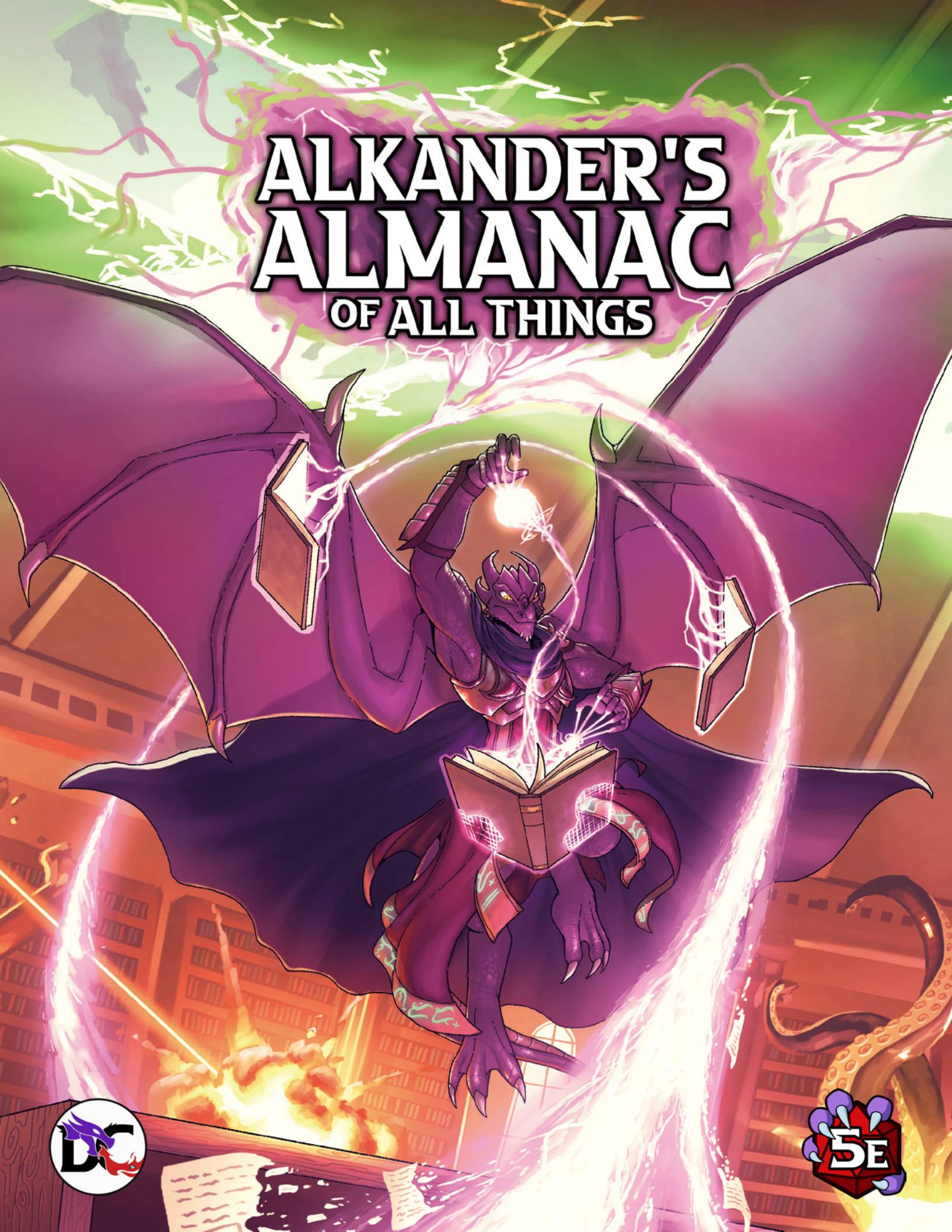


ALKANDER'S ALMANAC OF ALL THINGS



ALKANDER'S ALMANAC

OF

ALL THINGS



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The wild homebrew magic surges around Alkander in his Grand Library as he manifests the Almanac that you see before you!

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DEDICATION TO MIKE

I wanted to dedicate this book to Mike Nafziger and the impact he's had on me throughout this journey that I have been on the last few years. He's been like a father to me (aka "The Dungeon Dad") and has supported what I do in many ways that I didn't expect or felt that I deserved. He has a heart of gold and I hope one day I can impact someone as much as he has impacted me.

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These fellow YouTubers have helped make me into who I am today. The perspective, the knowledge, and the inspiration to go out and do this myself has been heavily influenced by these people. Watching Matt Mercer run games, hearing Luke Hart (The DM Lair) give advice on running the game, thinking outside the box with Dael Kingsmill (Monarchs Factory) and her brilliant homebrew solutions and systems, Professor Dungeon Master (Dungeon Craft) going old school with his philosophy of the game, Matthew Colville and his approach to game design, Mr. Rhexx and his MASSIVE amount of knowledge and lore of the game, and of course Brennan Lee Mulligan (Dimension 20) with the hype, passion, and the truly one of a kind approach he brings to his games, has made me a better GM than I would've ever been without them. All of these people have impacted me to be the GM and homebrew content creator that I am today, in ways they don't even realize. I can only hope that I impact others like they've done for me.





DEDICATION TO MY WIFE

And of course to my wife Sara... none of this would be possible without her, and I'm not just talking about this book, but the entire YouTube channel and all other content that has come before. I have spent the last 2 and a half years chasing HARD after this dream of mine. Being a full time teacher, coach, husband, and father is already a lot, and adding in full time YouTuber to that list could have NEVER happened without Sara stepping in where I needed her, to be able to have the time to make videos, create content, and especially write this book that you are reading right now. None of that time would've been available if she didn't sacrifice spending time with me and taking care of SO many things that allowed me to do this. This book marks a huge chapter in our lives, from me being able to go full time now and also have more TIME to spend with my family. This represents more than a lot of people realize for both the community and how it will hopefully help change your games, and for my family and how it will help change our lives. Thank you to everyone who purchased this book, whether digital or hardcover, to support what I do... and again thank you to my wife for being by my side through it all.

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CHAPTER 0: INTRODUCTION



FOREWORD

WHY DID I WRITE THIS BOOK?

Even before I started my YouTube channel I've wanted to help people with their D&D games. Every time I talk to someone about Dungeons and Dragons, I LOVE coming up with creative solutions and thinking outside the box, to help them with their games. Whether it's homebrewing monsters or creating and tweaking entire sets of rules, unlocking the creative potential for players and GMs has been my biggest passion.

We have all had moments at our tables where a certain ruling resulted in a flat moment, killing the immersion or excitement, and that feels bad. How many times have you heard, "Oh, well that's what the rules say," and had it feel like a big letdown? I want to help you eliminate those "lame" moments and empower you to pick and choose from a variety of options that can customize the game the way YOUR group wants.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Alkander's Almanac of All Things is designed to be a "Homebrew Buffet" full of options that you can pick and choose from at your table. You don't have to use ALL of these rules in EVERY game you play. The intent is for you to do 1 of 2 things:

- 1) Read through this book and if you see a rule that speaks to you, try it out! Talk to your group and implement it at your table to see if it's as fun as you thought. If it's not, then tweak it or throw it out.
- 2) Instead of looking at the rules first, think about your game and what parts of it feel off to you OR consider aspects of your game that you want to spice up. Check the table of contents and see if there are options that can provide the solution you have been looking for.

Please take the ideas in here and RUN with them! You should feel free and empowered to adjust them to make sense for you. If I say a Check would be Wisdom + Prof. Bonus, and you think it should be Intelligence + Prof. Bonus, then GO FOR IT! If you think something should be a Long Rest instead of a Short Rest, change it!

I look forward to hearing what tweaks you make to these rules to make them your own. I will provide you with DC Variants to give you some options, but if something feels off while reading this book or while using these rules, please make changes. I also would recommend mixing and matching different homebrews with different groups or different styles of campaigns. I have my own go-to list of homebrews that I ALWAYS use, but I will also change those to best fit the group and game I'm running.

You don't have to wait to put these rules in at the start of a campaign either. You can put them into your games before or after it's already started!

Before: Have a Session 0 where you talk about homebrews that you want to add to the new campaign you're about to start, OR (this would be crazy!) get out *Alkander's Almanac of All Things* at the table and go through it so that you can all go shopping for things you find exciting.

After: At some point either before, during, or after a session, talk to your group about a new homebrew you want to add. If they are down to try it out, then find a good time to implement the homebrew on a trial basis. If it goes over well, keep it! If it flops, tweak it or throw it out. You can also implement some of these rules under the radar without players noticing. Simply explain how a certain part of the game works (which is one of these homebrews) and then after the game is over tell them that it was a new rule you were testing out and get their feedback. That rule can now become a new default rule OR something that happens situationally.

Some of these rules might also "step on the toes" of other classes or subclasses in the game (like Bards and their Inspiration, for example). If you don't have these classes at your table, then it shouldn't affect you since there isn't an overlap of the homebrew rule and the group's class features. However, if you do have one of those classes, or add one in after your game has already started, that's ok too. In the spirit of this book, just make tweaks and adapt it to fit your game, or don't use it, of course. If needed, you can nerf the rule slightly to maintain the player's uniqueness, buff the player slightly to make their version a little bit stronger, or give the player some other reward that has nothing to do with overlap in order to give them something more fitting or exciting for their character.

My goal for *Alkander's Almanac of All Things* is to help you elevate the parts of the game that you want, in the ways that you want, so you can enjoy a gaming experience tailored exactly to YOU and YOUR table's needs! There is no "Perfect Ruleset" for every table, but hopefully I can inspire you to find your own!



CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1: General Rules

Base mechanics that could apply to all 3 pillars of Social, Exploration, and Combat. Rules related to a character's movement, potions, Help Actions, rolling dice, customizing PCs, and leveling up. Anything that isn't obviously in one of the other chapters, will be here.

Chapter 2: Inspiration Overhaul

A complete overhaul to the Inspiration system so you can create your own custom system for your table. You'll be able to answer the 3 big questions of: 1) How do you EARN it? 2) How MANY can you have? 3) What can you DO with it? I also provide the exact system that I use at my table.

Chapter 3: Skill Challenges

A wide variety of rolling methods to set DC's for Challenges you throw at your players. Full guides for Skill Challenges, now including One Round, Checkpoint, and Mass Combat Skill Challenges. There is also a brand new fast-paced Chase Scene system.

Chapter 4: Social Encounters

New systems for Social Interactions with Disposition, Influence Points, Reputation, and Adversity systems. There is also a full guide on the concept of Roleplay and how it can enhance every part of your game.

Chapter 5: Exploration

This is the biggest chapter because it focuses on EVERY aspect of Exploration. For the basic aspects of travel there are ways to customize Inventory Tracking, Rations, Encumbrance, and Wealth. It also completely covers various Travel systems, including Random Encounter Tables, a Revised Rest System complete with new Rest Roles, PLUS expanded Downtime rules.

Chapter 6: Combat

This chapter is designed to level up your combat in a wide variety of ways. The Dungeon Coach Weapon, Armor, and Shields System, the Challenge Mode Armor System, Spell Dueling, Advanced Grappling, and more. Not only are there new Actions to take in combat, but EVERY weapon has new Passive and Active features to make martial classes feel ALIVE.

Chapter 7: Mass Combat

Presenting the BRAND NEW Dungeon Coach Mass Combat system! Combat that feels very similar to regular combat, but at an EPIC scale! Lead troops of all kinds into combat for a simple and fun system you can use in any campaign.

Chapter 8: Death & Resurrection

This chapter focuses on unique methods to amp up your game in potentially deadly ways. Including new Mental & Physical Stress systems to portray the STRESS of adventuring, a full Lingering Injuries system and a new Madness & Terror system, but the KEY of this chapter is the expanded rules for Death Saves and Resurrection rules.

SESSION 0 GUIDE

Running a Session 0 is a MUST for me, and I wouldn't start a campaign without one. It's an important step in planning the campaign, getting to know your players, and figuring out the group's dynamic. Just like this book is designed for customization, your Session 0 should be as well. You might already know your players, or maybe you don't, but you should scan through this Session 0 Checklist and hit on the talking points that you want. Make sure you take notes so that you can be ready to lead Session 0 and set the tone for the campaign!

It's especially important for GMs that like to homebrew to talk about the rules they are using, like the ones in this book, so that everyone can have a voice in what is and isn't being used. If the players feel like their opinions matter, then they will be more accepting of the rules since they played a part in selecting them. As GM though, you do have final say on what goes into your game. If you NEED a certain rule to get across a vital component of your game, or if one is a key part of the FUN for you, then use it!

Overall, there are a lot of things on this list that might be uncomfortable to talk about. Having these conversations during a Session 0 can prevent them from being far more uncomfortable. Getting everyone on the same page about expectations, comfort zones, and what you're all wanting out of the game makes everyone feel more safe and understanding of the group's dynamic. It's often the case that bringing up a topic might be enough for it to never be an issue. Talking about how discouraging it feels as a GM to have players be disinterested and distracted at the table, with side conversations or cell phones, can be all that's needed for the players to take a step back and realize there's a problem. Players being on the same page as the GM and keeping each other in check helps the GM to not feel like the "fun police" and makes running the game much more enjoyable.

Lastly, it's my personal view that the GM is the leader of the group, and as such you need to be able to organize and lead the group through a wide variety of situations. Players need to feel comfortable enough to come to you with concerns, so you can help to navigate any issues. They also need to respect you enough to do the things you ask of them and not fight back constantly. The group should understand you, as a GM, and know that you have everyone's best interests at heart. Your primary goal is and always should be helping everyone have the most fun possible. When I'm the GM, I see myself as the protector of the game, and while that sounds very nerdy, it's also very fitting. I want to protect the fun of the group. It's my responsibility to make the experience as enjoyable as possible and if someone is jeopardizing that fun, I need to intervene and fix the issue. If that means removing a single player, I'll do it, the enjoyment of the GROUP as a whole is vital. I don't want to sound too harsh about these things, but Session 0 is the time to get ahead of these issues. Everyone should understand what they are getting themselves into.



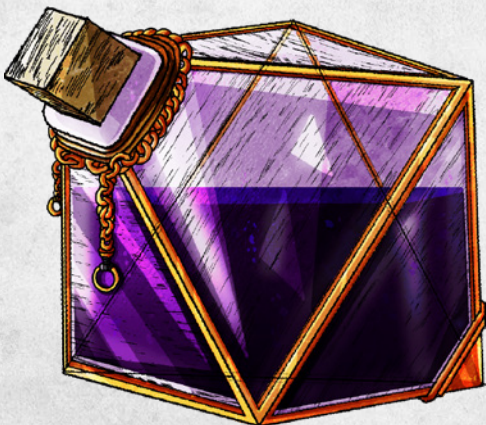


SESSION 0 CHECKLIST

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

These are some great questions to ask, as possible icebreakers, to get Session 0 started. This is a relaxed conversation, not an interrogation, so make sure each player has an opportunity to answer the questions, but you don't have to force it out of them.

- Which of the pillars of the game are you most excited about: combat, exploration, or social encounters? I always ask my players to give me the percentage of each out of 100%, to show me what kind of players they are... myself personally... I'm a 40/30/30.
- What's one thing you love about RPGs?
- As a player, what's one strength you bring to the table?
- What is one thing you've never done, but want to do, in a TTRPG?



REAL LIFE GROUP LOGISTICS

We all have different schedules and it's amazing when you can sync up to play a game on a regular basis. These questions can be brought up to address the logistics of the scheduling and timing challenges that can pop up.

- How often can this group meet? What day of the week will we meet?
- How long are sessions? Is there flexibility in the start and end times?
- How long of a campaign is everyone interested in? Weeks, months, or years?

Player Absences

Canceling sessions is one of the leading causes of groups falling apart. You should avoid this at all costs by making sure you establish something with the group that PLAYING is a priority. Rescheduling sessions for later shouldn't be the easy go-to option. Play when you're scheduled to and talk about what happens when these things arise.

- How long will you wait for the last player to show up before you start without them?
- How are we handling player absences?
- Will the GM play the absent player's character or do they just fade into the background?
- Does an absent player still get XP and loot?
- How many players have to be absent before you cancel?
- Do you have a back up plan in case you do cancel like game night, movie night, a one shot, etc?

SOCIAL CONTRACT & EXPECTATIONS

These are some of those “unspoken” elements that can get uncomfortable to talk about, but are very important. Read through these and choose those which you feel are important to bring up. Other topics might have more relevance to your specific gaming table, and you should empower others to have the difficult conversations now, to avoid future problems. I would also specifically mention that players can reach out to you one-on-one, so they feel comfortable doing so.

Table Expectations

- Is food welcome? Who supplies the food?
- Is alcohol welcome?
- Are phones welcome?

Social Expectations

- Players should avoid having disruptive side conversations.
- What happens if you feel uncomfortable with something going on? A safe word or an item in the center of the table that someone can grab to signal that they are uncomfortable works well.
- Consider talking to everyone about respecting and listening to each other.
- The GM alone can NOT make the table a safe space, it is a collective effort on everyone’s part to ensure a healthy gaming environment.

Game Expectations

- How much meta knowledge can be used? Just talk about metagaming and what it is, the good and the bad.
- Is the tone dramatic or comedic? Light or dark?
- What is the rating of your game, PG, PG-13, R? This is an easy way to address topics like sex, violence, language, etc.
- Discuss what lines & veils are. Lines are hard lines in the sand, for a player or GM, about material that shouldn’t come up in the game and should be actively avoided. Veils are subjects that should stay out of the spotlight but can occur behind closed doors, if vaguely described, or merely left implied, as if covered by a veil or curtain.
- Is PVP okay? How do you handle it, and how do the players feel about it?
- Are we using Milestone Leveling or Experience Points?

Dice Expectations

- Where should you roll your dice: in a tray, out in the open, on a virtual roller, etc?
- Players don’t make a check until the GM asks them to (this is a GM pet peeve of mine that I definitely don’t allow).
- Don’t touch other people’s dice or other items they bring to the table without asking.

CAMPAIGN SETTINGS

It’s important to realize how heavy the tone could be when talking about expectations, so a great way to switch gears is to dive into the more light-hearted fantasy stuff. This is a great opportunity for the players to connect their characters to the world and to contribute to worldbuilding. They’ll be inhabiting and playing in your world so when they contribute and give you feedback it’s invaluable as a GM... make sure you take notes!

World Settings

- Is it high-magic or low-magic?
- How dangerous is the world?
- How easy is it to die?
- How easy is resurrection?
- How do the gods affect this world?
- How advanced is the technology?
- What level of realism exists in your game? Yes, I know this is fantasy, but how serious does your world take itself?

Group Settings

- How do the PCs know each other, if at all?
- How do the PCs tie into the world?

HOME BREW RULES (BEST SECTION)

- What rule variations are you using?
- What restrictions are there? What other books do you allow?
- How much time will be dedicated to finding a ruling?
- What parts of *Alkander’s Almanac of All Things* are you using?
- How will the group go about introducing new rules mid-campaign?
- Do any of the players have cool, unique homebrew ideas from previous games that might add to this game?



CHARACTER CREATION

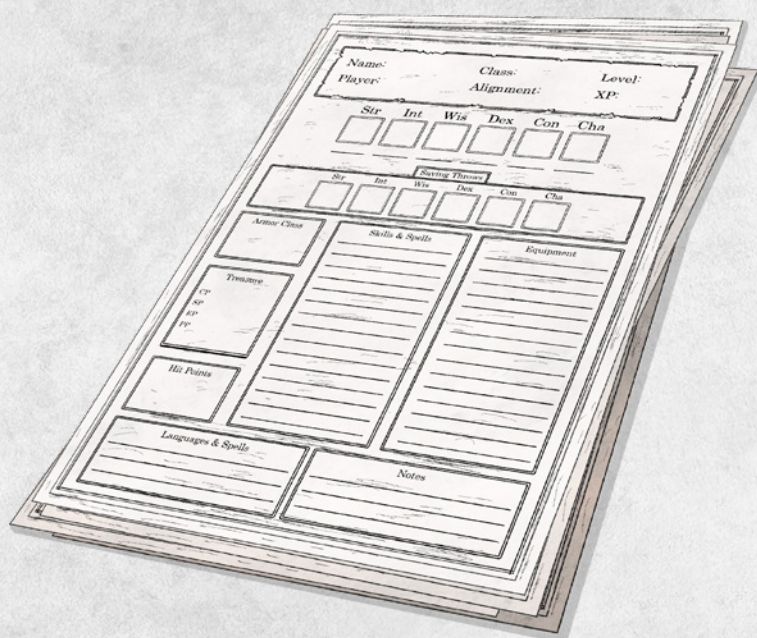
- What level are you starting at?
- How will players generate their stats?
- Do you require PCs to provide a backstory? You probably should... at least in SOME way.
- Does their character have a secret that nobody else knows about?
- Roll on the Personality Traits & Character Quirks Tables at the end of this chapter.

DC Tip: I LOVE to give each player at the table some secret that only they know (good or bad) and some lore of the world that only they know. How important those pieces are, is up to me.

PLAY A LITTLE?

Don't feel like you have to roll dice at ALL. You can give them scenarios and let them role play their characters a bit and play around with potential voices or personalities. This can be a great chance for them to explore their PCs' abilities in a safe place and for you to get to know the character and what the player wants them to be. You can also give them a mock combat to flex their muscles in battle. You can establish that this encounter is canon or that it's just for fun and none of this actually counts.

Depending on your group, you might be ready to go and can prepare something small to get the campaign started. I run fully homebrewed campaigns which I custom-build for my players based on how Session 0 goes... so I have NOTHING prepared and don't actually play during Session 0. Overall, I like to use Session 0 to strengthen the connections within the group, come up with possible scenes based on their backstories, and build up the hype and anticipation so it can carry over into Session 1.



PC CREATION TABLES

These tables give both new and veteran players everything they need to get the ball rolling during character creation. I've used these in every Session 0 that I've ever ran and it's always been a highlight because of the cool character concepts that come out of it. To get the full Dungeon Coach experience with Session 0, I suggest you also try to use these at your table.

I provide the tables for first and last names to help out with that process, but there are plenty of name generators out there. The KEY parts of this are the Personality Traits and Character Quirks Tables. I love these things SO much and they are a HUGE piece of my GM toolkit. There is a moment during Session 0 where I have each player roll on these tables to create a spark of roleplay inspiration for their character. I tell them beforehand that these are just a recommendation and if they don't like them, they have the power to veto the results... this is THEIR character, after all.

I use these tables once we've started character creation and they've had some time to think about the things they want to have. Maybe one player KNOWS they want to be a Bard while another KNOWS they want to be a Purple Dragonborn. Let them have time to lock in some ideas and then bring these tables in to shed some light on the gaps and help push through any spots where they might be stuck. These tables get players to think about the "what ifs" for their characters, and even if they say no to something, at least they are moving in the right direction. You can also use these tables as inspiration instead of rolling on them. Players can go "shopping" and look through them to find traits and quirks that they think would be a fun part of their character.

We start with the Personality Traits Table and each player rolls 2 d100s. We then go around the table as they tell me the numbers and I say what the results are. They can pick the one they like the most, veto them entirely, or they can just roll again. Then we go to the Character Quirks Table, which is my favorite, and we do the process again. Lastly, there is a Professions Table that comes up from time to time when players are stuck on their backstory. You can roll on this table to see what profession they pursued before becoming adventurers or use it to determine the main export of their hometown.

DC Tip: You can also use these to create unique NPCs, I use these exact tables to make ALL of my randomly encountered NPCs. I get an index card and number it 1 through 10, put 1 Personality Trait and 1 Character Quirk to create 10 NPCs that I can pull from at any random moment. These NPCs tend to be party favorites and all it took was 2 simple prompts that I ran with.

Masculine Names table (d100)**Common**

1	Aiden	26	Jasper
2	Alasar	27	Kade
3	Alcelon	28	Kelmp
4	Androxus	29	Larus
5	Apollo	30	Leo
6	Barnubus	31	Logan
7	Bartholemew	32	Malcom
8	Basillis	33	Marco
9	Bast	34	Maximus
10	Bolder	35	Milo
11	Branson	36	Munir
12	Cain	37	Newt
13	Cyrus	38	Oath
14	Darius	39	Octavius
15	Darlo	40	Otto
16	Davin	41	Pax
17	Declan	42	Pharis
18	Devin	43	Pyrus
19	Dobah	44	Ramsay
20	Edwin	45	Shadrac
21	Eldrick	46	Sigwald
22	Elwin	47	Theodrin
23	Flint	48	Theorus
24	Garret	49	Torel
25	Hugon	50	Uldrin

Unique

51	Abarax	76	Ledric
52	Abraxus	77	Leviathan
53	Areck	78	Lex
54	Axel	79	Lorkai
55	Azriel	80	Malachi
56	Bane	81	Merk
57	Boon	82	Morzad
58	Borath	83	Orion
59	Braz	84	Pyros
60	Bulder	85	Rados
61	Cyanus	86	Ronan
62	Derlon	87	Ruger
63	Dirge	88	Seph
64	Dreag	89	Soren
65	Dryden	90	Syke
66	Duri	91	Taras
67	Enoch	92	Ticer
68	Gage	93	Tregarr
69	Garash	94	Vault
70	Garik	95	Vergil
71	Gast	96	Voron
72	Guile	97	Xander
73	Jago	98	Xavier
74	Kaffar	99	Xenos
75	Kruger	100	Zadak

Feminine Names table (d100)**Common**

1	Ada	26	Jamai
2	Adeline	27	Josslin
3	Adley	28	Larissa
4	Ahlinn	29	Lark
5	Akia	30	Lia
6	Ali	31	Lorelai
7	Ana	32	Luna
8	Anja	33	Macie
9	Asha	34	May
10	Aster	35	Merik
11	Astrid	36	Olivia
12	Aubrey	37	Ophelia
13	Ayla	38	Oshalen
14	Calestra	39	Piera
15	Cameron	40	Robyn
16	Corrin	41	Rue
17	Dawn	42	Rylee
18	Dorian	43	Sarth
19	Ecta	44	Teagan
20	Elma	45	Telnora
21	Elwyn	46	Terra
22	Genevieve	47	Toril
23	Gia	48	Una
24	Ilvina	49	Undarin
25	Ingrid	50	Yasmin

Unique

51	Alzena	76	Polagra
52	Bazel	77	Quinn
53	Brundil	78	Rae
54	Brynn	79	Rezi
55	Dimetra	80	Row
56	Dresh	81	Roxy
57	Ember	82	Saphryn
58	Gremkin	83	Senica
59	Halete	84	Skye
60	Huatli	85	Talitha
61	Iris	86	Taryn
62	Jacy	87	Tetryl
63	Jaden	88	Thasha
64	Jadmir	89	Theodycia
65	Jasmine	90	Torel
66	Jura	91	Vain
67	Maev	92	Valin
68	Makron	93	Venus
69	Maorganna	94	Vera
70	Marcenna	95	Wryn
71	Minerva	96	Xen
72	Mirran	97	Zack
73	Nira	98	Zenith
74	Nyx	99	Zilla
75	Pharyl	100	Zora



Surnames table (d100)

1	Arken	26	Fenn	51	Mournspell	76	Stringfellow
2	Aronnis	27	Fenddale	52	Nerilon	77	Sweeny
3	Arswol	28	Flintfoot	53	Oftring	78	Swiftfoot
4	Balistair	29	Forwind	54	Olsim	79	Taylor
5	Baxter	30	Foster	55	Orthum	80	Thistleback
6	Bell	31	Fox	56	Ovariel	81	Thorvaer
7	Bellness	32	Frostfury	57	Packard	82	Threepwood
8	Bigge	33	Gallyrak	58	Payne	83	Tinker
9	Bonner	34	Glumwallow	59	Quick	84	Torm
10	Brekken	35	Grant	60	Renwall	85	Townsend
11	Bronlief	36	Hailcloak	61	Rotback	86	Uther
12	Chamberlain	37	Halfhelm	62	Russ	87	Valtheas
13	Chapman	38	Harper	63	Ryder	88	Vendair
14	Coriscent	39	Hirsh	64	Scivvens	89	Venom
15	Crew	40	Hollowbear	65	Selish	90	Vinera
16	Davies	41	Inman	66	Sevnal	91	Vittlevottle
17	Degetras	42	Kitchner	67	Shale	92	Wainwright
18	Dempster	43	Knoch	68	Sims	93	Ward
19	Dewglade	44	Krepp	69	Sindlebeck	94	Ware
20	Elmora	45	Landin	70	Skorm	95	Watchblade
21	Enric	46	Ledbetter	71	Smithshire	96	Webb
22	Everett	47	Lightfoot	72	Snakeblade	97	Westloyal
23	Featherwick	48	Megwether	73	Steele	98	Wheeler
24	Felladan	49	Mornelon	74	Stern	99	Winter
25	Fellows	50	Morrell	75	Stonestrike	100	Zemranell

Professions table (d20)

1	Leather worker / Tanner / Fletcher	11	Inventor (Magic & Mundane)
2	Baker / Cook / Butcher	12	Jester / Fool / Town Crier
3	Barber / Beautician / Stylist	13	Mapmaker / Cartographer
4	Barkeeper / Brewer	14	Musician / Entertainer
5	Blacksmith / Miner / Locksmith	15	Painter / Artist / Sculptor / Potter
6	Carpenter / Toymaker	16	Potioneer / Alchemist / Herbalist
7	Combat Trainer / Bodyguard	17	Fisherman / Sailor / Shipwright
8	Florist / Gardener	18	Tailor / Weaver
9	Jeweler / Glassblower	19	Hunter / Trapper / Animal Trainer
10	Healer / Medic / Surgeon / Dentist	20	Undertaker / Taxidermist



Quirks table (d100)

1	Always very dirty and smells bad	51	Has a terminal illness (is there even a cure?)
2	Off their rocker... truly unique	52	Veteran of many wars, possible PTSD
3	Absolutely cannot swim	53	Hates all non-humanoid living creatures
4	Pretends to have greater riches	54	Hears voices in their head (real or imagined)
5	Adrenaline junkie, always wants to be in danger	55	Anterograde amnesia (can't form new memories)
6	Addicted to some type of substance	56	Always carries a fragile, sentimental heirloom
7	Afraid of *element* (water/ fire/ lightning)	57	Insomniac that's afraid to go to sleep
8	Afraid of *animal* (harmless or not)	58	Must make monthly payments to square a debt
9	Afraid of heights	59	Is a convicted felon that is hiding from authorities
10	Afraid of the dark... like BAD	60	Utterly unbelievably unlucky. Possibly cursed?
11	In debt to bad people	61	Is completely Blind
12	Horrible memory	62	Is completely Deaf
13	Believes literally everything they hear	63	Is completely Mute
14	Can see dead people/spirits	64	Demonic possession, gives another quirk (reroll)
15	Only speaks an uncommon language	65	Secretly has higher powers, watching over one of the PC's
16	Cannot tell a lie	66	Illiterate/ speaks with a low vocabulary
17	Gets very emotional very easily	67	Jumpy and easily startled, uneasy
18	A HUGE flirt	68	Kleptomaniac and always looks to steal things
19	A compulsive hoarder	69	Knows something secret about the party or a PC
20	Animal lover who is inept with animals	70	Time is nearly up on their Devil's Bargain
21	Claustrophobic or afraid of heights	71	Severe scarring causes them pain when ____
22	Compulsive liar	72	Missing a limb/body part of some kind
23	Deathly allergic to *food*	73	Must always be clean and HATES being dirty
24	Borderline fatal allergy to something common	74	Narcoleptic and can fall asleep at any moment
25	Ambivalent to gold, not moved by money at all	75	Near or Far-sighted
26	Photo-sensitive epileptic seizures	76	Oddly sweaty for no reason
27	Everything is 'magic' and they say so	77	Paranoid of something after them (crazy)
28	Everything is mundane, magic doesn't exist	78	Plotting to kill one of the other party members
29	Extremely religious, praises their deity	79	Poor hearing
30	Trouble focusing on one thing at a time (ADHD)	80	Non-Paladin who follows a paladin's code of honor
31	Extremely old, possibly senile	81	Mocks others through mimicry
32	Has multiple personalities, shifts between them	82	They know you are being hunted by an assassin
33	Evangelical, always trying to convert others	83	Secretly works for a covert group/organization
34	Extremely short temper/anger issues	84	Shaky hands, but only when ____ happens
35	Is always unprepared and never ready	85	Take far too long to say anything
36	Extremely skeptical, distrusts everyone	86	Speaks only telepathically through touch
37	Eyes glow when they tell a lie	87	Killed someone on accident recently
38	Addicted to magic healing	88	Squeamish and vomits easily
39	Gluttonous, always eating or drinking	89	Strong dislike of cold
40	Has a crush on one of the party members	90	Strong dislike of heat
41	Afflicted with a strange curse	91	Pyromaniac
42	Paranoid their Dark Secret will come out	92	Severe burns across a large section of their body
43	Is posing as someone they're not	93	Unreliable and clumsy, always breaking stuff
44	Has a nervous tick/shaky hands	94	Very confident in their poor instrument playing
45	Thinks their stuffed pet is alive	95	Vocal cord injury and has restricted speech
46	Secretly royalty in hiding	96	Will not speak to opposite sex
47	Extremely over the top attractive	97	Would do just about anything for gold
48	Moody and ill-tempered	98	Refuses to speak to magic users
49	Has vivid auditory hallucinations	99	Compulsive altruist, must always help the needy
50	Has vivid visual hallucinations	100	This character is to blame for a PC's tragedy



Personality Traits table (d100)

1	Addict	26	Erratic/Unpredictable	51	Know-It-All	76	Quiet
2	Adorable	27	Excited	52	Loathes Magic	77	Reckless/Risky
3	Annoyed	28	Fanciful	53	Macho	78	Regal/ Proper
4	Authoritative	29	Flamboyant	54	Maternal	79	Religious
5	Blunt	30	Foolhardy (drunk)	55	Mellow/Chill	80	Reserved/Shy
6	Callous	31	Foolish	56	Misguided	81	Rowdy/Unruly
7	Careless	32	Forgetful	57	Morbid/Gloomy	82	Sarcastic
8	Casual	33	Friendly	58	Motivated/Inspired	83	Sassy
9	Charitable	34	Frightened	59	Mournful	84	Secretive (npc whisper)
10	Cheerful	35	Frugal	60	Murderous	85	Self-Conscious
11	Childlike	36	Gambler	61	Negotiator	86	Self-Loathing
12	Clean Freak	37	Generous	62	Nurturing	87	Shy
13	Clumsy	38	Gossiper	63	Obsessive	88	Sloppy/Slob
14	Cocky	39	Greedy	64	Old-Fashioned	89	Sly/Smooth
15	Creepy	40	Gullible	65	Ominous	90	Stern/Strict
16	Curious	41	Helpful	66	Organized/OCD	91	Stubborn
17	Daring/Determined	42	Honest	67	Overly Genuine/ Attentive	92	Stylish
18	Demanding	43	Humble	68	Overly Nurturing	93	Superstitious
19	Dignified	44	Humorous	69	Paranoid	94	Suspicious
20	Disagreeable	45	Impatient	70	Perfectionist	95	Thoughtful
21	Elegant	46	Impressionable	71	Pessimistic/Cynical	96	Threatening
22	Emotional	47	Insecure	72	Polite	97	Touchy Feely
23	Emotionless	48	Insulting	73	Possessive	98	Unadventurous
24	Empathetic	49	Introvert	74	Prejudiced	99	Vain
25	Envious	50	Irritable (by PC)	75	Presumptuous	100	Well-Traveled



CHAPTER 1: GENERAL RULES



BASIC GAME MECHANICS

These rules have to do with your character's body and its capabilities. Jumping, holding your breath, running for long distances, and falling from great heights can all come up when you least expect it! They are all pretty easy to remember and can provide more impactful challenges to your party. Now, let's JUMP right into the first rule of *Alkander's Almanac of All Things*.

JUMPING

My biggest issue with how jumping works in the game is that it's not easy to remember and doesn't feel like it's connected to the normal rules of the game. Hardly anything in the game uses Ability SCORES instead of Modifiers, so I tweaked the base rules of jumping to feel more heroic and be easier to remember.

LONG JUMP

You can perform a Long Jump up to a distance equal to 5x your Strength Modifier if you've moved at least 10ft, on foot, before the jump, otherwise your Long Jump distance is cut in half.

Example: A character with a +5 Strength Modifier can Long Jump 25ft (5x5).

High Jump

You can perform a High Jump up to a number of feet equal to 1 + your Strength Modifier if you've moved at least 10ft, on foot, before the jump, otherwise your High Jump height is cut in half.

Example: A character with a +4 Strength Modifier can High Jump 5ft (4+1).

This is what you would use to figure out how high someone's feet can leave the ground when they jump. If you are instead looking for how high they can REACH, then you need to factor in how tall they are.

Whether a character is 4ft-tall or 7ft-tall, if they both have a +4 Strength Modifier then they both have a High Jump of 5ft. Their height is what makes all the difference for how high they can reach while jumping. Here is the formula for figuring out how high a character's hand could reach, if they were trying to jump up and grab a high ledge.

While performing a High Jump, your total reach is a number of feet equal to 1 + your Strength Modifier added to 1.5 x your height.

Example: A character with a +4 Strength Modifier, that is 6ft-tall could jump and reach a total height of 14ft: 1 + 4 (Str Mod) + 9 (6ft x 1.5 for the height).

DC Tip: An easy math tip for multiplying things by 1.5 is to just cut the number in HALF and then add it back to the original number. So 1.5 x 8 would be 12, because half of 8 is 4, then you add that 4 back to the original 8 for a total of 12. MATH!

CONSTITUTION CHECKS

Checks that test a character's endurance, fortitude, or vitality are considered Constitution Checks instead of Constitution Saves.

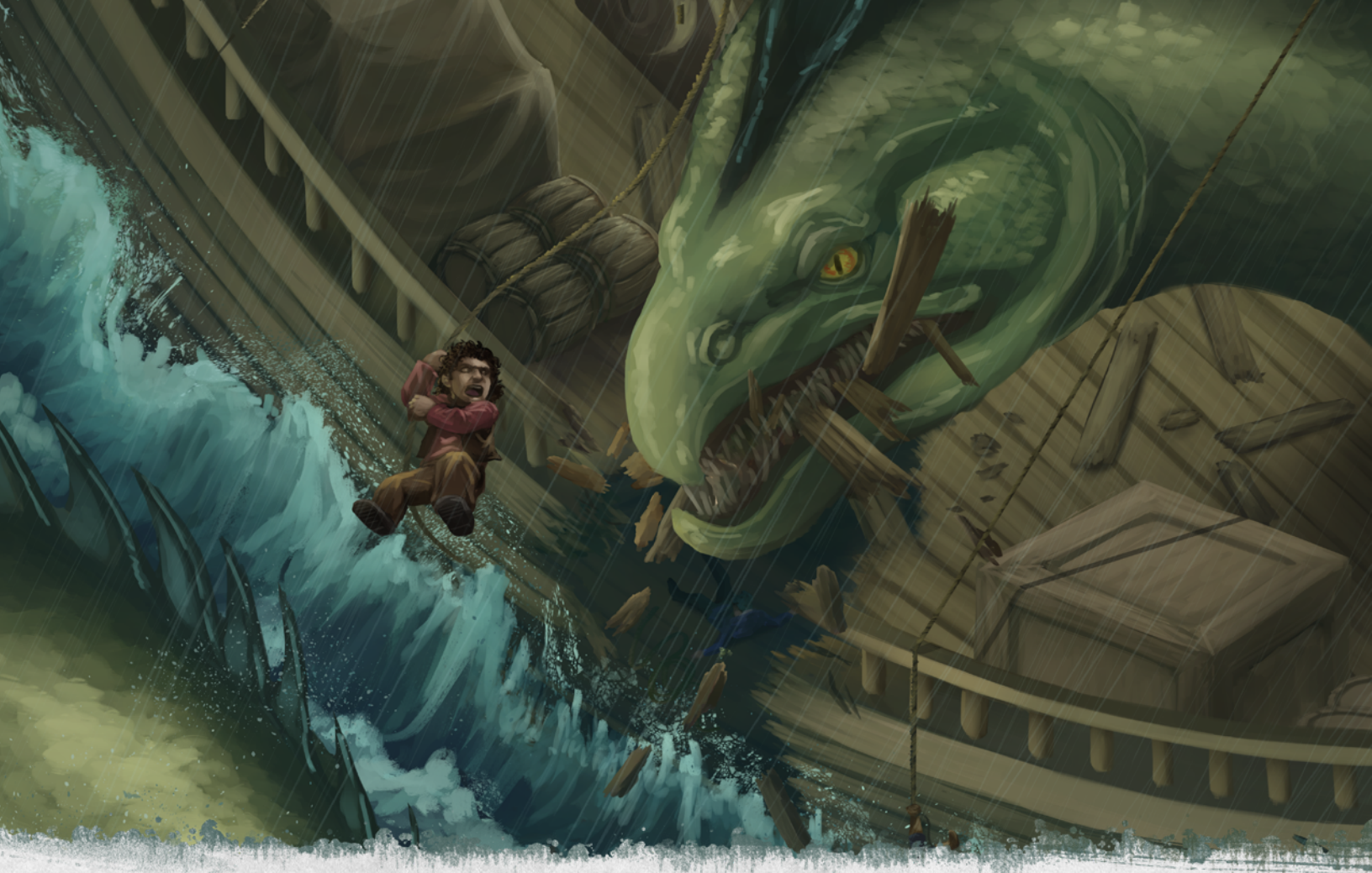
This rule is not as much a rule as it is a way to handle Constitution Saves differently. Various spell and combat effects should still require a Save since the character's life is actively in danger and THAT is the spirit of the Save mechanic. Concentration Checks make sense to be a Constitution Save still because it happens during combat when people are fighting for their lives. However, there are plenty of times, when the circumstances are not as dire, where you should make Constitution CHECKS instead.

During travel, if you decide to push onward and travel for longer than normally possible, have that be a Constitution Check instead of a Save. Instead of Saves for levels of Exhaustion, or things that involve your characters overall endurance, having them be Checks instead would make it much scarier. Often these moments end up being Constitution Saves which is too generous in my opinion. In these scenarios, adding a character's Prof. Bonus can be overkill.

Considering that there are plenty of Olympic sprinters who don't have the best ENDURANCE, perhaps Barbarians and Fighters, who have decent Constitution scores, shouldn't automatically succeed in stressful situations just because they are proficient in Constitution Saves. Only characters who have a high Constitution Modifier should shine in these moments. The endurance of adventurers should be around similar levels to each other, since they are all pushing their bodies to the limit.

DC Tip: You could also use Constitution based Athletics Checks if you want to have another solution.





HOLDING YOUR BREATH

While not in combat or other strenuous activities, you can hold your breath for a number of minutes equal to $1 +$ your Constitution Modifier. If you are in combat or another strenuous activity, you can hold your breath for a number of ROUNDS equal to $10 +$ your Constitution Modifier. If you run out of time then you immediately fall Unconscious.

This adjustment has always felt better to me. It doesn't make any sense that a Barbarian with a $+5$ Constitution Modifier can hold their breath for SIX MINUTES while in full combat, running around and swinging their huge weapon... it just doesn't work like that. This rule is very simple to remember because it's in minutes for non-combat and in rounds for combat. If a standard adventurer were fighting for their life, it's reasonable to think that they could hold their breath for at least 1 minute, or 10 rounds, so I changed the base modifier to match that. This gives a bit more creative freedom to make how much air they have left become a looming threat and not something that's over in just 2 rounds.

Non-combat refers to casual activities like walking around, comfortably swimming, and so on. Combat is quite the opposite and should be treated differently. Fighting while there are toxic fumes suffocating you, being underwater while wearing armor, or getting stabbed are all things that will GREATLY limit the amount of time you can hold your breath for.

COMBAT DAMAGE “AIR TAX”

Whenever you take damage while holding your breath during combat, you must make a Constitution Save. The DC equals 10 or half the damage you take (rounded down), whichever is higher. **Failure:** You lose one round of air.

This is a way to speed up the process of drowning and to get your party closer to losing their breath. 10 rounds of combat can be a long time, but this really ramps up the danger and puts strain on those taking the most damage. You can also give monsters abilities that force the PCs to make a Save, losing a round of air if they fail.

You can also implement this “Air Tax” in other ways too. If you take the Dash Action while holding your breath, you trigger this Constitution Save. If you cast a spell while holding your breath, you automatically lose 1 round of air. You could also make it entirely impossible for a caster to maintain Concentration on a spell while holding their breath. There are many ways to increase the threat around holding your breath during combat.

COMBAT BREATH SAVES

At the start of your turn, if you have no rounds of air remaining, you must make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** You fall Unconscious. **Success:** You gain enough air for this round and must repeat the Save at the start of your next turn.

This gives players a little more time, allowing them to push their limits in these dire situations.



FALLING DAMAGE

At the end of a fall, a creature takes 1d10 Bludgeoning damage for every 10ft it fell. The creature can make a Dexterity or Acrobatics Check to reduce the fall damage by half, but can only make this check for falls less than 100ft high.

Fall damage is not respected enough, especially by high-level characters. When falling from 50ft results in taking only 5d6 damage, the threat of falling becomes a joke, and the impact of falling from that height is comparable to attack damage from some monsters. There are many benefits for the GM to have fall damage be more dangerous and respected. Dynamic fights with levels of terrain that are high and low now become more tactical. Creatures that can swoop in and pick up players become more scary. This way, fall damage becomes another tool at your disposal to use against your players, and that they can use against you, of course.

If you think that 1d10 damage for falling 10ft is too punishing, you can make the first 10ft a character falls be “for free”, which they take no damage from. This would allow for those epic maneuvers around the battlefield that happen more frequently. The characters would only take fall damage after that first 10ft. For example, a 30ft fall would be 2d10 (since the first 10ft doesn't count), compared to 3d6 from the standard, making them very similar. However, falling from higher becomes more dangerous since you are adding d10's for every 10ft instead of d6's.

DC Tip: In my games, Rage does not reduce fall damage. I see Rage as being the Barbarian's ability to fight off attackers through their focused anger on the battlefield... This does not apply when free falling. I don't care how mad you are... you are hitting that ground like a meteor. Again, this should be balanced for your table to see if the Barbarian player feels that it's a fair ruling.



LINGERING FALL DAMAGE

If you take damage equal to half of your HP maximum or more from falling, you must roll on the Lingerin Injuries Table (page 207). This can be the missing piece that gives fall damage the “danger” that it's missing. There are plenty of bad things that can happen from the Lingerin Injuries Table, and connecting it to falling from only the HIGHEST of heights helps players respect fall damage more. You could also make it so that taking damage above half your HP maximum triggers a Constitution Save for the lingerin injury, or that the creature gets knocked out and “falls” (get it?) Unconscious.

SHARED FALL DAMAGE

If you land on a creature while falling, you and the creature both must make a **DC 15** Dexterity, Strength, or Constitution Save (GMs discretion). **Failure:** You take full damage and the creature takes half damage. **Success:** You take half damage and the creature takes no damage.

This is a fun way to give those reckless characters, that jump down from high places, options to use in combat. They take additional damage, but they have a CHANCE to deal extra damage to the target as well. I haven't had a PC abuse this too much since they are literally spending their own health to deal more damage. If the PC fails and the monster succeeds, the PC takes full damage and the monster takes none, which feels fair to me!

PERCENT HEALTH

At the end of a fall, a creature takes Bludgeoning damage equal to 10% of their HP maximum for every 10ft it fell.

This makes falling very serious because falling from 100ft would be enough damage to knock any character out. 100ft is VERY high and having that be the threshold for being knocked Unconscious feels okay to me. I can't think of that many times where a character has fallen from 100ft... and if that situation does happen, it should be a scary moment for that PC.

TERMINAL VELOCITY DAMAGE

When applying damage taken as the result from falling, the first 10ft results in 1d6 Bludgeoning damage, the second set of 10ft increases to 2d6, the third set of 10ft increases to 3d6, and it continues to increase by increments of 1d6 for each new set of 10ft fallen.

Example: A character falls from 30ft.

- **First 10ft:** 1d6
- **Next 10ft:** 2d6
- **Last 10ft:** 3d6
- **Total fall damage:** 1d6 + 2d6 + 3d6 = 6d6

This method starts off slow with the usual d6 and quickly ramps up to a very deadly amount of dice. As I said before, most characters do not fall from great heights often in a game, so adding up what the total amount of d6 is won't slow the game down too much. Even if it does, that can be used as a looming tension about how much damage someone is going to take, as the players realize how bad it is.

DC Tip: I usually cap the MAX amount of fall damage as 100d6 which is about a 140ft fall.

POTIONS

Healing potions are a part of many campaigns, but their availability and potency can be different from campaign to campaign and table to table. In some groups, divine healing is limited, so healing potions might be a primary resource. In other groups, there might be an overabundance of healing, making it difficult to apply pressure to the party. How do you need to adjust healing potions at your table? Is there a shortage of divine healing, or too much? Are healing potions readily available or scarce? Are they inexpensive or unaffordable?

This section includes rules to help adjust how healing potions work at your table. You can increase or decrease the potency of healing potions, you can make them more or less scarce by increasing or decreasing their cost, or you can improve the ease of consuming a healing potion so it doesn't require a full turn to gain its benefits. The rules below can help you adjust the potency, cost, or consumption of healing potions.

LEVELED HEALING POTIONS

Leveled healing potions are assigned a potency level, according to the number of d6 included, from 1 to 10. Each character that drinks a leveled healing potion adds their Constitution Modifier (minimum of 0) to each die rolled.

Example: A level 5 healing potion has 5d6, and adds your Constitution Modifier 5 times (once per die). A player that drinks a level 5 healing potion regains HP equal to $5d6 + (5 \times \text{your Constitution Modifier})$. If the player has a Constitution Modifier of 3, they would regain an average of 33 HP.

Most GMs (and players) have a hard time recalling the number of dice each type of healing potion includes. I use this intuitive system to make it easy to remember. Adding a character's Constitution Modifier helps improve the usefulness of healing potions when characters have a high HP maximum. It also helps provide consistent healing even when you roll low on the dice.

Since this system has 10 different levels, scaling from 1 to 10, I can easily hand out healing potions for the potency needed at the table. If the party has little to no healing, I might give them higher-level healing potions. If they have a lot of healing, I might give them lower-level healing potions. I usually hand out level 1 to 4 healing potions throughout a campaign, and very rarely provide a level 8 healing potion (making the players more excited when they receive one).



HEALING POTION TABLE

Level	Healing	Cost
X	Xd6 + X(Con)	---
1st	1d6 + 1xCon	50 gp
2nd	2d6 + 2xCon	150 gp
3rd	3d6 + 3xCon	300 gp
4th	4d6 + 4xCon	500 gp
5th	5d6 + 5xCon	750 gp
6th	6d6 + 6xCon	1000 gp
7th	7d6 + 7xCon	1400 gp
8th	8d6 + 8xCon	1900 gp
9th	9d6 + 9xCon	2400 gp
10th	10d6 + 10xCon	3000 gp

DC Tip: You can change the die used down to a d4 (original potions use d4's) for less healing, or up to a d8 for more healing (like Cure Wounds in a bottle).

BONUS ACTION POTIONS

A creature can drink a potion using a Bonus Action or Action, but an Action is still required to administer a potion to another creature.

Healing in 5e is less optimal than dealing damage, since most healing effects are less potent than damaging effects. If you use an Action to drink a potion and regain lost HP, your efforts will likely be undone by the enemy on its next turn (since its damage is likely to be greater than your healing). For this reason, drinking a potion using a Bonus Action helps ensure you actually benefit from drinking it. You can use a Bonus Action to drink the potion, and then use your Action to deal damage (or take some other beneficial action). You can consume the potion without losing ground to the enemy.

DC Tip: Start your campaign off with healing potions needing an Action to drink... then when they hit level 3 or 5 give them a Group Bonus Level Up Perk that gives EVERYONE the ability to drink them as a Bonus Action. They have become more efficient adventurers and can drink them more quickly now.

MAXIMUM ACTION POTIONS

A creature can drink a potion using an Action, rather than a Bonus Action, to gain the maximum benefits of the potion. If the potion restores HP, the creature regains the maximum amount possible from the potion.

Example: A potion that restores HP equal to $5d6 + 5x\text{Con Mod}$ would instead heal 45 HP (assuming a Con Mod of 3). This comes from 5×6 (or 30) for the d6, and 5×3 (or 15) for a "Maximum" of 45.

Using this rule, a player can make a strategic decision to spend their Action to make better use of their consumable potions. They can afford to spend their Action drinking the potion since it is likely to outpace the damage the enemy will inflict on its next turn.



HELP ACTION

PROFICIENT HELP ACTION

A creature that lacks proficiency in a skill cannot take the Help Action to aid another creature with an Ability Check using that skill.

This rule can help limit the amount of “help” provided by party members that lack the ability to perform the task themselves. Note that this doesn’t prevent a party member from taking the Help Action to grant an ally ADV on their attack, since anyone can be a sufficient distraction to the enemy.

HELP CHECKS

In order to take the Help Action, a creature must make a Help Check, before it can aid another creature on an Ability Check. The Help Check DC equals 10, or 5 less than the DC of the Ability Check the target creature is attempting to make.

Example: If Creature A is attempting to climb up a cliff, Creature B could take the Help Action to attempt to aid Creature A. Creature B could use its knowledge in Nature, deductions made with Investigation, or observations made with Perception to provide advice on how to get up. If the DC to climb the rocks is 18, then the DC to provide aid is 13 (5 less than 18).

This rule allows anyone to help an ally perform a task, but also ensures that the help granted is sufficient enough to provide actual aid to the ally.

HELP DICE

When you take the Help Action, you roll a d10 and add the result to the aided creature’s next Ability Check or Attack Roll. The creature must make this Check or Attack before the start of your next turn.

This rule helps you feel like you are providing actual help to an ally because YOU are the one actually rolling the dice. You roll the d10, and your ally adds it to their roll, instead of you granting them ADV to let THEM roll an additional d20. This is still a very quick and intuitive way for PCs to help each other, and the dice can actually represent how WELL they helped. If they roll a 1, it could be described as something humorous that didn’t even help, but if they roll a 10, it could be described that THEY were the reason the Check or Attack succeeded. This also increases the cap of what’s possible to be rolled. Even with ADV, a 20 is still the highest, but by adding a d10, the maximum result possible before adding modifiers becomes 30.

Feel free to use different methods for different situations. Maybe this Help Dice system is only in effect during skill challenges and not during combat. Maybe you use this method when a PC tries to help an ally that already has ADV (instead of using the ADV Stacking rule shown below).

DC Tip: You could have the player roll a different die based on how well their Help Check went, or how much sense it makes for them to help in this way. Maybe a Gnome helping to lift something would be only a d4... but the Goliath would be a d12.

HELP DAMAGE BONUS

When you take the Help Action in combat you also add the result of your roll to your ally’s damage total.

The GM might require you to be within your own attack’s range to gain this bonus depending on the description or situation.

D6 CONSISTENT HELP DICE

When you take the Help Action, your Help Die is now 1d6 + your Prof. Bonus.

This makes the Help Dice total scale with level and be more consistent. My only concern with this is that the consistency is less exciting since the d6 becomes less impactful the more your Prof. Bonus rises. I like the variability of the 1d10 Help Dice more and feel like it stays true to the standard ADV system.

DC Tip: If your party relies on a Rogue getting ADV from their familiar for their attack or a noncombatant NPC providing help, leaving the decision on whether or not they roll the die or take the ADV as a choice, might be a good mix.



ROLLING DICE

ADV AND DISADV STACKING

Each new source of ADV or DisADV, after the first instance, grants the player either a +2 bonus or a -2 penalty to their roll. Multiple instances of ADV and DisADV cancel each other out.

Multiple sources of ADV and DisADV should stack together, allowing you to achieve higher highs and lower lows. After canceling each other out, each instance of ADV or DisADV beyond the first provides a +2 bonus or -2 penalty to the roll, in addition to rolling the extra d20. Allowing ADV and DisADV to stack encourages players to find ways to combine their efforts to achieve success. This kind of collaboration can improve player investment in the story and how they can add value to the situation at hand. When players are encouraged to brainstorm on ways to work together, it can lead to wonderful roleplay experiences that make the game more memorable.

Example: The group's Fighter trips an enemy making them fall Prone, the Cleric casts *Guiding Bolt* at them, and the Barbarian goes all-in with Reckless Attack! This is a LOT of combining factors leading up to this moment and should be rewarded. With these 3 sources of ADV, the first would grant normal ADV, but the 2 additional sources would both turn into a +2 bonus. This would result in a total of a +4 modifier added on top of rolling with ADV.

STACKING ADV & DISADV		
Sources	Roll 2d20	Modifier
1	Keep Highest / Lowest	-
2		+2 / -2
3		+4 / -4
4		+6 / -6

DC Tip: As the GM, if you use this rule, you are in control of what you allow to stack in this way. You could always say no to things granting additional stacks of ADV if you DON'T think it would help the situation the players are in. Additionally, if your players manage to stack an absurd amount of bonuses, just skip the roll entirely. If the Rogue slips a poison into the enemy's drink before they go to bed, the Wizard casts Greater Invisibility on the Barbarian, the Cleric blesses them, and then they use Reckless Attack against the sleeping, poisoned, paralyzed target... you probably don't need the dice.

