety of shapes and forms, from nearly humanoid creatures to writhing masses of tentacles and claws.

The demonic brute villain class is useful for generating eldritch threats. It was designed with the following archetypes in mind:

- A demon summoned and bound by an arcanist to defeat his enemies.
- A demon that prowls a ruin like a wild animal, intent on crushing and rending all who fall into its grasp but too dim to formulate any cunning plans.
- A brutish demon that acts as a servant or foot soldier for a more powerful villain.
- A mighty foe for low-level parties of adventurers.

The basic concept behind the demonic brute villain class is to let you pit low-level characters against fiendish foes. Outsiders and demons are classic opponents in fantasy gaming, and they provide an easy way to throw a compelling, scary antagonist at the characters.

CR Range: A demonic brute's Challenge Rating ranges from 3 to 10. It's physically tough, but it lacks the magical abilities, defenses, and potential of the more powerful demon varieties. In the ranks of demonkind, demonic brutes occupy some of the lowest rungs.

Creature Type: Outsider.

Abilities: A demonic brute's Challenge Rating determines its ability scores. These demons are physically powerful but intellectually limited.

Skills: Demonic brutes have well-developed physical talents, but are otherwise poorly trained. Their limited intellects prevent them from developing any complex skills. A demonic brute has ranks equal to its Challenge Rating + 3 in Climb, Jump, and Spot. You can substitute different skills if you wish. Apply the demonic brute's ability score modifiers to the skill ranks as normal.

DEMONIC BRUTE ABILITY SCORES BY CR

CR	Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
3	18	12	16	6	12	10
4	18	12	16	6	12	10
5	20	12	16	6	12	10
6	20	14	18	6	12	10
7	22	14	18	8	14	10
8	22	14	18	8	14	10
9	24	16	20	8	14	10
10	24	16	20	8	14	10

Feats: A demonic brute gains feats according to its Challenge Rating (see below). It gains all the feats listed for its CR and all lower CRs. For example, a CR 8 demon gains the feats listed for CRs 3 to 8.

Challenge Rating	Feats
3	Power Attack (mastery 1, 2)
4	Cleave (mastery 1)
5	—
6	Weapon Focus (claws, mastery 1)
7	—
8	Power Attack (mastery 3)
9	—
10	Weapon Focus (claws, mastery 2)

Hit Dice: A demonic brute gains Hit Dice as determined by its Challenge Rating. It uses d10s for each Hit Die and gains 5.5 hit points per Hit Die on average. Add the demon's Constitution modifier to this total as normal. (The hit points given in the Demonic Brute Progression by Challenge Rating table already take the Constitution modifier into account.)

Base Attack and Defense Bonuses: Demonic brutes are fearsome warriors, but they tend to focus on offense rather than defensive moves. Thus, they have a good base attack bonus progression but a poor base defense bonus progression. Add the demon's appropriate modifiers to its attack and defense bonuses as normal.

Saving Throws: Demonic brutes are fast and tough, but they're easily overcome by effects that challenge their willpower. Thus, they have excellent Fortitude and Reflex saves but a poor Will save progression. Add the demon's ability modifiers as normal to its saving throws.

Class Abilities

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A demonic brute is proficient with its natural attacks, two claws and a bite. It uses its full attack bonus to make one claw attack as a standard attack. If it uses a full attack, it attacks with two claws and one bite. The bite attack suffers a −2 penalty because it is a secondary weapon and the demon has the Multiattack feat (see below).

The demon otherwise lacks weapon proficiencies, though you can assign any you wish to it.

Size: A demonic brute's Challenge Rating determines its size (see table on next page). The larger, tougher demons are bigger than their weaker cousins. A demon's size determines the damage it inflicts with its natural attacks, as detailed below. You can decrease the demon's size without making other changes to its abilities, but you should not normally increase the size of a demonic brute with a low Challenge Rating.

Multiattack (Ex): A demonic brute gains Multiattack as a bonus feat. When using its secondary attack, it suffers a penalty of −2 to the attack rather than −5.

Natural Attacks (Ex): A demonic brute's size determines the damage it inflicts with its natural attacks. See the table Demonic Brute Characteristics by Challenge Rating, next page.

Natural Armor (Ex): A demonic brute gains a natural bonus to defense based on its Challenge Rating. See the table Demonic Brute Characteristics by Challenge Rating, next page.

Speed: A demonic brute's size determines its speed. See the table Demonic Brute Characteristics by Challenge Rating on the next page.

Special Abilities (Su): Demonic brutes with sufficiently high Challenge Ratings gain special abilities. The abilities appear below in alphabetical order, each with its corresponding CR value. A demonic brute can have one ability equal to or 1 less than its CR. It can have two other abilities that are 2 or more less than its CR. (Because the least powerful special ability is CR 4, demonic brutes of CR 3 gain no special abilities.)

DEMONIC BRUTE PROGRESSION BY CHALLENGE RATING

Challenge Rating	Hit Dice	Hit Points	Base Attack	Base Defense	Fortitude	Reflex	Will
3	4d10	34	+4	+3	+3	+2	+1
4	6d10	51	+5	+3	+4	+3	+1
5	8d10	68	+6	+4	+5	+4	+1
6	10d10	95	+7	+5	+6	+4	+2
7	12d10	114	+8	+6	+7	+5	+2
8	14d10	133	+9	+6	+8	+6	+2
9	16d10	172	+10	+7	+9	+7	+3
10	18d10	189	+11	+8	+10	+7	+3

DEMONIC BRUTE CHARACTERISTICS BY CHALLENGE RATING

CR	Size	Claw	Bite	Natural Defense Bonus	Speed	Reach	Notes
3–4	Medium	1d4	1d6	+2	6 squares (30 feet)	1 square	—
5–6	Large	1d6	1d8	+3	6 squares (30 feet)	2 squares	−1 size penalty to attack, defense
7–8	Huge	1d8	2d6	+4	8 squares (40 feet)	3 squares	−2 size penalty to attack, defense
9–10	Gargantuan	2d6	2d8	+5	8 squares (40 feet)	4 squares	−3 size penalty to attack, defense

Blindsense (CR 7): The demon can pinpoint the location of any foe within 60 feet. Its keen senses and magical nature allow it to see into spectra that humans cannot perceive.

Breath Weapon (CR 9): Once per day the demon can use a breath weapon to inflict your choice of acid, cold, electricity, or fire damage in a 60-foot cone. It inflicts 9d6 points of damage, with a Reflex save (DC 10 + half the demon's HD + its Constitution modifier) for half damage. The demon gains immunity to the energy type its breath weapon uses.

Flight (CR 6): The demon can fly with average maneuverability and an aerial speed equal to twice its normal speed.

Improved Grab (CR 5): If the demon strikes an opponent with a claw attack, it may initiate a grapple as a free action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Invisibility (CR 5): The demon can turn invisible once per day for up to 10 minutes. If it attacks, it becomes visible.

Regeneration (CR 4): The demon gains regeneration 2. It suffers normal damage from two of the following energy damage types: acid, cold, or fire.

Rend (CR 6): If the demon strikes a foe with both of its claw attacks, it immediately inflicts damage equal to double the dice normally used for its claws + its Strength modifier.

Scent (CR 5): The demon can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. For upwind foes, the range increases to 60 feet; if they are downwind, it drops to 15 feet. It can detect strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, at twice the ranges noted above. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at triple normal range.

When detecting a scent, the demon does not determine its exact source, only its presence within range. It can take a standard action to note the scent's direction. If the demon moves within 5 feet of the source, it can pinpoint that source.

A demon can follow tracks by smell, making a Wisdom check to find or follow a track. Following a fresh trail is DC 10 (no matter the surface), varying based on the strength of the odor, the number of creatures, and the trail's age. For each hour that the trail has grown colder, the DC increases by 2. Otherwise, follow the rules for the Track feat, but ignore the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility.

Swim (CR 5): The demon gains a swim speed equal to its normal speed. It can breathe underwater.

APPEARANCE AND DETAILS

Most demonic brutes are towering, hulking brutes with feral traits or a similarity to a twisted version of a mundane animal. You can use the demonic brute Basic Appearance and Strange Traits tables below to generate its appearance or as inspiration for creating your own monsters.

Demons should be strange and memorable. Try to make them as vivid and unique as possible.

You can use the tables in a number of ways. For example, you can roll once on each table and then add some demonic color and details to the creature yourself. Or, you can roll two or three times and describe the demon as a bizarre amalgam of the different creatures you randomly generated.

d10   Basic Appearance
1   *Frog:* Shiny green skin, bulging eyes, massive legs. +4 bonus to Jump.
2   *Ape:* Shaggy, furry, hairy, long arms.
3   *Humanoid:* May look like a human or have brutish, ogrelike features.
4   *Piscine:* Fishlike with scales, gills, bulging eyes, vestigial fins.
5   *Cat:* Sleek fur, massive incisors, sharp claws, tail.
6   *Hound:* Dog ears, snout, slobbering drool, shaggy fur.
7   *Lizard:* Scales, long tail.
8   *Snake:* Serpentine body, long forked tongue.
9   *Insect:* Chitinous body, pincers, spiderlike or flylike eyes.
10   *Bird:* Feathers, long beak, clawed feet, wings.

d10   Strange Traits
1   Horns
2   Tentacles
3   Drooling maw
4   Long, needlelike teeth
5   Three or more eyes
6   Strange coloration
7   Fat
8   Rail thin
9   Horrid odor
10   Spines

In addition to the demon's appearance, you can equip it with weapons and armor. Most demonic brutes lack the intellect to handle anything beyond simple weapons and a few martial ones. Avoid giving it medium or heavy armor, as the demon's natural bonus already gives it a passable defense.

These brutes rely on their hit points and powerful attacks, rather than their defensive abilities, to pose a threat.

DREADED SORCERER

The dreaded sorcerer is a villain class designed to produce antagonists who are mighty in terms of magic, but weak when it comes to physical conflict. It was designed with the following archetypes in mind:

- The powerful, feared spellcaster who deals with demons, devils, and worse. His magic is beyond what most mortals can ever achieve.
- An otherworldly being who adopts a human guise while on this plane. He conjures spells with the same ease that humans walk or breathe.
- A cult leader who, through sacrifices and ancient spells, has bound the power of a demon lord.

The key conceit of a dreaded sorcerer is that he can create magical effects that dwarf the arcanist's talents. If you want an enemy who uses magic as his primary weapon, a dreaded sorcerer is a good option.

CR Range: A dreaded sorcerer's Challenge Rating ranges from 3 to 20. This class is designed to produce powerful spellcasters, making it a poor fit for CR 1 or 2. Even the least powerful dreaded sorcerer is a formidable opponent to neophyte characters.

Creature Type: Monstrous humanoid.

Abilities: A dreaded sorcerer's Challenge Rating determines his ability scores.

Skills: A dreaded sorcerer has skill ranks equal to his Challenge Rating + 3 in Concentration, Intimidate, Listen, Spellcraft, and Use Magic Device. Apply the ability modifiers to each skill as normal. These give the dreaded sorcerer a basic mastery in skills vital to spellcasters, while Intimidate allows him to keep his followers in line and Listen helps protect him from sneaky characters. Bundling both Spot and Listen with this class might make it too strong against characters who rely on stealth.

Feats: A dreaded sorcerer enjoys Improved Initiative. Otherwise, he does not gain any feats.

Hit Dice: A dreaded sorcerer gains Hit Dice as determined by his Challenge Rating. He uses d6s for each Hit Die and gains 3.5 hit points per HD on average. Add the sorcerer's Constitution modifier to this total as normal. (The hit points given in the Dreaded Sorcerer Progression by Challenge Rating table on page 23 already take the Constitution modifier into account.)

Base Attack and Defense Bonuses: A dreaded sorcerer has a poor rating in both of these areas, because he relies on magic rather than physical combat to overcome his enemies.

Saving Throws: A dreaded sorcerer's supernaturally enhanced mind and body grant him excellent Will and Reflex saves, but he lacks physical resiliency. Fortitude saves are one of his weak points. Add his ability score modifiers to his saves as normal.

DREADED SORCERER ABILITY SCORES BY CR						
CR	Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
3	8	10	10	16	12	14
4	8	10	10	16	12	14
5	8	10	10	16	12	14
6	8	12	12	16	12	14
7	8	12	12	16	14	16
8	8	12	12	16	14	16
9	8	12	12	18	14	16
10	8	12	12	18	14	16
11	10	14	14	18	16	18
12	10	14	14	18	16	18
13	10	14	14	20	16	18
14	10	14	14	20	16	18
15	10	14	14	20	18	20
16	10	16	16	20	18	20
17	10	16	16	22	18	20
18	10	16	16	22	18	20
19	10	16	16	22	20	22
20	10	16	16	24	20	22

CLASS ABILITIES

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A dreaded sorcerer is proficient with all simple weapons, no armor, and no shields.

Arcane Bolt (Su): By calling upon the magical power that roars in his blood, a dreaded sorcerer can smite his enemies with a bolt of pure arcane energy. The sorcerer gains a bonus to this attack equal to his Intelligence modifier, and his mystic sense allows him to ignore a target's active bonus to defense. The damage inflicted with this ability depends on the sorcerer's Challenge Rating:

Challenge Rating	Arcane Bolt Damage
3	2d6
4	2d6
5	3d6
6	4d6
7	5d6
8	6d6
9	7d6
10	8d6
11	8d6
12	9d6
13	10d6
14	11d6
15	12d6
16	13d6
17	13d6
18	14d6
19	15d6
20	16d6
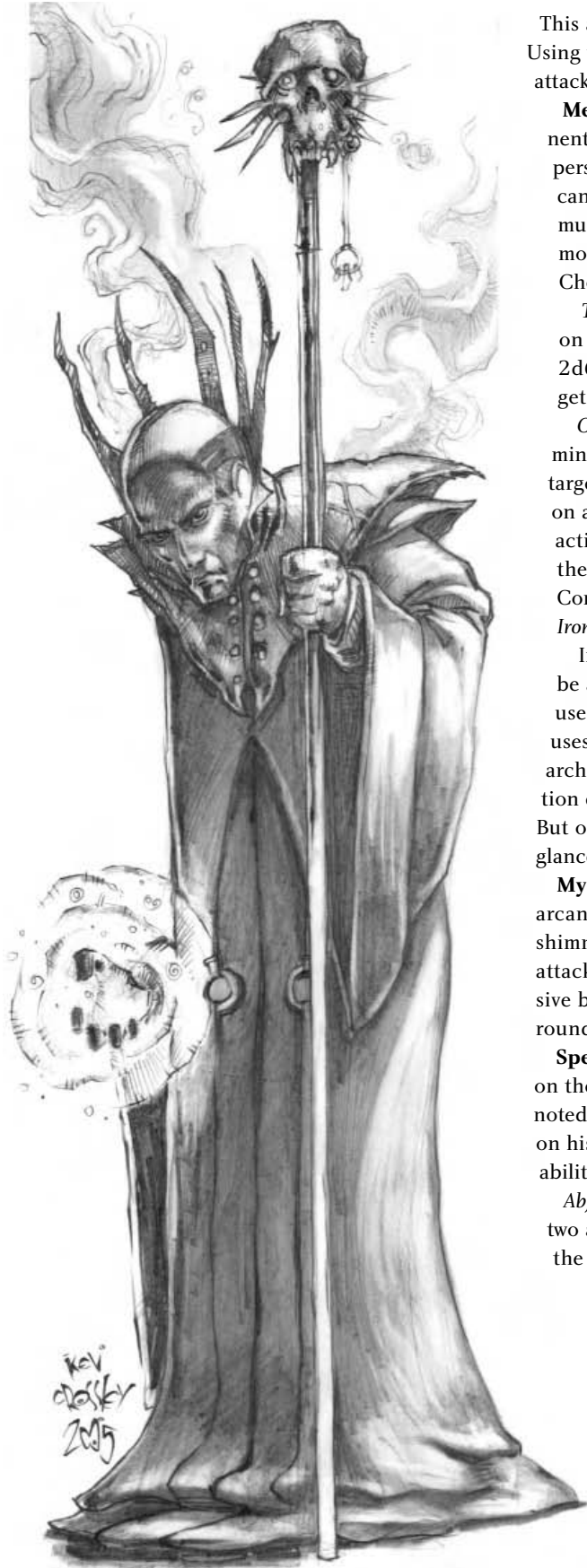
This attack has a maximum range of 300 feet and no range increment. Using this attack is a standard action. As a ranged attack, it provokes an attack of opportunity. The arcane bolt doesn't allow a saving throw.

Mesmerizing Glance (Su): A dreaded sorcerer can batter his opponents with magic or lure them under his power with his overwhelming personality. Once per round as a standard action, a dreaded sorcerer can attempt to dominate an opponent that he can see. The target must make a Will save (DC 10 + dreaded sorcerer's CR + his Charisma modifier) or be compelled to suffer one of the following effects. Choose an effect for the sorcerer when you create the character.

Terror: The target of the mesmerizing glance becomes frightened on a failed save and shaken on a successful save. This effect lasts for 2d6 rounds. A dreaded sorcerer can't use this ability on a given target more than once every 24 hours.

Obedience: A dreaded sorcerer attempts to control his opponent's mind. If the target fails her save, the dreaded sorcerer controls the target on the target's actions. The sorcerer can take no other actions on a round in which he controls the target. At the start of the target's action, she gains another save to throw off the sorcerer's control. If the sorcerer suffers damage while using this ability, he must make a Concentration check (see the skill's description in Chapter Four of *Iron Heroes*) to maintain his grip over his victim.

If the target succeeds at her Will save against this ability, she can't be affected by it for 24 hours. If she fails, the dreaded sorcerer can use it on her again if the first effect ends. For example, a sorcerer uses mesmerizing glance to take control of a berserker. The party's archer hits the sorcerer with a ranged attack, triggering a Concentration check that the sorcerer fails. He loses his grip over the berserker. But on his action, the sorcerer could attempt to use mesmerizing glance on the berserker again.

Mystic Shield (Su): A dreaded sorcerer can summon a field of arcane energy to protect himself from harm. This field might be a shimmering suit of astral armor, a guardian demon that knocks away attacks, or some other supernatural effect. The sorcerer gains a passive bonus to defense equal to his Challenge Rating divided by 4 and rounded down, with a minimum of 1.

Spell Specialty (Su): A dreaded sorcerer gains special abilities based on the school of magic that he focuses on. Pick one of the schools noted below for the dreaded sorcerer. He gains abilities from it based on his Challenge Rating. Unless otherwise noted, using one of these abilities is a standard action.

Abjuration: Once every 4 rounds, a dreaded sorcerer can use one of two abilities. Optionally, you can choose spells from a book that uses the core d20 magic system for this ability.

- *Cage of Force:* The dreaded sorcerer produces a shimmering wall of pure magical force that traps opponents. The wall lasts for one minute and can have a length (in feet) of up to 5 times the sorcerer's Challenge Rating. The wall measures 10 feet high, but the sorcerer can double this height by cutting the wall's length in half. The sorcerer can't use this ability again until the first wall's duration expires. Each 5-foot section of the wall has hit points equal to the sorcerer's total when he cast the spell and takes damage as normal. The wall blocks line of effect for all attacks.

DREADED SORCERER PROGRESSION BY CHALLENGE RATING

Challenge Rating	Hit Dice	Hit Points	Base Attack	Base Defense	Fortitude	Reflex	Will
3	4d6	14	+2	+2	+2	+2	+3
4	5d6	17	+3	+3	+2	+3	+4
5	6d6	21	+3	+3	+3	+4	+5
6	7d6	24	+4	+4	+3	+4	+6
7	8d6	28	+5	+5	+4	+5	+7
8	9d6	31	+6/+1	+6	+4	+6	+8
9	11d6	38	+6/+1	+6	+5	+7	+9
10	12d6	42	+7/+2	+7	+5	+7	+10
11	13d6	45	+8/+3	+8	+6	+8	+11
12	14d6	49	+9/+4	+9	+6	+9	+12
13	16d6	56	+9/+4	+9	+7	+10	+13
14	17d6	59	+10/+5	+10	+7	+10	+14
15	18d6	63	+11/+6	+11	+8	+11	+15
16	19d6	66	+12/+7	+12	+8	+12	+16
17	21d6	73	+12/+7	+12	+9	+13	+17
18	22d6	77	+13/+8	+13	+9	+13	+18
19	23d6	80	+14/+9	+14	+10	+14	+19
20	24d6	84	+15/+10	+15	+10	+15	+20

- *Dispel Magic:* The dreaded sorcerer can cancel a continuing spell with a roll of d20 + his CR against a Difficulty Class of 10 + the spellcaster's mastery rating.

Conjuration: Once per hour, a dreaded sorcerer can call upon any monster with a Challenge Rating equal to his own CR−3. This ability requires a full-round action, and the creature appears within 100 feet of the sorcerer. It manifests at the start of his next action and may take its own actions as normal. It obeys the dreaded sorcerer's commands to the best of its ability. It remains for 1 round per sorcerer level. If the creature's Challenge Rating would be below 1, the sorcerer must summon a creature with a CR less than 1.

Illusion: As a standard action, a dreaded sorcerer can create illusionary images. A single image can fill up to four squares. A creature can attempt to disbelieve an illusion with a Will save as a standard action. The Difficulty Class for this save is 10 + sorcerer's CR + his Charisma modifier. The illusion has no effect on the physical environment. Anyone who physically interacts with it, such as by touching it, automatically notices that the illusion is a fake.

Necromancy: A dreaded sorcerer gains the services of undead creatures whose total Hit Dice equal twice the sorcerer's Hit Dice. An individual undead creature's Challenge Rating can be no greater than the sorcerer's CR−5. In addition, the dreaded sorcerer can animate the dead as a standard action with a range of 100 feet. This ability transforms the target corpse into a skeleton or zombie according to the *animate dead* necromancy spell method described in Chapter Ten: Magic of *Iron Heroes*.

WARLEADER

The warleader is a field commander for a more powerful villain, a warrior who wins the obedience and discipline of his followers through threats, intimidation, and other terror tactics. He makes an excellent opponent for low-level parties and serves as a useful bridge between a villain's flunkies and the actual main villain himself.

The warleader was designed with the following archetypes in mind:

- A second-in-command or field officer who oversees minor tasks on behalf of a powerful villain.
- A bandit chieftain or the leader of a humanoid tribe.
- A minor villain who relies on using his minions to defeat the party.

A warleader's basic concept is that some villains draw strength from their followers. A warleader is poorly suited for use as a powerful villain pitted against high-level parties, as he has little personal power. Without his hordes of minions, he's much weaker.

Don't confuse a warleader with a villain who happens to attract hundreds of followers to his side. The warleader must rely on his minions to even the odds against the party. Other villains may use thugs and foot soldiers, but the warleader depends on them.

CR Range: A warleader's Challenge Rating ranges from 3 to 10. Like a demonic brute, he's best suited as an enemy for low-level parties or as a follower pledged to serve a more powerful villain.

WARLEADER ABILITY SCORES BY CR

CR	Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
3	14	10	14	12	12	14
4	14	10	14	12	12	14
5	14	10	16	12	12	16
6	14	10	16	12	12	16
7	16	12	16	14	14	18
8	16	12	16	14	14	18
9	16	12	18	14	14	20
10	16	12	18	14	14	20

Creature Type: Pick an existing creature, such as human, goblin, orc, and so forth, and add the warleader's abilities to the base creature in the same way you would add a class.

Abilities: A warleader's Challenge Rating determines his ability scores. Add any appropriate ability score modifiers for his race as normal.

Skills: A warleader gains ranks equal to his Challenge Rating +3 in Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Listen, and Ride. He focuses on social abilities and, in many cases, he makes his way up a villain's hierarchy because of his personality rather than his accomplishments.

Feats: A warleader gains feats according to his Challenge Rating. He gains all of the feats listed below for his Challenge Rating and all lower CRs. For example, a CR 9 warleader gains the feats listed for CRs 3 to 9.

CR	Feats
3	Improved Initiative, Overwhelming Presence (mastery 2)
4	Overwhelming Presence (mastery 3)
5	—
6	Overwhelming Presence (mastery 5)
7	—
8	Overwhelming Presence (mastery 7)
9	—
10	Overwhelming Presence (mastery 8)

Hit Dice: A warleader gains Hit Dice as determined by his Challenge Rating. He uses d8s for his Hit Dice and gains an average of 4.5 hit points per HD. Add the warleader's Constitution modifier as normal. (The hit points given in the Warleader Progression by Challenge Rating table already take the Constitution modifier into account.)

Base Attack and Defense Bonuses: A warleader is a well-trained warrior capable of making effective attacks while defending himself. Add the usual bonuses to attacks and defense to the warleader's total.

Saving Throws: A warleader has average saving throws in all three areas. He excels at none, but he doesn't suffer any particular weaknesses. Add his ability score modifiers to his saves as normal.

CLASS ABILITIES

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A warleader is proficient with all simple and martial weapons; light, medium, and heavy armor; shields; and the tower shield.

Tyrannical Leader (Ex): A warleader's glowering presence and intimidating style of command are brutally effective. He grants his Charisma bonus as a bonus to all attacks made by his allies who have fewer Hit Dice than he has. This benefit applies to all allies within 30 feet of him who are capable of hearing him speak. If the warleader is rendered silent, he no longer grants his allies this benefit.

Field Commander (Ex): Once per round during an ally's action, a warleader can grant a bonus equal to his Charisma modifier to an ally's skill check, defense, or saving throw. This ally must be within 30 feet of the warleader.

Battle Leader (Ex): A warleader learns not only to command his underlings but also to use them to ensure that he escapes a battle unharmed. He chooses a number of the following special abilities equal to his total Challenge Rating from this villain class divided by 2 and rounded down. The warleader can select an ability once.

Bootlicking Toadies: Through his personal charm and carefully perfected ability to manipulate the weak but ambitious, the warleader has groomed his followers into a fighting force trained to protect him at all costs. Any of the warleader's allies within 30 feet of him who have fewer Hit Dice than he has can

WARLEADER PROGRESSION BY CHALLENGE RATING

Challenge Rating	Hit Dice	Hit Points	Base Attack	Base Defense	Fortitude	Reflex	Will
3	4d8	26	+3	+3	+2	+2	+2
4	5d8	32	+4	+4	+3	+3	+3
5	6d8	45	+5	+5	+4	+4	+4
6	8d8	60	+6/+1	+5	+4	+4	+4
7	9d8	67	+7/+2	+6	+5	+5	+5
8	10d8	75	+8/+3	+7	+6	+6	+6
9	11d8	93	+9/+4	+8	+7	+7	+7
10	12d8	102	+10/+5	+9	+7	+7	+7

take actions to defend him. When their opponents provoke attacks of opportunity, they can replace their normal attacks of opportunity with the aid another action to give the warleader a +2 defense bonus against the target of their aid attempt.

Whenever the warleader's allies with fewer Hit Dice than his own total actually use the aid another standard action to improve his defense or give him a bonus to attacks, they grant a +4 bonus. This does not apply to the special aid action used in place of an attack of opportunity.

Bully Among Thugs: The warleader is at his best when he fights weak, inferior foes who can't hope to match his prowess. He gains a +2 morale bonus to attacks and damage against foes who have fewer Hit Dice than he has. He loses this benefit if his hit points drop below half.

Grunt Cover: If the warleader is adjacent to an ally who has fewer Hit Dice than he has, he can use that ally as cover against ranged attacks. As a move action, the warleader chooses an ally as the target of this ability. The warleader gains complete cover against ranged attacks if his chosen ally is the same size or larger than him. This benefit lasts until the start of the warleader's next action. It also ends if the chosen grunt drops or moves so that she is no longer adjacent to the warleader.

Grunt Shield: If the warleader stands adjacent to an ally who has fewer Hit Dice than he has, he can use that ally as a shield. As a move action, the warleader chooses a single ally as the target of this ability. When the warleader suffers an attack, treat the warleader as if he and the target of this ability were locked in a grapple to determine who actually suffers the attack. Resolve the attack once you have determined the true target.

This ability immediately ends if the warleader's chosen target drops or moves so that she is no longer adjacent to the warleader.

Lead From the Rear: Once per encounter, the warleader can change his initiative score to 20 + his initiative modifiers if he does nothing but move away from his opponents. The warleader must choose to use this ability at the end of the current round.

WARLEADER EQUIPMENT AND DETAILS

Warleaders tend to favor heavy armor, though only if they can ride a horse or similar mount into battle. When on foot, they use large shields and lighter armor to maximize their defensive abilities and their ability to escape from superior foes. While warleaders might not be cowards, they are pragmatists when deciding whether to stand and fight or run and live to fight another day.

A warleader is the perfect sneering foil to the characters' heroic actions, the mid-level flunky in a villain's hierarchy, or the local bully who leans on his gang of thugs to get his way. Time and again, the characters defeat the warleader's minions, only to see him run away before they can trap him. He makes a good recurring opponent, especially if you play up his scheming nature.

A warleader can also be a humanoid chieftain or a moderately skilled mercenary leader, particularly for organizations or tribes with a strong emphasis on religious or political extremism. In this case, the warleader's followers aid him out of a sense of desperate fanaticism. Abilities such as grunt cover reflect the desire of his followers to die in his service or in the name of their god or cause.

NPC CLASSES

The NPC classes exist to make a clear distinction between the heroic player character classes and the commoners who populate the world. The player characters are special, and whether they fight for good or evil, they leave a mark. The NPC classes are reserved for those who toil off to the margins of the campaign—the innkeepers, blacksmiths, and peasants that the PCs may sometimes interact with. They're not adventurers, and they're not likely to become heroes. Thus, in *Iron Heroes*, the NPC classes are notably weaker than the core classes.

Some of the NPC classes retain the same hit point total from levels 1 through 20 or lack a one-to-one relationship between level and Hit Dice. Only the warrior—a fighter who lacks the advanced training of a weapon master, harrier, or other PC class—gains 1 Hit Die per level. The NPC classes don't focus on combat, so even high-level commoners, aristocrats, and experts make poor opponents for a trained player character.

NPC Class Advancement

The NPC classes advance in some areas at a slower rate than the core classes do. They tend to live quieter, less challenging lives, and the training they undergo is far less intensive compared to that of a player character class. The NPC classes grant feats and ability score increases slower than other classes do, as shown on the NPC Skill, Feat, and Ability Improvements table below.

NPC SKILL, FEAT, & ABILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Level	Max. Skill Ranks	Feats	Ability Score
1	4	1st	—
2	5	—	—
3	6	2nd	—
4	7	—	1st
5	8	—	—
6	9	3rd	—
7	10	—	—
8	11	—	—
9	12	4th	—
10	13	—	—
11	14	—	—
12	15	5th	2nd
13	16	—	—
14	17	—	—
15	18	6th	—
16	19	—	—
17	20	—	—
18	21	7th	—
19	22	—	—
20	23	—	3rd

Multiclassing and NPC Classes

The NPC classes are not meant for adventuring. If you wish to let player characters take levels in NPC classes, you must make a few modifications to how a character advances in them.

A player character who takes a level in an NPC class always uses the PC class advancement table at the beginning of Chapter Three in *Iron Heroes* for bonus feats and ability score improvement. Otherwise, a character with NPC levels is simply too weak to hold his own with the other characters.

A character who multiclasses in several NPC classes uses the standard NPC advancement given in the table on this page.

If a character starts in an NPC class, gains several levels in it, and then switches to an adventuring class, you must combine the two tables. The character gains feats and ability score improvements as the NPC class. When he gains his adventuring class, he enters the PC feat and ability score advancement scheme at his current level.

For example, the merchant Tondus is a 5th-level aristocrat. A rival destroys his business, and to survive, Tondus becomes a thief. He gains a level in that class, making him a 6th-level character total. He looks up the PC "Skill, Feat, and Ability Improvements" table in Chapter Three of *Iron Heroes* and checks to see what he gains at 6th level. From now on, regardless of what class Tondus takes a level in, he uses that table. He does not retroactively replace the benefits he gained as an NPC from levels 1 through 5 with the benefits he would have gained from an adventuring class.

Characters should rarely jump from NPC classes to PC classes. The *Iron Heroes* rules are designed around the idea that the player characters are noteworthy and important purely because of their status. The NPC classes are designed to make it easy to create nonadventuring folk.

Aside from the exceptions noted above, multiclassing works for an NPC class the same way that it does for a PC class.

Variant Rule: NPC Classes as Background

Some DMs dislike the idea that the player characters begin at 1st level with fully formed talents. Instead, they see a character's training and prior experiences as important background elements. This variant rule allows you to add such artifacts of a character's past into his abilities at 1st level.

Under this variant, each player selects one NPC class as his background. When creating a character from an adventuring class, each player spends half the 1st-level ranks of the NPC class on the skill groups it has access to and the following skills: Craft, Knowledge, Profession, and Speak Language. He can't spend these bonus ranks on other areas.

He spends his ranks from the PC class without restriction and gains the full ranks for 1st level. As he gains levels, he gains ranks in his PC class as normal.

ARISTOCRAT

An aristocrat represents a high-born noble, a successful merchant, or the prosperous head of a sprawling criminal syndicate. This class focuses on social ability rather than fighting. Public influence, political alliances, and economics are an aristocrat's weapons of choice.