FATE ROLLS

When your group presents you with a situation where the type of Check is unknown, or arbitrary, instead you can use a Fate Roll. Roll a d20, with a 1 being the worst possible outcome and a 20 being the best.

This is a core function of my games and has an infinite amount of uses. I call these Fate Rolls because they decide the fate of what happens in that given moment. It can be used when a PC asks if there is something in the room that they want. Simply make a Fate Roll and have the dice answer that question. I will make these Fate Rolls both in front of the group and behind my own screen depending on the situation. I might want to let the dice decide how something goes or respond to decisions that NPCs make on the fly. These are fun to roll out in the open as well so the group can see their fate in action!

Example: PCs have broken into a bandit hideout and there is a moment where you stop and give an explanation of what is about to happen. You say, "You all are now in the middle of this hideout... now I'm going to make a Fate Roll. Low means something bad happens that will make things more complicated, and you really DON'T want a Nat 1. High means something good happens that might help make things easier... let's see what happens." You roll the dice in front of the table and then see what happens!

DC Tip: You can also have these rolls be a simple high or low "coin flip", and something good happens on a 11-20 and something bad happens on a 1-10.



DAMAGE SEVERITY BY LEVEL

There are times when you need to come up with how much damage to deal to the PCs when bad things happen. This can range from being slid across a counter in a tavern brawl to being crushed by a falling boulder. These systems give you a quick guide for ruling how much damage is dealt by removing some of the variables and getting you started in the right direction.

I suggest placing your favorite method on the back of your GM screen to be able to refer to it quickly. I check the chart and see what damage it says, then tweak it from there based on what feels right for the situation. Over time this will become much faster and you might not even need the chart at all!

SCALING DAMAGE DICE METHOD

When coming up with damage values on the fly, assign a severity rating of 1-5 (Inconvenient to Extreme Deadly), and scale the damage dice according to the party's level, where level 10 equals 10 dice.

This is the method I use in my games. With this method you always use a number of dice equal to your party's level. You just have to decide how severe the threat is. If something Dangerous happened to my level 10 party, my mind would immediately jump to 10d8 as the baseline... then I would increase or decrease it to match the given situation.

Here is the thought process I have for each damage Severity:

- **Inconvenience:** Light damage, everyone is fine
- **Setback:** Nobody will go Unconscious (probably)
- **Dangerous:** Someone might go Unconscious (especially if they were already low)
- **Deadly:** Someone WILL go Unconscious
- **Extremely Deadly:** Someone might instantly die

DC Tip: I very rarely, if ever, use the Extremely Deadly severity, so use that with extreme caution. I also tend to reduce the amount of damage that this chart says, slightly, because I can always throw more damage at my party if I want to... but it's a lot harder to "reverse" it once they have already taken damage (apart from letting them rest... but then that can slow the game down).

SCALING D6 METHOD

The default damage dice size is always a d6. Use the table to determine the number of d6 rolled, based on that size of the party and severity of the threat.

Severity	Number of d6 Rolled
Setback	1/2 Party Level (rounded up)
Dangerous	Party Level
Deadly	Party Level x 2

DC Tip: Only note to make is that you might want to round down for the low-level Setbacks, as they could get deadly.

The nice part about this is that the level of your group does not change that often, so for a given period of time you will know the damage dice for the 3 scenarios. If your group is 5th-level, then you know a Setback is 3d6, Dangerous is 5d6, and Deadly is 10d6. Those numbers sound like a good ballpark and you can easily tweak it to what feels right. Does a Setback of 3d6 sound like too much for this little trap? Then make it 2d6. You are free to adjust as you see fit.

Damage Examples:

A Setback booby trap for a level 3 party would deal a number of d6 equal to half their party level rounded up (2d6). This is an average of 7 damage, which is about 25% of an average level 3 character's HP maximum. These are enough to be noticed, but pose almost zero risk of mortally wounding a PC, even at max damage... Watch out, Wizards!

A Dangerous cave-in for a level 3 party would deal damage equal to their party level (3d6). This is an average of 10.5 damage, which is about 40% of an average level 3 character's

Severity	Size of Dice x Party Level
Inconvenience	d4
Setback	d6
Dangerous	d8
Deadly	d10
Extremely Deadly	d12

HP maximum. This cave in would be lethal enough to pose a real threat to a wounded party member or heavily soften up those caught in it.

A Deadly gas inside an evil necromancer's lair for that same level 3 party would deal damage equal to 2 times their party level (6d6). This is an average of 21 damage, which is about 85% of an average level 3 character's HP maximum. This damage should really live up to its name and pose a real threat.



CUSTOMIZING CHARACTERS

CUSTOM SPELLCASTING MODIFIER

A player can choose Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as their spellcasting ability when they gain a level in a class for the first time.

Example: A player that chooses Paladin for their class uses Charisma as the spellcasting ability for their Paladin spells, however, using this rule they could choose Intelligence or Wisdom as their spellcasting ability instead.

CUSTOM SAVING THROWS

When a player creates a character, they gain proficiency in 2 Saves of their choice, replacing the 2 standard Saves from their chosen class.

Example: A Fighter has proficiency in Strength and Constitution Saves, but using this rule they can replace these Saves with any 2 of their choice, such as Dexterity and Intelligence.

This might sound crazy, and if you have a player that will choose the most min/maxed or tactically optimal options, then maybe you don't give them this choice. This helps further customize characters by not having ALL Barbarians, for example, be based on Strength and Constitution. Maybe you want to make a Dexterity-based Barbarian for some reason and that just wouldn't make sense, so you swap proficiency in Strength Saves for Dexterity.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY

Players can choose 1 Primary Save (Dexterity, Constitution, or Wisdom) and 1 Secondary Save (Strength, Intelligence, or Charisma).

This variant is great for when you want to give more structure to your players, either because they can't make a decision or because they'd create a min-maxed monster. Primary Saves protect you from the most common hazards in the game (forced movement, damage, mind control), whereas Secondary Saves protect you from the *very* rare, but *very* deadly hazards in the game (melting organs, mind destruction, forced planar travel).

EXTRA ATTACK MULTICLASSING

A character gains the Extra Attack feature when it gains 5 or more combined levels in two or more of the following classes: Barbarian, Fighter, Monk, Paladin, or Ranger.

Each of these classes gains the Extra Attack feature when you reach 5th-level in that class, and it always feels terrible to multiclass 3 levels into Fighter and 2 levels into Barbarian... but not get Extra Attack compared to if you just stuck with one class. I experienced this, as a player, and want to provide a bit more flexibility for martial classes to pick up their "key feature" of Extra Attack.

However some of these classes also gain something else at 5th-level along with Extra Attack. Paladins and Rangers get access to 2nd-level spells, Monks get Stunning Strike, and Barbarians get Fast Movement. Fighters on the other hand get nothing except Extra Attack at 5th-level. Why does this matter? Well, once that character reaches 5th-level in that class, they already have the Extra Attack, so it could feel underwhelming, especially for the Fighter since they would literally get nothing. You can grant multiclassed characters a secondary benefit if this happens and give them something small like a Feat, a Fighting Style, or a Bonus Level Up Perk. This is a moment where you can give something that is customized for them. Look at what they are multiclassing into, and give them a cool feature that is a combination of the classes.

DC Tip: Take into consideration things like the College of Swords Bard or even Hexblade Warlock. Maybe every 2 levels counts as 1 for trying to get the 5 levels needed? Maybe the required level is 6 instead of 5? This rule is you just being a nice GM, and if the players try to take advantage of you, then I would not use this rule for them.

INTELLIGENCE PROFICIENCIES

When creating your character, you gain a number of additional proficiencies equal to your Intelligence Modifier, these can be skills, tools, weapons, or even languages.

This gives Intelligence greater importance when creating your character and it becomes less of a "dump stat" that people just put their lowest score into. Often I see players choose to have a low Intelligence Score because there is really no reason to worry about this if they aren't a spellcaster that uses Intelligence as their spellcasting modifier. However, Wisdom ties into Perception, Charisma is used for social encounters, Constitution is your health, Dexterity is overpowered, and Strength can play a bigger role for martial classes and those who want to carry a lot of things.



Example: A Fighter who prides themselves on their smarts and strategic thinking has a +3 for their Intelligence Modifier. They can now choose to also be proficient in Stealth (learned to tactically position themselves), History (learned about historic battles) and Dwarvish (the books they've read about previous wars were written in Dwarvish).

This also makes sense because someone who is really smart tends to pick up on things and learn them faster. Learning tools, languages, and skills all come more naturally to someone who is smarter, and can master them more quickly. Picking something like Stealth could make sense for an intelligent character that studied how to move and hide.

You can choose to extend this rule past character creation as an incentive for PCs to gain more skills. When a character's Intelligence Modifier permanently increases from an Ability Score Increase (not from a magic item or spell effects), they also gain a new proficiency. This gives characters an option to gain proficiencies as they level as well.

INTELLECT POINTS VARIANT

When creating your character you gain a number of Intellect Points, equal to your Intelligence Modifier, which you can spend to gain additional proficiencies.

You can spend Intellect Points in the following ways:

- **1 Point:** Any tool, weapon, or language proficiency (GM approval)
- **2 Points:** One skill proficiency

This is a more balanced approach for awarding proficiencies based on your Intelligence Modifier. In most cases skill proficiencies are more useful than tools or languages, so they cost twice as many Intellect Points.

BONUS LEVEL UP PERKS

Either when characters level up, or in-between levels (GM discretion), you can give out customized features or abilities called Bonus Level Up Perks.

These are connected to what the character has been working to improve upon, their experiences during this level, or building onto and upgrading something they can already do. These are GREAT for rewarding your players for the things they are working towards. I love giving these out more than magic items because there is a sense of "earning it" through roleplay or tough challenges that they have overcome. The key is to know your players and identify which re-flavored abilities, feats, mechanics, spells, or buffs they would enjoy. Have conversations with them about the direction they want to go and then inspire them to make moves towards that goal. Don't just hand out these rewards because the players want to do something cool. Challenge them to figure out ways to bring this into their roleplay.

Example: A Warlock wants to animate their Pact Weapon. Have them spend downtime or Long Rests roleplaying them casting magic on their weapon and attempting to do this. Maybe they know *Animate Objects* and cast it on their own sword and start to practice this over time. Then when they level up (or between leveling up) you could have the weapon now function like *Spiritual Weapon* once per Long Rest!

Example: A Storm Herald Barbarian wants to embrace their lightning heritage and have even more lightning flavor for their character. Challenge them to come up with ways to make this happen. How would they roleplay this? Could they try to reach out to some sort of Storm God? Maybe they look for a thunderstorm and enter a Rage while in the middle of dangerous lightning. They get struck by it and get knocked Unconscious... but when they awaken... they have more lightning powers than before. Now they get a Bonus Level Up Perk that lets them use their Rage charges to cast some 1st-level lightning spells!



GROUP MILESTONE PERKS

This is less of a rule and more of a method to implement new house rules into your game. After your characters reach a certain level or story moment, give them new abilities or unlock new rules for your game. This could be giving your players an attack or ability that has additional bonuses when they work together, or an artifact that takes two or more players to activate.

DC Tip: This is a great way to implement house rules mid-campaign. Talk to your players beforehand and make sure they understand the rule and how it will be implemented. You can also just send your group the video of mine where I talk about it and let me be the one to break the ice for you!

Example: Your players have just helped defend a town from invading hordes of barbarians. As a reward, the Army Commander offers to train your party in effective group tactics, giving them additional battle maneuvers for extra damage when the players work together and use those maneuvers on their turn. Let your players be the creative force behind how this interaction works and they might come up with some amazing combinations!

ATTUNEMENT

Attunement is designed to ensure a character doesn't become more powerful than the game is designed to handle. 5e is designed around working well with relatively small numbers, using ADV and DisADV to simplify the benefits you receive from situations akin to their namesake, and using attunement to limit the magical benefits of external items so a character doesn't become virtually immune to broad categories of hazards and enemies.

Normally, you can attune to 1 magic item during a Short Rest, up to a maximum of 3 total attuned items. There's no difference in that limitation for a level 1 character and a level 20 character. Although attunement has core design benefits, it feels very "video gamey" at times. Why can't a character attune to more than 3 items at a time (without certain class features)? Why is it the same at level 1 and level 20? The rules in this section offer alternative methods for attuning to magic items, the total number you can be attuned to at a time, and scaling attunement with character progression.

NUMBER OF ATTUNEMENT SLOTS

Changing the number of magic items a character can attune to affects the special attunement benefits that Artificers receive. To use these attunement changes, I recommend making some small adjustments to the Artificer class features at 10th, 14th, and 18th level. Allowing the Artificer to continue to attune to more magic items than other classes, the way they do by using normal attunement rules, will make these changes less detrimental to those Artificers.

Artificer Attunement: Artificers can attune to an additional magic item at 10th-level (+1 attunement), again at 14th-level (+2 attunement), and again at 18th-level (+3 attunement).

MILESTONE ATTUNEMENT

You can attune to 1 magic item but gain 1 additional attunement slot when granted by the GM.

This rule grants complete control to the GM to determine magic item balance at your table. You can offer more powerful magic items a bit more freely, since the players will need to make tactical decisions about which they want to attune to, knowing that they can only attune to a small amount at a time. You can also grant the ability to attune to more magic items to certain players. This can be useful if certain PCs feel a bit underwhelming when compared to other party members.

PROFICIENCY ATTUNEMENT

You can attune to a number of magic items equal to your Prof. Bonus.

This rule offers scalable attunement that starts with 2 magic items, and increases with your character's proficiency, up to 6 magic items. This allows high-level characters to be better differentiated from low-level characters, helping to fulfill the fantasy of gaining better control over powerful magic as a character progresses.

LEVEL ATTUNEMENT

You can attune to a number of magic items equal to half your character level (minimum of 1).

This rule is similar to Proficiency Attunement in that it scales with character progression, although more rapidly and to a higher potential. Characters can attune to 1 magic item at 1st-level, which increases to 10 magic items at 20th-level. This rule is best suited for high magic settings where magic items with attunement are readily available, and the characters are powerful champions facing impossible challenges.

INTELLIGENCE MODIFIER ATTUNEMENT

You can attune to a number of magic items equal to your Intelligence Modifier.

This rule allows Intelligence to benefit from more than just a few Checks and a rare Save. A higher Intelligence allows a character to attune to many items, even at low levels (should they be available). This is especially beneficial to classes that traditionally have greater expertise with arcane devices, such as Artificers and Wizards.

DC Tip: You can combine these methods or others to create your own "formula" for the number of attunement slots. I think using (Prof. Bonus + Int Mod) would be a pretty cool idea.



ATTUNEMENT ITEM SLOT SCALING

Magic items are assigned a number of attunement slots, based on their power. When you attune to such a magic item, you must have enough attunement slots available for that specific item.

Some magic items can require you to use more than one slot to attune to it. These magic items are especially powerful, requiring multiple uses of your attunement. You can't attune to a magic item that requires more attunement slots than you have available. When you attune to such a magic item, it counts as multiple magic items for the purposes of determining the number of magic items you are attuned to.

Examples: If you can attune to 3 magic items, and have a magic item that takes up 3 attunement slots, when you attune to the item it is treated as 3 magic items for the purposes of determining the number of magic items you are attuned to. If a magic item requires 4 attunement slots, and you can only attune to 3 magic items, you cannot attune to that item.

This rule allows you to hand out especially powerful magic items without reducing the number of magic items a character can attune to. If a character can attune to 3 magic items, instead of balancing the power of each item you grant them, you can offer them 1 magic item of exceptional power but make it require 2 or more attunement slots. This can be a good tool when used in conjunction with the Proficiency Attunement or Level Attunement rules that can grant 6-10 attunements, respectively.

DC METHOD ATTUNEMENT

I use the following attunement rules at my table. You can use each of them individually or in combination (how I use them). Attunement is a system designed to enforce power limitations at all levels, to ensure no character becomes so powerful that they break the game balance. These rules do away with the concept of attunement in that sense, and instead allow a character to attune to any number of items their body and mind can handle. If a character attempts to harness more magical power than they can handle, they can become overloaded and experience unforeseen consequences. This system creates a more natural connection between the character and magic item attunement while still maintaining game balance.

INFINITE ATTUNEMENT

There is no limit to the number of magic items you can attune to at a time.

ATTUNEMENT OVERLOAD

When you exceed the number of magic items you can normally attune to, you suffer Magical Instability for each additional item you attune to beyond your normal limit. If you are using the rules for Infinite Attunement, you begin to experience Magical Instability when you attune to a number of items that exceeds your Prof. Bonus.

Magical Instability: This might sound vague and mysterious - that's the goal! I want my players to be able to attune to as many items as they want, but if they push the limits of this too much, there could be some bad consequences. I purposely don't lay this out, which gives me creative control as the GM to make it as BAD or as trivial as I want. If they are attuned to 1 too many magic items and the items are all mediocre, and I'm not worried about them "breaking the game", then there might be inconsequential or possibly funny things that happen. However, if a player is trying to push the limits of the game and abuse this (we all know who I'm talking about), then I can have something crazy happen to them. Maybe one of the magic items breaks entirely, the effects gets dulled or weakened, it doesn't work as intended, or maybe a Wild Magic Surge happens.

EQUIPMENT SLOTS

Characters gain a number of equipment slots (determined by GM) and can only equip one item in each slot.

- Head
- Hands
- Left Ring
- Necklace
- Belt
- Right Ring
- Back
- Lower Body
- Primary (not worn)
- Upper Body
- Feet
- Secondary (not worn)

You can add or take away any of these to be more or less limiting. You could add in Shoulders or combine Hands into "Upper Body. Another thing to note would be that I only allow my players to attune to 2 magic weapons or items that they are not wearing, a Primary and a Secondary. Anything more than that can't be passively attuned to since they aren't wearing it. There are only so many things you can attune to that you aren't WEARING, so I limit that to 2 items.



ACTION ATTUNEMENTS

A creature can attune to a magic item using an Action, which grants it an intuitive understanding of how to activate any magical properties of the item, including any necessary command words.

It has always felt odd to me that a creature must spend 1 hour meditating, practicing, or performing some activity with an item to attune to it. This prevents the opportunity to steal a powerful artifact from a creature or place, and immediately use its powerful properties. You can't pull the Legendary sword Excalibur from its resting stone and gain the benefits of its magical properties - no, you must first spend an hour with it, killing the tension and pacing of the story.

Using this rule, you can immediately attune to a new magic item using an Action. This can happen in the middle of combat, as your party races against their enemies to control a powerful relic hidden away within a forgotten temple. Characters can obtain new magic items and feel its magical power resonate within them, allowing that power to wash over them if they so choose.

ENDING ATTUNEMENT

If a magic item is attuned to another creature, you must spend 10 minutes with the item to end its previous attunement before you can attune to it yourself. Additionally, you can spend 10 minutes to end your attunement to a magic item.

This rule prevents creatures from disarming each other of magic items and immediately using their magical properties. If an enemy disarms your magic weapon, they can't immediately use it against you. For them, the item doesn't behave any differently than an ordinary weapon until they can break your attunement to it. Similarly, a character can't separate the villain from their magical "McGuffin" and immediately use its world shattering power.

Keep in mind this is a base rule and you can always change up the attunement process for different items. Some items could still require a Short Rest, Long Rest, or longer to attune to. You could also add specific requirements like reading a passage from a tome, or landing a killing blow with it. Some items could require the same for ending attunement. Maybe you have to accomplish tasks, obtain specific items, or even destroy the item to end the attunement.



LEVELING UP

There are 2 main methods to leveling up your players: Milestone and XP Gain. I propose a possible blend of both. I have used both separately but my preferred method is a mix of the two. These XP rules help make tracking and awarding XP easier mathematically and mechanically!

ADJUSTED XP TABLE

Number of Monsters	Multiplier
1	X 1
2	X 1.5
3-6	X 2
7-10	X 2.5
11-14	X 3
15+	X 4

ADJUSTED XP VALUES

When determining the amount of XP earned in any given encounter, refer to the Adjusted XP Table and apply the multiplier to the baseline XP, as stated in the monster stat block. Take that adjusted XP total and divide it evenly between the characters in that encounter (including NPCs).

Instead of using the XP value based on the sum of each individual monster, like usual, instead award the adjusted XP value based on how many monsters there are. If the encounter is that much harder, you deserve that much more XP!

Example: An encounter with 10 Kobolds (25 XP each) would normally award 250 XP. To calculate the difficulty of the encounter, you would use the adjusted XP of 625 (250 x 2.5). Instead of awarding 250 XP, give the adjusted amount of 625. Using this rule awards characters XP based on the true challenge of the encounter.

Feel free to separate your monsters into multiple groups and run each monster group through this XP calculation before determining the total experience to award. If the party defeats a Vampire Lord supported by several Zombies, the Zombies might not be adding much to the difficulty of the encounter. You might treat the Vampire Lord as a single creature, the Zombies as a separate group, and determine the total XP to award between these two groups of monsters.

This would make your party level up much faster since they are receiving a larger number of XP. I don't throw a ton of combats at my group every single day, because each combat is important and has stakes involved. I also award XP based on the other systems explained below, as well.

I have never enjoyed having my group level up too fast, so there are a few things you can do to slow down leveling to a more controllable pace. Use whichever of these methods you have to, to find your favorite XP rewarding method:

- Put a % reduction on the XP they are awarded. Once you have calculated how much XP they get based on that one large total number, reduce it in some way. You could do



50% and cut it in half and they would level up half as fast as before. This might help to reduce the number you reward back down. But you can always change this over time and apply the % that you want based on how fast or slow you want them to level up through this current part of the story.

- Only reward XP for KEY combats. If there is a small brawl or nonthreatening combat, then you could not award XP for it. If this sounds terrible and mean, this is what happens constantly in milestone leveling. As the GM, you are in control of how fast your group levels up and you can do a hybrid between milestone and XP gain by choosing certain encounters (social, exploration, and combat) that count for XP and others that don't. This might also balance out from the larger number that you are awarding them with this XP method, as well.

ALTERNATE XP THRESHOLDS

These are alternate XP thresholds for character advancement. The XP needed represents the total XP required to reach that level. This total does not reset between level ups.

This version feels better to me than the standard XP chart because the numbers on there seem clunky and random, instead of consistent and clear cut. In comparison I still start

LEVEL	XP NEEDED	LEVEL	XP NEEDED
1	0	11	100k
2	300	12	120k
3	1000	13	140k
4	3k	14	160k
5	6k	15	180k
6	10k	16	200k
7	20k	17	225k
8	40k	18	250k
9	60k	19	300k
10	80k	20	350k

off with 300, then triple it to 900... but I instead round it up to an even 1,000 so from here on everything is in increments of 1K. This triples to 3k, then the growth rate slows down to only double the previous number so it doesn't get too crazy. I also round off the XP at 6th-level to be an even 10k and from there things are a smooth increase until 16th-level where it jumps to 25k increments, and 18th-level jumps to 50k increments to end at 350K. My players know that I use a different chart, but I don't show them these numbers. In fact, I don't even tell my players what XP I award each session, I keep that all behind the scenes for multiple reasons I get into in this section.

DIFFICULTY THRESHOLDS XP

When awarding XP, instead of calculating the XP values of individual monsters, you award XP based on the players' level and the difficulty rating of the encounter, based on the Encounter Difficulty by Level Table shown below.

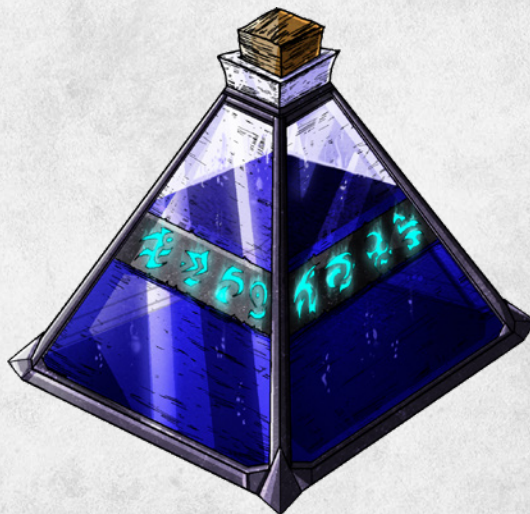
Consult the chart below to calculate the encounter difficulty thresholds for your group. You will end up with 4 separate totals for each type of encounter difficulty: Easy, Medium, Hard, and Deadly. To find these values you add up the numbers for each character across each difficulty rating.

Here is a group of two 3rd-level and two 4th-level characters as an example:

- **Easy:** 400 XP (75 + 75 + 125 + 125)
- **Medium:** 800 XP (150 + 150 + 250 + 250)
- **Hard:** 1200 XP (225 + 225 + 375 + 375)
- **Deadly:** 1800 XP (400 + 400 + 500 + 500)

You will only ever award one of these 4 amounts of XP to your party. If they have an easy combat encounter, award them 400 XP. If they have a Hard encounter, you award 1200 XP. If they have an entirely different "Hard" encounter with entirely different monsters... you still award 1200 XP. This takes the complicated calculations out of the picture and is how a "Homebrew GM" who does not use the CR system can still calculate XP in a fair way.

All you have to do is record these totals for your group and it can last for every encounter they have during this entire level. You only need to update these numbers if a party member levels up, which does not happen that often. I also use these numbers as a reference point and adjust from there. In the above example, if that 2nd Hard encounter was more difficult and pushed the players to the LIMIT more than the first one did, I might give them 1500 XP instead. Where did that extra 300 XP come from? My head. I just picked a number that felt right based on how the fight went and used these numbers as a guide. Don't be afraid to award more XP than the Deadly encounter says, or less than an Easy encounter says, these are just reference numbers.



CHOOSE YOUR DIFFICULTY

How do you know what difficulty your encounter is? This will largely be a gut feeling for you and will become very obvious when you gain more XP as a GM.

Easy: This does not drain the parties resources or put them into any real danger. The PCs could lose a few HP but they will definitely win this combat with no issue. I tend to rarely use these except for fun or humor.

Medium: This might get scary, once or twice, if poor decisions are made but the PCs should be in no real threat of going Unconscious. I probably use these the least of all encounters. They land in a weird gray area for me and aren't easy enough to be fun and light-hearted, but then also don't pack enough of a punch to present a true challenge to the PCs.

Hard: This could go real bad. PCs who already have low HP are in real danger of going Unconscious, or worse. This is the category where most of my encounters fall into, but even

NON-COMBAT EXPERIENCE

This is a PERFECT system for awarding XP for “non-combat” encounters. So many times players think that they ONLY get XP from killing things. Using this system lets you award XP using the same thought process for the other pillars of the game too. Did they have a “Hard” time exploring the swamp lands to find the temple? Give them some XP for it! Don't be afraid to award XP for large sections of travel, accomplishments during downtime, or even puzzles they solve. Use this chart as a reference and give them THAT amount of XP. Maybe they had a “Deadly” social encounter where they talked their way out of a bad situation or convinced a powerful NPC to join their cause. Award them XP for it!

Again, use these numbers as a reference point for how much to give. You don't have to stick to it exactly. If you want to give less XP for these situations, instead of awarding the “Hard” amount, round down to the “Medium” amount and give them that. You will start to know how much to award based on these numbers over time.

ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTY BY LEVEL TABLE

Character Level	Encounter Difficulty			
	Easy	Medium	Hard	Deadly
1st	25	50	75	100
2nd	50	100	150	200
3rd	75	150	225	400
4th	125	250	375	500
5th	250	500	750	1,100
6th	300	600	900	1,400
7th	350	750	1,100	1,700
8th	450	900	1,400	2,100
9th	550	1,100	1,600	2,400
10th	600	1,200	1,900	2,800
11th	800	1,600	2,400	3,600
12th	1,000	2,000	3,000	4,500
13th	1,100	2,200	3,400	5,100
14th	1,250	2,500	3,800	5,700
15th	1,400	2,800	4,300	6,400
16th	1,600	3,200	4,800	7,200
17th	2,000	3,900	5,900	8,800
18th	2,100	4,200	6,300	9,500
19th	2,400	4,900	7,300	10,900
20th	2,800	5,700	8,500	12,700

then these are HARD and truly provide a challenge with a real threat of defeat.

Deadly: This could be lethal for one or more PCs unless they use clever tactics and teamwork to avoid defeat. These are a standard in my games and players expect that this will be on the table, especially if there has been a lot leading up to it. I usually don't drop Deadly encounters on my PCs out of nowhere, but these are definitely the big finales that each story arc needs.



TALLY POINT SYSTEM

When a PC has a character moment that drives the story forward or overcomes a large challenge, takes a huge risk, develops their character further, or for any other “cool thing” they do, they receive a Tally Point. The GM tracks these Tally Points over the course of the session and then each PC gets a number of XP equal to (10 x character level) for EACH Tally Point.

Example: A level 5 PC had 3 Tally Points at the end of a session. They would be awarded 50 XP for each Tally Point, for a total of 150 XP (10 x 5 x 3).

The GM can award Tally Points to players for anything they want. These moments are largely subjective and can be used in the exact same way as Inspiration would (see “Inspiration System” on page 28). I award these to PCs that IMPACT the game and progress the story or their character forward. This includes great roleplay moments or tough decisions their character made, big risks they took for the betterment of the group, and other things that everyone would agree are big moments at the table and for that character.

In general, I don’t award these points out loud and I keep them a secret. I don’t want players to be asking me for Tally Points and have it enter the game in a cringey way. I have an index card behind my screen and will make notes on it, but I mostly award these Tally Points in private, when I calculate XP for the group after everyone is gone. I will take notes to highlight these moments for the recap at the start of the next session and even talk to players one-on-one to let them know how great they are doing. However, I don’t let these Tally Points enter the conversation by saying something like, “Oh wow, that’s 2 Tally Points right there!” that would feel bad to me.

You can use this Tally Points system for both XP Gain and Milestone leveling systems. It’s obvious how it would be used in XP Gain, but for Milestone you can use this as a “pulse check” for how much IMPACT each PC has had on the game.

Calculate this number on the side, and if one PC gets extremely far ahead than the others... maybe level THAT character up 1 or 2 sessions before other characters? If that sounds crazy then don't do it, but I think this is a GREAT reward for a player that has earned it by PLAYING the game you put in front of them. I usually give a quick speech about what cool moments have led them to this or even craft a storyline around how the character has an in-game reason for why they just got more powerful.

Just having this rule at the table can really inspire your players to PLAY the game in big ways that progress both the story and their own characters. This promotes actions and development and being more than a casual bystander of the game.

XP FUDGING

When you award XP, you can blend XP Gain and Milestone together, using XP Gain to determine when the party is close to leveling up, but using Milestone to create a cinematic moment for it.

This is just me giving you permission to award XP however you want for whatever reason you want. My preferred system is that I use many of the methods outlined above to track XP across the campaign, but only as a recommendation. The numbers tell me, mathematically, when they are close to leveling up, which makes me look for what spot in the current story to level them up at. Are they close to a big story moment? Did they just finish a big moment and are about to have downtime? I choose to level them up wherever I want to (like Milestone) but I use the XP that I track to inform this decision (XP Gain).

When I award XP, I keep all of this in mind and might increase or reduce the XP if I feel like I want them to be closer or farther from their next level. I will also round off XP in chunks of 10 or 100 to make it easier to add up. I also might throw in entire chunks of 1000 XP if I was really proud of what they did or if they accomplished a big story moment.



CHAPTER 2: INSPIRATION OVERHAUL



INSPIRATION SYSTEM

Inspiration is a system that a lot of groups don't even use. I want to get you to think outside the box and see a TON of different ways to use Inspiration for your group. First we should talk about the issues with Inspiration, in general, and think about WHY you don't use Inspiration or what a perfect version of it could look like at your table. Then I will give you options that you can pick and choose from to create a custom system.

Think about the following questions so you can create your own system with this guide:

1. **How do you earn Inspiration?**
2. **How much can you have at once?**
3. **What does it actually do when you use it?**

Normally, Inspiration is earned when you RP your character's traits, you can only have ONE Inspiration at a time, and you can use it to give yourself ADV on a roll. That's it. BUT it could be so much more.

Inspiration is a great way for a GM to reward their players for wonderful roleplay moments. Some GMs avoid awarding Inspiration due to how ambiguous the rules are regarding when to do so and what a player can do with it once they have it. Inspiration is a fantastic system that can be improved quite a bit with just a few changes.

CHALLENGES & CUSTOMIZATIONS

Inspiration doesn't work for everyone, and that's okay! If you want to customize Inspiration to work best for your table, this section can help guide you through the process of tailoring it to what you think is best. Below are a few of the challenges that many GMs have encountered with the standard method for awarding and using Inspiration. For every problem listed, I will offer my solution to the issue. Feel free to use or tweak these changes to better align with the gameplay you want at your table.

EARNING INSPIRATION

The traditional methods for awarding Inspiration usually surround roleplaying a character's traits. This means Inspiration heavily favors players that have experience roleplaying. A lot of players are new to the game, and may not be comfortable or know how to roleplay their character, which can be a bit of a downer if they don't ever receive Inspiration. It can also feel bad for the players if you only award Inspiration to the players who play the game the way YOU want.

Award Inspiration for more than just roleplaying. There are 3 pillars of gameplay: combat, social, and exploration. Feel free to award Inspiration to players who invest themselves into these pillars. GREAT character roleplay, EPIC combat maneuvers, and BRILLIANT puzzle solving ideas are all great ways for players who enjoy different parts of the game to earn Inspiration. It can be a great reward that encourages new players to continue doing things that improve the game and help them grow as a player. When you award Inspiration, take a Timeout to explain to your players why they are earning the Inspiration. This can help the players feel recognized for their investment and encourage them to do it more. If you award Inspiration for many different types of activities, it can encourage the players to try new things.



Below is a list of different methods for awarding Inspiration to your players and I would recommend picking multiple options to fit the various playstyles at your table. The players are the ones who earn Inspiration, so think about what they like to do, and try to award Inspiration to ensure they have a fun experience. Also, think about what you can do to motivate your players to play the game in ways that are more fun for everyone at the table (including you). If good behavior is awarded with Inspiration, it will increase the likelihood of it happening again.

Sources of Inspiration:

- At the start of each session
- Showing up on time
- Sharing a creative or clever idea
- Remembering a key piece of information (it pays to take notes)
- Making an epic move or taking a big risk
- An act of selflessness, kindness, teamwork, or other positive trait
- Roleplaying your character's traits (positive or negative)
- Making a suboptimal choice in order to be true to their character (see Setbacks)
- An allied player rolls a Nat 20 (they inspired you)
- Rolling a Nat 1

You can choose to tie Inspiration to a critical success or failure on a d20 roll. A natural 20 on a Check could grant Inspiration to either the person performing the Check or those watching, since witnessing a perfect performance can inspire an observing ally or passerby. Alternatively, when a player rolls a natural 1, you could offer them Inspiration if they provide a creative description of how things went wrong for them.

Setbacks

A character setback is a moment of gameplay where a player decides to take the harder path or less optimal choice in order to stay true to the beliefs of their character. They might decide to make a roll with DisADV because their character doesn't like doing such a task or isn't very good at it (from a narrative perspective). When they take a Setback, you can reward them Inspiration. This doesn't have to be them giving themselves DisADV, as long as they make a less than ideal choice in the spirit of "doing what their character would do", then you can reward them with Inspiration.

Player Led Inspiration

Can your players give out Inspiration to each other? This can be a great way for players to build comradery and acknowledge the big moments their teammates do. You could give each player at the table ONE instance per session that they can hand out an Inspiration if a moment in the game stands out to them. You could also allow players to give their own Inspiration to other players, but I would at least require for there to be a good reason or moment that made this transfer happen. Make sure to establish a standard here for what is "worthy" of being given Inspiration and that players aren't trying to take advantage of the system. Keep your players honest with each other and as long as they aren't trying to give Inspiration purely for an ally to have a mechanical benefit, then let them reward it as they see fit.

SAVING INSPIRATION

Players love to hold onto things for the PERFECT opportunity, which likely never comes. Since a player can only have 1 Inspiration at a time, they may want to hold on to it for an important moment, which can discourage them from creating cool gameplay moments until they spend the Inspiration they already have. If you offer them more than 1 Inspiration, they may still hoard it until perfect moments arrive, and never end up using it.

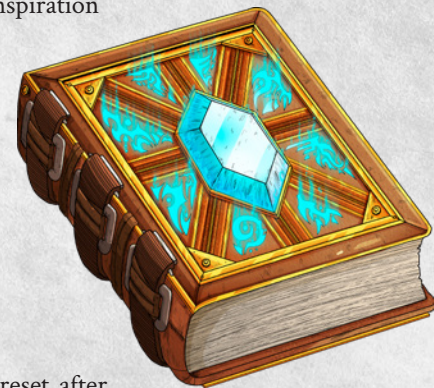
Multiple Inspiration

Can players have more than one Inspiration at a time? Depending on your system, you might want to allow players to accumulate more than one. I don't like having a hard cap at 1 because then once I give a player an Inspiration... they can no longer get it again, which removes one of my abilities to reward them for the things they do. As they keep collecting them, make it harder to get more and then when they have "too many" you can say things like, "Well, I would give you an Inspiration but you already have too many!"

Allowing players to have more than one also lets them use multiple Inspirations on a single moment, for even bigger effects. Maybe certain uses cost 2 or even 3 points of Inspiration, or the effect of the Inspiration is stronger in some way.

Possible Inspiration Caps:

- 1
- 1/2 Prof. Bonus
- Prof. Bonus
- 1/2 Your Level
- Your Level
- Infinite



Losing Inspiration

You can also have Inspiration reset after each game session or decay over time, forcing your players to "use it or lose it". This is an especially useful rule for players who really like to hoard Inspiration rather than use it. If you only allow them to have 1 at a time, this rule can ensure they spend their Inspiration so they can earn more. If you don't restrict the amount of Inspiration they can earn, this rule will keep them from hoarding it all for a rainy day.

You could have this decay happen at certain periods of time either in-game or at the table. I have seen this decay happen on either Long Rests, sections of Downtime, or even each session. The decay can be a complete reset to zero, cut in half, or just reduced by 1. I personally don't have a decay at my table. I instead have it become harder and harder to get Inspiration the more they acquire. You can also just throw very important things at them to "bait" out those Inspiration dice!

DC Tip: I personally do not limit the amount of Inspiration my players can earn, BUT I award Inspiration less frequently to players who have more of it than other players. I give out Inspiration more freely to players with 0-1 Inspiration over players that have 3 or more.



REMEMBERING INSPIRATION

It doesn't matter how awesome your Inspiration rules are if you forget to award it and players forget to use it. This is something I struggled with for a long time before making some small changes at my table.

An easy solution to this problem is to use something TANGIBLE to represent the Inspiration. If you are playing in-person, this can be a special token or die (maybe of a unique color) that the GM and players hold onto. The GM can see these special tokens or dice, which serves as a reminder to award them, and the players can remember to use them. If you are playing a virtual or text-based game, this can be a special tag or icon you can give your players that can indicate they have Inspiration.

I have a small plastic container of tiny d6s that are bright red and purple (of course). When a player is awarded Inspiration, they get excited to see these special dice that they can use later. You can keep a bowl in the center of the table with coins, tokens, or dice inside or stash them behind your GM screen.

USING INSPIRATION

Inspiration normally grants a character ADV on a d20 roll of their choice. On paper, this sounds like a great use of Inspiration, but when you consider how rare Inspiration normally is, and how fickle ADV can be at times, it can feel a bit disappointing when you end up with 2 low rolls or 2 high rolls. When you roll low twice, it can feel like a complete waste of your Inspiration, since it didn't amount to anything (and especially disappointing since it was probably an important roll). When you roll high twice, it can feel completely unnecessary, since both rolls would have succeeded.

Rather than granting ADV, you can instead use Inspiration as a bonus die that the player can add to their d20 roll (just like Bardic Inspiration). This method ensures that players spend their Inspiration when they know it's needed. They can roll the d20, see the result, and choose to use the Inspiration Die. More importantly, it actually improves the chance of success, since it ADDS a number to the result of the d20, potentially delivering a total result much higher than would otherwise be possible with ADV (which doesn't increase the maximum result, just the average). The Inspiration Die can start out as a d6, and scale with character level up to a d12 (d8 at 5th-level, d10 at 11th, and d12 at 17th). This works well to ensure it's not too powerful at lower levels, and doesn't fall off at higher levels.

Inspirational Examples

- You can reroll a d20 roll. You can choose to do so after you see the result, but before the outcome is determined. This can be limited to a character's own rolls or expanded to allies only or even enemies.
- You can choose to gain ADV on a d20 roll.
- When you fail a Save, you can choose to succeed instead.
- When you take damage, you can subtract a d6 from the amount. The size of the die increases when you

reach 5th-level (d8), again at 11th-level (d10), and again at 17th-level (d12).

- When you score a hit with an Attack, you can turn the hit into a Critical Hit.
- You can choose to gain a +5 bonus to your Initiative.
- You can reroll damage dice AFTER you roll for damage.
- You can add an additional damage die BEFORE you roll for damage.
- You upcast a spell to a higher level.
- Use an ability you would normally not have access to, such as a spell, or customized feature (see "Class Specific Inspiration" on page 33).
- You can regain an expended resource or can cast it for free.
 - A spell slot of a level that's equal to or lower than your Prof. Bonus.
 - A number of Ki or Sorcery Points up to your Prof. Bonus.
 - 2 uses of your Rage or Wild Shape.
 - 1 use of your Action Surge or Channel Divinity.

DC Tip: It's up to you if it has to "make sense" for these things to happen. Have them describe what they are doing instead of the players just saying, "I use an Inspiration." It's much better for them to paint a picture of what causes this to happen.

Social & Exploration Inspiration Uses

Inspiration can be combined with Player Improv Rules to let players add more to the world. This is a great way to limit the frequency of these uses by connecting it to your Inspiration. Below is a basic outline for each but more details and examples can be found in Chapter 4 on page 61.

I Know Someone: PC says that they know someone who can help with a current issue the party is having. They make a Charisma Check to see the NPC's disposition towards them and how this NPC exists in the world.

Just as I Planned: PC says they had made preparations beforehand to benefit them in their current situation.

That Reminds Me: PC says they remember something about a topic and briefly describes how they possibly know about it and makes a Check to see if they remember.

I Have Just the Thing: PC says they have an item that they currently don't have, but explains a "flashback" where they could have obtained it from a person or place that they visited somewhat recently.



Combat Inspiration Uses

These are just for getting you thinking about what is possible, and how you can make combat features even more customized to your PCs.

Human Shield: When an ally within 5ft of you is damaged, you can spend an Inspiration Die to take the damage instead. You have resistance to that damage.

Adrenaline Rush: On your turn, you can spend an Inspiration Die to take an additional Action or Bonus Action (your choice). If you take the Attack Action, you can only make 1 additional Attack.

Heroic Stand: When you are reduced to 0 HP, you can spend an Inspiration Die to drop to 1 HP instead.

Legendary Action: At the end of another creature's turn, you can spend an Inspiration Die to perform 1 of the following actions:

- You can make 1 Weapon Attack.
- You can cast a cantrip.
- You can move up to your full Speed.
- You can move up to 1/2 your Speed and take either the Disengage, Dodge, Hide, Search, or Use an Object Action.

BARDIC INSPIRATION FRUSTRATION

Yes, my system works very similarly to Bardic Inspiration, which is a great class feature for Bards. I will address this in two ways (similarly to the start of the book). First, if you do not have a Bard at your table, then don't worry about it, this isn't an issue at all, keep playing the game as usual. How many people play Bards anyway! Second, if you feel this system "steps on the toes" of Bards and makes them feel less special, then don't use it. Instead, use the custom system above to make a version you do like, OR you can do what I've done and tweak what Bards can do so that they can still feel special. Here are examples of what I've done with Bards at my table, where I used this Inspiration system and they each LOVED their version of it and still felt like awesome and inspiring Bards.

Bard Examples:

Give the Bard player a number of "Real Life Inspiration Die" (the little purple d6's) equal to the number of players there are at the table. During the session they are allowed to give those out to the party as they see fit. This is ON TOP OF their normal Bardic Inspiration. They can just hand these out FREE of cost. If this sounds crazy... think of it like this... THEY ARE DOING THE WORK FOR ME! I literally off-loaded giving out Inspiration to this player and they LOVED it. They would react in character about how awesome something was and hand it out. I was still the "referee" though and would judge if it made sense in the moment of if they were trying to game the system. Plus, I could still give out my own Inspiration if they didn't.

This one was simple, I allowed the Bard player to give out the Inspiration that I gave them, to their allies once per turn, no Action required. So the Inspiration Die was another tool for them to inspire OTHER players with, AND since they were always giving out that Inspiration... I GAVE that Bard player Inspiration at a much more frequent rate. They loved having basically TWO methods to give out Inspiration.



DUNGEON COACH INSPIRATION

METHOD

This is the default system that I use at my table. I will definitely tweak this depending on who is at my table and how I'm wanting to use Inspiration in the game. I've had it play both a minor and major role, but this is just the default version.

HOW DO YOU EARN IT?

I like to keep it pretty broad and vague so that when BIG moments happen at the table I can throw out Inspiration as I see fit. I want my players to know the type of moments that could earn them Inspiration, but I've found that if you're too specific, people start doing things just to get Inspiration... which feels bad to me. My players know that I'm looking for them to PLAY HARD, go "all-in", make big moves, do what their character would do, and progress the story. To be more specific, here are a few examples of things that earn Inspiration at my table:

- Roleplaying their character in a way that adds something to the game
- Doing something LESS optimal because that's "what their character would do"
- Engaging with the wants and needs of other characters
- Taking creative risks that move the story forward
- Contributing the world building with things I hadn't thought about
- Solving a problem in such a genius way that it heavily changes the outcome
- Describing or revealing HUGE moments in combat that excite the group
- Thinking outside the box



HOW MANY CAN YOU HAVE?

Technically... INFINITE! There is no cap on how much Inspiration my players can get. I don't see this as a problem because... I GIVE IT OUT! So, I can stop giving it out if I think they have too much. If that doesn't sound fair, here is what I tell my players:

"The more Inspiration you have, the harder it is to get. So if you have NONE then I'll be looking for even the simplest of things that you do, that are awesome, of course. But if you are sitting on 3, 4, or more... then I might not give you more, unless you do something MIND BLOWING."

I usually just ask the player, once they do something cool, "Oh wow, that's crazy! Hey, how much Inspiration do you have?" They will tell me the number and I'll just say, "WOW that's a lot! Maybe you should spend those things," and then I move on!

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH THEM?

This is the BIG PART! I use a d6 Inspiration Die. It's just a little jar of those tiny colorful d6, purple of course, that you can get for TTRPGs. These dice literally ARE their Inspiration, and once a player EARNS an Inspiration, I just grab a d6 and pass it out to them like candy! This helps me remember to GIVE THEM OUT since I have the jar right in front of me... AND it helps the players remember to USE THEM since they have colorful dice (that aren't their own) in front of them.

What can they do with these little d6's? They can roll them and add the result to ANY d20 roll that they make. Once they roll the d20, BUT BEFORE they hear the result of what happens, they can choose to roll the additional Inspiration Die to add onto the roll (just like Bardic Inspiration, which I'll address in a second).

Additional Rules

- A player can only use a number of Inspiration Die equal to their Prof. Bonus. So if a player is sitting on 4d6, they can't just ROLL 'EM ALL and basically get an auto success.
- You can use your Inspiration Die on your allies' rolls if you describe HOW it makes sense that you help them in some way, and if the situation allows for it. I get the final say if this is possible, but I love to see my players help each other so I usually help them figure out a way to make it work (if it makes sense... lol).
- I DON'T let my players use their Inspiration Die to LOWER the result of an enemy's roll, because this has always felt strange to me. There are only 1 or 2 times where I have allowed this to happen, which were VERY situational and appropriate at the time, so always be open to what your players are thinking.
- Decide what you allow your players to use these d6's on. Would you let them use the d6 Inspiration Die on a Death Save? I personally... would not... BUT there have been campaigns where I DID let them do it and it literally saved someone's life.

HEROIC INSPIRATION

Here is an example system where you can have up to a maximum of 5 Inspiration Points, at any given time. You choose to spend your Inspiration Points, save them up for something CRAZY, or use them in a moment of need.

1 Inspiration Point:

- Reroll any of your own d20 rolls.
- Cast a 1st-level spell without using a spell slot (you can increase this over time).

2 Inspiration Points:

- Reroll any of your allies' d20 rolls.
- Choose to succeed at a Save that you just failed.
- **Heroic Save:** Take half the damage from any source of damage that hits an ally within 5ft of you.

3 Inspiration Points:

- Reroll any of your enemies' d20 rolls.
- **Heroic Stand:** Drop to 1 HP, instead of going Unconscious, from damage that would have dropped you to 0 HP.

4 Inspiration Points:

- **Limit Breaker:** You can cast a spell of one level higher than what you are currently capable of casting (must be on your class list).
- **Heroic Haste:** You gain the effects of *Haste* and it cannot be dispelled.
- **Legendary Action:** You gain the use of 1 Legendary Action that you can use while not on your turn. This lets you take one Action and refreshes at the top of each round. This lasts until the combat is over.

5 Inspiration Points:

- PC becomes the GM for a moment and can influence one specific outcome or scenario.

This can be absolutely INSANE, but they get to speak something into existence and do something that no player EVER gets to do... become the GM for one moment. This RARELY happens... but when it does... it's amazing!. I told the players that if they somehow get 5 Inspiration and really go for it, they can just say that something happens and I'll take it from there. Keep in mind... I'm the one who hands these out... so if a player wants to go for this they KNOW that it's going to be VERY hard to get that 5th Inspiration (as I described earlier). I also tell the players that if they ask for something RIDICULOUS or too GREEDY... then I'll simply say NO... and take away one of their Inspiration... bringing them back down to 4... and they have to earn it back again. This is important and I've NEVER had to actually do this before, but it's crucial to establish a tone of understanding and respect... they can't just SAY ANYTHING and then BOOM. I also tell the player that once a combat starts I become far more strict on its use and won't just let them say... "Oh yeah that thing dies now"... that would feel very anticlimactic and LAME. You might be surprised with how humble of an ask your players will want for this moment of ABSOLUTE POWER... but if you know your players would abuse this... then don't do it and just tell them the cap is 4 Inspiration!

CLASS SPECIFIC INSPIRATION

This is one of my favorite ideas for Inspiration and I've LOVED using this system. You can add it into ANY Inspiration system as an option that players can spend their Inspiration on. What this does is give a character access to a specific ability that they can ONLY use if they spend an Inspiration to do so. This is very unique because what they do with this could be extremely powerful since the resource (Inspiration) is very scarce... unless you just give it out all the time.

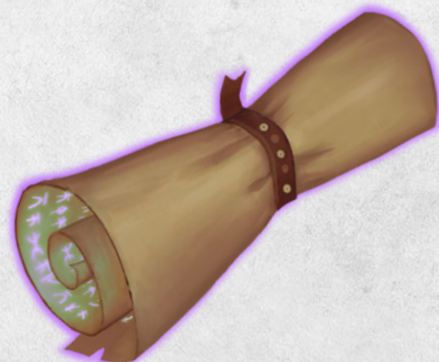
You can also have these cool moves cost multiple Inspiration (if you allow for multiple in your system). These can be specific to the class, background, race, or anything having to do with the character you are giving this unique ability to. I've even had "combo move" abilities where BOTH players had to use an Inspiration to trigger something truly amazing! You can upgrade and change these over time and they also fit right alongside Bonus Level Up Perks (see "Bonus Level Up Perks" on page 20).

These abilities can start off as cool things that your players can do if they use an Inspiration to create a big moment. At early levels this might be great, but as they level up maybe you give them the ability to do some of these things WITHOUT Inspiration and then give them upgraded stuff they can now do with Inspiration.

This system can help fix any clunky mechanics that make players feel bad about certain parts of their character. If your Barbarian thinks they don't do enough damage while using Rage, maybe they can use an Inspiration to increase their damage. This can help solve numerous problems and not break the game, since it costs a resource that you control. Keep in mind everything we've talked about when it comes to making tweaks that feel right for you. I feel like a Barbarian would be able to use Inspiration differently than a Rogue, so here are some class specific examples to get the creative juices flowing:

Barbarian: The Barbarian can use Inspiration when rolling initiative to immediately enter a Rage when combat starts. You could restrict the use of this to only combat that truly MATTERS to the Barbarian, such as having a loved one in danger or during a battle against their archenemy. Maybe they can spend an Inspiration to gain Temp HP or deal more damage, while using Rage.

Bard: The Bard can use Inspiration to temporarily BOOST the power of their Bardic Inspiration. Either increase the size of the dice by one (a d6 would go to a d8) or they can inspire TWO targets at the same time with just one use of the feature.



Cleric: The Cleric can cast *Bless* or *Guidance* at 1st-level without components or their holy symbol and without expending a spell slot. Or you can give the Cleric an expanded spell list from their deity that they can only access with Inspiration. This also touches on Inspiration scaling as characters get stronger. So at first, they could only cast *Bless* or *Guidance*, but over time, they could gain access to more spell options. Or you can give them an opportunity to use Inspiration twice for the free use of *Mass Healing Word* in a huge moment where they dig deep and heal their entire party!

Druid: So the Druid wants to shapeshift into a tiny mouse to explore around? They could use Inspiration, instead of Wild Shape, to shapeshift into a CR 1 or lower creature, but it only has 1 HP. This would save those Wild Shapes, or if they're already in a Wild Shape form, they could use Inspiration to extend the duration. Maybe they could cast certain low-level spells while shapeshifted? Now I know this is a huge ability that Druids don't get access to till much later, but that's also another homebrew philosophy I have: give your players cool stuff early on, but just limit the scale of it. So this Druid would be able to cast from a list of spells, but only if they use Inspiration!

Fighter: The Fighter can gain an effect similar to *Haste*, in that they gain an extra swing when they use the Attack Action. Maybe you give the Fighter a "Legendary Swing" where they can use Inspiration to Attack while it's not their turn. They could also use Inspiration to move half their movement speed while it's not their turn. How legendary!

Monk: The Monk can take the Dodge Action, make an extra Attack, or even spend a Ki Point for free. Maybe the Monk likes the subclass features of a different kind of Monk than the one they are currently playing. Let them tap into some of those features if they use Inspiration point to do so.

Paladin: The Paladin can use Inspiration for a free Divine Smite... but that's a little too simple, and they can already smite enough in the first place! Now depending on my players' playstyle, I would open them up to a list of spells they could cast, like we talked about earlier. One of my players was a Paladin who was constantly looking for the "Truth", so at a higher level, the Paladin gained access to using his Inspiration to basically be a human lie detector. However, he was only able to do this for things that were important to the core identity and backstory of his character.

Rogue: The Rogue can use Inspiration on a Check that they have Expertise with, adding an additional +5 or even a +10 to the roll. Now I know you might think it's crazy to just let players add 10 to whatever roll they want. However, keep in mind they had to choose this "CORE" ability to have Expertise, and spells like *Pass without Trace* add 10 to Stealth Checks. I would restrict this in the same way as the Paladin, in that it had to be tied to something meaningful to the Rogue, and they'd have to give a description of why this was important to them when they used it.

Ranger: Have the Ranger be able to generate the spell effect of *Find the Path*, *Locate Object*, or *Locate Creature*. You can explain this through the use of their amazing tracking abilities instead of magic (which is what I normally do for Rangers), but this

can give them some huge inspiring moments of tracking down something or someone! You could even let them automatically *Hunter's Mark* a KEY target in combat if it's a big part of their backstory.

Sorcerer: The Sorcerer could use Inspiration to gain access to Metamagic options for a limited time that they would not normally be able to use. If that isn't strong enough, have that special access last for one full minute or let the Sorcerer use more Metamagic options than normally allowed, like 3, or dare I say 4, on the same spell!?

Warlock: I would treat these very similar to a Cleric for spell options from their Patron. However, what if you try to solve a major Warlock problem through the use of Inspiration. They have so few spell slots, so what if in a major combat or backstory moment, when the Warlock runs out of spell slots, they can tap into that inner fire from their Patron and instantly gain the benefits of a Short Rest. WHAT?! That's crazy! Well then make it cost 2 uses of Inspiration, or if that's not enough, let the Warlock also be able to roll Hit Die in this big moment like they would with a Short Rest.

Wizard: Everything I've stated for casters, from above, applies here too! So specific spells trigger for free and all that stuff but inspired Wizards should be so smart and so good with magic. I am picturing those times in movies where two people are talking far away, and someone can read their lips and know what they are saying. Maybe if the Wizard sees an arcane caster perform the verbal and somatic parts of a spell, they could use their Inspiration to cast that same spell, even though it's not prepared! WHAT?! Hey, I'm just trying to think outside that box! But if you want something more tame, then the Wizard could use Inspiration to upcast spells (get excited), or you could let them add new spell effects like a Sorcerer does to push the limits of their magic.