The characters are likely to encounter aristocrats first as benefactors, employers, and authority figures. As the PCs gain levels, aristocrats might treat them as potentially useful tools or threats to the current social order. If the characters lack any talent for diplomacy, they could become pawns in aristocratic power games.

Especially while of low level, the characters are likely to deal with aristocrats who are several levels above them.

Hit Die: 1d6 at 1st level, +1d6 every fourth level.

Skill Groups

An aristocrat gains access to the Academia and Social skill groups. In addition, most aristocrats have ranks in Knowledge, Appraise, Speak Language, and other skills that they cultivate as part of their profession. Aristocrats tend to be better educated than the common folk.

Skill Points at 1st Level: (4 + Intelligence modifier) ×4.
Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 4 + Intelligence modifier.

Feats

An aristocrat excels at social manipulation, but this class lacks the cunning, devious talents of a thief or arcanist. The aristocrat gains mastery in social feats at 1st level, and his mastery improves as he gains levels. Otherwise, he must spend his feat selections on general feats.

Aristocrat Level	Social Feat Mastery
1–2	1
3–5	2
6–8	3
9–11	5
12–14	6
15–17	8
18–20	9

Class Abilities

An aristocrat gains some opportunities to train with weapons, and his reliance on social talents to make his way through the world gives him several bonus feats.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: An aristocrat might have weapons training based on his background and society. He can choose to gain proficiency with all simple weapons, three martial weapons, light and medium armor, and shields. If he doesn't want these proficiencies, he's not proficient with any weapons, armor, or shields, but he gains a bonus feat at 1st level.

Bonus Feat: An aristocrat gains a bonus feat at 4th, 10th, and 16th levels. He can spend these bonus feats on any feat for which he meets the mastery requirements.

COMMONER

The commoner class represents the broad swath of average folk in the campaign world. It covers farmers, laborers, and others who lack specialized, formal training in a field. The vast majority of people that the characters encounter on their travels are commoners. Use this class for serfs, the typical man or woman in a tavern, and any nonplayer character who doesn't fit the adventuring classes or any of the other NPC classes.

Hit Die: 1d6 at 1st level, +1d6 every fourth level.

ARISTOCRAT PROGRESSION BY LEVEL

Aristocrat Level	Hit Dice	Base Attack/Defense Bonus	Fortitude Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special Abilities
1	1d6	+0	+0	+0	+2	Weapon/Armor Proficiency or bonus feat
2	1d6	+1	+0	+0	+3	—
3	1d6	+1	+1	+1	+3	—
4	2d6	+2	+1	+1	+4	Bonus feat
5	2d6	+2	+1	+1	+4	—
6	2d6	+3	+2	+2	+5	—
7	2d6	+3	+2	+2	+5	—
8	3d6	+4	+2	+2	+6	—
9	3d6	+4	+3	+3	+6	—
10	3d6	+5	+3	+3	+7	Bonus feat
11	3d6	+5	+3	+3	+7	—
12	4d6	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	—
13	4d6	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	—
14	4d6	+7/+2	+4	+4	+9	—
15	4d6	+7/+2	+5	+5	+9	—
16	5d6	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	Bonus feat
17	5d6	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	—
18	5d6	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	—
19	5d6	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	—
20	6d6	+10/+5	+6	+6	+12	—

COMMONER PROGRESSION BY LEVEL

Commoner Level	Hit Dice	Base Attack/Defense Bonus	Fortitude Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special Abilities
1	1d6	+0	+2	+0	+0	Weapon Proficiency
2	1d6	+1	+3	+0	+0	—
3	1d6	+1	+3	+1	+1	—
4	2d6	+2	+4	+1	+1	—
5	2d6	+2	+4	+1	+1	—
6	2d6	+3	+5	+2	+2	—
7	2d6	+3	+5	+2	+2	—
8	3d6	+4	+6	+2	+2	—
9	3d6	+4	+6	+3	+3	—
10	3d6	+5	+7	+3	+3	—
11	3d6	+5	+7	+3	+3	—
12	4d6	+6/+1	+8	+4	+4	—
13	4d6	+6/+1	+8	+4	+4	—
14	4d6	+7/+2	+9	+4	+4	—
15	4d6	+7/+2	+9	+5	+5	—
16	5d6	+8/+3	+10	+5	+5	—
17	5d6	+8/+3	+10	+5	+5	—
18	5d6	+9/+4	+11	+6	+6	—
19	5d6	+9/+4	+11	+6	+6	—
20	6d6	+10/+5	+12	+6	+6	—

SKILL GROUPS

A commoner doesn't gain access to any skill groups. Members of this class must pay for their skills on a 1-point-per-rank basis. Commoners typically have ranks in Profession, Craft, and the Strength-based skills. While they can spend points on any skill, they rarely have ranks in Knowledge, Use Magic Device, or other exotic skills.

Skill Points at 1st Level: (4 + Intelligence modifier) ×4.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 4 + Intelligence modifier.

FEATS

Commoners enjoy access to general feats only. They never gain mastery in any areas unless they multiclass.

CLASS ABILITIES

Aside from a few weapon proficiencies, commoners gain no special abilities.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A commoner gains proficiency with three simple weapons of his choice. Many commoners learn to handle a dagger or spear as part of a local militia or to hunt for food when times are tough. Because the ruling nobility places strict controls on access to weapons and training, many commoners lack proficiency with any weapons.

EXPERT

The expert is a catch-all class for a broad variety of skilled artisans and others who must undergo long, rigorous apprenticeships to master their trade. A sage, a skilled guide, a translator, and an engineer all qualify as experts.

Experts tend to act as helpers and assistants to the player characters. The party might visit a sage who can decode the runes in an ancient tome they find, while a skilled weaponsmith can forge the barbed spear they need to slay a dragon.

Hit Die: 1d6 at 1st level, +1d6 every fourth level.

SKILL GROUPS

An expert gains access to one skill group of her choice. Some experts delve into academic areas, while others are trained in leading expeditions through difficult terrain. Most experts take the Academia skill group, although the Wilderness Lore group comes in handy for those who work outdoors.

Skill Points at 1st Level: (6 + Intelligence modifier) ×4.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 6 + Intelligence modifier.

FEATS

Experts tend to take general feats to match their area of work, but some delve into academic study. The expert gains mastery in lore feats at 1st level, and her mastery improves as she gains levels. Otherwise, she must spend her feat selections on general feats. Note that while experts have this mastery, many never use it. For example, a blacksmith may never select a lore feat, while a sage or guide spends all of her feat selections on that category.

Expert Level	Lore Feat Mastery
1–2	1
3–5	2
6–8	3
9–11	5
12–14	6
15–17	8
18–20	9

EXPERT PROGRESSION BY LEVEL

Expert Level	Hit Dice	Base Attack/Defense Bonus	Fortitude Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special Abilities
1	1d6	+0	+0	+0	+2	–
2	1d6	+1	+0	+0	+3	–
3	1d6	+1	+1	+1	+3	–
4	2d6	+2	+1	+1	+4	Bonus feat
5	2d6	+2	+1	+1	+4	–
6	2d6	+3	+2	+2	+5	–
7	2d6	+3	+2	+2	+5	–
8	3d6	+4	+2	+2	+6	–
9	3d6	+4	+3	+3	+6	–
10	3d6	+5	+3	+3	+7	Bonus feat
11	3d6	+5	+3	+3	+7	–
12	4d6	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	–
13	4d6	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	–
14	4d6	+7/+2	+4	+4	+9	–
15	4d6	+7/+2	+5	+5	+9	–
16	5d6	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	Bonus feat
17	5d6	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	–
18	5d6	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	–
19	5d6	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	–
20	6d6	+10/+5	+6	+6	+12	–

WARRIOR PROGRESSION BY LEVEL

Warrior Level	Hit Dice	Base Attack Bonus	Base Defense Bonus	Fortitude Save	Reflex Save	Will Save
1	1d8	+1	+0	+2	+0	+0
2	2d8	+2	+1	+3	+0	+0
3	3d8	+3	+2	+3	+1	+1
4	4d8	+4	+3	+4	+1	+1
5	5d8	+5	+3	+4	+1	+1
6	6d8	+6/+1	+4	+5	+2	+2
7	7d8	+7/+2	+5	+5	+2	+2
8	8d8	+8/+3	+6	+6	+2	+2
9	9d8	+9/+4	+6	+6	+3	+3
10	10d8	+10/+5	+7	+7	+3	+3
11	11d8	+11/+6/+1	+8	+7	+3	+3
12	12d8	+12/+7/+2	+9	+8	+4	+4
13	13d8	+13/+8/+3	+9	+8	+4	+4
14	14d8	+14/+9/+4	+10	+9	+4	+4
15	15d8	+15/+10/+5	+11	+9	+5	+5
16	16d8	+16/+11/+6/+1	+12	+10	+5	+5
17	17d8	+17/+12/+7/+2	+12	+10	+5	+5
18	18d8	+18/+13/+8/+3	+13	+11	+6	+6
19	19d8	+19/+14/+9/+4	+14	+11	+6	+6
20	20d8	+20/+15/+10/+5	+15	+12	+6	+6

CLASS ABILITIES

Experts tend to focus on their area of training to the exclusion of all else. Thus, they have few talents beyond those of their core profession.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: An expert gains no proficiency with weapons, armor, or shields.

Bonus Feat: An expert gains a bonus feat at 4th, 10th, and 16th levels. She can spend these bonus feats on any feat for which she meets the mastery requirements.

WARRIOR

The warrior class represents a typical town guard, soldier, thug, or similar person with some military training but none of the specialized expertise of a harrier, man-at-arms, or weapon master. In most cases, warriors form the bulk of a military organization's personnel. Even elite units consist of higher-level warriors, while strategists and commanders are a mix of aristocrats, experts, and warriors with high Intelligence and Charisma scores.

In comparison, soldiers with levels in adventuring classes are either unique operatives or small, elite corps assigned to special duties. For example, a queen's personal guards might be specially trained weapon masters. The men and women who watch the palace's walls and patrol its corridors are probably warriors.

Thugs, bandits, and others who take up arms without formal training are also warriors. A thief or aristocrat usually leads these gangs, while an archer, hunter, or executioner character may serve as an assassin or special operative in the group.

Hit Die: 1d8/level.

WARRIOR MASTERY BY LEVEL

Warrior Level	First Mastery	Second Mastery
1–5	—	—
6–8	1	—
9–11	2	—
12–14	3	1
15–17	4	2
18–20	5	3

SKILL GROUPS

Warriors gain access to the Athletics skill group. Their training in combat develops their physical fitness. Warriors tend to have few skills beyond those provided by that group, as they focus most of their training on weapons and armor.

Skill Points at 1st Level: (2 + Intelligence modifier) ×4.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 2 + Intelligence modifier.

FEATS

Warriors gain a basic competence in the art of fighting, but they never attain the level of mastery of a player character class. A warrior can handle a sword and shield with far more skill than a commoner or an aristocrat, but he can't hope to take on a fresh weapon master or man-at-arms in a fair fight.

Warriors gain mastery starting at 6th level. Before that time, they must spend their choices on general feats. A warrior picks one area in which to gain mastery from this list: armor, defense, finesse, power, or projectile. At 12th level, the warrior picks a second category from that list.

CLASS ABILITIES

A warrior character focuses on combat training to the exclusion of almost every other professional pursuit. Aside from his superior base attack and defense bonuses, he gains few other abilities.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A warrior is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, all shields, and light and medium armor.

NPC CLASS CHALLENGE RATINGS

Sometimes the NPC classes serve as an easy way to create villains, common thugs, and other opponents for the player characters. Since NPC classes are far less powerful than adventuring classes, their level does not equal their Challenge Rating. Instead, the Challenge Rating of an NPC class is usually slightly less than its level. See the Challenge Ratings by NPC Class Level table here for details.

CHALLENGE RATINGS BY NPC CLASS LEVEL

| NPC Level | CHALLENGE RATING BY CLASS | | | |
	Aristocrat	Commoner	Expert	Warrior
1	1/4	1/8	1/4	1/2
2	1/2	1/4	1/2	1
3	1	1/2	1	2
4	1	1	1	3
5	2	1	2	4
6	2	1	2	4
7	3	1	3	5
8	3	2	3	6
9	4	2	4	7
10	4	2	4	8
11	5	2	5	8
12	5	3	5	9
13	6	3	6	10
14	6	3	6	11
15	7	3	7	12
16	7	4	7	12
17	8	4	8	13
18	8	4	8	14
19	9	4	9	15
20	10	5	10	15

CHAPTER FOUR:

COMBAT

In many roleplaying games, combat is just one part of the action.
In Iron Heroes, *a rousing battle may take up an entire session.*

Many of the new combat rules in *Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes* are designed to make fights more interesting, more dramatic, and more compelling. Ideally, a fight in this game is much more exciting than two groups of warriors lining up, rolling for initiative, and trading blows. The action should come fast and furious, with characters and monsters attempting stunts, using action zones to turn the environment against their enemies, and so forth.

While combat has more options in this rules set, it also places an added burden on the DM. Not only must you create NPCs, plots, and the campaign, but now you must put extra thought into each combat encounter. *Iron Heroes* provides you with a variety of tools, but they take some effort to master. This chapter is designed as a tutorial and owner's manual for those rules. It also introduces zones and gives extensive examples, along with ideas for spicing up encounter areas, notes on tactics, and advice on how to keep battles moving.

Some options in this chapter note that you need to roll 1d3. To do this, roll 1d6, and consider a roll of 1 or 2 to be "1," a roll of 3 or 4 to be "2," and a roll of 5 or 6 to be "3."

ZONES: INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

A berserker pushes a catapult off a castle's walls, sending it tumbling into a crowd of enemies. A skilled hunter leaps onto an elephant's flank, slices the ropes that keep the howdah on its back, and sends the archers aboard it crashing to the ground.

These characters have different actions available to them based on where they stand on the battlefield. If a berserker moves next to a catapult, he has the option to push it off the wall's edge. The hunter leaps onto the elephant and then has the option to destroy the howdah.

Zones allow you to create new choices and abilities for characters based on their physical location during an encounter. They can add new options to the standard tactical battle. When characters stand in a particular zone, the players find themselves looking at the combat environment in a

whole new way—everything in it becomes an opportunity. A chandelier serves as a convenient swing. A teetering stone wall turns into an avalanche of bricks with a good stiff push.

Zones are powerful tools for creating interesting battlefields. A simple fight with a few thugs can be dull or difficult to spice up, but if you set the same battle in the midst of a sagging ruin during an earthquake, the action becomes far more intense and compelling. What was once a run-of-the-mill battle becomes a tense affair as walls crumble, the floor caves in, and chunks of rock fall from the ceiling.

The DM creates zones to make environments more interesting, and players should always be on the lookout for ways to use them to their advantage. Run along a tree branch with your Balance skill. Jump from a balcony onto the back of the dragon that rampages in the courtyard below. Players never know if the DM has put specific terrain in an encounter area for them to use as a springboard to action. The more inventive they are in combat, the more success they'll find.

Types of Zones

Three types of zones exist: condition zones, event zones, and action zones. Each involves a different feature of a battlefield.

A *condition zone* describes a specific effect that continuously functions within the battle area. While fighting in the arctic, the characters suffer damage from the frigid temperatures. The cold wears at them every round.

An *event zone*, in comparison, comes into play only when it activates. Event zones are tied to things in the environment that occur without the characters' interference. For example, the PCs might battle a group of trolls in a ruined temple. The temple altar occasionally emits blasts of energy that target the characters and trolls at random. Traps also are event zones. They activate in response to an action, such as a character stepping on a pressure plate or walking through a tripwire.

An *action zone* is a fancy way of defining how a character can interact with the environment during a battle. Usually, these options are a lot like stunts that require you to use the environment in some way. Most action zones offer benefits that are greater than or different from those offered in *Iron Heroes'* stunt rules. For example, a massive boulder perched at the edge of a steep slope might inflict more damage against a greater number of targets than the typical area attack stunt.

Zones are divided into three different types to make them easier to handle, but they use identical rules. In many cases, they draw on existing rules, such as the rules for weather, or they use rules you're already familiar with. The altar that blasts the characters with eldritch energy simply makes an attack roll or requires a saving throw to dodge its power.

Condition Zones

A typical condition zone stat block looks like this:

Storm-Tossed Ship (Condition Zone): Balance DC 15; Fall prone in current square/no effect.

It starts with a name and zone type in bold, followed by the skill or save needed to resist it, the check Difficulty Class, and the effects of failure followed by the effects on a successful check or save. The example above is a condition zone for a ship caught in a fierce storm. As it rides the towering waves, characters aboard it must struggle to keep their footing.

Other condition zones use an attack bonus to resolve their effects. A stat block for such a zone looks like this:

Falling Rocks (Condition Zone): Base attack +9; 2d6 points of damage.

In this case, the zone lists its attack bonus and the damage and other effects it inflicts on a successful hit.

DESIGNING CONDITION ZONES

Building a condition zone requires a careful eye for balance. Since the condition zone affects everyone who enters it and continues to work against them each round, it's easy to create one that's too powerful. With a few failed saves, a character may fall to an improperly balanced condition zone. In addition, the PCs still have to battle their foes while dealing with the zone. Thus, condition zones tend to rely on slowly wearing down their victims' strength rather than a single, massive blow that knocks a character out of the fight.

A typical condition zone requires a save or check of some sort each round. Before a character or monster takes its action, it must attempt this save or check. Apply the results of this check, and then allow the creature to take its action as normal. In some cases, the result of this check determines the sort of actions that a creature can take.

CONDITION ZONE EFFECTS

A condition zone can inflict a variety of effects, from damage to knocking a character prone. The easiest way to determine how such a zone works is to picture it in your mind. Imagine how the battle might unfold and focus on how the zone affects the combatants. Does a ship rise and fall upon the waves, forcing its crew to keep their balance as they fight a swarm of pirates? Does the stifling heat of a volcano slowly sap an adventurer's strength?

With that scene in mind, consider the skill or save needed to resist the zone. Then plot out its effects on both a failed check and a successful check.

Save and Skill Check DCs: A condition zone usually requires a character to make a save or skill check each round to avoid its effects. Before you can determine the Difficulty Class, think about the skill or save needed to resist the zone. Balance is a good skill choice for any effect that involves a

moving environment, such as tremors that can knock the characters prone. The saves fill their niches as usual.

A saving throw's Difficulty Class should, on average, equal 10 + the party's level. This gives each character at least a 50 percent chance of success before accounting for feats or ability scores that improve a save. For skill checks, 13 + the party's level provides you with a minimum. Obviously, you can make the zone more or less dangerous by increasing or decreasing the Difficulty Class. Moving the DC up or down in units of 3 ensures that this change has a tangible impact on the game, as it can account for a high ability bonus or a feat such as Skill Focus or Iron Will.

Attack: In some cases, a condition zone uses an attack bonus rather than requiring a save or skill check. Any zone that relies on a physical attack that a character could dodge or deflect with a shield likely falls into this category. If a character can take cover against a condition zone, it probably uses an attack against him. The average attack bonus for the zone depends on the party's level. You can adjust the bonus up or down to represent a deadlier or less threatening attack.

Party Level	Attack Bonus	Party Level	Attack Bonus
1	+2	11	+14
2	+3	12	+15
3	+4	13	+16
4	+5	14	+17
5	+7	15	+19
6	+8	16	+20
7	+9	17	+21
8	+10	18	+22
9	+11	19	+23
10	+13	20	+25

A zone that uses an attack bonus might cause additional effects on a successful hit. For example, debris that falls from a cavern's ceiling might knock its target prone. These additional effects can allow characters to attempt saves or checks to avoid them. In the example of the falling debris, a Strength check (DC 10) allows a character to remain on his feet.

Damage: A condition zone's damage should be tied to the characters' level, as shown below. This damage assumes that you use the typical saving throw or skill check Difficulty Class. For higher DCs, you might want to decrease the damage slightly, perhaps treating the party as two or three levels lower. For lower DCs, you can treat the party as two or three levels higher.

The table assumes that the characters suffer half damage on a successful save. If they suffer no damage on a save, you can increase the damage by two or three levels as long as the Difficulty Class isn't too high.

Party Level	Typical Damage
1	1d2
2	1d4
3–5	1d6
6–8	2d6
9–11	3d6
12–14	4d6
15–17	5d6
18–20	6d6

Other Effects: You can use almost any effect imaginable with a condition zone, as long as it makes sense within the context of the game. A volcanic tremor might knock the characters prone, while gouts of hot steam could cause temporary blindness. The table below lists some common effects aside from damage and sources that could deliver them.

Try to avoid effects, such as stun or sleep, that leave a character unable to act. Otherwise, a character with a poor save or skill bonus might be unable to take any actions during a battle as he misses save after save. Condition zones should present the characters with a barrier to victory, not an effect that ties their hands.

Zone Effect*	Example Source
Blindness	Dense fog, steam, flashing lights, illusions
Checked	A powerful wind
Deafness	Loud noises, a piercing shriek, a magical effect
Entangled	Strange plant creatures, thick mud
Fatigued	Intense heat, a life-draining magical effect
Prone	Tremors, any effect that causes the ground to move
Sickened	Noxious gas, a magical effect

* See "States and Conditions" in Chapter Eight: Combat of Iron Heroes.

The list of effects is by no means comprehensive, but it should give you some ideas of how to use condition zones for things other than damage. In any case, an effect should have a duration that is long enough to play a role in the encounter without crippling the character. For a condition zone, most effects that don't require an action to escape, such as being fatigued or prone, should last for 1 or 2 rounds.

Terrain: Technically, you could consider terrain a condition zone. An icy coating on a set of stairs causes anyone who walks on it to slip and fall. This sounds like a zone, but the key difference is that the condition zone requires a save or skill check at the start of a character's action, regardless

of what he then does on that action, while a terrain effect does not. A character doesn't have to make a Balance check to avoid slipping on ice until he walks on it. On the other hand, a noxious gas that fills a cavern requires a save each round to avoid its effects. Some terrain effects have associated zones, as you can see in the section that starts on page 41.

Event Zones

Event zones can be triggered (activated by a character's action) or timed (activated according to a schedule or by chance). Here are sample stat blocks for a timed event zone and a triggered event zone.

Obelisk of Despair (Timed Event Zone): Once every 4 rounds; Will save DC 16; on a failed save, causes a −4 morale penalty to attacks and damage for 1d4 minutes.

Cave-In (Triggered Event Zone): Triggered when a character steps on a pressure plate in the cave floor; Reflex save DC 16; on a failed save, the victim takes 3d6 points of damage from falling rocks.

An event zone stat block starts with a name and zone type in bold, followed by how frequently it activates (for timed event zones) or what causes it to activate (for triggered event zones). Next comes the skill or save needed to resist it, its Difficulty Class, and the effects of failure.

Triggered or Timed: The stat block notes the zone's type in parenthesis next to its name. Mark the zone's location or area of effect on your map of the encounter area.

Save DC, Check DC, or Attack Bonus: An event zone either requires a saving throw or skill check to avoid its effects, or it uses an attack to determine whether it strikes a character. The relevant Difficulty Classes or attack bonuses are listed next.

Effects: Event zones inflict damage or other special states on the characters or cause other effects that require explanation. A flash flood pushes the party along each round, while a rolling boulder needs rules to track its movement.

Area: An event zone affects an area or a single target. If it affects an area, the stat block notes the radius or otherwise describes how it targets the characters.

Special Notes: Some zones have additional special rules or effects.

Designing Event Zones

Event zones can be triggered events or timed events.

Triggered events activate in response to an action, such as a character pushing a button.

Timed events happen on a schedule or in response to an event that the characters don't control.

A triggered event zone is basically a trap in the way it functions in the game. When a character steps into a square with a trap's trigger mechanism, the trap activates and either attacks him, such as by firing a crossbow bolt into his square, or causes an effect that requires a saving throw to resist, such by as releasing a cloud of poisonous gas into the room. Event zones have the same basic traits. When a character or creature enters the zone's area, the zone activates and attacks or causes an effect.

A timed event zone activates according to a schedule or by random chance. For example, every few rounds, a channel opens and floods the combat area with water. While an earthquake wracks a ruined city, there's a

chance each round that the crumbling pillars within a temple crash to the ground, crushing anyone unfortunate enough to be standing next to them. These event zones occur independently of the character's actions.

The first step in creating an event zone is to decide which kind to use. As with condition zones, picture the zone and its effect in your mind. Focus on how the zone interacts with the characters and the encounter. If the adventurers must take a specific action that causes the zone to activate, it's a triggered event zone. Otherwise, it's a timed event zone.

EVENT ZONE EFFECTS

Like a condition zone, an event zone can inflict damage, knock a character prone, blind him, and so forth. But because event zones are usually one-shot effects (rather than continuous), they often inflict more damage and can also cause temporary ability score damage. The characters can avoid the spot or action that activates a triggered zone, while a timed zone should activate only once or, if it repeats, every other round at most.

Save and Skill DCs: Event zones have higher Difficulty Classes than condition zones, since they might occur only once during an encounter. The single saving throw or ability check determines whether the zone has any effect on the character for the encounter, though timed zones might require multiple checks or saves.

The typical save Difficulty Class should equal 13 + the party's average level, and the typical skill Difficulty Class should equal 16 + the party's level. Reduce these DCs by 2 for timed zones that occur more frequently than once every 4 rounds. You can increase or decrease these DCs, but keep in mind that the characters will suffer the effects of a failed save more often.

Attacks: Just as some traps resolve an attack to determine whether they strike a character, some event zones make the equivalent of an attack. As a rule, if the zone's effect is a physical attack that a character could deflect with a shield or dodge completely, you should probably resolve it with an attack roll rather than a save or skill check. A zone's attack bonus depends on the party's level. You can adjust the bonus up or down for a deadlier or less threatening zone. Note that the attack bonus for an event zone is higher than that for a condition zone. Because an event zone usually has fewer chances to strike a character, it needs a better bonus to ensure that its attack poses a threat.

Party Level	Attack Bonus	Party Level	Attack Bonus
1	+5	11	+17
2	+6	12	+19
3	+7	13	+20
4	+9	14	+21
5	+10	15	+22
6	+11	16	+24
7	+12	17	+25
8	+14	18	+26
9	+15	19	+27
10	+16	20	+29

Skills: Almost any skill might prove useful in avoiding an event zone. A Survival check allows a hunter to notice that a patch of bushes has sharp, poisoned thorns. A Search check lets a character uncover the pressure plate before he steps on it and activates a trap. When you create an event zone, determine whether a skill check replaces a saving throw for avoiding its effects, or if a check allows a character to spot the danger before he stumbles into it. Spot, Listen, and

Search fill this role in most cases, as they cover a character's environmental awareness. Knowledge and Survival can also prove useful, as they indicate that a character has the training needed to realize he's near an event zone.

If you allow a skill check to notice an event zone, its Difficulty Class should be from 3 to 10 points higher than the save or check DC needed to avoid its effects. This ensures that only characters who put ranks into the skill can spot the danger. In addition, the DC is higher because the characters gain a greater advantage from a success. Not only do they spot the zone before it can affect them, but they can use the zone to their advantage during the encounter.

Damage: An event zone's typical damage depends on how often it activates. The Event Zone Damage table includes two damage columns. The first covers triggered zones and long timed zones (those that activate once every 4 rounds, or less often). The second covers short timed zones (those that activate more often than once every 4 rounds).

The table assumes that the characters suffer half damage on a successful save. If they suffer no damage on a save, multiply the damage dice by 1.5 to determine a fair and balanced total.

Other Effects: The advice for designing condition zones covers a few effects other than damage that you can throw at the party. In addition, event zones can inflict temporary ability score damage. Such damage is usually too harsh to use in a condition zone, but it represents a fair threat for an event zone. A triggered event zone can inflict ability score damage equal to half the damage dice balanced for the party's level.

Most nondamaging zone effects should last long enough to have an effect on the encounter without crippling a character. In most cases, 1d6 or 2d6 rounds are long enough. Other effects, such as being knocked prone, require specific actions or checks to remove them. Ability score damage heals at its normal rate.

Area: When you design an event zone, you must decide on its area of effect. In general, a zone that affects a broader area should have an effect that is weaker or easier to resist than a zone that attacks only one person. For example:

- A dam gate opens, filling a dungeon passage with a flash flood. In this case, the event zone targets everyone within the passage.
- A mechanical crossbow fires at the explorer who stepped on its trigger plate. In this case, the event zone attacks a single person.

If a zone targets only a single character or an area with a 10-foot radius, use the standard damage given above. For every 10 feet you increase the radius, drop the average damage by one level. If the zone covers a nonstandard area, as in the case of a falling archway that fills several squares, estimate the radius. The zone's area should have a logical area of effect that matches its physical effects in the game. In any event, if you reduce the damage by more than two or three

EVENT ZONE DAMAGE

Party Level	Triggered/Long Timed Damage	Short Timed Damage
1	1d6	1d6
2	2d6	1d6
3	3d6	2d6
4	4d6	2d6
5	5d6	3d6
6	6d6	3d6
7	7d6	4d6
8	8d6	4d6
9	9d6	5d6
10	10d6	5d6
11	11d6	6d6
12	12d6	6d6
13	13d6	7d6
14	14d6	7d6
15	15d6	8d6
16	16d6	8d6
17	17d6	9d6
18	18d6	9d6
19	19d6	10d6
20	20d6	10d6

levels, the zone might be too weak to pose any threat. If the zone expands beyond a 40-foot radius, don't keep reducing the damage.

Traps: The quintessential event zones, traps are useful in encounters because they force the characters to proceed with more caution than normal. They also encourage creativity and tactics, since a smart group can attempt to use a trap against its enemies. In general, traps provided in other roleplaying game sources are designed for use in noncombat situations. On the other hand, the guidelines given above assume that you want to use an event zone as part of an encounter, which means the characters must deal with the zone and with the monsters that threaten them.

Generally a trap is a good addition to an encounter if the party's level is 2 or more higher than the trap's Challenge Rating. Otherwise, the trap might prove too deadly within the context of the encounter. For example, a pit trap not only injures a character but also removes her from the fight until she can climb out. During that time, the adventurers must try to fend off their enemies while down one person. That might prove too much if the pit is deep and it takes the trapped character a while to climb out.

ACTION ZONES

Action zones encourage DMs to design interesting battle sites. Rather than simply running a fight in a tavern where the tables, chairs, bar, and beer kegs block movement, you

ZONES VS. STUNTS

Zones are like stunts that the DM sets up and places on the battlefield. They are usually tied to a piece of terrain, such as a swaying rope bridge or a crumbling platform, that you can use to complete stunt. Zones require a skill check, ability check, or attack roll of some sort, leaving them best used by characters with the relevant skill or score.

Zones look a lot like stunts in terms of the actions you can accomplish. (Review the "Stunts" section in Chapter Eight of *Iron Heroes*.) If you made a movie out of your game session or wrote a narrative description of it, the viewer or reader probably couldn't tell the difference between the two. In terms of rules, they have several important differences. The DM designs all zones, in contrast to the player-created stunts. Zones can also create more effects and can break the rules in different ways. Since the DM controls zones, he can design them to fit a broader range of abilities and effects without upsetting game balance.

can create zones around each of those features that define how the player characters (and their enemies) can use them. Instead of standing in one place trading blows with their foes, the adventurers can try a wide variety of actions.

When a character stands in an action zone, she gains the ability to select a special combat action that can be completed only in that location. Sometimes, taking that action makes it impossible for others to attempt the same thing for the rest of the encounter. Think of an action zone as an object waiting for a character to come along and do something interesting with it. It's like a boulder resting at the top of a hill. On its own, the boulder provides cover. With a stiff push, it becomes a rumbling, unstoppable force of destruction.

Here's a sample action zone stat block:

Rolling Boulder (Nonreusable Action Zone): With a Strength check as a full-round action, you can send a boulder rolling down a slope to smash into your enemies. The Difficulty Class and the damage this boulder inflicts depend on its size. Creatures suffer half damage from the stone if they make Reflex saves.

An action zone's stat block covers the following attributes:

Name: The action zone's name should be something descriptive, like "barroom stool" or "weak supporting beam."

Reusable or Nonreusable: Some action zones can be used only once before they're exhausted. A character might smash a brute over the head with a bench, but it shatters into pieces from the blow. After someone successfully uses an action zone, it disappears from the battlefield if it's nonreusable.

Actions: The stat block lists different actions available in the zone. Each action includes a skill, base attack, or ability check Difficulty Class that a character must make as a standard action. If the check fails, she spends her standard action but gains no benefit from the zone. However, she can try again.

In some cases, a zone may require minimum ability scores for a character to complete its action. For example, an adventurer can't pick up and throw an item unless she has the Strength needed to handle it.

DESIGNING ACTION ZONES

Action zones are simultaneously the easiest and most difficult zones to create. They're easy because you simply need to come up with the effects of the action offered by the zone. They're hard because they're the most likely to involve special cases that fall outside of the rules. Unlike condition zones and event zones, they lack a clear method of design scaled by level. They're more freeform in nature, but because you can easily design them for purposes other than directly injuring the enemy, they're easier to balance. Thus, the advice in this section focuses more on creating interesting action zones rather than ones that are balanced against the party's resources.