CHAPTER 3: SKILL CHALLENGE METHODS



DUNGEON COACH CHALLENGE

METHODS

Many game effects require rolling a d20, and adding relevant modifiers, to determine an outcome, which is often accompanied by a DC (Difficulty Class). Setting the DC of a d20 roll is largely up to the GM to determine. This section provides several options to help a GM determine what the DC of a given roll should be, and offers more than just rolling a d20 to determine an outcome.

GENERAL VS SPECIFIC DCs

You can base a DC on the difficulty of an average person or a specific person attempting the challenge. For example, if I need to set the DC for lifting a heavy oak table, I could base the DC on the difficulty of the average person attempting the lift, in which case the DC might be 15. However, I could also base the DC on the difficulty of a specific person attempting the task, in which case the DC could be higher or lower. If a normal person tried the lift, the DC might be 15, but what if a small child attempted to lift the table? Would the DC stay the same or would it change? This is why I set specific DCs based on who is attempting the challenge. I wouldn't even allow a small child to attempt the lift, since I know it's an impossible feat for them to achieve. I also wouldn't require a Barbarian with a Strength of 20 to make a Check, since it would be too easy for them to lift the table. Think of who is performing the Check when setting a DC.

SET BEFORE VS SET AFTER

This comes down to whether you lock in the number for the DC before or after hearing the result from the player. This might sound like cheating if you wait until after you hear the result of the roll to set the DC, but this is a very normal thing for GM's to do on the fly.

SET BEFORE

If you lock in what the DC is before they roll it gives you the bar for what they have to hit, and if they don't, you can describe everything that happens afterwards accordingly. You have time from the moment you ask a player for the check till they say the result to think about this. I would also say that failing the DC (especially when they come within 5) might not actually be a FULL failure. This is called failing forward, and if the DC was 15 and they got a 14 and came really close, maybe they still succeed, but there is some level of inconvenience or set back.

SET AFTER

This is a much more on-the-fly, free-flowing method. When you ask for a check, you just wait to hear what they got, and decide AFTER that, how it would go. There are so many gray areas on what the difference between a roll of 16, 17, or 18 would be, so you just let their roll be on the spectrum of success and failure. Just think of the result and give a description of what happens based on the roll. Depending on the situation or difficulty of what is going on, you might not want to have a hard set bar of 15, so you instead DON'T set a DC until you see their roll. Once you see the roll and it's a 14, you feel that is close enough to the desired number that you were about to arbitrarily set anyway and then you keep moving forward and describe their close success.





FLUID VS INCREMENTAL DCs

There are two schools of thought here when it comes to setting what this number is: Fluid and Incremental DCs. Fluid means that you set any number you want as the DC from 0 to 30 or more. Incremental instead goes by 5s when determining the DC. When I first started I used a fluid system and just picked any number that "felt right," and that was the DC.

So play along with me. One of your players wants to tightrope walk across that thin beam high up in the air between two buildings. What would you set the DC to be? No really, stop reading right now and pick a number, any number, that would be that exact DC. Okay, I say DC 13, did you? Chances are some of you said 13, but with so many options to choose from, more of you probably didn't say 13. This is the problem with fluid DC and why I switched away from setting DCs this way. If you do exact DCs, that leaves you with a particular and highly subjective failure threshold. I said 13, but I could see where 12 and 14 would make sense. Okay, and now what if it's raining and you are being chased?! What's the DC now? DC 19!?

The method I use now is this Incremental DC that goes by 5s. I feel like this gets everyone on the same page, and everything feels much more fair and less arbitrary this way. If I asked you that same question from before, I'm pretty sure we would all say DC 15 and feel pretty good about it. DC 10, no way it's that easy to do something so sketchy (unless it was a thicker beam or maybe not so high up in the air). DC 20 would be too high and there's no way it's that hard for this task.

SET DCs BY 5s

Setting DCs in increments of 5 helps me give a spectrum to the result of the player's rolls. If I set a DC of 10 and they hit it, that's great... but if they get 5 MORE than that and get a 15, that's even better and I might flavor a description differently or give them more information, etc. If they get a 20 on that same DC 10 check then they get one more 'notch' of AWESOME dialed up. I personally like how clean this feels, it gives the players a general sense of fairness and sets expectations for when they roll. They know if they roll a 14 they are SO CLOSE to one notch more of success.

Task Difficulty	DC
N/A (no need to roll)	5
Moderate	10
Hard	15
Very Hard	20
Extremely Hard	25
Nearly Impossible	30

DC 5: Something that is SUPER simple and I honestly probably wouldn't even ask for a roll if the DC was 5... they would just do it without a check needed. So I usually only use these as a "you better not roll a Nat 1" moment or something humorous.

DC 10: The first "legit DC". There's just something about that double-digit threshold that means something more compared to a DC of 9. I don't think of this as "easy," though. If you have a +0 to your roll, that's only a 55% success rate. However, someone with a +6 would have an 85% success rate, and that would be easy for them. I think of 10 as a moderate DC enough



for me to ask for a check, but you should be fine, especially if you have any kind of modifier applied towards it.

DC 15: Hard but totally doable if you are skilled at this thing. If you have a +0 modifier, then there is a much larger chance to fail, BUT if you are moderately good at this, then you should be fine. I see this as the entry mark for specialized skills where someone would have to have some sort of practice at this to succeed.

DC 20: Very hard because even if you are good at this thing, it's still going to be very hard to pull off, and if you're not good (you have +0 modifier), you better get a natural 20!

Your "Core DCs" are going to be 10, 15, and 20. DC 25 is next level impressive when players pull it off and DC 30 just starts to get crazy (or you have min/maxers with Expertise). I think of DC 25 as "highly trained" and DC 30 as "nearly impossible".

ENCOUNTER DCs

When you have an encounter of ANY kind, you can set a DC for the ENTIRE thing. For these DCs I usually do NOT follow the "by 5's method" and I think about exactly how hard I want this challenge to be. You should always think about what your players' modifiers are when deciding on this number so you can balance it to the intended difficulty you are looking for. This takes a lot of the pressure off of setting DCs each time something happens and -always has the DC be the same number. In combat I usually have monster abilities that require a Save to always be the same DC across the board. I have even gone as far as putting a big d20 out on the table with the number facing up to the DC of this encounter. This gives the players an idea of how difficult this encounter is compared to other ones and what that DC is so they know if they succeed or fail immediately. Be careful when you use this because you might not want your players to KNOW the DCs and might want to keep that to yourself. There are also times when something out of the ordinary happens where I will have a DC that is higher or lower than the "Encounter DC".

CHALLENGE DC SYSTEM

What if you don't want this one entire moment to come down to a single roll?! Well, that's where challenges come into play. These give multiple Checks or more interesting mechanics for those high stakes scenarios, and can be used in TONS of ways for almost any development you can think of. If your players were trying to escape from a stampede, what would you do? What would they roll to see how the story unfolds? Below are multiple options that you could use and many of them could work for this hypothetical scenario and much more. So, if you are doing your game prep and can't think of a cool way to handle rolling out a certain situation, check these out and see what you come up with as the best option, or homebrew your own.

CONTEST DCs

An Ability Check of some kind is made and the result of that check is now the DC. For anyone to succeed at a Contest DC, they must meet or exceed the originally set DC.

This is very similar to an actual contest but doesn't have to be as immediate. Contests are two rolls made at the same time with the higher one winning. What if you delay those rolls?

Example: Creature A wants to shove a bunch of heavy objects in front of a door to block anyone from getting in. The GM asks them to make a Strength Check and Creature A rolls a 16. The GM now sets the DC for clearing out that rubble to be a 16. For anyone to get through the rubble they would need to roll a 16 or higher. This does not have to be matched with another Strength Check, they could be clever with what types of Checks they describe, but the DC would always be 16 from Creature A setting it as that.

This can also work for things like setting a challenge DC to try and hide something. That initial skill check would set the DC and the following creature would have to match that to find it. In combat, a monster's ability could be a roll that you make in front of the players each round for some terrible effect, and the result of that roll is the DC they need to beat (be careful and only use this when you want things to be a bit more random).

DC Tip: You could add a +1 onto the initial check made so that the 2nd creature has to BEAT the original DC that was set instead of just meeting it. So in the example above you would set the Contest DC to be 17. Now a roll of 16 would no longer BEAT it and they would need a 17 or higher.





GROUP DC

Each player makes a Check of some kind towards the Group DC and then the results of each player's rolls are added together. The sum of all rolls must be higher than the Group DC in order to succeed.

Group DCs lets multiple party members combine their rolls together into one single result. This is especially useful for larger groups and another way to spice things up when multiple characters are trying to accomplish a SINGLE task. Your party can come together as a team and surpass otherwise impossible DCs that would be far too high for any individual to beat. Not ALL players have to join in on this group check, and in fact, you can have some situations have a limited number of characters that can participate. "Only 3 of you can help on this." Just like any other Check, there should be an outcome that happens after they succeed or fail. They can't just keep making Checks over and over again. You can have something bad happen when they fail, or maybe they still accomplish their goal but it just takes more time than if they had succeeded.

Keep in mind that when setting this DC, you have to approach it differently than usual. For myself, I usually just do some quick math on the fly. Let's say I have a group of 4 players and I want the DC for this Group DC to be the difficulty of around a 10 for them. I would take 10 and multiply that by 4, so the Group DC would now be 40. If I instead wanted the DC to be 15, then I would multiply THAT by 4 and get a Group DC of 60. How would this look?

Example: There is a huge boulder blocking a cave entrance and a group of 4 all want to help get past it. You set the DC at 40 (you can choose to tell the group the DC beforehand or not... I like to say the DC out loud, adds to the drama). The Barbarian tries to hulk out and lift it (Strength Check of 8). You describe that the boulder is SO heavy and you are sticking with it but it's barely moving. The Ranger gets a strong branch and tries to wedge it underneath to pry it up (Dexterity Check of 12 for a total of 20 now). You describe the perfect placement of the branch, the boulder getting unstuck, and the Barbarian is now able to start lifting it. The Druid casts *Speak with Animals* to try

and call for assistance (Animal Handling Check of 7 for a total of 27) You describe small birds fly over and start pecking at the rock... not doing much. NOW it all comes down to this final roll. The group has a 27 and needs the 4th player to roll a 13 or higher to hit that Group DC of 40. The Wizard casts *Levitate* on the boulder (Spell Check of 15 for a total of 42). SUCCESS! You describe the wizard focusing on the boulder to make it just light enough for the Barbarian to carry it out of the way, after the Ranger pried it free as useless birds peck at it. This paints a great group image of what happened as they worked together and also highlights how high or low their rolls were to help "flavor" what happened.

These could even be used in place of a FULL COMBAT. Each person would describe what they do in combat and a check would be made. If the group fails the DC, everyone makes a Save for damage and you go into round 2. You could also rule that whoever rolled the lowest takes DOUBLE damage and automatically fails the Save for some heightened tension.

You could start with a very high Group DC and have it take multiple rounds to try and bring it down. Maybe this takes place during combat and the players have to choose to either use their turn in combat OR help contribute towards this Group DC. Maybe something bad happens after each round or even after each player goes.

I usually have my players go one at a time like I showed in the example, but if you wanted to get the result out faster, then you could have them all roll their Checks at the same time. A good example of this is for something like a group Stealth Check. They are ALL making a Stealth Check, so they all roll and as they tell you the numbers, you add them up for their total. I also usually like to ADD up the players' resulting rolls to see if they hit the Group DC (since adding is easier to do). You could instead subtract the players' Skill Check results from the Group DC and see it drop over time, but subtracting DOWN from the Group DC is usually harder math than just adding them all up. In the end, it's totally up to you! There are just too many ways you can use these to even list and they have always been a fun choice and a go to for unique group situations.





DEPRECIATION DC

Once an individual succeeds at a Check against the Depreciation DC, the DC drops to a lower DC for any further Checks against the same Depreciation DC. There is one DC that keeps getting lower and lower with each success.

This DC starts off high and then is lowered over time when more people succeed at it. This is perfect for situations where multiple people have to repeat the same task, or for when one task needs multiple people to try and resolve it (like many of these).

Example: There is a locked puzzle with arcane runes around it in a thick swampy forest. There is a Depreciation DC set at 20. They could make a Nature Check to inspect the moss growing on the puzzle for clues, an Arcana Check on the runes, a Thieves' Tools Check against the lock itself, or many other things. The **FIRST** person to attempt a Check of ANY kind has a DC of 20 and if they fail, the DC stays at 20... BUT if they succeed, the DC drops by 5 and now it's only 15 for the second person (since the first person helped make it easier). If the next player succeeds, the DC would drop another 5 for a DC of 10, and now they would only have to make a DC 10 to finish this type of "challenge". The story would change based on who tried what, and if they succeeded or failed.

Another great application of this is for learning new skills. You can use this system for when your players want to get better at something. If they want to get better at Animal Handling for some reason (check out the Downtime section on page 130), then have a Depreciation DC of 20, and every time they succeed at that DC, lower it by 1. Once they get it down to a DC of 10 and finally succeed on THAT... they become proficient in Animal Handling.

This lets individuals still do Checks like normal, but instead of a SINGLE Check, this gives players more chances to contribute. The method makes it feel like more of a team effort AND lets the players better suited for things (with higher Modifiers) go for the higher DCs first to lower the DC for the rest of the group on the following Checks.

There are a TON of ways you can tweak this. Start off by thinking, "What is the starting DC? What does the DC decrease by each time?" I usually stick to -2 or -5 in general, but have done as small as -1 or as big as -10. And finally, "What is the 'final' DC that they have to hit in order to be done?" Make sure you choose a starting number, what it goes down by, and what ENDS the challenge. Also, if they fail, you could have that INCREASE the Depreciation DC and make it more difficult to accomplish. You could also flip these upside-down and call them "Inflation DCs" and only change it if there is a failure, which just makes it harder.

EROSION DC

Once an individual succeeds at a Check against the Erosion DC, the DC drops by an amount equal to how much the individual succeeded on the Check by. This continues until the DC is reduced to below 0, which means a total success.

This DC starts off high and each successful Check lowers the DC (similar to Depreciation DC). Erosion DCs are just a more advanced system and can be used for some EPIC moments. It's up to you as the GM for which one you choose to use.



Example: This is an example from my own campaign that I threw at my players in the middle of the final combat. The main villain has a huge channeled spell that the players are trying to stop, which has an Erosion DC of 25. Knowing this is so high, the party's Wizard asks his allies for help. The Paladin takes the Help Action and describes motivating the Wizard with an emotional speech. The Druid focuses their energy to cast *Guidance* on the Wizard, while the Barbarian charges in to Attack the villain. All of this gives the Wizard a Spell Check with ADV + 1d4 and he gets a 30! A 30 Spell Check beats the Erosion DC by 5 (30-25=5) so now the Erosion DC is LOWERED by 5, for a NEW Erosion DC of 20 (25-5=20). Feeling confident now, the Wizard takes their next turn to attempt it by themselves and only gets an 18... just short. The Barbarian wants to spend their turn to take the Help Action to give the Wizard ADV... I ask them how this is possible and they said that he wants to sacrifice ALL damage this round and have their focus be on trying to make the villain spellcaster lose some focus on his channeled spell. I thought this was a creative use of teamwork, so I allowed it. The Druid flies back over, casting *Guidance* again to further help the Wizard break this spell. The Wizard makes a Spell Check at ADV + 1d4 again and gets a 27! This BEATS the Erosion DC of 20 by 7 points and now LOWERS that DC by 7, for a new Erosion DC total of 13. At this point, the Erosion DC is low enough for the Wizard to take care of it on his own as the group now continues to fight this villain. This continues until the Erosion DC is reduced to 0, which cancels the spell.

Thinking outside the box here, you could also use it in combination with the Group DC, where it takes a group working together to wear this DC down! They would have one round to get as high of a total as possible, and the DC would be reduced by that much. So at first the entire party should be needed to help bring that number down. Afterwards, it would require less party members to keep beating the DC. They could also keep trying as a group to bring it down to 0 faster, giving them some strategic decisions. I love to throw DCs like this at my party DURING a combat to make them have to choose... "Do I spend my action to help in the combat, or towards the skill check?"

Also... that example above was extremely simplified in order to help teach the concept better. The Erosion DC was actually set to 35. How was I confident that the Wizard could roll higher than 35? I used some homebrew rules (also presented in this book) to make teamwork really pay off. I used stacking ADV to give an additional +2 for each ADV you had. The Wizard could spend a Bonus Action to give themselves ADV on this Check, which rewards him for committing more of his action economy to the task. Other players could take the Help Action and, instead of granting ADV (which would be a +2), they could roll a d10 and add that to the roll. So the Wizard was able to get some HIGH rolls if his entire team helped him (if they could describe in a creative way how that was possible). This was also the final boss fight of a 3-year long campaign and they were all level 20, so he had a +12 Modifier for his Spell Checks already!

CONFLICT CONTESTS

The Conflict DC is the "middle ground" for this challenge. Each side of this conflict is trying to bring the Conflict DC up or down to a certain number. Each round there is a contested roll between the two sides, the difference between those rolls is then added to (or subtracted from) the Conflict DC. The winner is whoever gets the Conflict DC to their target number.

Usually one side is at 0 and the other side is at 20 with the Conflict DC in the middle at 10.

This works the same way as an Erosion DC, but can go both ways. For these DCs there are usually two opposing forces acting on something and there is a struggle to see who comes out on top.

Example: Two Sorcerers are casting a spell at each other and they collide mid air. Each of them makes a Spell Check against the other and a Conflict DC is initiated. The Conflict DC for this example is 10 (right in the middle). The player needs to try and reduce that DC down to 0 in order to "win". BUT if the DC reaches 20... then the enemy Sorcerer wins. They both make a Spell Check in this contest, the player gets a 17 and the enemy gets a 13. This means that the player BEAT the enemy by 4 so the Contest DC is now LOWERED by 4 for a new Contest DC of 6. Next round the enemy sorcerer beats the player by 10, the Contest DC now INCREASES up to 16.



SKILL CHALLENGES BREAKDOWN

Skill Challenges are an amazing system to present challenges to your players. There are SO many things that should be dramatic, creative, fast-paced, and thrilling that generic combat does NOT work for. Skill Challenges give your players a creative outlet with new and unique ways to push the limits of their character both in and out of combat. Players can look at their character sheet in ways they never have before and think about what their character could do in a wide variety of situations. Below is the system I use for Skill Challenges at my table and plenty of options for how you can customize it for YOUR table.

SKILL CHALLENGE BASE RULES

Once started, players go around in no set order and describe what they do about the situation in front of them, similar to combat. The GM asks each player to make a Check of some kind based on their description and they roll against the Skill Challenge DC. They each gain either a failure or a success on their Check. Once each player has had a turn, the round ends and you start a new round. The Skill Challenge ends once you either get a number of successes equal to how many players are at the table or you reach 3 failures. Whichever comes first is the result of the overall Skill Challenge.

WHAT KIND OF CHECKS DO THEY MAKE?

Think outside the box for what Checks you ask for as a GM. These should not be limited to JUST the 18 default Skills. Here are a list of other options you can use:

- **Flat Ability Check:** If something doesn't fit into a specific Skill then this is a great go-to option. Since these also don't have as high of Modifiers, it will make players think more specifically to come up with skills they are proficient in, instead of a flat Check.
- **"Initiative Check":** This is basically a Flat Dexterity Check, but I just like the sound of it better if someone is trying to act quickly or do something FIRST.
- **Attack Rolls:** These are totally acceptable requests for a Check of some kind, especially if they are describing that they are ATTACKING something. Be careful because these can easily get overused so make sure to stick to the No Repeat Checks rule, or its variant.
- **Saves:** I rarely use this as a roll unless they describe they are putting themselves in danger for something, and I will usually add in some small danger penalty of damage or something if they fail this (ya know, since Saving Throws should be scary).
- **Spell Check:** If a player says that they cast a spell, have them make a Spell Check. This is when they add their Spellcasting Ability Modifier and their Prof. Bonus to their d20 roll. The way you describe how they cast the spell depends on if they succeed or fail.

DC Tip: A lot of times when players cast spells I have it be a Spell Check, if they keep casting similar spells then I have it JUST be a Flat Ability Check with their Spellcasting Ability Modifier. I have also had spells fall under Nature for nature magic, Arcana for arcane magic, or Religion for holy magic.

TAKING TURNS

Once I announce that a Skill Challenge has started, ANYONE can "go first". Whoever the first player is to say what they do goes right away. For me, this keeps things FAST paced, but if you're not wanting to go as fast then try some of the extra rules below. The next player to speak goes second, and this continues until every player has gone once, then that round is over. At the top of the next round, anyone can go and you do not have to go in the same order. Just let the flow of what is happening lead the way!

Enemies, Lair Actions, or other events can also be woven into these moments. These events can happen at the start of the Skill Challenge, at the end of each round, or throw them a curveball right in the middle of a round. I don't always use these but they can make the challenge more dynamic and unpredictable, changing from one round to the next greatly.

END RESULT

If you get ALL of your successes first, then you SUCCEED! If you get 3 failures first... then you FAIL! This can look different for each Skill Challenge though (see the section on Failures below). All of those moments that happened during the Skill Challenge led to either a failure or a success, but what does that look like? You then narratively describe what happens and how it all led to the conclusion of the challenge.

SET THE STAGE

When you throw a Skill Challenge at players for the first time, make sure they understand the rules since this is like a "mini-game" within the overall game. I usually say, "And now we enter into a SKILL CHALLENGE," and then describe what is going on so everyone understands the big picture. First, describe the goal of what they are trying to accomplish, then the layout of the land and logistics of where everything is at, then finally what obstacles or dangerous things are in their way. It's also important to note that a single round in a Skill Challenge is NOT only 6 seconds like in combat. You could have a Skill Challenge happen during a combat (explained on page 47) but you could also have it happen over the course of downtime and each round could be a whole month of time passed.

CHALLENGE OBSTACLES

You should also throw enough obstacles, curveballs, or whatever you can think of at your party so that they have stuff to interact with and more options for their creativity. If they are JUST climbing a regular wall... and nothing interesting is happening... then it's going to be very hard to come up with cool things to do besides, "I keep climbing the wall". Throw some creatures coming out of the wall at them, maybe part of it starts to collapse after round 1, anything!

These are the pieces that help give your players ideas to come up with fun moments. It's VERY difficult to come up with what your character is doing during a Skill Challenge if the challenge is just running down a long hallway. Describe a couple of things that are in this hallway (or whatever the



challenge is) to get the ball rolling. Small creatures start coming out of the walls, flames are erupting out of the sides of the walls, and a giant boulder is rolling after them. NOW your players' minds are racing about what they can do and which of the multiple parts they want to interact with.

HINTS & CLUES OF FAILURES

I LOVE this part so much, this is where I give ominous or direct statements of what happens when they fail a Check or even fail the entire Skill Challenge. This is a balancing act of how much you want to tell your players and what kind of tension you want to have. A lot of times players will have some sort of idea on what bad things could happen to them, and sometimes it's best to just let their imagination run wild and let them scare themselves!

DC Tip: Listen to what your players say might happen and maybe have THAT be a thing that really could happen now! I have added extra moving parts to Skill Challenges on-the-fly based on players unknowingly giving me ideas.

Low Tension "Mystery" Method: After you set the stage, don't tell your players what happens if they fail, but wait until a failure actually happens. Don't reveal what happens on an overall failure until they are ONE failure away from it happening. This last minute reveal can pack a big punch for how EPIC those last rolls will be.

High Tension "Ominous" Method: Right after you set the stage you immediately tell the players exactly what happens on individual player failures... AND overall Skill Challenge failure. This really sets the tone for what is at stake. I usually do this if there is something BIG at stake or if what happens on failures is really bad. I also like this because even if they do AMAZING and beat the Skill Challenge with 0 failures... they still know what COULD have happened!

THE STORY OF ZACHARIAH

I have only had a PC be killed ONE time in a Skill Challenge, but the dice were really telling the story with all the Nat 1s. The party was trying to escape through a bug-infested cave. One player was already low on HP at the start of the Skill Challenge, and in the first round went Unconscious. Once I saw things shift in this way I immediately let the players know... if you fail this Skill Challenge, yes, you will make it through this cave... but that Unconscious character will have to make ONE Death Save... and if she fails... her character will be dead. The mood shifted at the table and everyone understood what was at stake... but the dice were not in their favor... even with a very low DC of only 12, this level 5 party could not make it, and failed. The Unconscious character then had to roll one Death Save... and rolled a natural 1... her character was dead. The group had made it to safety... but they lost a friend in the process. Just then they realized, there was a shaman at the nearby campsite that might be able to revive her! This moment is the cover art of this chapter and the cover of Chapter 8 shows her resurrection.

ADDITIONAL RULES

These are also rules I use for most Skill Challenges at most of my game tables. There is some wiggle room I give my players if a certain situation calls for it and, as with every part of the game, you are the GM making calls and adjustments on the fly as usual.

NO ASKING FOR CHECKS

This is a staple of my normal table rules anyway, but I do not let players just SAY that they make a certain Check... they have to describe it... THEN I ask them for a corresponding Check. If they are struggling to put it into words or need help thinking of a way to use "X" skill in this situation, then other players can chime in or I will even help them describe how that Skill could work here. This just helps the immersion of the challenge and stops players from saying, "Okay, I'll use Athletics," and rolling a die... that's so lame!



NO REPEAT CHECKS

Once a Skill Check is used... it cannot be repeated again by ANY player for the rest of the round. Additionally once a player uses a Skill Check they cannot perform that same Skill Check on back to back turns of their own.

Players cannot repeat the same type of Check that ANYONE did during that same turn, AND players cannot repeat the same Check that THEY did during their previous turn. This is designed to really push the creativity of your players and make these more... CHALLENGING. If players can repeat Checks, then the difficulty of coming up with what to do gets far easier. This also makes them work together and communicate quickly with each other to think of how they can accomplish this together. If YOU are good at something that nobody else is good at, that would be a good Skill to try and use so that you don't take one from someone else. At the same time, if you were going to do an Athletics Check for something physical and your ally just did an Athletics Check then you have to think fast and come up with something else that you could do! These are some of the best moments for me, when a player has to think quickly. Yourself and others can chime in about what is possible to help brainstorm, but it is up to you to keep the pacing going as fast as you want it to be. So now, instead of an Athletics Check, they use an ability in a cool way or go a totally different direction and use a Charisma Check of some kind. You can also allow repeated Checks but require a new and unique description of some kind, or you can have there be a penalty to their roll (outlined in the variants below).

Example: Let's say Player 1 makes a Perception Check in round 1. Now for the rest of round 1, nobody else can make a Perception Check since that would be a repeated Check within the same round. Now once round 2 begins... Everyone can now use Perception Checks again EXCEPT Player 1 (since they just did that in their previous turn and that would be a repeat check). This means you have to work together as a team and can't just keep falling back on the same old stuff over and over again.

You want to CHALLENGE your players with thinking creatively here, and some of the most creative moments have come from Skill Challenges where players come up with brilliant ways to use their best skills in different situations. Don't be afraid to award ADV to players that come up with awesome things to do that maybe aren't the best option with the highest Modifier for them. Giving them ADV can help reward them and make that cool idea work! But simply reducing the potency of these repeated Checks is usually enough to nicely divert your party from making too many.

Group Repeated Checks Variant

The No Repeat Checks rule only applies to individuals instead of the entire group. There are some times when party members want to do similar things but can describe them in a different way. I would be careful to open this up too wide though because if one person makes a Stealth Check... then everyone can get that idea to do the exact same thing, and the Skill Challenge can turn into a BUNCH of repeated Checks.

Reduced Repeat Checks Variant

When a player makes a repeated Check they cannot add their Prof. Bonus to the roll, so they just make a Flat Ability Check. If a repeated Check happens a 3rd time, then the player does not add ANYTHING to their roll, so they just roll a d20 with no Modifiers added.

This is a little more relaxed on how strict the No Repeat Checks rule is. I find myself using this if a player is really struggling to come up with something so they can at least do what they wanted to do, but their Modifier for the roll is reduced. This usually happens in a challenge where the players keep thinking of the same things or have a hard time being creative. You can also choose to assign DisADV to these rolls instead.

Example: If Player 1 makes an Athletics Check to climb over something, now nobody else can use Athletics for this round. Let's say Player 2 also describes an Athletics Check (instead of maybe trying to describe it like parkour or something for it to be Acrobatics). This player can still make the roll for it, but they would not add their Prof. Bonus to the roll, and it would be a Flat Strength Check, which might still be a good roll for them. Then let's say it's round 2 now and Player one AGAIN describes something about climbing... I would personally give the table a TIME OUT (yes I do that at my actual game tables) and try to help them think of SOMETHING else, but if they really just want to do the climbing thing again, I would have them just roll a d20 now as a Flat Check and see what happens.

AID ALLY

A player can use their turn in the Skill Challenge to aid another player (by describing how they help them) to grant the other player ADV on their Check this round. When a player aids an ally, they make a Check against a DC that is 5 lower than the Skill Challenge DC. BUT, if they succeed they do not gain 1 success towards the overall challenge, they instead successfully grant the other player ADV. If they fail this check, then it still counts as 1 failure in the overall Skill Challenge.

This is a cool mechanic that promotes teamwork AND can be a smart strategy to really boost some rolls and get better chances for success for those critical moments. There have been times where it all comes down to one roll that decides the final result, and I've seen 2 players in a row take the Help Action to REALLY set up their 3rd friend to have the best chance possible to succeed on that last check! You can also add in obstacles, enemies, or Lair Action style effects that happen every round to stop players from using the Help Action too much. With there being more pressure that happens every round this can put a clock on the challenge to keep things moving forward.

DC Tip: These homebrews go very nicely with the Aid Ally rules: ADV Stacking (page 17) and 1d10 Help Action (page 16). These can further tweak how your players can help each other during Skill Challenges.



SECRET SUCCESS TOTALS

I don't automatically reveal how many successes are needed for the completion of the Skill Challenge. I will do one of 3 things. I might tell them right at the start of the Skill Challenge to really set the tone for what is about to happen and they know what they are getting themselves into. I might not say anything the entire time until that FINAL success, then describe an epic victory moment. But what I usually do is, somewhere in the middle of the Skill Challenge, let them start to get clues as to how close they are, and once they are ONE success away... THEN I let them know. This REALLY builds up the suspense and excitement of that FINAL check where everyone knows they are SO CLOSE. This is especially true if they are already at 2 failures as well and it all comes down to this last roll!

DC Tip: Not saying the number of successes needed can also be a good thing to make adjustments on the fly. If you realize that you set the DC too high or especially if you chose too many successes, then you can dial that number down (or up) to balance it on-the-fly.

SETTING SKILL CHALLENGE DIFFICULTY

The overall difficulty of a given Skill Challenge is based on group size and how challenging the GM wants the challenge to be. If there are 5 party members, then make sure there needs to be at least 5 successes or people could be left out. Take your party's Modifiers into consideration as well. If they have a +5 Strength Modifier, all Strength rolls will succeed 55% of the time at DC 15 (since they just need to roll a 10). I prefer a 60% success rate, which would be DC 14 for this example. You can also increase the difficulty by increasing the amount of successes needed, but I never change the failures, it's always 3 failures.

SETTING SKILL CHALLENGE DC

Don't over complicate this. This is just the same as any other DC that you set, it just means more since there is a big challenge revolving around it. I usually use this formula for the default difficulty.

8 + Prof. Bonus of Party + Difficulty Modifier

Where do each of these pieces come from? The 8 is the standard number for most DC calculations and a good base to start from. The Prof. Bonus is for scaling with the party to provide more of a challenge as they get higher in level. The Difficulty Modifier is in the chart below, but you can think of this as their "average stat modifier" and simply use a +3 for most challenges. Most characters won't have a +5 in EVERY skill that they are using, and it probably wouldn't be good for them to use a skill with a +1 or less in it, during a Skill Challenge. So the +3 gives a middle-of-the-road number to go up or down from.

Skill Challenge Difficulty	Mod
Very Easy	+1
Easy	+2
Moderate	+3
Hard	+4
Very Hard	+5
Extremely Hard	+6

This chart is just a guideline for you to think about when you are setting the DC. The highest DC I have EVER set was a DC 20 Skill Challenge for 4 players that needed 8 successes... and I was purposefully going crazy on them since they were 19th-level and I used it as a Mass Combat Challenge. The easiest DC I have ever set was a DC 11 Skill Challenge for 4 players that needed 3 successes before 3 failures. Even without ANY Modifiers they have a 50% chance at success against a DC 11, so anything lower is just too easy in my opinion. So a Very Hard Skill Challenge for level 5 characters would be DC 16 (8 + 3 Prof. Bonus + 5 for Difficulty Modifier).

NUMBER OF SUCCESSES NEEDED

I definitely do NOT always have the number of successes required equal to the number of players at the table. This is a good rule of thumb for starting out and can help you dial in how difficult you want to make each Skill Challenge. It's a lot easier to set a DC and understand how much that affects their "odds" compared to increasing how many successes they need. There are a couple of things to think about when you are choosing this number but over time it will become second nature when you are creating these... and you might even change them on the fly as well!

Desired Difficulty	Number of Successes
Standard / Default	Number of PCs
Challenging	1.5 x Number of PCs
Extremely Challenging	2 x Number of PCs

This is just ONE of the variables in a Skill Challenge. You need to keep in mind what the DC is, as well, and think about what things you are throwing at them on failures. If you have a VERY low DC then you could have double the amount of successes required and it not be very challenging. So this chart above assumes you have a Moderate Difficulty. The number of challenges also dictates how LONG the challenge takes as well. Make sure you keep throwing new things at them or your players could run out of ideas in longer Skill Challenges.

DC Tip: I have NEVER changed the number of failures needed, that has always been 3. This just helps keep things consistent and if you start changing that variable now too, then it could get confusing about how much harder one adjustment is compared to the next.



WHAT HAPPENS ON FAILURES?

One of the biggest things you need to do is decide what happens on failures, both the small individual roll and an overall failure of the entire Skill Challenge. Usually “failing” a combat encounter would mean a total party kill... but with these challenges you can have a number of things happen in the story that are far less punishing than “GAME OVER”. For individual failures, sometimes it's enough that they failed their friends and you don't need anything else bad to happen. Sometimes a little damage or another setback might be appropriate. Maybe there are multiple end results based on how many failures you have before you succeed? Getting 5 successes and 0 failures is a lot harder to do than 5 successes and 2 failures... both are a success, but are the results the same? You decide.

Individual Roll Failures: One player makes one Check and fails it during their turn in a round.

Overall Failures: The total number of failures gets to 3 before they get enough successes.

FAILURE RESULTS

These are so widely usable I can't list off everything possible, so just think of what would make sense in the story for both the small and big failures. Here is a list of ideas you can use for failures for Individual Rolls, Overall Failures, or Round Ending Save Failures.

- Take damage of some severity (see “Damage Severity by Level” on page 18)
- Condition is inflicted to the person who failed or others
- Suffer a level of Exhaustion
- Something bad happens to the world around them (NPCs or other PCs too)
- New set back for the players to overcome in the Skill Challenge
- They now need 1 more overall success to beat the Skill Challenge
- The Skill Challenge DC increases by +1
- Takes more time to complete (they still do it, but it just takes a LONG time to do so)
- Lose a resource of some kind (spell slots, class features, magic items, gold, stage coach, etc)
- Get knocked Unconscious, fail a Death Save, or even death (be careful with this one)
- Combat starts or more enemies are added to the combat

Example: In a social Skill Challenge to win over the favor of the town, the charismatic character wants to try and convince a group of people to help spread the word about how great the party is. If he fails on this Check that doesn't mean he wasn't charismatic or that the people didn't believe him... maybe something else happened? Maybe he unknowingly associated with a group of thieves and that now makes the party look bad. Maybe you convinced only one person and they got lost, kidnapped, or entirely forgot what you had asked. Maybe you finally convinced the whole group, but by the time you convinced them, it was already too late and time ran out to spread the word. This prevents characters from feeling incompetent at things they feel they could totally do within a Skill Challenge.



FAILURE STAGES OPTION

Instead of stand-alone failures on these challenges you can have different outcomes for when the players reach different numbers of failures during the challenge. If they complete the Skill Challenge with ZERO failures, then that is a PERFECT victory and nothing bad happens (this VERY rarely happens). If the players have one failure, then there is a small setback that they will have to deal with later (or right now!). If they got 2 failures, something worse would happen, and of course 3 failures means the worst case scenario happens.

Example 1: PCs have to defend a town from waves of monsters. During the challenge, at 1 failure the town's main gates would fall, at 2 failures there would be large casualties of the citizens (and one important NPC), and at 3 failures there would be mass casualties (multiple dead NPCs) and the party would have to retreat and surrender the town to the beasts.

Example 2: It's a King-of-the-Hill style Skill Challenge where an NPC was working on something that needed to be protected. Each failure added more enemies to the combat that would happen immediately after the Skill Challenge was over. I told the players if you get 0 failures, then there is NO combat and you WIN, 1 failure would be a normal combat to protect the NPC, 2 failures would be a challenging combat and be pretty rough... and 3 failures... might be a total party kill. They ended up getting only one failure (by design on my part) BUT it was a VERY intense Skill Challenge since they knew what stakes were on the line.

FAILURE = SAVING THROW?

Instead of a failure on a roll within a Skill Challenge immediately causing something bad to happen, it could instead trigger some kind of Save the player needs to make. This is usually what I do at my tables if I want there to be a consequence for failing a roll (or the entire challenge). Once they fail a Check, I ask them to make a Save of some kind, and if they fail THAT roll, then something bad happens. This can all be set up during the description of the Skill Challenge when you “set the stage” for what is to come!

ROUND ENDING SAVE FAILURES

At the end of each round, (regardless of failures) you can throw something at the party, similar to a Lair Action. This would be the equivalent to the “bad guys” taking a turn where the NPCs or the environment react to what the characters just did in that round. The PCs might get attacked or be subject to some environmental effect which would continue to happen at the beginning or end of each round. Keep in mind this is another thing that the party can “fail” at now so make sure there is a clear separation between failing one of these Checks vs a skill check towards the challenge vs the overall failure. The DC for Saves should be the same as the DC for the Skill Challenge, but failing these Saves does not count towards the overall number of failures for the Skill Challenge. You could also do this at the beginning of the FIRST round if you want to start things off with a bang!

Example: Have the group make a Dex Save at the top of the round as something bad happens. This is purposefully vague and gives you another failure condition to keep things interesting. If they are on a boat that is being attacked by a Kraken... then this failure would be them falling overboard. The rolls in the next round will now reflect this happening and you could even go as far as to add additional successes needed towards the overall challenge.

DC Tip: You could have everyone roll for Initiative at the start to determine an order, but I usually don't. Additionally, here are some tips on different kinds of rolls you can ask players for based on what they say:

- *Attacks/Ranged Attacks/Spell Attacks*
- *All Saves*
- *Flat Ability Modifier Checks*
- *Profession Checks*
- *(Ability Modifier + Prof. Bonus) for any of those “outside the box” Checks*

VARIANT RULES

These are some rules that I use sparingly or situationally for Skill Challenges depending on the group or type of challenge I want to throw at my group.

COMBAT SKILL CHALLENGES

You can run a Skill Challenge in the middle of a full-on combat. You decide what it “costs” the players to be able to make a Check towards the Skill Challenge (Action, Bonus Action, Free Action once per turn, or just be near a certain thing). Players can then each decide on their turn in combat if they spend part of their action economy towards the combat or towards the Skill Challenge. This can be a fun strategy moment for the players to manage what is more important in that moment. Maybe there is a ritual being performed and you must get “X” successes in order to stop it from happening.

Most of the time for these I don't have the “before 3 failures” part because it is already punishing enough to spend an Action towards the Skill Challenge and then fail, causing nothing to happen. I might still have some sort of bad thing happen from the failure, but usually failing is already bad enough.

STATIC DC vs DYNAMIC DC

Should the DC you set for the Skill Challenge ever change? A Static DC is when the number you chose for the DC does NOT change and it is the same for each Check no matter what. A Dynamic DC is when you have a general DC that is set, but based on what the players ask to do, you change and move that DC up or down depending on what is asked (like you would in the normal game outside of a Skill Challenge).

Personally, I like Static DCs more. I see it like the Armor Class of an enemy. Players won't know how high the DC is until someone hits it exactly and I say, “You exactly succeed,” or they are within 1 of the DC and I say you JUST succeeded or JUST failed. Now they know what that bar is and that can be exciting too. It's also very clear what they have to beat, so I can't lower the DC because they said something cool. They have to beat THAT number, and after trying it both ways many times, I feel that this is more rewarding and feels better for everyone, overall.

Dynamic DCs are nice since you can set the DC like you normally would, but since Skill Challenges have more stakes involved, I don't like having to come up with these numbers on-the-fly. If a player describes something AMAZING and I want to give them a better shot at succeeding... with a Dynamic DC I could just set a lower DC that they have to beat... which can feel like I'm giving it to them for cheap. With a Static DC, I can always give them ADV or even give them Inspiration to use on THIS roll (see Chapter 2: Inspiration Overhaul). Overall, I like that the players know what to expect with Static DCs instead of me choosing different numbers every time and it all starting to feel arbitrary. You could combine both of them together and start off with a Static DC and then if they fail a Check (or succeed), it increases or decreases by 2.

SECRET DC vs KNOWN DC

I go back and forth on this one and literally use both equally. Having a Secret DC is usually the default I start off the Skill Challenge with, and I do NOT tell the players what it is until they hit it exactly or get within 1 point of it. With Known DCs it can be fun to tell the players, “THIS is what you have to hit,” and they immediately KNOW how difficult this is and can be mentally prepared for it.

A benefit of keeping things secret is that you can adjust on the fly if you feel like it's needed. For example, let's say you set the Skill Challenge DC to be 16 and wanted it to be pretty hard for them. The first round is pretty rough and they are already at 2 failures with only 1 success. You think to yourself, “Whew... I really made this too difficult..” Then the next player rolls a 15 with a big excited look on their face that says MAYBE there is a shred of hope... you then say that they SUCCEED and everyone is still hanging on by a thread (now that you lowered the DC by 1 on-the-fly). This is totally fine if you truly feel that it was harder than you wanted it to be and that “bad feeling” kicks in. But I also challenge YOU to stick to your DCs if you feel that it's what should happen. Players NEED to lose Skill Challenges every now and then to know that you mean business and you aren't just going to pull your punches.





SKILL CHALLENGE INITIATIVE

This is the choice to have your players roll for Initiative at the start of a Skill Challenge. If you like the structure and want the dice to impact when each character goes (similar to combat) then you ask everyone to roll for Initiative. This can feel intense like combat and there is something special about saying the words, “Roll for Initiative.”

I personally don't like the forced structure of Initiative and rarely ask for it to be rolled for in Skill Challenges. I want to THROW my players into it and after I set the stage, I ask them, “What do you do!?” The first person to speak up GOES, or if 2 players want to do something together, they can go for it and they could even roll their Checks at the same time! This just feels more fast paced and free-form to me, which is what these awesome challenges are meant for.

NAT 1s & NAT 20s

This rule has a Natural 1 count as 2 failures and a Natural 20 count as 2 successes. I personally LOVE Natural 1's and 20's as a GM and I dive into the extremes of those rolls for some EPIC moments. So does it feel bad when a Nat 1 hits and it's 2 failures? Yes, but that is the dice telling the story and let's see where it takes us. Especially once things are looking rough and a player rolls a Nat 20... it's truly a glorious thing to see. I also like to remind players that once you have 1 failure... if you roll a Nat 1... then you fail the Skill Challenge! If you are new to running Skill Challenges then maybe DON'T use this rule, so you can get a feel for the balance better since this can swing things one way or the other very quickly.

OVERALL SKILL CHALLENGE TIPS

Here are some final pointers on things you can do to make these the most fun possible. My players love these things and I think that comes down to you customizing your Skill Challenges towards your table to get the right feel.

HOW TO AVOID TROLLS

One time, in a very big Skill Challenge that I had set up for a Chase Scene to catch one of the main villains in the campaign, in the very first round, the Wizard of the group cast *Hold Person* on the leader of the Broken Blade Bandits, and they failed the Save ending the Skill Challenge immediately. This felt bad because it was a big reward for doing something so simple, but it could have been an EPIC challenge. My mistake was that I let the spell happen as if they were in combat instead of within the context of a Skill Challenge.

Looking back, I should have said, “Okay, *Hold Person*? Wow, great idea. Make a Spell Check to see how well this goes.” There would NOT have been a Save made by the NPC because this is not combat, so the PC is the one making the Check. If he succeeds that's GREAT, it would be 1 success, but if not it would be 1 failure. I should have also used the description to set an expectation for what would happen on a success. This would prevent the player from wanting *Hold Person* to be an “auto-win” and I would have described them holding the target in place for a bit so everyone could catch up (showing progress for the success) before the villain broke free from the spell.

Spellcasters have a TON of power behind them and can spend spell slots of great magnitude to potentially END a Skill Challenge before it begins. You want to empower them to use their spells in creative ways and contribute to the Skill Challenge without breaking it. *Hold Person* is a strong spell, and if you run it like combat then the NPC would get a Save every 6 seconds... Skill Challenges do NOT happen in that same time frame and they can span over the course of hours, possibly, depending on how you are running it. A chase across town might span 10 minutes or more, so trying to use spells in the SAME way as combat is not always the right move. This is why I treat them as Spell Checks and have them affect the Challenge in a way that makes sense. The success of *Hold Person* would stop the NPC in their tracks for a few seconds



as the party catches up right before they shake it off and keep running, and would not outright END the challenge.

If players are expending BIG resources, feel free to have them get some sort of reward for it. Spending spell slots or big class features on Skill Challenges could result in you giving them ADV on their rolls, or if they succeed you could grant 2 successes instead of 1. You don't want to get too carried away because then players could just spend all of their resources on the Skill Challenge then take a Long Rest and act like nothing ever happened. Keep in mind the scope of your adventure and where this Skill Challenge fits into it. If they are about to have a big combat and expending a BIG resource would mean they are now worse off, then reward them. If you know they are taking a Long Rest directly after this Skill Challenge, then maybe you shouldn't.

If players pull off something truly epic, then yes, go nuts and maybe even end the challenge entirely because of something INSANE happening. I don't want you to be a party pooper GM, I'm just saying to keep in mind that this is a Skill Challenge so the same thing doesn't happen to you that it did me!

GIVE A GOAL

Another example is when I started a Skill Challenge to escape a sinking ship... and that's about all I had prepared. I realized though that my players had no idea what the goal of the Skill Challenge was. They all just kinda... jumped off the boat and didn't really know what to do or what they were REALLY trying to accomplish. I should have had a destination for them to get to or even had them fight off what was breaking the boat, and if they failed the Skill Challenge maybe they would have to fight it. You want to make sure there is a clear objective or goal in place when running a Skill Challenge, or even multiple, to get your players engaged. Without a clear goal, your players won't be able to approach the problem in a creative way, especially if there is seemingly only one option, which in this instance was jumping off the ship.

MENTAL PLAYTEST

Try to get in your players' heads before you throw the Skill Challenge at them and think about what they might do. If YOU were their characters... what would you do? This also helps me think about things to ADD into the Skill Challenge to highlight certain players that might not have as much that they could do. Huge Boulder Skill Challenge? Maybe there are runes on the boulder that the Wizard can do an Arcana Check on.

ADJUST ON THE FLY

There are plenty of things you can adjust on-the-fly, especially while you are getting used to running Skill Challenges. You can change DCs (up or down) if you feel that you messed up when setting the DC, assuming the players don't know what the DC is already. You can change the number of successes needed (up or down) if you feel like it's too short or long. You can also add in or remove individual failure punishments. Maybe you planned on not having individual punishments for failures and not having any round ending Saves. If your group is about to STOMP on the Skill Challenge that you thought was set to be HARD... then add Saves in on-the-fly. The opposite is also true. If they are getting destroyed and you planned on hitting them with something BAD at the end of round 1... maybe hold off on doing that for now and see what happens. You will get better at balancing all of this over time.

BUILD A SKILL CHALLENGE CHECKLIST

These are what you need to think about to make sure you are ready to run ANY Skill Challenge you can think of! Once you get used to this you can prepare an entire Skill Challenge in seconds!

1. What is the Challenge/Obstacle?
2. What is getting in their way? What can they interact with?
3. What skills could be used here?
4. How many successes are required?
5. What is the DC?
6. What happens on each failure?
7. What happens if they Win or Lose the overall challenge?



WHEN TO USE SKILL CHALLENGES?

Let's start off with when you should NOT. If you want your party to cross a rickety bridge, solve an ancient puzzle, wade through a river, or jump across a chasm... you don't have to use a Skill Challenge for it. You can just run that off "normally" and have them make Checks as they say what they do. I tend to use these for more fast paced action scenes that have STAKES. There should be some level of danger or consequence that the players are trying to work towards or against.

You could use Skill Challenges for the things I said above, but make sure you think about that checklist I just showed you. What happens if someone fails a check during a Skill Challenge across a rickety bridge? Maybe they slip and catch themselves on a rope but are hanging on for dear life. What about the puzzle? A Skill Challenge puzzle would be very weird to run, but if you throw in some extra variables it could work. Enemies charge in to get the puzzle, the room starts to fill with water, blinding light shines off the puzzle. Give them challenges to overcome so then once they hit the total number of successes needed, the puzzle is solved and their efforts have led to that victory.

Don't overdo it with Skill Challenges. I love these things so much I find myself using them too often. They are really fun to run, and easy to set up, but you want them to be special when you throw them at your players. There are PLENTY of options in this chapter that you can use to give your players a wide variety of challenges.

Here are some examples of times where I have ran Skill Challenges at my game table:

- A sketchy figure sees the party and runs through the city streets.
- While traveling through a canyon the walls around them begin to collapse in a domino effect. They party has to get out or be buried alive!
- Social debate where the party has to convince a kingdom's army to join their cause... instead of the enemy's.
- Ritual summoning portal that needs to be stopped while creatures start to pour out.
- Raging rapids within a cave. Can they stay afloat and not shatter the raft (or their bodies) on the sharp rocks?
- Split path of 2 options where they can either go left to save some NPCs that are being taken away, or go right to retrieve their stolen gold, gear, and magic items. Does the party split and try to go after both? When I did this I had two separate Skill Challenges going simultaneously and they could choose which one to be in.
- Escape from an Umber Hulk nest after killing its queen (this was the story above where a player died).
- A city is being attacked from all sides and needs to be defended.





ONE ROUND SKILL CHALLENGES

This is one of my favorite homebrews I have come up with. There are so many times where you want something in the game to be more than just a single d20 Check, but not enough to be a full on Skill Challenge or combat with multiple rounds. One Round Skill Challenges are a perfect solution for moments where you have a situation that your ENTIRE group is in, that you want to see how well it goes. That is a very simple description but that is the point here. A quick check across your group where they can have an opportunity to be as creative as they want, and then quickly see what the result is, all in ONE ROUND. So how do they work?

These work the same as Skill Challenges and have a DC set at the start, but instead of needing a number of successes before a number of failures is reached, each player describes what they do and makes ONE Check. You then see how many players succeeded vs failed, and THAT is the result. If you have more successes, then they succeed at this “group check”, and if they have more failures, they fail.

I also love these because everyone gets a chance to do something and nobody is left out. This is also WAY better than asking for boring group Checks where everyone rolls the same Check at the same time. Instead of asking for a group Stealth Check, present them with a “stealthy problem” and ask them what they do! Maybe some players will think outside the box and come up with something that is better for their character than just making a Stealth Check would have been.

FAILURES

Just as with Skill Challenges, you need to think about what happens on individual failures or overall failures. Maybe you don't have individual failures, or maybe something bad happens to those that fail.

TIEBREAKERS

If you have an even number of players at your table, then there is a possibility you could get a tie. If it is looking like a tie might happen, you might want to tell your players, “If a tie happens, then [blank],” so that they don't feel cheated by whatever the tiebreaker is. But if this does happen, there are a number of options you can do:

- The GM rolls a 1d20. 1 through 10 is a failure, and 11 through 20 is a success. You could also rule it like a Death Save and have it just be a Flat DC10, and a 10 would succeed too. If they get a tie, I love letting the dice decide their fate! But if there is a lot on the line, or the group you're running for doesn't like the 50/50 feeling of it, then don't do this.
- Throw it back to the party and leave it up to ONE final roll... who will be the ONE person to step up and either win or lose! I also don't let players use Aid Ally too much during this because it makes this final roll too easy. This is a great moment to give to a player that puts all the pressure on their shoulders!
- Have an NPC that is with the party make a check of some kind during the challenge. However, I usually try not to have the NPC go LAST, so that the big moment of success or failure falls on a player.
- If there are enemies present in some way then you can roll for the enemies as the GM. When I do this I ALWAYS roll in front of the GM Screen. I like to keep all the rolls in these challenges open to everyone. Keep in mind though that the NPC is rolling AGAINST the DC as well, so let the players know what the modifier is and what the enemy would need to roll so everyone is on the same page as you before the roll.
- Just have it be a tie. I rarely do this but there have been times where it was honestly a beautiful result for the final moment to be a draw, and after all their best efforts, nothing happened. This is always a great place for failing forward to happen, but even that can feel a bit off when the result of these big moments ends in a tie. I would only do this if there is truly a neutral result that could happen, so again, use this sparingly.



CHECKPOINT CHALLENGES

Players must get through a certain number of Checkpoints in order to complete the Checkpoint Challenge. There is a Skill Challenge DC set for each Checkpoint and once a success is gained, the group can proceed to the next Checkpoint. Failures have no limit and keep accumulating as characters fail their Checks.

The biggest difference here compared to Skill Challenges is that Checkpoint Challenges do not stop at 3 failed Checks. Each Checkpoint is there and you cannot move on until you get a success. Sometimes the challenges we put in front of our players would work better this way to give them something that they **HAVE** to overcome, even if it takes numerous failed attempts along the way.

This still gets across the feeling of a challenge but makes a bigger deal about each **SPECIFIC** moment. In a normal Skill Challenge, the players could be tackling numerous problems in a variety of ways, dynamically describing a wide range of options. In Checkpoint Challenges there is a **CLEAR** obstacle in the way that the party needs to overcome. There could be numerous ways to do this, **BUT** this is the Checkpoint they are trying to beat.

Example: There is a fortress that the group needs to protect and they have to survive 3 rounds of enemies before the boss arrives. You start a Checkpoint Challenge where each round of these enemies attacking represent a Checkpoint. Each round you would describe the new wave of monsters that approaches as a large battle breaks out! PCs would jump in and describe epic things they try to do to fight them off, making Checks one at a time (or Aid Ally to help each other). All you need is **ONE** successful Check against the Challenge DC and that Checkpoint is over. You then describe a calm before the storm as another wave of different creatures approaches. Each time a PC fails a Check the entire group makes a Dex Save for damage, but the character that failed the roll takes double damage. This goes on until you get 3 successful Checks and the Checkpoint Challenge is over. **THEN** the boss arrives and combat starts, and depending on how the challenge went, the characters may or may not be in a rough spot.

There are many ways that you can take these and make them your own by combining methods from this entire chapter. You can require more than just 1 success per Checkpoint. Maybe it takes 2 or 3 successful Checks in order to get through **ONE** Checkpoint. You can also increase or decrease the DC from one Checkpoint to the next, giving a sense of the tension shifting. Keep thinking outside the box on how you can present these challenges to your players.



ROLEPLAY CHALLENGE SYSTEM

When a situation is presented to the party, each PC rolls a Flat d20 and says their result. The party then roleplays and describes what happens to explain the results they got from their d20's.

There are times when you want to throw something at your players, but not enough to have them enter a full blown combat, Skill Challenge, or have to make Checks with the potential of failure in them. This system takes the pressure off of ALL of that and lets players just roll and then describe what happens.

These are usually used in situations where failure would not be an option, but you still want to give your players a chance to have fun with it and roll some dice. These dice are just the "flavor" for what happens and your players run with it from there. You, of course, still interject as the GM and help guide the process, but these are rare moments when players can just say what happens based on interpretation of these results.

Example: The party wants to break into a thief's house and get their gold back. Everyone rolls a d20. Player 1 gets a 18, Player 2 gets a 12, and a Player 3 gets a 6. Now the players get to describe what happens in this scene based on their rolls. Player 1 would have saved the day or made the biggest moves towards getting their gold back, Player 3 would have been the one to screw things up in some way, and Player 2 would be somewhere in the middle.

This is a vague example, but that is the point, they can say anything happens! If they say or do some extra crazy things, then of course you can have them make Checks for things as usual, but this system just gets the roleplay ball rolling.

CHASE SCENES

These are iconic moments in action movies and should have the same thrill and excitement at the table. Usually these can get confusing, slow down the pace, and can end up feeling like a combat with lots of running.

BEGINNING A CHASE SCENE

As soon as a Chase Scene begins, everyone makes a Chase Initiative Check.

There is a defining moment when a Chase Scene breaks out. This could come from combat where the losing side makes a break for it, exploration when you discover a thieves hideout and they flee, or a social encounter when you realize that the person you are talking to is the assassin that killed your NPC friend! RUN! For this system here are some components of what each term I will be using is. Keep in mind that there could be multiple of each of these roles and the PCs could be on either side of this chase.

Quarry: A creature that is running away from the Pursuer.

Pursuer: A creature that is in pursuit of the Quarry and chasing after them.

Lead Pursuer: The Pursuer who is currently closest to the Quarry.

Participant: Either a Quarry or a Pursuer (can be multiple of each and PCs could be on either end of this chase).

Safe Haven: The destination of the Quarry (usually some sort of base or hideout).

Complication: A setback or obstacle of some kind that slows down Participants in the Chase Scene.

Unit: A measurement of distance between Participants in the Chase Scene. These can be any distance you want to match the scale of the chase but the default distance is 30ft.

CHASE INITIATIVE CHECK

Each participant in the Chase Scene makes a Chase Initiative Check which can be whatever type of Check that makes the most sense for this chase. I feel that Dexterity for Initiative is how quick you can react to combat happening, but might not be the best suited for a Chase Scene. There are 3 core Checks I would use for their Chase Initiative Check based on the scenario.

Athletics Check: A chase with running and sprinting at a fast pace. Jumping, climbing, pushing, and shoving through crowds all lean towards Athletics (my default check for a chase).

Acrobatics Check: A chase with balance and nimble movement around and over numerous obstacles. Parkour, running across rooftops, and weaving through small spaces all lean towards Acrobatics.

Constitution Check: A chase with endurance over longer stretches. If your chase is stretched out across a long distance, possibly the time span of hours, that leans towards Constitution.

Movement Speed Check: You could determine the order of who acts first based on whoever has the highest movement speed. On a tie you could have them roll for it or decide based on who would logically be a faster character.

Situational Check: The order of the chase is determined by what makes the most sense situationally from where everyone is located when the Chase Scene begins. You can start with the Quarry going first to start it off, then the next person to go would be the next closest person to the Quarry, and the last person would be the farthest.

DC Tip: These events can be triggered by certain Checkpoints happening or when the GM rules it. Requirements could be being farther than 120ft away, or have a creature spend an Action and their full movement to begin a Chase Scene. As the GM I decide when a Chase Scene begins based on the intent of the characters involved and when it would make sense.



COMBAT TO CHASE SCENE TRANSITION

This happens when a creature uses their full movement speed and takes a Dash Action to flee. Both PCs and NPCs can do this to start a Chase Scene.

The line between a combat encounter and a Chase Scene can be difficult to determine. Your players might not notice that an enemy has slipped away trying to escape, or maybe one PC does and begins to chase after them! As a general rule of thumb, if a creature uses most of their action economy to flee and at least one PC follows after them, you've got a Chase Scene.

RUNNING A CHASE SCENE

Mechanics during a Chase Scene work differently than during combat. In combat there are key moments when creatures move in and out of each other's threatened range causing Opportunity Attacks and tactical spacing for Ranged Attacks. In combat, a PC could run 30ft to be in melee with an NPC, then on that NPC's turn they move 30ft away in this strange back and forth that just doesn't make sense in a Chase Scene. During a Chase Scene most participants are moving in one direction and at a similar pace, so there shouldn't be as much "Yo-Yoing" back and forth. So a character in a full sprint forward no longer has the ability to make Opportunity Attacks because they are constantly in a state of forward motion.

CHASE POINTS

Each character has 3 Chase Points that they can spend on their turn on any of the following things: Action, Bonus Action, Reaction, or Movement of 1 Unit. A character can only move 1 Unit per turn unless they take the Dash Action. You can take the Dash Action a number of times equal to your Constitution Modifier + 3. You must make a **DC 10** Constitution Check for each attempt over this number. Each time you make this save the DC goes up by 2. **Failure:** You suffer a level of Exhaustion.

Distance during a Chase Scene is broken up into Units and each unit is approximately 30ft. Standing up from Prone costs 1 Chase Point, interacting with an object (such as opening a door) costs 1 Chase Point. If you want to instead slam through the door, then a Check can be made to see if you can avoid spending Chase Points. Melee distance is 1 Unit, and if you are within 1 Unit of a creature you can use any melee features. If you are within 2 Units of the target, you can use things with a 30ft range, etc. Basically you assume that you are at the **FRONT** of that 30ft distance that a Unit covers. So if you are one square away from someone, you are within melee range of them. Certain sections of the Chase Scene might go through difficult terrain and cost twice as many Chase Points to move through.

THE ESCAPE CONTEST

The Quarry can make an Escape Check at the end of their turn if they either get out of the line of sight of the Pursuers, or are farther than 6 Units away from the Lead Pursuer. The Escape Check is based on what they do to try and escape: Stealth Check to sneak away, Deception Check to blend into the

crowd, Perception to spot them, Athletics Check to outrun them, Acrobatics Check to parkour over a crazy obstacle, etc. This check is contested by the Lead Pursuer and also can be whatever type of check you want to ask them for. If the Quarry fails, the Chase Scene is still active, and if the Quarry succeeds... then the Chase Scene ends. As the GM, you can assign ADV or DisADV to either side's rolls based on the situation. A crowded street could give them ADV while the party's Ranger having a pet hound that has their scent could give the Quarry DisADV.

THE CHASE LINE

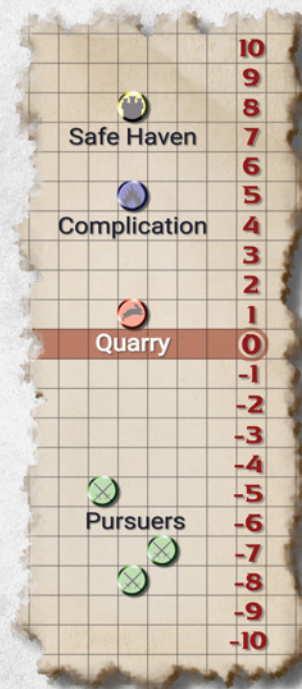
Once a Chase Scene begins all participants are placed onto the Chase Line. This is basically a fancy number line that represents the distance between each participant. You can move participants UP or DOWN this line as the Chase Scene progresses and you as the GM will know at what points in the Chase Line the Complications and Safe Haven are at.

Starting Distances

- The Quarry starts at the 0 mark.
- The Pursuers start at a mark somewhere in the negative zone, from -3 or farther away.
- Safe Haven is somewhere in the positive zone (usually at 10 or farther).
- Complications are at marks somewhere in the positive zone.

Visual Aids

Usually a blank battle mat can be used and each square represents 1 Unit of distance for the Chase Scene. You can have it be bland and in a single file line or actually make it a map with twists and turns along the way. Everything is to scale, and instead of each square representing 5ft they represent 30ft. This way you can draw out an entire Chase Scene with 6 times more space, OR you can keep it simple with a blank map and let it just be a visual aid for the theater of the mind happening in your head.



RUNNING A QUARRY NPC

When you are the Quarry, make sure you present challenges to the PCs to make this difficult. There are many different things you can tweak on the base Chase Scene rules to spice things up and make your players have to think fast! Have the Quarry create Complications on their turn that the PCs have to deal with once they pass it, or launch effects straight at specific players to throw them off. You can give the Quarry more than 3 Chase Points to show how fast they are, or when they spend 1 Chase Point, they move 2 Units instead. Give the Quarry extra Chase Points in the form of Legendary Actions to be able to spend in between the PCs turns. Give them Legendary Resistances to ward off effects that might stop them in their tracks! However, make sure you keep the balance of this Chase Scene in mind so things don't feel unfair.

RUNNING A PURSUER NPC

In the same way that you want to present a challenge to the PCs when you are the Quarry... you want to challenge them when you are the Pursuer and are chasing them down. This can be SO much fun to literally chase after your party with some kind of NPC or monster creature. Give them abilities that push the limits of what is possible so that they have to work together to come up with a way to win. The options are the same: more Chase Points, Legendary Actions, Legendary Resists, triggering Complications, etc. You might need to make rolls sometimes if you need to see if the NPC you are running would know where the PCs went. You as the GM know that the player stopped and went to hide in the stables around the corner... but does your NPC know that? These moments should be Checks you make during the Chase Scene to see what happens.

NARRATION

Pacing, how you speak, and how you ask your players for things gets across a LOT of how the Chase Scene feels. If you want to get across a fast paced feeling of excitement, then you have to keep things going, speak quickly, stay on top of your PCs to ACT, and ask them what they are doing. Communicate and give a heads-up to the PC that is up next so they have a little head start before it's their time to go. Intense music can help to set the stage and get the right vibe going at your table. You can even subtract Chase Points from players who are too slow to say what they do. Use this sparingly, but once it happens ONE TIME, your players will understand that you are not messing around.



ENDING A CHASE SCENE

If the Quarry reaches their Safe Haven, then the Chase Scene is over. This does not mean that they are permanently safe, but are for now. The Pursuers can still continue to do whatever they want, but instead of a Chase Scene, this would shift into the exploration or social pillars of the game. There are many things that can lead to the eventual end of a chase:

- Either side stops
- Quarry's speed is reduced to 0 and a Pursuer catches up to them
- Quarry gets more than 6 units away and succeeds at their Escape Contest
- Quarry reaches their Safe Haven

COMPLICATIONS

Without Complications, a Chase Scene is very boring. It's just a bunch of people, running in a line. You can plan out Complications that happen during the chase, or roll to decide on them randomly. Complications can affect all participants in the Chase Scene, or just one. As the GM, you can throw Complications at whomever you want, which can either come from the participants or the world around them.

Some Complications might be areas that the participants are charging through. They can be sprinting through the town square, jumping over walls, or crossing bodies of water or even lava. Think about what type of terrain they are running through and throw fitting effects at them.

You can roll on tables at certain points for these events or you can manually choose where they go in the Chase Line.

Generic Complication Inspiration:

- Flock of Flying Creatures (bats, birds, bugs)
- Stampede of Creatures (cows, horses, rhinos)
- Creatures Attack (panther, alligator, hawk)
- Weather (rain, wind, temperature)
- Time (duration of chase)
- Barrier (fence, wall, canyon)
- Natural Disasters (earthquake, storm, blizzard)
- Collapse (cave in, falling building, avalanche)
- Obstacles (tables, rocks, giant plantlife)
- Slippery Ground (wet, ice, ooze)
- Elevation Increase (stairs, ladder, mountain)
- Elevation Decrease (stairs, drop off, sinkhole)
- Tight Spaces (narrow hallway, street, tunnel)
- Jumping Gaps of Space (rooftop to rooftop, or rock to rock over lava)
- Crowd of People (civilians, guards, cultists)
- Snare (vines, quicksand, creature)
- Blockade (boulder, fallen tree, guards)
- Blocked Vision (sandstorm, dense trees, crowded streets)
- Hazard (trap, spikes, pit)
- Competition (someone else is ALSO chasing the Quarry)



RANDOM COMPLICATIONS

There are many ways you can roll for Random Complications to keep some unpredictability in these chases:

- Roll a d20 after each PCs turn. On a 9 or lower a Complication happens.
- At the end of the round when the PCs have all gone, roll on a Random Complications Table and see what happens.
- Each time a PC fails a Check during the Chase Scene, a Complication happens.
- At the start of the Quarry's turn, roll on the Random Complications Table.

Some Complications disappear once someone has passed through it (such as by breaking through a barricade of some kind), but there are also Complications that do NOT disappear, and EACH participant must overcome it (a huge wall that needs to be climbed or a gap that needs to be jumped across). Complications that only affect the first person can help to slow down the Quarry and let the Pursuers catch up. Keep this in mind as the GM.

To keep track of these Complications, simply mark on your Chase Line the location that the Complication occurred at and keep track of any participants that pass through that location. You can also rule that it's easier to get passed a Complication once someone else has gone through it.

A creature that fails a Complication either does not move passed it, or has to spend an additional Chase Point as a penalty but still makes it through the obstacle. Success on a Complication moves the Participant forward 1 Unit automatically for completing it, while failing does not move them forward and they become stuck on that Unit. You can give a participant an option to spend an additional Chase Point to be able to move past it (costing 2 Points) to move through that Unit after a failed Check.

GENERIC COMPLICATIONS TABLE

1d20	Type	Complication	Examples
1	Hazard	Make a DC 10 Dex Save to navigate the impediment. Failure: You fall 1d4 x 5ft, taking 1d6 Bludgeoning damage per 10ft fallen as normal, and land Prone.	Hole, crevice, trap, unseen obstacle, steep incline, heavily broken ground, the path skirts a quicksand pit, log bridge crossing a stream, running on rooftops, slippery floors, jump through window
2	Cramped space	Make a DC 15 Acrobatics Check to get through this space. Failure: The obstacle counts as 10ft of difficult terrain.	Street, market, public building, alleyway, shoppers, stationary crowd
3	Poor visibility	Make a DC 10 Con Save. Failure: You are Blinded until the end of your turn. While Blinded in this way, your Speed is halved.	Blind corner, woods, dense brush or busy area
4	Barrier	Make a DC 15 Acrobatics Check to get past the obstacle. Failure: You fall Prone.	Wall, fence, cliff, thick hedges, tall fences, building, river, canyon or swamp
5	Impediment	Make a DC 10 Athletics or Acrobatics Check (your choice) to get past the impediment. Failure: The obstacle counts as 5ft of difficult terrain.	Tree branch, fallen log, chicken coop or vegetable cart, trail suddenly drops off, flock of birds
6	Crowd	Make a DC 10 Athletics or Acrobatics Check (your choice) to make your way through the crowd unimpeded. Failure: The crowd counts as 10ft of difficult terrain.	Fleeing (or angry) peasants, a funeral procession, people leaving a performance, a moving crowd
7	Entanglement	Make a DC 15 Dex Save to avoid being entangled. Failure: You are caught as if in a net and are Restrained.	Clotheslines, curtains, banners, drying pots, chimes, hanging meat, vines
8	Animal herd	Make a DC 10 Dex Save. Failure: You are knocked around and take 1d4 Bludgeoning damage and 1d4 Piercing damage.	Must pass through a herd of animals. Camels, Donkeys, Horses, Cows, etc.
9	Uneven Ground	Make a DC 10 Acrobatics Check to navigate the area. Failure: The ground counts as 10ft of difficult terrain.	Any stairs of 4 or more steps (less than 4 steps is considered an "impediment"), river bank, hill, 5ft or more change in elevation in 10ft of horizontal movement.
10	Obstacles	Make a DC 10 Acrobatics or Intelligence Check (your choice). Failure: The area around the obstacle counts as 10ft of difficult terrain.	Tables, chairs, pews, benches, carts, crates, field of boulders, field of giant mushrooms.
11-20	No Complication		



MASS COMBAT SKILL CHALLENGES

Skill Challenges are perfect for Mass Combat where you don't want to have mechanics for troops or moving units around a battle mat. Skill Challenges present challenges to your players... and in this case it would be presenting the challenge of a MASSIVE COMBAT! These are going to be cinematic descriptions of what the players do to stop the onslaught of the hordes of enemies.

These are both designed to be Defense Challenges where the PCs have to defend a certain location for a certain amount of rounds, or require a certain amount of successes. I hope these get your mind going because this is just the tip of the iceberg for how Skill Challenges and Mass Combats blend together. Both of these examples are pulled straight out of my own personal home games.

ONE ROUND DEFENSE CHALLENGE

The players arrived at their home city that was currently under attack by a horde of Lycanthropes. They were on the outskirts of the city at the beginning of the fight and were not directly involved with it, and they could choose to withdraw and retreat at any time. If they chose to withdraw, I told them that I was going to roll a d20 Fate Roll for the city itself. The DC could be lowered if they participated in a One Round Skill Challenge to help save the city. Each success they gained while in this challenge lowered the DC of this Fate Roll by 1. I didn't tell them what the DC was in the first place, they just knew they could help to impact it. I then told them what was at stake by explaining the rules of the One Round Skill Challenge.

SETTING THE STAGE

I first described the scene in more detail about exactly what is going on to show the PCs some things they could possibly interact with (an important part of any Skill Challenge). I said that there was a large gate entrance with allied city guards protecting it with ladders that led to the castle walls, a large mass of boulders against the castle walls that creatures were climbing up, a forest clearing that seemed to be the source of where these creatures were coming from, and finally ballistas and archers on the castle walls. I provided a generic bird's-eye view map of the battlefield with those points mentioned so they had a logistical overview of where everything was.

THE RULES

As I stated in the beginning they could choose to participate in ONE round of this Skill Challenge. Once they enter the round, they have to complete it and go through each PC one time (there were 4 in this example). If they ended the round with anyone Unconscious, they must enter the next round if they want to retrieve the body of their ally to save them. If they chose not to, Death Saves would be rolled until either 3 successes or 3 failures were reached, as normal.

Once the round begins, each PC has an opportunity to describe what they do in the battle to help defend the city. This now works like a normal One Round Skill Challenge. The DC for this challenge was set to 14, and the party was a group of 4 level 3 characters.

On a success, the DC of the Fate Roll drops by 1. If they succeed by 5 or more, then the PC also gains a Hero Token (I'll explain what that does in a moment). On a Nat 20, the Fate Roll DC drops by an additional 1 point.

On a failure the entire group takes **1d6** damage, and the person who failed the roll takes double damage. This gives the threat of falling Unconscious during this challenge, especially if the same person keeps failing since they take twice the damage. If they failed by 5 or more (rolling a 9 or lower) then the PC that made the roll has to also make a Constitution Save against Lycanthropy. I made this a big deal at the table, and they knew that contracting Lycanthropy... was something there was no known cure for... so the tension at the table was high. On a Nat 1 the group would take an additional 1d6 damage for a total of **2d6**.

What does a Hero Token do? A Hero Token can be used to save an ally from having to make a Save against Lycanthropy if they fail by 5. I love to implement rewards on one end of the spectrum of rolls that counteract the consequences from the low end of rolls. In the first round of this challenge a PC got one of these tokens and it ended up coming in clutch soon after.



THE STORY

After one round, they only got 2 successes and 2 failures, leaving them a little beat up and only reducing the DC by 2... still not looking good. So they decided to go in for another round. During this round there was the first failure of 5 or more, and a PC was going to have to roll a Save, but their ally gave them their Hero Token from the first round to save them. They still took some big damage, but didn't have to make the Con Save against Lycanthropy. During this round there were 3 successes, one of which was a Nat 20 that got the group another Hero Token as well. This now brings the Fate Roll DC down by 6 (2 points from the first round and 4 points from the second).

One PC was VERY low on HP at this point, and they were contemplating whether to go in again or not. I revealed to the group that the DC was originally 10 and they have now lowered it to 4. So that's only a 20% chance that the city falls. I wanted to see what they would do, as I describe NPCs struggling to fight off the attackers, but then other NPCs being successful from the PCs help over these 2 rounds. I asked them, "What do you do," and they wanted to go in for another final round. During this 3rd round there were 2 successes but one of them was by more than 5 and they got a 2nd Hero Token. Which is good because they got 2 failures, and one of them was below 5. They spent the Hero Token to prevent the Con Save, but the PC still fell Unconscious from the damage they took. The round ended and they had to keep pushing forward to save their friend.

The DC of the Fate roll was now at 2, and if they succeeded twice there would be no roll and they would automatically win. They get their 2 successes from some teamwork and creative ideas to end the Skill Challenge. The PC that went Unconscious was the group's healer and there were going to be some Checks made to see how things went and if they would be able to heal them up. They had to go around and help this person to give them ADV on Death Saves... but then a PC asked an amazing question, "I have one Hero Token left from the battle... can I use it to save her?" I stopped for a second because I had never thought of the Hero Token being used in this way... then I immediately said, "YES, that is amazing," and started to describe them saving her life in a heroic fashion.

OVERVIEW

Use the outline of what I showed here to format into your own. Once you set the DC, decide what happens on successes and failures, then sit back and watch what the players do. After the battle, I told my players that there were BIG consequences if the city fell, and big rewards for pushing the DC all the way to 0. Make sure your players know that when they take big risks they are noticed, both by you as the GM and the world they are playing in.



4-WAY DEFENSE CHALLENGE

This was for a new group of players that had a small village that was about to be attacked by monstrous toad creatures. I wanted to give the players the feeling of being spread too thin and being attacked from all sides. They had one day to prepare for battle, then a 4-way Skill Challenge would take place. There were also 3 phases to this battle. First up was preparation, then the Skill Challenge, then it all ended in a final combat to decide it all. The better they prepared, the easier the Skill Challenge would be, and the better the Skill Challenge went, the easier the combat would be. I told my group, in a very serious tone, that if they prepared poorly and failed the Skill Challenge miserably... the combat that would be thrown at them would be next to impossible to defend against, and they would probably have to run or all die if that happened. Then I wished them good luck!

The city had 4 access points where the enemy would be attacking: The Gates, The Lake, The Stables, and The Wall. I created 4 unique entrances for them to defend to give a variety to the type of interactions potentially, and let them think about where they would go and how they would expend resources. They also had a high-level NPC Ranger (the mother of one of the PCs) and a low-level NPC Ranger (an NPC who had a crush on one of the characters) that were helping them in this fight. I was 100% in control of the high-level NPC Ranger. I did this because this was the players' FIRST time running something like this, and I wanted to have this character be an example character for them to see what is possible, like a tutorial guide NPC. The low-level NPC was just an NPC they could boss around and tell what to do, giving them another thing to adjust to give the feel of a large battle.

PHASE 1: PREPARATION

I gave them one round to help set up defenses. They each had one chance to prepare for the approaching attack. This was a One Round Skill Challenge essentially, and a success meant that THAT wall received a +5 modifier for the following Skill Challenge, which was HUGE. A failure meant nothing. I didn't want to punish failed rolls during the preparation, because the goal of this is to help a side, and it would feel bad for them to make something WORSE.

They go around the table, and 2 succeed and 2 fail. So now 2 of the walls are a bit more protected and 2 of the walls remain more vulnerable by default, which gives some great tactical decisions to make. I then roleplayed the low-level NPC and asked them, "Where should I go?" They now had a moment of strategy before the Skill Challenge started. I showed them a sand timer and flipped it over behind my screen. I now watched as they frantically tried to get organized and ready for the battle. Little did they know, I wasn't even watching the timer, I was just listening to them and getting a FEEL for that perfect timing of when they were ready, but not 100% ready. I didn't want them to finish completely and then all look at me and say, "Okay we're ready now." I wanted to get across a frantic feeling. These are lower level players and I want it to feel like they are caught up in a crazy battle to defend a small town! So when the time was right, I kicked on the music and we went into the Skill Challenge!



PHASE 2: 4-WAY DEFENSE CHALLENGE

To run this challenge, I combined a One Round Skill Challenge with Group Skill Checks.

One Round Skill Challenge: Each PC gets one chance to make a Check towards the objective and either get a success or a failure.

Group Skill Checks: The group can add together their Checks to try and reach a single DC.

For this 4-Way Defense Challenge there were 4 “Defense Zones” that the PCs could choose to defend and they had to declare where they were at the start of the round. I told them that there were going to be 3 waves of enemies attacking the city and that failures would be tracked for each zone. If a zone ever got to 3 failures, something terrible would happen (I didn’t tell them what). I also reminded them that, after this Skill Challenge, there would be a combat to defend the town, and each failure they get only makes the final combat more deadly. For each round of this challenge, each zone needed to reach a Group DC of 30. That means that there are 4 different zones that need Skill Checks to be made in them to reach a total of 30 at each one. This is basically a DC of 120 that the players have one round to spread themselves out and defeat. Additionally, each Defense Zone gets a single 1d10 that is rolled to defend each of the gates that is also added to the Group Skill Checks. This represents the town’s militia helping to fight off the creatures. BUT, if a Defense Zone ever gets a failure, that zone no longer gets the 1d10 anymore. This represents the troops of the militia being eaten, killed, or destroyed in that round’s failure.

Here is how I calculated the math on these numbers. There was a group of 5 PCs, 2 NPC Rangers and 1 of the Defense Zones had a ballista which was considered an NPC for the sake of this challenge. I did this knowing that the 4 zones would potentially have 2 characters at each of them, making it to where if they both got a 15 on their Skill Check, then they could hit the DC 30. That is also why I did the Preparation phase, giving them a chance at getting a lower DC for each zone and making it more possible. Also, adding 1d10 to the roll to represent the militia at each gate helped to make it possible for one PC to hold a Defense Zone by themselves (which actually happened and was EPIC).

Once this phase started, I went through each Defense Zone one at a time. If there were any NPCs or guards I would roll those d20s first, and I would also roll the 1d10 and add all of that up before the PCs made their roll. I do this so that the PCs are the ones who have the spotlight in these moments and know what the DC they need to beat is. They then described what they do, and I asked them for a Check, then we knew if they hit the group DC of 30 or not.

So to recap everything that is going on:

- There are 3 rounds to this challenge happening back to back.
- 4 Defense Zones that need to hit a Group DC of 30 to get a success.
- Each Zone has a 1d10 rolled to represent the troops and the result is added to the total towards the Group DC.

- 1 Zone (the Wall) has an NPC there representing the ballista that cannot move from one zone to another. The roll this NPC makes is always just an attack roll of 1d20 + 5.
- 1 NPC is controlled by them that always makes their roll as a 1d10+5 (the d10 representing a weak NPC).
- 1 NPC controlled by me is a high-level character. I describe different and flashy things to show the power of this NPC while demonstrating how outside the box you can think. This NPC usually would roll a 1d20 +7 depending on the Checks.
- If the group fails then the combat following this Skill Challenge gets more deadly.

The battle was EPIC, and here are just a few highlights.

Round 1: 3 successes and 1 failure.

Round 2: 2 successes and 2 failures. One of the PCs asked to change from their zone with zero failures to a zone with 1 failure. I hadn’t thought about the players switching Defense Zones, but I allowed it. I told them to make an Initiative Check, and if they beat a DC 15 they make it there in time. If they fail, they would still get to the zone in time for the next round, but the Check they make there will be at DisADV. I thought that was a good ruling to reward them for wanting to help, but to make it more risky.

Round 3: After many epic moments of successes and failures, the round ended with 4 successes. They protected the one zone from getting its 3rd failure! One of those successes was from the Warlock who defended the entire zone SOLO by rolling a Nat 20. The little Gnome Warlock described a massive fear effect holding the creatures at bay.

PHASE 3: COMBAT

The core of the combat was a huge toad monster, a toad shaman that would buff it, and 3 different types of frog creatures (spitter, thrower, brawler). That is the exact fight they would have encountered if they didn’t get ANY failures. Each failure added 1 of each of those 3 frog creatures, so that is 3 new enemies each time they fail. They failed 3 times so that was 9 creatures added to the combat, which might seem like a lot, especially with them doing fairly well. But keep in mind, I wanted this entire battle to feel like a MASSIVE challenge, ending with a final combat! I wanted to lean toward MORE enemies, so I made each of those creatures into minions that would die in 1 hit, except for the brawler toads that would die in 2 hits (or 1 big hit). So the combat ended with an epic defeat of these demon toad creatures, and the party felt heroic. They thought about what might have happened if there were more failures... or even worse... what if they had gotten that 3rd failure on the single Defense Zone? Having your PCs be victorious in situations that they know could have been way worse if they didn’t make smart choices are some of the BEST moments in this game.



CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS



SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

This chapter covers social rules and roleplay tips, which I feel are the most underrepresented aspects of the game. This is the pillar of the game where players interact socially with either each other or other things in the world. I want to take these concepts and weave them into every aspect of the game. There are so many times that combat and exploration can be enhanced in different ways, and this chapter will provide you with a ton of options. Whether your players are interacting with NPCs or each other, a lot of these rules will add mechanics to help those interactions or even inspire everyone to engage more with what is going on.

DISPOSITION SYSTEM

Charisma Checks are strange in that you can say some amazing stuff... but the dice can't hear you and might not match up with that awesome thing you just said. You can give a great speech full of wonderful reasons why an NPC should listen to you... then you roll bad. Or you could not know what to say and just say something random... then roll great. This really takes away from the RP conversation that the player is having with the NPC. They should be rewarded for the GOOD or BAD things that they say to this NPC, and THEN the dice can come in and help tell the story from there.

STARTING DISPOSITION

Any NPC that your PCs come across will be one of 5 Dispositions: Ally, Friendly, Neutral, Unfriendly, or Enemy. It should be fairly obvious which one of these categories each NPC fits in, with the "default" category being Neutral. Below are generalized feelings for each Disposition and you can choose where those lines are for yourself as well.

Ally: They trust you completely, and would help you to be successful. They would even put themselves in danger for you.

Friendly: They mostly trust you, and hope that you are successful. They would not put themselves in danger for you.

Neutral: They act completely on their own motivations and do not consider your wants or opinions over their own.

Unfriendly: They do not trust you, and hope that you are not successful. They would not necessarily act out against you in a harmful or hostile way.

Enemy: They actively oppose you, and try to stop you from being successful. They will resort to violence if necessary.

DISPOSITION AND PERSONALITY

When you set an NPC's starting Disposition, take into account their personality, their environment and any other relevant factors that might affect how that Disposition could change. Some people are incredibly impressionable, and a good conversation together with some nice wine will do wonders. Other people are very paranoid, and are more likely to turn against people than to trust them. Thinking about an NPC's personality will help you figure out if it's easy or difficult to affect their Disposition, and whether it's more likely to shift in one direction over the other.

HOW DISPOSITION WORKS

When you first interact with an NPC, what you say matters and it's not based on the dice at all. If you simply walked up to an NPC and said something, what you said would determine if there was an initial Disposition shift or not, and then a Check can be made within that resulting Disposition. If you want to push it further, you could say more things or try for more Checks, and depending on either what was said or the results of those rolls, you could shift the Disposition even more or make the temporary shift permanent. Typically, it's not possible to shift the Disposition more than one level during a single interaction with them. It's up to the GM's discretion when this happens.

Example: An NPC loves it when they are given flowers or compliments. The Druid PC roleplays with them and during that interaction gives them a compliment (this temporarily shifts their Disposition from Neutral to Friendly). The PC might not even know that this was a trigger for this NPC, but you know as the GM and can adjust what the NPC does accordingly. If the conversation continues and the PC uses *Druidcraft* to produce a flower, or gives more compliments, etc, then this Disposition can shift to be permanently Friendly so that the next time this NPC sees the PC they are automatically Friendly. HOWEVER, this NPC probably will not be moved to Ally within one conversation.

You can use these 5 different levels and leave it up to yourself as the GM to move the NPC's Disposition up and down between them, or you could implement a point system (see "Influence Points" on page 65).



DC Tip: I usually don't use the risk modifier unless there is an obvious risk for the NPC that would be a big deal to them. I might reduce the DC if there was a risk that the PCs negate, or I might add 15 to the DC if the NPC would be terrified to do this request.

TEMPORARY DISPOSITION SHIFTS

In a social encounter with an NPC, what you SAY determines if their Disposition shifts up or down temporarily (or stays the same). The dice do not affect this interaction, until a roll of some kind is asked for. What your players SAY can shift an NPC's Disposition up or down, and THEN they make a Charisma Check of some kind within THAT current Disposition. The result of the first dice roll does NOT shift the Disposition, it just gives them a result within their current Disposition. Additional Checks can be made, or more things can be said, afterwards if the player wants to try and shift Disposition further or to make a temporary shift permanent.

Request Type	Ally	Friendly	Neutral	Unfriendly	Enemy
Help PC with major cost	Auto	Auto	Auto	10	15
Help PC with minor cost	Auto	Auto	10	15	20
Help PC with no risk/time	Auto	10	15	20	n/a
Help PC with minor time/risk	10	15	20	n/a	n/a
Help PC with major time/risk	15	20	n/a	n/a	n/a

DISPOSITION CHECK DCs

This chart shows what DC to use for any Check that a PC would make, to convince an NPC with the associated Dispositions to do various things. Each Check will come with either a cost or a benefit to the NPC. If the NPC will benefit from the request, then the DC will be lower, and if it'll cost the NPC something, then of course the DC will be higher. These benefits and costs don't have to be just money, it could also be a promised favor, information, specific items, or whatever makes sense. Here are some examples of each type of request across a spectrum from Major Benefit to Major Cost.

DC Tip: As the GM, you have the final call on what these DCs would be, or if the Check is even possible at all. Maybe some NPCs are SO MUCH of an enemy that they would NEVER help the PCs, or maybe they DO... then backstab them. I usually don't ask for Checks when the DC is 5, so you could have those be automatic as well.

- **Major Benefit:** Large amount of money, information, or favors (complete a quest first).
- **Minor Benefit:** Small amount of money, information, or favors (share a secret or give a tip first).
- **Neutral:** Little to no reward for them, doesn't take much time to accomplish, or it's a fair trade.
- **Minor Cost:** NPC has to give up a small amount of money, information, or favors.
- **Major Cost:** NPC has to give up a large amount of money, information, or favors.

Risk Modifier

Requests often carry some amount of risk which represents how dangerous it would be for the NPC to complete the task. There could be a Major Benefit for the NPC... but at a GREAT risk to their own life. This risk would increase that DC by a certain amount. The amount that you increase (or even decrease) a DC based on this risk is up to you as a GM. Do what you think lands the DC in the right spot.

Major Risk (+10 to the DC): Their life could be in danger if they do this request.

Minor Risk (+5 to the DC): Their reputation or other relationships are in danger if they do this request.



PERMANENT DISPOSITION SHIFTS

If an NPC has had their Disposition shifted temporarily, they can gain this new Disposition permanently due to a number of factors.

- Failing follow up Checks made to interact with that NPC. This could be one single LARGE failure, or multiple small failures.
- Something is said that triggers the NPC to now STAY at this new Disposition.
- The NPC has been temporarily shifted to this new Disposition multiple times and the GM thinks that this should now be their new default Disposition.

NPC TRIGGERS

Each NPC will have different things that “trigger” them, in both good and bad ways. These can be the NPC’s Ideas, Bonds, and Flaws, but I personally don’t think about those 3 things for NPCs or players. For my own NPCs, I usually think about the following concepts, and whatever sticks out to me, I take that and run with it. I also have a d10 list on the back of my GM screen with ALL of these listed just in case I need to add them to an NPC on-the-fly.

- What Personality Trait do they have? (this is usually a one word emotion like genuine, cautious, or grumpy)
- What kind of Quirk do they have? (this is usually something strange or unique that separates them from a “generic” NPC)
- What do they want? (this can also be their “goal” or what they are trying to accomplish)
- What do they fear? (this can be their “kryptonite”, weakness, or something that upsets them)

DC Tip: Examples of Personality Traits and Quirks are in the tables in Chapter 0 (page 10)

These 4 Triggers can help your party interact with these NPCs to get on their good side. But how will they learn these things? You can easily RP these traits when you play these NPCs and give little clues here and there. Players could do some background checking and ask around if it’s really important for them to learn about a specific individual. You can also have players make Insight Checks for getting clues on how to interact with NPCs for these things. If they succeed on the Check then they could learn what makes this NPC tick and better talk with them, but if they roll poorly instead of saying “they are just hard to read” you could possibly give them false information that leads them into triggering the NPC in a bad way (see “Secret Insight Checks” on page 76).

When players have great RP, or they say and do things creatively in these social situations, don’t be afraid to give out ADV on the roll, lower the DC they are trying to beat, or BOTH! The same can be said for players who aren’t thinking or caring. If they say something bad that might trigger the NPC in a negative way, you can give them DisADV. All of this depends on if the NPC was triggered in a positive or negative way and to what degree.

NPC INSIGHT CHECKS

These don’t have to ALWAYS be used for being a “human lie detector”. Let players try and gather information while speaking with the NPC so they can get some INSIGHT about their preferences, quirks, or triggers. This is especially useful when a PC is trying to get a temporary Disposition shift. A good enough Insight Check might let them learn about the NPC’s triggers or even their current Disposition towards them or their party. These Insight Checks can be made before, during, or after social interactions to possibly prepare for or learn from things you talk to them about.

DC Tip: I have even had some smart players have one PC go in first to “probe” the NPC and ask a bunch of questions about things and then do an Insight Check after to see what they could learn. They then told this to the charismatic character of the group and sent them in to talk to the NPC now knowing more about the NPC!

EACH NPC IS DIFFERENT

Some NPCs that are truly “bad” and have more “evil” intentions might start off already pretty antisocial at the Neutral Disposition. If there is a negative Disposition shift it could cause the NPC to start plotting against the party, and if that continues, to even plot to kill one of the PCs. Then there are some NPCs who are just really nice people who wouldn’t harm a fly even if they were at the Enemy Disposition, for whatever reason. Just keep in mind that each NPC is their own person within this Disposition System and you shouldn’t force actions on them that don’t make sense for them.

DC Tip: PCs could even use Stealth or Perception Checks beforehand to eavesdrop on the NPC. Below is an entire section on Insight Checks, but I would encourage you to think of other Checks that could win over an NPC. Even an Arcana Check to “nerd out” with an NPC Wizard would be a good way to shift Disposition.



INFLUENCE POINTS

This is a point system to help you keep track of each relationship with a simple number. You can use Influence Points to help you keep track of things as NPCs move from one Disposition to another. You can award Influence Points for successes on certain rolls, or even for accomplishing tasks or quests for the NPC. PCs can also LOSE Influence Points from negative interactions or from certain failed rolls. You can also change the amount of points needed to go from one Disposition to another. Maybe it takes only 1 point to become Friendly, but then 2 points to become an Ally. You can also award these points, as the GM, for whatever you want that would make sense.

GAINING INFLUENCE POINTS

Use these as little or as much as you want, this is just another tool in your GM toolbox to award players with. They could gain a point for a positive interaction with an NPC that was meaningful enough to stand out to you. You could award an Influence Point for a Check of some kind made to interact with that NPC that was REALLY high (maybe 5 or 10 higher than the DC).

This system should be working in the background and not be a mechanic that the players are too aware of exactly how it's working. You don't want to tell a player, "Make a Charisma Check to see if you gain an Influence Point." Instead, have it be something that you reward behind the scenes alongside the interactions your PCs do. You run the risk of your NPCs feeling like a video game character that the PCs are trying to interact with in specific and calculated ways to "earn points" instead of just roleplaying and having positive interactions. Players can be aware that there is a system in place for increasing an NPC's Disposition towards them... but it's their actions that increase or decrease the Disposition. Don't get too caught up with explaining how the points work.

DC Tip: You can also use any of the Skill Challenge Methods from Chapter 3 to run a social encounter, and the end result of that would change the Influence Points for that NPC.

LOSING INFLUENCE POINTS

Just like above, you can also lose the points from the opposite results. Saying something really bad to them, rolling really low on a Check, or losing a social challenge of some kind can reduce the Influence Points you have with an NPC. Time could also be a factor here. If you have a lot of in-game time pass and your players never talk to the NPC, send them something, or mention them at all... maybe the next time they see them, they aren't quite as friendly, or are hurt from being ignored.

GENERAL TIPS

You can use this system as loosely or strictly as you want. Make a little note next to each NPC on what their relationship is, or just play it by ear with a general understanding of how this NPC feels about the PCs.

Social interactions don't have to always be a contest between an NPC and PC. I usually prefer to have a social interaction Check of some kind to be a DC just like any other Check. If you have it be a contest, it introduces TWO sides of "randomness", and if the NPC rolls GREAT when it would feel strange for them to, or rolls LOW when it should have been a challenging thing to do... that feels bad. So 90% of the time I have it be a DC, but sometimes I will roll for it where it feels right, or if I DO want to have some more chance factor into it.

There are a number of social skills already, and still even more skills that could come into play in a social encounter. When you're determining whether a Disposition change becomes permanent or quickly reverts to Neutral, keep the approach of the characters in mind. Some NPCs will respond better to Intimidation Checks, while others might engage more with some polite discourse and Persuasion Checks.

If there is a time when a PC has a great bit of dialogue with an NPC, by either doing or saying something that really "hits the spot" for the NPC... just have them automatically succeed. Don't be afraid of doing this. This is the ultimate reward to the PC and makes total sense. If there is a big, strong Barbarian that wants to lift up a table... I wouldn't even ask for a Check on that... because it's so obvious that it would happen. This is true here as well. If a PC makes such a great point or triggers an NPC in a specific way, then just have them succeed.



REPUTATION SYSTEM

This can be used for individual NPCs, groups of NPCs, entire factions, or even an entire kingdom. You can use the same Influence Point system outlined above but apply this sliding scale of values towards a Reputation system.

STARTING REPUTATION

Each group will start out at different levels when the party first encounters them. Most will be at a Neutral 0, or maybe they have heard of the party and are at a +1 or -1. Maybe the group just killed someone that was unknowingly a part of this group and they are already -2 or worse!

OPPOSING FACTIONS

Introduce factions that are in direct opposition to your players or to each other. Some factions might start to have lower Disposition levels with the party just because they are working with their rival faction. It's also a good progression to have a faction start out as enemies with the players and they have to figure out how to get on their good side.

REPUTATION REWARD TIERS

Each level of Disposition can have different rewards that unlock once you reach these "tiers". This can be access to new locations, information, NPC contacts, gold rewards, magic items, and more! Try to think of rewards that are specific to your world and campaign as well, maybe there is a certain plot point that doesn't happen until they reach a required Reputation level with a specific faction. Now there are a few sessions where they have to figure out how to impress this group, leading to social encounters to talk to these people, exploration to gather things, or quests to go kill stuff.

INDIVIDUALS WITHIN GROUPS

A faction's Disposition towards you represents what they collectively think of you and what the group in general is willing to do for you. It's important to remember that, unless the faction is some sort of hivemind, there will still be individuals within that organization. The thieves guild that LOVES you for taking down the mayor of a town who was clamping down on their operations might have a few members who think you are a risk to the guild. Have a look at where faction Disposition and personal Disposition clash and you're guaranteed to find something interesting for your game's story.



PLAYER IMPROV RULES

These can be fun additions to your game and empower your players to ADD to the world. These can blur the lines between player and GM, but used in the right way can really let everyone create a better world that they ALL feel connected to. Even with these rules there should be an understanding that the GM can still veto anything crazy, and the players should respect the power they are given in these moments and not abuse it.

You can put limitations on how often players can use these rules since it could become an issue if these are overused. I personally haven't had to do this and just leave it open to an understanding and respect for players not to push the limits. You could tie these to Inspiration if you wanted there to be a resource for it (see "Inspiration System" on page 28). You could also have its own resource pool. Each player could do this once per session, or you could put a bowl in the center of the table with 3 coins in it that have to be spent to use these cool options.

Gold or items can be another resource that you have these things COST. This can be something the player gives up in order to gain what they want. These can be really cool moments to see how much a player wants something. They can make it happen because they would give up THIS to be able to do THAT. You can think of this like a GM bribe, plus a dice roll to see if something happens that would have never been possible otherwise without these unique rules. I make sure that these bribes make sense in the world. I don't just have them spend something for the sake of spending it.

All of these rules offer unique solutions to what would normally have to be "ret-conned" and clunky. You can run many of these moments as flashbacks where you go back in time to a certain point of the story to show something that happened that "nobody saw". Now these become story moments that you all share in creating. If players are testing the limits of these rules, then maybe they can't handle the freedom these rules offer, so you shouldn't use them.



I KNOW SOMEONE

When the PCs are presented with a difficult situation in which knowing someone could possibly help them, they can say, "I know someone." They then explain how they know this person, provide a description to help the GM, and the GM can now RP this new NPC on-the-fly. After this description, the PC then makes a Charisma Check to determine their current relationship with the NPC (you can use this to gauge their Disposition too) and this NPC now exists in the world.

Charisma Check Outcome

- **5 or less:** The NPC isn't happy to see them and may claim they owe them money or some other obligation.
- **6 to 14:** The NPC remembers them, offers some information, but nothing too significant.
- **15 or higher:** The NPC is happy to see them and may offer assistance with their predicament.

This is truly collaborative storytelling because the players at the table just CREATED AN NPC on-the-fly! This can be used to gain passage into a restricted area, learn information on some morally ambiguous noble, find a missing NPC, or any number of predicaments. I've had this as an option at my table for years and you might be surprised that players don't use this rule as much as you would think. It doesn't happen often, but when it does there is always a great moment at the table where the player feels so empowered that they just created something in the world (that makes sense and I go along with). I also love seeing a player describe that they have a GREAT relationship with this NPC and then roll a terrible Charisma Check and now I get to come up with what happened from then to now to make the NPC hate this PC now. This can be a very "meta" rule, but has always been fun.

Good Example: The party needs to get some dirt on a noble in the city to try and remove them from power. Player 1 says, "I know someone," and starts to describe that they have an uncle from their backstory who was a tailor for nobility and might have overheard some things. They make a Charisma Check and get a 10. Now the party has a contact point to get the ball rolling on this quest, and Player 1 helped get it started. You could also grant ADV for their roll if they tie it into their own backstory or if who they say they know REALLY makes sense.

Bad Example: For the same example above, but instead Player 2 says, "I know someone," then says that they literally know THAT noble and that they are connected in some way. The GM tells the player that that is quite a leap and this individual would not have had interactions in this way. This method is not designed to completely skip and bypass important plot moments, but to give players creative freedom to think outside the box!





JUST AS I PLANNED

When a PC is in a difficult situation, they can say that they had made some preparations beforehand that benefit them in their current situation. If it isn't too ridiculous of a request, the GM can allow the preparations to have taken place, and the PC describes what preparations they made and how they benefit them now (usually with a flashback of some kind).

These need to be balanced or restricted in some ways or players could just abuse this mechanic. You can have the character make a Check of some kind to see if the thing they said is true, or tie it to some other resource like Inspiration as mentioned above. If you have them make a Check to see if this happens, maybe there is a chance that something BAD could happen, which can also reduce players abusing this.

Most of the time I have these be Flat d20 Checks to see if the dice are in their favor in these moments. If it would make sense for their character's abilities to influence if this would happen, then I make it a Check that makes sense. There are many different ways that this could go, so here is a single example scenario with good and bad examples.

The party finds out that everything in their house was stolen. The characters scramble around to think about what they can do.

Good Example: Player 1 says, "Just as I had planned... I have a magical tracking beacon on my things." The GM thinks that this could be possible and asks for a Flat D20 Check (DC 15). They succeed and now have a strong sense of where their stuff is heading.

Good Example: Player 2 says, "Just as I had planned... I paid a guard 10gp to watch our house for the night, who could maybe have some info or help." The GM asks for a Persuasion Check (DC 15) to see if they could convince a guard to work an overtime shift. They succeed, and the GM then describes the guard coming into the front door at about this time and talking to the party. The guard could have captured one or more of the robbers, or just have a LITTLE bit of information on what they saw. Maybe the party finds the guard tied up in a closet and almost killed. Either way the player now has to spend 10gp as part of the deal.

Good Example: Player 3 says, "Just as I had planned... I had cast *Glyph of Warding* and set it to explode if anyone besides us entered this area." The GM is surprised by this idea but it totally matches up with this character's paranoia, so asks for a Flat D20 Check (DC 10). They succeed and now the GM adds to the description that they just gave that there is instead an EXPLOSION that happened and there are 2 bodies on the floor... but their stuff is still missing and they see bloodied tracks leading out of the rubble.

DC Tip: This really did happen at my game table and I thought this was a brilliant thing for the player to come up with so I ran with it. The new bodies gave them more clues AND there was even a Setback from it since now their house had EXPLODED. I respected the fact that they were also okay blowing up their own house for something their character would have done.

Bad Example: Player 4 says, “Just as I had planned... I actually locked the door with *Arcane Lock*, so none of this actually happened and our stuff is fine.” OR they say, “That reminds me... I actually keep ALL of my stuff on me at all times, so I didn't actually lose anything!” The GM says “TIME OUT” and explains how that isn't how this rule works.

I personally wouldn't let things like this happen, as it feels bad to go backwards and have a player say that something actually didn't even happen. It would be a BIG shift in the story or possibly screw up something if these people didn't even rob them. Make sure the players understand that this has to keep moving the story FORWARD, instead of trying to have what they say go back and have things not even happen. Both of the good examples ADDED to what happened, whereas this is SUBTRACTING. If you think this is a valid example then you can always still ask them for a Check and just set the DC higher so at least there was a chance. Also, if you are ok with “ret-cons” like this, and the new possibility interests you, then let it happen!

THAT REMINDS ME

A PC says, “That reminds me!...” and then attempts to recall information that they might already know from the past. The PC then makes a Check of some kind to see if they remember the information. On a success, they do remember and you tell them the information.

You can have these be History Checks, Flat Checks, or you could come up with custom Checks that may or may not add their Prof. Bonus to them. You can even assign ADV or DisADV to the roll. If moments like this speak to you, and you like what the players are trying to do, then roll with it. A lot of times players having more information is not a bad thing. Reward them for their creativity and interest in your world. For these examples, the GM reveals something that nobody in the group would have known about the monster or villain.

Good Example: Player 1 says, “That reminds me... I used to study up on these creatures as a kid in my monster survival course at school.” The GM asks for a History Check (DC 15) to see if they either paid attention, or were even taught that in the first place. If they succeed they get some information on how these creatures work that could help them fight these things.

Bad Example: Player 2 says, “That reminds me... I know the exact location of the Lich's Phylactery!” The GM stops and says “TIME OUT!”

This rule is not intended to be used to skip entire challenges or parts of the story. It's also not possible to just know ANYTHING that there is no way of your character knowing. In situations like this I talk with the players about respecting the boundaries of the game and having what they ask for with these moments to be reasonable while not trying to break the game.



I HAVE JUST THE THING

When a PC is in need of a specific item that could've been obtained from a person or place that they visited somewhat recently, they can try to initiate a flashback to gain that item. If it isn't too ridiculous of a request, the GM allows them to gain the item, and the PC describes how they obtained it.

This rule is similar to the ones above, but specifically refers to items. As the GM makes sure that this interaction isn't abused and can even make it based on a Check of some kind that would have come from this flashback interaction. If obtaining this item would've cost them gold, charge them this gold. You can make this as easy or difficult to accomplish depending on what the item's importance or value is.

Good Example: Player 1 runs out of spell components for a specific spell. They go to cast their spell and realize this, so they say, "I have a thing! Do you all remember when we were back in town? I actually found this sketchy vendor that had these spell components. They overcharged me a ton, so I paid 10gp but I have them now!" The GM loves the description of the story and the player charges themselves 10gp for something that would have just been 2gp, so they smile and don't even ask the player for the Check and the game continues. You could ask them to make a Check of some kind or even barter with them for how many resources it would cost to do this.

Bad Example: The party is looking for a missing statue for the quest that they have been on. Player 2 proclaims out of nowhere, "I have a thing... I actually found the missing statue... it was on the ground over here... see?" The GM hangs their head low and says, "TIME OUT!" This is NOT the spirit of how this rule is supposed to be used. It is not meant to be a catch-all to just have things appear out of nowhere. What they ask for should have some level of creativity and make sense. Just saying they have something because they want it... is never going to fly with me.

EXPLORATION PILLAR

These are some ways to weave in more of the Social Encounters Pillar into the Exploration Pillar.

RANDOM SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

Make sure you add in Social Encounters into your random encounters. Random encounters are the things your party comes across while roaming about a town, traveling through the woods, or delving through a dungeon. I hate calling these random because there should be some purpose to them and, no matter what pillar they fall under, they shouldn't be purely random. A LOT of GM's will have mostly combats on their encounter tables, so I challenge you to weave in some social interactions to spice things up. Even if you have a social encounter turn into a combat (see below), that still adds an opportunity to have your players TALK to something. It's easy to throw in social encounters while in a city, but while traveling you can have a traveling salesman or fortune teller pass them on the road. While delving through a dungeon, have them meet another adventuring party, a lost villager, or a wounded soldier.

MYSTERIES

The Exploration Pillar is also about solving puzzles, but instead of your classic puzzles, traps, or riddles... combine those together with social encounters to create some mysteries for your PCs to solve. A murder mystery is basically a social puzzle that your party has to solve. This is the perfect merge of the two pillars together and can even lead to combat when things go wrong.

Not all mysteries have to be about murder. You can have missing items or people, suspicious activities, strange creatures, or other unexplainable phenomena. Running mysteries can be difficult and I could write an entirely different book about it, but here are a few tips for you:

- Write a list of clues that ANY NPC could have, then when players come across an NPC, you can pull from that universal list and give them a clue from that NPC's perspective.
- Have SPECIAL clues on SPECIFIC NPCs that have more unique information. These should be on key NPCs (especially the ones closest to the mystery).
- I love having an NPC that LOOKS like they're bad but they're actually good, and an NPC who LOOKS like they're good but are actually bad.
- Once you trick your players with certain ideas or tropes make sure to change it up on them and keep them guessing.

DOWNTIME PROGRESSION

Downtime is a great opportunity for your players to engage in social encounters. Often downtime is done inside of a city or safe place with other NPCs around. Give PCs options to interact with these NPCs. This is also a great window to use Reputation from the rules above and give Influence Points to those who interact with certain NPCs. You should have some of the solutions to your PCs' goals be tied to NPCs that they need to talk to or perform side quests for (see "Downtime" on page 130 for more Downtime rules).



COMBAT PILLAR

Combat doesn't have to be JUST combat. You can throw social encounters right in the middle to make things interesting. These are things you can add into your normal combats that would usually not have any social interaction elements, or you could place them in before or after a fight.

TALKING ENEMIES

This one is simple... TALK for the enemies that the PCs are fighting during the combat. So many times GMs just focus on the mechanics and running the combat, but there are PLENTY of times where someone is grabbing their dice, adding up numbers, etc, and you can just interject some dialogue to get in some social interaction. This can be difficult to get used to or be able to do on-the-fly so write some one-liners on a note card, or on the same paper the monster information is on, then just read one off every now and then. Sometimes I will have them target specific players or really start giving one player a hard time.

COMBAT ESCALATION & DIFFUSION

Before Combat: Have social encounters that could possibly LEAD to combat if they don't go well. If the party says something bad, then they roll for Initiative! You should also have moments where the players can diffuse the conflict and "beat" the encounter with some good social skills. Just like how Disposition works, these moments shouldn't hinge on the roll of the dice. If your players say certain things and it makes sense for the enemies to react negatively or positively, don't be afraid to react based on what they SAY instead of the result of a Check.

DC Tip: This is also a perfect place for a Skill Challenge to set the tone before combat... or you can have the Skill Challenge carry over INTO combat to try and reason with the enemy!

During Combat: Have social interaction DURING combat that could lead to a variety of outcomes. Based on what they say to the enemies, different things might happen. Maybe the enemies make general statements and whoever speaks up is who they target next, or the opposite... Players who don't say anything in response to their speaking are perceived as rude and are ATTACKED! You can also have moments during combat where if certain things are said or a deal is made, the combat completely stops. I have thrown VERY difficult encounters at my party where if they fought them blindly it would be extremely deadly, but if they just talked to them... the combat would be over.



After Combat: Social interaction AFTER combat can look like a few different things. Enemies can surrender if things look bad for them and try to beg and barter with the PCs to spare their lives. This can give some unique social and moral problems for them to deal with. You can also have some of the survivors wake up after combat is over and cough up blood as they are still barely holding on. Be careful how often you do this, because you don't want players feeling like they have to stab everything multiple times after they die to MAKE SURE they are dead. You could roll a single Death Save and if they succeed they regain consciousness and say some final words. You can still have them die after they say these "final words" as they then fall limp to the ground.

ROLEPLAY REIMAGINED

This entire game fits into the category of a "roleplay game", but there are not many tools available that can help both new and veteran players with this skill. The following rules are designed to bring out the best in both the GM and players, and help to increase immersion and RP at your table. When players can truly connect and get inside their characters head, some great things can happen. Roleplay is part of every aspect of the game, not just social encounters. The following sections also show different systems you can incorporate at your table to level up everyone's creativity and roleplaying.

GENERAL RP TIPS

The concept and the act of roleplay does not come naturally to some people and has to be learned. These are tips for both GMs and players to try out for themselves. I don't recommend trying ALL of these at once. Just pick one concept below and think about that for your next session and see how it feels. Try these out one week at a time, and then over time you will become a stronger roleplayer to help set an example at your table and help other players as well. Yes, it can be uncomfortable and feel weird to put yourself out there like that, but that is part of the vulnerability that we can grow into at our own tables. Try these out with your friends, or the entire group, and you can all improve together!

GM SETS AN EXAMPLE

It's my philosophy that the GM sets the example for many behaviors in the game. If they don't want players to be distracted and on their phones, then they shouldn't be either. If you want the players to invest in your world, then you should invest in your players' characters and tie them into it. For roleplaying, this is very important. It is a LOT easier for a player who is either new, or just not experienced at roleplaying, to get into it and feel SAFE to get into it if the GM leads by example. You don't have to be the best at it either, just do whatever you are comfortable with AND acknowledge or praise when players DO roleplay, and point out that you noticed and throw 'em a compliment! You can lead by example by both endorsing good RP and doing it yourself. Personally, I will go ALL IN on characters that I play to show that I am not afraid of looking stupid for some random shopkeeper they find. I don't do this all the time, but enough to make sure they know that we aren't going to make fun of each other here, and if anyone looks the weirdest... it's ME!





EXAGGERATE QUIRKS & TRAITS

For MOST of my NPCs I have a one word emotion written in a spot next to their name in my notes for that character. Passionate, grumpy, empathetic, and cautious are just a few examples, but those ONE WORDS can really help me roleplay that NPC both from the way that I say things and from a decision making perspective. This one simple word can give some good “flavor” to a character in those moments where you don’t know what they would do. You can think, “Oh they are cautious... they would do THIS!”