A good action zone offers an exciting, fun action that the characters can't normally complete. An action zone is also a handy way to encourage a particular kind of stunt, especially if the players are not yet comfortable with using the stunt rules to produce various effects. Some players prefer options that are more concrete and obvious. The stunt rules might seem vague to the players, or they might have trouble mapping the effects they can choose to the situation in the game. Action zones help you avoid that pitfall, especially at low levels or with new players.

When creating an action zone, first picture the consequences of the zone in combat, and then write up rules that reflect the possible events leading up to the consequences. Find game effects that closely model the results and use them to guide you. Good resources for game effects include equipment listings (especially the net weapon), monster special attacks (from monster books compatible with the d20 System), and so on.

An action zone should inflict about 1d6 points of damage for every 4 or 5 points of its Difficulty Class. The description should specify the zone's number of targets or area of effect. This area should correspond to the area that the object could physically cover. For example, a thrown bench might land in any three adjacent squares, inflicting damage on any creatures standing there.

If an action zone requires an attack of any sort, you need to hit your targets before the action can take effect. In many cases, a touch attack works best for thrown objects and other large, bulky items. Use these rules of thumb:

- An item small enough to wield as a normal weapon requires a normal attack roll.
- An item as large as a Medium creature requires a touch attack.
- An item as large as a Large creature always hits; creatures in its target area must instead make Reflex saves to avoid damage. Use DC 15 to save for half
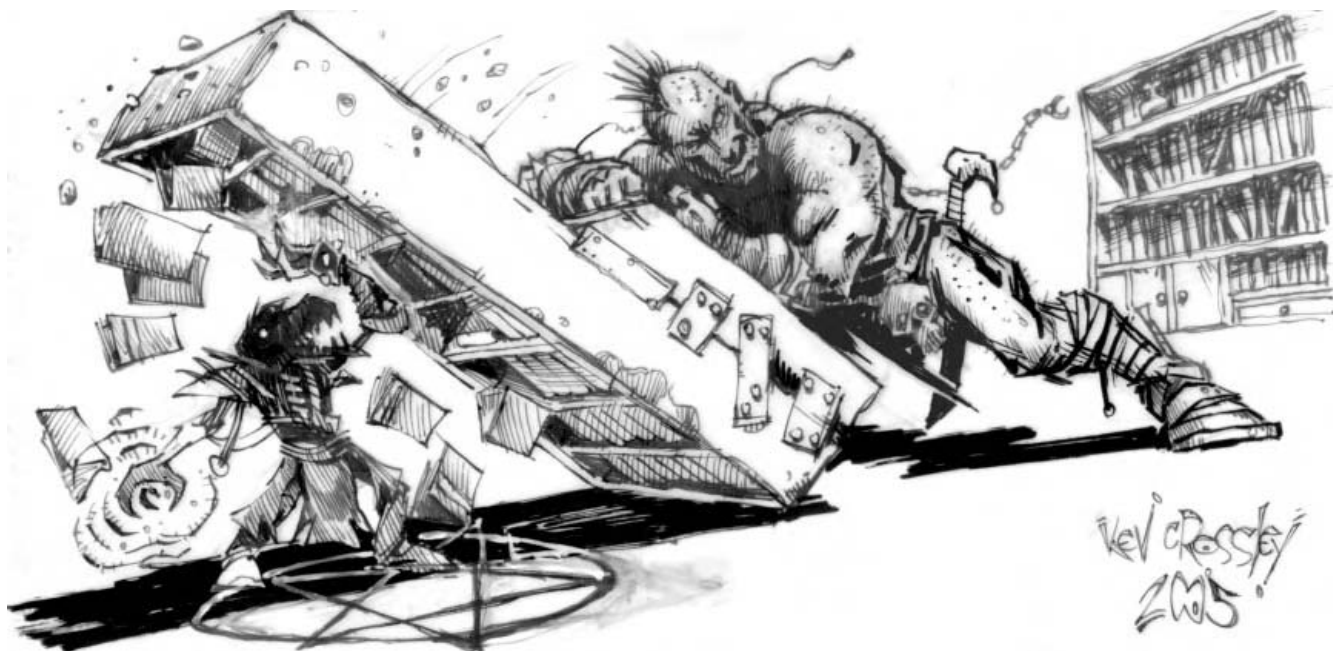
damage; add 5 or 10 to this Difficulty Class for exceptionally large, bulky, or heavy items.

In addition to making attacks, an object in a zone might help the party members move from one point to another or let them interact with the environment in an interesting way. For example, an action zone might allow them to hack down the wooden poles on which a small building stands. When the poles fall, the building collapses into debris that fills the battlefield, and anyone inside the structure suffers damage.

If an action zone is available in an encounter area, the DM should summarize its effects before the battle begins. This information allows the players to make use of the zone if they wish, and it helps emphasize its presence in the encounter. Keep in mind that even if a piece of terrain isn't a zone, the characters still can use stunts to simulate the different maneuvers they can complete with it.

Remember, an action zone simply lets the characters use their environment in new, exciting ways. When you create encounters, use action zones to turn mundane pieces of terrain into fun tools that encourage the adventurers and their enemies to employ interesting tactics.

TERRAIN EFFECTS

This section presents a variety of basic terrain types, such as desert and forest, along with some sample zones that correspond to the terrain types.

Use this section as an encounter area toolbox. It provides dressing that you can use to spice up your game and make encounters more fun than two mobs of warriors lining up and smashing each other with their weapons.

GENERIC TERRAIN

The following terrain features can be found anywhere.

Berm: A common defensive structure, a berm is a low earthen wall that slows movement and provides a measure of cover. Put a berm on the map by drawing two adjacent rows of steep slope (described in "Mountain and Hill Terrain" on page 46) that meet in the middle. Thus, a character crossing a two-square berm will travel uphill for one square, and then downhill for one square. Two-square berms provide cover as low walls (see next page) for anyone standing behind them. Larger berms provide the low wall benefit for anyone standing one square downhill from the top of the berm.

Fences: Wooden fences generally contain livestock or impede oncoming soldiers. It costs an extra square of movement to cross a wooden fence. A stone fence provides a measure of cover as well, functioning as a low wall (see next page). Mounted characters can cross a fence without slowing their movement if they succeed at a Ride check (DC 15). If the check fails, the steed crosses the fence, but the rider falls out of the saddle.

Rubble, Dense: The ground is covered with rocks of all sizes. It costs two squares of movement to enter a square with dense rubble. The Difficulty Class of Balance and Tumble checks on dense rubble increases by 5, and the DC of Move Silently checks increases by 2.

Rubble, Light: Small rocks are strewn across the ground, making nimble movement more difficult. The Difficulty Class of Balance and Tumble checks increases by 2.

Trench: Often dug before a battle to protect soldiers, a trench functions as a low wall (see next page), except that it provides no cover against adjacent foes. It costs two squares of movement to leave a trench, but it costs nothing extra to

enter one. Creatures outside a trench who make a melee attack against a creature inside the trench gain a +1 bonus on the attack because they have higher ground. Trenches might serve as irrigation ditches as well. These rules also cover gulleys, deep gutters, and so on.

Wall, Low: This wall is 3 or 4 feet tall, high to provide cover for a Medium character. Larger creatures receive no benefit from the wall, while smaller ones gain complete cover from it. A Medium creature can cross a low wall by spending two squares of movement, while larger creatures pass it without penalty. Smaller creatures must scale the wall (Climb, DC 10) to cross it.

You can map the effects of a low wall to walls of different size by applying their effects to different size categories. For example, a low wall is "low" relative to a Medium character. For a low wall relative to a Large creature, replace "Medium" with "Large" in the previous paragraph. In this way, you can create walls of various heights.

AQUATIC TERRAIN

The aquatic terrain rules apply to adventures on the high seas and encounters on or near streams, rivers, and ponds. See "Underwater Combat" on page 54 for more information on fighting in water.

Any character can wade in relatively calm water that isn't over her head, with no check required. Similarly, swimming in calm water only requires skill checks with a Difficulty Class of 10. Trained swimmers can just take 10.

Flowing Water: Large, placid rivers move at only a few miles per hour, so they function as still water for most purposes. But some rivers and streams are swifter; anything floating in them moves downstream at a speed of 10 to 40 feet per round. The fastest rapids send swimmers bobbing downstream at 60 to 90 feet per round. Fast rivers are always at least rough water (Swim, DC 15), and whitewater rapids are stormy water (Swim, DC 20). If a character is in moving water, move her downstream the indicated distance at the end of her turn. A character trying to maintain her position relative to the riverbank can spend some or all of her turn swimming upstream.

Swept Away: Characters swept away by a river moving 60 feet per round or faster must make Swim checks (DC 20) every round to avoid going under. If a character gets a check result of 5 or more over the minimum result necessary, he stops his motion by catching a rock, tree limb, or bottom snag, and he's no longer being carried along by the flow of the water. Escaping the rapids by reaching the bank requires three Swim checks (DC 20) in a row. Characters arrested by a rock, limb, or snag can't escape under their own power unless they strike out into the water and attempt to swim their way clear. Other characters can rescue them as if they were trapped in quicksand (see page 46).

Nonflowing Water: Lakes and oceans simply require a swim speed or successful Swim checks to move through them (DC 10 in calm water, DC 15 in rough water, and DC 20 in stormy water). Characters need a way to breathe if they're underwater or they risk drowning. When underwater, characters can move in any direction as if they were flying with perfect maneuverability.

Drowning: Any character can hold her breath for a number of rounds equal to twice her Constitution score. After this period of time, she must make a Constitution check every round (DC 10 on the first round, +1 on each subsequent round) in order to continue holding her breath.

When the character finally fails her Constitution check, she begins to drown. In the first round, she falls unconscious (0 hit points). In the following round, she drops to −1 hit points and is dying. In the third round, she drowns.

It is possible to drown in substances other than water, such as sand, quicksand, fine dust, and silos full of grain.

Arctic Terrain

The forbidding climates of the far north or far south, along with the frigid upper regions of tall mountains, provide dangerous sites for adventures.

Ice Sheet: The ground is covered with slippery ice. It costs two squares of movement to enter a square covered by an ice sheet, and the Difficulty Class of Balance and Tumble checks there increases by 5. A Balance check (DC 10) is required to run or charge across an ice sheet.

Iced-Over Lake: Most open bodies of water freeze over in arctic conditions, but the ice might not be strong enough to support a creature. Use the rules given for the ice sheet above. In addition, the following triggered event zone applies to the encounter.

Thin Ice (Triggered Event Zone): Triggered when a character steps on a square of thin ice; Reflex save DC 10; on a failed save, the character creates a hole in the ice big enough to cover his space. In addition to the normal effects of attempting to swim and drowning, a character in freezing cold water must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) each round or suffer 1d6 points of cold damage. He also must make a Spot check (DC 10) to find the hole in the ice if he sinks below the water's surface.

Snow: When using snow in an encounter, give it a size rating similar to a creature's size category. The rating determines how deep the snow is compared to a creature. A creature with the same size category as the snow stands thigh-deep in it. It costs twice the normal movement allowance to move into a square that is covered with snow equal to your size. Smaller creatures must pay quadruple the normal movement cost, while larger creatures can move as normal.

Arcane Terrain

This category covers anything not normally found in the mundane world but likely present in a strange ruin, magical location, dreaded sorcerer's laboratory, or similar place.

Acid Pool: Corrosive acid deals 1d6 points of acid damage per round of exposure except in the case of total immersion (such as into a vat of acid), which deals 10d6 points of damage per round. An attack with acid, such as from a hurled vial or a monster's spittle, counts as a round of exposure.

The fumes from most acids are inhaled poisons. Anyone who moves adjacent to a pool of acid must make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or take 1 point of temporary Constitution damage. The character must make a second save one minute later or take another 1d4 points of Constitution damage. Creatures with any sort of acid resistance or immunity ignore this effect.

Creatures immune to acid's caustic properties might still drown in it if totally immersed (see "Drowning," above).

Altar: An altar provides cover as a low wall and might include the following timed event zone.

Altar of Evil (Timed Event Zone): Once every 5 rounds; Will save DC 15 (only for creatures that are not undead); on a failed save, causes a –2 morale penalty to attacks and damage for 1d4 minutes. In addition, any undead creature within 100 feet of the altar of evil gains a +2 bonus to damage reduction checks for armor (or DR 2/magic if it lacks armor) and a +2 morale bonus to attacks and damage.

Boiling Water: Boiling water deals 1d6 points of scalding damage per round of exposure, unless the character is fully immersed, in which case it deals 10d6 points of damage per round of exposure.

Lava Effects: Lava or magma deals 2d6 points of fire damage per round of exposure, except in the case of total

immersion (such as when a character falls into the crater of an active volcano), which deals 20d6 points of damage per round.

Damage from magma continues for 1d3 rounds after exposure ceases, but this additional damage is only half of that dealt during actual contact (in other words, 1d6 or 10d6 points per round).

An immunity or resistance to fire serves as an immunity or resistance to lava or magma, too. However, a creature immune to fire might still drown if completely immersed in lava.

Sealed Chambers: A Medium character can breathe easily for six hours in a sealed chamber measuring 10 feet on a side. After that time, the character takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage every 15 minutes. Each additional Medium character or significant fire source (a torch, for example) proportionally reduces the time the air will last.

Small characters consume half as much air as Medium characters. A larger volume of air, of course, lasts for a longer time.

Smoke Cloud: A character who breathes in heavy smoke must succeed at a Fortitude save each round (DC 15 on the first round, +1 for each subsequent round) or spend that round choking and coughing. A character who chokes for 2 consecutive rounds takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage.

Smoke obscures vision, giving concealment (20 percent miss chance) to characters within it.

Vacuum: Any character can hold her breath for a number of rounds equal to twice her Constitution score. After this period of time, she must make a Constitution check every round (DC 10 on first round, +1 on each subsequent round) in order to continue holding her breath.

When the character finally fails her Constitution check, she begins to suffocate. In the first round, she falls unconscious (0 hit points). In the following round, she drops to –1 hit points and is dying. In the third round, she suffocates.

Forest Terrain

A dark, mysterious forest is the perfect venue for adventures in the wilderness. The thick trees prevent the player characters from seeing far ahead, while deadly monsters can attack from the branches above. Forest terrain also mixes well with almost every other terrain type. A swampy forest consists of watery bogs dotted with trees, while a forest can thrive in hilly and mountainous terrain.

Trees: A creature standing in the same square as a tree gains a +4 passive bonus to defense due to cover and a +2 cover bonus on Reflex saves. The presence of a tree doesn't otherwise affect a creature's fighting space, because it's assumed that the creature is using the tree to its advantage when it can. The trunk of a typical tree has hardness 5 and 150 hit points. A Climb check (DC 15) is sufficient to climb a tree.

Medium and dense forests have massive trees as well. These trees take up an entire square and provide cover to anyone behind them. They have hardness 5 and 600 hit points. As with their smaller counterparts, it takes a Climb check (DC 15) to climb them.

Trees might provide the following action zones:

Diving Branch Attack (Reusable Action Zone): You can climb a tree and launch yourself down upon a foe. You may substitute a Jump check for your normal attack roll as a full-round action. If you hit, your opponent suffers damage equal to the falling damage you would normally take from the jump in addition to your weapon damage. You suffer half the normal falling damage.

Toppling Tree (Nonreusable Action Zone): You can use a
Strength check (DC 15) against a dying, dead, or otherwise
unsteady tree to send it crashing into your enemies. The tree
covers a line up to its height. This line must start from the
square it occupies, but it can extend in any direction you
wish. Creatures caught in the falling tree's area must make
Reflex saves (DC 15) or suffer 5d6 points of damage. A suc-
cessful save halves this damage.

Undergrowth: Vines, roots, and short bushes cover much
of the ground in a forest.

A space covered with light undergrowth costs two squares
of movement to move into, and it provides partial conceal-
ment with a 20 percent miss chance. Undergrowth increases
the Difficulty Class of Tumble and Move Silently checks by 2
because the leaves and branches get in the way.

Heavy undergrowth costs four squares of movement to
move into, and it provides partial concealment with a 30
percent miss chance (instead of the usual 20 percent). It
increases the Difficulty Class of Tumble and Move Silently
checks by 5. Heavy undergrowth is easy to hide in, granting
a +5 circumstance bonus on Hide checks. Running and
charging are impossible.

Squares with undergrowth are often clustered together.
Undergrowth and trees aren't mutually exclusive; it's common
for a 5-foot square to have both a tree and undergrowth.

DESERT TERRAIN

With its intense heat and shifting sands, the desert is a dan-
gerous place even under the best conditions.

Overwhelming Heat (Condition Zone): Fortitude DC 10; 1d4
points of nonlethal damage/no effect.
This zone represents the oppressive heat of the desert, espe-
cially when mixed with the physical exertion required in
combat. Use the standard temperature rules for extreme heat
(see page 52) in noncombat conditions. Characters in medi-
um armor suffer a –2 penalty to the save against this zone,
while those in heavy armor take a –4 penalty.

Sand Dunes: Created by the action of the wind, sand
dunes function as hills that move. If the wind is strong and
consistent, a sand dune can move several hundred feet in a
week's time. Sand dunes can cover hundreds of squares. They
always have a gentle slope pointing in the direction of the
prevailing wind and a steep slope on the leeward side. Use the
rules for slopes in "Mountain and Hill Terrain" (see page 46).

Sandstorms: A sandstorm reduces visibility to 1d10 squares
and provides a –4 penalty on Listen, Search, and Spot checks.
A sandstorm deals 1d3 points of nonlethal damage per hour to
creatures caught in the open, leaving a thin coating of sand
in its wake. Driving sand creeps penetrates all but the most
secure seals and seams, chafing skin and contaminating gear.

Marsh Terrain

Swamps have a justifiably sinister reputation. They are a haven for insects, disease, and predatory creatures. From an alligator that lurks just below the water's surface to the feral goblins that snipe at adventurers with their poisoned arrows, the marsh provides a daunting challenge for any character.

Swarm of Flies (Condition Zone): Fortitude DC 15; –2 penalty to attacks, checks, and saves/no effect.

This condition zone represents a large swarm of mosquitoes and other biting insects. These bugs are too small to inflict damage on a character, but their relentless bites prove distracting. The penalty represents the bugs' itching and painful bites. A character affected by the swarm must save each round to ignore the insects and fight as normal.

Bogs: If a square is part of a shallow bog, it has deep mud or standing water of about 1 foot in depth. It costs double the normal movement to move into a square with a shallow bog, and the Difficulty Class of Tumble checks in such a square increases by 2.

A square that is part of a deep bog has roughly 4 feet of standing water. It costs Medium or larger creatures quadruple the normal movement to move into a square with a deep bog, or they can swim if they wish. Small or smaller creatures must swim to move through a deep bog. Tumbling is impossible in a deep bog.

The water in a deep bog provides cover for Medium or larger creatures. Smaller creatures gain improved cover (+8 passive cover bonus to defense, +4 cover bonus on Reflex saves). Medium or larger creatures can crouch as a move action to gain this improved cover. Creatures with such improved cover take a –10 penalty on attacks against creatures that aren't underwater.

Both shallow and deep bogs impose a –2 penalty on all Move Silently checks.

Hedgerows: Common in moors, hedgerows are tangles of stones, soil, and thorny bushes. Narrow hedgerows function as low walls, and it takes three squares of movement to cross them. Wide hedgerows are more than 5 feet tall and take up entire squares. They provide total cover, just as a wall does. It takes four squares of movement to move through a square with a wide hedgerow; creatures that succeed at a Climb check (DC 10) need to spend only two squares of movement to move through the square.

Quicksand: Patches of quicksand present a deceptively solid appearance (looking like undergrowth or open land) that may trap careless adventurers. A character approaching a patch of quicksand at a normal pace is entitled to a Survival check (DC 8) to spot the danger before stepping in, but charging or running characters don't have a chance to detect the patch first. A typical patch of quicksand is 20 feet in diameter; the momentum of a charging or running character carries her 1d2 squares into the quicksand.

Effects of Quicksand: Characters in quicksand must make a Swim check (DC 10) every round to simply tread in place, or a Swim check (DC 15) to move 5 feet in whatever direction they desire. If a trapped character fails this check by 5 or more, she sinks below the surface and begins to drown whenever she can no longer hold her breath (see the Swim skill description in Chapter Four of *Iron Heroes*).

Characters below the surface of quicksand may swim back up with a successful Swim check (DC 15 on the first round, +1 for each consecutive round spent under the surface).

Rescue: Pulling out a character trapped in quicksand can be difficult. A rescuer needs a branch, spear haft, rope, or similar tool that enables him to reach the victim with one end of it. Then he must make a Strength check (DC 15) to successfully pull the victim, and the victim must make a Strength check (DC 10) to hold onto the branch, pole, or rope. If both checks succeed, the victim is pulled one square closer to safety. If the victim fails to hold on, she must make a Swim check (DC 15) to stay above the surface.

Mountain and Hill Terrain

Difficult to traverse and often rife with monsters, hills and mountains provide a daunting physical barrier to civilization's outward expansion.

Rock Wall: A vertical plane of stone requires a Climb check (DC 25) to ascend. A typical rock wall is 20 to 80 feet tall in rugged mountains and 10 to 160 feet tall in forbidding mountains. Rock walls are drawn on the edges of squares, not in the squares themselves.

Scree: A field of shifting gravel, scree doesn't affect speed, but it can be treacherous on a slope. The Difficulty Class of Balance and Tumble checks increases by 2 for scree on a gradual slope and by 5 for scree on a steep slope. If the scree is on a slope of any kind, characters suffer a –2 penalty to all Move Silently checks.

Slope, Gradual: A gradual slope is 30 degrees or less up or down. This incline isn't steep enough to affect movement, but characters gain a +1 bonus on melee attacks against foes downhill from them.

Rolling Boulder (Nonreusable Action Zone): With a Strength check as a full-round action, you can send a boulder rolling down a slope to smash into your enemies. The Difficulty Class and the damage this boulder inflicts depend on its size; see the table below. Creatures suffer half damage from the stone if they make Reflex saves.

ROLLING BOULDERS BY SIZE				
Size	**DC**	**Damage**	**Reflex DC**	**Suggested Level**
Small	10	2d6	15	1st+
Medium	15	4d6	18	3rd+
Large	20	6d6	21	5th+
Huge	25	8d6	24	7th+

The boulder travels one square if you push it along flat ground. Pushing it down a slope moves it the length of the slope and an additional distance along flat ground equal to the slope's length. It inflicts an extra 2d6 points of damage against a creature if it stops in a square occupied by that creature.

Slope, Steep: A steep slope is defined as sharper than 30 degrees but shallow enough that characters don't need to use the Climb check to ascend. Characters moving uphill (to an adjacent square of higher elevation) must spend two squares of movement to enter each square of steep slope. Characters running or charging downhill (moving to an adjacent square of lower elevation) must succeed at a Balance check (DC 10) upon entering the first steep slope square. Mounted characters make a Ride check (DC 10) instead. Characters who fail this check stumble and must end their movement 1d2 squares later. Characters who fail by 5 or more fall prone in the square where they end their movement. A steep slope increases the Difficulty Class of Tumble checks by 2.

URBAN AND INTERIOR TERRAIN
Even in the relative safety of a city or town, the characters must watch out for assassins, robbers, thugs, and other threats. Some monsters are at home when hidden among the vast mass of humanity.

SAMPLE ZONES
Urban zones cover some of the unique features that the characters must cope with in a city.

Crowd (Condition Zone): Strength DC 10. This condition zone represents a large crowd, such as an audience gathered to hear a proclamation or witness a public execution. A crowd counts as difficult terrain that blocks line of sight. You can attack only adjacent opponents. The crowd does not block line of effect. If you fail your Strength check, you become caught in the crowd and can move only at half speed. If you fail your check by 5 or more, you are knocked prone and suffer 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. If you are prone at the end of your action while in a crowd, you suffer another 1d6 points of nonlethal damage as people trample you.

Falling Objects (Timed Event Zone): Occurs at DM's discretion; attack bonus varies by party level (see "Event Zone Effects," page 38). Falling objects are a potential hazard in a city, especially if the characters fight near an occupied building. A chamber pot, garbage, and other materials could pose a threat. In addition to the standard rules for damage, the following effects fit with an urban encounter.
Falling Garbage: A dumped chamber pot embarrasses the character it hits and hampers his ability to fight. The victim must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds.

Riot (Condition Zone): Strength DC 10. This condition zone represents a general state of violence, rioting, and chaos. It simulates a packed crowd of panicked people who move and swarm along the streets seemingly at random. If caught up in the riot, you can move at full speed in the same direction as the riot, or you can move at half speed in a different direction. If you want to take other actions, you must make a Strength check (DC 10). Moving in the same direction as the riot adds a +5 bonus to the check.

If the check succeeds, you can take your action. However, you suffer a −4 penalty to attacks, checks, and saves as the riot pushes past you. In addition, you must make a Strength check (DC 10) at the end of your action or be knocked prone and suffer nonlethal damage as described below.

If the check fails, you're jostled to a prone position and suffer 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. To stand up, you must make a Strength check (DC 10) as a standard action. If at the end of your action you are prone in the riot, you suffer 1d6 points of nonlethal damage as people trample you.

FURNISHINGS AND OTHER OBJECTS

The concept of terrain inside a building may seem strange, but a table or an enormous keg of beer has an effect on a battle, just like a pit or a fence. The characters can use such things as cover, and they make excellent candidates for action zones. This section gives you basic rules for a variety of common furnishings, with an eye toward making them more interesting and useful than just pieces of cover.

Of course, this section can't present every possible furnishing or accoutrement found in a building. Hopefully, the list is extensive enough to help you with other obstacles or items that you add to your game. Almost any action-adventure movie provides plenty of ideas for creative use of background elements.

Banister: This wide, smooth guardrail runs the length of the stairs.

Slide Down (Reusable Action Zone): With a successful Balance check (DC 15), you can jump on the banister and slide down to the bottom of the stairs. This grants you the benefits of a charge with a standard action rather than a full-round action.

Barrel: A barrel fills the square it occupies. You can step on top of one with a Jump check (DC 5).

Barrel Roll Attack (Reusable Action Zone): You can kick a barrel onto its side and roll it toward your opponents, knocking them to the ground as the barrel careens over them. You must make a Strength check (DC 15) as a full-round action to knock the barrel over and kick it toward your enemies or pick it up and throw it. In either case, you launch the barrel in a line with a range of 15 feet. Any opponent in the line's area must make a Reflex save (DC 10 + your Strength modifier) or suffer damage equal to 2d6 points + double your Strength bonus. In addition, creatures one or more size categories smaller than you are knocked prone on a failed save. The barrel lands at the end of the line.

Chair: A chair turns the square it occupies into difficult terrain. You gain a +2 bonus to any Jump checks made out of the chair's square, as you step onto it before leaping to provide you with an extra boost.

Chandelier: In most cases, a chandelier has no effect on combat. Its main value lies in the quick, safe passage it can afford you across a brawl.

Chandelier Swing (Reusable Action Zone): You leap through the air, grab hold of the chandelier, and use it to swing across the room. You must make a Jump check as normal to reach the chandelier. You then use it to swing across the room as a free action. The distance it carries you depends on its size and the length of the rope or chain used to suspend it from the ceiling. If, after swinging across the room, you immediately attack a foe in melee, you gain the benefits and drawbacks of charging.

Chandelier Crash (Nonreusable Action Zone): With a successful base attack check (DC 20) made with a ranged weapon, you shoot the chandelier's supporting rope or chain and send it crashing to the floor. Anyone standing in the four squares beneath it suffers 3d6 points of damage, though they can make a Reflex save (DC 15) for half damage. The four squares now count as difficult terrain. Obviously, once you destroy the chandelier, it's useless. If candles on the chandelier are lit, targets may catch on fire (see page 52).

Table: A table provides an excellent refuge from a fight for anyone who ducks under it, while a table pushed onto its side offers cover against archers and other ranged attackers. You can duck under a table by squatting down and paying double the normal movement cost to enter the table's square. While under a table, you gain a +2 bonus to all Hide checks, as many combatants forget to look low when scanning an area for enemies. You gain cover against melee attacks made by opponents adjacent to the table. Moving out of a table's area costs double the normal movement cost, as you must wiggle out and stand as you exit. A creature can fit under any table that is designed for creatures of its size or larger. Most tavern tables come with two benches.

You can climb atop a table with a Jump check (DC 5). While on the table, you gain a +1 bonus to attacks for being higher than your opponents.

Table as Cover (Reusable Action Zone): With a Strength check (DC 15) as a standard action, you flip a table over. The table covers the same squares as before, but one side of that space now counts as a low wall (see page 42). You can switch the side that the wall runs along with another Strength check (DC 15) as a standard action.

Bench Toss (Reusable Action Zone): You can pick up and throw a bench if your Strength is 14 or higher. This attack has a range of 10 feet and can target up to three adjacent squares. Make a touch attack against each target in the area. A successful hit deals damage equal to 1d6 points + twice your Strength bonus.

Tapestry/Curtain: A tapestry or curtain provides either cover or partial concealment, depending on its thickness. A heavy curtain deflects arrows and sword blows, providing cover, while a light one allows such attacks to pass through but makes it difficult to perceive who or what stands behind them. In either case, you can hide behind a tapestry if it blocks sight.

Tapestry Swirl (Reusable Action Zone): As a standard attack action, you can pull down a curtain and wrap it around an opponent. Make a touch attack against your opponent. If you succeed, you grab the tapestry, swirl it in the air, and wrap it around your foe. Your opponent becomes entangled in the tapestry until the end of his next action. Of course, both you and the target must be close enough to the tapestry for this maneuver to work.

Tapestry Collapse (Nonreusable Action Zone): As a standard action, you pull the tapestry down upon your opponent. You must make a Strength check (DC 20, though it could be higher or lower depending on the tapestry's material) to tear it from the wall, and then make a touch attack against your opponent. If you hit, your opponent is entangled until he makes a Strength or Escape Artist check (same DC as needed to tear the tapestry down) as a standard action to escape.

Tapestry Rappel (Reusable Action Zone): You stab a piercing weapon into a tapestry or similar object and then hang from the weapon. As it slices down the tapestry, you ride it safely to the floor. With a successful base attack check (DC 15), you can fall any distance down a tapestry without suffering damage. Moving in this manner is a move action.

MOBILE TERRAIN

A raft floats downstream, carrying a party toward its destination. A group of orcs, noticing the raft, moves to attack. Some of the orcs fire arrows from the banks, but others swim toward the raft. The party must fight off the attackers, but luckily, the raft carries them away from danger.

Mobile terrain adds interesting wrinkles to an encounter. It can cause unexpected—and perhaps unwanted—changes to the positions of the characters or their opponents. If the characters don't know where or when a section of terrain or a feature will move, they might end up in a sticky situation. By the same token, a distant monster might suddenly bear down on the party with help from the terrain. For example, the characters might spot a gang of goblins at the far end of a mine tunnel. The mine-cart tracks the PCs have been following are old and rusty, making it quite a surprise when the goblins come screaming down the passage toward them on an ancient mining cart. The players may have counted on a few rounds to cast spells and prepare for combat. Instead, their enemies are upon them.

MOBILE TERRAIN IN COMBAT

The key consideration with mobile terrain is timing. If a platform in the middle of a battlefield is spinning around, what happens when a character jumps onto it? Does he immediately move with the platform, or does he have a chance to take an action and complete his movement? A rogue might jump onto the platform, ride it for a few seconds, and jump off to land next to an opponent. A hunter might want to take a few steps on it to reach his foe, but if the platform moves him as soon as he touches it, he can't reach her. Over the

MOVING TERRAIN BY SPEED			
Terrain Speed	**Balance DC**	**Defense Bonus**	**Distance**
Slow	5	0	20 feet
Moderate	10	0	40 feet
Brisk	15	+1	60 feet
Fast	20	+2	80 feet
Intense	25	+4	100 feet

course of a six-second round, everyone is assumed to act almost simultaneously, but if the platform moves on every character or monster's action, the results may seem strange.

For instance, Pharius leaps onto the spinning platform on his initiative count of 23. After his action, the DM resolves the platform's movement. If four other people jumped onto the platform, you'd expect that Pharius also would move with it those four other times. On the other hand, if the platform moves only once per round, monsters and characters can cross it, move onto and off of it, and otherwise treat it as static terrain. Only characters who remain on the platform when it moves have to deal with it. Unless the moving terrain is enormous or the characters must spend time on it during the encounter, you lose the feel of a dynamic battlefield.

The easiest way to get around this pitfall is to treat terrain that's in motion as more difficult to handle than regular ground. After all, it's only logical that taking a step on a fast-moving platform is risky. When you step onto moving terrain, you need to maintain your balance in order to continue moving as normal. If you're fast and agile, you can hop onto it, make a short move, and hop off. A slower, lumbering character might fall over or become frozen in place, unable to continue moving.

When you enter moving terrain, make a Balance check with a Difficulty Class determined by the terrain's speed. If you fail this check, your movement immediately ends, and you suffer a −2 penalty to attacks and checks due to your unsteady footing. If you want to keep moving, you must use another action to move. Before doing so, you must make another Balance check with a DC that's 5 higher than that of the previous check. Should this check fail, you fall prone in your current space and your movement ends. If you have an extra action, you can stand and attempt another Balance check to keep moving.

If your Balance check succeeds, you can continue to move and act as normal. You do not suffer the penalty to attacks and checks. In either case, moving terrain is difficult ground due to the speed of its movement and unsteady footing.

Moving terrain also makes you a more difficult target. You gain a passive defense bonus against anyone who's not on the moving terrain. This bonus takes into account your speed, plus the chance that as you move you might gain cover from the attacker.

When dealing with moving terrain, roll for its initiative with a +0 modifier. On its action, the terrain moves anyone standing on it a distance determined by its speed. Anyone on the terrain moves the listed distance along its path.
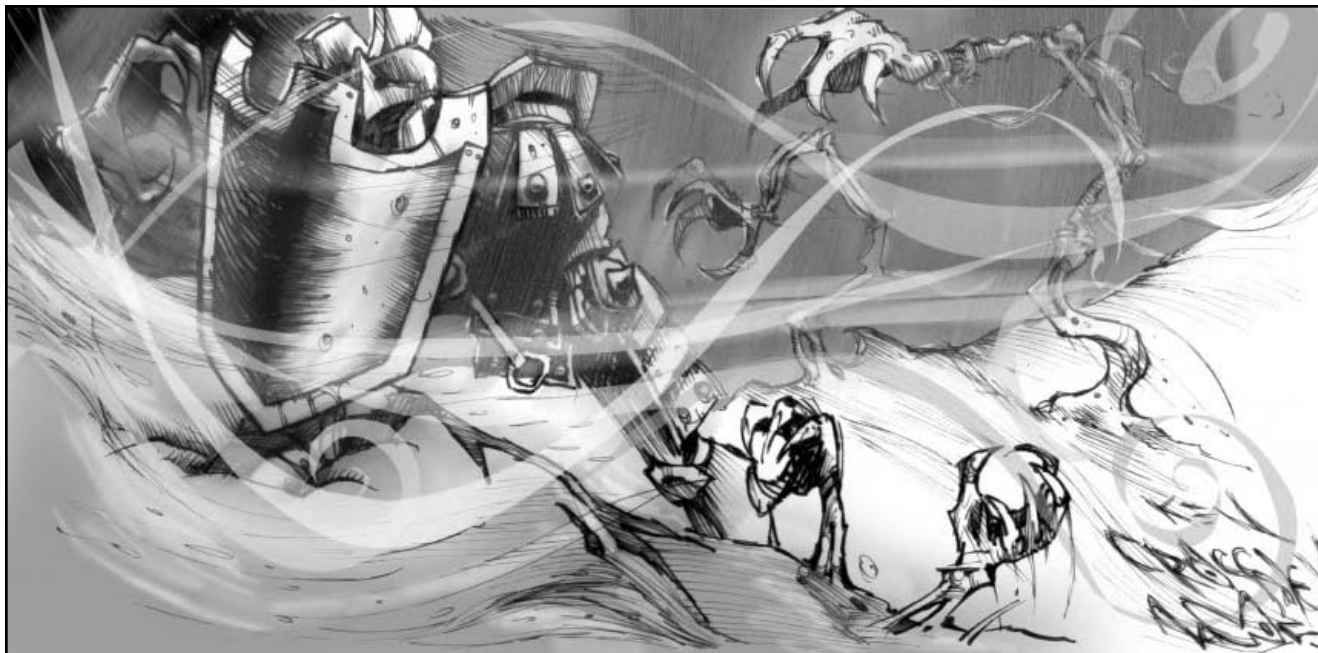
WEATHER EFFECTS

While moving through various types of terrain, the player characters also must deal with the effects of weather. They shouldn't face a storm or blizzard every time they step outside, but introducing different weather conditions lends a sense of realism to the game.

PRECIPITATION

Many DMs like to have the player characters blunder into fog or trudge through chilly rain, but don't overlook other types of precipitation as well.

Fog: Whether in the form of a low-lying cloud or a mist rising from the ground, fog obscures all sight, including darkvision, beyond 5 feet. Creatures 5 feet away have partial concealment (attacks by or against them have a 20 percent miss chance).

Hail: Hail does not reduce visibility, but the sound of falling hail makes Listen checks more difficult (–4 penalty). Sometimes (5 percent chance), hail can become large enough to deal 1 point of lethal damage (per storm) to anything in the open. Once on the ground, hail has the same effect on movement as snow.

Rain: Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a –4 penalty on Spot and Search checks. It has the same effect on flames, ranged weapon attacks, and Listen checks as severe wind.

Sleet: Essentially frozen rain, sleet has the same effect as rain while falling (except that its chance to extinguish protected flames is 75 percent) and the same effect as snow once on the ground.

Snow, Normal: Falling snow has the same effects on visibility, ranged weapon attacks, and skill checks as rain. A day of snowfall leaves 1d6 inches of snow on the ground. See "Arctic Terrain," page 43, for rules on movement through snow.

Snow, Heavy: Heavy snow has the same effects as normal snowfall, but also restricts visibility as fog does. A day of heavy snow leaves 1d4 feet of snow on the ground. See page 43 for rules on movement through snow.

Heavy snow accompanied by strong or severe winds may result in snowdrifts 1d4×5 feet deep, especially in and around objects big enough to deflect the wind—a cabin or a large tent, for instance. There is a 10 percent chance that a heavy snowfall is accompanied by lightning. Snow has the same effect on flames as moderate wind.

WIND

Something as simple as wind can be a minor inconvenience or a dangerous challenge, depending on its intensity. (See the Wind Effects table on the next page.)

Wind, Moderate: A steady, moderate wind has a 50 percent chance of extinguishing small, unprotected flames, such as candles.

Wind, Strong: Strong gusts automatically extinguish unprotected flames (candles, torches, and the like). Such gusts impose a –2 penalty on ranged attack rolls and on Listen checks.

Wind, Severe: In addition to automatically extinguishing any unprotected flames, winds of this magnitude cause protected flames (such as those of lanterns) to dance wildly. They have a 50 percent chance of extinguishing these lights. Ranged weapon attacks and Listen checks in severe wind carry a –4 penalty.

Windstorm: Powerful enough to bring down branches if not whole trees, windstorms automatically extinguish unprotected flames. They have a 75 percent chance of blowing out protected flames, such as those of lanterns. Ranged weapon attacks are impossible in windstorms, and even siege weapons have a –4 penalty on attack rolls. Listen checks are made at a –8 penalty due to the howling of the wind.

Wind, Hurricane: All flames are extinguished. Ranged attacks become impossible (except with siege weapons, which have a −8 penalty on attack rolls). Listen checks are impossible; characters hear nothing but the roaring of the wind. Hurricane-force winds often fell trees. See "Forest Terrain" on page 44 for an action zone that simulates a falling tree.

Wind, Tornado: All flames are extinguished. All ranged attacks are impossible (even with siege weapons), as are Listen checks. Instead of being blown away (see the Wind Effects table below), characters in close proximity to a tornado who fail their Fortitude saves are sucked toward the tornado. Those who come into contact with the actual funnel cloud are picked up and whirled around for 1d10 rounds, taking 6d6 points of damage per round, before being violently expelled (falling damage may apply). While a tornado's rotational speed can be as great as 300 miles per hour, the funnel itself moves forward at an average of 30 miles per hour (roughly 250 feet per round). A tornado uproots trees, destroys buildings, and causes other similar forms of major destruction.

TEMPERATURE

A simple way to remind the player characters of their environment is to make it much colder or hotter than is comfortable. This section also covers the rules for catching on fire.

EXTREME COLD

Cold and exposure deal nonlethal damage to a victim. A character can't recover from this nonlethal damage until she gets out of the cold and warms up again. Once a character falls unconscious through the accumulation of nonlethal damage, the cold and exposure begin to deal lethal damage at the same rate.

An unprotected character in cold weather (below 40° F) must make a Fortitude save each hour (DC 15 for the first save, + 1 for each subsequent save) or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. Characters reduced to unconsciousness begin taking lethal damage (1d6 points per hour).

In conditions of severe cold or exposure (below 0° F), an unprotected character must make a Fortitude save once every 10 minutes (DC 15 for the first save, + 1 for each subsequent save), taking 1d6 points of nonlethal damage on each failure. A character with the Survival skill may receive a bonus on this saving throw and may be able to apply this bonus to other characters as well (see the skill description in Chapter Four of *Iron Heroes*). Characters wearing winter clothing need to check for cold and exposure damage only once per hour.

A character who takes any nonlethal damage from cold or exposure is beset by frostbite or hypothermia (treat her as fatigued). These penalties end when the character recovers the nonlethal damage she took from the cold and exposure.

WIND EFFECTS

Wind Force	Wind Speed	Ranged Attacks Normal/Siege Weapons*	Creature Size**	Wind Effect† on Creatures	Fortitude Save DC
Light	0–10 mph	—/—	Any	None	—
Moderate	11–20 mph	—/—	Any	None	—
Strong	21–30 mph	−2/—	Tiny or smaller	Knocked down	10
			Small or larger	None	10
Severe	31–50 mph	−4/—	Tiny	Blown away	15
			Small	Knocked down	15
			Medium	Checked‡	15
			Large or larger	None	15
Windstorm	51–74 mph	Impossible/−4	Small or smaller	Blown away	18
			Medium	Knocked down	18
			Large or Huge	Checked‡	18
			Gargantuan or Colossal	None	18
Hurricane	75–174 mph	Impossible/−8	Medium or smaller	Blown away	20
			Large	Knocked down	20
			Huge	Checked‡	20
			Gargantuan or Colossal	None	20
Tornado	175–300 mph	Impossible/impossible	Large or smaller	Blown away	30
			Huge	Knocked down	30
			Gargantuan or Colossal	Checked‡	30

* The siege weapon category includes ballista and catapult attacks as well as boulders tossed by giants.

** Flying or airborne creatures are treated as one size category smaller than their actual size, so an airborne Gargantuan dragon is treated as Huge when determining wind effects.

† For effect descriptions, see "States and Conditions" in Chapter Eight: Combat of Iron Heroes.

‡ When checked, a flying creature is blown back 1d6 squares.

Extreme cold (below –20˚ F) deals 1d6 points of lethal damage per minute (no save). In addition, a character must make a Fortitude save each round (DC 15 for the first save, +1 for each subsequent save) or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. Those wearing metal armor or coming into contact with very cold metal take damage based on the length of their exposure. A character takes no damage on the first round, 1d4 points on the second round, and 2d4 points on all subsequent rounds until she drops the metal item, removes her armor, and so forth.

EXTREME HEAT

Heat deals nonlethal damage to a victim. A character can't recover from this nonlethal damage until she cools off. Once a character falls unconscious through the accumulation of nonlethal damage, the heat begins to deal lethal damage at the same rate.

A character in very hot conditions (above 90˚ F) must make a Fortitude save each hour (DC 15 for the first save, + 1 for each subsequent save) or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. Those wearing heavy clothing or armor of any sort suffer a –4 penalty on their saves. Characters reduced to unconsciousness begin taking lethal damage (1d4 points per hour).

In severe heat (above 110˚ F), a character must make a Fortitude save once every 10 minutes (DC 15 for the first save, + 1 for each subsequent save) or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. Characters wearing heavy clothing or armor of any sort take a –4 penalty on their saves. A character with the Survival skill may receive a bonus on this saving throw and may be able to apply this bonus to other characters as well (see the skill description in Chapter Four of *Iron Heroes*). Characters reduced to unconsciousness begin taking lethal damage (1d4 points every 10 minutes).

A character who takes any nonlethal damage from heat exposure suffers from heatstroke and is fatigued. These penalties end when the character recovers the nonlethal damage she took from the heat.

Extreme heat (air temperature over 140˚ F, fire, boiling water, lava) deals 1d6 points of lethal damage per minute (no save). In addition, a character must make a Fortitude save (DC 15 for the first save, + 1 for each subsequent save) every round or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. Those wearing heavy clothing or any sort of armor take a –4 penalty on their saves. In addition, those wearing metal armor or coming into contact with very hot metal suffer damage based on the length of their exposure. A character takes no damage on the first round, 1d4 points on the second round, and 2d4 points on all subsequent rounds until she's no longer exposed to the item.

CATCHING ON FIRE

Characters exposed to burning oil, bonfires, and noninstantaneous magic fires might find their clothes, hair, or equipment on fire. Spell methods with an Instantaneous duration don't normally set a character on fire, since the heat and flame from them come and go in a flash.

A character at risk of catching on fire is allowed a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid this fate. If she fails the save, she takes 1d6 points of damage immediately. In each subsequent round, the burning character must make another Reflex saving throw. Failure means that she takes another 1d6 points of damage that round. Success means that the fire has gone out. (That is, once she succeeds on her saving throw, she's no longer on fire.)

A character on fire may automatically extinguish the flames by jumping into enough water to douse herself. If no body of water is at hand, rolling on the ground or smothering the fire with cloaks or the like permits the character another save with a +4 bonus.

Those unlucky enough to have their clothes or equipment catch fire must make Reflex saves (DC 15) for each item. Flammable items that fail their save take the same amount of damage as the character.

COMBAT IN DARKNESS

An arrow streaks from the darkness, knocking the adventurers' torch to the ground. As it sputters out in one of the puddles that dot the dungeon floor, the clatter of boots echoes in the pitch blackness around them. While the party's thief desperately roots through his pack for a second torch, the rest of the adventurers steel themselves for the impending attack.

Darkness presents a daunting challenge for the characters, as they typically lack the ability to see without light. In caves, dungeons, catacombs, and other subterranean vistas, darkness is as deadly as an enormous cave spider or a pit trap.

Some characters or monsters might be able to see in the dark, while others are blinded. For purposes of this section, a blinded creature is one who simply can't see through the surrounding darkness.

FINDING AND ATTACKING TARGETS

Creatures blinded by darkness lose the ability to deal extra damage due to precision (for example, a sneak attack). All opponents have total concealment from a blinded creature, so the blinded creature has a 50 percent miss chance in combat. A blinded creature must first pinpoint the location of an opponent in order to attack the right square. If the blinded creature launches an attack without pinpointing its foe, it attacks a random square within its reach. For ranged attacks or spell methods against a foe whose location is not pinpointed, roll to determine which adjacent square the blinded creature is facing; its attack is directed at the closest target in that direction.

If an unseen foe strikes a blinded creature, the blinded character pinpoints the location of the creature that struck him (until the unseen creature moves, of course). The only exception is if the unseen creature has a reach greater than 5 feet (in which case the blinded character knows the location

of the unseen opponent, but has not pinpointed him) or uses a ranged attack (in which case the blinded character knows the general direction of the foe, but not his location).

A blinded creature loses its active bonus to defense. It suffers a −4 penalty on Search checks and most Strength- and Dexterity-based skill checks, including any with an armor check penalty. A creature blinded by darkness automatically fails any skill check relying on vision. Creatures blinded by darkness cannot use gaze attacks and are immune to them.

Locating by Sound: A creature blinded by darkness can make a Listen check as a free action each round to locate a foe (with a Difficulty Class equal to his opponent's Move Silently check). A successful check lets a blinded character hear an unseen creature "over there somewhere." It's almost impossible to pinpoint the location of an unseen creature. A Listen check that beats the DC by 20 reveals the unseen creature's square, but the unseen creature still has total concealment from the blinded creature.

Even if a blinded character can hear two creatures fighting, he can't be sure which is a friend and which is a foe. A character may have to guess or call out to a friend to determine a creature's identity.

Locating by Touch: A blinded character can grope about to find unseen creatures. A character can make a touch attack with his hands or a weapon into two adjacent squares using a standard action. If an unseen target is in the designated square, the touch attack has a 50 percent miss chance. If the attack succeeds, the groping character deals no damage but pinpoints the unseen creature's current location. If the unseen creature moves, its location again becomes unknown.

Locating by Smell: A creature with the scent ability automatically pinpoints unseen creatures within 5 feet of its location.

MOVING IN THE DARK

Characters blinded by darkness stumble about, paying double the normal movement cost to enter each square as they walk, unsure and unsteady on their feet. In addition, they must navigate by sound. Consult the Listen skill description in Chapter Four of *Iron Heroes* for the Difficulty Classes needed to hear the action around them. In most cases, these Difficulty Classes are trivially low.

When moving, a blinded creature risks veering off its intended course. A Wisdom check (DC 5) determines whether the creature can maintain a straight line. If this check fails, the creature becomes slightly disoriented and might make a wrong turn halfway through its intended movement.

To determine the direction in which the creature turns, roll 1d8. The result shows the new direction, with 1 through 8 counting clockwise around the squares surrounding the creature. The creature continues in this direction until it uses its intended movement or hits an obstacle. In the latter case, its movement immediately ends.

A character fumbling about in darkness suffers a −5 penalty to all saves and defense against hazards that are difficult to notice without sight. For example, a blinded character could stumble into a pit that is normally easy to spot.

RUNNING ENCOUNTERS

Part of the challenge of fighting in the dark lies in the characters' inability to locate their enemies. The use of a map grid and miniatures undermines this drawback by plainly showing where each combatant stands. As an optional rule, you can remove the grid and miniatures from play. Since the characters can't see the area around them, the players lose access to the visual representation of the battlefield.

In this case, you have two options. If you have a piece of graph paper or a similar small grid that you can keep hidden

from the players, you can chart each character's movement yourself. Alternatively, you can label the columns on your battle grid using an X and Y axis. This allows you to chart the exact location of the characters by tracking the X and Y values of the squares each combatant occupies. In other words, label the horizontal and vertical rows of squares with numbers. For example, square 1 – 1 would be the square that falls in vertical row 1 and horizontal row 1.

With this system, the players must make their best guess of which direction to move during an encounter. Since they can't use miniatures to determine the relative location of their friends and enemies, they must grope in the dark.

UNDERWATER COMBAT

Land-based creatures can have considerable difficulty when fighting in water. Water affects a creature's defense, attack rolls, damage, and movement. In some cases, a creature's opponents may get a bonus on attacks. The effects are summarized in the Combat Adjustments Underwater table below. They apply whenever a character is swimming, walking in chest-deep water, or walking along the bottom of a body of water.

Ranged Attacks Underwater: Thrown weapons prove ineffective underwater, even when launched from land. Attacks with other ranged weapons take a –2 penalty on attack rolls for every 5 feet of water they pass through, in addition to the normal penalties for range.

Attacks From Land: Characters swimming, floating, treading water on the surface, or wading in water at least chest deep have improved cover (+8 passive cover bonus to defense and +4 cover bonus on Reflex saves) from opponents on land. Magical effects are unaffected except for those that require attack rolls (which are treated like any other effects) and fire effects.

Fire: Nonmagical fire does not burn underwater. Spells or spell-like effects with the fire descriptor are ineffective underwater unless the caster makes a Spellcraft check (DC 20). If the check succeeds, the spell creates a bubble of steam instead of its usual fiery effect, but otherwise the spell

works as described. A supernatural fire effect is ineffective underwater unless its description states otherwise. The surface of a body of water blocks line of effect for any fire spell. If the caster has made a Spellcraft check to render the fire spell usable underwater, the surface still blocks the spell's line of effect.

MISCELLANEOUS STATES AND CONDITIONS

Some portions of this book refer to states such as invisibility. This section elaborates on such states and conditions for your convenience and to give players and DMs a baseline set of definitions that are more detailed than those provided at the end of Chapter Eight: Combat in *Iron Heroes.*

FALLING DAMAGE

A falling character suffers 1d6 points of damage per 10 feet fallen, to a maximum of 20d6 points of damage.

If a character deliberately jumps instead of merely slipping or falling, the damage is the same but the first 1d6 points are nonlethal damage. A Jump check (DC 15) or Tumble check (DC 15) allows the character to avoid any damage from the first 10 feet fallen and converts any damage from the second 10 feet to nonlethal damage. For example, a character who slips from a ledge 30 feet up takes 3d6 points of damage. If the same character deliberately jumped, he would take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage and 2d6 points of lethal damage. If he leaped down with a successful Jump or Tumble check, he would take only 1d6 points of nonlethal damage and 1d6 points of lethal damage from the plunge.

Falls onto yielding surfaces (such as soft ground or mud) also convert the first 1d6 points of damage to nonlethal damage. This reduction is cumulative with reduced damage due to deliberate jumps and the Jump skill.

Falling Into Water: Falls into water are handled somewhat differently. If the water is at least 10 feet deep, the first 20 feet of falling deal no damage. The next 20 feet deal nonlethal

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COMBAT ADJUSTMENTS UNDERWATER

| | | **ATTACK/DAMAGE** | | |
CONDITION	**Slashing or Bludgeoning**	**Tail**	**Movement**	**Off Balance?‡**
Has a swim speed	–2/half	Normal	Normal	No
Successful Swim check	–2/half	–2/half	Quarter or half*	No
Firm footing†	–2/half	–2/half	Half	No
None of the above	–2/half	–2/half	None	Yes

* A successful Swim check lets a creature move one-quarter its speed as a move action or one-half its speed as a full-round action.

† Creatures have firm footing when walking along the bottom, braced against a ship's hull, or the like. A creature can walk along the bottom only if it wears or carries enough gear to weigh itself down—at least 16 lbs. for Medium creatures, twice that for each size category larger than Medium, and half that for each size category smaller than Medium.

‡ Creatures flailing about in the water (usually because they failed their Swim checks) have a hard time fighting effectively. An off-balance creature loses its active bonus to defense, and opponents gain a +2 bonus on attacks against it.

damage (1d3 points per 10-foot increment). Beyond that, falling damage becomes lethal damage (1d6 points per additional 10-foot increment).

Characters who deliberately dive into water take no damage on a successful Swim check (DC 15) or Tumble check (DC 15), as long as the water is at least 10 feet deep for every 30 feet fallen. However, the Difficulty Class of the check increases by 5 for every 50 feet of the dive.

Falling Objects: Just as characters take damage when they fall more than 10 feet, so too do they take damage when falling objects hit them. Objects that fall on characters deal damage based on their weight and the distance fallen. Use your discretion as the DM for situations not covered by the following rules.

For each 200 lbs. of an object's weight, the object deals 1d6 points of damage, provided it falls at least 10 feet. Distance also comes into play, adding an extra 1d6 points of damage for every 10-foot increment it falls beyond the first (to a maximum of 20d6 points of damage).

Objects smaller than 200 lbs. also deal damage when dropped, but they must fall farther to deal the same damage. Use the table below to see how far an object of a given weight must drop to deal 1d6 points of damage.

Object Weight	Falling Distance
1–5 lbs.	70 feet
6–10 lbs.	60 feet
11–30 lbs.	50 feet
31–50 lbs.	40 feet
51–100 lbs.	30 feet
101–200 lbs.	20 feet

For each additional increment an object falls, it deals an extra 1d6 points of damage.

Objects weighing less than 1 lb. deal no damage to those they land upon, no matter how far they have fallen.

INCORPOREAL

Ghosts, phantoms, and similar creatures lack physical bodies. They are insubstantial and can't be touched by nonmagical matter or energy. Likewise, they can't manipulate objects or exert physical force on objects. However, incorporeal beings have a tangible presence that sometimes seems like a physical attack against a corporeal creature.

Incorporeal creatures are present on the same plane as the characters, and characters have some chance to affect them.

Attacks: Incorporeal creatures can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, by magic weapons, or by spells, spell-like effects, or supernatural effects. They ignore passive defense bonuses and are immune to the following:

- all nonmagical attack forms
- normal fires
- natural cold
- mundane acids
- critical hits
- sneak attacks

Even when struck by magic or magic weapons, an incorporeal creature has a 50 percent chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source, except for a force effect.

The physical attacks of incorporeal creatures ignore material armor, even magic armor, unless it is made of force.

Movement and Interaction: Incorporeal creatures move in any direction (including up or down) at will. They don't need to walk on the ground. They can pass through solid objects at will, although they can't see when their eyes are within solid matter. They pass through and operate in water as easily as they do in air.

Incorporeal creatures have no weight and don't set off traps that are triggered by weight. They can't fall and never suffer falling damage. Corporeal creatures can't trip or grapple incorporeal creatures.

Incorporeal creatures hiding inside solid objects get a +2 circumstance bonus on Listen checks, because solid objects carry sound well. Pinpointing an opponent from inside a solid object uses the same rules as pinpointing invisible opponents (see "Invisibility," below).

Detection: Incorporeal creatures are inaudible unless they decide to make noise. They leave no footprints and have no scent.

INVISIBILITY

The ability to move about unseen is not foolproof. While invisible creatures can't be seen, they can be heard, smelled, or felt.

Detection by Vision: Invisibility makes a creature undetectable by vision, including darkvision and similar abilities that don't expressly say that they allow you to see invisible creatures or objects.

Invisible creatures leave tracks and can be tracked normally. Footprints in sand, mud, or other soft surfaces can provide clues to an invisible creature's location.

An invisible creature in the water displaces water, revealing its location. The invisible creature is still hard to see, however, and benefits from total concealment.

Detection by Spot: A character can notice the presence of an active invisible creature within 30 feet with a Spot check (DC 20). The observer gains a hunch that "something's there" but can't see it or target it accurately with an attack. A creature that holds still is harder to notice (DC 30). An inanimate object, an unliving creature holding still, or a completely immobile creature is even harder to spot (DC 40). It's practically impossible (+20 DC) to pinpoint an invisible creature's location with a Spot check, and even if a character succeeds at such a check, the invisible creature still benefits from total concealment (50 percent miss chance).

Detection by Listen: A character can try to find an invisible creature by making a Listen check for this purpose as a free action each round. A Listen check result at least equal to the invisible creature's Move Silently check result reveals its presence. (A creature with no ranks in Move Silently makes a Dexterity check instead, to which an armor check penalty applies.) A successful check lets a character hear an invisible creature "over there somewhere." It's practically impossible (+20 DC) to pinpoint the location of an invisible creature.

The table on the next page suggests appropriate Listen check Difficulty Classes to detect invisible creatures.

Invisible Creature's Status	Listen DC
In combat or speaking	0
Moving at half speed	Move Silently check result
Moving at full speed	Move Silently check result −4
Running or charging	Move Silently check result −20
Some distance away	+1 per 10 feet
Behind an obstacle (door)	+5
Behind an obstacle (stone wall)	+15

Detection by Touch: A character can grope about to find an invisible creature. He can make a touch attack with his hands or a weapon into two adjacent 5-foot squares using a standard action. If an invisible target is in the designated area, the touch attack has a 50 percent miss chance. If the attack succeeds, the groping character deals no damage but pinpoints the invisible creature's current location. (If the invisible creature moves, its location again becomes unknown.)

Detection by Smell: Invisibility has no effect on the scent ability. A creature with scent uses that talent against an invisible foe in the same way it does against a visible one.

Immunities: Invisibility does not, by itself, make a creature immune to critical hits, but it does make the creature immune to extra damage from sneak attacks.

Attacks: If a character tries to attack an invisible creature whose location he has pinpointed, he attacks normally, but the invisible creature still benefits from total concealment (and thus a 50 percent miss chance). A particularly large and slow creature receives a smaller miss chance. If a creature is one size category larger than the character attacking it, it gains only partial concealment (20 percent miss chance). If it's three or more sizes larger, it gains no concealment.

If a character tries to attack an invisible creature whose location he hasn't pinpointed, have the player choose the space where his character will direct the attack. If the invisible creature is there, conduct the attack normally. If the enemy's not there, roll the miss chance as if it were there, don't let the player see the result, and tell him that the character missed. That way, the player doesn't know whether the attack missed because the enemy's not there or because you successfully rolled the miss chance.

A creature with blindsight can attack (and otherwise interact with) creatures regardless of invisibility.

If an invisible creature strikes a character, the character struck knows the location of his attacker (until the invisible creature moves). The only exception is if the invisible creature has a reach greater than 5 feet. In this case, the struck character knows the general location of the creature but has not pinpointed the exact location.

Invisible creatures can't use gaze attacks.

Objects: If an invisible character picks up a visible object, the object remains visible. An invisible creature can pick up a small visible item and hide it on his person (tucked in a pocket or behind a cloak) and render it effectively invisible.

Of course, you also could coat an invisible object with flour to keep track of its position (until the flour fell off or blew away).

An invisible object, such as a torch, still gives off light as normal.

Ethereal Creatures: Ethereal creatures are invisible. Since ethereal creatures are not materially present, Spot checks, Listen checks, scent, Blind-Fight, and blindsight don't help locate them.

Incorporeal Creatures: Incorporeal creatures are often invisible. Scent, Blind-Fight, and blindsight don't help in finding or attacking invisible, incorporeal creatures, but Spot checks and possibly Listen checks can help.

STARVATION AND THIRST

Characters might find themselves without food or water and with no means to obtain them. In normal climates, Medium characters need at least a gallon of fluids and about 1 lb. of decent food per day to avoid starvation. (Small characters need half as much, and Large characters need twice as much.) In very hot climates, characters need two or three times as much water to avoid dehydration.

A character can go without water for one day plus a number of hours equal to his Constitution score. After this time, he must make a Constitution check each hour (DC 10 for the first check, + 1 for each subsequent check) or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage.

A character can go without food for three days, in growing discomfort. After this time, the character must make a Constitution check each day (DC 10 for the first check, + 1 for each subsequent check) or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage.

Characters who have taken nonlethal damage due to lack of food or water are fatigued. Nonlethal damage from thirst or starvation can't be recovered until the character gets food or water as needed. Not even magic that restores hit points heals this damage.

CHAPTER FIVE:

TREASURE, REWARDS AND EXPERIENCE

In many fantasy roleplaying games, gold, jewels, and magical treasures are far more than a reward for defeating a terrible monster. They form an important part of a character's abilities, as the rules assume that characters accumulate magic items and wealth as they gain levels. From a design perspective, magic items are as important a part of characters' abilities as their feats, skills, and attack bonuses.
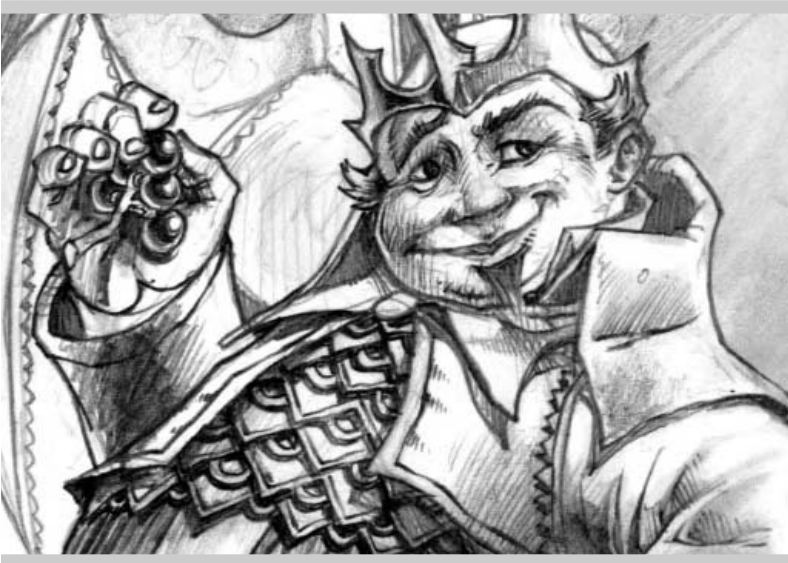
O f course, *Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes* removes magic items as important elements in a character's abilities. This change sets off a short chain reaction in the game's structure. With the role of magic items radically reduced, wealth becomes less important to determining a character's power in terms of combat and skills. As a result, monetary rewards may seem less compelling to the players. Since money no longer buys the characters magic weapons, armor, potions, and other gadgets, the players may not see it as important.

Worst of all, if you use treasure and rewards as a motivation for the characters in other d20 System games, you might have trouble using the same strategy in *Iron Heroes*. In another fantasy game, the king's offer of a 10,000-gp reward for defeating a dragon is enough to keep the players interested. In *Iron Heroes*, the players may not see that as a compelling reason to risk their characters' lives.

This chapter addresses this issue in a number of ways.

- It gives some advice on creating motivations and goals for adventures that draw on story considerations rather than mechanical rewards.
- It touches on the role a character's burgeoning wealth can play when he can't use a fabulous diamond to buy a new magic sword.
- It introduces a new game feature, wealth feats, which represent the favors, new options, and capabilities that come from having a vast fortune. A rich character can buy an audience with the king, bribe city officials into forgiving his crimes, or create a lavish, safe lifestyle. Of course, such advantages last only as long as a character has enough coin to support them.

WEALTH, REWARDS, AND CAMPAIGNS

Mechanically speaking, a character's wealth has little impact on his effectiveness in *Iron Heroes*. Aside from masterwork weapons, armor, and tools, there isn't much a character can buy that improves his fighting ability or skills. Furthermore, only certain classes can take advantage of such gear. A thief has little use for a suit of plate armor, while a masterwork sword can't transform an arcanist into a skilled warrior. Masterwork equipment is useful enough for most characters to invest in it, but it doesn't change the game's complexion.

In many ways, the shift away from wealth makes running an *Iron Heroes* campaign easier. There's little need for extensive bookkeeping to track each character's total wealth, the gold piece value of treasure handed out for each encounter or adventure, and so on. You can give a character 100,000 gp, but it doesn't help him defeat a snarling werewolf in single combat. By the same token, you can hand out cash in small amounts without upsetting the game's balance.