USING VOICES

You do NOT have to use an over-the-top accent for your characters, you can just use your own voice... with a few tweaks to it. Here are a few things you can change:

- Talking speed (fast vs slow)
- Vocabulary that you use (slang words vs big words)
- Pitch of your voice (slightly higher vs slightly lower)
- Projection of your voice (speak softly vs speaking loudly)

I also like to give some characters a “catch phrase” to weave into as many places as I can, which can even become a joke at some point. One NPC always says, “OOOOO WEEEE,” in a cajun accent every time someone asks them a question. This alone has made this character stand out, and my players probably like them more for THAT quirk than they do my terrible attempt at a Cajun accent.

USING YOUR FACE & BODY

There is more to a character than just a voice... unless you are playing online with voice only. You can use your face and body to really bring a character to life and help to tell one NPC apart from another. You don’t have to do something with your face and body for EVERY character, just have it cross your mind if you think something could be added to this NPC if you did.

To use your face, think of what you can do with your eyes, eyebrows, and mouth. You could speak completely in your own, normal voice but have really sleepy looking eyes and just talk slower. Now you have a “sleepy” type of NPC and you are easily roleplaying!

To use your body, think of what you can do with your hands and arms, how you can hold your head, and how you are sitting, along with your overall posture. To roleplay a person of high nobility that is very condescending, stick your nose up in the air. With JUST that, they will know that when you do this, you are talking as THAT character.

ROLEPLAYING NPCs

Look for connections to your players and things that you could connect to them or oppose them with. Be unique enough to tell the difference from one NPC to another. Use everything in this section to help them stand out. Even just body posture helps when there is more than one NPC that is talking with the players. Have one NPC sit up nice and tall and have the other one slouch. This will make it very clear which one you are roleplaying, especially if you're not as confident with varying your voices.

Go BIG and don't be afraid to go for it if you have a thought to try out. That will be far more rewarding than an NPC who doesn't say or do anything interesting.

PRACTICE ALONE

Especially if you are uncomfortable or self-conscious about this, you can practice any of these when you are by yourself. I practice voices that I might use for the upcoming session when I am in the car driving to work, walking from my car into the grocery store, or alone in my room. If someone stops at a red light and looks over at me talking to myself with weird facial expressions and hand gestures... they might think I'm crazy... but I'm okay with that! Have fun with this and laugh at yourself! You will be surprised how much better you will get and you'll be less hesitant at the table.

VOICE TRANSITIONS

I struggled a LOT on transitioning from one voice to another and back to my own. This is mainly an issue for GMs since we play MULTIPLE characters and might have to switch back and forth between sentences. I practice this skill by picking a phrase and 2 different character voices. Say the phrase as yourself, then character 1, then character 2, one after the other. Do this with just the voice first, then add in mannerisms and facial expressions. I have even roleplayed 2 characters talking back and forth to each other as I interjected my own voice by saying GM things.

- Character 1, in a deep heroic voice, "Behold! I shall now climb this very wall you see here before you!"
- As myself, "Oooo okay, give me an Athletics Check."
- Character 2, in a pirate accent, "Good luck matey, best not fall on your arse!"



INSPIRED NPC CREATION

Take inspiration from the world around you, and I do mean the ENTIRE world. I have created NPCs based off of friends of mine, characters from shows or movies, students I taught in school, or even strangers I had met that day. A baseline of a personality or appearance to go off of helps get that ball rolling. Just take this as a rough outline and run with it. You can even change up the characteristics to make them unrecognizable to the original inspiration.

ROLEPLAY SYSTEMS

These rules are grouped together since they inspire players (literally in some cases, like INSPIRATION... get it?) to invest into their character and into the story. They draw the players in and reward them based on their actions. Things that you want your players to do more of should be rewarded, so you can see these as “rules” or just ways to motivate your players to engage with your world and their own character.

INSPIRATION

Inspiration can be used in many ways and be given out for many different kinds of actions. Like I said before, when your players go outside of their comfort zone and have some great roleplay... give them Inspiration. That acknowledgement and reward will increase the chances of them doing it again! A player could do something as simple as talk in character more often than usual, or make a decision based on what their character would do that leads to a possibly less than ideal result (see “Chapter 2: Inspiration Overhaul” on page 27).

THEMATIC PROGRESSION

A character is not allowed to receive a class feature, feat, or any other ability unless it “makes sense” based on the actions of that character leading up to that moment.

It doesn't make any sense when a Sorcerer hits level 5 and then learns how to cast *Fireball*... OUT OF NOWHERE. This means that players no longer just automatically learn everything that the book tells them they can do now... it has to make sense. This is something I love to challenge my players with.



It might seem like a mean thing to do as a GM, but it really does make players THINK about their character's past, present, and future! You are inspiring (or forcing) the players to build their character in a realistic way that matches what is happening in-game, instead of just sitting back and waiting for those mechanical bonuses (class features). This can assist in acquiring feats, spells, and even multiclassing.

Example: The Sorcerer wants to learn *Fireball* at 5th-level... So at 3rd-level they picked up the level 2 spell *Scorching Ray*. Between levels 3 and 5 they kept asking the GM to try and merge the 3 bolts together... What a crazy idea! The GM was quick on their toes and said... IF all 3 land on the same target, you will trigger a small explosion in a 5ft area around the target (with a Dexterity Save for half of the total damage dealt to the target). This is a cool homebrew boost for this spell that also BEAUTIFULLY transitions this Sorcerer into picking up *Fireball* at 5th-level.

This system makes players feel like they truly EARN each and every ability they have because THEY put in the work to get there. Talk to your players about this and make sure they are on the same page so it doesn't feel like you are playing keep away with their own abilities. Players have come to me and asked, “How could I roleplay to get THIS ability,” and we have a great brainstorm about what that could look like. The player then looks forward to the next bit of travel or downtime because they have something to do and a goal to accomplish during that time. I like to keep this momentum going and once they push their characters' limits, I lean into it and give them MORE rewards or “homebrew boosts” to certain features that they start to really love (see “Bonus Level Up Perks” on page 20).

If the players don't buy into this system then try not to be too hard on them or FORCE it onto them. Just like any of these homebrew rules, you should never force them onto anyone. I've had players that showed they were super sad about not getting an ability they were looking forward to and I could tell they were frustrated, so I worked out something with them and we came up with an explanation about how they could do the feature now. Apparently they had been sneaking away during the night's watch to practice this feature (even though they hadn't been in-game). You have to know your players and establish how HARD you are enforcing this. I've handled it VERY strictly or not at all, and it all depends on your group.

If the players buy into this system, then this isn't something you will even have to enforce heavily and they will hold themselves accountable. I have had players say, “Yeah, I want to pick up this spell but I am going to roleplay some stuff during this next downtime first, so let me know once I have access to it.” Once they start playing the game in this way, where their character evolves smoothly, they will start to look ahead at what their character gets next level and start building that path NOW so that once they level up they DO have access to all of those things.

DC Campaign Story

There was a brand new player I added to the group and they wanted to play a Barbarian. We talked about what kind of Barbarians there were and she wanted to play the Ancestral Guardian. We then decided that the flavor of this Barbarian was that when she was younger, her older sister died trying to save her, so she sees her sister's spirit around her when she's in danger (when in combat). She was only level 1 at the time and had not yet gained access to any Ancestral Guardian features, but this made sense because she hadn't been able to tap into them yet. During combat, I would describe her sister near her, yelling out to her to watch out or cheer her on.

The sessions went on and there was a theme I kept putting in front of this character: Be brave and protect others. Those were the tenants of her sister, and she tried to instill those in her... but every time I put people that needed help in front of this character, she was scared and only tried to keep herself safe. I would roleplay the ghost of her sister looking on in sadness shaking her head... ashamed. When she leveled up to 3rd-level, she asked me what features she got. She was a new player, so she didn't know... but I told her, you get nothing. We had a conversation, GM to player, about what she remembered her sister's values to be. I gave her a little one-on-one Flashback Sequence where I gave a play-by-play of the choices she had made and her sister's responses to them. She put it together herself at that moment, and she said, "My sister is ashamed of me because I have been selfish and scared... I have to be brave."

I get chills just thinking about this moment in real life... and what happened next session. I put a small family in danger in the middle of combat. I could tell the player knew what she had to do. The family was surrounded by Demon Toads, but she went into a Rage and CHARGED IN. I described her sister's apparition next to her... and for the first time the rest of the party could see this ghostly image of her sister. They then charged into battle together, and for the rest of that combat she was able to fight side-by-side with her sister again. I kept describing her sister protecting her from these creatures. She was overwhelmed with enemies, but her sister had her back. I told her that all enemies' attacks against her are at DisADV, and I even let her make an Extra Attack during this combat (even though she was only 3rd-level). Yes I know that is not how the Ancestral Guardian Barbarian's 3rd-level abilities work... but for THIS combat... for THIS moment... this was how it worked.

This moment was one of the most epic moments I have seen in this game... and it never would have happened if I just gave her the class features she "should" have gotten at 3rd-level. She didn't EARN them yet, in this example it was for a lore, backstory, and roleplay reason, but it inspired the player to engage with the story and her own backstory. After the combat, I explained that she now had access to her 3rd-level Barbarian class features, and explained to her what they did "normally". This is also what I mean when I say that I give the players MORE at certain times because I understand that I am asking MORE of them. This is not designed to "gate keep" your players from their own abilities, but more to inspire them to truly invest in their character and the world around them.



SECRET ROLLS

Whenever a character needs to make a Check and the result of that Check would give the player too much information, the GM can ask for a Secret Roll instead. The player will not know the result of that roll and then continues playing.

I want my players' knowledge to be in sync with their characters' knowledge to the best of my ability. Yes, sometimes this is hard to do and you would then rely on the players to not act on that "meta" information. But that's not what I'm worried about. I trust my players to not "metagame"... I am worried about their immersion and experience. It would be like you knowing what you are getting for your birthday before you open the gift... I'm not worried about them opening the gift early... I'm wanting to keep up the suspense and surprise until the right moment.

Bad Example 1: A suspicious NPC is talking to the party and gives them a quest to go on. INSIGHT CHECK! Of course one player is suspicious and makes an Insight Check. They roll a Natural 20... so now they have become a magical human lie detector and KNOW that they just rolled really high... so the resulting information out of the GM's mouth will be FACTS.

Bad Example 2: A player is looking out for traps or enemies in a dangerous location. The GM asks for a Perception Check and the player gets a Natural 1... so they see nothing... BUT... that PLAYER knows that there IS something there or at least there could be... so they now have to fight the urge to proceed cautiously. Alternatively, they could roll a Natural 20 and then they see EVERYTHING and know that they can proceed without a care in the world. Both situations either remove the tension or add a strange amount of knowledge to the player that the character wouldn't know.

Bad Example 3: The group walks into a mushroom-filled forest and you ask the group to make an Intelligence Save... they tell you their numbers (meaning they know who rolled low or high). Now you start to describe that the players that rolled low are starting to see strange creatures stalk you while appearing and disappearing. Hmmm, it's almost like everyone now knows that those are ILLUSIONS since you just asked the group for an INTELLIGENCE Save... and the players who rolled low are the only ones seeing them!

Each of those examples feel so terrible to me. Yes, I trust my players to try not to "metagame" and act like they don't know that those are just illusions... but why ROB them of the experience to figure it out themselves IN-GAME instead of from seeing the dice roll results OUT of the game.

There are many ways to handle this, and some methods will rub you the wrong way and others might be too complicated, but that's why it's important to find the one that you and your party feel good about. I will say that, in general, I like for my PLAYERS to roll for themselves, because it is important to me that THEY are the ones that rolled the dice, especially if something big is at stake.

Player Modifier Card

Get an index card or digitally collect each of the players' relevant modifiers: ALL Saves, ALL Ability Score Modifiers, Insight, Perception, and Stealth. You will need this card to be able to add the Modifier to the result of the roll no matter which method you use below.

The GM rolls a d20 behind their screen and adds the players' corresponding Modifier for the Secret Roll they asked for.

The player rolls a d20 behind the GM screen and only the GM sees the result. This can also be done by the GM holding a dice tray above the players eye level then bringing it back down. The player could also roll in front of themselves and look away so the GM sees the result, then moves the dice so they can't see the result when they look back.

I call this the "trap door method", where the GM lifts up their screen and the player rolls the dice under the screen as the GM quickly slams it down!

The player grabs two or more d20s and the GM secretly chooses one of the dice in the player's hand before they roll. The player then rolls them all at once and the GM only pays attention to the ONE dice they had selected for the result.

Flip a coin, roll a dice, or choose in your own head between "standard" or "inverted". The player then makes the d20 roll themselves. If you chose standard then the dice is exactly as it is on the table, but if you chose inverted then you instead invert the result of the dice to be the exact opposite. So a natural 1 would instead be a natural 20, a 17 would instead be a 4, and a 10 and 11 would be switched right in the middle. Just make sure you don't forget to add on the Modifier after.

DC Tip: Without complicated math, you can just think in your head, "High is bad and low is good now."



Before a session, give each player an index card with 10 blanks and have them roll a d20 10 times, putting in the result of each d20 roll on a blank. The player then hands the card back to the GM and they randomly scramble those results and compile them into ONE index card with each of the PCs on it. Now the GM has one card with every player's 10 random d20 rolls on it. When a Secret Roll comes up, have the player roll a d10, and the result on the d10 corresponds to whatever roll is in the blank on that number, making THAT the result of the roll.

Example: When a player needs to make a Secret Roll, they just roll a d10. Let's say they rolled a 6 on that d10 roll. Now on the GM card it says that a roll of a 6 on the d10 corresponds to a 17 on the d20 result. So the GM now adds the Modifiers to the 17 for the player's total. This method takes some time to set up, but once you have it, you can use it for an entire campaign.

DC Tip: When I use this, I personally only have them roll 8 times and I automatically fill in one Natural 1, and one Natural 20 for the d10 table. If they roll a Natural 1 or Natural 20, I have them reroll it so they don't have too many crazy outcomes and to keep it balanced. I also do a general look at the numbers, and if they are obviously slanted to high or low, I have them reroll 1 or 2 of them.

So now with using ANY of these methods, you can have a better experience in those same 3 examples from above. Here's what they look like if you instead have the player make a Secret Roll.

Good Example 1: The player wants to make an Insight Check and the GM asks them to roll the dice behind their screen. The GM adds the Modifier to the result and hands the player back their dice. With an unknown Insight Check, players are no longer a human lie detector. Only the GM knows the result of the roll and gives information based on that. They could give a wrong read if you roll low, or be completely correct in exactly what is going on... but it is now up to the players to decide what they do with that information and they are still able to roleplay and not know 100% what the real answer is.

Good Example 2: The player makes a secret Perception Check and knows that they are making a Perception Check, but only the GM knows the result. They then tell the player what they see. The player can now continue to play their character based on ONLY what the GM said and still have a sense of mystery if there is anything more or less to what was said.

Good Example 3: The PCs walk into a mushroom-filled forest and are ALL asked to roll a Flat d20, and the GM then adds their Modifiers behind the screen and knows who failed and who succeeded on the Intelligence Save. The players have a sense of, "Wait what just happened," and are confused and cautious... as they should be. They are on the same page as their own characters as to what is happening. Now once some players start to see creatures stalking them, they could think that the roll might have been a Secret Group Stealth Check and they have alerted some monsters... or it could be something else. They have to figure it out on their own based on GAME knowledge instead of META knowledge.

Now players have to rely on their OWN thoughts and roleplay their character without any excess information. They

can truly explore and make decisions without having to tiptoe around any "meta" knowledge.

If it is a Group Check of some kind and you don't want the group to know the result, you can secretly choose one of the players and THEIR roll is the one you use. If multiple players need to make Secret Rolls at the same time, it's fine because the players still won't know either result and you can just give different descriptions to each and they have to figure out which information they trust more.

Don't overuse Secret Rolls because they can lose their special feel and can slow things down if you keep asking for them over and over. It should be reserved for unique situations. If a player wants to Insight Check someone just for a general flavor of body language, and it's just a random NPC, just have it be a normal Insight Check, with no Secret Rolls needed. However, I would recommend throwing out a secret Insight Check every once and a while on an NPC that means absolutely NOTHING... just to have them stay on their toes so that you could use these on ANYONE, not just important people.

You can also have Death Saves be secret as well (see "Death Save Rules" on page 208).



THE GM DEAL

A player can offer up some kind of resource to the GM in order to ask for something in return.

This is a very situational rule, but when it comes up it can have amazing results. A player can offer something in return for something they want, and it's as simple as that. The GM would then either explain what would need to happen to make it work, that there is no way that would work, or agree to the offer and do the deal. These need to make sense in some way. Players are interacting with the GM above the table and whatever happens needs to connect back into the world and make sense, instead of there being some crazy divine intervention to make it happen (or was there?).

Example 1: Players are stuck and can't find a contact they've been looking for (they have been rolling really poorly). One of the players says, "GM, can I give you 20gp and stay up all night to go around bribing people to find this person? I will even take a level of Exhaustion for it!" The GM now has a choice of what to do with this offer. Take it? Make them do a Check of some kind and THEN say yes if they succeed? Tell them no because this NPC has apparently left the city and is nowhere to be found?

Example 2: A door won't open, everyone keeps failing at the rolls to open it, and they are running out of time. A player says, "GM, can I take half of my HP right now in damage to throw my body through this door so that we don't lose any more time?" The GM can agree and describe an epic moment where the Barbarian sacrifices their body to slam through the door, or they could say no because it wouldn't make sense for a Halfling Wizard to be able to do that.

Example 3: A character dies in a big combat and the Cleric was not able to save them in time (see "Death Save Rules" on page 208). The character is dead, and there is a moment of silence at the table. A player interjects and says, "GM, if I sacrifice ALL of my levels of Cleric... can I plead to my God to bring them back?" This... is a big moment and a BIG sacrifice. The GM can of course say yes or no to this based on what they feel is right in the moment. I personally would clarify the sacrifice they would be making, and then have the Cleric make ONE final roll. They would make a **DC 15 Religion Check** and if they succeed... they get their request. Their character would lose all access to Cleric Abilities and would be a common character without a class (possibly keeping their HP), then I would talk with the player and have them see what class they would start down the path of, or try to earn back their Cleric abilities.

This rule just being an option at the table gives the players a tool that they can use to feel free to engage with the GM in creative ways, offering up something in exchange for something they really want. This is great feedback for the GM too, because it shows truly HOW MUCH they want certain things. You can tell how much they care about certain parts of the world by what they offer. This will not come up very often, but the players know that it's there in those times where they truly want something to happen. This can be very comforting for the players, and many times I won't even ask them to roll for it if the sacrifice they give is meaningful enough.



FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

This is when you temporarily go back in time to a scene from the past. Players can learn information, gain items, and potentially change parts of the game (for better or for worse).

These can be player or GM-led. You have to establish how these work at your table. You can spark these as a story opportunity to give players access to the past and do things they would never be able to accomplish normally. If you allow them, players can ask for these in specific situations and request them in a similar way to “The GM Deal” above, and ask for a Flashback Sequence in exchange for them spending some resource. You can also tie the ability to cause flashbacks to the use of Inspiration at your table so players have a limited resource that is supplied by you (so you still have control).

There are some points in the game where players ask the GM, “Would I know this? Do I know this person?” You could offer them a Flashback Sequence or they could throw it out there themselves. You can bring in the entire group on these too if it makes sense. Maybe the scene was that one night at the local tavern a month ago, where you could have possibly met this

NPC. You have a flashback with the whole group and they end the scene with new information, allies, or items.

Information Example: The party encounters a terrifying monster for the first time and they have no idea how to combat this creature. A player asks the GM if they know anything about this from their backstory. Another player chimes in and says that they went to the same school growing up and might know this information too. The GM starts a quick Flashback Sequence where they are back in class and the professor starts to discuss the exact monster they are fighting. Everything else the professor was saying is fuzzy, but then the GM points at the players as the professor and says, “Okay, everyone gets to ask one question about this beast. YOU IN THE BACK, what is your question?” The players now get to ask ONE question about this monster and you can roleplay an answer as the professor. You can have this take up their entire turn in combat and they miss their turn, or you could just give it to them for free.

Allies Example: The group is trying to break into a castle of some kind. They start their infiltration mission and they get discovered by a guard. A quick and clever player asks the GM,



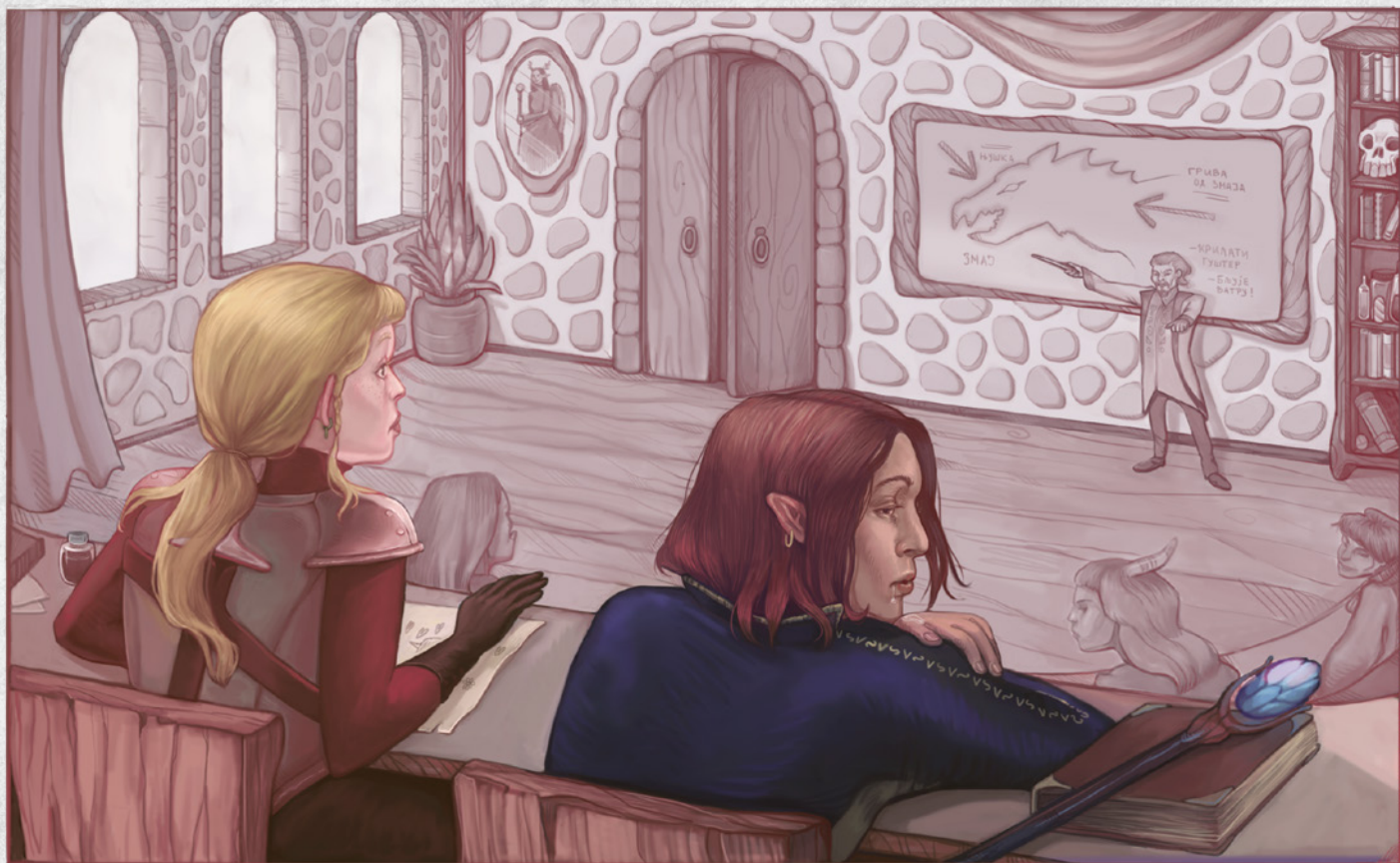
“Can we do a Flashback Sequence to see if I have met this guard before?” The GM is impressed by the quick thinking and starts a Flashback Sequence from a few days before where the players are drinking at a tavern. They look to their right and see THAT GUARD drinking next to them. The GM tells them they have ONE chance to make friends with this guard, and based on this conversation... he will either like you or not. This can now go MANY different directions. They have to not only make friends, but also get him to be okay with them breaking into the castle. This is a far more creative and memorable moment than, “We stab him!” If things don’t go well, the GM can end the flashback and then roleplay as the guard and say, “Wait! I know you!” Now the situation is actually worse because this guard knows the identity of the group.

Item Example: The group is entering into an Undead area, or are in the middle of combat with an Undead. A player realizes they are in over their heads and are totally unprepared for dealing with Undead. The player says, “GM, can we have a Flashback Sequence from when we were in that city a few days ago? I want to try and get some holy water from the church.” The GM allows it and describes a packed church scene with a fountain of holy water in the distance with clerics surrounding the sacred fountain and says, “What do you do?” The players now have a chance to try and get holy water. If they succeed, the flashback ends and they have that item. If they fail, the flashback ends with nothing gained except possibly a nearby city of upset clerics from their attempts to steal holy water.

Once players understand how these work and where they can fit into the story, they might start to ask for them on their own. If you are okay with this then allow them to do this, but if you aren’t then explain that these will only happen when you initiate them yourself.

You can also make these moments as easy or as difficult as you want them to be. If you are too nice to say NO to this Flashback Sequence request, then you can just have a lot of the information and rewards be behind Checks that the players need to make. In the church fountain example you can choose for there to be an empty abandoned fountain to make it easier, OR make it heavily guarded if you want them to have to work for it. You can also have a COST as part of this too that the players have to pay (similar to The GM Deal). If you want to give things out more freely then you can make the DC very low for those rolls, or just give out the information for FREE.

Keep in mind, something BAD can happen with these rolls as well. If you have a Flashback Sequence and upset an NPC, maybe from now on that NPC is an enemy of yours. You can also take characters that appear in flashbacks that the PCs haven’t met yet and introduce them in the current time where they cross paths with NPCs from the flashback.



ADVERSITY SYSTEM

Characters going through adversity possess an Adversity Die which represents the central struggle in their lives. When a character is Triggered, they make an Adversity Check by rolling their Adversity Die to see how they react in the moment. Characters keep working on this struggle over the course of a campaign during Downtime and the choices they make.

TIME OUT: *The following system is meant to simulate struggles with things ranging from addiction to systemic mental anguish. These topics may or may not have a place in your own game. If they do not, feel free to disregard the following system. However, if they do, this system proposes a method for dealing with such topics with more sensitivity than the base rules of the game otherwise allow. These rules are meant to simulate both the journey into the darkness and the characters' path out of it.*

This system uses both narrative choice by the players and the randomness of the dice. I want my players to feel like they have SOME control over their struggle through the choices they make, but it might feel strange to have them “choose” to fall back into their suffering. That is where the dice come in. In a game where struggle and the unknown are represented by dice, so is this system for telling the story of a character's journey.

ADVERSITY DIE

Characters who choose to use this system start out with a d8 for their Adversity Die, which represents the strength of a character's mental preparedness, well-being, and resolve. You can choose to start with a higher or lower die if that makes more sense for your character. The lowest Adversity Die is a d4, and the highest is a d20.

Based on your Adversity Check rolls, and the choices you make during Downtime, your Adversity Die will either grow or shrink in size over the course of a campaign.

ADVERSITY CHECK

When a character gets Triggered they make an Adversity Check to see how their character reacts. If the player rolls a 1, then their Adversity Die drops down to the next lowest size.

Example: It's the 1 year anniversary of a character losing their best friend. They are racked with pain and loss and are Triggered to make an Adversity Check. They have been making great progress healing and have a d12 Adversity Die. They roll their d12 and get a 1. This is not enough to make them revert back into their main struggle, but their Adversity Die drops down to a d10 to symbolize the emotional struggle of this moment.

If a character currently has a d4 Adversity Die and rolls a 1, that represents the beginning of a relapse. This may be a relapse into a specific substance, or more generally a relapse into old and negative modes of thought they've worked to get away from. When this happens it's up to the player how big of an event this is, and they are in control of how bad it gets. This can be fully roleplayed, hinted at, or done as a simple “fade to black” where the aftermath is not directly communicated. Just keep in mind what would be most comfortable for both the player and the entire group.

A result of a 1 on any die besides a d4 does NOT mean that you gave into the suffering. It just shows a weakening of your resolve and mental well-being. For an alcoholic character, you could flavor a roll of a 1 as just having one drink, or just a sip, or they didn't drink anything but it just wore their willpower down some from the event. You can also flavor the description of the struggles based on the result of the roll. If you roll a 2 on a d8, then maybe it was a really close call, while a 7 was a great sign of strength in that moment.

TRIGGERS

Players who want to use this system will come up with a list of Triggers for their character. The number of Triggers on this list can be as short or as long as you want, and be as specific or as broad as you want. Triggers can also be internal, external, or both. Internal Triggers might be more personal or something you feel and external Triggers might be something based more on your surroundings and what you encounter. Triggers can be whatever makes sense for you and your character. Some examples are below, this list is not exhaustive:

External Triggers:

- Being around it
- Seeing someone else do it
- Hearing about someone else doing it
- Specific people in general
- Familiar locations
- Certain times of the year
- Being insulted

Internal Triggers:

- Sadness / Anger / Frustration
- Abandonment / Loneliness / Rejection
- Stress / Panic / Overwhelmed



Ultimately, players have the final say on what might trigger their character. The GM can assist as much as the player wants in coming up with these. They can also talk about boundaries and what they are comfortable with, since this can already be a more intense topic than usual. The GM can also hold that player accountable and point out things in a scene that might be a Trigger and let the player decide if that is worth a roll or not. However, as a GM you should never force a player to make a roll like this. While it may seem like an immersive option, it actually robs your player of agency regarding their character. This is especially bad if your player chose to have an adversity that could connect to a real life adversity or their own.

As sessions and campaigns progress, our characters often change. This can be reflected both in the positives of new skills, new levels, and new gear. But it can just as often appear in the ways we feel tested. As such, feel free to add new Triggers and remove old ones that make sense for your character and the game at large.

DOWNTIME

When presented with Downtime, a character who uses this time to focus on their recovery automatically increases the size of their Adversity Die by one step (d8 steps up to a d10). This cannot exceed the maximum die size of a d20. Additionally, a character who previously failed an Adversity Check with a die size of d4 can begin the journey back to wellness in Downtime at a d4 die size. If a character does not choose to prioritize their recovery during Downtime, the GM can choose to automatically lower a character's Adversity Die. However, they cannot cause a player to go below a d4 in this manner. If the character's Adversity Die is already at a d4, the GM can instead have the player make an Adversity Check. The GM can never outright cause a player to fully slide into their struggle. This does not mean they are in immediate danger of falling back into their struggle, but this does show the very real opportunity cost of recovery. It is meant to reflect the very real sacrifices of time, effort, and diligence it takes for people to maintain their resolve. This system is also meant to represent that recovery is rarely static. Your Adversity Die will either increase or decrease during Downtime since this struggle is not something that can or should be taken for granted.

While using this system, a GM should make sure to include regular periods of Downtime so that PCs have opportunities to work on their struggle. There should be moments where the GM asks the players to describe what they do during the period of Downtime (see "Downtime" on page 130 for more on Downtime). Make sure there are Downtime activities that would be appropriate for their characters and the setting. Present them with options to increase their Adversity Die size and other attractive options unrelated to their struggle. There should always be a difficult choice between working on their wellness and improving in other ways. Make sure the party also has the freedom to help generate what some of these ideas could be. Let them ask around to see if there are different options that they want to engage with. Some characters might like

to workout to get some of the stress off by training. Others might want therapy or to talk to friends and family, or maybe even developing new relationships or skills. Negotiate with players to determine which activities may or may not help their mental wellness and keep them from slipping back into their struggle.

The GM can challenge players when it feels appropriate by giving them choices between things that might help their mental wellness, and other things that are equally attractive but do not. Giving these choices really gives the character a moment to choose recovery and make a statement by NOT choosing something else. Do not over do this. You don't want the players to feel like they are constantly missing out by never getting to do anything since they ALWAYS have to focus on recovering. Make sure they can accomplish some of the more basic things they wanted to do during Downtime that would make sense. They just wouldn't be able to do something more involved if they focused on recovery.

Lastly, a player can challenge themselves if it makes sense narratively. Someone struggling with their resolve might put themselves in a dangerous situation to challenge it, and perhaps in doing so reinforce it. For example, an alcoholic character might purposely go sit at a bar to see how they can withstand the pressure. They might even question if the struggle of recovery is worth it. They might fall back into their struggle, but they might instead leave knowing they've faced down one of their greatest fears and walked away stronger.



RESOLUTION

It is up to the PC to decide if they are ever truly “over” their addiction. Once they get to or surpass a d20 Adversity Die, you can ask them if they want to remove it entirely. This should be a big moment for both the player and their character... this can be very powerful, symbolically. However, no matter how it is played out, it must be THEIR choice. Even when the Adversity Die has been removed, it may be later reintroduced if the player feels it is appropriate. The new Adversity Die can be tied to the same struggle or to a wholly new one, whatever makes sense. Maybe they have told this character's story about the triumph over this addiction and want to just roleplay on their own now without this mechanic involved. Consult the player and the group overall if it seems like a character may be approaching some kind of resolution in the narrative of their struggle.

USING THIS SYSTEM

Our struggles can take many forms and play a large or small role in our stories. What causes us to struggle - and what helps us or makes it more severe - is something deeply personal to both players and characters. An alcoholic is very different from someone suffering from chronic depression. The point of this system is to provide the basic building blocks to simulate whatever struggles most resonate for you. Sometimes this system won't be right for that. Don't force your struggle into this specific shape if it doesn't work for you. Sometimes you won't need a dice system at all. Check in with your players frequently to see where they and their characters are in their struggles. Play safely and have fun.

ADVERSITY ROLL TABLES

As with all tables in this book, feel free to look over them and choose one or if you want to leave it up to the dice, you can roll. I personally recommend NOT rolling for this since this is something you need to feel comfortable with since it is a big part of your character.

Bad Habit

These are some actions or activities that you might be more inclined to do, when under duress or overly excited. Extreme moods can sometimes call for extreme measures, and you often go a bit further than others.

d8	Bad Habits
1	Substances
2	Theft
3	Dishonesty
4	Gambling
5	Pyromania
6	Overindulgence
7	Perfectionist
8	Materialistic

Negative Emotion

These emotional states are where you might wind up when things get too tough to handle, or maybe these lead to the difficulties in the first place. You can also connect these to your Bad Habit and the two can be interconnected, one causing the other.

d8	Negative Emotional States
1	Need for Validation
2	Rage
3	Numbness
4	Vanity
5	Fear
6	Self-hatred / Depression
7	Thrill-seeking / Adrenaline Junkie
8	Paranoia

SOCIAL ENCOUNTER RP

Now to take all of that shiny roleplay advice and bring them into the game with a social encounter. Players are now talking to either you as an NPC or to another player character.

PLAYER VS PLAYER CHECKS

When one Player 1 makes a Check against Player 2 (against their will), instead of a contested roll, Player 2 gets to decide what happens. Player 1 either (1) fails, (2) succeeds, (3) has to make a Check for it against a DC, or (4) both players make a contested roll.

There are some moments in our games where the players have to go against each other in some way. These have the potential to be great and hilarious, or terrible and uncomfortable. You want to have a system in place that BOTH allows for the fun parts to happen AND protects players from feeling uncomfortable and leaving a negative impact. Giving the targeted player a CHOICE in these moments allows for them to be in control of this and either go along with it or shoot it down entirely.



Example Part 1: Player 1 wants to pick the pockets of Player 2. The GM asks Player 2, “What happens?” Player 2 now gets to decide which option to go for. They think to themselves, “Well, their character does have a criminal background and doesn't yet trust my character since they just met... so I'll go along with it... but I want it to be a fun game.” So, Player 2 decides, “Okay, let's roll for it!” The GM asks Player 1 to make a Sleight of Hand Check and Player 2 to make a Perception Check, and the game continues.

Example Part 2: These are the same players from the above story... but multiple sessions later. Player 1 is back at it again, trying to steal from Player 2. Player 2 is fed up with this now and is starting to get annoyed. Luckily... the rules here are going to help diffuse this situation and not let it get worse. This time when Player 1 attempts to steal again, the GM asks Player 2, “What happens?” Player 2 says, “No, that doesn't work. My character is on to his tricks and catches him in the act.” Now the game continues and the potentially toxic situation isn't even allowed to happen, and Player 1 gets a reality check that it's not funny anymore.

An important thing to note here is that the GM is still the mediator of this interaction. When a player goes against another player, the GM needs to interject and ask the other player what happens. If not, then it's just two players potentially arguing with each other and you have lost control of the situation as the GM. It's also important to be at the center of all of this because there are times where both players might go for something and it's not clear who is in control. If two players are both racing for a piece of loot that nobody has touched yet, am I going to have them make a Check against each other, yes. But if one player already has an item, and the other is trying to take it... I'm going to ask the player who already has that item what happens. This is a judgment call that you make as a GM just like any other, so use this method where you see fit. The important thing in these situations is to always favor the person being targeted, unless their decision is ridiculous. Don't allow any arguing about it. Once your players are discussing whether Player 2 should have let himself be stolen from, this system loses effectiveness.

PLAYER PROMPTED ROLEPLAY

These are when players throw improvised moments at other players on-the-fly. In roleplaying games you can just say something and BOOM it's there! As GMs, we have absolute power here and whatever we say happens, happens. I will never take control of a player, but I will definitely recommend things that could happen. This is an example of that, but between two players. It's best to share examples of these curve balls that players can throw at each other if they are okay with it.

A group of PCs are in a tavern listening to a band play. One player says to another player, “Oooo, I see you looking at the bartender, you should go talk to them!” This player never said that they are doing that... but they have now been prompted by this bit of improv to bring them into the moment and put them on the spot.

At the end of the day, it's up to the player of the character to say if they are doing something or not. These moments can be great and bring shy players out of their shell, while creative

players are free to just say things to spread ideas around. Be careful not to let this get out of hand, and make sure to keep a pulse check of everything so that you know if players start to feel like other players are stepping on their toes. You might want to employ the same rule for these situations as you do with Player vs Player situations. Let the prompted player determine the truth of the situation. It's perfectly fine for a player to not want to engage with a specific prompt. It might not fit the idea they had for their character, or they might be uncomfortable with the situation. These moments should be seen as an invitation, not a demand.

GM PROMPTED ROLEPLAY

There are many things you can prompt your players with, in certain situations, to get some good roleplay out of them when they don't do it naturally themselves. If you phrase it right, and do so at the right times, it can help the players see where those windows are that they can add in some more descriptions. Here are some phrases you can say, and when to use them:

How are you feeling?: If something just happened to a character and the player doesn't really explain what's going on in their head... ask them! This will either force the player to get into their character's head to think about it or let that character become more “real” for the rest of the players at the table to get some insights into this character.

What do you say?: This can be used right before a big moment happens with a PC, and you can ask them what their character says in this moment. When a character is about to land the killing blow on their archrival, or the character just realized they have been tricked by a trusted ally... you can ask, “What do you say?” This is also great because they can even voice their character in this moment to help get them used to the concept of “speaking in character” (again, they do not have to use a fancy voice or anything).

Now do that in character!: There are many times that players might speak about their character doing something or saying something and then just gloss over it. This can be fine in some situations, but if you want there to be a roleplay scene or lead into something else you can ask them to do that again, but in character this time. This can also help new players since they now know what they are getting themselves into and don't feel like they have to improvise as much.

With all of these questions, don't overuse these phrases, and only use them at times when you want to get a little bit more out of your player at that moment.

PLAYER TARGETED SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Specifically target your players interests, goals, and preferences in some social roleplay moments. Some players might not feel comfortable talking in character while the whole party is interjecting over each other. If you can create smaller windows of more “one-on-one time” with a PC and an NPC of yours, that can help bring them out of their shell and engage them.

Example: One of your characters used to be part of a thieves guild in their backstory. So, you hold onto that nugget and the next time they go off by themselves to go to a shop or meet some other NPC... the character notices that this NPC



has an odd tattoo that they recognise to be a symbol of the same guild. This could just be a side quest, but this is also a moment to roleplay with this player and give them a small, safe environment to roleplay with JUST you on a topic they are comfortable with (their own backstory).

You can also spin this around on the players and have an NPC be very interested in THEM. Have an NPC engage with a character about something they have or they can do. Even just a small child running up to the Barbarian and asking them to lift them up might be enough to get a player to loosen up! Just try all different kinds of characters and personality types to see which players are drawn toward which NPCs and when you want to target one of your players, you'll be able to do it better with this information.

QUALITY TIME CHECKS

During periods of rest or Downtime, when two PCs have a moment together, one player can make a Quality Time Check. The player makes a Charisma Check and the result is what type of roleplay moment results from it.

- **Beef (1-4):** The two characters have an argument or setback of some kind in their relationship.
- **Reveal (5-14):** A player has to open up about something from their past, a secret, or an idea or thought they have.
- **Bond (15+):** The two characters bond over something and build a stronger relationship.

This can be player or GM-led as far as who asks for the scene to take place. Players can also have these moments with NPCs. This gives your players a chance to explore their own characters alongside each other. They could discover more about their own backstories just by opening up or asking themselves questions. They might not even have something from their backstory to reveal, but being put on the spot, they can come up with something and run with it.

DC Tip: I would recommend only using this as a prompt to help players warm up to this idea. I usually just ask, "So what do you two talk about?" If that isn't enough, you can use this to help get the social ball rolling.

EXPLORATION RP

Sometimes you don't want travel or exploration to take up too much time, but you want to do SOMETHING to add some flavor to it. Instead... why not let the players do it for you?

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

Ask your players what they notice about this (insert noun here). Whatever that player says next is now "official canon" and added to the game (with GM approval of course).

This lets your players add and engage with the world around them and also takes some of the burden of creation off of your shoulders. It's so fun to see players be given this opportunity to be the GM for 1 second to say something is there, and it is a powerful moment. So many cool things can happen here, and these moments can take small, meaningless moments and turn them into huge curve balls that progress the story... or just be funny.

Monster Example: You are fighting a Dire Wolf on a dark night. The first PC the wolf attacks, you ask them, "What do you notice about the wolf?" They can now say ANYTHING that pops into their head. It's missing half of its face, its Undead, it has a collar around its neck.

Building Example: Your group wanders into a town that you did not expect them to, and they ask to go to the nearest tavern. An NPC points them in the right direction and upon approaching the building you ask the entire party, "What do you notice?" They can now interject ideas of what this tavern is like and literally custom build it themselves.

NPC Example: Your group asks to talk to the nearest town guard and you have nothing clever to come up with, so you say that they find the guard, but add, "What do you notice?" They could describe the guard having a satchel with a seal from a local thieves guild, or something strange like they keep their eye on one of the characters in the group (in a good or bad way).

You can also be a part of this creation process with them. You could take some ideas and add to them, or take some ideas and shoot them down because it would be too crazy, not possible, etc.



WHAT HAPPENS ALONG THE JOURNEY?

When the group sets out to travel from one location to the next, ask them, “What happens along the journey?” This gives them a moment to say that some stuff happened to make the travel a bit more than “you arrive” (see “Chapter 5: Exploration” on page 89). This can be as guided or open-ended as you want. I personally have some roll tables ready just in case the players can’t come up with anything cool. I have a table of monsters that make sense for different parts of my world, and they can roll on it to have a “roleplay combat” against it. How does that work?

Roleplay Combat: Each character rolls a Flat d20 Check with no Modifiers added. The result is how well they contributed to this combat. How well everyone rolls decides if they describe an epic defeat of this creature or describe having to turn and run away. Let your players take these moments and describe both the high and the low rolls that happen. It’s great to see players explain what happened with a little bit of roleplay guidance from the dice.

DC Tip: You could have players add in their Prof. Bonus if the group consists of different levels. You could even have this be similar to a One Round Skill Challenge and let players make a Skill Check of some kind based on what they described that they do!

This is also a great moment for them to interact and just have conversations with each other. Since I do this at my table, players will wait for these moments and have one-on-one conversations or group discussions while they travel. It just adds a natural window into the usual sequence of events. You can also have prompts to roll on for smaller things that happen, or NPCs they might meet along the way, just like how you would prepare a list of possible encounters or random encounters. You can do that for these situations, but you don’t have to prepare as much since it is a collaborative moment with yours and the players’ own ideas.

COMBAT RP

Some players live for combat, some live for roleplay, so why not do both!? This isn’t about adding social encounters into combat. This is about taking some time to embellish descriptions and really painting a picture with your combats to increase immersion for both you and the players.

CUSTOM DICE DAMAGE

If a character can use a weapon, they can re-flavor that weapon to look like ANY weapon they want, as long as it does not gain any additional properties or damage.

If a Fighter wants to use a two-handed weapon... but instead of a greataxe... they want to wield a giant grim reaper looking scythe, then let them do that as a 1d12 damage “greatscythe”. If players want to describe the type of weapons they use as something else that gives them no tactical advantage... let them do it!

I have a Barbarian in my group right now that just wants to punch stuff... so, who am I to force them to only make Unarmed Strikes, dealing terrible damage compared to the 1d12 weapon they could be using. We talked about it and

came up with a fair agreement of 1d8 for his “weapon” (which was his fists). There are advantages gained from not needing a weapon of course, so I just downgraded the d12 to a d8 and he was cool with that. BUT, anytime he touches a weapon of ANY kind... he rolls all of his attacks at DisADV.

FLAVOR DAMAGE

If a player describes something cool that their character is doing to damage an opponent, have the damage that they deal be the same damage roll as whatever their normal Weapon Attack would have been.

I hate seeing players describe EPIC things that they want to do in combat and it leads to a GM saying... “Okay, well technically that is an improvised weapon... so roll a d4.” Don’t reduce what damage a player could do simply because they flavored it in some cool way. If they don’t gain a tactical advantage in any way (causing the target to be Prone, Grappled, Blinded, etc) then just have the damage be the same as if they walked up to it and hit it. You could of course add in MORE damage if you feel it warrants it, I just make sure whatever Check they had to make was more challenging to pull off in order to gain bonus damage or effects. Another rule of thumb I do is to “downscale” the dice by 1 or 2 depending on what effect happens. So if they do have some sort of extra effect happen, maybe have them roll a d6 instead of their normal d8.

Example Part 1: The Fighter wants to grab the glass bottles on the counter top and stab the monster on the bar. I would clarify and ask if they are going for some type of extra glass shards effect here? They say, “No, I’m just trying to kill it.” So, you ask them to make an Attack (with their normal Modifiers) and then roll for damage (with their normal weapon dice). Then you describe an epic shattered glass weapon sinking into the creature.

Example Part 2: The same example above, BUT the player DOES want to get some cool glass shard effects going on. You can have them roll a d4 for damage instead of their normal d8, but now the creature takes an additional d4 damage each round of combat from the Bloodied Condition. You could also have them make an Attack without their Prof. Bonus (making it harder to pull off).

Make sure your players know that some of these moments are exceptions for the sake of them doing something cool, and isn’t a normal mechanic for their character to repeat every single combat. Reward the creativity in the moment, but don’t let it turn into something players abuse or try to take advantage of.

CINEMATIC FINISHING BLOWS

Whenever a character lands a killing blow in combat, you ask them HOW they do it.

This adds SO much flavor and empowerment to how that PC wants to express themselves through the carnage of the kill, or maybe even the simplicity of the kill. This goes beyond JUST big moments or killing blows on final bosses... you can ask this at ANY time. Don’t over do it, but if the PC has a big moment or a great idea, ask them what that looks like to get them to open up more, as well.



ALTERNATE DICE METHODS

These are some really fun alternate dice methods to add to your game for different circumstances that come up. I don't use any of these as a default in my games, but when certain situations come up or there are certain moods I want to get across, I will use these accordingly.

TENSION DICE

Tension Dice are a pool of dice that build up in the center of the table (usually in an ominous bowl or something). These dice represent the growing feeling of dread from something bad that is about to happen. This buildup of dice can represent different things depending on the adventure or scenario. These can be used to represent the passage of time (sneaky missions where you don't know if the guards are coming), or the ominous possibility of something bad happening (creature wakes up, ritual is completed, etc.). The Tension Dice give the party a visible indication of dread. Whenever the players waste time on something, they see the tension mounting and they feel what their characters feel.

The rules for the bowl are pretty simple. The bowl starts out empty, and different things can cause dice to be added to the bowl. Once this event happens, you roll ALL the dice in the bowl (more on these events in a second). Any time a 1 is rolled on any of the d6 from the bowl, something bad happens. This can be a Setback, Complication, Encounter, or anything else that the GM can think of. The GM should consider preparing a list of possible Complications for the scenario they want to use Tension Dice for. These complications always make things worse, they are never beneficial.

INTERACTING WITH THE BOWL

There are 3 ways to interact with the bowl:

Add a Die: Pick up a d6 and visibly drop it in the bowl. This happens when something increases the tension of the situation.

- In combat, add a die at the end of every round to add a feeling of inevitability.
- Failing Checks or attempts towards something, in order to account for the loss of time.
- Taking cautious actions (since they would take longer), forcing them to weigh the benefits between caution and speed.
- Any time you feel the group lagging around or taking their time.

Subtract a Die: If someone does something to save time or reduce the chances of this bad thing from happening, maybe their efforts take away some Tension Dice.

Roll ALL the Dice: Pick up all the dice currently in the bowl and roll them. This happens based on one of the events listed below.

ROLLING ALL DICE

The bowl can never have more than 6 dice in it. Once you add the 6th die to the bowl, this causes them ALL to be rolled. One chosen player rolls all of the dice, and everyone prays for no 1's.

- The event you are trying to prevent or avoid takes place. The ritual is completed, the avalanche reaches you, or the slowly fraying rope finally gives way.
- Someone does something risky, reckless, or unsafe.
- When a failed Check is made for something of huge importance.
- These will all depend on the situation and the feeling you are going for at the table. So, pick what best fits or come up with your own.

You can also have something even WORSE happen if there are multiple 1's rolled. This will be a more rare situation, but just have that possibility in mind when these situations arise. Overall, the key to this mechanic is to figure out what adds dice to the bowl and what causes them all to be rolled.

VARIANT RULES

This system is so diverse and there are so many things you can do with it. Here are some ideas to get you going:

- You can have the player that caused the die to be added to the bowl roll that die (just their own), and if they roll a 1 it could also cause the big bad effect, or maybe something bad just for them.
- If something really bad happens maybe add two dice at the same time.
- You can remove the cap of 6 dice, having the number of dice build up until some story event or failed roll happens. Then when it's triggered, you roll all of them to see what happens. The more 1's you roll, the worse it is!
- Rolling multiple 1's causes you to fight more difficult things or roll twice on the encounter table, taking the more difficult encounter.

DC Tip: This could also be adapted as a way to keep track of the passage of time. This works out because each tension die can represent 10 minutes, which means when the bowl is full, that would be 1 hour.



EXAMPLES

Here are some examples of Complications and what adding Tension Dice would look like, including what might happen if a 1 is rolled:

Scenario: On the side of an unstable snowy mountain (just like in any movie you've seen).

- **Adding Tension Die:** Failed Checks for silence, dropping something, talking too loud (even at the table) all could add dice into the bowl.
- **Rolling a 1:** Causes an avalanche.

Scenario: Dangerous section of travel through dangerous monster filled jungle.

- **Adding Tension Die:** Failed Perception Checks, staying in the area too long looking for a quest item or treasure, taking Short Rests while in the area, small combats in the area. Add a tension die each round of combat.
- **Rolling a 1:** A huge Python that has been following them ATTACKS, you roll on the most dangerous encounter table you have, or they get ambushed by a tribe of warriors.

STACKING D6 DICE TOWER

This is similar to the Tension Dice, but has a slightly more “meta” feeling to it, so play around with what you like better. Each time a failure is made on a Check during this specific part of the adventure, a die is stacked in the middle of the table (use all the same type of d6, from the GM). Once the dice tower falls, something terrible happens like the death of a player... or maybe other less extreme things.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Failed Stealth Checks add 2 dice to the tower, and upon collapse the party is discovered.
- If a ritual is about to be completed and they need to do something to stop it from happening, add a die on Initiative 10 and 20. Additionally, failed attempts to stop the ritual add dice.

When the tower falls, add up the values and use the total as the amount of damage taken from this thing happening to them. It could be divided among the party or all dealt to one person. For example, someone has a creature that has burrowed inside of them and they have to get it out. Over time more dice are added to the tower, and when it falls, the player takes that much damage.

DC Tip: Change up what dice they are stacking... it's a lot harder to stack d8's than it is d6's. Just don't try to do d4's, that's impossible!

HYPE ROLLS

When something BIG is about to happen, be completely transparent with ALL the Modifiers for this high stakes situation, and everyone at the table will know the exact value that you or the player needs to roll. The “roller” then rolls the dice in the designated location, in front of everyone, while each person at the table knows the number they are wanting to see on the dice! The tension and anticipation is INSANE!

Have a dice box with a skull on it, a fancy dice tower, or just an ominous looking bowl. These moments at the table should be unique and not overused. Make sure you save these for the KEY moments in a story, or something that has been building to a climax. When the result of a single roll has a HUGE impact on the story is when you use this roll!



CHAPTER 5: EXPLORATION



GENERAL EXPLORATION RULES

INVENTORY TRACKING

Some groups want to track each and every piece of equipment while others handwave inventory entirely and aren't bothered by the fighter carrying 15 weapons. These systems help to offer a balance between the two ends of the spectrum so that inventory and its management can play as big or as small of a role as you want.

You can choose to use these rules for SOME parts of your game and not for others. If your group enters a barren wasteland, tell them that you will now be using (insert homebrew rule here) while you are in this wasteland. Once you leave, this rule leaves with it but while they are here this rule could help get across the overall feeling you are going for. I usually don't track encumbrance, but when my players went on a quest that required them to gather multiple HEAVY objects and bring them back... I implemented the Stone Encumbrance System that was active ONLY during that quest. This provided more challenge toward the current focus of the game.

SUPPLY DIE

Each group has a Supply Die (ranging from a d4 all the way to a d12) that represents the amount of supplies the group has. When your supply comes into question, the GM can ask for a Supply Check and one player will roll the group's Supply Die. There are two main scenarios when this would occur:

Missing Supplies: The party wants to see if they have a specific item. GM sets a DC for what they need to roll on their Supply Die. **Success:** Yes, they have it. **Failure:** No, they don't.

DC Tip: Keep in mind, this DC is going to be different because they are NOT rolling a d20 for their Supply Check.

Decreased Supplies: The parties supplies are being depleted in some way, either by themselves or from some other external source. The GM asks for a Supply Check, and on a roll of a Natural 1 on the die, their Supply Die drops down one size.

Use these Supply Checks whenever there is a question on the group's inventory and there isn't a clear cut answer. A failure on this check can mean as much or as little as you want it to, just in the same way the DC you set for them to roll can be as high or as low as you want. The higher their Supply Die the better chance they have to have the supplies they need. However, if you ever roll a 1 while your supply die is a d4... THEN you would be completely out of supplies and that could be really bad!

There are many instances in the game where a group's inventory comes into question. The group's Supply Die can be the answer in that moment and show, in general, how prepared a group is for general adventuring. It literally can represent anything you want it to. Here are some examples of what could cause a GM to ask for a Supply Check:

- Do we have a 30ft rope?
- Is the Ranger running low on arrows after that big fight?
- Does the Wizard have those spell components?

- Do you have a spare wagon wheel to swap out with the broken one?
- Do we have enough to feed the group of hungry NPCs asking for some food?
- Wild animals snuck past the PC who was on night's watch and got into the group's tents... Did they steal any food?
- A stray fireball hit part of the stagecoach... did it take out any key supplies?

This system allows you to generally track ALL of your supplies in one simple die. You can also add new challenges into the game that could lead to Supply Checks. Which, over time (as their Supply Die gets smaller and smaller), could lead to the group having to worry about their supplies, if they can keep pushing forward, or if they have to find a place to stock up. This can give that feeling of being low on resources while not being too crunchy of a system.

The party can also "upgrade" their Supply Die while in town or any other place where it would make sense to "stock up on things". You can have requirements at certain Supply Die sizes like not being able to go from a d10 to a d12 unless you are in a capital city. You can charge them whatever feels right based on the economy of your game. I personally have charged them gold equal to the dice size they are upgrading too. If they have a d6 and want to upgrade to a d8 it costs them 8 gold, want to upgrade to a d12? Then you have to spend the gold to get to a d10, THEN the gold to get to a d12. This has felt right, in general, and is just enough of a tax to not be too unfair. You can always increase or decrease this based on where they are as well.

It's always up to the GM whether or not the item in question could be part of the Supply Die. If the players ask if they have the ancient sword of dragonslaying... they would NOT make a Supply Check for that... they just don't have it. Make sure the system makes sense when you use it and for what the players have or don't. This system being in place will make players be proactive to make sure they pick up the items they want, because if the player already has the item then you of course would not ask for a Supply Check, thus keeping them accountable.

This system can be used generally across an entire party's supplies or it can be used specifically for certain items. The Ranger can have a Supply Die for just their arrows and make Supply Checks after each combat, which ties in nicely with Ammunition (see below). They only run out when they roll a 1 on a d4 Supply Die. The Wizard can have a Supply Die for their spell components and only need to make Supply Checks when they cast some of their larger spells. There could be a campaign specific resource that is very scarce and you can use a Supply Die to track its depletion.



AMMUNITION

In my opinion whether or not a PC should track ammo or not should be up to the PC. Forcing rules onto players that they don't like can make them enjoy playing their character less, which is something we don't want. Some players LOVE to track things, and others don't. Share these systems with your players and let them choose what they want.

Recovering ammunition is something you also have to decide on for any of these systems. It's much easier to say that once you use up the ammo it is gone, and I usually base the systems I choose around that premise. Adding in a recovery method on top of the ammo tracking can get cumbersome, but just make sure everyone is clear on if they can go up to the body and pull out arrows or not.

STRAIGHT UP

Track each and every projectile fired with each Attack. This is something I usually reserve for POWERFUL magic ammunition. I usually NEVER hand out +1 arrows because I would much rather give them a +1 bow since tracking how many arrows I give them (like 20?) would get tedious and it's only for a +1 bonus, which isn't that much in the first place, and can get clunky when trying to remember that you are even using those vs. regular arrows.

I do like to use this for POWERFUL ammunition that has crazy properties that would be similar to a spell. A Chain Lightning Arrow would be AWESOME... but the player only has 2, so they can use them wisely. This is the perfect system for that.



PER COMBAT (AMMO BUNDLES)

Track each combat that a ranged projectile user participates in. They would stock up in town with a number of Ammo Bundles and each bundle would last for 1 combat. Now you only have to track how many combats they have... which is VERY easy to remember, and you could even check your session notes (or just remember) how many combats there have been since they were in town last. Charge a set number of gold per bundle, and they can stock up in town. This now lets them have to truly prepare for LONG stretches of adventuring because they could run out of ammunition if they don't plan ahead.

There might be other situations that come up that are not combat and you tell them to mark off an Ammo Bundle. A Skill Challenge where the player describes shooting multiple arrows could easily count as them losing one bundle. Don't limit these to ONLY combat but do what makes the most sense for your group. There could also be combats that last for a LONG time that you could rule as burning up 2 Ammo Bundles. Just make sure you are fair and consistent.

You can introduce a +1 Ammo Bundle for an increased gold cost or that they find as combat rewards. The PC can then choose if they are using a normal bundle or a +1 bundle for the combat and for the ENTIRE combat they would have a +1 to their Attacks.

RATIONS

Rations can be more than just food. They can also represent a character's upkeep, hygiene, medical needs, comfort, hydration, etc. Thinking of rations like this can help players see the importance for their character and can make them more important in your games.

If you are going to track rations in any way, they should use at least one a day. Yes, people have gone an entire week without food, but your PCs are adventurers exerting far more energy on tasks than usual. These rations help keep them going physically and mentally. This is also why you can have it represent the general things that a character would need to do in a day to maintain themselves, especially in an adventuring capacity. General rules on the amount of rations is 1 per Medium creature and +1 for each size category larger.

MEAL A DAY

A creature must consume one food ration per day. If a full day passes without consuming a food ration, they must make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** The creature suffers a level of Exhaustion.

This allows you to still track food rations but in a much easier way. You don't have to stop and track these things 3 times a day, instead you just do it at the end of the day (usually during a Long Rest). This also adds a resource that must be accounted for and a TAX representing time passing, to the game. Players might want to use Downtime to hunt for food, or stop in town for a meal to keep their rations up. Just having this rule in place can lead to some good roleplay choices and if they are on long periods of travel it becomes a real concern and challenge to overcome too!



LONG REST MEAL TICKET

In order for a character to gain the benefits of a Long Rest they must expend a ration. If a character goes 3 days in a row without using a food ration in this way they automatically suffer a level of Exhaustion.

This is a very unique homebrew that ties Long Rests and rations together. This will really make your players care about those rations since they can't get their cool abilities and HP back from only taking a rest. It would be REALLY bad if your PCs ran out of rations deep in a dungeon when they really need a Long Rest. Be careful with this because this rule will FORCE your players to care about rations, which might make them resent it, and it does make it more punishing when you run out of rations.

EQUIPMENT STORAGE

You need to establish what's on a person's body and what's in their backpack (potions, weapons, magic items, special story items, etc). This also lets both the player AND the GM know exactly where each of the items are, which can avoid some messy situations. You will also know what's directly on a character's body (Worn Equipment) and what's in their backpack (Stored Equipment). If you want to try to steal certain items from the players, now you know who has them and where they're at, so you can execute your devious plans!

WORN EQUIPMENT

This is the most important piece, and you can have this be as strict or relaxed as you want. These items are ALWAYS on the character's person and in their safe keeping. I keep track of these separately than items in their backpack for those times when something happens QUICKLY and we need to know where items are. An item in a backpack is not only much harder for the PC to get to but it's also much easier for an enemy to steal an item in a backpack.

How I run it is each character has slots for items to go on their character, these slots are their Worn Equipment. I give each character one quick access item that they can access during combat as a Bonus Action. They also have 2 slots for sheathed weapons on their back where they can stow their weapons. If they have a VERY important item to them (quest item, backstory item, etc) then they have 1 hidden spot they can use. This comes up more than you think and players can keep whatever they want there and it's more difficult for others to find. I have also given out special items that have more of these hidden spots in them. This lets players keep IMPORTANT items on their person instead of in their backpack and also shows YOU what they value most.

STORED EQUIPMENT

This is where you can handwave most things and just allow them to throw it in their backpack. Again, you can be as strict or as lenient as you want here because the MOST important distinction for me is if an item is on their person OR in their backpack. You can also use an encumbrance system, like the one below, to track how much is in the backpack, OR you can just use common sense and call players out once it starts to get crazy.



STONE ENCUMBRANCE SYSTEM

Your carrying capacity is tracked using a system of measurement called Stones. In this system you are considered either: Unburdened, Encumbered, Heavily Encumbered, or Over-Encumbered.



Unburdened: You are considered Unburdened when carrying a number of Stones up to a maximum of 1/2 your Strength Score. While Unburdened, you suffer no penalties.

Encumbered: You are considered Encumbered when carrying a number of Stones greater than 1/2 your Strength Score, but up to a maximum equal to your Strength Score. While Encumbered your Speed is reduced by 10, and you have DisADV on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution Checks.

Heavily Encumbered: You are considered Heavily Encumbered when carrying a number of Stones greater than your Strength Score, but up to a maximum equal to 1.5 your Strength Score. While Heavily Encumbered your Speed is reduced by 20, and you have DisADV on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution Checks, Saves, and Attacks.

Over-Encumbered: You are considered Over-Encumbered when carrying any number of Stones greater than 1.5 your Strength Score. While Over-Encumbered your Speed is 0, and you automatically fail all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution Checks, Saves, and Attack Rolls.

DC Tip: This Stones system comes from ancient times where a Stone was equal to around 15 pounds. If you wanted to be more crunchy you could take an item's weight and divide it by 15 to get the exact number of stones.

Each size category above Medium, that a creature is, doubles the amount of Stones they can carry and each size category below Medium reduces it by half. Quadrupeds also double the number of Stones they can carry. Characters that have a racial feature or class ability that increase their carrying capacity add +5 to the number of Stones they can carry.

Example: A character with a Strength Score of 10 could carry 5 Stones (1/2 Strength Score) without any problems. They would become Encumbered above 5 Stones, and would become Heavily Encumbered at 10 (Strength Score). They would not be able to carry more than 15 Stones (1.5 times Strength Score).

Sometimes tracking encumbrance can really weigh you down... get it? But it doesn't have to be a system where you track every single pound of equipment you have. This is also something you don't have to track and monitor CONSTANTLY, just reference the rule if there is a situation that arises where a person's encumbrance comes into question. These moments will be more obvious if a character finds large weapons or armor, or if they loot a dragon's hoard. Encumbrance can make moments like this matter because they have to CHOOSE what they carry and what they leave... instead of hand waving that they just get the entire thing!

This is designed to be a rough estimate of a character's carrying capacity so don't stress out about being too exact. The main purpose I see with encumbrance systems is to make sure a character isn't carrying FAR too many items, not to micromanage each and every item across the entire game. You could go entire sessions without checking how many Stones you actually have, then once it comes up have a quick moment where everyone does a STONE CHECK!

STONES

To keep this system SIMPLE there are 3 sizes of items: Small, Medium, and Large. Usually what size an item is will be pretty obvious, but here are some general ideas to help you decide, but over time it'll become more natural:

- Small items weigh 0 Stones
- Every set of 5 Small items weigh 1 Stone
- Medium items weigh 1 Stone
- Most Large items weigh 2 Stones (or more)
- You can push, pull or drag a number of Stones equal to twice your Strength Score

Small Items: Easily fits in most pockets or pouches.

Medium Items: Can be carried in one hand or under one arm and fits inside most backpacks. Usually made of lighter material like clothes, a quarterstaff, or large book.

Large Items: Must be carried with two hands and doesn't fit inside a backpack. Around the size of half your body. Usually made of heavier material like a tent, a metal chain, or 50ft of rope.

Example 1: A character with a Strength Score of 10 has a sword and shield sheathed on their back (1 Stone each), wearing Medium Armor (2 Stones), a backpack full of 10 small items (every 5 small items = 1 Stone), 500gp (1 Stone), and is carrying a very heavy crate (4 Stones). This character's total Stone value is 11, which means they would be Heavily Encumbered because they are above their Strength Score of 10. The character puts down the heavy crate when battle starts and drops from 11 Stones to 7 Stones and is now only Encumbered.



Example 2: Same character gives 8 of those 10 small items to their friend with a *Bag of Holding* and only has 2 in their possession. Then they share the gold around and only have 250gp. Their Stone value is now 4. The 2 small items only count as 1 Stone once you get 5 of them, so that is nothing yet, and the same with the gold, they only have 250gp and haven't reached the 500gp threshold yet. So now it's just 2 for Medium Armor, 1 for sword and 1 for shield for a total of 4 Stones and is no longer Encumbered.

DC Tip: Have characters find out what they can carry and NOT be Encumbered and then everything else can be put into backpacks that they can drop in combat if they need to... or just give them a *Bag of Holding*!

COMMON ITEM WEIGHT TABLE

Item	Stones
Weapon	1
Shield	1
500gp or 250gp worth of gems	1
Light Armor	1
Medium Armor	2
Heavy Weapon	2
Heavy Armor / Large Crate	4
Small Creature / Treasure Chest (75lbs)	5
Light Medium-sized Creature (150lbs)	10
Heavy Medium-sized Creature (225lbs)	15
Lion / Tiger / Bear (375lbs)	25
Small Statue / Horse (750lbs)	50
Wagon (1500lbs)	100
Stagecoach / Cow (2250lbs)	150

DROP AND ROLL

If a character wants to drop their backpack (the thing holding MOST of their equipment) they can do so as a Bonus Action. This will allow them to keep all of their standard equipment on them and drop some excess Stones if they are getting close to a point where it might start to make them Encumbered.

This is GREAT for a GM to play around with. Now their items are vulnerable on the ground for other creatures to possibly steal and run away with. In the adventure I ran this system in, they had to collect heavy objects inside of the dungeon. One of the characters would do Drop and Roll before combat, and once they did, I had some item hoarding Kobolds run in, grab the bag, and run!

BACKPACKS & BAGS (OF HOLDING)

Backpacks always count as 1 Stone no matter the size. This represents the space on their back that allows them to carry more items. You can add properties to these backpacks that could increase the amount of Stones a character can carry, either by mundane or magical means, like a pocket dimension.

DC Tip: When giving out a Bag of Holding, just choose a number of Stones that that Bag of Holding can carry and THAT would be its limit (assuming that the items can fit through the opening of the bag).

LIFTING VS PULLING

Lifting something straight off the ground requires much more strength than simply pushing it across the ground (especially if it has wheels). So to account for this I usually reduce the Stones something weighs by half if it is being pushed and cut it in half again if it is being pulled on wheels that can support the weight. This largely accounts for carts and wagons for beasts of burden.

Example: A wagon weighs 100 Stones. If a character or horse were going to pull or push this wagon you would first cut the weight in half since it's not being LIFTED. This brings the total to 50 Stones, but since it's on wheels you can cut this in half again for a final pulling weight of 25 Stones.

BEAST OF BURDEN

These can be very valuable to travelers since they are usually Large creatures and are also Quadrupeds, which means a normal beast of burden can carry 40 Stones (10 Stones for a Strength Score of 10, x2 for being Large, and x2 again for being a Quadruped). Treat wagons and stagecoaches the same as characters treat backpacks, but if multiple creatures are pulling the weight, then they can share the load between them.

Example: If a single Mule can carry 40 Stones, and you had that Mule pulling a wagon that weighed 30 Stones, the most amount of Stones you could store in the wagon is 10 Stones. If you add an additional Mule to the equation, their combined carrying capacity would be 80 Stones, so you could add up to 50 Stones worth of equipment or people into that same wagon.

Travel Pace: If a beast of burden is Encumbered, their travel speed is slowed by one level (depending on whatever travel system you are using).

WEALTH SYSTEM

Instead of tracking how much gold a character has, each character instead has a Wealth Tier. Characters can purchase anything at or below their current Wealth Tier at the cost of dropping down in tiers depending the expense.

This wealth system is an alternate method for how to handle gold in your games. People always complain about gold losing value in the game, issues pricing things, and losing the feeling of gold being a reward in the first place. This system provides a simple way to track each individual character or the group as a whole.

The Wealth Tiers show what you are able to purchase at each tier and the general idea of how much items at this tier would be worth. The more you use this system the quicker you will become at knowing in what tier various expenses would be.

WEALTH TIER

Every possible expense is broken up into Wealth Tiers. Players can purchase anything with a value equal to or less than their own Wealth Tier.

- Purchasing anything on your current Wealth Tier decreases your wealth by 2 tiers.
- Purchasing anything 1 level below your current Wealth Tier decreases your wealth by 1 tier.
- Purchasing anything 2 levels below your current Wealth Tier does not decrease your wealth at all, unless purchased regularly or in large quantities.

Purchasing an item with a value EQUAL to your Wealth Tier will cost a large percentage of your total finances whereas purchasing things from lower tiers cost so much less than what you can afford at your current tier, it won't even affect you. This makes sense because people who can afford to purchase a house, probably won't have to worry about buying food.

It is up to the GM if a character is pushing the limits of going up or down a Wealth Tier. Usually these moments are fair and make complete sense, just make sure to communicate how close they could be or what they could do to go up or down in tiers. If players are pushing the limits of what they can buy then make sure they know that, YES, purchases at 2 tiers lower than your current Wealth Tier are "free" essentially... but if you over do it and buy too much or too often they could still drop a tier!

Example 1: Player 1 at Tier 5 (Comfortable) wealth wants to purchase a house in town. With a good Persuasion Check they might even be able to get a medium or large size house (instead of just a small one). Purchasing this item will cost a great deal of their total finances and cause them to drop down 2 tiers from Tier 5 (Comfortable) to Tier 3 (Poor). They own a house now but it was such an expense they will have a lower Wealth Tier for now until they can get it backup with their round of adventuring.

WEALTH TIER LIST

1	Wretched	Urchin, Beggar, Hobo	Meal scraps but not enough to be full, second-hand dirty clothes, no shelter, trash you find on the ground
2	Squalid	Pauper, Peasant	Basic food for the day, night at a cheap inn, a new item of clothing, a sturdy rope, a bottle of rum.
3	Poor	Commoner, Serf	An extravagant night out, damaged weapon, common livestock, camping gear, simple transport (mule), light armor
4	Modest	Tradesperson, Craftsman	A functional weapon, a decent horse or wagon, medium or heavy armor, small rental home, untrained hirelings
5	Comfortable	Master Craftsman, Business Owner	Very fancy horses or stagecoach, a small house, extravagant weapon, full plate armor, bodyguard, trained hirelings
6	Wealthy	Minor Nobility, Government, Priests	A mansion, luxury transport, a personal guard or security force, established business, expert hirelings
7	Aristocratic	Knights, Bishops	A castle, caravan of horses and stagecoaches, small army, small town
8	Nobility	Dukes, Baron	A large army, small country
9	Royalty	King/Queen, Prince/Princess	A Kingdom





Example 2: Player 2 is at Tier 3 (Poor) and can purchase food for themselves no problem, but if they want to purchase food for an entire event they are hosting, that would drop them down 1 tier, maybe 2 depending on the size of the event.

EXPONENTIAL WEALTH

The Wealth Tiers exponentially grow from one tier to the next. An item on one tier is approximately 10 times more expensive than an item from one tier lower.

Example: 10 Bodyguards Tier 5 (Comfortable) is about the same value as 1 Security Force Tier 6 (Wealthy). This is just a rough estimate and should not be applied literally in all cases. The biggest thing to understand is the jumps from one Wealth Tier to the next gets bigger and bigger the higher up you go.

Keep in mind as a GM that it's FAR easier to go from Tier 2 (Squalid) to Tier 3 (Poor) than it is to go from Tier 5 (Comfortable) to Tier 6 (Wealthy). Things will escalate over time and the role that money plays in your game will change how you award Wealth Tiers.

SETTING YOUR WEALTH TIER

A character's Wealth Tier is determined by the GM at character creation based off of the character's backstory. The standard limit to a new character is Tier 3 (Poor) and the GM will choose a tier that makes the most sense to them.

You have a lot of cool options you can do with this system to spice up the economy of your game. Characters can offer to sacrifice Skill Proficiencies for a 1 level increase to their Wealth Tier. They could offer to decrease their Wealth Tier in order to gain something of great value to them. Negotiate and have fun with this to start the game off at a point that feels fair and balanced for everyone.

Some players might love to play characters at Tier 1 (Wretched) and have another party member who's a Tier 6 (Wealthy) and just pays for everything. With this system that can actually work and be roleplayed very easily to not have the one player always spending gold and slowly getting their finances whittled down. The opportunities for roleplay to be able to spend gold on things far below your Wealth Tier without worrying can be nice. Balanced starting wealth is important to not make entire parts of the game irrelevant. Work with your players so that their income level is something that makes sense for their character and doesn't start them off too high.

INCREASING YOUR WEALTH TIER

PCs can increase their Wealth Tier throughout the campaign by a number of means. The GM has this as another reward system to give the players both individually and as a group. Completing quests, finding treasure, selling items to shopkeepers, working a job, or even starting up their own business are all examples of things players can do to have their Wealth Tiers increased. These might not happen instantly the first time they do something, but over time they can add up and they'll get to a point where the GM tells them to increase their Wealth Tier by one!

Each character can progress individually with their own Wealth Tiers. If one PC is at Tier 5 (Comfortable) it's going to take a LOT to get to Tier 6 (Wealthy), if that is even a goal of theirs. If another PC in the same group is at Tier 3 (Poor) and they get a bunch of treasure to sell, they will jump to Tier 4 (Modest) while the other PCs who are already at a higher tier don't change at all. This is something you (and your players) will keep a pulse check on to know when it makes sense for the GM to award a Wealth Tier.

The beautiful thing about the simplicity of the system is that it works when wealth is front and center as a focus in a campaign

AND even when it doesn't matter at all and can easily fade into the background. If you want to have money be a big deal in your game, then heavily enforce this system and have it be a clear reward when they do certain tasks that could increase their Wealth Tier. Certain parts of the game can revolve around increasing their tier so they can afford certain things, this is far easier than approximating and calculating price points of actual gold. This system also works on the other end of the spectrum when your campaign isn't focused on gold at all. Once the party gets a high enough Wealth Tier, they can probably afford just about anything they would normally want and not have to worry about tracking gold at all. They have earned it!

GM PRICING

As the GM, you know which things you care about PCs purchasing. They want to stock up on supplies for travel? Sure, they have the Wealth Tier to do it. They want to buy an entire castle? Nope, they have to work a lot more to get to a higher Wealth Tier. They want to bribe someone to give them information? Interesting, maybe this is something you want to allow them to do for no cost, or maybe it would cost one player dropping their Wealth Tier. You have options to allow and not allow certain things to happen based on if it would feel right for them to be able to “just do it”.

GROUP WEALTH

You can establish this system exclusively for the party as a whole or even represent a faction in your game. Their Wealth Tier would allow them to do certain things and as they complete quests, or even donate money towards the group their Wealth Tier increases and allows access to better and better rewards. You could assign gold amounts that players could pay towards the group to “level up” their standing with them. This could also represent their own business or base of operations with different levels of features that each Wealth Tier has.

WEALTH QUIRKS TABLE

If you either start the game off with money, your character comes from money, or you come into money and start to become obsessed with it, this table is for you! Wealth Quirks are little traits about your character and their relationship with money. Challenge your players to roleplay these moments and let them explore what these mean for their character. These don't have to be permanent either, in the same way that you don't have to start with these, you also don't have to be stuck with them. Look for character arc moments that might impact these quirks.

1	Scrooge: You will not spend a copper on anyone except yourself.
2	Patron: You support someone who needs your money to do their creative passion, and cannot refuse their requests.
3	Expensive Tastes: There is an aspect of life where you will only accept the absolute best (food, wine, lodgings, clothing).
4	Philanthropist: You are extremely charitable to those in need, even to your detriment.
5	Loan Shark: You will spend your money on others, but demand it back with interest. No exceptions.
6	Hidden Price: If you buy something of value for another, you will expect a favor of significance in return. If refused, you will demand your item.
7	Tight Purse: You will never purchase anything that would drop your Wealth Tier.
8	Blood Money: Your wealth secretly stems from a dark source that is kept secret.
9	Family Ties: Your money is tied up in a trust, or controlled by someone else. All spending is monitored and any spending that would decrease your Wealth Tier must be approved by them.
10	Fame: Your wealth has brought you fame appropriate to your Tier (local celebrity, business owner). But this attention is unwanted, you stand out and people recognize you, constantly seeking your advice, attention, or hand outs.
11	Debt: Your wealth is balanced against huge credit or debt, but you're afloat due to your income. If you ever lose your income for a month, you immediately drop 2 Wealth Tiers.
12	Stolen: Your wealth is in part stolen from someone else who would very much like it back.
13	Elitist: You treat people at a lower Wealth Tier than you as inferior in an obvious manner.
14	Ladder Climber: You grovel and are overly nice to those with a higher Wealth Tier than you.
15	Romantic Gifter: You are prone to overspending on romantic interests to win their hearts in over-the-top displays of love.
16	Closed Trade/Unique Market: Your source of wealth is limited in scope and only renewable in the locale you come from. This could be a niche business, or a trade good only valuable in one area. You treat your Wealth Tier as two points lower when outside this area (Scope depends on game setting and GM discretion).
17	Unethical Business: People know your money stems from a source most don't like. It isn't necessarily illegal, but the common folk dislike you for it.
18	Superior's Favor: Your success hinges on the support and recommendation of a major figure or noble. If they withdraw that support, you will have nothing.
19	Risky Investor: If the potential exists for profit, you will spend money even if it reduces your profit level. Somewhat susceptible to accomplished con artists.
20	Employees: Your wealth and investments support some employees, you are obligated to ensure their needs are met, but they can perform basic services for you too. The way you treat them will spread fast.





THE CLICK RULE

This is a fun rule that I will use in circumstances when there are a lot of traps, or they enter into a dangerous area that they know they have to be on their toes for. I talk to my players when I am “activating” this rule at the table and let them know when we are LIVE. Once “activated”, anytime the GM says “CLICK” and describes something REALLY BAD happening, every player has to immediately shout out what they’re doing at that very moment in response to what was said. If the players hesitate or stumble over what to do, they make a Save against the effect. If they said something that doesn’t help at all, then they still have to make a Save (or make it at DisADV if you want to amp up the danger). HOWEVER, if they describe something that would be helpful then they don’t even have to make a Save (or can make it at ADV).

Example: You describe a rough, rocky hallway with cracks and crevices in it, with smears of blood along the walls and floor. “CLICK!!! A massive boulder starts rolling down the hallway!” Your players now have 1-2 seconds to say SOMETHING!

- Player 1 says, “I lay down prone.”
- Player 2 says, “I slide into a crack in the walls.”
- Player 3 thinks that player 2 had a great idea... but realizes they are a 7ft-tall Barbarian and probably can’t fit, so they stumble over their words and say nothing in the short time frame before the GM describes what happens and asks the group for Dexterity Saves (or Strength Saves).
- Player 1 has to make a Save because laying on the ground doesn’t save you from the boulder (unless maybe they described laying down in a gap of some kind).
- Player 2 doesn’t even have to make a Save because of their fast thinking.
- Player 3 has to make a Save because they said nothing (or just make them auto-fail if you are a mean GM).

Make sure to discuss this method with your players before using The Click Rule. It’s especially important with this rule for people that have anxiety issues or who wouldn’t do well with the potential tension and stress that these moments can have. You can mention this possibility at Session 0 or even right before they enter a dungeon that you want to use this method for.



HOW TO RUN TRAVEL

One of the largest parts of exploration is traveling from one place to another. If you aren't fighting monsters or talking to NPCs, then you must be traveling between places. This can be done with an airship, boat, horse, by foot, or even by crawling through a dungeon, but either way, it can be an entertaining part of the game that also helps set the tone of the campaign. Exploration in our games should either serve a purpose and enhance that part of the game, or get out of the way and let the story continue without bogging the game down. But what things can you implement to speed up or slow down these story moments? This section talks about how to run travel, components to think about before, during, and after travel, and tons of different travel systems that each feel completely different. Once you read through this entire section you should have a strong feel for what kind of travel you want to run.

The first step in planning out travel is to determine what kind of journey you want the PCs to experience. Is this a short trip to a neighboring village, or a distant journey to a new land? Is the path safe or full of danger? Are there obstacles to overcome and enemies to defeat? Sometimes the journey can be the real challenge. If you want the trip to be long and difficult, make the trip take several days (or weeks) and plan out multiple encounters for the PCs along the way. What if they are backtracking through an area they have already traveled through? Don't drag things out with checks and encounters if the journey is no longer the main focus of the current adventure.

There are several things to keep in mind when figuring out how you want to handle travel. Each of these aspects of travel are covered in the following subsections:

- **Travel Plan:** How long is the journey?
- **Travel DC:** How difficult will it be?
- **Travel Mechanics:** How do you run it? How does it work?
- **Setbacks & Shortcuts:** How well does it go?
- **Travel Narration:** How do you describe it?

TRAVEL PLAN

A Travel Plan is something the PCs put together before beginning a journey, though sometimes it might be provided by an NPC. The group may need to gather supplies for the trip if they expect it to take multiple days to complete or if it requires special equipment, such as climbing gear, cold weather gear, or both. Make sure to be available to help answer questions they may have and to guide them through this process. Sometimes they might simply want to depart without considering the journey itself. When that happens, ask them questions about their plan for the journey, and remind them of the things they may be forgetting.

The planning session should end when everyone has a general understanding of where they are going and about how long it would take to get there. Again, this is just a plan and is subject to all the curveballs along the way, but having everyone understand the big picture will help get across the feeling of travel, however large or small you want that to be.

TRAVEL DC

A Travel DC is a general DC that represents the difficulty of traveling from point A to point B. This is the DC used for navigation, staying on course, avoiding danger, and other travel activities. I tend to use the same DC for similar trips to create a feeling of consistency, which helps the PCs get a feel for how difficult they think a familiar or new journey will be based on how difficult that kind of journey was in the past. Longer trips can have checkpoints that break the trip up into multiple smaller trips, each of which may have its own Travel DC. Below is a table I use to help me determine the Travel DC for a specific journey.

TRAVEL MECHANICS

You can travel 8 hours in 1 day. Anything more would lead to Exhaustion. This block of 8 hours matches up perfectly with Long Rests being 8 hours and keeps things pretty smooth with a 24 hour day. You get 8 hours of rest, 8 hours of travel, and you have 8 hours left in which everything else happens like watering your horses, the Cleric's daily prayers, bathroom breaks, and adventuring, of course.

These are rules and systems that I use across all of the different methods for travel. These things can play as big or small of a role as you want. Some of these terms will be used in other methods in this chapter and will also be explained here to help you run ANY kind of travel at your table.

As with most things, it's all about balance. You need to find the right balance for the players at your table, and each table is different. Travel needs to feel like a challenge, without being boring. Try incorporating different strategies until you find what works for your group. Don't be afraid to try different things!

Terrain Type	DC
Well-traveled area that you have been to before	none
Well-traveled areas that you have NOT been to before	10
Less-traveled areas / Outskirts	15
Wilderness, mountains	20
Modifiers for Travel DC	
Sunset, bad temperature, bad weather, or difficult terrain	+5
Night time, extreme temperature, extreme weather, exotic terrain (desert, tundra, volcano)	+10
Having a map, learning about the area, following an NPC guide	-5



TRAVEL DISTANCE

If my players ask me how far away a certain city is I will answer them in terms of days of travel. Moving at a normal pace equates to 1 day of travel, which might seem pretty obvious, but it's FAR simpler than talking in terms of miles.

In general, 1 day of travel to me is about 20 miles, which represents a group traveling for a total of 8 hours. If they are slowed down by any number of factors, like heavy equipment or difficult terrain, I cut it in half and they only get a 1/2 day of travel instead. If the group wants to pack light, are familiar with the area, or succeeds on some Travel Checks, or any number of positive reasons, I might double that and they are moving at twice the speed.

As the GM just keep in mind what kind of travel setup your group has and you can determine days of travel from there. When you use days of travel it becomes much easier to estimate how long things would take without slowing down the game. A group of adventurers could move at a fast, power-walking pace and move at about the same speed as horses in a casual walk. If you know something is difficult to travel through (like a snow storm or swamp) then you can just double the amount of hours it would take to get there, and therefore double the amount of days needed to travel.

MARCHING ORDER

Before we get into these systems, we need to know your group's marching order. It's a good idea to understand your group's general behavior in any situation. This can be as simple as having them describe what they're doing and the formation they're traveling in. If an encounter is triggered, it's essential to know approximately where everyone would be instead of waiting for the chaos to ensue and then asking everyone's position.

FORCED MARCH

You can take a forced march to go beyond the normal amount of 8 hours you can travel in a day. Each character makes a Constitution Save to push forward for another 4 hours and see if they can push themselves beyond their normal limits and really test their endurance. **Failure:** Suffer one level of Exhaustion (see "Alternative Exhaustion Systems" on page 148).

TRAVEL PACE

As always, a single day of travel is 8 hours, but depending on what pace you are moving at, you could cover more or less ground. It's much easier to think of travel and how far apart things are in terms of days instead of miles. So a normal speed for a group traveling would be 1 day. If the group wanted to move more cautiously at Half Speed, then it would take them twice as long to cover the same distance. You could also make up time and move at a Fast Speed to cover TWICE the ground possible.

This chart helps to show the advantages and disadvantages of each travel pace and can help your party decide how fast they want to travel. You could also have situational mechanics come into play too, for different areas that are more treacherous to traverse through. If your party is traveling at a Fast Speed for multiple days in a row, they might have to start making Constitution Saves.

Pace	Speed of Travel	Effects
Slow	Half Speed	Allows Stealth Checks to be made during travel
Normal	Normal Speed	n/a
Fast	Fast Speed	Travel and Perception Checks made at DisADV





DAYLIGHT HOURS

When I design travel, I find out the overall distance players want to travel and determine how far they could make it in one day. This requires the players telling me how they were preparing to travel, and where they are traveling to. Based on that, I determine a Travel DC for each section or day of travel and have them make a Travel Check to see how each day goes. This system limits the redundant Checks every HOUR and makes it only 1 per day.

The default rules go over how many miles you can travel in 1 hour and have MILES be the focus of travel. With this system though, you have the distance between locations be measured in how many HOURS of travel it would take to get there. As the GM, you can easily think of how many days of travel you would want this place to be from their current location. The default for travel is 8 hours in a given day, so now THAT is the unit of measure. Your mindset with this system should be focused on describing how far something is by how many days of travel it is away. So if the PCs want to go to the waterfall, you would say that it's 1/2 a day of travel. Maybe it's far away and you want it to be more challenging to get there, so you'd say it's 2 days of travel. This removes the burden of calculating the MILES from being the key feature. This also gives you some wiggle room on the exact time of day they arrive.

Instead of thinking about the world as a static place with a set distance between locations that you need to calculate miles per hour travel for... flip that around. Backwards design your travel around how many DAYS you want it to be, and stretch the miles to match it. Talk to your player in terms of days traveled for distances and slightly adjust what time of day (dawn, day, dusk, or dark) they would arrive at their destination. I've created this system in blocks of 4 hours at a time, which will also connect perfectly with the rest system described later in this chapter.

Calculating Miles

You can still calculate how many miles it is to the destination by multiplying the number of days traveled by 20. A day of travel is assumed to be traveling 24 miles in 8 hours, and, for simplicity purposes, I like to round that off to 20. You can also adjust this number if the group slows down or speeds up, but I would base things more off of their Travel Checks and DAYS than the number of miles.

Rolling for Days of Travel

When you gain or lose hours with this system, you are simply just "saving time". It's not like you actually traveled for LONGER that day (unless you describe it that way). When you can normally travel for 8 hours and you roll well, you essentially gain 4 hours of travel time, but you still only traveled for 8 hours that day. You were just more efficient than usual and covered more ground. Alternatively, you could describe it in a way that the group was able to travel for 12 hours that day, but not have them make any kind of Constitution Saves.



SETBACKS & SHORTCUTS

During your travels there are a wide variety of things that you could come across. These are referred to as Setbacks and Shortcuts. Setbacks have some sort of negative result to the group and Shortcuts have a positive effect.

Sometimes it's hard to come up with WHAT the Setback or Shortcut actually was instead of saying, "Yeah, your travel was hard today." This can give you sparks of inspiration to build off of and tailor to the section of the world your party is traveling through.

I usually have the TIME that they lose or save be in increments of 4 hours. As stated above, 1 day of travel is 8 hours, so losing 4 hours would be losing half a day of travel. Gaining 4 hours from a Shortcut can either mean that you traveled the normal distance in half the time, or you traveled 50% farther that day. You have wiggle room as the GM to use these Setbacks and Shortcuts to manipulate the time that it takes to travel.

SETBACKS

These will happen more frequently because, in general, this game is about throwing challenges at your party and having them overcome it! There will even be times where players turn a Setback into a Shortcut! These can be represented in many different ways and should ultimately be seen as a Setback to then overcome instead of a punishment.

Example: If you attack the party with a group of bandits, but they convince the bandits to turn to their side and show them the way!

Whenever a Setback happens you can choose to have it be as severe as the situation calls for. A setback could be as simple as NOT having something positive happen. It could also be a narration of unideal circumstances, a loss of travel time, taking damage, losing resources, a Skill Challenge, or even a full blown combat encounter!

These are different outcomes that you can choose from as a Setback. This list goes from the least punishing to most punishing. There could also be story implications depending on the plot of the current game state as well.

Setback List

- Nothing (usually them losing out on having something positive happen)
- Loss of Time (usually 4 hours or 8 hours)
- Taking damage or losing Hit Dice
- Loss of resources
- Suffer Levels of Exhaustion
- Skill Challenge
- Combat

Loss of Time

The loss of time is sometimes all you need for a Setback during travel, especially when they are "on-the-clock". When failures happen, you can increase the time something takes, which might make a difference in a quest objective or in trying to stop something before it happens.

I usually have these result in being able to travel half as far as usual. Sometimes, for really bad Setbacks of time, they don't even progress at all (something like having to bunker down because of a storm).

When you use a loss of time as a Setback, you should explain HOW they lost that time. You can use this as inspiration to explain what happened to the group. Most of these are general enough to be used anywhere so you can have the Setback make sense and even tie it into what's going on in the story.



Loss of Time Setback List

- Weather or environment (fog, storm, temperature)
- Sneak around something (creature, group of NPCs, watch tower)
- Creatures (follow/stalk, attack on sight, annoy)
- Travel vehicle breaks (wagon, stagecoach, horse)
- Terrain (desert, mountain, swamp)
- Detour (blocked path, dead end, wrong turn)
- Get lost (wrong direction, get separated)
- Get stuck (captured, fall into trap)
- Fatigue (Disease, Exhaustion, extended travels)

Saving Throw for Damage

Have some sort of Save be made by the person who failed, the entire group, or a specific character. These can be for damage, status effects, or a combination of the two.

Loss of Hit Dice

This is a simple “cost” that you can tax your players with since Hit Dice don’t come into play that often, but if they’re about to head into a situation that they might need a Short Rest for, then this could be a good option.

DC Tip: This really works great with my Rest System presented on page 123. Having both healing and Hit Dice regenerate slower lets me use the “loss of Hit Dice” as a decent Setback that actually matters.

Loss of Resources

The party could lose some amount of gold, food rations, supplies, or even magic items depending on the situation. A small group of animals could eat their food or a sneaky thief could steal some precious items.

DC Tip: Be careful with this one as to not steal something too important without them having a chance to prevent it.

Exhaustion

If the PCs have some sort of failure, you can give those who failed or the whole group a level of Exhaustion. You can have them first make a Constitution Save from the failure and then if they fail THAT Save, they suffer a level of Exhaustion.

DC Tip: Check the Exhaustion options (page 103) for a less punishing system to use.

Skill Challenge

Anytime you want there to be a chance for something worse to happen, but you don't want it to be a full combat, these are a great solution. Chase scenes or anything else dynamic can easily be turned into Skill Challenges to have the party really feel the dangers of this Setback.

Combat Encounter

I would recommend for the combat to progress the story in some way and not just be purely random. This will end up damaging the party or expending some of their resources, and you can even have this make them lose time as well for an even bigger Setback.

SHORTCUTS

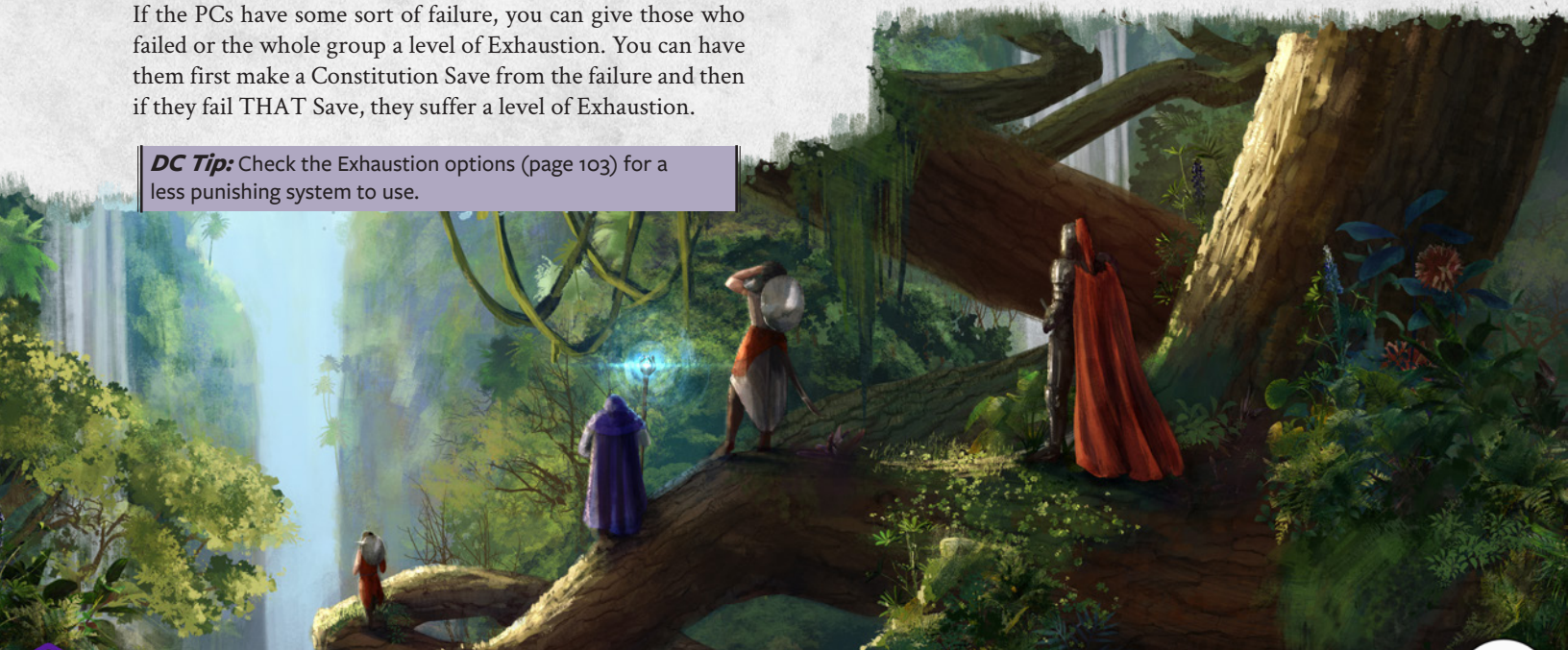
Most of the time these are underrated because your reward for succeeding in travel... is NOT getting punished. I like for GOOD things to happen when everything goes well, they think creatively, or roll really high! Don’t overuse this though because it will be less exciting and can become something they expect more often. A lot of the time in this game, arriving ON TIME is enough of a reward since we are supposed to challenge players with those Setbacks. Use these as rewards as much or as little as you see fit.

Save Time

Instead of NOT losing time from a Setback, these Shortcuts can literally save time traveling. Have them arrive at their destination half a day of travel sooner, or even a full day sooner. This can be expressed by actually finding a shortcut, digging deep and pushing through difficult challenges, or just moving at a faster pace.

Find Cool Stuff

These are literal rewards that the PCs can find along their travels. They might spot something in a clearing on the side of the road, find abandoned ruins with hidden treasures inside, or an abandoned wagon with loot inside (do they take it?).



Find a Helpful NPC

These are GOOD social encounters that they cross paths with for something beneficial. They can get information on important things, receive items, or gain a guide to help on their travels.

Find Story Plot Points

Take this opportunity to give them a reward that ties into the story or accelerates the plot in some way. The NPC or location they come across can bring them deeper into the campaign, even in the smallest of ways.

Is the character that's following them the brother of one of the PCs? Do the ruins they stumble across have a weakened magic item inside with traces of magic from the BBEG? Is the abandoned wagon from a group of adventurers that the party met back in town?

Shortcut Examples

Sometimes you just want these Shortcuts to be quick, narrative-only moments where you describe by what means the party was able to speed up their travels.

- Open field / smooth terrain
- Find a shortcut / cut a corner
- Beautiful weather
- Rough days travel, but pushing forward

PROGRESS GOALS

Think about what the party is trying to accomplish and have the Setbacks and Shortcuts revolve around THAT. Have the mechanics interact with their goals to make them more exciting. If they are trying to find someone, then some Shortcuts could be clues they left behind. If they are trying to get to a location before it's too late, then a Setback of even just 1 hour could be huge. Think about their goals of travel, their quest, or the campaign, and then backwards design your Setbacks and Shortcuts around those.

RESOLVING SETBACKS & SHORTCUTS

With the wide variety of results you can get, there are many ways to handle what happens once a Setback or Shortcut occurs. Does it immediately happen? Can they avoid it? Often, if there was something the players' actions led them to, then the result would just happen. But if you rolled randomly on a table and got a Setback, then you might want to have it be contested.

Automatic Results

Another option is that whatever the results say would automatically happen. You describe how they either gained or lost time based on what the result of the Check was and then simply move on to the next one. There is no chance for the players to avoid this or try to affect the result in any way, it just happens.

This is nice for keeping the game moving and not getting too bogged down with the Checks from some of the other methods, but it can also feel bad that the players are just subjected to the randomness of the dice (which is part of the game of course). But it's your call if you want to try these out and see when you want to use this method.

Contested Results

Once you get the result of a Setback or Shortcut, the effect does not immediately trigger. The PCs have a chance to make it better... or worse! You instead present the situation and give the players a moment to respond in some way. They will be able to directly impact the outcome of this day of travel depending on their choices and how the dice fall.

Let the situation play out in whatever way feels right. Maybe you have multiple characters wanting to help out, or maybe you limit it to just ONE PC that gets to try and save the day. Maybe you restrict it even further and force the player that rolled the result to be the only one that can make the Check. There are many different ways to handle these challenges (see "Dungeon Coach Challenge Methods" on page 36).

Setback Example: The party has their path blocked by a ton of fallen debris which would cause them to lose 4 hours of travel time. The Wizard speaks up and wants to cast *Telekinesis* to lift key pieces out of their way as they try to avoid the Setback. They succeed on their Check and they do NOT lose those 4 hours. They instead have a normal day of travel.

Shortcut Example: You encounter a wandering hermit NPC that seems a bit loopy and odd. The PCs don't really know how to interact with the hermit... because they don't know if this is a Setback, a Shortcut, or even a possible combat encounter. One of the PCs talks to this figure and finds out that they like shiny things, and gives them a broken clasp from their armor. The act of kindness gets the NPC to reveal that there is a Shortcut close by and leads them to a path that lets them save 4 hours of travel time. In this example, I didn't even have the PCs make a Check since they figured it out with JUST their social roleplay abilities, but you can also incorporate Checks or even different Skills like Intimidation if you want.

You can also use the Help Action rules here to give other party members the ability to help out on these Checks, if it makes sense for them to do so. You can also restrict it to just one Help Action, or not even allow it in the first place. Keep pacing in mind here, as the more Checks you allow, the longer it will take.

Improvised Results

Instead of having a list of premade Setbacks and Shortcuts, throw it to the PCs to describe what they do to save time. This gives them a great roleplay moment to describe what they could have possibly done to help (or hurt) this journey. There have been some amazing story moments that PCs came up with that have both caused some good laughs, and planted a seed that I used later to weave into the story.

I would have SOMETHING written down for the result just in case the player can't think of anything. In that case, you can chime in with your prompt and help describe the result.



TRAVEL NARRATION

Narrating a journey can make it feel real, which can increase the players' immersion and their involvement in how it unfolds. Narrating a journey can be as simple as providing a couple sentences that describe the transition from one place to another. Travel without narration can feel empty or hollow, and more like a video game. Sometimes it's fine to handwave the details of a journey if it happens during Downtime, such as the passing of large chunks of time (weeks, months, or years) in what might be a few seconds of real world time. However, when the journey is part of the story, such as a quest or mission, describing the trip can make a huge difference in making the story feel real. Describe the things the PCs might see, hear, smell, taste, or touch during their trip, including what kinds of emotions they may experience during their journey.

SIGHT

What do they see? Describe the landscape in the areas the PCs travel through. What does the soil, trees, or roads look like? Are there any visible creatures around? Sometimes not seeing something can help paint a picture of the environment. Motionless trees without any visible creatures around can create a picture of a foreboding forest. Add in a layer of fog that obscures the ground below and it can make the forest feel even more unnerving.

SOUND

What do they hear? Describe the sounds made by the things they see (and things they don't see). If they see trees swaying in the wind, describe the sound of the wind on the trees. Perhaps the wind is howling ominously or carrying the sound of rustling leaves. A swamp might have an overwhelming buzz of insects coming from all directions. The sound of something unseen can help build a sense of uneasiness too.

SMELL

What do they smell? Describe the things they smell on the air, such as a strong scent of moisture and copper from a pool of water in an underground cavern, or the smell of flowers in a grassy meadow. Even general descriptions, such as "lovely" or "terrible", are suitable when you can't find the words to describe the scent of lavender or rotting flesh.

TOUCH

What do they feel? Describe the sensation they feel when they touch something or something touches them. If the walls of an underground cavern are covered in moss, it might feel cold and slimy to the touch. The rocks near a hot spring might feel incredibly smooth and hot. Describe the jostling felt when riding in a stagecoach over a bumpy road, the irritating sensation on the skin from the sands carried by a desert wind, or the sting of cold air in an icy tundra. Describing the sense of touch can go a long way to help the players really imagine what their characters might be physically experiencing on their journey.

TASTE

What do they taste? This is often the least used sense, since it requires licking something, eating something, or encountering a smell so powerful that you can literally taste it in your mouth (which can really emphasize the potency of a smell). Swimming through a body of water can trigger a sense of taste, such as salty, dirty, or refreshing (if the water is especially clean, cold, and fresh). This can happen when the water touches your lips, spills into your mouth, or you take a breath so strong you can taste the water on the air.

EMOTION

What do they feel emotionally? Describe what kinds of emotions they might be experiencing consciously or subconsciously. This can be a great way to convey a sense of wonder when something interesting might be just around the corner, or to convey a sense of danger when a new threat reveals itself. Perhaps a chill runs down their spine, a looming fear weighs on them, they feel a sense of relief when near a radiant orb of sunlight, or a sense of madness when near an alien artifact. Describing these emotional senses can help dial the tension in the story up or down. Dial it up when something big is about to happen, and dial it down once they've overcome the challenge. Even saying a place feels "ominous" can convey to the players that their characters sense that this place is dangerous.

DC Tip: Prepare some descriptions of what the players will experience as they travel or be prepared to make them up as you go. These little moments of sensory detail help keep your players immersed and traveling nicely. Be sure to plan important details and moments that work into your narrative as well.



TRAVEL CHECKS

Travel Checks are used to cover a variety of different travel related challenges that arise during a journey. It can be a Survival Check to track a creature you are following, a Survival Check to orient yourself and find a path, a Constitution Check or Save to endure the effects of a long journey, or an Athletics and Acrobatics Checks to traverse obstacles in your path.

DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENTS

There are certain sections of the world that are more dangerous than others, and sometimes you want to get that across with more than just scary stories. These systems give you some mechanics for these moments and can help get across the feeling you want at the table.

LOST ROLL

A Lost Roll works like a Death Save. Each player rolls 1d20 with no Modifiers attached to it. Players who roll 10+ remain together and players who roll 9 or lower are lost, meaning the party is split. When this occurs, the GM makes an Encounter Check, meaning the split party could potentially be attacked. In order to find the lost party member(s), the main party must make a Travel Check to find each other or they can stay and wait for the lost members.

The GM could opt to have the players find each other in other ways, such as a Skill Challenge or other methods listed later in this section. Additionally, you can change what happens if they fail. They might still rejoin the group on a failure, but have something else bad happen, like a combat encounter or DisADV on the next Check made during travel.

SCARY FAILURE POSSIBILITIES

Having something looming over the players can really add some tension to travel. The looming threat of an avalanche or the rumors of a legendary beast in the area is sometimes all it takes to make travel FEEL dangerous... even if they never actually encounter it! Give the PCs some lore from a storyteller at the local tavern, ghost stories around a campfire, or warning posters of a terrifying creature plastered all around town.

I might even tell the players how they might encounter this beast. If we roll a natural 1 on this encounter table... it finds you, if you fail a Stealth Check by more than 5...it finds you, and etc. You can tease your players with this threat as well. Have something bad ALMOST happen, or they see the creature but it just killed a large creature and is feasting on its body. You can put the threat AROUND them without needing to actually attack them with it (yet).

PC FOLKLORE MONSTER CREATION

Something you can throw at your players is making THEM create this terrible creature! Stop and ask the players, "What rumors have you heard about this terrible creature?" The BEST part is that these are "rumors" and the PCs won't know if they are true or not. YOU, as the GM, get to decide what is true and what is false. You can play into some of them and have them not be true, or dive into other aspects and have those be the main mechanics of the monster.

These can be as specific or as general as the players come up with, and could even turn into some fun roleplay sessions of talking to people around town. One time, my player said they talked to a crazy old man who had fought the beast and told them about the creature's 3 heads! We then had a roleplay encounter of me as the crazy old man, and I dove right into how this creature had 3 heads and that I barely escaped! BUT, before I dove in, I described him having thick cracked glasses and never making eye contact with the player. SO all of that was NOT TRUE... he saw three heads because his glasses were cracked.



DAINGEROUS TERRAIN

There are many ways to run travel and the type of terrain you are on can drastically change how it feels. Traveling on a road is one thing, but when that road is winding around a rocky mountain pass or a poorly made bridge across a swamp, that feels different. Here are some ways to mechanically represent this dangerous travel to get across the feeling that things just got real! Alternating between different systems based on the scenario can help travel get across the feeling that you want.

INCREASED TRAVEL DC

If you are using a consistent Travel DC, make it slightly higher while they are going through a particularly dangerous area. You don't have to say exactly what this new increase is, but just saying that it has gone up will get across the idea of danger.

INCREASED TRAVEL DESCRIPTIONS

Really set the tone with a darker or more ominous description of exactly what types of things could be causing problems. This is also a great place to weave in some foreshadowing like traces of webs catching light in the setting sun between the trees (setting up the approaching spider queen ambush!).

DAINGEROUS WEATHER

Nature can be wild and unforgiving, causing all sorts of problems for PCs to deal with. You can have the intensity of the weather be as big or as small a part of the game as you want. Sometimes the weather might not come into play at all, or it might make or break some of your PCs' plans. Burning down a tower is going to be very difficult if it's currently raining, so use weather as another tool at your disposal to challenge your players with. You can just decide what the weather is or use some of the tables below to roll on it to keep it more random.

RANDOM WEATHER

This is a table I use to give me a sense of what the weather is like on a certain day or period of time. I keep what the condition is vague so I can decide that based on where they are. The variables are rain, wind, and temperature. Once you roll on this, you can see how intense the weather is and choose a type for what is happening. It being more general can help you to use this more freely across a wide variety of locations. Maybe extreme weather conditions in a swamp are swarms of bugs, while extreme weather in the arctic is a blizzard.

RANDOM WEATHER TABLE

d12	Intensity of Rain, Wind, Temp
1	Extreme
2-3	Heavy
4-6	Light
7-12	Normal Weather / Sunny / Cloudy

WEATHER PROGRESSION

If you want your weather to be more of a smooth transition from one state to the next, then you can roll on this table and have the weather worsen toward some kind of extreme condition, or get better toward clear skies! Don't be afraid to play around with these options. If you want the environment to feel oppressive, you could roll on this same table using a d10 and have a climate that is more often hostile than hospitable.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

These are different mechanics that you can impose on your PCs based on the current weather. Pick and choose from this list based on the severity of the weather. If it's a light rain, then they might not have DisADV on Ranged Weapon Attacks until it starts pouring or the wind picks up.

WEATHER PROGRESSION TABLE

d12	Change in Weather
1	Drastically Worsen
2-3	Slowly Worsen
4-9	Maintain
10-11	Slowly Improve
12	Drastically Improve

Fog

- DisADV on all Perception Checks that use sight

Wind

- DisADV on all Perception Checks that use sight and sound
- DisADV on Ranged Weapon Attacks

Rain

- DisADV on all Perception Checks that use sight and sound
- DisADV on Survival Checks for tracking or shelter
- DisADV on Ranged Weapon Attacks
- Travel speed is halved

Storm

- DisADV on all Perception and Survival Checks
- DisADV on Ranged Weapon Attacks
- DisADV on Concentration Checks
- Travel Speed is halved
- Constitution Saves for Exhaustion
- Constitution Saves for damage from hail / thunder / debris / cold



ALTERNATIVE TRAVEL METHODS

There are SO many different ways that you can run travel at your table, and you should NOT just choose one and ONLY use that method. Travel should feel different for different situations in the story. Traveling across long stretches of land for days and days... should be ran differently than an in-and-out trek up a volcano swarming with fire elementals. Try out these systems and get a feel for which one fits for which type of travel scenario you are going to run. I have my favorites that I will choose between on-the-fly, so I always have them ready. Changing things up also adds some spice and variety to travel to keep it interesting!

A lot of the systems throughout this book will give you options that you can use for travel. Here are a few tips on using these systems for travel, on top of what is already presented in those sections.

TRAVEL ROLES METHOD

Before starting their travel each PC selects a Travel Role for the journey. They can choose from Navigator, Scout, Defender, or Custom and, based on what they choose, they'll be able to help the group while traveling, in different ways.

This is more of a default priority system the characters follow while traveling, similar to a marching order. With marching orders, you ask the group what their formation is and from that point forward you understand the "default". Travel Roles work the same way. This is the characters' "default" priority they are focused on during their journey.

You can have as many of each role as you want and even have players create their own Travel Roles by telling you what they want their priority to be for travel. Some roles can also overlap with what they are doing. The Navigator might be looking out for branches in their path while the Scout is doing the same.

FULFILLING A TRAVEL ROLE

While traveling during a journey, a PC can fulfill a Travel Role to gain special benefits during the journey. A PC can only fulfill 1 Travel Role at a time, unless stated otherwise. If a Travel Role calls for a Check, the GM decides which skill can be used to make the Check.

Example 1: If multiple PCs fulfill the same role while traveling, one of them must be chosen as the primary for that role. When the GM calls for a Travel Check, they'll identify which Travel Role needs to make the Check, then the primary makes the Check, gaining ADV on their Check for each additional PC fulfilling that same role.

Example 2: If there are 3 PCs fulfilling the Navigator role while traveling and the GM calls for a Navigator's Travel Check, ALL 3 PCs will make the Check to see which one of them "saves the day". This gives them an increased chance for a higher result, but they might have some gaps in other roles now.