While monetary wealth doesn't translate into new powers and abilities for a character, it still should play a role in the campaign. If you give the characters a tremendous cache of wealth, they can use it in a number of imaginative ways. After all, money is power.

HANDING OUT TREASURE

Handing out treasure in *Iron Heroes* may not require a great deal of attention to detail and balance, but it still deserves some thought. When running a game, you should carefully consider any decision that could alter the character and feel of your campaign. Money is a useful resource, even if it can't buy a *vorpal sword*.

Before proceeding too far into this chapter, think about the tone and feel of your campaign. To help get you started, consider these three basic campaign models:

1. Money as a Goal: In this campaign, the characters actively seek out wealth and riches. They might be beggars and thieves who are down on their luck and eager for some cash, or perhaps they're soldiers of fortune who seek money and fame. Wealth plays an important role in the campaign because it helps drive the action. The characters might decide to sneak into the temple of Set because they want to steal a great treasure cache kept there.

2. Money as a Luxury: Wealth might prove useful in this campaign, but it rarely drives the action. Instead, the characters seek revenge, increased fighting mastery, the destruction of a great evil, or the crown of the land. Money might help them achieve these things, but on its own it holds little allure. In this campaign, the characters might sneak into the king's palace to kidnap a corrupt magistrate. They might use money to bribe the guards or find out about the secret passage into the magistrate's chambers. These campaigns usually feature roleplaying and intrigue in addition to combat.

3. Money as No Object: In this campaign model, material wealth is almost irrelevant. Gold and jewels play only a tiny role in the characters' plans, and the world might even lack a functioning economy. The adventurers might slay a dragon to prevent it from burning the crops of neighboring territories, because it slew their loved ones, or because no one else in the land has a chance of defeating it—not because they expect fame and fortune. The beast may not even have a treasure hoard, hunting solely for food.

The characters should still be rewarded in proportion to the threat they face. However, few monsters in the world of *Iron Heroes* have treasure chests stuffed with thousands of coins, and random thugs may carry no more than a few silver or copper pieces.

The key to handing out wealth lies in the plots and stories that you, as the DM, want to develop in the campaign. Just as you set how much treasure the characters can uncover, you also determine how much cash they need to meet their various goals. Thus, when you hand out treasure, you should do so with some idea of how you expect the characters to use it.

Think of wealth as a key that can unlock doors for the party. If money is important in the campaign, the characters need to accumulate a lot of it to hire a mercenary army, bribe noblemen, buy materials for a grand sacrifice to the gods, and so forth. If the characters never face such barriers, money rarely proves useful to them. In many cases, you might use wealth in the same way that you could use an artifact or a magic item that helps the characters bypass a barrier or fulfill a specific goal.

Finally, wealth is its own reward. In real life, money buys you fine food, a nice place to live, health care, and other benefits and necessities. The wealth feats presented later in this chapter give you a way to reflect the benefits of wealth through game mechanics.

The Complications of Wealth

While money can solve problems, it also creates them. Wealth brings you power and influence, but it also makes you a target for thieves, schemers, and rivals who want to knock you from your lofty perch. If you use wealth as a reward for the characters' actions, you can introduce a variety of complications to keep them in the adventuring life. After all, they might not have a reason to keep risking their skins after they recover a dragon's treasure horde. With their every material need satisfied, why would they want to continue adventuring?

In many campaigns, the characters still have plenty of reasons to adventure even after they make a fortune. Old enemies resurface, new threats to the world emerge, and old scores need to be settled. Sometimes, though, the characters may be content with a small fortune in gold and jewels. What, then, can you do to keep the game exciting?

The simple but wrong answer is to take away the characters' wealth. If the players have earned something, it's extremely poor DM form to take it from them arbitrarily. The characters' enemies might steal their money or their rivals may frame them for a crime, but the characters should have a chance to save themselves.

With that in mind, you can still introduce a variety of challenges and threats to the party. Just as the characters might have raided a temple or noble's villa for the wealth kept there, so too might thieves target the characters. When the PCs have something that they value, invariably someone who also values it tries to take it away from them.

The best part about introducing this sort of threat to the campaign is that it makes the situation much more compelling. If the players worked hard to achieve a goal, anything that threatens to take it away becomes an important danger. One of the challenges you face as DM is coming up with compelling storylines. In this case, the story almost writes itself.

The threats to the characters' wealth can take on a variety of forms. Some basic ideas appear below.

Thieves: In the most obvious example, thieves could try to raid the characters' abode to carry off their treasure. The first attempt might catch the PCs by surprise, forcing them to react to a sudden assault with little preparation. As the characters investigate the attack, they uncover a plot to steal their fortune from beneath their noses. The characters must track down the villain behind the scheme, uncover the plans, and defeat the criminals before they can make another move.

A Fool and His Money: While money can buy many things, it can't buy intelligence. Scam artists, charlatans, and other schemers may emerge from the woodwork to harass the characters. An arcanist might offer to forge an unbeatable

suit of armor for a party member—if he pays a few hundred thousand gold pieces for it. A priest may claim that his god can allow a character to contact a dead companion or even restore the lost friend to life—for a tremendous monetary sacrifice. Don't be afraid to throw red herrings and liars at the characters. When a charlatan dupes a character out of his fortune, the party must track the criminal down and figure out a way to get it back. Best of all, the players will truly hate an NPC who manages to trick them so thoroughly. Again, this situation breeds an instantly compelling storyline.

Betrayal: A character's success may gain him a host of new friends, but not all of them have his best interests at heart. Even old allies may slowly turn against the characters, as they begin to lust after the fame and power the PCs have accumulated. A newly wealthy character may find his relatives coming to him for favors and loans. In time, his siblings might seek to poison him and divide the inheritance. What happens when a character's brother plots against him? What if the plot is actually a ruse by another enemy who wants to turn the characters against their staunchest allies? This sort of development has tremendous potential for compelling roleplaying and fun stories. Best of all, *Iron Heroes* lacks the spells and magic items that would make it easy to uncover lies or gather information.

Legendary Treasures

Not all wealth is created equal. Finding a stash of 100,000 gp is a great deed, but recovering the famous Ruby of Talanthar from the demon pits of an abyssal city is a legendary one. True, the ruby might be worth a grand total of 100,000 gp, but the notoriety and fame that come with seizing it make it worth far more than a similar sum of coins. The manner in which the characters gain wealth and the specific treasures they acquire are just as important as the total value of their fortunes.

Adding an element of the mystical and legendary to a treasure helps heighten its importance, while lending an air of fantasy to the game. Put simply, recovering a gem said to have been forged by a god and stolen by a demon prince is far more exciting to the players than shoveling a mountain of gold coins into burlap sacks. The former treasure comes to life in terms of the setting and the story. The latter is just another number on a character sheet.

Thus, even if wealth lacks importance in your game, you can still make it a short-term goal for the characters by supplying the right background to a treasure. Chapter Seven goes into more detail about using game mechanics to make such treasure more important. For example, you might award bonus experience points to the characters if they recover a rare or legendary treasure. But even without such added incentives, a treasure with a story is far more interesting than a treasure without one.

Wealth Feats

Byrden the Cunning has a lot of friends in town. With a few bribes, a handful of loans given without expectation of repayment, and several donations to local churches, he's made connections with all the right people. When the city guard comes to arrest him for the murder of one of his enemies, the entire matter turns out to be a case of mistaken identity. A few more coins here, a reminder of his past

deeds there, and the guard releases him. In this case, wealth can help an adventurer out of a tight spot. If you make an investment in others, it can pay back a hundredfold.

Wealth feats allow characters to gain mechanical advantages based on the fortune they've acquired through their adventures. In certain situations, a few coins in the right place can prove far more useful than a sharp sword. Wealth feats are similar to other feats in that they give you special abilities unrelated to the talents of your class. However, they also have several key differences. You don't use a feat selection to gain a wealth feat—you merely invest money in the feat. In addition, when you use a wealth feat, you usually must spend additional money to gain its benefits.

GAINING WEALTH FEATS

You must spend a number of *wealth points* to gain a wealth feat. This is what's known as the feat's "buy-in cost." When you meet the other prerequisites for the feat, you spend the listed buy-in cost and then gain the feat's benefits. Unlike other feats, you don't select wealth feats based on your level. You simply meet their requirements. If for any reason you no longer meet a wealth feat's prerequisites, you immediately lose its benefits.

Unlike many other *Iron Heroes* feats, wealth feats don't have minimum mastery ratings or expanded mastery abilities.

USING WEALTH FEATS

Wealth feats differ from other feats in another important way. Normally, to gain a wealth feat's benefits, you must spend money. This expenditure represents a bribe, a direct payment, money spent in the recent past, and so forth. You can spend money to activate a wealth feat only under the conditions given for a specific feat. If you don't meet those conditions, you can't use the feat.

Furthermore, you can't use the feat if you no longer meet its prerequisites. When this occurs, you must spend any resources needed to gain the feat again. Once you meet those prerequisites again, you can use the feat.

In most cases, wealth feats require you to establish your economic influence in a particular city or region. You might be known as an influential philanthropist in the city of Thasp, but that reputation means little to the hill giants of the Wyrm's Teeth Mountains.

THE WEALTH POOL

Many wealth feats draw upon your *wealth pool:* an abstract measure of your standard of living. It ebbs and flows over time as you spend cash to activate wealth feats and pour more treasure into it. The wealth pool breaks your personal fortune into a value that's easier to handle.

Each time you place 100 gp worth of treasure into your wealth pool, the pool increases by 1 point. You can cash in your wealth pool at a conversion rate of 50 gp per point.

COHORT [WEALTH]

Your fame and wealth attracts followers to you. You recruit a cohort, a trusted and skilled henchman who serves as a lieutenant or sidekick.

Prerequisites: You must have a wealth pool of at least 50 points. You must pay your cohort an equal share of treasure from any adventures he participates in, and you must pay him 2 points from your wealth pool each month. This payment represents room, board, and spending money.

Benefit: You gain the services of a cohort, a nonplayer character who obeys your commands as long as you treat him well. The DM creates your cohort, though you may select his class.

The cohort's level depends on your Charisma and your wealth. To determine the cohort's maximum level, divide your wealth pool by 2, and add your Charisma modifier. You can choose to recruit a cohort with a lower level.

Note that the cohort's maximum level depends on the class you select for him. A cohort with levels in the player character classes detailed in Chapter Three of *Iron Heroes* is much more likely to seek his own fortune than to remain with you. Thus, such cohorts have a much lower maximum level when compared to cohorts built with the NPC classes detailed in Chapter Three of this book (aristocrat, commoner, expert, and warrior).

WEALTH FEATS		
Feat Name	**Prerequisites**	**Benefit**
Cohort	Wealth pool 50 points, pay cohort equal share of treasure +2 wealth points/month.	Skilled lieutenant or sidekick obeys your commands.
Followers	Wealth pool 20 points, pay followers 1 wealth point/month for every five followers.	Gain staff members, servants, assistants, etc., to look after your interests.
Manse	Wealth cost 1–8 points/square of area.	Own a furnished home.
Money Buys Innocence	Initial bribe 10 wealth points, 1 wealth point/month maintenance.	Go free when charged with a crime; those you accuse of minor crimes are found guilty.
Political Connections	Wealth pool 50 points, spend 10 wealth points on a party.	Receive an audience with local ruler or other important area figure upon request and expenditure of 1 wealth point.
Social Influence	Wealth pool 25 points.	Receive a +1 bonus to Diplomacy or Gather Information checks for every wealth point spent (up to a +5 bonus).

	COHORT LEVELS		
Cha Mod. + (Wealth÷2)	Cohort Level (PC Class)	Cohort Level (NPC Class)	
0 or less	0	1	
1–30	1	3	
31–40	2	5	
41–50	3	7	
51–60	4	9	
61–70	5	11	
71–80	6	13	
81–90	7	15	
91–100	8	17	
101+	9	20	

The DM controls your cohort, but as long as the cohort's level is at or below the maximum listed for your wealth, he obeys your commands. Your cohort fights to the death for you, but he won't obey obviously suicidal commands unless there's a clear, compelling need for such a sacrifice.

Special: If your cohort's level rises above the maximum allowed, he may leave or betray you. Your cohort may also leave if you fail to give him a share of the treasure and the monthly wealth points, as noted above.

Each week, you must make a Charisma check with a Difficulty Class equal to 10 + twice the difference between the cohort's level and the maximum level you can normally gain. You suffer a –1 penalty to the check for each day that you're late with your monthly payment to the cohort.

If you fail this check by 5 or less, your cohort refuses to engage in dangerous activity on your behalf.

If you fail by more than 5 but less than 10, the cohort leaves your service.

If you fail by 10 or more, the cohort betrays you. He steals as much of your wealth as possible before fleeing or otherwise acts to harm you before taking his leave.

Followers [Wealth]
You gather a number of followers who work as your servants, assistants, and so forth. These followers might staff your manse, look after your palace while you're away, or help you complete tasks around town.

Prerequisites: You must have a wealth pool of at least 20 points. You must pay your followers 1 point from your wealth pool each month for every five people you have on staff. This payment represents room, board, and spending money.

Benefit: The number of followers you can hire depends on your Charisma and your wealth. To determine the maximum number, divide your wealth pool by 2, and add your Charisma modifier. You can choose to recruit fewer than the maximum number.

If your wealth grows, you can recruit more followers for free. If your wealth shrinks, you lose any followers above the maximum allowed by your new wealth pool. However, you suffer no special penalty for gaining or losing followers. You simply hire or dismiss them.

Followers have levels only in the NPC classes outlined in Chapter Three of this book. They don't accompany you on adventures or undertake dangerous missions on your behalf. Otherwise, they obey your commands. If you wish, you can design each follower, or you can let the DM do it.

Followers can use skills such as Gather Information, Diplomacy, Craft, Knowledge, and so forth on your behalf. They are best employed to conduct day-to-day business or take care of minor tasks that might distract you from critical affairs.

Your followers might reside in quarters that you provide in your home or mansion, or they may have homes of their own. When you gain a follower, you must determine his home base of operations. For example, you might have a few followers in the city of Penderlen, several more in the small town of Yerren's Point, and others scattered elsewhere, all of whom communicate with you by messenger. They can spend gold from your wealth pool at the normal conversion rate (1 point equals 50 gp) to undertake tasks on your behalf.

Even if you're not present, you exercise almost direct control of your followers. As long as they're paid, they always act in your best interest, though they don't risk their lives.

Special: If you fail to pay your followers, they might betray or abandon you. You can always dismiss followers if you can't afford to pay them, but if you keep them on staff without wages, you must make at least one check as detailed below before dismissing them.

Each week, you must make a Charisma check (DC 10). You suffer a –1 penalty for each wealth point you were short in the last month's payment.

If you fail this check by 5 or less, your followers refuse to work for you.

If you fail by more than 5 but less than 10, your followers leave your service.

If you fail by 10 or more, your followers betray you. In addition, you lose wealth points equal to half the total number of

NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS

Cha Mod. + (Wealth÷2)	Number of Followers by Level					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
20 or less	–	–	–	–	–	–
21–25	5	—	—	—	—	—
26–30	6	—	—	—	—	—
31–35	8	—	—	—	—	—
36–40	10	1	—	—	—	—
41–45	15	1	—	—	—	—
46–50	20	2	1	—	—	—
51–55	25	2	1	—	—	—
56–60	30	3	1	1	—	—
61–65	35	3	1	1	—	—
66–70	40	4	2	1	1	—
71–75	50	5	3	2	1	—
76–80	60	6	3	2	1	1
81–85	75	7	4	2	2	1
86–90	90	9	5	3	2	1
91–95	110	11	6	3	2	1
96 or higher	135	13	7	4	2	2

followers that were in your employ, though your pool cannot drop below 0.

Manse [Wealth]

You own and maintain a mansion or similar living quarters.

Prerequisite: You must spend the wealth points listed in the table below to obtain your living quarters.

Benefit: You purchase a piece of property or an existing structure for your use. Note that this feat falls short of the rules needed to model a full-blown castle, massive estate, or the like. Rather, it allows you to design a simple hideout or mansion.

The base price of your manse depends on where you wish to buy it, as shown in the table below. You pay a price per 5-foot square of space within it. If the manse has multiple floors, count up the squares covered by each floor, including the basement.

Manse Location	Cost Per Square (Wealth Points)
Rural area	1
Small town	4
City, poor district	2
City, middle class district	4
City, rich district	8

Once you've determined the total squares of space available to you, draw a floor plan for your manse.

Your home comes with basic furnishings, such as beds, drawers, desks, chairs, fireplaces, and so forth. It's made out of whatever materials are appropriate to the area. Assume that any exterior doors can be barred shut.

You also can add features to your manse as shown in the Manse Options table. Each option increases the total cost, and most options have a minimum required space (in squares). When designing a floor plan for your manse, you must allocate space for a given option equal to its minimum space (see table, below).

The manse features available to you appear in the descriptions that follow.

Library: You keep a small collection of scrolls, ancient tomes, and other reference materials within your manse. While you have access to this library, you gain a +2 bonus on all Knowledge checks.

Lock: You can add a high-quality lock to an interior door in your manse at the cost of 1 wealth point. The lock has an Open Lock DC of 20. You can increase this Difficulty Class by 5 for each additional wealth point you put into it, to a maximum Difficulty Class of 30.

MANSE OPTIONS

Option	Cost (Wealth Points)	Minimum Space
Library	3	4 squares
Lock	1	0 squares
Secret door	2	0 squares
Secret entrance	5	0 squares

Secret Door: Each time you purchase this feature, you can add a secret door to the interior of your manse. You can use secret doors to build hidden rooms by making one of these doors the only point of access. The base Search DC for a secret door is 20. You can increase a door's DC by 1 for each additional wealth point you spend on that door.

Secret Entrance: Your manse has a hidden passage that leads to the outside. Finding the hidden doors at both ends of the passage requires a Search check (DC 20). You can increase the Search check DC by 1 for each additional wealth point you spend on this feature, to a maximum Difficulty Class of 30. The hidden passage leading into your manse can be up to 100 feet long.

Special: You can buy more than one manse. One might serve as your public home, while another is a hideout for when you must escape from prying eyes.

Money Buys Innocence [Wealth]

Your frequent bribes to the local magistrates ensure that in any legal case short of a killing spree, you need not worry about imprisonment.

Prerequisites: You must spend 10 wealth points as an initial bribe to judges, town guard commanders, and so forth. Each month afterward, you must spend an additional point from your wealth pool to maintain their protection. If you miss a payment, you must spend 5 wealth points within three months of the missed payment to retain this benefit. Otherwise, you must regain this feat as normal.

Benefit: If you're charged with any crime short of murder or theft of more than 10,000 gp, the guard sets you free. In any case where you're charged with murder or theft of more than 10,000 gp and the evidence consists of your word against another person's testimony, you win an acquittal or pardon.

If you charge another person with a minor crime that results in imprisonment for a week or less, the defendant is always found guilty.

In a case where both the plaintiff and defendant have this feat, the two must secretly spend wealth points on a bribe. Whoever delivers the larger bribe wins the case if there is reasonably compelling evidence for a favorable result.

Special: This feat assumes that the local constabulary is open to bribery. The DM may rule that you can't take the feat, or that you must pay more than the listed rates. It's much more difficult to bribe officials in a city whose rulers actively campaign against corruption. Your DM may double, triple, or quadruple this feat's costs depending on the situation at hand.

Political Connections [Wealth]

Your burgeoning wealth allows you access to social strata normally inaccessible to adventurers. You can request an audience with a local ruler, an important merchant, or the head of a respected temple.

Prerequisites: You must have a wealth pool of at least 50 points. In addition, you must spend 10 points from your pool on a ball, masquerade, or similar party for the influential and powerful folk of the city or region. When you throw this party, you gain the feat's benefits in the city and the region around it.

Benefit: You can request a personal audience with any public figure within the city where you have established political connections. You must spend 1 point from your wealth pool each time you use this ability.

You can use this ability only with a public figure, defined as anyone who conducts legal, public business or holds a commonly acknowledged title or position.

You gain no special favor or ties to the person with whom you wish to meet. This feat allows you to arrange a meeting,

but it doesn't give you any special bonus to Diplomacy checks.

You can't use this ability to arrange a meeting if the person you wish to speak with has a reasonable suspicion that you mean to harm him or her.

Special: You can gain this feat's benefits in multiple geographic locations by spending the 10 points from your wealth pool on a party in each location.

Social Influence [Wealth]

Your wealth allows you to acquire friends and allies in a variety of places. You can use your wealth to buy favors and aid from others.

Prerequisite: You must have a wealth pool of least 25 points.

Benefit: You can spend 1 point from your wealth pool to gain a +1 bonus to a Diplomacy or Gather Information check. With the Diplomacy check, you must designate a single specific person against whom you wish to make this check. You can use this benefit only against targets who are open to bribes, available to receive gifts, or otherwise have some sort of social connection to you.

You can spend up to 5 points from your wealth pool to increase your bonus to a maximum of +5.

As a rule of thumb, this feat applies only to residents of the city or kingdom where you reside. For example, you can gain this bonus against the mayor of your city, but it would not work on a barbarian chieftain of the steppes.

REWARDS OTHER THAN MONEY

Rewards can take on far more forms than gems, jewels, and coins. The king may award noble titles and related benefits to the adventurers who turned back the goblin army. The warrior who defeated an elemental that threatened to level the city has a parade in her honor, and she never has to worry about buying a meal in town again. When a gang of assassins tries to ambush her in a tavern, the patrons rally to overcome her foes.

When the characters commit great deeds in the public eye, they earn the gratitude and admiration of those around them. People aren't about to forget the brave hero who faced down a dragon, especially if her actions saved their lives. Sometimes, it helps to look at the potential rewards that the characters can earn in terms of social and political benefits.

Fame

The difference between a typical high-level *Iron Heroes* character and a hero is that everyone knows about the hero's accomplishments. You might save the world from a horde of demonic monsters, but if no one knows of your deeds, life goes on the same as before. However, if you defeat the horde in front of thousands of bystanders, your deeds spread far and wide. Total strangers greet you on the street. The rich and powerful flock to you to win glory by association.

Fame, like wealth, has its own distinct set of benefits and drawbacks for the player characters. On the plus side, many

of life's inconveniences fade as they gain renown. Food, drink, and shelter are as close as the nearest grateful innkeeper. Nobles happily fund their next expedition to the nearby ruins, and they might even receive noble titles.

On the other hand, fame also makes the characters into targets. Political factions might seek to manipulate them, and enemies have a much easier time tracking them. If a famous adventurer needs to complete a deed in secret, she must take special care to disguise her identity.

Furthermore, a character's skill and fame might put her in a position where others expect her to repeat her deeds time and again. If a new threat appears, the king may call upon her to face it. If a war erupts, both sides bid for her alliance. If the character throws in with the winning side, she might end up hailed as a conqueror. But if she chooses her allies poorly, she could face banishment or death as a traitor. In either case, she's stuck between two factions without any way to appease both.

Political Power

Success in an adventure, particularly one undertaken on behalf of a benefactor or sponsor, can help an adventurer build up political influence in a kingdom or city. If a character defeats the team of assassins sent to kill the king, the crown owes her for the service. Only a fool would turn his back on a warrior who proves so useful, especially since failing to reward heroism might discourage others from risking their lives.

If the king owes a favor to a character, she can take advantage of the situation in a number of ways. Obviously, the crown provides food and board to heroes who have rendered great service to it in the past. In addition, a character might earn a prominent place within the structure of government. Unfortunately, such honors invariably come with great responsibility. She might earn a comfortable stipend and a large mansion in her role as chief magistrate, but she also must hear cases and mete out justice.

Monarchs tend to delegate much of the dirty work of their reign to their underlings. Furthermore, if a character is popular, the crown may see her as a threat. When these two factors combine, the character might find herself posted to a distant land as an ambassador, sent on a hopeless quest, or set up as a scapegoat for a disastrous policy.

However, political power isn't all bad news. If a character has the king's ear or the respect of powerful figures, she gains the ability to foment great change.

- If monsters threaten the land, she can rally the army to repel them.
- When a strange cult stalks the slums for sacrificial victims, she can bring the full weight of the law against it.
- Villains who rely on their own political resources and the veneer of respectability that comes with their social position become far more vulnerable if she can counter their influence.

- A master assassin NPC might have the town guard in his pocket, but even his bribes might prove useless if the PC is close friends with the guard's commander.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Experience points (XP) measure a character's accumulated insight and ability to improve his talents. In the standard *Iron Heroes* experience system, you gain XP for defeating monsters, overcoming challenges, and otherwise surmounting the obstacles that stand between you and your goals.

Every creature, pitfall, and obstacle you face has a Challenge Rating: a measure of its relative difficulty. The experience system is designed so that you have to overcome 10 obstacles with a Challenge Rating equal to your level in order to progress to the next level. If you defeat obstacles with a CR higher than your level, you gain more experience, and vice versa.

A table at the beginning of Chapter Three in *Iron Heroes* shows how many experience points you need to gain each level.

Chapter Seven: Campaign Options in this book introduces a variety of optional rules and ideas the DM can use to customize the experience system to fit the specific campaign. The basic experience system is a good match for the typical game of high adventure and intense action. If your campaign deviates from this format, or if you simply want to shift the focus away from combat, consult Chapter Seven.

MONSTERS AND CHALLENGE RATING

Every monster in *Iron Heroes* has a Challenge Rating to indicate its relative strength. A Challenge Rating is a lot like a monster's level. A single creature with a CR equal to the party's average level (assuming a party of four) is a good challenge for the group. Creatures with higher Challenge Ratings make deadlier enemies. The characters should face one or two such foes, at most, per session. These enemies usually serve as the highlight of a session's battles.

Monsters with lower Challenge Ratings serve as thugs, a villain's underlings, and other threats that pose a danger only in large numbers. Generally, a group of creatures has an equivalent Challenge Rating equal to each creature's base CR + the total number of creatures – 1. This rule applies only when the group is made up of the same type of creature. If a group consists of different types of creatures, you can't assign a single CR to the whole group.

Some creatures are weaker than a 1st-level party. These monsters have Challenge Ratings expressed as a fraction. In this case, add the creatures' Challenge Ratings together to determine their equivalent CR. If the total is higher than 1, round down the total Challenge Rating.

Adding Challenge Ratings to determine a group's total threat is a useful tool when designing adventures. However, when you award experience points, use each individual creature's Challenge Rating to calculate the total award. For example, if the characters face four CR 1 creatures, the encounter is the equivalent of a single CR 4 creature (each creature's base CR + the total number of creatures – 1 = 4). When you award experience points, hand

out the reward for defeating four CR 1 creatures, not one monster of CR 4.

Marks: A Simpler Alternative

The core experience system is designed so that you can easily slide into it from other games that use a d20-based mechanic. However, a character's experience point total has little effect on an *Iron Heroes* game. None of the character options allow you to spend XP to gain a benefit, such as creating magic items or casting powerful spells. Thus, you don't need to keep close track of your XP total.

As an alternative to the system above, you can use a more abstract system of marks that's easier to manage. When a character accumulates 10 marks, he gains a level, erases his current mark total, and starts the process again for his next level. A character gains a mark based on the Challenge Rating of creatures defeated or obstacles overcome. Its value is based on its CR compared to your current level.

Monster CR	Marks Earned
CR 3 or more below your level	0.0
CR 1 or 2 below your level	0.5
CR equal to your level	1.0
CR 1 or 2 above your level	1.5
CR 3 or more above your level	2.0

This system lacks the precision of a running experience point total, especially when it comes to monsters with a Challenge Rating higher than your level. In general, the characters end up slightly behind a group that keeps strict track of their XP. If you feel that the game is easier to manage with this alternative, keep in mind that it breaks down if you regularly send powerful monsters against the party.

Gaining Levels

A character gains a level after accumulating the needed experience point total and resting for the night. When he wakes up, he enjoys the benefits of his new level.

When you gain hit points for a new level, add them to your current hit point total and to your maximum hit point total. Otherwise, spend skill points, select feats, and so forth as outlined in the Introduction of *Iron Heroes*.

Alternate Rule: Training: Some DMs feel that it's unrealistic for characters to suddenly gain new talents after a good night's sleep, or that it places the characters too far out of context with the world. For example, it seems strange that a hunter could embark on a journey from his home village as a neophyte and return two weeks later as one of the most powerful warriors in town.

Under this alternate rule of training, the characters must study with a master to gain levels. Their training takes place in addition to the other activities they pursue when not adventuring.

To gain a level, a character must spend at least five hours per week in training with a master who is three or more levels above him. A character no longer needs to train once he reaches 5th level (total character level, not 5th level in one class). At that point, only combat experience and insights earned in the field allow him to advance in level.

A character's master need not be a member of his class. As long as the DM rules that the master has some insight to offer a PC, he can serve as that character's tutor.

The main strength of this alternate rule is that it lets you place the characters within the context of the world.

A master provides an easy way to bring the party together. Perhaps they all trained with him, and now that they've learned the basics of their chosen paths, they must go out into the world to complete their training.

A master serves as a convenient NPC who can hand out quests, give the characters a place in the local community, play a role in their backgrounds, and offer advice and insights for their adventures. The master shouldn't swoop in to save the day when the characters are in trouble. Rather, he serves as a trusted advisor who has been through many of the same situations that his students now face.

A master helps keep the story focused on one location, particularly if the players are new to the game or your campaign setting. In this case, their master gives them a good reason to explore a limited region and deal with the troubles in a small area.

The characters might have relationships with the locals based on the link to their master. For example, if the master is feared, well liked, or respected, that attitude extends to the adventurers as well.

MAGIC AND MAGIC ITEMS

Iron Heroes presupposes a world where magic is a dangerous tool. By the same token, magic items are unstable devices that harm their users as frequently as their targets. The danger in using magic lies in channeling its energy from dimensional space into reality.

Magic items are, in essence, raw magical power merged with the intellect of an outsider and given physical form. On one hand, they exist as stable entities within reality. This trait allows them to produce magical effects that are more reliable than spells. On the other hand, the intellect contained within a magic item is almost invariably sinister, unpredictable, and domineering.

Arcanists have a saying: "Does the man control the blade, or does the blade control the man?" That statement sums up the hazard of magic items in *Iron Heroes*. While many items stop short of exercising mental control over their users, most of them subtly guide their owners' fates. For example:

- A magic blade thrives on the blood of innocents. When wielded by a heroic warrior, its edge goes dull, and it proves unable to penetrate even the lightest armor.
- A potion contains ichor taken from a demon. It offers invisibility for a short time, but anyone who drinks it too often starts to develop bizarre deformities.
- A scroll holds an arcane chant needed to cast a mighty spell, but secret phrases encoded within it summon a demonic being to the reader shortly before the spell takes effect. Only a caster clever enough to spot this trap can evade it.

MAGIC ITEMS IN THE GAME

Considering that magic items are so dangerous, one might wonder why they're part of the game. After all, why would anyone in his right mind use a sword that could prove his undoing?

In *Iron Heroes*, magic items serve as temporary solutions. A magic arrow might offer the only way to slay a dragon. A group of adventurers might drink a potion that allows them to pass through walls only because they must enter the tyrant's keep as quickly as possible. Magic items allow you, as the DM, to inject a level of wonder and fantasy into the game. They aren't meant to dominate the game, but they do help flavor it as a fantasy setting while giving you a useful tool to develop your campaign.

Magic items are also a deadly temptation, particularly for players obsessed with gathering more and more power for their characters. They give you a convenient tool to let the PCs get themselves into more trouble through their own actions than you could ever place them in with a normal adventure. This doesn't mean you should ruthlessly slaughter characters who pick up enchanted items. The game wouldn't be much fun if the players had no chance to avoid a deadly fate or had too few clues to stop a threat before it struck.

The key is that the players should know that magic items are dangerous, but they may still choose to use them. As they suffer complications from an item's use, your campaign can move in unpredictable but exciting new directions. Perhaps the party's man-at-arms bears a cursed blade that he must destroy in order to save his soul from a demon prince. If the players got into this predicament because of their own decisions, especially if they knew the repercussions of using the sword, the resulting adventures grow out of their choices.

Giving the players a sense that they control the action, even in a case where they must undo a bad decision they made, is a powerful way to make them feel that their characters are an important part of the story.

Magic items also help you drive the action. A villain may uncover a mighty artifact that he uses to lay a city to waste, leaving the characters to stop him before he strikes again. A corrupt noble may hire the player characters to find an enchanted ring, with which he then begins a campaign of assassination and intimidation to seize the throne. The characters may have to stop the monster they've unwittingly created.

Finally, in a fantasy game, magic helps to create strange vistas and bizarre lands. Deep within ancient ruins, floating disks carry riders up to the highest towers. A strange, alien archmage comes to town riding a flying carriage pulled by a winged serpent. The presence of magic allows you to create a bewildering variety of foes, places, and would-be allies for the characters. A memorable scene or a strange NPC can stick with the players long after the campaign has ended.

MAGIC ITEM ABILITIES

Magic item abilities can range from the simple, such as a bonus to attacks and damage from a magic sword, to the complex, such as the power to create a vampire thrall by filling a cauldron with human blood. Some complex abilities include a research Difficulty Class and prerequisites.