Navigator

A Navigator identifies which path is best to take and guides the party to their destination or quarry. When the GM calls for a Navigator's Travel Check, the primary Navigator will make a Survival Check to avoid getting lost or losing track of their quarry. A failed Check may result in the Navigator getting the party lost, leading them on a dangerous trail into hostile territory, or taking much longer to arrive at their destination.

Scout

A Scout keeps an eye out for nearby threats, unusual activity, or areas of immediate interest. When the GM calls for a Scout's Travel Check, the primary Scout will make a Perception Check to detect creatures, an important item, nearby danger, or signs of activity. A failed Check may result in the Scout not spotting an enemy that's been following the party, leading to a surprise attack the next time the party takes a Long Rest outside of town.

Defender

A Defender remains alert to danger and keeps guard over the party. When the party encounters danger, the primary Defender will make an Initiative or Athletics Check to save another party member from a trap that goes off, interpose themselves between an attacker and an ally, or take another action to react to the threat. A failed Check may result in succeeding against the challenge, but taking damage in the process. It may also leave a party member vulnerable to danger.

DC Tip: I often use an Attack Roll for the Check they make as well, which feels pretty fitting.

Custom

A PC can fulfill a role other than Navigator, Scout, or Defender at the GM's discretion. Assuming it's possible to fulfill the activity while traveling, a PC can fulfill a Rest Role (page 128) during their journey. Rest Roles usually require working with tools that need a stationary surface to perform properly. Fulfilling a Rest Role while traveling is usually possible while riding in a large vehicle where the PC has access to an adequate work space with a stable surface.

Each role can offer a variety of benefits that can play as large or as small a part as you want in how you run your travel. You could do a simple pulse check to see who is doing what as they travel so you know who to go to for certain events. The group is getting attacked by wildlife? Put the Defender on the spot to see what they do to help! The group is lost and needs to find their way back on track? Have the Navigator make a Survival Check to see if they can save the day!

In general, when you use this system you can have events happen that make you call on one of these Travel Roles to see if they can overcome a challenge for some sort of Setback or Shortcut. Whoever is in that role can make a Check of some kind and see how they do. If there are multiple PCs with the same Travel Role, then they can help each other to have a better chance. This rewards players for adapting their roles to match the scenario. Are you about to travel through a dense jungle? Have multiple Navigators! Are you about to travel through a dangerous city with thugs around every corner? Have everyone be a Defender! BUT what if something happens and you don't have ANY of a certain role? Maybe you have them automatically fail that moment and they get a Setback of some kind. Maybe one player can step into that role on-the-fly but has to make the Check at DisADV.

You don't have to have one of each Travel Role, and I heavily encourage players to come up with new options. Once they choose their roles, think about what things you could throw at them that might challenge these roles. You'll be surprised by what players come up with, but whatever they do, try and have it matter in some way, which will help to sculpt the travel into a customized and engaging experience.



Example Travel Roles from my players

Mule Assistant: Takes care of the stubborn mule and makes sure they don't act up. This player had a great relationship with the pack mule and wanted to have their entire role be to take care of the mule. Every so often I might ask them for an Animal Handling Check to see how well that aspect of the trip is going. High rolls lead to more bonding or Shortcuts, while low rolls might slow down the group and have some Setbacks.

Researcher: Reads continuously in the stagecoach while everyone else focuses on traveling. This PC had a LOT of research to do and would spend their travel rolls making History Checks. Their role was to keep diving into the lore of the world to try to dig deeper and get some answers on what was going on.

DC Tip: Let the roles your players choose show you how THEY want to play the game. My players wanted to take care of animals and read books about the lore of my world, so I engaged with them in THAT way. Just asking them what their Travel Role is and giving them this custom choice helps to shape travel into something fun for everyone.

ROLE BASED SETBACKS

With this system you can have specific Setbacks happen with specific roles. Whatever makes sense for this type of role can be the Setback for failing that type Check. You will have to get creative on the custom roles that your players come up with, but these can serve as inspiration on what could happen:

- **Navigator:** Lose 4/8 hours of travel time
- **Scout:** Save for damage against environmental effect
- **Defender:** Save for damage against a creature
- **Utility:** Custom effect

Success here usually means that you don't get punished... which can feel bad sometimes, so you can think about cool rewards for players to get during travel to prevent that. I have things prepared for my players if they roll crazy high, but usually this isn't needed. Players will be excited that they got through the dangers of travel and that is usually rewarding enough!

ROLE BASED TRAVEL CHECKS

When you are using this system and want to see how well a section of travel goes, you can make Travel Checks in a number of ways. The roles allow your players to describe what their priorities are during travel and now you get to challenge them, knowing this information. Did the group choose to not have any Defenders? Maybe that's totally fine and it makes sense... or maybe they're being lazy and you want to call them out on this by having something happen to the group that a Defender could have stopped. You, as the GM, decide what types of Checks you ask for, so think about what the PCs chose for their roles and give them Checks based on that. You don't need EVERY section of travel to have EACH party member make a Check, but throw something their way based on their Travel Role every now and then so that choosing that role matters.

TRAVEL ROLES ENCOUNTER TABLE

D12	Targeted Roles	Encounter	Setback or Shortcut
1	Navigator + Defender	HUGE creature attacks the group and chases after them	Setback: Deadly combat against creature
2	Scout + Defender	Incoming stampede of creatures	Setback: Skill Challenge to avoid being trampled
3	Navigator + Scout	Dangerous area with many tall trees/ ledges	Setback: Group Dex Save for damage and loss of Hit Die
4	Defender + Scout	Small creatures raid their supplies	Setback: Loss of food rations, gold, and supplies
5	Scout + Navigator	Find a way through rough, rocky, mountainous terrain	Setback: Loss of time, not able to find a way out of the mountains
6	Defender + Navigator	Dangerous area with wildlife to avoid and navigate around	Setback: Loss of time, take a detour around to avoid creatures
7	Navigator + Utility	Ground in the area becomes more unstable and difficult to navigate	Setback: Loss of time, mule gets injured, Speed reduced until healed or tended to
8	Defender + Utility	Dangerous area with creature tracks all over, mule gets scared and makes noises	Setback: Combat against a swarm of creatures
9	Utility + Defender	Pack of creatures target and attack the mule	Setback: One Round Skill Challenge to try and save the mule, or it dies
10	Utility + Scout	Mule smells something strange but needs help to find it	Shortcut: Find Goodberries & medicinal herbs
11	Utility + Navigator	Wandering NPC is fond of your mule, offers help traveling	Shortcut: Gain time, new NPC helps them travel faster
12	Scout + Utility	Branching routes of extremely narrow paths and terrain	Shortcut: Gain time, found a shorter path



PAIRED TRAVEL CHECKS

Each result on the Travel Roles Encounter Table has 2 Travel Roles associated with it, giving many different kinds of encounters from their combinations. The first role listed has an opportunity to say what they do when encounter unfolds, then the GM asks them to make a Check of some kind. If the Check is successful, then it grants ADV to the second character's subsequent Check. If the first Check is really BAD, and they fail by more than 5 (or a Natural 1), then you could give DisADV to the second Check. Based on what has been described so far from the first Check that was made, they now say what they do. The second character's Check is the MOST IMPORTANT because if they succeed, they get a Shortcut or avoid a Setback, but if they fail they get a Setback or miss out on a Shortcut.

You could also choose to have 2 possible outcomes for each result on the table, a Setback and a Shortcut that would make sense for the situation. I personally like to have the encounter be either a negative (Setback) or positive (Shortcut), and see if they get it or not. I also like to add in neutral encounters that could go one way or the other, it's up to you to balance your table how you see fit!

If you get a result where there is not a character filling the FIRST role listed, then this is considered an automatic failure. The 2nd character now makes their Check at DisADV. If there is not a character filling the SECOND role listed there are two options you can do. First is to put all of the pressure on that first character and everything rides on their one Check. You could also choose to assign DisADV to that Check, if you think performing it alone would be far more difficult. The second option is to have another player step up into that role and make a Check at DisADV to try and save the day.

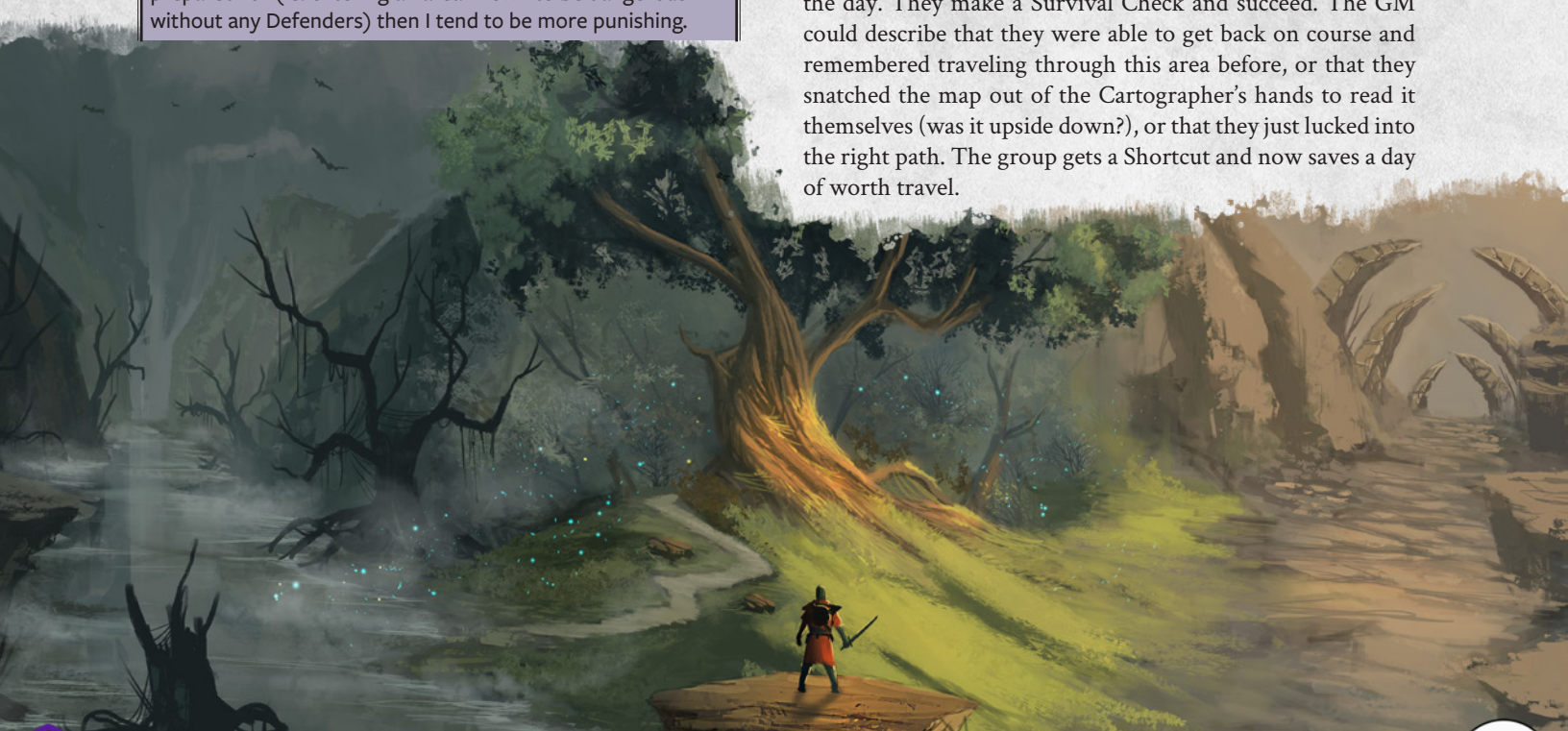
DC Tip: It's up to you to decide how difficult you want it to be for your group. If this is something that they should've prepared for (ie. entering an area known to be dangerous without any Defenders) then I tend to be more punishing.

TRAVEL ROLES ENCOUNTER TABLE

This table has an even distribution of the 4 main Travel Roles. The last 6 entries on this d12 table are with the Utility role. If you've added any additional roles, you can expand the table with more results. For example, in one of my games my players made a Utility role that's sole purpose is to take care of the pack mule (who has become the party's favorite pet). So in order to include that player in the possible results I've added in scenarios that involve the mule.

Stampede Example: After rolling a 2 on the table above, the GM describes the disturbing sounds of a strange rumbling. The Scout describes that they want to listen for where exactly this is coming from and if they feel the ground rumbling. The GM asks the Scout for a Perception Check. The Scout succeeds and is able to spot a stampede of large bull-like creatures coming their way, this gives ADV to the next Check. The GM then goes to the Defender and describes the creatures approaching and asks what they do. The Defender makes their Check with ADV because of the Scout helping earlier BUT they still fail their Check. The Defender wasn't able to get people to safety in time, stop the creatures, or do what they described. Since this was a failed attempt the group now has to go through a Skill Challenge to navigate through this stampede and try and get out. What happens if they succeed or fail at THIS is entirely up to you.

Cartographer Example: The group has a Cartographer in the Utility role and they make maps for the group during their travels. When you roll a 11 on the table (Utility + Navigator), you would describe that the directions on the map are not matching up to the environment causing confusion for the Cartographer. The GM asks for a Cartography Check from them to see how accurately they made the map for this area. The Cartographer fails the Check and the GM describes that some of the things they drew aren't matching up to the area around them. It's now the Navigator's turn to try and save the day. They make a Survival Check and succeed. The GM could describe that they were able to get back on course and remembered traveling through this area before, or that they snatched the map out of the Cartographer's hands to read it themselves (was it upside down?), or that they just lucked into the right path. The group gets a Shortcut and now saves a day of worth travel.



ROLEPLAY TRAVEL CHECKS

You could use any travel system and have these Travel Roles be “flavor” for what they’re doing, having zero mechanical presence in the game. They can shift and change what they’re doing from time to time, and it gives players a Travel ROLE to help them ROLE-play.

Once you describe the scenario and ask for the Check, you can let the players help describe what the result looks like. Let them flavor their successes and failures so that it feels like something their character would do. Offer help and guidance about what things are possible here, and over time players will get more comfortable. First, ask them generally what they are doing for the situations you throw at them, then you can follow up after they make their roll to fill in the gaps. For a failure, you can ask things like, “What does your character failing this Check look like?” or for a success, “What did you do to get a success here?”

You might use the Flat D20 Roll Method and have one person make a Travel Check with a flat d20 roll to see how the day of travel goes. Whatever the result of the d20 is would be what happens, and you can flavor what each PC is doing based on their Travel Role. Using this system can empower characters to roleplay things they might not normally and gives them mini Downtime moments for character development.

FLAT D20 ROLL METHOD

Every section of travel a PC must make a Flat d20 Roll for a result on a d20 Travel Table that you prepared beforehand. These sections of travel could represent part of a day of travel through a specific location, or even represent a group of days.

It’s up to you as the GM how often you have your players roll on the Travel Table. You might have players alternate who makes the Check until each player has done one, then you repeat the process. You could have one player roll for the whole group and that represents how the travel goes. If your group is about to travel for 4 days, maybe you fast travel through the first day or two, then roll on the table when they enter a certain section on the map, then fast travel the final day to get to their destination.

ROLL TABLES FOR THIS METHOD

You’ll see that roughly 50% of the entries on this table are a simple “Gain Time or Lose Time”, which represents a Setback or Shortcut. If one of these results happen, use the examples from the Setbacks & Shortcuts section to help describe what happens in the given situation. The other results are a simple encounter concept with a possible twist to help the GM spice up the encounter if they want.

Setbacks result in the party losing 4 hours of travel time for that day of travel. Shortcuts result in the party saving travel time, and they are able to travel an additional 4 hours for that day of travel. You can also have these be 8 hours gained or lost for more extreme results. This could result in TWO days worth of travel in one, or the opposite would result in ZERO days of travel made and they would be the exact same distance away from their destination as before. Make sure these results are used sparingly and that your description makes sense about what would cause that much of a time difference.

FLAT D20 TRAVEL TABLE

D20 Event

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Huge flying creature swoops in on the party and tries to scoop one of them up. Twist: It takes them back to their nearby nest to feed them to their babies OR drops the PC and swoops back down for another. |
| 2 | Lose time |
| 3 | Gain time |
| 4 | Trigger a trap and discover a trapped NPC. Twist: NPC is dangerous and on the run OR group of enemy NPCs come to inspect the freshly sprung trap |
| 5 | Lose time |
| 6 | Gain time |
| 7 | Find a group of adventurers fighting a creature. Twist: Their lives are in danger as they fight a deadly creature OR the adventurers kill the beast right as the PCs arrive. |
| 8 | Lose time |
| 9 | Gain time |
| 10 | Discover a group of injured NPCs that need help. Twist: They are actually a group of bandits / thieves waiting to rob the party OR they just came back from where the party is heading and have some key information. |
| 11 | Meet a traveling hunter with great survival skills, tools and knowledge. Twist: He is completely oblivious that he’s actually terrible at everything OR he offers to temporarily join them... at a cost. |
| 12 | Lose time |
| 13 | Gain time |
| 14 | Large group of a nearby kingdom’s forces crosses paths with the party. Twist: Force the PCs to pay a tax, offer aid and safe travels, OR attempt to arrest them on sight for a crime. |
| 15 | Lose time |
| 16 | Gain time |
| 17 | Meet a powerful caster traveling alone, on foot. Twist: They have magic that can solve a problem the party has OR they need something that the party has. |
| 18 | Lose time |
| 19 | Gain time |
| 20 | One PC spots a strange landmark with an outline that looks like a door. Twist: Secret hideout for an NPC with key information and abilities, OR it’s a secret treasure cache with gold and magic items. |

SKILL CHALLENGES

If you aren't familiar with Skill Challenges, please check out Chapter 3 (page 35) for the full explanation to prepare yourself for this section.

Skill Challenges can be great for treacherous travel across dangerous areas and terrain. Stormy mountains, lava canyons, and monster infested swamps would be VERY difficult to travel across. Instead of a dangerous area, maybe they have high stakes and need to make it back to town within ONE HOUR, so you start a Skill Challenge to see if they can make it! The stakes and difficulty can come from a number of things besides just a "dangerous area". Skill Challenges get across this level of CHALLENGE perfectly and establishes tension from the looming possibility of what happens if you fail!

Failures are a HUGE part of this, both the individual failures from each Check and if the group fails the Skill Challenge overall. Be prepared and know what the results are for failures, and maybe even communicate that to the players beforehand. You can give them Setbacks at EACH individual failure OR only give a Setback if they fail the whole thing. Even if they succeed at the challenge, you can also take into consideration the number of failures they have. There could be different outcomes for how the travel went based on how many failures they accumulated during the challenge.

ONE ROUND SKILL CHALLENGES

This is a faster version of a skill challenge and is my go-to for high-stakes travel. I tell the players what lies ahead of them and describe multiple difficulties they might need to overcome. Then I say, "We're now entering into a One Round Skill Challenge, what do you do?" Different PCs will step up and try to tackle different issues that I give them OR they may go for the same thing. I give them a variety of brainstorm ideas to interact with, let them go for it and be creative, and then follow the rules to apply any failures to see how well they did!

CHECKPOINT CHALLENGES

This method works great when you have specific Checkpoints in mind that you want to throw at the players to try and overcome. In order to travel from your current location to your destination you need to succeed at a certain number of Checkpoints. Each Checkpoint represents some sort of obstacle or struggle that the party has to overcome. The number of Checkpoints needed is chosen by the GM based on the difficulty and number of players. PCs describe what they do to help the travel go smoothly and make Checks against the Travel DC. Each time a PC fails a Check they get a Setback of some kind. Once they complete each Checkpoint in the challenge, they arrive at their destination.

This system uses Checkpoints throughout travel to break up the distance between the group and their destination. You could have every Checkpoint represent a day of travel or have a certain number of ATTEMPTS count as a day of travel. The longer it takes them to get through the Checkpoints the more time they waste, or the more Setbacks they encounter.

Example: The party needs 4 Checkpoints to arrive at their destination. You begin your journey in your stagecoach but quickly come across a large tree blocking your way. The Sorcerer describes setting the tree on fire to clear the path. The GM asks for a Spell Check and they fail, causing a small forest fire that takes the party 4 hours to contain. They lost 4 hours of travel that day, but moved forward to the next leg of the journey. The next day they are being stalked by a pack of creatures and the Druid wants to shapeshift into the same creature to try and scare them away. The GM laughs at this great idea and the Druid makes an Intimidation Check with ADV and succeeds, earning 1 success. The next day there is a huge crack in the ground and the wheel on the stagecoach breaks. The Artificer wants to weld some metal onto the wooden wheels to try and fix it. The GM asks for a Tinker's Tools Check and the Artificer succeeds, earning another success! This continues until the group earns 4 successes.

ROLLING METHODS

There are a lot of methods listed in this section which you can use to represent travel or the obstacles that come up during travel. Choose one of these rolling methods and how well the PCs do will determine whether they receive a Setback or Shortcut. Weave these into whatever system you use to keep things fresh and not feeling too repetitive.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Random encounter tables can really improve the travel in your games. The full section below goes into this in more detail. Regardless of what method you want to use for travel, I would recommend having SOME kind of travel table in your backpack to roll on during the parts of travel that you aren't as prepared for. These tables can fit into any travel system and can be created for an infinite amount of circumstances.

DC Tip: Recently I didn't have time to prepare anything for travel and my random travel tables carried me through months of game time. This gave me SO much less stress and SO much more confidence.



TRAVEL ROLEPLAY TABLES

This can be used with the Roleplay Challenge System in Chapter 3 (page 53). This is a great table to roll on when you need inspiration for a creature that your party can fight. They would roll on this table and then the group can describe how the fight goes in a more relaxed roleplay setting instead of actual combat. I use these for my current campaign, so make your own adjustments as needed.

TRAVEL ROLEPLAY TABLE			
1	Manticore	11	Stirge
2	Giant	12	Goblinoids, Orcs, Trolls
3	Dinosaur (Drakes)	13	Gnoll
4	Gorgon	14	Bugbear
5	Bulette	15	Kobold
6	Griffon	16	Centaur, Dryad
7	Owlbear	17	Grungs, Bullywugs
8	Dire Wolves (Worgs)	18	Hippogriff
9	Ankheg	19	Pegasus
10	Giant Spider	20	Unicorn

TENSION DICE FOR TRAVEL

Traveling by day is considered safe, as is sleeping by night with a watch rotation. This forms the basis for normal travel. For each hour of travel in the wilderness, or in other dangerous locations, add a die to the bowl. For every failed Survival Check, add a die to the bowl. When there are 6 dice in the bowl, roll them all. What happens when a 1 is rolled? Perhaps the creature that's been stalking the party catches up, or an avalanche catches the party off guard, or maybe even a random encounter is triggered. Alternatively, you can add a die for each day of travel and each night the dice in the bowl are rolled. If any 1's appear, there's an encounter that evening.

Want to use Tension Dice to keep track of time and see if the group makes it back in time? Use the dice to see if they make it. Each time a long route is taken, they get lost, or they do something cautiously, add a die to the bowl and rolling a 1 could represent a Setback or getting to their destination late.

Want to use Tension Dice to keep track of something scary that's looming over the group, like a creature attack or something stalking them? Every time they do something that is more dangerous or risky, add a die to the bowl as they frantically try to get through before it catches them (rolling a 1).

FAST TRAVEL

This might seem like a cheap thing to put on a list, but it needs to be said! I'm here to tell you that it's okay to just let them arrive at their destination! Too many times I've seen GMs turn travel into this thing that can't be avoided, but if the journey doesn't advance the plot or convey a game experience then don't force it!

I don't usually do this at the start of a campaign because part of the challenge at lower levels is just getting around the dang map! I want to get across the feeling that the world is dangerous and that the players are weak at first. Once they get more experienced, the difficulty of travel should make them feel more powerful! The world is now less dangerous in comparison, unless they go into the Swamps of Death or Doom Valley - then they better be ready for a challenge!

When my party is circling back through friendly territory, I usually let it happen instantly. However, if they're going from a safe haven toward their quest location, and I feel like there aren't any major plot points or encounters to include, I'll make the most of that time. I won't just say, "Okay, you're there!" Instead, I'll give a quick narration about where they are and what they see. If it takes more than one day, I'll include some RP moments during their Long Rests by asking, "Who's keeping watch, and is there anything y'all want to talk about?"

This gives players a chance to roleplay one-on-one while performing their watch. I have an entire new Rest System that will double the amount of RP opportunities that your group has! It's all about your players having those fireside chats during Long Rests, like I just mentioned, where your PCs have small windows of time to talk to each other privately.

That's it, no threatening encounters, or a random fight that has nothing to do with anything. If your players are progressing the story and they're in a groove, let them keep going! Give a quick narration with some flavor thrown in, and you describe their arrival to the destination!

DUNGEON COACH TRAVELING METHOD

Before my players set off toward any destination, I think about what story elements there would be on the way. What things can I CHOOSE to throw at them? It can be plot hooks that pull them deeper into the overall story, an individual character's backstory, or even a new side quest. Sometimes nothing comes to mind, so I fill in those gaps with random encounter travel tables. If there are a few things that I want to have happen but I can't decide between them, or if I want to leave it up to the dice, then I will make a custom table with those results on it. Once they get to where the potential encounter is, I roll on it and see what happens.

This is when I take a big step back and think about what goals I want to accomplish during this travel and what goals my players might have. I also think about each of the pillars of the game. Have we had combat recently? Are they heading toward combat? When was the last time they interacted with an NPC for some social encounters? When was the last time they explored in any way? Should I adjust any of these up or

down to get the right balance? These are things that I think about to get a good idea of what I want to do.

Once I'm ready and the players have their travel plan, I ask them for their marching order and Travel Roles to get a solid DEFAULT for what this trip looks like for them. This helps me to know what someone might be doing if things suddenly get crazy. I then employ ANY number of the travel methods in this book to travel from point A to point B. I enjoy all of these methods and go back and forth with them and even create new versions to fit the FEEL of travel that I'm going for. This also helps keep things interesting for myself as well.

Part of my game prep is to make sure KEY LOCATIONS have at least 3 lines of text that I prepare for each section of travel, so there's at least SOME level of description. Then I stop and decide if I want to use a travel system for potential encounters, throw a predetermined encounter at them, or just have them arrive and continue on with the game.

Here are a number of things that I might throw at my players from one session to the next:

- Ask for a single Travel Check from the Navigator for the days traveled.
- Ask the Scout for a Perception Check to see if they notice anything (person following them, shortcut, secret treasure hoard).
- Ask the Defender for an Attack Roll against a surprise attack that could either save the group or trigger a combat based on the result.
- I ask the Custom Role for some sort of Check based on whatever thing they're doing.
- Go around the table and ask everyone if they want to get anything accomplished or talk to anyone during this trip.
- Describe a dangerous section of travel with obstacles and start a Skill Challenge.
- Set the tone for why the group needs to get somewhere FAST and start a One Round Skill Challenge.
- Have 5 Checkpoints in place that the party has to complete to trudge through the poisonous swamp or arctic tundra. Each failed Check has them roll on a Negative Travel Encounter Table.
- Go around the table and have each player roll a d20 on the Neutral Random Encounter Table. We go around until each player has rolled once.
- Each player rolls a d20, and a result of an 11 or higher is a Shortcut and 10 or lower is a Setback. The players narratively describe what happened for their Setback (with my guidance if needed). The party loses 4 hours of travel time for a Setback and gains 4 hours for a Shortcut. Their descriptions are purely just for roleplay and flavor.
- I choose one of the Rolling Methods to represent an obstacle that gets in their way during travel. The better they do the more rewards, setbacks, or shortcuts they get.
- Roll on a Random Weather Table if I feel like throwing a weather curveball at them.
- Have them roll on the Travel Roleplay Table and narratively describe some cool travel montage.
- Fast forward through the travel (after the description) and ONLY run the Long Rests to give the players a chance to talk to each other or accomplish Downtime activities.

- Give players choices about different paths that could yield different results. These could be predetermined outcomes that I have prepared, or two different tables they might roll on.

If you want to always decide what your players encounter, then go for it. That's what I used to do, but over the years I've found myself introducing more randomness into the game because I feel like randomness is a core part of this game, so why not spice it up and go with it? The experience at my table has been more fun because of it! Make sure to also keep in mind what your PLAYERS like when thinking about what to put in front of them. Just like I talked about balancing the pillars of the game, make sure to keep your players engaged by thinking about what things excite them.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

This is where the group runs into something based on a system you've chosen to use. This is an entire section on encounters with tables and MANY different systems you can use to determine what kind of encounter actually happens. THIS is the place where you can customize what method you use to get across the type of travel that you want!

There are many different times in our games when we need to throw some random encounters at our party. I'm here to try and help you use these to make your life easier and turn random encounters into something your players look forward to as an exciting part of the game. These are both tips on how to run ANY random encounter, and systems to apply them at your table.

You as the GM are ALWAYS in control of what you want to put in front of your players. These tables just help spice things up for YOU, or can help you with game prep while they travel. These should take work OFF of your plate, and once you make one you can use it for an entire campaign. I have a d12 Forest Encounter Table that I've been using for an entire campaign. I will either roll on it or choose manually off the list. You can always fill in the gaps, or if they roll the same number just skip to the next one.

HOW TO RUN RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

There are many ways you can use random encounters but here are a few tips on how to get the most out of them and not run into any clunky issues.

WHEN TO USE THE TABLES? (OR NOT)

You as the GM should control the possibility of when an encounter can happen. There are times when you might just decide to have something happen and roll on a table. Maybe you have a d20 table with a 50/50 split and evens are an encounter and odds are nothing? Maybe they messed something up and now you roll a d20 to see what happens! Do NOT establish something like, "we will make an Encounter Check every Long Rest", because NOW you'll have to do that every time, since you set it out there as a rule. Sure, you can have that thought in your head, but you need to reserve the right to roll on it (or not roll on it) whenever you want. Keep



in mind you can always just CHOOSE off of the roll table as well, that's well within your GM powers!

The encounter system you use will heavily influence when you roll on these tables and what is on them. Here are some examples for times when you could make an Encounter Check:

- Specific intervals of travel between Checkpoints
- Each night's watch during a Long Rest
- When players take a Long Rest in a dungeon
- Someone rolls a Nat 1 during a tense moment
- The party is being indecisive or taking too long in a dangerous situation

There are times when I roll on a table for a moment of inspiration and I don't like what I get, or it just doesn't make sense... then I IGNORE IT! Don't feel forced to do anything you roll on a table for... unless you went into the roll with that mindset. I have even rolled on a table, not liked the first result and peeked down at the NEXT result and did that one. I hope you don't think this is cheating in any way... because these tables are designed to HELP us get inspiration for what to do in these "random" moments. We could just choose to make up EVERYTHING that happens... but that can be very difficult and takes a lot of experience and skill to pull off. So I use tables as little boosts of creativity to spice up these moments. How I get the result on the table is irrelevant. So choose from the table, roll on it, ignore it, or do a mixture of it all!

WHAT IS IN THE TABLES?

Although the word random is in the name, it shouldn't happen at random times AND it shouldn't happen against random things. Have these encounters be connected to the story and progress it forward, or open up new branches. When you create your random tables, put things in them that make sense for your world, plot, and story. As a GM you can always decide what to throw at your players. I have random tables ready at all times... but it's up to me how I use (or not use) them. Think about your party when you choose or create what you put in these tables. These are great moments to weave in parts of the story that haven't happened yet, or that the players missed from before.

Results on random tables should also not always be a negative thing. I have some tables that only have negative results or some with only positive results, but MOST tables have an even mix of both. Depending on where the group is traveling, I will roll on different tables that have more or less punishing results. Make the players question what kind of encounter this is. Is it combat with a scary creature, or is it a scared creature that needs help? Do you come across a dead body, or are they just sleeping off a hangover?

Make the encounters unique and have something going on that they can interact with and make choices about. They should also be able to choose to avoid it entirely if they want to keep going. There will be times you force encounters on them, but there should also be times where they have the freedom to choose.

NATURAL 1'S AND 20'S

You need to make it clear that a Natural 1 is TERRIBLE, and a Natural 20 is AMAZING. This should put a level of stress and excitement for the players to wonder what happens if they get either of those. Also, once those results happen, whatever happens needs to be obviously BAD or GOOD since the players KNOW this is going to happen. Save any sort of mysterious encounters for the rest of the results.

The results 2-19 are purely random and could be good, bad, or neutral. It's important that your players can't look at the result of a 3 and realize it's going to be bad, especially if you have encounters on these tables that could go either way. Having it be a mystery on 2-19 makes players have to really think, when the encounter is being described, as to if it's good or bad.

Example: The group sees a caravan with a hooded driver approaching them on the road. If they rolled a 2 for this, then they might start to assume that this is a villain of some kind... but if they rolled a 19 they might think it's no threat at all. Make sure to remove these "meta" thoughts from your players by telling them that the results between 2-19 are purely random.

Out of the 20 possible results, the 1 and the 20 positions should have those EXTREME results that the players are waiting to have happen. The other 18 results can be divided up in a number of ways. You can split those 18 in half to get 9 Setbacks and 9 Shortcuts, or mix them in with REAL encounters that you sprinkle in there.

Personally, I take those 18 results and fill them in randomly with 9 Setbacks and Shortcuts. I fill them in with something simple as a prompt for what could happen based on the environment or other story beats going on. Then I take some of those 18 spots and replace the Setback or Shortcut with a REAL encounter. I have a few encounters that are good, bad, and neutral that I sprinkle in that are connected to the story or other events that matter to the plot of the campaign or a character's backstory... or just something fun. Once that encounter is rolled and happens, I then remove it and it reverts back to the Setback or Shortcut that it was before, or I replace it with another encounter that I come up with. Overall my 18 middle results are usually 6 encounters, 6 Setbacks, and 6 Shortcuts.



ALL 3 PILLARS

Random encounters can be used in all 3 pillars of the game and your random tables can have all 3 of these types of encounters on them. The pillars could also be combined too, and there could be social and combat in the same random encounter to convince someone you're an ally. The players could find someone who wants them to help with an investigation, so it's both exploration and social.

Combat: This is the most obvious and the most common one that you see, but even with these, they should be more unique than "you fight 3 Orcs". There should be something interesting going on (see "Random 3 Die System" on page 122).

Exploration: These are GREAT for travel and a key component to how I run travel. Sometimes in a random encounter they don't discover a creature to fight or talk to, but instead find a secret passageway or mysterious chest. Don't be afraid to have an encounter be an area to explore or a piece of a puzzle.

Social: Make sure to put these into your random encounter tables. They can be positive, negative, or neutral depending on how the players interact with the NPC.

BUILDING ENCOUNTER TABLES

These can be very useful and save you a TON of prep time if they are made right and you have enough of them. You need to be able to read this encounter and know in 2 sentences or less what is going on. I want to be able to roll this at the table and be able to run it right away instead of being stuck reading a paragraph. This has to strike the right balance of improvisation and preparation to be most efficient. You might need to prepare generalized stat blocks for creatures you have on these results, or sometimes I just have a few basics of what cool stuff it can do and come up with the rest on the fly.

LOCALIZED ENCOUNTER TABLES

I usually try to have as many encounter tables as there are places the party might go. These are just nice to have in your backpocket for if you want to throw something at them to see what happens, if the game is slowing down, or if the players are stuck wondering what to do next.

Make sure you keep in mind the limitations of your encounter tables so that it makes sense WHERE you use them. If you have some results that you wouldn't want to use inside of a city, then make a different table for a city. There are some encounters that are just better suited for different locations so keep that in mind while building your own.

Location Examples: Towns, Dungeons, Desert, Arctic, Forest, General Travel, Dangerous Travel, Social Encounters, Campaign Plot Twists

THE DECK OF BIG THINGS

This is a system I use at my tables where I get 13 cards and make a table from TERRIBLE to AMAZING (Ace being terrible and King being amazing). Each result matches up to a card that has HUGE campaign altering events on them. I will ask players at different points in the campaign that I feel are appropriate... to draw a card. If they draw an ACE then the WORST thing possible happens to THEIR character and the ACE is put back into the deck. There are plenty of variations to this, but my players and I absolutely love it!

SPECIFIC VS GENERAL

If you have a Giant Sand Worm on one of your roll tables... but you are in the arctic... then why is that sandworm there? OR maybe you just put Giant Worm, and NOW you can flavor it to be whatever you want it to be. You can even re-skin it into a snake if you are in a forest. Keep things generic when you want to use a table in a wide variety of situations.

However, specific tables can feel better sometimes since it makes so much sense for that thing to be there, but can take more time to prepare for. I like to have a mix of things and have even made hybrid tables. I've done d12 tables where numbers 3-10 are generic and the only things that change from place to place are the two lowest rolls and two highest rolls. Those specifically change when the area changes, but everything else is normal.

POSITIVE VS NEGATIVE VS NEUTRAL TABLES

Most tables I create are a mix of both. I have a 1 be real bad, the highest result be real good, and everything in the middle be random or neutral. I also have tables that are either ALL positive or ALL negative to use in situations where I want to reward the players with something good, or have something ready to throw at them for a challenge or in the result of a failure.

You can also be clever in your random table design by making all of the negative results LOW, and when you want something ONLY bad to happen then roll a smaller sized die instead. So if you have a d20 (or d12) table, with negative results being low and positive results being high, then DON'T roll the max sized die and instead roll a d4 since all of those results should be pretty "negative". OR if you want to get fancy, you can even turn this same trick into a positive table as well. Roll a d4 still but only apply it to the TOP of the table. So a 1 would be the TOP result, a 2 would be the SECOND result, and so on, which lets you get ONLY positive results from that same neutral table.



EXAMPLE TABLES

Here are some examples of tables that I have used before to make my game prep easier. Each table has an explanation of when to use it.

NEUTRAL CITY TABLE

The party is walking around a city and I want it to feel more alive, so I might just randomly roll on this when I feel like it, when they walk from one district to the next, or right before or after they leave the city. This is a very casual table for me.

NEUTRAL CITY TABLE

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | The player who is currently the most vulnerable gets mugged or kidnapped. |
| 2 | A pickpocket makes off with your coin purse and accidentally drops it into the sewers before you can reclaim it. |
| 3 | A black cat follows you closely and watches your every move. There's something familiar about this creature. |
| 4 | An ominous pale blue light spreads out from the local temple, covering the city and causing unrest amongst the townsfolk. |
| 5 | An old man is approaching people and looking for help finding his dentures or glasses. He's willing to pay to get them back... or is it a trap? |
| 6 | A parade has kicked off nearby, the PCs can hear cheers and see magical lights as a large colorful collection of people march toward town hall. |
| 7 | The party bears witness to a musical showdown in the center of town between an old fiddler and a young Bard. |
| 8 | A messenger hawk swoops down and delivers a message to you. The scroll contains an encouraging letter from a friend or family member. (or something bad?) |
| 9 | The party encounters a Humanoid with some of their limbs and features replaced with those of random animals. They seem to be afraid, in a hurry, and avoiding guards at all costs. They just escaped from a mage's lab that was doing experiments just outside the city. |
| 10 | You happen upon a funeral in progress, delivering the body to a tomb in the middle of town. |
| 11 | The PCs hear a whisper from around a corner, and standing in front of a small kiosk is an elderly woman with pure white eyes. She knows the characters by name, and offers a glimpse of the future. |
| 12 | A trivia game show host calls over to the party. If they can correctly answer 3 questions about the city, they win a bag of gold! |

NEUTRAL TRAVEL TABLE

If the party wants to travel to a nearby town and I have nothing planned for it what-so-ever? I'd roll on this table for what they could have met along the way. This is usually how I would use a table like this, just to have the world feel unpredictable and alive. How I use these tables and when I roll on them depends on which Travel System I am using.

NEUTRAL TRAVEL TABLE

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Some sort of predator begins stalking the group. |
| 2 | The party finds a traveling circus duo destined for a larger city. A Halfling riding on the back of a Hill Giant offers a short and amusing ride to the youngest/smallest member of the party. |
| 3 | A group of people riding mules and wearing dark robes sees the party and approaches them. The riders are members of a cult to an unknown god, and are on a pilgrimage to spread their god's word and gain more followers. |
| 4 | What appears to be a runaway prisoner is running from town on horseback (or any other mount). They immediately try to avoid the party. |
| 5 | A rift to the Plane of Water opens up near the road and begins to slowly flood the area, making it difficult to move around. |
| 6 | A gang of highwaymen stand on the path, their leader tough and thick-skulled. They are the Slicers, and they slice and dice, unless you pay them not to. |
| 7 | You come across a crumbling watch tower at a fork in the road. The tower has a storage cellar that contains an armory of antique weapons and rotted food stores. |
| 8 | Your path branches into a grove of trees bearing delicious fruit that have a slight glow to them. (do they eat or continue back on the path?) |
| 9 | At dusk, you spot a shooting star that appears to land just over the horizon. In the meteor's crater lies the remnants of a large egg. |
| 10 | A traveling salesman with strange items crosses your path. |
| 11 | An overly helpful guide answers many questions by the party... (are they honest? Do they have false motives?) |
| 12 | On the road, you find a small bag of foreign gold coins. |



NEUTRAL REST TABLE

If I have nothing crazy planned to throw at my players when they try to rest... BUT I don't want them to just go to sleep because the day of travel was too simple and nothing exciting has happened yet... I'll roll on this table during each of the 2 night's watch shifts (see "Rest System Revised" on page 123). If the result seems fun I'll do it, if it seems out of place or too much... I'll leave it alone. OR I might roll on a Negative Rest Table instead, if I want to really spice things up!

NEUTRAL REST TABLE

- 1 Nocturnal predator attacks one of the PCs on the night's watch.
- 2 As the party lays down for some rest the first member on watch is ambushed by an adventuring party similar to themselves. Upon realizing that they have the wrong party the ambushing party apologizes profusely and leaves the area.
- 3 Kind NPC is lost and asks if they can share the campsite for the night.
- 4 Fugitive NPC on the run from someone tries to join them (to hide) at night, if they say yes the character will be found by their pursuers the next night.
- 5 Small creatures rifle through some of the PCs items (nothing of real value) and they cause chaos (no mechanical detriment).
- 6 A person seemingly possessed by something casually walks straight past the campsite with a ghostly stare.
- 7 Whoever is on watch sees a Giant Owl fly into a nearby tree, and it begins hooting loudly. Sleeping party members keep waking up to the sound of this Giant Owl (causing no detriments, but being rather annoying), which continues until it's driven away somehow, or killed.
- 8 After the sun has set, there is a glint of pink light in the woods. A single mote of light floats above a tiny pond, surrounded by a ring of mushrooms.
- 9 Three stones used to encircle the campfire come to life as baby Earth Elementals and they appear to be lost.
- 10 A man and their teenage child come out of the darkness and approach the party, and ask for their company for the night. The two were out hunting a large beast, as a rite of passage for the young one, and weren't able to get back before dark, and wish to stay safe by being near the party.
- 11 A small creature snuggles up to one of the party members as a strange new friend.
- 12 A traveling NPC stumbles upon the group with tons of valuable information or treasures.

NEGATIVE DESERT TABLE

This is when things get scary. ALL of the results on this table are dangerous and have some sort of skill challenge, combat, or trap on them for the players to fall into. I usually use this if the players messed up on a roll or choice of some kind while in this kind of terrain... OR they are knowingly entering into a very dangerous area and they have to get through THIS encounter to make it there. I don't want tables like THIS to have positive results because I need it to get across the feeling of danger on EVERY result.

NEGATIVE DESERT TABLE

- 1 A Dragon soars overhead, spotting the group and deciding that they look either very tasty or very rich. (Do you give up the magic items? Run? Use them to fight?)
- 2 On the path the party attempts to follow, a grueling forest of cacti has grown dense enough to force a new route to be found. **Setback:** Lose 1 day of travel time.
- 3 A bola whips out from seemingly nowhere, ensnaring a PC. Insect-like humanoids leap up from the sand and charge. All they want is to capture that one NPC and then run.
- 4 An oasis is on the horizon, but when the party gets close it turns out to be an illusion and trap set by snake people.
- 5 The group travels unknowingly into quicksand. The first half of the group (based on marching order) now realize they are in quicksand and a Skill Challenge starts to save them.
- 6 A massive sinkhole causes you to lose a 1/2 day of travel as you're forced to circumnavigate it.
- 7 A flock of vultures gather and circle above you wherever you go, giving away your position to other desert inhabitants.
- 8 You happen upon a strange black monolith that, when you near, appears to be attracting hordes of Undead.
- 9 Walking through the desert, the party encounters what looks to be a covered hole in the ground. After 1 round, a hungry Giant Spider jumps out and attacks the party, as others jump out of more nearby holes covered by rock and sand.
- 10 A swarm of beetles rise up out of the sand and steal all of your food before retreating underground.
- 11 The sand beneath you shifts as a Gargantuan Sand Worm tunnels through the ground, it can ONLY sense movement. (How does the group travel to safety? Do they wait it out?)
- 12 A large explosion booms in the distance and causes a cloud of smoke, sand, and debris to overtake you.



POSITIVE ARCTIC TABLE

Didn't think you would see a POSITIVE Arctic table huh? This is what I mean by not always having roll tables be something bad. Maybe you're running a rough grueling campaign in the frozen north... I would DEFINITELY have a table like this in my back pocket. You need to sometimes cheer up the players or give them something that isn't always trying to kill them. If it's been a rough session or rough bout of travel I will make a roll on THIS table instead. You might still see the players flinch in fear from the roll being behind the screen... but then one of these lovely events happens.

POSITIVE ARCTIC TABLE

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Stumble upon a massive battle between two monsters. If they help one side, the other will help them in some way. |
| 2 | A meteor crashes nearby bearing an ore with unique healing properties. |
| 3 | You come across a refreshing hot spring that could possibly restore any negative conditions or Exhaustion the party has. |
| 4 | You find a village of small arctic creatures that are very friendly and bring you into their living space for shelter. They cannot speak but are very friendly. |
| 5 | As you walk on the ice, it cracks and splits open revealing the entrance to a small temperate biome of flora and fauna. |
| 6 | The party comes across an injured arctic wolf, fox, or other animal. If they feed and heal it, it becomes friendly to the party and follows them around, possibly aiding in battle. |
| 7 | A stray dog is wandering around with some sort of liquid to drink inside a keg around its neck. The keg reads, "Drink for warmth," and the liquid inside has magical properties. |
| 8 | You encounter a snow pixie that is very interested in learning more about you in exchange for some information about the area. |
| 9 | You discover a small family of friendly Dwarves attempting to free their wagon from deep snow. The father rewards an act of goodwill by offering to sharpen weapons and polish armor. |
| 10 | The party finds a dead tree that is hollowed out. Inside is a bunch of dried food (and potentially other goodies) that has been kept fresh by the cold and shade. |
| 11 | The party sees a cave up ahead that looks to have a light coming from inside, and inside of the cave is a skeleton, with a glowing magic item resting atop it. A note beside the skeleton reads, "Fellow travelers and heroes... This shall keep you safe, so you shall carry on where I could not, through the cold." |
| 12 | The party sees a cave entrance with ice crystal stalagmites sticking out of the ground strangely. They look to be made of pure ice, but once you enter everything becomes very comfortable and warm. Magic items and shelter lay inside. |

UNIQUE LOCATION TABLE

This is a bonus table that I use to fill in the world, especially when PCs travel in a direction that I was not as prepared for. This can give some flavor and life to the travel from point A to point B and is something I glance over when I'm thinking about descriptions for the session.

UNIQUE LOCATION TABLE

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Wild Magic area with strange creatures, plantlife, and structures |
| 2 | Winding river with a bridge |
| 3 | Ruined structure with overgrown plant life |
| 4 | Broken down transportation |
| 5 | Water well or fountain (abandoned?) |
| 6 | Markings of some kind of runes and glyphs |
| 7 | Secret passageway towards something sketchy |
| 8 | Tall ominous tower |
| 9 | Sacred location (good or evil?) |
| 10 | Beautiful scenery that is an illusion |
| 11 | Lair, cave, or nest of a large monster |
| 12 | Remnants of a massive battlefield |

D12 RANDOM ENCOUNTER SYSTEM

Everyone at the table rolls a d12 Encounter Die. A random encounter happens if any of the player's Encounter Die matches the result of the GM's Encounter Die.

This system has so many things I love about it and so many things that you can customize to use it in a variety of ways. This system involves the players' rolls in the encounter and has a level of mystery on if there was a match or not. After you make that Encounter Check and start describing what happens, the players won't know if you are describing something good... bad... or nothing at all and they can continue on their way.



ENCOUNTER DIE

The standard size for an Encounter Die is a d12, but you can change this depending on a number of variables. You can represent MORE danger by decreasing the size of the Encounter Die. The smaller it gets the higher chance there is for an encounter. You can have PCs roll more or less dice on the Encounter Check based on other variables or checks made beforehand.

One of my favorite things about this system is being able to change the dice, especially if players are trying to rest somewhere dangerous, it makes them understand how dangerous it is and maybe think twice before doing it!

- Traveling through a dangerous area? The Encounter Die is now a d8 instead.
- Trying to rest inside of a dungeon (crazy players)! The Encounter Die is now a d4.
- The Paladin fails their Stealth Check before the GM asks for an Encounter Check? They now roll TWO d12's since they failed, giving them a higher chance to match the GM.
- The group is traveling through the Ranger's "favored terrain". The Ranger doesn't even roll ANY dice during the Encounter Check, lowering their chance for an encounter.

You can also roll more Encounter Dice for whatever reasons you come up with as well. Maybe each time there is a failure of some kind during an adventure you add 1 Encounter Die to the pool. Just keep in mind all the variables you have to change with how many dice everyone rolls and what size of dice they use.

Example: Players make a group Stealth Check. Those who pass the Check don't roll an Encounter Die, and those who fail the Check roll 2 Encounter Dice. If everyone succeeds on this check, then there's no chance for an encounter, but for each person that fails there's TWICE the chance.

D12 MATCHING RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLES

Something you can do to take this system to the next level is to use D12 Random Tables when you use this D12 Encounter System. What happens when you do this is that players make their Encounter Check and roll their d12... if they match the GM's d12... then THAT number is the result on the roll table. There is no need to take any more time to make another roll, it just happens automatically.

When creating D12 Encounter Tables with this system keep all of the BAD things on the lower side and the GOOD things on the high side of the d12 list. This makes sure that when you lower the size of the die from a d12, to a d10, d8, d6, or d4 that the results are more dangerous too. This should also make sense because if they're traveling in a dangerous enough area, the encounters there probably would be all "bad" at that point. You don't have to do this, but you should at least keep this concept in mind when creating tables that you are going to use in this way.

You do NOT have to use a d12 table for this. There are times that I use other types of roll tables or have a predetermined outcome on what happens if players match. For travel I have my own D20 Travel Tables that I will roll on after a player matches me. I've had players sneak through a Dragon's den and tell them if they match me on the Encounter Die... the Dragon finds them first and gets a surprise round! Talk about tension at a table!

MATCHING ENCOUNTER DIE

Another thing you can do is to TARGET the player that matched you. So the encounter says a giant bird swoops down and grabs one of the PCs? Guess which PC I'm going to choose? The one who matched me! This adds a really fun "meta" dynamic to these rolls.

What happens if PLAYERS match each other? That's your call! That could also trigger an encounter, but that would increase the chances of it happening AND take control out of your hands a little bit too.

OPEN VS SECRET ENCOUNTER CHECKS

Open rolls are when the GM rolls the dice in front of the screen, and secret rolls are made behind the screen. I use both methods depending on the situation and what I'm wanting to accomplish.

Secret Rolls: I usually roll my Encounter Check in secret because it creates a moment of tension when I describe what happens next, as the players listen carefully for what may or may not happen. As GMs we have the right to choose if an encounter happens or not, so I would usually just not ask for a Check. There are times however that the PCs are expecting you to ask them for an Encounter Check, or maybe you just want to try and add more tension to the moment. If you roll your dice behind the screen, the PCs won't know the result and then you can choose to have an encounter or not. In general, if you want to have this much control over the moment then don't ask for the roll and just keep the game moving. I love the moment of tension at the game table, for myself too, and I'm usually straight up with the dice 99% of the time, but at least you can intervene on those rare moments if they happen.

Open Rolls: If there is something BIG on the line and they REALLY don't want an encounter to happen (like the Dragon finding them example). I will FIRST roll my Encounter Die out in the open...the players will see the result that they DON'T want to match... and know what they are trying to avoid. Knowing the number then gives the moment of excitement right when the dice hits the table instead of waiting for the GM's description. I've even had each player roll one at a time after knowing the result of my roll to see if they made it through or not.



RANDOM 3 DIE SYSTEM

Roll 3 dice that correspond to 3 different tables (Creature, What is it Doing, Twist) and instantly generate a truly random encounter.

This system has 3 separate tables, but when you combine them together you get some pretty amazing results that have never let me down. I will provide my own below but I encourage you to modify these as you like (especially the Creature Table).

Each of the 3 tables in this system can be interchanged from game to game. If you travel to an arctic area, you might want to switch out the Creature Table with a more arctic-themed table. If you enter into a scary dungeon ONLY filled with ghosts you might switch the Creature Table AND What is it Doing Table with more haunted and spooky options.

Each of these tables can also be as short or as long as you want. If you want to add some of your own options, then fill out the table, but if you don't like some, then shorten the table. I personally like the d12, d10, and d8 system because I can easily see WHICH number matches up with EACH die. I also have a huge version of each behind my screen for when I want to use this method.

You can also use these 3 tables as inspiration to create an encounter. These are great launching points and things to think about for generating encounters. You could also only roll on PART of these and choose the rest. Maybe you KNOW that you want them to run across an NPC from the story, but you roll on the other 2 tables and go from there.

CREATURE TABLE

This is what the main creature of the encounter is. This table purposefully does NOT say how many... because that is up to you to decide based on ALL of the factors involved. Is this going to turn into combat? What are the stats of these things? I have stat blocks prepared for some of these that I keep on index cards behind my GM screen. I keep them generalized because I have no idea when these encounters may or may not happen, so I balance them on-the-fly, which is its own skill.

I would encourage you to also put things specific to your campaign and adventure in here too. I incorporated a neutral faction in my creature list and it was interesting to see how they would come up in the world. I like to be able to interpret these rolls and go with what the dice are telling me.

This table has been generalized from something I would normally use at my table so that you can fill in the blanks from here.

d12	Type of Creature
1	Scariest Single Monster you can think of or the BBEG
2-3	Monster Creatures
4-5	Magic Caster (Good or Evil, you choose)
6-7	Adventuring Party (good or bad)
8-9	Exotic Humanoid Creatures (good or bad)
10-11	Humanoid Creatures (good or bad)
12	Absolute best thing they could run into

DC Tip: When you fill this out make sure you have more neutral options ready for anything that has (good or bad) in there so that you can adapt and change them on-the-fly.

WHAT IS IT DOING TABLE

These are broad enough to give you a general idea of what this mystery creature is doing, which can also change based on it being intelligent or feral. Something like "Hiding" could be interpreted many different ways. Is it scared? Is it waiting for the right moment to strike? Does it know the PC's and doesn't want to be spotted? A bat hiding would look very different from a mole or a bandit doing so.

WHAT IS IT DOING TABLE

1	Guarding (special thing)
2	Hunting / Searching
3	Setting a Trap (for someone else?)
4	Following Someones Orders
5	Healing Wounds
6	Lost / Wandering
7	Eating / Setting up Camp
8	Sleeping / Hiding
9	Celebrating / Playing
10	Being Attacked

TWIST TABLE

Something is not as it seems. When I first used this system there were only 2 tables, but after adding this one, it's now my favorite table and can make these encounters so much more unique! You can choose to ignore this if it doesn't make sense, would be too strange, or if you just can't think of how to incorporate it. Let this flavor the encounter or be something to surprise the PCs with.

TWIST TABLE

1	Looks Good, but is BAD
2	Sick (Rot)
3	Broken Gear / Body
4	Trapped / Tangled / Captured
5	Needs Help from PCs
6	Terrain / Fire / Water
7	Looks Bad BUT is Good
8	Offer to help / join PCs



PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

So once you roll all 3 of these dice and look at each matching result... you now have to make sense of it all. The below example I truly did roll randomly and then wrote it into this book to try and demonstrate how this works. Make sure you are thinking outside the box here and don't try and take things too literally. Go with where your mind takes you as you try to do this. I challenge you to do one yourself, right now, and see what you would do. These happen LIVE at the table and you need to come up with what happens in a matter of seconds.

Example Rolls:

- Creature (9): Exotic Humanoid Creature
- What is it Doing (5): Healing Wounds
- Twist (1): Looks Good, but is BAD

So my mind immediately goes to a Dragonborn (Exotic Race) who has some extreme wounds on his body (from the Healing Wounds)... BUT he looks good, but is BAD... so there is some level of betrayal here. I now think that those wounds he has are FAKE and an illusion. So this Dragonborn is a spellcaster now, but won't reveal that, and now I'm even wondering if they are even a Dragonborn, or if THAT is also an illusion. Now all is left is to think about motive... which requires a campaign for me to be running. I could say that he is looking for a magic item the group has and is going to wait for the right moment to swipe it! Think about the lore of your world, the backstory of your players, and the campaign as a whole to help fill in the gaps!