Effects: Each ability has one or more effects. For example, a magic sword's effects might be a +3 bonus to attacks and a +3 bonus to damage. In general, a single ability covers all the benefits you gain from using one action to activate the item. In the sword's case, swinging it at an opponent grants you the bonus to attack and damage. If the sword could also fire bolts of eldritch energy, that would be a second ability.

Research DC: Some abilities require a skill check to help you understand how they work. You must make a Use Magic Device check against the listed Difficulty Class to use the item. Some items list other skills, such as Knowledge (religion) that can take the place of Use Magic Device. If this check succeeds, you understand how the ability works. If the item requires an extended check, that is noted along with the Difficulty Class.

If an ability lacks a research DC, its usage is obvious. Anyone who handles the item can plainly see how to activate it, though the exact results might remain unknown. You can make a Use Magic Device check (DC 15) to determine the basic function of an ability that lacks a research Difficulty Class.

Prerequisites: Some items require special talents or qualities in order to activate them. For example, a magic wand might draw on mana that the user channels into it. DMs can assign a prerequisite of their choosing to a magic item on a case-by-case basis if they feel it is warranted. Using prerequisites in this way can add flavor and variety to magic use in the campaign.

A prerequisite is either a skill check, an ability check, or a special trait or capability. Some items function only for outsiders, and others have special effects when a humanoid attempts to employ them.

Even if you don't meet an ability's prerequisites, you can still make a check against its research DC to determine how it works. If you succeed, you learn the prerequisites along with the abilities.

Prerequisites should allow the DM to customize items for specific creatures or to keep them from falling into the characters' hands. One of the themes of the *Iron Heroes* magic system is that spellcasting and arcane energies are in many ways

baneful to human life. Since *Iron Heroes* focuses on martial talent rather than magical power, the prerequisites fit into the game's feel.

In most cases, you can include a prerequisite that the item's user must be an outsider or some other creature type unavailable to the players.

Drawback: Some magic item abilities extract a cost in return for the power they offer. This cost can range from drawing on a limited number of charges stored within the item to a blood sacrifice needed to power it. Other items slowly sap a user's vitality or sanity. Drawbacks reinforce the idea that magic is a dangerous force that can prove useful for only a short period. If you grow to rely on a magic item, it can consume your soul, change you forever, and destroy you.

THE USE MAGIC DEVICE SKILL

Characters can make Use Magic Device checks to determine whether they can use most magic items and to see which abilities they can access. In essence, a magic item is like a complex piece of machinery without an instruction manual. The Use Magic Device skill represents your ability to puzzle out an item's functions. Without it, you have little hope of using many items. Even if you have a high bonus in the skill, some aspects of a complicated item might be beyond your reach.

Not every item requires a Use Magic Device check for activation. A sword, shield, or suit of armor provides its most basic benefits through mere use. A magic blade chops through steel with ease, even if you don't understand how the arcane matrix within it functions. Likewise, if you don a suit of magic armor, you gain the benefits of the added protection it affords you. Generally speaking, Use Magic Device is necessary with items that lack an obvious benefit or that need an outside source of magical energy to function.

RESEARCHING ITEMS

For each item, you can make one Use Magic Device check per day to puzzle out the item's function—unless you want to activate the item's abilities blindly (see next page). This check represents four hours of work spent studying and experimenting with the item. You make this check against the item's research Difficulty Class.

If the item has one ability with a research DC, you make a check as normal. If successful, you understand all of the item's abilities and can use them according to its description.

Should the item have multiple abilities with separate research DCs, you always roll against the lowest DC. If you succeed, you unlock that ability. The next time you research the item, you roll against the next higher DC, and so on.

The DM makes these research checks in secret. You can also roll to see whether you have uncovered all of an item's abilities. If you succeed at a check (DC 20) against an item whose abilities you've already begun to research, you know when you've uncovered all its secrets. Otherwise, you're unsure whether further study will reveal anything.

In some cases, an item allows you to use a skill other than Use Magic Device to unlock its abilities. However, the additional skills provide more options. They don't replace Use Magic Device, and you can still employ Use Magic Device as normal. A magic item's description states whether it allows other skills in this way.

EXTENDED STUDY

Some abilities of a magic item are too complex for a single check to solve all their mysteries. In this case, you must succeed at an extended Use Magic Device check to unlock the item's abilities. (See *Iron Heroes*, Chapter Four, for a discussion of extended skill checks.) An item that requires an extended check lists the number of successful checks needed to allow the use of an ability. If you succeed at a single check, you know that you're making progress but that you haven't yet completed the task. When you've succeeded on at least half of the necessary checks, you gain a basic understanding of the function that you're in the process of unlocking.

While you make steady progress in this study, a catastrophe can set you back. If you fail the Use Magic Device check by 10 or more, you lose one of your successful checks. If you haven't made any successful checks yet, a failure increases the total number of successful checks needed by one.

BLIND ACTIVATION

While magic items normally require careful study and experimentation, sometimes circumstances allow for neither. If a terrible monster attacks and all you have to protect yourself with is a mysterious magic staff, you can attempt to activate the item blindly. In this case, you try to coax an effect from the item by using your knowledge of how such devices work.

You can do this only if you're trained in the Use Magic Device skill. If you lack ranks in the skill, you simply have no idea how to manipulate a magic item.

This variation of Use Magic Device requires a full-round action. Make a Use Magic Device check as normal. The DM randomly selects one of the item's abilities. If you lack the prerequisites for that ability, your check automatically fails. If you meet the prerequisites, you activate the ability if your check succeeds against the item or ability's Use Magic Device DC + 10.

If you fail this check by 5 or less, nothing happens. If you fail by 6 or more, the item produces its effects, but you accidentally target the wrong space or person. In this case, the DM selects a random creature or space within range and resolves the effect. If the DM picks a random creature, he includes you in the mix of possible targets. Otherwise, he can use the rules for weapons and scatter from "Throw Splash or Grenadelike Weapon" in Chapter Eight: Combat of *Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes*.

You can never use a skill other than Use Magic Device to activate an item blindly, even if an item allows you to use other skills to unlock its abilities.

MAGIC ITEM DESCRIPTIONS

This section breaks magic items down into several categories, giving rules and examples for each. The standard magic items for *Iron Heroes* are as follows:

Armor: Magic armor can withstand and absorb blows that would slay even the toughest warrior, but many of these suits are crafted from unwholesome materials. Warriors who come to rely on magic armor change in strange, subtle ways.

Potions: Crafted from a bizarre and often noxious combination of ingredients, potions create temporary magical effects for those who drink them. However, many potions cause side effects as the unwholesome materials within them interact with the human body.

Weapons: Magic weapons offer a deadly way to strike down enemies, but at the same time, they're usually possessed by an independent, willful intellect. Other magic weapons slowly change their users' minds to better match their own goals.

Wondrous Items: This catch-all category covers any magic item that doesn't fall into the above categories. It includes everything from a magic wand to a pair of boots that allow you to walk along the walls.

The following sections provide rules for each magic item category, along with conversion rules for adapting magic items from other games to *Iron Heroes*.

MAGIC ITEM CREATION

In *Iron Heroes*, creating magic items is both simple and difficult. *Iron Heroes* sheds many of the usual game mechanics that ensure an item's proper balance against other options. Since magic items are rarely part of a character's arsenal, there's little need to worry about how they interact with his talents. Instead, you must consider how a magic item functions within the context of the campaign.

In the vast majority of cases, magic items should serve one of two purposes. Either the item grants an NPC an additional source of power, or the item is an important part of the plot to an adventure or campaign arc. Magic items are not intended to serve as rewards for the characters or as a means to improve their powers. Instead, they drive the story. Think of magic items as a useful part of your bag of tricks, one that helps you create plots and adventures.

For this reason, the magic item creation rules in *Iron Heroes* are deliberately vague. There are no hard and fast rules for designing items, only guidelines that you can use to create anything you want.

NPCS, CHALLENGE RATINGS, AND MAGIC ITEMS

In many cases, magic items prove useful to NPC villains but baneful to the player characters. A magic staff or an enchanted cloak serves to broaden the villain's abilities, making him a more dangerous foe. To keep things balanced, increase the villain's Challenge Rating or related experience point rewards.

If the item serves as the villain's primary method of attack or defense and provides a clear, powerful boost to his standard abilities, increase his Challenge Rating by 1 or 2.

If the item summons creatures or otherwise grants the villain additional allies, award the party XP for defeating those enemies as normal. (Usually, summoned creatures do not grant XP awards.)

On the other hand, *Iron Heroes* demands a few special considerations when creating magic items.

History: An item should convey a sense of history and its importance to the game world. Crafting a magic item is a long-term, difficult project, one beyond the capabilities of most mortals. Arcanists can only rarely complete such items, and even then only after decades of toil and with the rarest, strangest, and most expensive ingredients and materials. When you design an item, add tales and legends of its past that the characters can learn. The magic sword they recover from the barrow of an ancient, forgotten civilization might appear in diagrams drawn in a book written in an indecipherable language. A magic cloak once may have belonged to a master thief who simply disappeared, his final fate a mystery.

Plot Significance: Since magic items are so rare in *Iron Heroes*, their appearance in your campaign should be an important event. When the item surfaces, it should draw the interest of a variety of groups, sages, arcanists, and others. Kings and other mighty individuals may seek it for their own use, placing the characters in the middle of a vicious power struggle. The item should spur plots and serve as the centerpiece of adventures.

Drawbacks: Almost every item should have one or more drawbacks that make its long-term use a bad idea. A suit of armor might slowly sap your strength, while a magic sword is destined to turn against its wielder. While magic items offer a quick path to power, they rarely provide anyone with lasting success.

Each drawback you select for an item must be linked to a single ability. You can pick the same drawback multiple times, applying it once to each ability. There is no limit to the total number of drawbacks you can place on an item.

These rules assume that player characters in your campaign never belong to the outsider monster type. In *Iron Heroes*, outsiders are infused with tremendous magical energies. Many drawbacks represent the dangerous effects of magical energy on mortal, mundane creatures. An outsider can shrug off such energy as if it were no more hazardous than a spring rain.

ARMOR

Magic armor provides two basic sorts of abilities: an increased capacity to protect the user, and magical powers that alter or extend the wearer's physical abilities. For example, a suit of armor might turn aside steel weapons. A different suit might sport a pair of demonic wings that allows its wearer to fly.

Obviously, armor has a close relationship to its user's body. It surrounds and encases you as you wear it. While this allows it to protect you from harm, it also greatly exposes you to the fell energies and strange magic that give it power. Armor tends to physically warp those who wear it for long. Mortals are simply too fragile to sustain the arcane energy.

For each suit of magic armor, select an enhancement bonus and/or an armor ability plus one drawback.

ENHANCEMENT BONUS

Most forms of magic armor grant a bonus to the armor's damage reduction. This bonus can range from +1 to +5. When you roll an armor's DR against an attack, add the bonus to the total damage reduction result.

Magic armor provides its full DR against magic weapons. Normally, such weapons ignore the damage reduction afforded by mundane armor.

ARMOR ABILITIES

In addition to an enhancement bonus, armor can have one or more of the following abilities. Most armor abilities lack research DCs, since using a suit of armor is simply a matter of putting it on. You can add prerequisites to these abilities as normal (see page 70).

Blinding: A shield or suit of armor with this ability flashes with a brilliant light up to twice per day upon command of the wielder. Anyone within 20 feet except the wearer must make a Reflex save (DC 20) or be blinded for 1d4 rounds. Unlike many other armor abilities, this ability requires a research check to unlock its potential.

Research DC: 25.

Chameleon: This strange armor shifts its colors to match the environment around you. Depending on the extent of its power (DM's discretion), *chameleon* armor can grant a bonus to Hide checks ranging from +2 to +10.

Note that the armor's check penalty, if any, applies as normal. However, if you remain motionless while hiding, you don't suffer the check penalty. As soon as you move, you must make another Hide check with the armor penalty as normal.

Energy Resistance: A suit of armor or a shield with this property absorbs the first 10 points of energy damage per attack that the wearer would normally take. Select one of the following energies for the armor: acid, cold, fire, or sonic. A suit of armor can carry this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, choose a different type of energy.

Energy Resistance, Improved: As *energy resistance*, above, except it absorbs the first 20 points of energy damage per attack.

Energy Resistance, Greater: As *energy resistance*, except it absorbs the first 30 points of energy damage per attack.

Fortification: This suit of armor or shield produces a magical force that protects vital areas of the wearer more effectively than normal armor. When an opponent scores a

critical hit or deals sneak attack damage to the wearer, there's a chance that the armor negates the critical hit or sneak attack bonus damage.

Fortification Type	Chance for Normal Damage
Light	25%
Moderate	75%
Heavy	100%

Ghost Touch: This armor or shield seems almost translucent. Both its enhancement bonus (if any) and its armor bonus to defense count against the attacks of incorporeal creatures. It can be picked up, moved, and worn by incorporeal creatures at any time. Incorporeal creatures gain the armor or shield's enhancement bonus against both corporeal and incorporeal attacks, and they can still pass freely through solid objects.

Glamered: A suit of armor with this ability appears normal. Upon command, though, the *glamered* armor changes shape to assume the appearance of a standard set of clothing. The armor retains all its properties (including weight) when glamered. Unlike many other armor abilities, this ability requires a research check to unlock its potential.

Research DC: 25.

Phantom Armor: The wearer of *phantom* armor can become incorporeal once per day, on command. The character can remain incorporeal for as long as desired, but once he returns to normal, he can't become incorporeal again that day. Unlike many other armor abilities, this ability requires a research check to unlock its potential.

Research DC: 30.

ARMOR DRAWBACKS

Armor tends to have severe drawbacks, primarily because it requires a great degree of physical contact. Considering that magic items carry energies that are fundamentally deadly to mortal creatures, encasing yourself in magic armor is dangerous at best (see sidebar on the next page).

Fusion: The armor slowly merges with your body, making it difficult to remove. Metal hooks from the armor dig into your flesh, or the metal and leather plates meld with your skin. When you attempt to remove the armor, you must make a Will save (DC 20 + the total number of consecutive days that you have worn the armor). If you succeed, you remove the armor but suffer 2d4 points of damage. Should the save fail, you refuse to remove the armor. You must then make another Will save at the end of each subsequent day. Each time you fail a save, the armor maintains control of you (the specifics are left to the DM's discretion). The alien personality within it guides your actions until someone somehow removes the armor, or until you finally make your Will save, at which point you can take off the armor but also suffer 2d4 points of damage.

Infestation: This suit of armor bears a strange curse. Anyone who wears it develops a strange skin disease, manifesting sores, rashes, and other troublesome ailments. For each day (or portion of a day) that you wear the armor, you suffer 1 point of Constitution damage.

Life Leech: The armor slowly drains your vitality, sapping your strength to sustain its magical energies. For each hour (or portion of an hour) that you wear the armor, you must make a Fortitude save (DC 20 + the number of consecutive hours that you've worn the armor). If this save fails, you suffer 1d4 points of damage to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution.

If the save succeeds, you suffer 1d2 points of damage to Strength, Dexterity, *or* Constitution—choose one score at random. Outsiders are immune to this ability, as their strange planar natures sustain the armor without harm.

POTIONS

From an elixir that strips away the ravages of old age to a fetid brew said to improve a warrior's strength, potions offer a variety of abilities. Despite their promises of power and vitality, most potions come with a bevy of side effects. Of all the magic items, potions have the closest interaction with their user's body. A potion must be ingested before it takes effect, allowing its arcane ingredients to mingle with flesh, bone, mind, and blood. Most potions provide useful benefits only in the short term. Over time, they cause hideous mutations, addictions, and other debilitating side effects.

This section presents 10 potion abilities and six drawbacks. To create a potion, simply match an ability with a drawback. You can also use these properties as examples for abilities and drawbacks of your own design. Then select a duration as described below.

POTION DURATION

Some potions provide a permanent benefit. An *elixir of youth* reduces its drinker's age by a decade or more, restoring his physical vitality. By the same token, the drawbacks it inflicts should be permanent also. A potion that allows its user to see in the dark for a short time should have a drawback that also fades over time or manifests only with repeated use.

When you select a potion's effects, pick one of the following three durations. Apply the rules to the potion's abilities and its drawbacks.

Short Duration: This potion provides a temporary boost to its user. Luckily, its drawbacks also tend to fade over time.

Abilities: The potion's abilities last for up to one hour. After that time, the benefits fade away.

Drawbacks: The potion's drawbacks remain in effect as long as its abilities. Once the benefits fade, the potion's drawbacks also disappear.

Long Duration: These potions last for several days, as their magical essence is strong enough to endure within the body for an extended period of time.

Abilities: The potion's abilities remain with the drinker for one week. After this time, they fade away.

Drawbacks: The drawbacks last for the entire week of the potion's duration. In addition, each time a character drinks a long-duration potion, he gains 1 toxin point that remains with him for a year. Each time the character gains a toxin point, he must make a Fortitude save with a DC equal to his newly increased toxin point total. If he fails, he permanently suffers one potion drawback of the DM's choice.

Permanent: This potion mingles with the user's life essence, forever altering it or causing effects that remain in place even after the magic fades.

Abilities: A permanent potion grants its drinker a new ability, such as the power to command air elementals or cure injuries with the touch of his hand.

Drawbacks: The potion's drawbacks are likewise permanent.

Exceptions: Some potions may have abilities that fall into one category, but their drawbacks are better covered by a different category. Normally, this situation arises when the potion's benefits aren't good enough to inflict a long-term, devastating drawback. For example, a potion that heals injuries is useful and seems to have a permanent effect. The wounds it mends don't burst back open after an hour or a week. However, the potion pales in comparison to one that gives a permanent boost to an ability score. Should both potions have comparable permanent drawbacks? In the case of the healing potion, it makes more sense to use a drawback that is one duration category shorter than normal.

In general, a permanent potion should offer advantages that don't fade due to any condition short of death. A potion that cures a disease shouldn't count as a permanent potion unless it also offers immunity against all diseases. Even if it conferred immunity to a single disease, the benefit probably isn't great enough to justify a permanent drawback. In any case, make your best judgment if you're unhappy with a potion's abilities and drawbacks.

POTION ABILITIES

Use the abilities listed here to design potions or as models for new benefits of your own creation.

Armor: When you consume this potion, your skin becomes as hard and tough as a dragon's scales. You gain a +4 natural passive bonus to defense while the potion's effects last.

Boost: A *boost potion* describes a general category of elixirs that enhance your natural talents. When you drink one of these potions, you gain a +4 enhancement bonus to one ability score. Most *boost potions* grant a bonus to Strength, but versions exist to improve any score. When the potion's duration expires, you lose the bonus it provides.

Remember that an enhancement bonus is a modifier that does not stack. The permanent version of this potion provides the equivalent of a continuous enhancement bonus. That means you can't drink multiple *boost potions* to permanently increase a single ability score more than once.

Cleansing: A *potion of cleansing* purges poison, disease, paralysis, or a similar condition from your body. Each potion is linked to a specific condition and removes only that condition.

It doesn't restore any effects that the condition previously caused, but it does prevent future penalties or damage from the *current* condition affecting the imbiber. For example, say a character suffers a bite from a poisonous spider, and its venom deals him 3 points of Strength damage. A *potion of cleansing (poison)* would not remove that damage, but it would prevent the poison's secondary damage.

Healing: This potion knits wounds shut, either providing temporary reprieve from injury or permanently restoring your health. When you drink this potion, you heal 4 hit points per Hit Die. Any healing above your normal maximum number of hit points is lost. If the potion has a duration other than Permanent, you take damage when it expires equal to the number of hit points you healed.

Flight: This potion infuses you with the energy of elemental air, allowing you to soar through the skies with the same ease as walking. You gain a flight speed equal to double your normal land movement rate with average maneuverability.

Phantom Form: This potion lets you adopt a spectral form. You can slide through walls, avoid many physical effects, and foil a variety of defenses. You become incorporeal for the duration of the potion's effects. You can shift to your normal physical form again by doing nothing but concentrating for one minute. At the end of this time, you become physical. You can return to your incorporeal state by concentrating for another 10 minutes. Any items you carry while you change shift along with you.

Speed: When you consume a *potion of speed*, you can move faster than normal. For the duration of the potion's effects, you gain an enhancement bonus of two squares (10 feet) to your speed in all movement modes you normally use. You also gain an additional move action each round, including surprise rounds. The effects of multiple *potions of speed* don't stack.

Transmutation: When you ingest this potion, your physical form shifts and changes. The potion can have a variety of effects. It might change you into a different creature, make you as tall as a giant, or shrink you down to the size of an apple. Each *potion of transmutation* creates one specific change.

If your size changes, you gain the appropriate size penalty or bonus to attacks, defense, and Hide checks. For example, a Medium creature that shrinks to Small gains a +1 bonus to attacks and defense and a +4 bonus to Hide. Consult Chapter Eight in *Iron Heroes* for more information. In addition, you gain a +2 bonus to Strength for each size category you grow and suffer a −2 penalty for each size category you shrink.

POTIONS FROM OTHER SOURCES

You can import potions from other d20 System games by matching drawbacks to their effects. In most cases, potions from other games have short durations. For example, a *potion of bull's strength* grants an enhanced Strength score for a few minutes at most. In such cases, the potion's drawbacks should also have a short duration, according to the rules given here for creating potions.

A creature's speed also changes with its size. You gain a two-square (10-foot) bonus for each size category you grow and suffer a two-square (10-foot) penalty for each size category you shrink, to a minimum speed of 5 feet.

If a *potion of transmutation* turns you into a different creature, you gain that creature's Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution scores in place of your own. You also gain its natural bonus to defense and all of its supernatural, spell-like, and extraordinary abilities. You retain your class abilities, though you might not be able to use them. For example, a berserker transformed into a bear would be unable to wield his axe but could still accumulate and use his fury tokens.

True Sight: This elixir sharpens your senses and grants you the ability to perceive things normally hidden from mortal eyes. You gain a +5 bonus to all Spot and Listen checks. You can see all invisible and ethereal objects and creatures, and if you concentrate for 1 round, you perceive all magical auras within a 60-foot radius.

Vitality: This powerful draught grants you superior durability and toughness, allowing you to shrug off wounds that normally would severely injure you. You gain 2 hit points per Hit Die. These bonus hit points exist as a separate pool from your normal hit point total. Until the potion's duration expires, you subtract any damage you suffer from this pool. If the pool is reduced to zero, you begin to suffer wounds as normal.

For example, let's say you currently have 12 hit points. You drink a *potion of vitality* and gain 10 extra hit points from it. An attack then deals you 6 points of damage. These 6 points come out of your extra hit points, reducing that pool to 4. You then suffer 8 more points of damage from another attack. Of this damage, 4 points come out of your extra pool, reducing it to zero, and the 4 remaining points of damage are subtracted from your normal hit point total.

When the *potion of vitality's* duration runs out, you lose the pool of bonus hit points it provides (if any remain). Your normal hit point total remains unchanged.

POTION DRAWBACKS

Potions tend to have terrible drawbacks, as they must be taken internally to have any effect. The magical energies that enhance your body or give you special abilities can also warp and twist your form in unpredictable ways. When selecting a drawback for a potion, pick one that has a logical connection to the potion's benefits. For example, a potion that enhances a character's Strength might cause a penalty to his Intelligence. In this case, the same magic that enhances a character's body weakens his mind. This sort of design also enables the potion to be useful in some circumstances despite the drawback.

Addiction: You become increasingly dependent on the potion, developing a physical or psychological addiction to its effects. It may have pleasurable side effects in addition to its game mechanic effects, or its magic may change your

body so that you can't survive without frequent doses of the potion.

When you first drink this potion, you must make a Fortitude save (DC 20). This Difficulty Class increases by 2 every time you drink that same type of potion. If you drink different potions that have the addiction drawback, keep track of their DCs separately.

Should you fail this save, you develop an addiction to the potion. Each day that you don't drink a vial of the potion, you must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + the number of days since you last drank the potion). If you fail the save, you suffer 1 point of Constitution damage. Drinking the potion later that day does not heal the Constitution damage.

If the potion is not permanent, you must go 28 consecutive days without using it in order to break the addiction. Once that time period passes, you no longer have to make saving throws.

If the potion is permanent, you can rid yourself of the addiction only by losing the potion's effects. Even in that case, you still must go 28 consecutive days without consuming the potion to break the addiction.

Delusions: The potion interacts with your mind in strange ways, granting you unwanted insight into the nature of the cosmos. You see bizarre planar creatures that lurk just beyond the edge of perception—or at least you believe that you do. Each round in combat, there is a 10 percent chance that all of your attacks for the round miss because you lash out at one of these phantom threats instead of your actual target. Make this check the first time you attempt an attack on your action. This drawback lasts until the end of your action. It has no effect on attacks of opportunity or other attacks that don't take place on your action or as part of a readied action.

Madness: As the potion's magic takes effect, your mind grows increasingly unstable. You suffer a −4 penalty to all Spot and Listen checks due to your distraction. In addition, you must make a Will save (DC 15) each round of combat, immediately before taking your actions. If you fail, you suffer from confusion as described in "States and Conditions" in Chapter Eight of *Iron Heroes*. If you succeed, you act as normal. Regardless of the result of your saving throw, you continue to make a new Will save each round. The DM also may require you to make a save each round when you're in other stressful situations, not just combat.

Mutation: The potion's magical essence has a baleful effect on humanoids. It may or may not have a similar effect on other creatures. For example, a potion crafted by a demon may have no side effects on an outsider, but it warps and twists any other creature that consumes it.

Each time you use a potion with this drawback, you gain 1 mutation point and must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 10 + your total number of mutation points) or undergo a severe or hideous physical change to your body. These mutations include thick scars, weeping sores, and other deformities. They cause you to suffer a −2 penalty to all Charisma checks and Charisma-based skill checks. The penalty increases by 1 each time you suffer a mutation.

In addition, each mutation causes you to suffer a −2 penalty to one ability score chosen at random. This penalty usually relates to the deformity. For example, if your head withers in size, your Intelligence may drop. When this drawback's duration ends, the penalty goes away (your body adapts to it) but the change to your appearance remains, as does your current mutation point total.

Poison: In addition to its normal effects, the potion is highly toxic to humanoids and perhaps other creatures. The

DM decides whether any creature types are immune when he creates the potion. The potion inflicts 1d4 points of Constitution damage as its primary and secondary effects, with a Fortitude save (DC 25) to resist. If the potion has a duration of longer than one day, you suffer the initial effects of the poison each day upon waking (or at noon if you don't sleep).

Spasms: The potion interacts with your body in strange, unpredictable ways. You develop random tremors, muscle spasms, and other physical breakdowns. During combat or in other stressful situations, there is a 20 percent chance per round that you suffer from these tremors. They inflict a –4 penalty to attacks, checks, and saves for the duration of that round. Make this check at the start of your action on each round. This drawback lasts until the start of your next action.

NONSTANDARD POTIONS

For the purposes of your campaign and the adventures you design, some potions might have no drawbacks. Instead, they might serve to drive the plot forward or give you an excuse to set an adventure in a strange area. For example:

- A mystical brew concocted from the horn of a great dragon is the only thing that can neutralize a deadly poison.
- The boiled blood of a kraken grants anyone who drinks it the ability to breathe underwater, allowing the adventurers to swim to a shipwreck located deep beneath the waves.

Potions are an excellent way to deliver temporary magical effects to the characters, particularly if doing so opens fun options for adventure. Most players, particularly those experienced with other fantasy games, expect that a potion has a limited duration. When its magic runs out, they don't feel cheated. If you want to prevent magic items from becoming too important a part of the game, you can easily control access to such potions. The ingredients needed to make them might be difficult to find, only a few doses of the potion might remain in existence (and they're needed for the current adventure), and so on.

Remember, the rules for magic items in this chapter assume that you want to stick close to the low-magic feel of *Iron Heroes*. The effects given here for potions are not the only ones possible in the context of the game. These rules should never prevent you from creating plots, stories, and other game elements that you want to include.

WEAPONS

Magic weapons offer a warrior an easy shortcut to victory, but often at a perilous cost. In most cases, weapons enhanced with magic alter a character's actions or cause complications that soon outweigh their advantages.

For each magical weapon, select an enhancement bonus and/or a weapon ability, plus one drawback.

ENHANCEMENT BONUS

Magic weapons grant a bonus to attacks and damage that ranges from +1 to +5. In addition, these weapons deal magic damage. They ignore the damage reduction provided by mundane armor.

WEAPON ABILITIES

In addition to an enhancement bonus, a weapon can feature one or more of the following abilities.

Brilliant Energy: The significant portion of a *brilliant energy* weapon (a sword's blade, an axe's head, etc.) transforms into light, although this does not modify the item's weight. It always gives off light as a torch (in a 20-foot radius). A *brilliant energy* weapon does no injury to nonliving matter (including undead, constructs, and objects) and has no effect on it. Passive bonuses to defense don't count against it because the weapon passes through armor. Like all magic weapons, it ignores armor DR.

Dancing: As a standard action, a *dancing* weapon can be loosed to attack on its own. It fights for 4 rounds using the base attack bonus of the one who loosed it, and then drops. While dancing, it can't make attacks of opportunity, and the person who activated it is not considered armed with the weapon. In all other respects, it is considered wielded or attended by the person for all maneuvers and effects that target items. While dancing, it takes up the same space as the activating character and can attack adjacent foes. A reach weapon has a reach of two squares (10 feet). The *dancing* weapon accompanies the person who activated it everywhere, whether she moves by physical or magical means. If the wielder who loosed it has an unoccupied hand, she can grasp the weapon while it's attacking on its own as a free action. When so retrieved, the weapon can't dance (attack on its own) again for 4 rounds.
Research DC: 30.

Defending: A *defending* weapon allows the wielder to transfer some or all of the sword's enhancement bonus to her defense as an active bonus that stacks with all others. As a free action, the wielder chooses how to allocate the weapon's enhancement bonus at the start of her turn before using the weapon, and the effect to defense lasts until her next turn.
Research DC: 25.

Distance: This property can be placed only on a ranged weapon. A weapon of *distance* has double the range increment of other weapons of its kind.

Flaming: Upon command, a *flaming* weapon is sheathed in fire, which doesn't harm the wielder. The effect remains until the wielder commands it to go out. A *flaming* weapon deals an extra 1d6 points of fire damage on a successful hit. Bows, crossbows, and slings so crafted bestow the fire energy upon their ammunition.
Research DC: 25.

Flaming Burst: A *flaming burst* weapon functions as a *flaming* weapon that also explodes with fire upon striking a successful critical hit. The fire doesn't harm the wielder. In addition to the extra fire damage from the *flaming* ability (see

above), a *flaming burst* weapon deals extra fire damage on a successful critical hit.

If the weapon's critical multiplier is ×2, it deals an extra 1d10 points of fire damage. If it is ×3, it deals an extra 2d10 points of fire damage, and if the multiplier is ×4, it deals an extra 3d10 points of fire damage.

Bows, crossbows, and slings so crafted bestow the fire energy upon their ammunition.

Even if the *flaming* ability is not active, the weapon still deals its extra fire damage on a successful critical hit.

Research DC: 30.

Frost: Upon command, a *frost* weapon sheathes itself in icy cold, which doesn't harm the wielder. The effect remains until the wielder commands it to turn off. A *frost* weapon deals an extra 1d6 points of cold damage on a successful hit. Bows, crossbows, and slings so crafted bestow the cold energy upon their ammunition.

Research DC: 25.

Ghost Touch: A *ghost touch* weapon deals damage normally against incorporeal creatures, regardless of its bonus. (An incorporeal creature's 50 percent chance to avoid damage does not apply to attacks from *ghost touch* weapons.) An incorporeal creature can pick up and move the weapon at any time. Essentially, a *ghost touch* weapon counts as either corporeal or incorporeal at any given time, whichever benefits the wielder more.

Icy Burst: An *icy burst* weapon functions as a *frost* weapon that also explodes with cold upon striking a successful critical hit. The cold doesn't harm the wielder. In addition to the extra damage from the *frost* ability, an *icy burst* weapon deals extra cold damage on a successful critical hit.

If the weapon's critical multiplier is ×2, it deals an extra 1d10 points of cold damage. If it is ×3, it deals an extra 2d10 points of cold damage, and if the multiplier is ×4, it deals an extra 3d10 points of cold damage.

Bows, crossbows, and slings so crafted bestow the cold energy upon their ammunition.

Even if the *frost* ability is not active, the weapon still deals its extra cold damage on a successful critical hit.

Research DC: 30.

Keen: This ability doubles the threat range of a weapon. It stacks with other abilities that increase a weapon's threat range. Apply the standard rule for adding together different abilities that multiply a value (see the Introduction of *Iron Heroes* for the rules of multiplying).

Returning: This special ability can be placed only on a thrown weapon. A *returning* weapon flies through the air back to the creature that threw it. It returns to the thrower just before the creature's next turn (and is therefore ready to use again in that turn).

Catching a *returning* weapon when it comes back is a free action. If the character can't catch it, or if the character has moved since throwing it, the weapon drops to the ground in the square from which it was thrown.

Seeking: Only ranged weapons and ammunition can have the *seeking* ability. The weapon veers toward its target, negating any miss chances that would otherwise apply, such as from concealment. The wielder still has to aim the weapon at the right square. Arrows mistakenly shot into an empty space, for example, don't veer and hit invisible enemies, even if they're nearby.

Shock: Upon command, a *shock* weapon sheathes itself in crackling electricity, which doesn't harm the wielder. The effect remains until the wielder commands it to stop. A *shock* weapon deals an extra 1d6 points of electricity damage on a successful hit. Bows, crossbows, and slings so crafted bestow the electricity energy upon their ammunition.

Research DC: 25.

Shocking Burst: A *shocking burst* weapon functions as a *shock* weapon that also explodes with electricity upon striking a successful critical hit. The electricity doesn't harm the wielder. In addition to the extra electricity damage from the *shock* ability (see above), a *shocking burst* weapon deals extra electricity damage on a successful critical hit.

If the weapon's critical multiplier is ×2, it deals an extra 1d10 points of electricity damage. If it is ×3, it deals an extra 2d10 points of electricity damage, and if the multiplier is ×4, it deals an extra 3d10 points of electricity damage.

Bows, crossbows, and slings so crafted bestow the electricity energy upon their ammunition.

Even if the *shock* ability is not active, the weapon still deals its extra electricity damage on a successful critical hit.

Research DC: 30.

Speed: When making a full attack action, the wielder of a *speed* weapon may make one extra attack with it. The attack uses the wielder's full base attack bonus, plus any modifiers appropriate to the situation. This benefit is not cumulative with similar effects.

Thundering: A *thundering* weapon creates a cacophonous roar like thunder upon striking a successful critical hit. The sonic energy doesn't harm the wielder. A *thundering* weapon deals additional sonic damage on a successful critical hit.

If the weapon's critical multiplier is ×2, it deals an extra 1d8 points of sonic damage. If it is ×3, it deals an extra 2d8 points of sonic damage, and if the multiplier is ×4, it deals an extra 3d8 points of sonic damage.

In addition, subjects dealt a critical hit by a *thundering* weapon must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or be deafened permanently.

Bows, crossbows, and slings so crafted bestow the sonic energy upon their ammunition.

Throwing: This ability can be placed only on a melee weapon, granting it the thrown identifying descriptor. A *throwing* weapon gains a range increment of 10 feet and can be thrown by a wielder proficient in its normal use.

Research DC: 20.

Vorpal: This potent and feared ability allows the weapon to sever the heads of its victims. Upon a roll of a natural 20

(followed by a successful roll to confirm the critical hit), the weapon severs the opponent's head (if any) from its body. Some creatures, such as many aberrations and all oozes, have no heads. Others, such as golems and undead creatures other than vampires, are not affected by the loss of their heads. However, most other creatures die when their heads are cut off. A *vorpal* weapon must be a slashing weapon.

Wounding: A *wounding* weapon deals 1 point of Constitution damage from blood loss when it hits a creature. A critical hit does not multiply the Constitution damage. Creatures immune to critical hits (such as plants and constructs) are immune to the Constitution damage dealt by this weapon.

WEAPON DRAWBACKS

The following drawbacks cover the typical baleful qualities present in a weapon forged with arcane energy.

Domination: The weapon contains a malign intellect that slowly overcomes its owner's personality. Each day that you carry this weapon, you must make a Will save (DC 15 + the total number of previous saves made against this ability). If the save fails, you suffer an effect based on the number of times you have failed.

With your first failed save, you grow to value the weapon above all others. You refuse to use other weapons as long as this one is in your possession. If you lose it, you do everything in your power to regain it.

With your third failed save, the weapon seizes control of you in battle. Whenever you attack in combat, the sword chooses your target (as decided by the DM). It might turn you against your friends, or it could force you to take on a powerful foe that promises to increase the sword's renown.

After your fifth failed save, the sword's personality displaces your own. You become an NPC under the DM's control, a puppet of the weapon who lives only to serve its inscrutable purposes.

Doom: This weapon's legacy is rife with stories of the deaths of those who have wielded it. After carrying the weapon for seven days total, you feel its grim legacy take hold. Your opponents double their critical threat ranges against you and gain a +10 bonus on all rolls to confirm critical hits. This effect remains in place whenever you carry the *doom* weapon.

Physical Dependency: Over time, you grow dependent on the weapon to sustain you. After carrying it for seven days total, you must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 20 + the number of days you have carried the weapon). If the save fails, you suffer a –1 penalty to Strength and Constitution whenever the weapon leaves your possession for more than one hour. You continue to make a new Fortitude save every seven days, and the penalty increases by 1 for each failed save. This effect is permanent.

WONDROUS ITEMS

The wondrous items category covers any item that doesn't fit into the other categories. Rings, cloaks, gloves, and similar objects fall here. Wondrous items tend to have high research Difficulty Classes and multiple abilities. In most cases, an item's physical form closely follows its function. For example, a cloak has the ability to hide its wearer's form, wrap her in a protective layer of magical energy, or disguise her true appearance.

WONDROUS ITEM DRAWBACKS

There are no creation rules for wondrous items—they cover such a wide range of abilities that it's impossible to fully detail them all. Your best bet in creating this type of item is to give it a harsh drawback so that the characters will use it only once or twice before discarding it.

In addition to the generic drawbacks given below, use the sample items presented in this section to guide your design process. You can easily swap out abilities and drawbacks to create the exact item you wish to design.

SHORT-TERM USE DRAWBACKS

These drawbacks ensure that the party uses an item for no more than a day or two before discarding or destroying it. These items might be too powerful or offer abilities that could derail an adventure. In addition, try to create prerequisites for the item that restrict it to one or two characters. Otherwise, the party might trade the item back and forth to spread its ill effects across the group.

Ability Score Loss: Sapping a character's ability scores is a good way to reflect an item's dangerous nature, as a drop in an ability potentially affects her saves, skills, and combat prowess. The loss should range from 1d6 to 2d6 points. The item should seriously impair the character, not instantly kill her or render her helpless. The item inflicts this ability damage when it is first used or worn and inflicts it again every 24 hours.

Corrupting Influence: The item slowly alters its user's personality. With each day that passes, it exerts greater control over its user, forcing its alien intellect into her mind. When a character activates the item, she gains 1 corruption point. Alternatively, she can gain corruption points based on how long she carries the item. A rate of 1 point per hour is good for the most dangerous items, while 1 point per day is reasonable in other cases.

When her total corruption points from the item exceed her Charisma score, the item gains the power to replace her personality with that of a malevolent spirit. While the character possesses the item, she must make a Charisma check (DC 10 + the number of corruption points accrued from the item) at the start of each encounter. If she makes the save, she maintains control of herself. If she fails, the item controls and corrupts her for the next 1d4 minutes; the DM runs the character during this time period.

If she manages to rid herself of the item, she no longer needs to make this Charisma check. However, her corruption point total never decreases. If she later reacquires the item, she suffers its effects starting with the corruption total she has already accrued.

If a character uses multiple items with this drawback, track her corruption totals for each item separately. If she carries more than one of these items at the start of an encounter, she makes Charisma checks in order from highest Difficulty Class to lowest. If she fails a check, the relevant item immediately seizes control, with no further checks needed.

Curse: The item places a terrible curse on whoever carries it. The bearer suffers a –4 penalty to attacks and a –8 penalty to saves. In addition, her allies within 60 feet suffer a –2 penalty to attacks and a –4 penalty to saves. You can increase or decrease these penalties to better match the curse's potency. With each day that passes, increase each penalty by 1 as the item exerts its baleful influence on those foolish enough to carry it. If the characters finally drop the item, write down their current penalty. If they ever reclaim the item, they suffer its effects starting with the penalty they've already accrued.

Limited Use: The item can be activated only once a month or even once a year, forcing the characters to use it only when absolutely necessary. Alternatively, the item has a limited number of uses. Each time the characters activate it, the item consumes one of its few remaining charges. When it has no charges left, it turns to dust. Assign the item a number of charges based on how many times you want the characters to use it. While this option doesn't inflict a penalty, it's probably the most effective way to remove the item from the game once it has served its purpose.

LONG-TERM USE DRAWBACKS

For items that you want the party to use for a long time, the costs are lower and tend to build up slowly. In any case, the characters should rarely use an item for more than one or two adventures unless it's important to the plot. A magic item should serve as a useful tool but never a replacement for a character's abilities. As a general rule, items meant for long-term use should suffer the drawbacks listed above for short-term use items, but with lesser penalties.

In some cases, an item's drawbacks take time to build up. A magic ring might grant its wearer fantastic strength, but after a month, it begins to drain her intellect. This allows the characters to make use of an item that's important to the current adventure while discouraging long-term dependence.

Ability Score Loss: This item inflicts its damage once every two or three days, and it doesn't begin to heal until the character goes without using the item for a week.

Corrupting Influence: For an item with potential for long-term use, corruption points accrue at the rate of 1 per week. In addition, a character need not make Charisma checks before encounters until she has built up 10 corrup-

tion points or a total equal to half her Charisma, whichever is lower.

Curse: Start this drawback off at a lower total penalty and slowly increase it, perhaps by 1 point every three days or every week.

Limited Use: This is the easiest drawback to scale. You can simply grant the item more uses if the party needs it over a longer period of time.

SAMPLE WONDROUS ITEMS

You can use the following items as treasures or plot devices for your campaign. In addition, they make useful models for designing your own items.

Wondrous items should be unique. No arcane factories churn them out by the hundreds. Instead, each item represents years of research, an intense investment of magical power, and endless nights of toil. A single wondrous item might take four or five years to produce, and many of these objects are relics from ancient civilizations or noteworthy items with long, storied histories. Finding a wondrous item should be an important part of a campaign.

Likewise, selling a wondrous item is no easy task. Once word spreads that the party has a genuine and unique magic item for sale, thieves might seek to liberate it from them. The king's agents might investigate and seize the item if they feel it's too powerful to fall into the wrong hands, while others who seek the item descend upon the party like a pack of wolves.

If the PCs do manage to sell the item and it turns out to have a debilitating drawback, the buyers might come after the characters for revenge. In any case, set a price that makes sense for your campaign. If the characters uncover a magic item, it should set the stage for action and adventure. In *Iron Heroes*, such items are not easy to cash in for fabulous wealth.

Banner of the Red God: Crafted from silk, this red, 4-foot-long banner is trimmed with yellow. It features no symbols, devices, or other signs. When touched to the body of a humanoid creature killed by a violent act within the past minute, its true power manifests.

Ability: When touched to a recently killed humanoid, the banner glows with a bright crimson light. The spectral image of a red, humanoid-shaped figure—the Red God—appears before the banner's carrier. The image speaks to the bearer via telepathy and agrees to answer a single question. The Red God's answer is no more than 20 words total, and it's usually cryptic and strange. However, the message always contains the truth, even if it is shrouded in symbols.

The banner's power can be activated once per day.

Research DC: 25, extended check 3 successes, Knowledge (religion).

Drawback: Each time a character contacts the Red God, she must make a Will save (DC 20 + 5 for each previous attempt to commune with this strange deity). On a failed save, the character begins to make a small (10 gp or less) sacrifice to the Red God each day and paints a series of

strange runes on her face in red. She also must make another Will save (DC 25) each day or attempt to use the banner again, resorting to violence if others try to stop her. Upon this second use, the character immediately converts to worship of the Red God and becomes a fanatical high priest (and NPC) in his service. If the victim goes for one week without touching the banner, she returns to normal.

The Red God bids his followers to commit murders as sacrifices in his name. In particular, he favors the rich and powerful and offers his devotees absolute knowledge of the world. Some sages believe that the Red God is a powerful demon who, if offered enough souls, can win its freedom from whatever strange prison holds it.

Design Notes: The banner makes a good element for an adventure. Perhaps the characters must slip into the secret lair of a Red God cult, use the banner to learn an important clue, and escape. If one of the characters or a trusted NPC falls under the item's spell, the others must fight to save their friend. Obviously, the party should use this item only a few times at most.

Cloak of the Dead: This horrid cloak is crafted from cured human skin and knitted with hair from sacrificial victims. Anyone who dons the cloak feels a strange chill run through her body. It has two abilities: "master of the dead" and "denizens of the grave."

Ability (Master of the Dead): The cloak grants its wearer the ability to command the undead. As a standard action once per round, you can attempt to force undead creatures with a total of 20 or fewer Hit Dice to obey you. The targets must be within 60 feet of you, but once you establish control, the effect has no range limit. The targets of this ability must make Will saves (DC 25) or fall under your power. They obey your commands without hesitation, though you must have some way to deliver your commands to them. Undead creatures that lack Intelligence scores don't receive a saving throw against this ability.

Affected undead fall under your power for 24 hours. After that time, they may attempt another save to resist the effects. Until this save succeeds, they must obey your commands.

Research DC (Master of the Dead): 20.

Drawback (Master of the Dead): The cloak drains your life essence to power this ability. If you are a living creature, you must make a Fortitude save each day with a Difficulty Class equal to twice the total number of Hit Dice of undead you control. If this save fails, you suffer 2 points of temporary Charisma damage. If your Charisma drops to zero because of this damage, you become an undead creature (and NPC) under the DM's control. Your creature type becomes undead, you use d12s for your Hit Dice, and you lose your Constitution score, but your Charisma score returns to its normal value.

Ability (Denizens of the Grave): Once per day, you can summon a total of 15 Hit Dice worth of undead. These creatures appear within 100 feet of you and obey your verbal commands. You can spread this ability out over multiple uses. For example, you could summon 5 Hit Dice of undead during the morning, 7 Hit Dice in the afternoon, and the final 3 Hit Dice at night. A summoned undead creature serves you for one hour before disappearing or until it is destroyed, whichever comes first.

Research DC (Denizens of the Grave): 25, extended check 3 successes.

Drawback (Denizens of the Grave): Each time you summon undead with this power, you suffer 1 point of temporary Charisma damage as described under the drawback for the "master of the dead" ability, above. There is no saving throw against this damage, though nonliving creatures are immune to it.

Design Notes: The drawbacks for this item have a terrible effect on player characters, but an undead NPC is immune to them. This technique shows how you can create a magic item to bolster an NPC's abilities without worrying about it falling into the player characters' hands.

The Lamp of Zarthaleez: This brass lantern is covered with a variety of strange sigils in a whirling, elegant pattern. It's warm to the touch, and in areas of darkness, the markings upon it glow with a faint silver radiance, enough to shed illumination in a 10-foot radius.

Ability: If a vial of human blood is poured into the lantern, a ghostly blue flame ignites within it. This flame casts pale, cool light in a 60-foot radius. Within this area, incorporeal creatures and objects lose the benefits of that ability. They become solid and can interact with objects as normal. As soon as such a creature moves beyond the lamp's area of effect, it returns to the incorporeal state. Any solid objects it carries remain solid and interact with the incorporeal creature as normal for that ability. A single vial of blood provides enough fuel to activate the lamp for one hour.

The lamp can function in this manner for a total of 12 hours before the energies that sustain it collapse. When the lamp enters an inert state, its runes no longer glow in darkness.

Research DC: 25, extended check 5 successes, Knowledge (arcana).

Drawback: Corporeal creatures other than undead, elementals, fey, and outsiders suffer a strange effect if they stand within the lamp's radius while it is active. They see strange, horrid monsters that press and grind against the fabric of reality as they attempt to enter the physical world. For each round a creature remains in the lamp's radius, it must make a Will save (DC 25) at the start of its action. If this save fails, the creature suffers 1 point of temporary Wisdom damage.

Design Notes: The lamp inflicts its penalty when the characters use it. This is a good way to balance an item that you expect the party to use over the course of several adventures. It allows them to overcome an opponent while creating new problems that they must deal with.

Map of the Awakened Eye: This magic item is a battered piece of parchment roughly 1 foot in length along each side. A few bloodstains mar its yellowed, wrinkled surface. Legend has it that the map shows the location of rich treasures, nearby enemies, and other features. It has passed through the hands of many users, though each owner has disappeared within a year of acquiring the map. Somehow, the map continues to turn up in the hands of merchants, treasure hunters, and peddlers.

Ability: When three drops of blood are spilled upon the parchment, it displays a map of the surrounding area including secret passages, creatures, traps, and other notable features. The map provides a snapshot in time. It doesn't show a creature's movements, but it does reveal invisible or hidden objects. The map can be used in this manner once per day.

Research DC: 20.

Drawback: The map displayed by this item is not always reliable. There is a cumulative 5 percent chance per use that it fails to show living creatures, traps, and other items that could prove dangerous to the map's user. The chance of a malfunction drops to 0 percent if the map remains unused for one year.

Rod of the Sands: Crafted from bone of unknown origin, the *rod of the sands* first appeared in the hands of a prophet from a great, fiery desert. He used it to gather a small sect of followers to his side, then led them into the desert on an enigmatic quest. Years passed without word from the prophet, and eventually the rod resurfaced when a band of adventurers uncovered it in the dungeons beneath a desert pyramid. The rod has two abilities, "arouse the faithful" and "eyes of the desert," and one drawback that covers them both.

Ability (Arouse the Faithful): The *rod of the sands* grants its bearer a +4 bonus on all Diplomacy and Bluff checks. Its magic makes her more persuasive and personable than normal. This ability has no research Difficulty Class; the rod's user automatically gains it while she carries the item.

Ability (Eyes of the Desert): By dipping the rod in a jug of water and driving its wet end into the desert sand, the user can determine the relative direction and distance to the nearest burial tomb of the ancient Kyrsofar city-states of the desert. Once, the city-states were the greatest human civilization in the world. Now, all that's left of them are demon-haunted ruins and towering, black granite pyramids that house their restless dead.

Research DC (Eyes of the Desert): 15.

Drawback: The rod contains the personality seed of an ancient Kyrsofaran functionary. Once per week, the rod attempts to seize control of its user. The user must make a Will save (DC 10 + 2 for each previous save attempted). On a failed save, the user believes that she is the prophet of a deity known as the Slumbering God. She gathers followers to her side and leads them on a pilgrimage to an ancient desert pyramid. In truth, this is an elaborate trap. The functionary's master, an ancient vampire, poses as the Slumbering God. One by one, he devours those duped into seeking to worship him.

Staff of Osseus: One end of this wooden quarterstaff is set with the mummified, grasping claw of a demonic creature. The most cherished possession of the god-wizard Osseus, the staff is said to have been the source of his power. According to legend, while it lent him strength, it also brought about his doom.

Ability: The staff is a natural conduit for magical energy. Spells channeled with its assistance achieve their desired form more often than usual. When you cast a spell while holding the staff, you gain a +5 bonus on all channeling checks.

Research DC: 30, extended check 2 successes, Knowledge (arcana) or Spellcraft.

Drawback: Each time you gain the benefits of the +5 bonus, there is a cumulative 1 percent chance that the staff draws the attention of its creator, a demon lord named Londroniun. If this occurs, the fiend seeks the staff's owner, as the item was stolen from the demon centuries ago by a planar traveler.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CAMPAIGN OPTIONS

Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes spends little time detailing the game's setting. It describes a sample location known as the Swordlands in brief, but the book focuses simply on using the rules to create a unique feel and tone for fantasy adventure. Action and adventure drive the game, but the venue for them is largely up to the DM.

This chapter provides several ideas for alternate rules that you can use to further customize *Iron Heroes* to produce the campaign world, adventures, and action that you want to see in your game.

Tokens gained from certain class abilities (as described in Chapter Three of *Iron Heroes*) reward characters for embracing their classes' core competency in battle. Think of them as a tactical reward for the players. This chapter looks at strategic rewards, or rules that allow you to provide incentives for broader, more long-term actions and plans. They're built on the same basic principle as the tokens. Characters receive a reward for behaving in a manner in keeping with the tone, intent, and focus of the campaign. With these options, you can provide tangible, readily apparent differences between each campaign. If you run a game where the characters are holy warriors on a quest to slay a demigod, you can create rules that enforce the feel of a crusade and give a mechanical bite to that theme. Later, you could run a game where the characters are treasure hunters and use a different set of rules to enforce the change in goals, tone, and feel.

This chapter shows you how to institute such changes with relatively simple alterations to the rules. Even if you don't find specific rules here for the exact campaign you want to run, the models give you examples and ideas that should make it possible to adapt them to a broad variety of campaigns.

ALTERNATE EXPERIENCE SYSTEMS

One consistent theme in roleplaying game design holds that players will willingly take actions or follow certain behaviors in return for a reward in the game. In many ways, *Iron Heroes* embraces this concept. The token pools give a big edge in a fight to characters who take the actions needed to fill their pools. A berserker who charges into a mob of opponents racks up far more fury tokens than one who hovers at the rear of a battle. This concept of rewarding choices underlies many of the *Iron Heroes* mechanics, particularly those designed to spur the players to action.

The alternate experience systems in this section also embrace this concept. The idea behind them is simple. If you reward the characters with experience points (XP) for a certain range of actions, they'll pursue those actions over other choices. You can therefore pick out a set of options or expected goals for your campaign and tie them to XP rewards.

The easiest way to understand this concept is to read the example systems given below. They provide commentary on why you would use them in addition to the mechanics behind them.

FLAWED HEROES

The characters make the game, and in this alternate system, they receive experience points for getting themselves into trouble in a way that's consistent with their personalities.

Concept: In fantasy novels, comic books, and adventure fiction, the main characters sometimes have flaws that work against them. The dashing thief can't resist an alluring woman, even if she's actually a demon in disguise. The barbarian warrior from the north is too greedy to let a great treasure go, even when a terrible monster guards it. An impetuous knight refuses to allow an insult to pass, even when discretion might be the better choice.

Game Mechanics: Each character has one flaw, such as greedy, head-strong, reckless, or lustful. Whenever a situation comes up where that flaw might come into play, the character must either willingly play it out the trait or try to resist it.

If the character willingly plays out his flaw, he receives double the XP for any encounter or reward earned because of that flaw. As a rule of thumb, this bonus applies only to an encounter that is immediately tied to the event that triggers his flaw.

If he tries to resist playing out the flaw, he must make a Will save (DC 10 + his character level). Failure means he has to play out the flaw to its natural consequences. Whether this save succeeds or fails, he earns only the normal amount of XP for the situation. Note that this Difficulty Class scales with character level to keep the save as an important obstacle at all levels and to show that the character must struggle against his own nature, not some external force.

Otherwise, award XP as normal for whatever set of rules you decide to use.

Effects: This alternate system emphasizes playing the game true to each character's role rather than making the most tactically astute choice. However, it has some drawbacks.

First of all, you and your players must be on the same page when it comes to determining how a character's flaws function in the game. Flaws are not an excuse for the DM to ruthlessly take advantage of the adventurers. On the other hand, the flaws must place the characters in danger for them to have a real effect on the game. Flaws should play a role in the adventure, but they shouldn't demarcate the line between success and defeat.

More importantly, every player's flaw should receive equal attention. Since some characters will receive bonus experience points for an encounter that draws on their flaws, the game could develop a gap between characters whose flaws play a role in the action and those whose shortcomings remain on the sidelines. Again, this requires careful adjudication by the DM. If you appear to favor one character over the others, the players may feel slighted.

Tweaks: If you and your players feel comfortable allocating a significant portion of experience point awards to the DM's judgment, the whole group can have a lot of fun with this variant rule. You can expand the bonus XP awards to include almost any sort of trait that you feel is important to the game, from a character's motivation to the defining qualities of a hero. The idea behind this rule is that the players are supposed to roleplay and use their characters' personalities as filters for the decisions they make. When the players make decisions that are not the best tactical ideas, but that are in keeping with their characters, you reward them with extra XP for the encounter.

GOAL-DRIVEN EXPERIENCE

One of *Iron Heroes'* strengths is that it requires less long-term recordkeeping than some games. You have to keep track of tokens during combat, but in most cases, you build them up and spend them quickly. Experience point totals require rather extensive bookkeeping and computations, particularly for the DM. You can streamline this process by tying level advancement to achieving specific goals that are important to the campaign or the ongoing story.

Concept: The characters gain in skill only when they face a challenge that pushes their abilities beyond their limits. A warrior doesn't steadily improve as the result of each separate battle. Rather, the sum total of an adventure gives him the insight and experience needed to improve.

Game Mechanics: Rather than award individual dollops of XP, you simply grant the party members an added level of experience once they've accomplished a specific goal. For example, if the characters are a gang of thieves in a sprawling city, they may gain a level for successfully raiding a heavily guarded villa. A band of heroic warriors could gain a level for leading a blind old prophet through dangerous territory to a distant shrine.

This system cuts down on "experience packing," or the process of adding in a number of minor battles solely to give the party a level boost before facing a specific challenge. It also gives you absolute control over when the characters gain levels, making it easier to plan encounters since you have a clear idea of the characters' levels after an adventure.

Effects: This system works best if your players are more interested in exploring the world, facing their enemies, and coming out on top rather than improving their characters. It also requires a degree of trust. If the players think that a challenge you set before them is too tough for their level, they may feel that you're abusing your control over the flow of level advancements. In contrast, the standard experience system ensures that the players get a fair portion of XP based on the difficulties they overcome. If you want to use this alternative, be aware that some players may think it puts too much power in your hands.

As with many issues in gaming, communication is the key. If cutting down on recordkeeping sounds appealing to you, be sure to talk this rule over with the players. It also helps to give them clear conditions for gaining levels. If they must defeat the ogre king to gain a level, tell them that. It can serve as a useful reason for them to dive into the story or scenario you created.

On the other hand, if they'd rather pursue a different course of action, listen to their preferences. This alternate rule gives you the power to railroad the characters into whatever plot you have in mind, because you can drive the story with promises of XP. Some players don't mind that level of DM control, but others may resent it.

Note: This system is incompatible with any rules that allow the characters to spend XP for special benefits, since they no longer keep an exact running total of accumulated experience points.

Tweaks: If you like the idea of tying XP awards to story elements but think this system goes too far, you can add XP kicks to certain encounters. For example, the ogre king might be an important villain in your campaign. He's a CR 9 foe, but due to his importance in the game, you award experience points for defeating a CR 11 creature when the characters overcome him. This solves the problem of having to add fights to the game simply to give the party enough experience points to level up. Again, keep the players' preferences in mind when you make this change. Some of them might feel like it's cheating to gain bonus XP in this manner—they'd prefer to earn their rewards the hard way. Other players place less emphasis on leveling up as long as the game is interesting and challenging.

Gold, Greed, and Fortune

This alternate XP system stems from the idea that money makes the world go around. The characters earn experience points based on the treasure they find and spend.

Concept: The characters are thieves, mercenaries, and treasure hunters. They desire the rich, comfortable life that a fortune in gold coins or a bejeweled idol can buy them. As risk-taking adventurers, they're willing to do whatever is required for fame and wealth. By the same token, they have great appetites for the comforts in life. After a successful adventure, they're likely to pour their money into a brief but legendary spree of fine clothes, expensive drinks, wondrous accommodations, and stunning bed partners. Once the coins are gone, they gather their equipment, ready their weapons and armor, and embark on a new quest for wealth.

Game Mechanics: Characters gain 1 XP for each gold piece spent on wine, women (or men), and song. In essence, they gain experience points for money they spend on something other than game-mechanics benefits for their characters. However, the gold must be well and truly spent. A character can't merely lend gold to an ally, gain the XP, and then ask for the money back.

Effects: This change has several critical effects on the game. First, it makes combat almost purely optional. Slaying a monster doesn't improve your abilities unless you manage to uncover a great treasure as a result of your victory. Second, it makes finding rich treasures far more important than in the standard *Iron Heroes* game. The characters are much more likely to pursue options that appear the most financially profitable. This is a great choice for games that emphasize planning, deceit, raids on evil temples, and mad dashes for rare, fabulous treasures.

If you're a fan of classic sword and sorcery, this rule helps enforce the idea of the characters as soldiers of fortune who are looking for the next great opportunity for debauchery. You can also have a lot of fun playing out the repercussions of the characters' partying lifestyle. Perhaps the adventurers sign up for a dangerous task while they're befuddled with drink. For example, after a few cups of ale, they might agree to break into the local temple of the Spider God and steal the ceremonial hood of the high priestess. If you like bar brawls, this XP model guarantees you plenty of chances to run them. Bone up on the rules for zones!

Tweaks: You can add new layers to the game with a few subtle changes to this rule.

Classic Play: In this change, treasure is important but so is defeating terrible monsters. Award half the normal XP for defeating creatures and 1 XP for every 2 gp spent as described above. This mix emphasizes treasure and monster slaying, making it great for classic dungeon explorations. From 5th level onward, award full XP for monsters slain so that you don't have to award the players tens of thousands of gold pieces to keep their level progression reasonable.

Honor Among Thieves: If you want to run a game where the characters don't completely trust one another, award double

the XP for gold spent that was recovered without the other characters' knowledge or that was stolen from another party member. This is an excellent option for games that feature the thief class in a prominent role or campaigns where you expect the players to plot against one another.

METAGAME MECHANICS

Metagame mechanics are rules that exist outside of the events depicted within the game. They're tools that players, rather than characters, possess that can alter the game. Action points or hero points are a classic example of metagame mechanics. Players decide to spend action or hero points to grant a bonus to their characters' attacks or skill checks.

Many game mechanics have a direct analog in the reality of the game. For example, characters in a roleplaying game world don't talk about their current level, but level does measure a tangible element—a warrior's skill, an arcanist's talent for magic, and so on. Metagame mechanics often lack that sort of analog. They usually exist solely within the context of the game mechanics, rather than within the context of the game setting.

Most metagame mechanics either emphasize a certain style of play by rewarding specific actions or give the players a tool to avoid the vagaries of luck.

GLORY POINTS

A berserker charges a dragon, heedless of the terrible wyrm's fiery breath. A heroic weapon master stands at the city gate, ready to give his life against an endless horde of monsters to buy the critical seconds needed to evacuate the elderly and the children. An executioner readies for her last mission, knowing that even if she slays the wizard lord, she will die in the attempt. These characters don't fight for money, riches, or personal acclaim. They do battle with the forces of darkness because it's the right thing to do.

Glory points are a metagame mechanic that you can use to encourage heroic sacrifice, brave acts in the face of unbeatable odds, and gallantry in the face of evil. They reward characters who take risky actions for the good of others, making them an excellent addition to any game that concentrates on heroism in the face of overwhelming opposition.

Concept: Glory points support the concept of the characters as heroes, defenders of the realm who stand between civilization and the forces that would destroy it. The heroes may not be nice, pleasant, or charitable, but when everything's on the line, you can count on them to do whatever it takes to defeat evil. Characters gain glory points through actions such as:

- Attacking a powerful monster that threatens a small village.
- Standing and fighting a mighty foe even when escape is an easy option.
- Wading into the midst of the enemy to help an ally.
- Dying to save a comrade.

As a character gains glory points, he can spend them for the following benefits:

- A bonus on an attack, skill check, or saving throw.
- Bonus tokens for his various pools.
- A chance to remove deadly effects or counter spells that target him.
- The ability to return from the gates of Valhalla to aid his comrades.

The last point may not apply to a campaign where the afterlife is strange, mysterious, and unknowable, but it demonstrates the sorts of things that are possible with these rules.

Game Mechanics: The mechanics behind glory points are relatively simple. When you complete a heroic act, the DM

tells you how many glory points you earn. You can then spend the points as you wish, as detailed below.

Awarding Points: You can earn between 1 and 5 glory points for a single act or a sequence of acts. Whether you earn points is solely up to the DM. He judges your actions and, if he thinks they fit the heroic mold, awards points. The DM follows some basic guidelines to determine how many points to hand out. Note that the 10-point action, giving your life for your allies, applies only if your DM uses the optional rules for Valhalla, given below.

Points Awarded	Action
1	Risk serious injury to aid a friend or innocent in danger.
3	Rescue a friend or innocent while putting yourself in dire peril.
5	Drop below 0 hit points in the act of saving another.
10	Die so that another may live.

In addition, you can earn glory points for heroic actions, stunts, and maneuvers that require you to risk your life to complete them. For example, leaping across a bottomless pit to prevent a dreaded sorcerer from escaping with a magic artifact should earn you glory points. The key consideration for such actions is that you choose to risk your life to accomplish a deed, particularly when a safer option—though perhaps one without potential for a great victory—is available.

Spending Glory Points: At any time, you can spend a glory point to gain a bonus on any attack, skill check, ability check, or saving throw. You can spend 1 point per roll. If you decide to spend the point before rolling, add 1d10 to the result. If you decide to spend the point after rolling, add 1d6 to the result. In other words, if you wait to see whether your attack hit or your check succeeded before deciding to spend a glory point, your maximum bonus will be smaller.

You also can spend glory points to remove conditions and effects from your character. When you spend the points, you stop suffering from the effect. However, any damage it has already inflicted upon you remains. For example, if you fail your saving throw against a giant snake's poison, you suffer the initial ability score damage as normal. You then can spend glory points to remove the poison. The initial damage remains, but you don't suffer the poison's secondary effects.

Condition/Effect	Points to Remove
Disease	2
Poison	2
Paralysis	4
Fear effect	6
Mind-affecting effect	8
Death	10

There is one exception to this rule: You can spend 10 glory points to try to avoid death. In this case, you gain one of the following benefits (your choice):

- If you suffered hit point damage from an attack (as opposed to a spell) that killed you, the killing blow automatically misses instead.
- If you fell victim to an effect that allowed a saving throw, your save automatically succeeds instead. Note that you still might die if the reduced damage is high enough.

The Gates of Valhalla: Many fantasy settings provide a cosmology that, in part, explains what happens to a creature's soul when it dies. Some settings have multiple planes of existence, many of which are occupied by a variety of gods. Others have simpler systems. In either case, one or more planes serve as the home of the dead. When a hero dies, his soul journeys to another plane, where he rests with his forefathers.

The Gates of Valhalla rule builds on this concept. This optional rule allows a slain hero to continue to aid his companions from beyond the veil of death. Perhaps he watches their actions from the heavens, or he waits with his weapons and armor ready for one last chance for glory. When his friends need his aid, he departs the land of the dead to battle beside them one final time.

Under this rule variant, you keep track of the total number of glory points you earn while alive. Even as you spend points, keep a log of how many you accumulated over the course of your career. If and when you fall, that total determines your standing in the afterlife. If you've earned more than 50 total glory points when your character dies, you enter Valhalla (or its equivalent in the campaign world) and are lauded as a great hero. Your ancestors greet you with open arms, and you earn a place of honor at the great feast of heroes in the heavens. More importantly, your fame, prowess, and bravery earn you the right to aid your allies from beyond the grave.

Your current number of glory points becomes equal to the total number of glory points you earned in life. For example, if your character accumulated 78 glory points during his career but has only 12 points when he dies, he enters the afterlife with 78 points.

You can spend these glory points to aid the other players' characters and whatever new character you create for the game. Even though you have fallen, your comrades continue to battle your enemies. They need your aid, and even death cannot stop you from helping them.

The various benefits you can purchase with your points are summarized below. Once your glory point total drops to zero, you draw away from the world. Your work is done, and you leave mortals to their own fates. You can't earn more glory points once you have entered the afterlife.

Point Cost	Benefit
4 points per +1	Provide a bonus on one attack, check, or save
6 points per 1d8	Heal points of damage
4 points per +1	Provide a bonus to defense for 1 round
All points/special	Pierce the mortal veil

For example, you can spend 4 glory points to provide a +1 bonus on a character's attack, 8 glory points to provide a +2 bonus, and so on. You can spend 6 glory points to heal 1d8 points of damage dealt to a character, 12 glory points to heal 2d8 points of damage, and so on.

The benefits you provide apply to one of the current characters in the game or their allies. You can spend these points once per round at any point in time. You apply the effects immediately. For example, you could spend points to heal a character immediately before a foe attacks him.

The "pierce the mortal veil" option allows you to return to life for one final battle. You can use this option only once, after which your glory point total immediately drops to zero. You enter the mortal world cloaked in divine energy. You appear within 10 feet of any of your allies and may act as normal for a number of rounds equal to 10 + your Charisma modifier. You are equipped with the following items:

- One melee weapon of your choice
- One suit of armor of your choice
- One shield of your choice
- One ranged weapon of your choice
- 40 projectiles of your choice for the ranged weapon (such as arrows, slings, and so on). If you wish, you can have four throwing weapons of your choice instead of the ranged weapon and its projectiles.

None of this equipment has any magical or special abilities.

You have full hit points and the full spread of abilities, feats, skills, and so on that you had when you died. You stand alongside your allies for one last battle, appearing in their hour of need to strike a grievous blow against their enemies. At the end of the duration, you and your equipment return to the realm of the dead permanently. (Note that if you lose enough hit points during the battle, you can be "killed" as normal, which means you return to Valhalla immediately.)

This is an optional rule meant to soften the blow of a character's demise. In *Iron Heroes*, death is final. There are no spells that can return the dead to life, but this option allows a beloved character the chance to play a role in the game even after he is gone.

Glory Point Variants

The glory point rules are meant to encourage heroism, self-sacrifice, and other noble acts. Like the experience point rules given earlier in this chapter, you can modify them to reward other actions depending on the flavor and tone of your campaign. For example, heroic actions might not be appropriate for a campaign set in a gritty, crime-ridden fantasy city. In such a game, you might reward characters who betray their allies, risk their lives for a fabulous treasure, or accept daring missions purely for monetary gain.

Making this change is relatively easy—simply award glory points for different criteria. This section covers a few basic variants for different types of games.

Skill at Arms: The characters earn glory points for defeating powerful enemies, as shown on the table below. In this variant, the characters must demonstrate their ability by meeting certain benchmarks that prove their mastery. They can gain each reward once per encounter, and they can't receive more than one reward for a single action.

For example, if a character defeats a creature with more than triple his Hit Dice, he receives 4 glory points. He does not also receive the reward for defeating a foe with more than double his Hit Dice. In other words, if an act fulfills multiple rewards, the character receives only the highest reward for it. However, he can receive more than one reward for a single encounter. If he defeats two monsters, one with more than double his Hit Dice and the other with more than triple his Hit Dice, he receives 5 glory points total.

All members of the party earn the same number of glory points for the encounter. The DM doesn't award points and then divide by the number of characters. So if the whole group battles a monster together but one adventurer lands the killing blow, each character still gets the same number of points.

This variant works especially well with variant XP rules that place less emphasis on combat. With this glory point variation, the characters still receive a tangible reward for defeating their enemies. It keeps combat important while focusing on another method for gaining levels.

Points Earned	Action
1	Defeat a foe with more than double your Hit Dice.
1	Defeat two foes in 1 round.
1	Land a single attack that inflicts 20 or more points of damage.
2	Defeat five foes in 1 round.
3	Slay a foe with more Hit Dice than you in single combat.
4	Defeat a foe with more than triple your Hit Dice.
5	Defeat a foe with more than double your Hit Dice in single combat.

Story Awards: This variant rewards the characters based on the emotional importance of an act. Glory points represent the confidence and determination that help drive the characters. As they overcome important goals they set for themselves, they gain the resolve needed to do their best in a time of dire need.

To work properly, these rules require some input from the players. Each character has one goal or cause that he fights for. When he progresses toward that goal or defends his cause, he gains glory points. The goal can be short term or long term, and when a PC achieves a goal, he should pick a new one.

The goals selected by the characters answer the basic question, "Why do you adventure, battle enemies, and risk your life?" The goals in this system derive from a character's motivation for adventuring.

This system requires a tremendous amount of DM judgment, as you must measure how each action or event in the game helps the characters achieve their goals. You should award the PCs 1 to 5 glory points at the end of each session to reflect their actions. In addition, you can give a one-time award during a session if a character makes a decision that allows him to progress toward his goal, particularly if the choice requires a risk or sacrifice on his part.

The number of glory points awarded should be in line with the progress made and the dangers suffered to make it. Keep in mind that the players may feel slighted if you consistently reward one character over others. Try to arrange events so that everyone's goals come into play during each session. If you can't pull that off, talk it over with the players. Be sure never to leave anyone out of the action for long and to rotate attention from character to character.

This system is best suited for campaigns in which you expect the characters to have their own plots and stories that run concurrent with the game's primary events. It's also useful in encouraging the players to create backgrounds, story ideas, and depth for their characters.

Tactical Entertainment

This metagame model is designed to reward players who get into the spirit of *Iron Heroes* and spice up combat with fun descriptions, stunts, and other actions. These rewards can come into play if someone uses an action zone, describes an otherwise normal attack in a cool way, completes a wild stunt that impresses everyone at the gaming table, and so on.

Concept: This variant emphasizes fast-paced action and cinematic combat. It can be a lot of fun for creative groups, since it rewards efforts to come up with interesting actions in even the simplest battles. On the other hand, these rules reward a player's actions and creativity rather than his character's abilities. Some players freeze when asked to come up with wild, crazy ideas on the fly. Some might feel that they're being forced to compete with other players who have more experience at this sort of thing or who are naturally better at coming up with details at a moment's notice. Use this variant only if the whole group feels comfortable with it.

In addition, be considerate of the players. If you use these rules, give them extra time to come up with cool ideas. Allow the players to help each other think of ideas, and reward everyone at the table. Don't be afraid to step in with ideas of your own. Many players are intimidated by the creativity demanded by stunts and exciting descriptions, but with practice, they soon feel comfortable with it.

Finally, try to judge everyone fairly. Since the DM determines whether a player's description is good enough for a reward, you might cause hard feelings if you consistently rule against a few players or are too hard to please. The object of the game is to have fun, and this variant moves away from hard and fast rules and toward increasing a DM's control over the action. Some players feel uncomfortable placing that much power in the DM's hands, so be sure to treat them all equally.

Game Mechanics: Whenever a character attempts an attack or stunt, makes a skill or ability check, or uses an action zone, he gains a +2 bonus on the relevant d20 roll if his player provides an interesting, fun, or entertaining description of the attempt. This description should make the game fun for everyone by adding more color and detail to the action. The DM determines whether the description warrants the bonus. A character can gain this bonus only once per action.

Effects: This change works best if you like to run long, cinematic fights where the visuals are just as important as the tactical considerations. The rule makes it easy for the players to gain a key advantage over their enemies, especially in the case of opposed checks. Expect the characters to have an easier time with many encounters, particularly if the players consistently come up with entertaining descriptions. This option works well for experienced players who are comfortable with the idea, but it definitely isn't for everyone.

In addition, villains and monsters should have full access to entertainment rewards, based on how well you as the DM describe their actions. In this case, allow the players to judge if the description you created is worth a bonus. If you're not sure you can trust the players to make this decision impartially, the entire model is probably a poor idea for your group.

The entertainment model fits perfectly with freeform, cinematic, over-the-top games that make reality take a back seat to action. In most cases, it works best for short campaigns or single-session adventures rather than sober, dramatic, long-term campaigns. However, if you like the model, you can make it work for a long game.

COMBINING METAGAME RULES AND ALTERNATE EXPERIENCE AWARDS

As with the variant rules for experience, metagame mechanics allow you to alter the game to emphasize certain styles of play, types of actions, or facets of the game world. In many ways, the two types of rules cover the same ground. If you want to use both of them in one game, first consider the role that each one plays.

Experience awards are good for games that place a greater emphasis on gritty action and games where the characters

aren't necessarily any better than other adventurers. For games that adhere to the core *Iron Heroes* rules and level of balance, use the alternate experience rules to encourage particular types of actions.

Metagame mechanics let the players dodge bad luck or erase a harmful event. They're somewhat arbitrary and tend to swing the balance of power toward the PCs. If you want a game that stresses heroism and success against long odds, metagame mechanics are a good choice.

You can use a metagame rule and alternate experience awards at the same time, but doing so requires special considerations. If both sets of mechanics reward the same actions, the characters might accumulate too much power too quickly, especially when compared to other characters who don't rigorously fill the requirements needed to gain those benefits. This arrangement can work, but keep in mind that it gives double the reward (such as bonus XP or glory points) for one action. If some players aren't committed to running their characters in a manner that's consistent with the game's tone, you might end up with a few characters who lag behind the group. This might become a problem with either set of rules, but it's more troublesome if you use both variants at the same time.

Alternatively, you can use metagame mechanics to reward one type of action and bonus XP to reward a different action.

You can make this distinction by tying the mechanics to the campaign setting. For example, glory point rewards might be divine in nature. The gods watch the characters' actions and reward their heroism. Experience point awards, on the other hand, represent self-confidence, insights, and accomplishments. The divide between the two rewards can help draw the line between the characters' actions, goals, and motivations. Some characters may strive to earn the gods' favor, while others seek to improve their talents on their own.

To create a serious divide between the two types of mechanics, you can use them to reward opposed actions. Characters might earn bonus XP for stealing from each other or escaping encounters unharmed, but they earn glory points by risking their lives for others. This sort of arrangement separates the two paths for characters—in this case, greed and charity. It might cause some trouble for party unity, but it can also provide fodder for good roleplaying. The greedy thief might decide to grab the treasure and run, while his companions must battle the monster that guards it.

As with any alteration to the core rules or any rule that requires DM judgment, be sure to talk your ideas over with the players. Good communication helps put everyone on the same page and clears up any misunderstandings before they can cause problems.

APPENDIX:

IMPORTING GAME MATERIAL

One of the advantages of open game material is that you can transfer it from one game system to another relatively easily. However, you still need to make some changes before certain material is ready for your Iron Heroes *game.*

This appendix looks at various types of rules you might want to add to *Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes* and gives advice for converting them to this game. In addition, it offers ideas for using other game material in ways that you may not have considered before.

CLASSES

The key characteristic of *Iron Heroes* is that it drops magic items as an important measure of a character's power. Some other fantasy games do this, too, but *Iron Heroes* also keeps everything balanced against the core monster books. The characters must be balanced against chimeras, dragons, demons, and everything else.

This creates a gap in power between *Iron Heroes* classes and those drawn from other d20 System games. Generally speaking, an *Iron Heroes* character can easily defeat a fantasy character from a different game who doesn't have an appropriate load of magic items. Thus, it's generally a bad idea to shift *Iron Heroes* classes to other games.

Luckily, the reverse is not true. While the warrior-type classes, such as fighter, paladin, ranger, and barbarian, are outmatched by their *Iron Heroes* counterparts, the spellcast-ing classes make excellent additions as villain classes. Clerics, wizards, druids, and sorcerers have the magical firepower needed to pose a threat.

BASIC CHANGES

A character class from another game gains a defense bonus equal to its base attack bonus and replaces its base saves with a save modifier equal to its level. Add all modifiers, such as ability scores, feats, and so on, as normal. In addition, switch the Hit Die of the new class to the *Iron Heroes* equivalent, unless it's an NPC class. Imported classes gain a pool of reserve points and obey all other *Iron Heroes* rules, including the progression of new feats by level, as found in *Iron Heroes*.

Standard Hit Die	*Iron Heroes* Hit Die
1d4	1d4
1d6	1d4+2
1d8	1d4+4
1d10	1d4+6
1d12	1d4+8

IMPORTING SPELLCASTERS

When incorporating a spellcasting class into *Iron Heroes*, you must increase the save DCs of its spells and account for its loss of magic items. Assign the class a defense bonus equal to its base attack bonus. The save Difficulty Class of a spell equals 10 + the minimum caster level needed to use the spell + the relevant ability modifier.

For example, *fireball* is a 3rd-level spell, and a wizard must be 5th level to use it. Thus, the save DC for a wizard's *fireball* is 10 + 5 (the minimum caster level) + the wizard's Intelligence modifier.

In addition, add modifiers for feats as normal. This change is important, as *Iron Heroes* characters have higher saves than other classes do. If you use the standard save DCs, characters of *Iron Heroes* classes can almost ignore spells used by imported spellcasters.

The spellcasting classes work best as villains and powerful NPCs, particularly if they're members of strange, alien races who have a natural affinity for the magical arts. You can also apply them to weaker outsiders and elementals to give them expanded abilities.

TRAITS

Currently, *Iron Heroes* is the only d20 System game to replace the concept of race with traits. Thus, you may not yet find many sources for new traits. However, you can easily add to the trait list by adapting standard d20 feats to become traits from specific regions of your campaign world. In particular, feats that are accessible only at 1st level make great additions as traits. A trait should be about as powerful as a feat.

Weapon-specific feats are a good way to further reinforce the differences between regions in your campaign. Perhaps only one area of the world uses the exotic weapon you've taken from a different sourcebook. You can also use traits to introduce feats or abilities that don't fit into the *Iron Heroes* feat system.

SKILLS

Iron Heroes uses the standard skill system found in most other d20 System games, with some additions (see Chapter Four of *Iron Heroes*). As such, when adding new skills to *Iron Heroes*, check to see how they interact with the rules additions.

The rules for challenges give a generic set of benefits you can add to any skill check. If additional, skill-specific challenges come to mind, be sure to balance them against these standards.

Assigning a new skill to a group is a thornier issue. This step is completely optional, as not every skill must fall into a group. Try to think of two other skills that currently exist in the game and have a natural connection or relationship with the new skill. Look at the groups to which those skills belong. If they share a group, the new skill probably belongs with them. If they're in different groups, assign the new skill to the group that provides the best fit, or assign it to both groups if the new skill is a logical part of both.

FEATS

In most cases, you can add feats directly to the game without any changes. While it may seem inelegant to keep a feat's prerequisites when *Iron Heroes* feats are arranged by mastery rating, it might be difficult to translate the new feats you want to add into expanded mastery levels of existing base feats.

If there are obvious analogs, such as a new feat that uses Power Attack as a prerequisite, make the feat into an expanded mastery ability based on its prerequisites. A feat should have a mastery rating equal to half the minimum level a character normally needs to attain before she can take the feat.

When assigning a feat to a feat category, consider the feat's usage, its general role in the game, and its prerequisites.

Armor: Feats that alter or improve how a character uses a shield or armor belong in this category.

Defense: Feats that grant a bonus to defense belong here, as long as they don't provide a defensive bonus by improving a character's ability to wear armor or carry a shield.

Finesse: Feats that improve a character's attacks and use Dexterity or a Finesse feat as a prerequisite fall into this category. In addition, feats that improve attacks at the cost of damage fit in here.

Lore: Feats that have an Intelligence prerequisite might fall into this category. Consider how the feat works. If it draws on a character's knowledge to grant her a benefit, and particularly if it focuses on scholarly pursuits, it's a good match for this category.

Power: Feats with Strength or Power Attack as a prerequisite fall into this category, as do combat feats that improve damage at the cost of accuracy.

Projectile: Any feat that improves only ranged attacks or that changes how a character uses a missile weapon falls into this category.

Social: Feats that improve a character's social skills fall here. Generally, they require ranks in skills such as Diplomacy, Bluff, and Gather Information. If the feat uses Charisma as a prerequisite, it might fall here, depending on its implementation.

Tactics: Feats that allow characters to improve an ally's fighting ability fall into this category, as do feats that give a bonus for creating a certain tactical situation, such as being flanked.

Some feats are difficult to slide into a single category. You can place a feat in multiple categories, especially if the feat requires a character to select a single weapon that gains its benefits. In this case, the feat could fall into the category most closely linked to the chosen weapon. In other cases, these feats still match best with a single category.

Don't be afraid to designate a feat as a general feat, especially if it has no direct usage in combat. It also helps to talk to the players and see what they think about the feat. If no one wants to take it, it probably isn't worth worrying about. If only one player wants the feat, it might make sense to put it in a category that her character can access, as long as the feat is a good match for that category.

WEAPONS AND ARMOR

When adding weapons to *Iron Heroes*, look at the current list and find an existing weapon that most closely matches the new weapon's form, function, and game statistics. Exotic weapons might be hard to fit into a category, especially if they're truly strange. In this case, look at the feats and think about which ones the weapon's typical user would favor. Based on what seems to make sense, assign the weapon a category and descriptors that match the feats commonly used with it.

Armor is a trickier fit. Basically, *Iron Heroes* has the armor types it needs. Unless money is hard to find, the characters will upgrade quickly to the most expensive armor available in the category (light, medium, or heavy) that they favor. The damage reduction provided by armor is a carefully balanced mechanic. If it rises too high, the game can break down. In most cases, you're better off using the statistics for an existing type of armor to match the new gear you want to add to the game. While this smothers some of the distinct flavor and feel of different kinds of armor, it keeps things simple.

MONTE COOK PRESENTS:
MASTERING IRON HEROES

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PDF Version 1
September 2005

WEB ENHANCEMENT:

BORGNOK'S RAID

A Mastering Iron Heroes free web enhancement by Adam Windsor.

Requires use of Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes, *published by Malhavoc Press.*
Requires use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Third Edition Core Books, *published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*
This book utilizes updated material from the v. 3.5 revision.

BEGINNING THE ENCOUNTER

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The Skullcrag goblins have lived in the mountains west of human lands for decades. The older locals can remember several skirmishes with the Skullcrags back in their younger days, but for the last thirty years or so the goblins have left your people alone.

All that has changed recently, however. A goblin raiding party has been striking at outlying farms, carrying off booty and slaying all who try to resist. The pattern of their attacks suggests that the next place they will strike is the Ramshorn Farm, and the local authorities have dispatched you to protect the Ramshorn family.

It seems you may have arrived too late. As you approach the farm, you catch sight of small, bandy-legged humanoids darting about the place. The high, chittering sound of goblin voices rises as the creatures catch sight of you, and the battle is joined. . . .

Mastering Iron Heroes introduces two important new concepts to your *Iron Heroes* game: zones (areas of the battlefield which have special effects or grant you extra tactical options) and villain classes (which allow you to create quickly versatile enemies for your game).

Borgnok's Raid is a short encounter designed to demonstrate these new game features in action. This web enhancement is intended for a group of four 1st-level *Iron Heroes* characters. Suitable characters should take only a few minutes to generate using the starting packages in Chapter Three of *Iron Heroes*. Characters created for the *Iron Heroes* adventures *Dark Harbor* or *Song of the Blade* also could be used for this encounter.

The map in this adventure was created with *Dundjinni* software. For more information, visit <www.dundjinni.com>.

Feel free to fit this encounter into your home game, or use it as the start of a new *Iron Heroes* campaign. You don't need *Mastering Iron Heroes* to use this web enhancement, but you will find its rules on zones and villain classes helpful as you run *Borgnok's Raid*. Find out more about *Mastering Iron Heroes* at <www.montecook.com/Mastering>.

The layout of this web enhancement begins on page 2. There is no page 1.

THE GOBLIN RAIDERS

The long peace with the humans wears thin the patience of Borgnok, warleader of the Skullcrag tribe. An ambitious goblin, Borgnok desires to become chieftain of the tribe, but he knows that to supplant the current chief he needs the support of most of the tribe's warriors. Thus, taking a handful of his most trusted followers, he has set out on a secret raid of the human lands against his chief's orders. Borgnok believes that if he returns from the raid with bags of looted goods, he will be able to challenge and replace the chief easily.

Unfortunately for Borgnok, making off with bags of looted goods requires that there be goods to loot, and few of the farmers have much of value. His raid has had to go on much longer than he intended, which has given the local authorities time to dispatch the player characters to stop him.

Borgnok; Male warleader; CR 3; Small humanoid; HD 4d8+8; hp 26; Init +5; Speed 30 feet; Defense 17 (+3 base, +1 Dex, +1 size, +2 light wooden shield) (DR 1d2/magic), touch 15, flat-footed 13; Base Attack +3; Grapple +0; Attack/Full Attack +5 melee (1d4+1/19–20; short sword); SQ Bootlicking toadies, dark-vision 60 feet, field commander, tyrannical leader;

SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills: Bluff +7, Diplomacy +9, Hide +5, Intimidate +9, Listen +7, Move Silently +5, Ride +10.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Overwhelming Presence (mastery 1).

Languages: Common, Goblin, Orc.

Possessions: Short sword, leather armor, light wooden shield, 2d6+20 gp, copper urn stolen from the Ramshorn Farm.

As a field commander for a more powerful villain, the war-leader is a warrior who commands the obedience and discipline of his followers through threats, intimidation, and other terror tactics. He makes an excellent opponent for low-level parties and serves as a useful bridge between a villain's flunkies and the actual villain. For more details on this villain class, see *Mastering Iron Heroes*, Chapter Three (page 23).

Warleaders gain abilities that allow them to use their followers to their own advantage. Borgnok has the following such abilities:

Bootlicking Toadies (Ex): Borgnok manipulates the weak but ambitious members of his raiding party and has groomed them into a fighting force carefully trained to protect him at all costs. Any of his allies within 30 feet of him can take actions to defend him. When their opponents provoke attacks of opportunity, they can replace their normal attacks of opportunity with the aid another action to give Borgnok a +2 defense bonus against the target of their aid attempt. Additionally, whenever Borgnok's allies use the aid another action to improve his defense or give him a bonus to attacks, they grant a +4 bonus. This does not apply to the special aid action used in place of an attack of opportunity.

Field Commander (Ex): Once per round during an ally's action, Borgnok can choose to grant a +1 bonus to an ally's skill check, defense, or saving throw. This ally must be within 30 feet of Borgnok.

Tyrannical Leader (Ex): Borgnok's glowering presence and intimidating style of command prove brutally effective. He grants a +1 bonus to all attacks made by his allies whenever they are within 30 feet of him and can hear him speak. If rendered silent, Borgnok no longer grants his allies this benefit.

Goblin Warriors (6); Male and female warriors1; CR 1/2; Small humanoids; HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +1; Speed 30 feet; Defense 12 (+1 Dex, +1 size), touch 12, flat-footed 11; Base Attack +1; Grapple –3; Attack/Full Attack +2 melee (1d6, 20/×3; spear) or +3 ranged (1d6, 20/×3; light crossbow); SQ Darkvision 60 feet; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will –1; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills: Hide +7, Jump –2, Listen +1, Move Silently +7, Ride +5, Spot +1.

Feats: Skill Affinity (Listen, Spot).

Possessions: Spear, light crossbow, bolts (10), 2d6 sp, sack of looted items from human farms.

ZONES: THE BASICS

Zones are powerful tools for creating interesting battlefields. A simple fight with a few thugs can be dull or difficult to spice up, but if you set the same battle in the midst of a sagging ruin during an earthquake, the action becomes far more intense and compelling. What was once a run-of-the-mill battle becomes a tense affair as walls crumble, the floor caves in, and chunks of rock fall from the ceiling.

The DM creates zones to make environments more interesting, and players should always be on the lookout for ways to use them to their advantage. When zones are present in an encounter, the DM should point them out to the players. The three types of zones are: condition zones, event zones, and action zones. Each involves a different battlefield feature.

A **condition zone** describes a specific effect that continuously functions within the battle area. While fighting in the arctic, the characters suffer damage from the frigid temperatures. The cold wears at them every round.

An **event zone**, in comparison, comes into play only when it activates. Event zones are tied to things in the environment that occur without the characters' interference. For example, the PCs might battle a group of trolls in a ruined temple. The temple altar occasionally emits blasts of energy that target the characters and trolls at random. Traps also are event zones. They activate in response to an action, such as a character stepping on a pressure plate or walking through a tripwire. (This encounter does not include any event zones.)

An **action zone** is a fancy way of defining how a character can interact with the environment during a battle. Usually, these options are a lot like stunts that require you to use the environment in some way. Most action zones offer benefits that are greater than or different from those offered in *Iron Heroes'* stunt rules. For example, a massive boulder perched at the edge of a steep slope might inflict more damage against a greater number of targets than the typical area attack stunt.

Zones are divided into three different types to make them easier to handle, but they use identical rules. In many cases, they draw on existing rules, such as those for weather, or they use rules you're already familiar with. The altar that blasts the characters with eldritch energy simply makes an attack roll or requires a saving throw to dodge its power.

TACTICS

The goblin warriors' starting positions are marked with "G"s on the map on the next page. If you have more than four players, add three extra goblin warriors for each player after the fourth. These additional goblins can start in whatever positions you choose. A "B" denotes Borgnok's location.

The goblins' initial reaction to the party's arrival is to hunker down and fire their crossbows. However, as soon as Borgnok emerges from the house, he calls on them to "slaughter the filthy humans" and presses forward into melee.

You should always keep at least one goblin within 10 feet of Borgnok so that it can threaten the same target as he does and aid another to give Borgnok a +4 bonus to either his attack rolls or his defense. It gives him the bonus to attack rolls until Borgnok falls to half his hit points or less, at which point it begins giving him the bonus to defense instead.

Borgnok is a tough opponent for 1st-level characters, but his effectiveness in combat is based largely on the bonuses he

gives to his allies and vice versa. Make sure to emphasize to your players how Borgnok barks orders that make the goblin warriors' attacks more accurate, and how the warriors in turn seem to help him land his blows (or dodge the heroes' attacks). This should help tip off your players that depriving Borgnok of his allies is the best first step toward defeating him.

Borgnok fights to the death: He must return from the raid with a glorious success, or he will be killed for disobeying the chief. His warriors fight to the death while he is alive, but they run as soon as Borgnok falls.

THE RAMSHORN FARM

Lying on the western edge of human settlement, the Ramshorn Farm consists of a single-story log home and a wooden barn. The farm, which is named after the family that owns it, gets its water from a well just south of the house. The family provides for itself with poultry in the barn, apples from trees dotted around the property, a sty full of pigs, and several fields of wheat. The farmer and his family fled to the neighbors' place as soon as they saw the goblins approaching.

The areas below comprise the farm, and most of them feature one or more zones. For more details, see the sidebar on the previous page and see *Mastering Iron Heroes*, Chapter Four (pages 33 to 41). In addition, a zones preview is live online at <www.montecook.com/ironheroes> for your reference.

Remember to inform players of action zone opportunities when those encounter areas come up in play.

BARN

This single-story wooden building contains four chicken coops and an open main area where the farm tools are kept and where the pigs stay during winter.

Ramshorn Farm

each square = five feet

Farmhouse

It is unlikely that combat will spill into the house itself, as Borgnok leads his followers into melee, but the interior layout of the building appears on the map in case it is required. The following zones apply within the house:

Action Zone (Ransacked): Reusable. The goblins have ransacked the building thoroughly, strewing all kinds of items on the floor. Every square not occupied with furniture contains several discarded objects. With a move action, a character can pick up one of these items to use as an improvised thrown weapon. The objects inflict 1d2 points of damage (plus Strength modifier), have a range increment of 10 feet, and suffer the usual attack roll penalties for being improvised weapons.

Condition Zone (Ransacked): The pieces of refuse on the floor not only can serve as weapons, they also make footing treacherous. Treat all non-furniture squares as difficult terrain. Remember that a character can use Tumble to negate the effects of difficult terrain, and a nimble hero could even navigate the area at full speed by jumping between furnishings.

Haystack

This 10-foot-high stack of hay is used for bedding, animal food, and other farm purposes. It blocks line of sight and provides cover. It also offers a couple additional options in combat:

Action Zone (Flame On!): Usable once. The haystack can be set alight with a full-round action and some flint and tinder. Alternatively, it automatically bursts aflame if it suffers 1 point of fire damage (such as from burning oil or a torch). Once lit, it immediately blazes into flame and burns for 20 minutes. Any creature that enters one of the four squares the haystack occupies while it is on fire suffers 1d6 points of fire damage immediately. A creature that spends a full round in such a square suffers 2d6 points of fire damage instead.

Condition Zone (Treacherous Footing): The haystack has steep slopes, and the hay itself shifts and moves underfoot. Any creature entering one of the four squares the haystack occupies must make a Balance check or fall prone. The Difficulty Class of the check is 10 if the character entered the square voluntarily, but 15 if he did so due to the actions of another character (for instance, due to a bull rush).

Pigpen

Within the low wooden fence of this pen are four large, heavy pigs. They become agitated when combat occurs, squealing and pawing at the fence.

Action Zone (Stampede): Usable once. If a character opens the gate on the southern side of the pigpen, she can then use a

Handle Animal (DC 5) or Intimidate (DC 10) check to cause the four pigs to stampede. The swine immediately charge 30 feet due south. Treat them as a single Large creature with Strength 15 and the Improved Overrun feat (mastery 3 and 7) for the purposes of determining their effects on any creature in the path of this movement. After charging 30 feet like this, the four swine split up in random directions, fleeing the battle.

Trees

Four apple trees grow around the area close to the house. They are 15 feet high and require a Climb check (DC 10) to scale them. Any character who climbs at least 10 feet up one of these trees is out of range of melee attacks (except those made with reach weapons) and can find a stable position from which to make ranged attacks.

Well

The Ramshorns get their water from an artesian bore well located between the house and the barn. Encircling the well is a low stone wall approximately 1 foot high. A 10-foot-tall well house has been built over the well. The bucket and winch for retrieving water are fixed to this well house.

Condition Zone (Long Drop): Any creature that enters the well's square must make a Balance check (DC 10) or fall 20 feet to the water below. The check Difficulty Class increases to 15 if the creature entered the square involuntarily (such as through a bull rush). A creature falling into the well suffers 1d6 points of damage from the fall and then must climb out again (Climb check, DC 10).

Action Zone (Bucket-Swing): Reusable. The well's bucket dangles about a foot above the well wall at the end of a long piece of rope. A character adjacent to the well can use a standard action to swing the bucket in a wide arc. The hero can choose three consecutive squares that are adjacent to the well. You may make a melee attack roll against each creature within those squares, as if you were using a reach weapon to attack. Each creature you hit suffers 1d2 points of damage (plus your Strength modifier).

Woodpile

The Ramshorns keep their woodpile close to the front door of the house. A wooden shelter with a flat roof protects the

chopped wood from rain, keeping it dry for use on the fire. Four barrels of dried apples have been placed on top of this roof (where the pigs can't get at them).

Action Zone (Roll out the Barrel): Usable once. By taking a standard action and making a Strength check (DC 10), a character adjacent to the woodpile can knock over the posts that support its roof. This causes the roof to drop down into a ramp, and the barrels to topple to the ground. The hero can choose four consecutive squares within 10 feet of the woodpile. A barrel falls into each of these squares. Any character in one of these squares must make a Reflex save (Difficulty Class equal to the hero's Strength check) or suffer 2d6 points of damage as a barrel lands on him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adam Windsor is an Australian gamer and freelance writer who has credits with Clockwork Golem Workshop and E.N.Publishing. He's been playing roleplaying games for over 20 years and, despite his parents' many questions on the subject, has no plans to "grow up" any time soon.

Adam ran one of the playtester groups for the books in Malhavoc Press' *Iron Heroes* line. Look for his *Iron Heroes* official adventure *Dark Harbor* coming soon as a PDF exclusive product from Fiery Dragon Productions.

BORGNOK'S RAID: A WEB ENHANCEMENT BY ADAM WINDSOR

ADDITIONAL CREDITS