REST SYSTEM REVISED

Your party has dealt with the randomness of encounters, traveled through trials and challenges... now it is time to rest! One of my favorite parts of the game is rest. You can watch your party have conversations between themselves, let them accomplish mini downtime tasks, and even attack them with creatures in the night.

PROBLEMS WITH REST

Whether it's taking an hour just to catch your breath or being able to sleep off an attack that nearly cleaved your soul from your body, the mechanics of a Short Rest and Long Rest have never felt quite right. Below are some of the issues I have with the current rest system.

SHORT REST

Not So Short Rest: A Short Rest is intended to be a short period of time where you can take a break to regroup on strategy, spend Hit Dice to recover HP, or regain expended resources (Ki Points, Pact Magic, etc.). However, it wouldn't realistically (even in fantasy) require a full hour to catch your breath and patch up some wounds. This can usually be accomplished with a shorter 10 minute rest. Taking a 10 minute break in the middle of a hostile environment is more believable than taking 1 uninterrupted hour of rest.

Solution: Make a Short Rest 10 minutes.

LONG REST

Magic Reset Button: A Long Rest is intended to be a full night's rest to recover your energy from one day to another. It involves sleeping, and may include light activities such as reading, eating, or dressing. However, a Long Rest causes a character to recover from grievous wounds and near death experiences as if healed by powerful magic - something a one night's rest shouldn't be able to undo. Since a Long Rest is so powerful, players will often attempt a Long Rest in the most unlikely of places, such as at the doorstep of a boss monster. A well-timed Long Rest can dissolve any tension in a story and trivialize most adventuring days.



Solution: Long Rests no longer grant a complete recovery of all HP. Instead, an even longer rest can be taken that fully restores your character.

Solitary Watch: Another challenge with a Long Rest is that it requires 6hrs of sleep and another 2hrs of light activity such as standing watch (8hrs total). On paper this looks fine, but in order to take a Long Rest outside of a place of safety, the party must take watch rotations in order to ensure they aren't surprise attacked while sleeping (which can completely kill the entire party). This usually means 4 characters will break up the 8hrs into 4 shifts of 2hrs each, which means each character will be standing watch alone without an opportunity for Downtime or roleplay. This is a huge missed opportunity for character conversation and roleplay at the end of an adventuring day.

Solution: Break up a Long Rest into fewer watches so party members can be paired up to create opportunities for roleplaying.

DC Tip: There's also a Variant Rule on Death Save failures NOT resetting until you take a Long Rest. This is a very simple way to make those Death Saves matter and to have PCs be worried if they get any.



DUNGEON COACH REST SYSTEM

This section covers my changes to the rest system which create opportunities for meaningful roleplay, and maintain story tension and pacing. With each rest system presented, there are also variant resting options, DC Tips, and breakdowns that give you knobs you can use to customize these resting options to suit the kind of gameplay you want to run at your table.

Feel free to increase or decrease the number of different kinds of rests the party can take in a 24hr period, or change the resources the party recovers when completing certain rests. You could allow the party to regain a small portion of expended spell slots, Sorcery Points, or magic item charges when they complete a Short Rest.

ACTIVITIES

No Activity: Sleeping, meditating, or contemplating while idle.

Light Activity: Non-strenuous activity that requires little effort, such as talking, reading, eating, bandaging wounds, and standing watch.

Strenuous Activity: Any activity that requires physical exertion, such as traveling, foraging, exercising, training, or casting spells.

Dangerous Activity: Any activity that causes extreme injury or stress, such as engaging in combat with a hostile creature.

SHORT REST

Short Rest: A period of No Activity or Light Activity and is at least 10 minutes long. You can spend 1 or more Hit Die, up to your maximum, at the end of a Short Rest. For each Hit Die spent in this way, roll the die and add your Constitution Modifier to the result. You regain HP equal to the total (minimum of 0). You can decide to spend an additional Hit Die after each roll. You can take 2 Short Rests per 24hr period.

Variant Rule: Quick Rest

In this alternative rest system, a Short Rest remains unchanged from its original design, at 1hr long. Additionally, a Quick Rest is introduced to offer the 10 minute rest period that allows characters to expend Hit Dice to regain HP. The benefit of this alternative rule is that abilities that recharge upon completing a Short Rest won't be affected by taking a 10 minute rest. Ki Points, Pact Magic, and other abilities will still require taking a 1hr Short Rest to recharge, but characters that only need to spend Hit Dice to regain HP can do so by taking a 10 minute Quick Rest.

Quick Rest: A period of Light Activity at least 10 minutes long. You can spend a number of Hit Dice up to your Prof. Bonus at the end of a Quick Rest, not to exceed your maximum. For each Hit Die spent in this way, roll the die and add your Constitution Modifier to the result. You regain HP equal to the total (minimum of 0). You can decide to spend an additional Hit Die after each roll. You can take 1 Quick Rest per 24hr period.

Short Rest: A period of No Activity or Light Activity at least 1hr long. You can spend 1 or more Hit Die, up to your maximum, at the end of a Short Rest. For each Hit Die spent in this way, roll the die and add your Constitution Modifier to the result. You regain HP equal to the total (minimum of 0). You can decide to spend an additional Hit Die after each roll. You can take 2 Short Rests per 24hr period.

DC Tip: This can still lead to the issue of certain players pushing for a longer "1hr rest" to get those abilities back, but I offer this as a variant for those who want to limit the characters that might be "too strong" if you give them those cooldowns back too easily. I personally would just modify those abilities to maybe have Warlocks get HALF their spell slots back, or Monks get HALF their Ki Points back on these quicker 10 minute Short Rests.



LONG REST

Long Rest: A period of 4hrs of Light Activity and 4hrs of No Activity, taken in either order, for a total of 8hrs of Downtime. If one of the 4hr periods is interrupted by any amount of Strenuous Activity you must begin that 4hr period again.

At any point during a Long Rest, you can spend Hit Dice following the same rules as a Short Rest. At the end of the first 4hr period of the rest, you gain the benefits of a Short Rest and regain a number of spent Hit Dice equal to half your total (minimum of 1 die). At the end of the second 4hr period of the rest, you gain the full benefits of completing the Long Rest. You can take 1 Long Rest per 24hr period.

If you have any levels of Exhaustion, you can spend both 4hr periods doing No Activity to recover 1 level of Exhaustion. Alternatively, you can choose to spend both 4hr periods performing Light Activity, however if you do, you must make a **DC 10** Constitution Save. **Failure:** You suffer 1 level of Exhaustion. Each subsequent Long Rest you take in this way causes the DC to increase by 5. Taking a Full Rest resets the DC to 10.

DC Tip: The first and second 4hr periods of a Long Rest can be broken up into 2 watch groups. Party members can volunteer for 1 of the 2 watches and spend time role playing with the other party members that share their watch. This is a great opportunity to roleplay how the events of the adventuring day affected their characters, or how an impending mission, quest, or danger weighs on them.

Variant Rule: Half Rest

This variant resting option allows you to take a 4hr rest called a Half Rest, which is equivalent to half the time of an 8hr Long

rest. Taking a Half Rest may be more favorable than a Long Rest when you don't have the opportunity to take 8hrs of rest, but need more than the benefits a Short Rest can offer.

Half Rest: A 4hr period of Light Activity or No Activity. If the rest is interrupted by any amount of Strenuous Activity you must begin it again. When you complete a Half Rest you also gain the benefits of a Short Rest. If the entire rest is spent performing Light Activity, you regain a number of spent Hit Dice equal to half your total (minimum of 1 die). If the entire rest is spent performing No Activity, you recover a number of expended spell slots with a combined level that is equal to or less than half your level, but none of the slots can be 6th-level or higher. You can take 2 Half Rests per 24hr period. If you take a Half Rest, you can't benefit from a Long Rest in the same 24hr period.

Example: A 4th-level Cleric can recover up to 2 levels worth of spell slots: either one 2nd-level or two 1st-level spell slots.

DC Tip: I used the exact rules from the Wizard's Arcane Recovery feature, and it worked perfectly. But wait, what about Wizards!? That's their ability, and won't they feel less unique if everyone gets it? This is one of the more significant complaints I get in the comments about certain homebrews. My response is that I would either not use this or tweak it if there was a Wizard in the group. Since none of the players in that group were Wizards, then it didn't matter! Steal from other class mechanics that aren't represented in your group. If you add in a new character (or there's a death and you bring in a new one) you can always re-evaluate the rules you are using then and make tweaks accordingly. Keep things like that in mind when selecting which homebrew rules your group uses!



Variant Rule: Max Hit Dice Healing

When spending your Hit Die during a Long Rest you heal for the maximum amount on the die. So a d10 would always heal you for (10 + Constitution Modifier). This both speeds up the time it takes to perform a Short Rest, and gives back a little more healing potential since you don't let them get a FULL heal from a Long Rest, which lets them have some guaranteed healing when resting in this way. You could also extend Max Hit Dice Healing to Short Rests as well.

Variant Rule: Max Hit Dice Recovery

In the same way as above you might want to let your players recharge ALL of their Hit Dice during a Long Rest since they no longer get the benefits of a full heal back up to their HP maximum. This can be very wearing on the party (which is the point though), you could give half of the Hit Dice back after the first 4hrs and the other half back on the second 4hrs. They still have to ROLL to get the health back, but this just gives them their Hit Dice back easier.

FULL REST

Full Rest: A 24hr or longer period (determined by the GM based on the pacing of the story). It must be spent in an area of safety, such as an inn, where you can eat well, rest, and recover. If the Full Rest is interrupted by any amount of Dangerous Activity you must begin it again.

At the end of a Full Rest, you gain the benefits of a Long Rest, recover all levels of Exhaustion, you regain all spent Hit Dice, your HP maximum is restored, you regain all lost HP, and you gain one or more of the following benefits (determined by the GM) for the next 24hrs:

- Gain Temp HP equal to twice your Prof. Bonus.
- Gain Temp HP equal to your level.
- Gain Temp HP equal to twice your level.
- Gain ADV on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution Saves.
- Gain ADV on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma Saves.
- Gain ADV on all Saves.
- Benefits last for an additional 24hrs.

DC Tip: If a Full Rest is interrupted by Dangerous Activity, feel free to award the party with the benefits of the Full Rest if you feel the amount of time they've spent resting warrants the reward. For example, if the party has been resting for 2 days into what was planned to be a 5 day Full Rest period, and combat ensues, a partial or complete reward of the Full Rest benefits would be perfectly acceptable.

Resting in Dangerous Locations

Shorter Rests: The Dungeon Coach Rest System also helps address the challenge GMs may face when the party decides to attempt a Long Rest in an area of danger, such as inside a villain's dungeon. The new 10 minute Short Rest (or Quick Rest) better allows the party to rest for just a few minutes and regain some health, without giving their enemies an hour of preparation for the next encounter. However, if the party really wants to attempt an 8hr Long Rest in the middle of a dungeon, they can at least break it up into two 4hr windows (or a Half Rest for one 4hr window), which will allow them

to benefit from a partial rest in the (very likely) event they are attacked during the rest.

Enemy Attacks: It's a lot easier to navigate what happens if a rest gets interrupted with this system. If the first section of 4hrs gets interrupted with combat then you would start from 0 and still need 8hrs. If the second section of 4hrs gets interrupted then you only need to restart the last 4hrs. It's also clearly outlined what you get back at what times, AND there is something you get at the halfway point so you don't feel like it was all a waste. These 2 halves of the rest are also a great way for you to let your players know that if they rest inside dangerous locations you will be making random Encounter Checks at each of the 4hr increments. This might be enough to discourage your players from resting at times or locations you don't want them to, and is just another tool you have control over.

DC Tip: You can also just handwave this if it's not a big part of the pacing or vibe that you are going for. You could just describe that they all settle back down after the interruption, a few more hours pass, and they all finish their Long Rest. You don't always have to be hardcore with the rules, if that's not the main focus. On the other hand, if you're really wanting to make them sweat and feel drained, I've kept interrupting the party at EVERY night's watch. Especially if they are in a place that makes no sense to try and rest in.

WHY USE FULL REST?

Full Rests should be viewed as Downtime whether it's just for a day, a week, a month, or more. There is a WIDE variety of circumstances when you would "require" the group to take them, and some are listed off below. It's up to you as the GM to decide what would make sense for the pacing of the story and make sure to weave these in every now and then for players to have Downtime moments.

How Long?

The answer is usually just a "few days". Once my players come back to town after an adventure I just simply say, "You all can take a few days here to get a Full Rest, what do you do?" I also could say things like, "To be fully rested you'd need to take some Downtime here for 1 week." This gives them an incentive to take the Full Rest time that you have allotted or choose to go right back out into something else. Play around with this choice but also make sure you aren't running your party into the ground with adventure after adventure, give them some time to recover and let time pass to accomplish things that tend to take longer, either as a group or individually.

What Things Affect Full Rests?

- What is the pacing of the story?
- Is there something pressing that needs to be handled?
- Can the plot wait, so your characters can enjoy some leisure activities?
- How big of a fight were they just in?
- How long was the fight?
- How draining was it?
- What kind of players do you have?



Full Rest Buffs

There are many options that give incentive and cool rewards towards Full Rests. Temp HP is one way of doing it but here are some other ideas:

- Abilities or magic items that only recharge on a Full Rest.
- ADV on Saves of some kind for a number of days after they complete their Long Rest (this works similar to *Heroes' Feast*).
- Give them points that they can spend on things like skill, tool, or language proficiencies (this would need to be another system to build out based on what things you'd want them to have).
- Give them rewards from the things they accomplish during the Full Rest and THAT would be their "reward".

Variant Rule: Extended Adventures

If you are out adventuring for a certain period of time (again, GM chosen) then you can make them FEEL this "wear and tear" on their bodies by having them make a Constitution Save at the end of each Long Rest. **Failure:** They suffer a level of Exhaustion.

Make sure to give them a heads up on this or make it something they know about beforehand. If my players are about to head out into some dangerous type of terrain, I might say, "You all have about 7 days before you'd need to get back to town and take a Full Rest. After 7 days you'll be making Con Saves for Exhaustion each day, from the brutal elements of this terrain." This is just one more tool or incentive to add pressure and stakes to their travels and have time MATTER.

Variant Rule: Hit Dice Erosion

This is more of a tool than a variant rule. You can implement mechanics in your world that temporarily reduce the maximum amount of Hit Dice a character has. This is similar to Exhaustion but instead targets their vitality instead of their rolls. I have used this during long stretches of travel to have their failed Checks lower their Hit Dice pool, representing the party being worn down from the travel.

This doesn't have to just be from travel. You can also have monsters with abilities that reduce their Hit Dice maximum, making the adventure scarier over time as the pool keeps being lowered. Healing gained from the Hit Dice still works in the same way but you just have less of them to use until you take a Long Rest... or even a Full Rest.

DC Tip: You as the GM have control on what would be considered a Full Rest. I've had creative players want to sacrifice an entire day of travel to set up camp and get a Full Rest. There have also been times where I shoot this type of thing down if it doesn't make sense or I want things to be more punishing. You can also insert "rest stops" or other small towns or "safe places" to let your players recover if you don't want to force them to return back to a city.

HOME BREW DISCLAIMER

You might have to make tweaks based on what your Short Rests give to your characters. If you think that some things would be too powerful... then adjust as needed. For instance, Warlocks get back most of their abilities on a Short Rest, and some have thought this would be "broken". Personally, I feel like this makes Warlocks feel WAY better to play and I haven't seen them become overpowered from getting their TWO spell slots back any easier. Don't be afraid to change what an ability's cooldown rests are. You can change an ability from resetting on a Short Rest to resetting on a Long Rest, or from Long Rest to a Full Rest.

These rules are not set in stone. They should be adjusted to fit your style of play and the composition of your party. Want magic to feel less common? Reduce the number of slots you can recover on a Long Rest. Want to have Exhaustion play a more significant role in your campaign? Have the Full Rest only recover 1 level of Exhaustion per x number of days. Use these rules as a starting point and build your setting around the atmosphere that you want it to have.

REST SUMMARY

ACTIVITIES

No Activity: Sleeping, meditating, or contemplating while idle.

Light Activity: Non-strenuous activity that requires little effort, such as talking, reading, eating, bandaging wounds, and standing watch.

Strenuous Activity: Any activity that requires physical exertion, such as traveling, foraging, exercising, training, or casting spells.

Dangerous Activity: Any activity that causes extreme injury or stress, such as engaging in combat with a hostile creature.

SHORT REST (SR)

Duration: 10 minutes of No Activity or Light Activity

Benefits: Spend Hit Dice and gain back Short Rest cooldowns

Limits: Maximum 2 SR per 24hr period.

LONG REST (LR)

Duration: 4hrs of No Activity and 4hrs of Light Activity

Benefits: Spend Hit Dice

• **First 4hrs:** Regain 1/2 your Hit Dice Pool

• **Second 4hrs:** Regain all spell slots and all other Long Rest cooldowns

Limits: Maximum 1 LR per 24hr period, must have No Activity for 8hrs to reduce Exhaustion by 1 level

FULL REST

Duration: 24hrs to 1 week (GM discretion)

Benefits: Regain all Hit Dice, recover all spell slots, recover from all levels of Exhaustion, and gain Full Rest boon

Limits: Must be done in a place of safety, usually in a bed



REST ROLES SYSTEM

During a rest, a PC can fulfill a Rest Role to gain special benefits during the rest or when the rest ends. A PC can only fulfill 1 role at a time unless stated otherwise. The activities of a Rest Role are considered Light Activity for the purposes of resting. If a Rest Role calls for a Check, the GM decides which attribute can be used to make the Check.

HOW TO RUN REST ROLES

This system gives players different things they can do during a Long Rest to gain some sort of advantage. Instead of focusing on the mechanics, you can use these simply as roleplay ideas to give your players an idea of what they could potentially DO during these nights of rest. Let your players start to get creative with what they want to do during rest and you can create custom Rest Roles of your own.

The DC for these Checks can increase for a variety of reasons that make sense to you, but the default here is DC 10. These players are choosing to spend a big chunk of time doing something that they want to do, I don't want it to be too difficult to be successful at this action. You should heavily modify these rules based on your party's level and the types of difficulties or advantages you want them to be able to perform. The numbers and DCs below are a solid baseline to start from, but you know how hard you want to be on your PCs and how challenging you want to make things.

DUNGEON COACH APPROACH

For myself I always use the Rest System in the previous section and with that I want to restrict the time frame on what can be accomplished by these rules. So since each Long Rest gives a character 4hrs of No Activity and 4hrs of Light Activity, I have ALL of these Rest Roles take 4hrs to complete. Each Long Rest you can perform 1 Rest Role and must do No Activity for the other half. If you choose to perform 2 Rest Roles then you must make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** You suffer a level of Exhaustion.

I find this to be a perfect fit for the two 4hr blocks during a Long Rest. The features below grant light buffs that the PCs can take advantage of and aren't too much to where they go out of their way to use them too frequently. I don't like having these be available during a Short Rest (or 1hr) because I find players would start to use these too much for those little buffs all the time. For myself I like to tie these directly with Long Rests to make it a bit more of a time commitment to gain the benefits from. BUT if you run 1hr Short Rests, then this might be a great thing for you to add in for players to do during that time, or for players who don't need a Short Rest and can instead perform a Rest Role.

REST ROLES

ALCHEMIST

Using Alchemist's Supplies, you can spend 1hr attempting to make an alchemical liquid. Make a **DC 10** Alchemist's Supplies Check. **Success:** You create 1 vial of caustic liquid that lasts for 24hrs. You can use a Bonus Action to throw the vial at a creature within 20ft of you that you can see as an improvised weapon. Make a Ranged Weapon Attack against the target. On a hit, the target takes **2d6** Acid damage.

APPRAISER

While resting, you can observe and deduce information about some of the items you have acquired. During a Long Rest, you can choose to gain 1 of the following benefits of your choice:

- You gain ADV on the next Check you make to determine the value of an item or assortment of gems in your possession.
- You can make a Check to determine the likely purpose, craftsmanship, or function of a magic item (This can be in the form of a clue from the GM).
- You can ask the GM 1 question about a subject as if you cast *Commune*.

CARTOGRAPHER

By note taking and careful observation, an area can be mapped in detail. This effort to map a region can be a great boon for anyone navigating an unmapped area. Using Cartographer's Tools, you can spend 1hr attempting to correctly map an area you've traveled through in the last 24hrs. Make a **DC 10** Survival or Cartographer's Tools Check. **Success:** You successfully map out the land that you have traveled during this day of travel. If you travel through an area while possessing an accurate map of the region, you make Survival Checks with ADV to locate landmarks and avoid becoming lost.

DC Tip: You could also have players only be able to fast travel through locations that they have mapped, reduce the amount of days it takes to travel through these locations, or give them less of a chance to encounter danger.

COOK

While basic rations can sustain your body, only a hearty, well-prepared meal can sustain your heart and soul. Using Cook's Utensils, you can spend 1hr preparing a nourishing meal from 5lbs or more of edible ingredients (see Forager Rest Role). Make a **DC 10** Cook's Utensils Check. **Success:** You create 1 Nourishing Ration for every 5lbs of ingredients used preparing the meal. A creature can consume a Nourishing Ration during the rest in which it was produced. When consumed, the creature regains a number of expended Hit Die equal to 1/2 its Prof. Bonus. **Failure:** The ingredients are consumed and a meal is created, but does not grant any restorative properties when consumed.



CRAFTER

You can attempt to sharpen a weapon or reinforce a suit of armor. The type of Artisan's Tools used and the associated DC is based on the type of material used in the crafting of the weapon or armor: Smith's Tools for metal, Woodcarver's Tools for wood, Leatherworker's Tools for leather or hide, and Weaver's Tools for cloth. Using an Artisan's Tool of your choice, you can spend 1hr attempting to improve the effectiveness of a weapon or a suit of armor of your choice. Make a **DC 15 Artisan's Tools Check**. **Success:** The weapon gains a +1 bonus to damage during the next encounter, or the armor turns the next Critical Hit against the wearer into a normal hit.

ENTERTAINER

Story tellers, musicians, poets, comedians, and entertainers maintain their companions' good spirits during long, difficult travels. You can attempt to entertain your companions through music, story, dance, or a similar medium. When you do, choose up to 8 creatures within 30ft of you that can see or hear you and understand you (which can include yourself) and make a **DC 10 Performance Check**. **Success:** Each chosen creature gains Temp HP equal to your Prof. Bonus.

FORAGER

During long excursions into the deep wilderness it can be nearly impossible to bring all the provisions and supplies needed for adventuring. You are able to hunt and gather to fill in any gaps in the party's rations. While in the wilderness, you can spend 1hr foraging or hunting for food. Make a **DC 10 Survival Check**. **Success:** You gather 10lbs of edible ingredients, plus an extra 5lbs for each point above 10 on your Check. Alternatively, you can choose to forage for materials used to create potions or poisons.

IDLE

You take this entire rest and stay completely idle to recover as much as you can. Make a **DC 10 Constitution Save** to let your body rest and recover. **Success:** Recover from one additional level of Exhaustion.

LOOKOUT

You can dedicate yourself to keeping an eye out for danger and are ready to alert the group of anything suspicious. Take a watchful stance and maintain a sense of readiness for the duration of your watch. Make a **DC 10 Perception Check**. **Success:** For the duration, you and allies within 60ft of you cannot be surprised and gain ADV on Initiative Checks until your watch ends or you cease to lookout for danger.

DC Tip: Using my Rest System this would be someone choosing to keep watch against danger instead of doing another Rest Role. These last for 4hrs (half the Long Rest) and then they stop their watch to do No Activity for the other half of the Long Rest.

MEDIC

Groups accompanied by healers that can safely and effectively tend to serious injuries have a greater chance of survival in dangerous environments. You can choose up to 2 creatures within 30ft of you (which can include yourself) and make a **DC 10 Medicine Check** to tend to their wounds. **Success:** Each chosen creature regains an amount of HP equal to your Prof. Bonus.

MENTOR

You can teach another creature about a Skill you've mastered. You can attempt to mentor another creature during a Long Rest you share together. The other creature must also spend their Long Rest on this Rest Role. Make a **DC 10 Skill Check** with a Skill of your choice that you have proficiency in. **Success:** The creature gains a bonus to Checks it makes with that Skill equal to half its Prof. Bonus until the next Long Rest.

POISONER

Using a Poisoner's Kit, you can spend 1hr attempting to make poison. Make a **DC 10 Poisoner's Kit Check**. **Success:** You create 1 vial of poison that lasts for 24hrs. You can use a Bonus Action to apply the poison to a Slashing or Piercing weapon (or 3 pieces of ammunition). On a hit, the attack deals an extra **1d4** Poison damage. Once applied, the poison lasts for 1 minute before breaking down into a harmless substance.

QUARTERMASTER

You can spend time during a Short or Long Rest to analyze items, organize your inventory, and plan ahead to interact with objects better. Until you take your next Short or Long Rest, you can interact with up to 2 objects on your turn without requiring an Action, and you can use a Bonus Action to take the Use an Object Action.

REFUGE

You can attempt to build a shelter during a rest. Make a **DC 10 Survival Check**. **Success:** You build a temporary structure from nearby materials that can shelter 6 Medium creatures. Additionally, you can make a **DC 10 Stealth Check** to conceal a structure. **Success:** Creatures must make a contested Perception Check against the result of your Stealth Check to detect the presence of the shelter..



DOWNTIME

Downtime is when your PCs are given a period of time to accomplish whatever tasks they desire on their own or in groups. This is a great place for character development to happen, individual goals to be worked toward, and to change up the pace of the overall game.

BASICS OF DOWNTIME

What is the point of Downtime? When are good times for PCs to have the opportunity for it? What things can the characters even do? We're going to break down the basics of the fundamentals then get into how you run it.

WHY HAVE DOWNTIME?

Characters shouldn't always be delving through dungeons, narrowly escaping death, and fighting one epic boss after another in rapid succession. Those things are great, but if your entire game consists of nothing but HUGE epic moments and stressful situations... then players can start to get numb to this. You need to change up the pace of your game and have an "intermission" to let the characters rest and recover, and focus on the things they want. Think of any action movie. It would be insane if the entire movie was explosions and fight scenes... you need the lows to make those HIGHS stand out once they come.

Downtime slows the game down and lets time pass, you can have a month worth of "game time" go by in one chunk of Downtime. This helps the world evolve, grow, and react to the events taking place. If your entire campaign takes place in the span of 1 month... maybe you should have some sections of Downtime weaved into your game. Your world should feel alive and ever-changing to what your PCs do in it, so let that time pass to show your players the effects they had on it. There is just something about playing in a world where time has passed instead of just a matter of days, it really helps to ground the PCs in the world and feel their characters' connection to it.

This is one of the only times you can progress individual characters' goals that don't involve combat or going into a dungeon. Multiple characters can work on their own individual goals here and not feel guilty for derailing the whole group. Each PC can do their own thing, or even group up together during Downtime. Giving your players time to invest in their character in a way that THEY want could accomplish more investment into their goals and increased immersion.

DC Tip: A mistake I made early on as a GM was that my players ALWAYS had something to go and do... so once they finished one quest, they had to RUSH over to the next town to save the day again. I never realized this was bad until one of my players wanted to do something in town... but they said, "I feel like there are so many fires to put out, we can't spend any time here." Since then I've always made sure the story allows for sections of Downtime so characters can press a reset button on feeling like they have to go put out all those fires.

WHEN TO HAVE DOWNTIME?

Think about what just happened in your story. Did they just finish delving through a huge dungeon where they nearly died? Give them a month's worth of Downtime! Did they just go on a quick side quest and need to stop back in town for supplies? Give them 1 day of Downtime. Did they just defeat what they THINK is the main villain after an epic showdown? Give them 1 year of Downtime so they lower their guard and you can see what they do during this time while you slowly start to reveal the TRUE evil mastermind!

Find gaps in between quests, adventures, and story arcs and give your PCs as long a period of time as you want. Keep in mind what is going on in the world and space things out enough to create these windows. Let the world grow and evolve as the players get a chance to explore things and accomplish their goals.



WHAT CAN YOU DO DURING DOWNTIME?

Your players should feel like they can do anything their character wants. Give the players the opportunity to work on their individual goals that might be hard to work on as a group. If some PCs don't have individual goals, giving them Downtime will make them think, "Oh, we have time to do stuff? Hmmm, what would my character want to do?" They might have never thought about this before but now that you've established that Downtime will be a thing in your games, they start thinking about it.

Help your players brainstorm about what is possible to accomplish and once they see that you will prepare something for them no matter what they say, it will open up the endless possibilities in their mind. Getting your PCs to ask, "What can I do," is huge and it'll only snowball from there. Your players will be more invested in the world because they can feel themselves changing it and moving closer towards accomplishing those goals!

Did the party just get back from an adventure? Sell that loot to get some extra gold that they can go spend on other stuff, maybe even magic items! What if some of them are strange and mysterious, you could go learn more about them. Speaking of learning, you could research more information about different things that've been important in your story, but you didn't know enough about it. Maybe you want more money and want to find your own source of income.

Let your players make money from applying the skills from their class in creative ways. The Bard can become a motivational speaker or give singing lessons to the local church. The Cleric and Paladin might want to spread the word of their god and go around healing the sick. The Monk can spend days in meditation and receive visions of something to come. The Sorcerer could go off looking for answers as to how they got their powers, while the Wizard might take some time to learn how to create a brand new homebrew spell. Maybe there is a strange endangered species that needs help, and through a solo side quest, the Druid could help this creature and learns a cool new homebrew Wild Shape in the process. Maybe the Warlock needs to complete a morally questionable task for their Patron. The Rogue could take missions from a thieves guild, the Ranger could become a bounty hunter and take on solo contracts, the Barbarian could throw themselves into the arena circuit to become a champion, and the Fighter could join a "Fight Club"... but we won't talk about that. With so much to do your players will be asking YOU for more Downtime!

Here is some inspiration to get your creativity going, but this list is just the start of what's possible!

- Sell Items
- Buy Items
- Craft Items
- Upgrade Items
- Work a Job
- Start or Run a Business
- Buy or Build a House
- Physical / Spell Training
- Learn New Skills
- Research Lore
- Research Plot Points
- Homebrew New Spells
- Talk with NPCs
- Secret Errands
- Solo Quests
- Bounty Hunting
- Gambling
- Performing / Entertaining
- Arena Fighting
- Guild Missions
- Join a Faction
- Spread Rumors
- Collect / Train Pets



HOW MUCH DOWNTIME?

In the same way I evaluate how much combat I put in the game compared to social encounters or exploration, I also balance how much Downtime I give my players. Think about both how often and how long the Downtime sections will be. You know what your players just did and you know what could happen in the future (maybe), so use this information to help answer this question. As the game goes on you will have a better idea of how much time to give your players. What things are they trying to accomplish? How long could that take? What's happening in the world? Think about the agenda and what's happening for both your PCs and your world and you can make decisions from there. Maybe let them have plenty of time to accomplish what they want before they head out. Maybe you don't give them enough Downtime to finish something because you want something else in the story to happen first. Maybe you present the PCs with a challenge about what they should do. Do they save the nearby town that is currently in danger or continue some key research to discover the main villain's plans.

COMPLICATIONS

Downtime shouldn't mean that nothing bad happens and that your players are safe from harm's way. This is still a game about presenting your PCs with challenges to overcome, so throw in some complications to your Downtime. Depending on what they are trying to do when they roll poorly, maybe a new problem arises that now needs to be taken care of. You sold off all those magic items, but it was to some bad dudes that are currently using those items to kill people. That contract the Ranger took goes south, and the player gets taken hostage. All that spreading of the word of your god has drawn the attention of a cult. It turns out that the cult is the one who kidnapped the Ranger and is using your own magic items you sold against you! It's all connected!

Try to have these complications be connected to things that the PCs caused themselves, this will make them feel like their actions have even more consequences. Of course you can throw these things at your players out of nowhere to spice things up, but try to bait them into these complications so they feel more connected to them.

RIVALS

Rivals are a great tool you can use to add a complication in the form of an NPC. These are individuals or groups of NPCs that oppose the party in some way. These can be non hostile like an opposing business, guards that have their eye on you, hirelings that keep screwing things up, or even a love triangle that a character is involved in. Hostile rivals are an option as well which can be a group plotting to kidnap a party member, steal a magic item, or even target the PCs' loved ones.

SETBACKS

If you want your players to feel like they earn the things they accomplish during Downtime, introducing Setbacks to delay them from their goal can make it that much more rewarding once they finally get it. These should usually come from either choices the PC makes or Skill Checks the PC fails. Did they choose to ignore something that caused them to have a Setback? Did they attempt a Check and get a natural 1? Complications pop up as a result of these Setbacks that the PC now has to overcome to attain their goal. These could also come in the form of a time Setback and they can try again next Downtime as well. You should have a feeling for how hard a PC should have to work for a given reward, and adjust the hoops they have to jump through accordingly.

CONNECTIONS

To truly be a next-level GM you need to figure out a way to tie all of these Downtime activities together into the larger story. Have these activities lead to parts of a character's backstory, answers to a previous mystery, foreshadowing a future problem, or even connect it to the main plot of the campaign.

WORLD CONNECTION

Downtime can be a great time to reveal some worldbuilding and show the players more about the lore that they can choose to interact with. Do they want to go back to the city that they didn't have a chance to earlier and see what it's like there? Do they want to learn more about the lore behind a secret group in your game? Do they want to research what the symbol on this magic item means? They now have the time to go do those things during Downtime. This lets players lead the interaction with your world instead of you having to force it on them. Watch what they engage with and maybe even make some tweaks on-the-fly to let them go even farther down these rabbit holes.



PLAYER CHARACTER CONNECTION

These are perfect for character building moments between PCs, as well. Let players work on things individually but also present them with challenges that could be easier if they asked their friends for help. Maybe the Monk wants to make some herbal tea, the Ranger knows where some plants are on the outskirts of town, and the Druid can use *Druidcraft* to help make the best tea ever! Maybe the Gnome wants to tinker but requires a LARGE piece of metal to be bent. Now he needs the Barbarians' help to finish his project. This can lead to some fun roleplay and a bonding moment for those characters. We all know from a meta level that these characters need to “be together” but these moments reinforce that in a natural way.

Take this one step further than just performing these actions, give your PCs mechanical rewards from these Downtime moments. Maybe the tea gives ADV to Constitution Saves for 24hrs, but it can only be made during Downtime if all 3 characters work together (and succeed on their Checks). Let them create items or even train to create combo moves with each other from the time they invest in each other.

Example: The Gnome Wizard of the group always struggled to get in and out of combat from being so immobile, he had a lot of spells that worked in close range but it was too dangerous to run in alone. The Wizard started to spend his Downtime working on a backpack type contraption that he could attach to the group's Barbarian and RIDE him into battle! Now this is quite the contraption and would lead toward quite the advantage in combat, so I made them work for it. He spent months of Downtime planning the design, gathering materials from their adventures, testing prototypes WITH the Barbarian, until they finally created the “Metallo-Pack-3000”. The Wizard could ride the Barbarian into battle and cast spells from his back. There were definitely mechanics to this contraption that balanced this interaction and let them improve how well it worked over time as they used it. This also led to more Downtime moments where they trained to really dial in what they could do together.



CAMPAIGN CONNECTION

Whether you are running a homebrew campaign or an adventure module, you know your campaign better than anyone. There are parts of the story that you have revealed and parts that you haven't. Find ways to incorporate what your players are doing into the main plot of the campaign. Everything from small clues the players can get from what they did with their Downtime or setting off a chain reaction that leads to the final arc of the entire campaign!

The flowers the Druid have been growing are giving off a strange aura of magic. Why is this? The town that the Bard visits to do performances in is now abandoned, why? The Warlock's Patron has been sending them on seemingly unrelated mysterious tasks during Downtime, then they realize the truth!

Example: The Paladin formed a small militia from the soldiers of his fallen kingdom, but over the years, through Downtime, he gathered more toward his cause and it grew into a full-blown army that he was in control of. He would send them out to handle problems here and there, and it was almost like a little side mini-game that he would play during Downtime, choosing how to use that resource. I put obstacles in the world that his army could address, and things changed based on that. Meanwhile the Ranger wanted to start his own leatherworking shop and grow a business... a very different goal than growing an army. Across the same Downtime I gave them, they both worked on two VERY different things as the months and years passed, but then something amazing happened. As the Ranger grew his business and expanded from city to city, he had to establish trade routes between ALL the kingdoms. When the main storyline's war struck the nations, the Paladin's army needed to travel across large stretches of land very quickly... so the Paladin and Ranger joined forces and the now well-established trade network of caravans were used to transport the Paladin's army. Together, toward the end of the campaign, they defended the countryside because their Downtime activities were brought full circle.

The example above would've never happened if I didn't see what my players were doing and bring that center stage to the story. One wanted to grow an army and one wanted to grow a business, it was on ME as a GM to bring those things my players enjoy and make them relevant. I never knew that it would be so beautifully done, but I always thought about how I could tie together what my players were choosing to do with their Downtime.

CUSTOMIZE DOWNTIME

Your group should feel like there are an endless amount of things they can do during Downtime, but you might have to open their eyes to this reality. Talk with your players and give them options at first to help warm them up to this idea. When players do engage with Downtime, reward them, let them get closer to accomplishing goals, or even gain tangible rewards. Once one player starts to engage with Downtime and everyone starts to see what cool things can happen, both narratively and mechanically, they'll start to get excited for the next Downtime.

If you run into a situation where a player does NOT enjoy Downtime then have a conversation about why and try to come up with solutions together. Many issues can be fixed just by using some of the methods presented here, but make sure you're having that conversation with the player. If they're still drawing blanks on what they'd want to do, you can take over and start to lead them down a certain path. Think of your main campaign and what mysteries are still unknown, have this player go down a side quest of sorts to answer some of those questions that are pressing problems to the group. Now, what was first an uninterested player is starting to make an impact on the game with their Downtime. This can be applied in many ways and could also result in the player gaining an item of some kind or any number of rewards that the player would enjoy. Think about what they enjoy about the game and backwards design Downtime from there.



PLAYER CUSTOMIZATION

What do the players at the table like to do during Downtime? This is very different from what their character wants to do. Some players might HATE shopping roleplay scenes, so let that player fast forward to what they want and how much it costs. Then engage with them and let them spend time on what they DO enjoy doing. Maybe they have one-on-one combat in an arena to work their way up the ranks? Maybe they want to go to the library and dive into the lore of the world. Talk to the player out of game too and see what they like or don't like. Make sure you set your players up for success so that there is at least SOME part of Downtime they look forward to.

CHARACTER CUSTOMIZATION

What does the character want to accomplish? Great roleplayers will know what their character wants to do, and you just need to make sure to empower them to make it happen. Put barriers in the way when needed and make them work hard for things that would be a big reward, but anything should feel possible. Once your PCs establish what they like to do with Downtime, start to customize the world to that.

Once my PC started up his own leatherworking business, I started to put in competing leatherworking businesses in the towns they would visit. I also had them stumble across a master leatherworker who was down on his luck as part of a quest they were on because I knew that my PC would love to hire this person to help grow their business. Put things in front of your characters that relate to the types of Downtime they love.

SOLO SIDE QUESTS

Downtime doesn't have to only consist of regular tasks in safe locations instead they could be entire mini adventures! This is a unique moment in your game where you can totally split the party and allow for players to truly be independent for a while. PCs can use Downtime to go on solo side quests to accomplish things that they want. Don't limit these things to only "non-combat" related quests. They could totally go dungeon delving during Downtime to explore ruins and collect treasure. You just need to make sure the systems and methods you use establish the danger and risk involved.

Don't feel like you have to play out these solo quests moment by moment. This is Downtime, let things go by at a faster pace. Have them make Checks for key points along their journey (see "Roll Systems for Downtime" on page 140) and be ready to hit them with some consequences. You can narratively describe an epic combat that they have on this quest, narrowly escaping with the loot, without having to run off a full combat at the table while the other players just watch.

I've had PCs go back to side quests that they passed up earlier in the campaign and want to do a solo side quest by themselves. These are amazing moments to show how much stronger the PCs become, what would have taken the entire party of 4 back when they were 1st-level, can now be accomplished by the single 5th-level Sorcerer. Have them make Checks and earn it, yes, but let them feel powerful enough to go on adventures during Downtime. Keep the concept of "failing forward" in mind. If they fail a Check during these solo adventures that doesn't mean their character dies or gets kidnapped. Maybe they just took longer than expected, lost some resources in the process, or didn't get as big of a reward. But don't be afraid to let your PCs go on solo adventures where those dangerous results ARE a possibility, just make sure they know what they are getting into. Now you might have one solo adventure turn into the rest of the group going to save that PC!



CUSTOM COMPLICATIONS CHART

Once I've established a good pulse check on my party and know what my players and their characters like, I will make a Complications Chart. I've made this for the group as a whole or custom charts for each PC. This is a roll table that has a random event on it that happens during Downtime. I put things on this table that are both good and bad and when there is Downtime I might roll on it to see what happens. Twists, rewards, Setbacks... you never know what could happen. My players and I both get excited when I roll on these tables because it really gets across the feeling that the world is alive and anything is possible!

I'll make purely positive and negative versions of the chart as well. If a PC screws up on something I might laugh and shake my head, then ask them to roll a d8. They immediately know what's going on and freak out as to what bad complication they just brought upon themselves. If a PC has a huge breakthrough moment of roleplay or a big roll they make, I'll cheer them on and tell them to roll a d8. They get even more excited to see what awesome bit of randomness they just unlocked for themselves. All of this revolves around their investment into Downtime and me creating custom systems to reward that investment.

ROLL VS ROLEPLAY

How do you pick and choose what moments should be played out and rolled for, or which moments you just handwaved and move on?

WHEN TO ROLL?

Some things during Downtime should "just happen" with no rolls required, but some things should be very difficult to accomplish and even span across multiple Downtimes. How do you know when to ROLL?

You should make your PCs roll for things that require true effort, would gain a large reward, or have a chance of failure. A PC having to roll for things makes them feel like they have earned it once they do get it. Things should take them more or less time depending on how high they roll or how creative their ideas are. Reward players creative ideas by granting ADV or lowering DCs.

This is also a great time to let the dice tell the story. Having the outcome be on the dice is part of the spirit of the game and incorporating that is only natural. There are times when I do NOT want that randomness to be involved with what the characters are doing, so instead I just have things happen. I usually will present them with a choice between multiple things so that their decision matters, but you don't always have to make them roll for each and every thing they do.

WHEN TO ROLEPLAY?

Downtime can stretch over the course of weeks, months or even years, so what do you choose to roleplay out scene-by-scene or what do you just "fast forward" through? Should you roleplay the shopping sequence each time? These are the same questions you ask yourself during normal game time, and the answer is just about the same for Downtime. These roleplay moments don't have to be extremely long, they can be a quick scene or played out fully. Here are some times I choose to roleplay:

- Is the scene important to a character or to the story?
- Could I potentially foreshadow or give hints to the bigger picture?
- Are they meeting a key NPC that will come up again later?
- Would it be fun?

If none of those answers are a yes, then you can entirely skip sections of roleplay to keep the game going. If the scene wouldn't add anything to the game or would be repetitive then just fast forward through it and get to the good stuff. Decide which moments during Downtime to spend more time on and then speed up the other parts so that Downtime doesn't end up taking forever.



HOW TO RUN DOWNTIME

Now you have all of these ideas in your players' heads about what they could do, but how do you actually run Downtime? What does it look like logistically and mechanically at the table? Sometimes Downtime can take a while, especially if players aren't prepared or knew that it was coming. How do you organize this to not take forever? Do you do it at your table or away from it? Does each player go around one at a time? How can you make Downtime a smooth time at the table?

DOWNTIME TIMING

If I know that I want to give my players some Downtime I try to end the session with them starting a period of Downtime. They can think about what they want to do and be ready to get into it at the start of the next session. You can answer any questions that pop up about how things work or what they can or can't do in between sessions. This helps to keep things organized and give you as many options as a GM to run Downtime efficiently. I also get a heads-up about what things they're planning on doing so that I can take the next week to prepare for whatever crazy things they might do.

DURING VS BETWEEN SESSIONS

What can you take care of between sessions and what should be done at the table? I usually try and get as much done one-on-one as I can outside of game time, but we all have busy lives and that can be difficult. So I have a few things I expect my players to tell me about their Downtime that we take care of between sessions. What is the "shopping list" of what you want to accomplish? Are you doing any "secret things" that the other players wouldn't know about? If they can give me those 2 things then I should be no problem running Downtime between now and the next session.

Knowing what your players PLAN on doing is great because you can either prepare that or let them know what to expect so that there aren't any surprise delays or miscommunications during the next session. Whatever we have time to do outside of the session we do and can usually accomplish a lot just texting back and forth a few times.

I love "secret things" in my games. I like to keep the players and their characters synced up in what they know. If one PC wouldn't know what another PC did during Downtime, I try not to have that happen publicly. This doesn't mean the PC is sneaking around doing nefarious deeds behind the other PCs' backs, they could be doing anything. I've had players keep in touch with NPCs through sending letters, learn about the lore of the world, or start a side hustle to make extra money. The other players didn't need to know about these "secret things" so let that be discovered when the time is right. Maybe the NPC they've been sending notes to appears as an ally at a crucial time, or maybe the extra gold and knowledge acquired is revealed to solve a problem out of nowhere. It is much more impactful to have a PC reveal this thing they've been working on, instead of everyone already knowing from hearing it be talked about at the table on and off for weeks. I love taking these moments to give players lore and backstory nuggets one-on-one so that THEY can choose when to reveal this information to the group. They get a cool moment when they reveal it and I get to watch what they do with this information. I have had entire campaign secrets separated amongst the party members and all they had to do was share it with each other and they would learn SO much.

If Downtime happens right in the middle of a session, then sometimes I will stop and say, "Okay so this is going to be about a week's worth of Downtime that passes here. If there is anything that you NEED to do now, we can, but everyone message me after the session what you all want to accomplish and we can take care of anything else between sessions." Game time is a precious time and I try to maximize it as much as possible. If next week comes around and you weren't able to reconcile everything from the Downtime, then have a quick little "flashback" to what needed to get done and then go right back into the game after. Make sure when you do this that nothing crazy could happen during that Downtime, that you skipped over, that would make you have to retcon or go back on something. If there is potential for that to happen then you might just want to run off the Downtime quickly and then continue on.



ORGANIZED DOWNTIME

How do you run Downtime as efficiently as possible? First you gather up as much information about what your group wants to do. You can better predict this over time as you learn your group's tendencies and goals they have. Second is to take a big picture look at what the Downtime might look like. Where are people going? How long would each thing they do take? Helping your players to logistically organize their Downtime is good for everyone. If two characters want to travel to the same place, then pair them together. If a character is going to do something that takes the entire Downtime and they will be out of reach to the rest of the group, that's important to know. Third is to decide what scenes need to be played out, keep the flow of them in order, and run each of them off.

Sometimes putting some constraints on Downtime can help to keep it organized. You can tell them that they can accomplish 1 big task and 2 small tasks. What a big vs. a small task entails is entirely up to you. Maybe 1 big task is the same as 2 small tasks. You can balance out the "action economy" of what your players are able to do to keep things organized. Now one player can't get carried away with a laundry list of things they need to do and they have to prioritize!

Try grouping up PCs when you can for some good team bonding moments and engage more than one player at a time. You need to keep in mind that there are multiple players at the table and if you spend too much time on one then you might lose the others. To keep my players engaged I will make sure to go around the table in rounds. If each player has 3 things they want to do then go around the table 3 different times so that you aren't on one particular player too long. If one player could only come up with 2 things, then you can come up with a 3rd scene on-the-fly and throw them into something. You can also have the more reclusive PCs group up with others and recommend that they could go with someone to help them out.

Have a feel for the time that passes and you can even sprinkle in little moments of narration about things that happen in the city, sights they see, or generalized descriptions of events that happen. This helps get across the feeling of the passage of time instead of just saying, "Okay like 3 months passed, now what do you do?" Describe the changing of the seasons, or progress being made on a local building construction... any sort of change in the world surrounding them will get across this feeling.



PHASED / BLOCKED DOWNTIME

If you want to organize your Downtime even further you can block out sections of time marked by key Checkpoints that happen.

Example: I gave my group 3 months of Downtime leading up to a Fire Festival. I told them they could accomplish one big thing and one small thing during each month of Downtime. I went around the table and once everyone had a turn, that would summarize what they did in the first month block. Then there was an event, I had a key NPC request a meeting with them and we had a scene where the NPC discussed a growing threat in the mountains north of the city. The PCs carried on into the second month and they had another round of Downtime to do one big thing and one small thing... but nobody ever went to check out those mountains (this was a test). So after the 2nd block of time there was another event, this time it was a Skill Challenge to defend the city's northern gates from Red Dragonborn. I described multiple times that the mountains to the north had billowing clouds of smoke coming from them. They succeeded and then carried on with their 3rd block of downtime. During this 3rd month they could do one more big thing and one small thing... but nobody ever even asked about the mountains or looked into what was happening. Now the Downtime ends and it's time for the big Fire Festival, but something terrible happens. I describe the beauty and wonders of the festival but then a familiar smoke fills the sky. Bursting through the dark clouds is a Red Dragon that begins to burn the city to the ground. The players could have stopped the Skill Challenge in the second month if they looked into the suspicious activity from the NPCs' warnings. The players could have stopped the Dragon attack if they looked into what the Dragonborn were planning.

You don't always need events leading toward something during these blocked sections of Downtime. They can just be key Checkpoints along the way. Maybe an important building is built that they can visit now. Maybe research is done or an item is finished being crafted. These moments help to establish a timeline of events so that you can smoothly keep things in order. If a PC wants to engage in something that lasts too long, they might miss one of these Checkpoints. Those can be part of the decision-making process your PCs have about what they want to do and what they want to prioritize.

Make sure your players know that just because they stopped for Downtime doesn't mean that the bad guys do too. This is a tricky balance to run because you want your players to feel like they can relax SOME of the time, but you don't want them to get so relaxed that they forget about potential dangers. For myself, it's about respect. If the players are respecting the world and the dangers in it, then I usually won't pull the trigger on anything crazy (unless I was already planning to). But as my example shows, have your players be curious about the dangers of your world, reward them when they do engage and have consequences when they don't.



ROLL SYSTEMS FOR DOWNTIME

Now your players are using Downtime, but how do you mechanically represent the things they try to accomplish? These systems offer you a wide range of options to employ along with some examples that you can use for inspiration.

DOWNTIME TERMS

These are some Downtime vocabulary terms that will help you both understand the ideas below and communicate better to your own party about Downtime.

Task: This is the thing they are trying to accomplish, this can be anything from learning a Skill, crafting an item, or going on a quest. I also might say Small Tasks and Big Tasks. These are subjective to you as a GM for what task falls into which category. This is usually pretty intuitive for players and is just another way to communicate how much stuff they can try and get done during Downtime.

Downtime Check: This is a Skill Check that best fits the Task they are trying to accomplish. If they are trying to craft something, it would be a Tool Check of some kind. If they are trying to do some training, then maybe it's an Athletics Check or Strength Check.

Blocks: Sections of Downtime that the GM separates into chunks of time. If you had 1 month of Downtime the GM might break it up into 4 Blocks.

Periods: This is the full length of Downtime as a whole. However long the Downtime is lasting is the Period, which the GM could break up into Blocks if they wanted.

DEFAULT RULES

Regardless of which rolling system you use there are things that you should just let the players do for free. If they want to do something for flavor or the sake of roleplay that won't have any sort of impact on the game, let them do it. I would hate for you to see the mechanics in the rules outlined below and shoot down a character doing something that they want to do, that would be fun for them or the group.

You can choose to have these Downtime Checks cost a resource of some kind to perform. If they are doing something that would consume materials, then they need to make sure they have the materials or gold requirements. Maybe it only costs extra if they fail the Check? Maybe the cost is losing an extra Block of time, or they just have less time in general.

DAILY TASKS

Each day a PC gets to try and make progress on a single Task.

This system is great for keeping things simple for players to accomplish a variety of tasks. You could have a single week of Downtime, which would be 7 different opportunities to accomplish the things they want. Sometimes they might need to make a Check for the Task, or sometimes all it takes is them saying that they are going to go take care of someone. Maybe the PC has an injured NPC that they take care of. You could mark that they cared for this person and move on, or have it be a Medicine Check. You could track how many successful Medicine Checks they get and eventually heal the NPC completely. Players can "spend" their Tasks on other PCs as well if they want to offer help in some way. You could give ADV for the Check or allow the helping PC to roll an additional d10 and add it to the result.

Example: You tell the group that they will have 4 days of Downtime and they can perform one Task each day. You then present enticing options for the group to engage with or they can come up with something else to do entirely. The options are so vast that they have to really think about what they want to spend their time on. You could also throw in some mandatory Tasks (such as repairs) that must be completed by the end of the Downtime.

Modifications

- Allow for more than 1 Task each day
- Allow for 1 Small Tasks and 1 Big Tasks each day
- Create Tasks that would require a certain number of group members to be able to complete it
- Create "mandatory" Tasks that are more like chores that must be accomplished
- You must spend 1 Task in order to receive the benefits of a Full Rest (see page 126)

TRIPLE CHECKS

To progress toward a Task a PC has to make 3 Downtime Checks in a row against a DC, what happens depends on the results of each.

This system is great for crafting, training, solo side quests, or anything that has multiple stages to it. Use this for more important moments where you don't want the outcome of something to come down to just one roll. Set a DC for how difficult the Check would be and then start going into each Check one at a time. Depending on what the PC is trying to do, describe a set up to this moment to set the stage for what's happening, then ask for the first Check. Describe how it goes and what happens as a result of their first roll and connect it into the second roll. Keep describing what happens based on their rolls and ask for Checks that would make sense for each part. The three Downtime Checks you ask for don't have to be the same thing each time, break the Task up into different parts and have them make Checks for each. This will help you describe what happened and maybe what part of it went wrong if they fail.



Example: A PC wants to make a combustible potion for the first time. (1) History Check to see if they remember the ingredients and instructions. (2) Alchemist's Supplies Check to perform the literal act of potion brewing. (3) Dexterity Check to carefully contain the liquids without it blowing up in their face. Now a number of things can happen depending on successes and failures of these 3 Checks. Maybe you only require them to make 2 Checks and would consider it a success. If they fail the History Check, then you could say they forgot everything and just winged it, but it worked. If they fail the Alchemist's Supplies Check, then it was a sloppy mess but they had everything in place and were careful enough with their hands to make it work. If they fail the Dexterity Check, then part of it blows up in their face and they take some damage or lose a finger. Even failures can be flavored based on which Checks they missed. If they failed the History and Dexterity Checks then they got the instructions wrong at the start, then made something that wasn't even explosive... so when they fumbled it at the end, it didn't even matter because the materials are inert. This flavor could result in a great moment of humorous tension building.

Modifications

- Increase the DC of Checks after failed Checks, showing that it's now more difficult because of the failure.
- Decrease the DC of Checks after successful Checks, showing that they are getting closer and closer to completing the Task.
- Require that they have to succeed on ALL 3 Checks in order to complete the Task.
- Only require a Triple Check the first time, then once they succeed have it be a single Check each subsequent time.

SKILL CHALLENGES

PCs must obtain a certain amount of successes on Downtime Checks before 3 failures.

These should be reserved for the most important of Tasks and serve as great intermission moments during Downtime to get some action into the mix. Throw these at your players between Blocks of Downtime to bring them together to accomplish something that may or may not connect to what they were doing during the Downtime. These would be most applicable if there are a group of PCs trying to accomplish something together. If you Block out your Downtime, then a PC could make a Check toward this Skill Challenge once every Block, and the challenge could span across the entire Period. I would also use these when the Task has a real risk of failure. You could run these similar to a Triple Check but increase the number of Checks made and stop the challenge if the PC reaches 3 failures.

Example: Halfway through Downtime a problem arises that the group has to come together for and help. A monster could be attacking a city, there could be a fire in the local library and the ancient tomes are in danger, or maybe there is an epic drinking contest at the local tavern and the party has to impress the locals with their skills.

Modifications

- Reduce the number of failures to 1.
- Only certain party members are able to contribute while the others make separate Checks.
- Start two challenges at the same time and the party has to choose which one to join in on.

CHECKPOINT CHALLENGES

PCs must obtain a certain amount of successes on Downtime Checks over a period of time.

These are great for when you want a PC to reach a certain number of Checkpoints to be able to complete a Large Task. They might encounter failures and Setbacks along the way but as they succeed on these Checks they will be getting closer and closer to completing this one important Task. These can span across multiple Downtime Periods and you can see how long it takes the player to accomplish them. If they spend ALL of their time on it, maybe they can accomplish it quickly, but what other Tasks did they have to sacrifice or ignore to do so.

Example: The home city of the party was under attack and its defenses are in shambles. The PCs must make Downtime Checks to get through 8 different Checkpoints. Each Checkpoint represents a different facet of the city that needs help, and each requires a different kind of Check. The party has to figure out who would be best for each job. What if they could only make 1 Check each during this Downtime Period? What if there are other important Tasks to accomplish too? What will they prioritize first?

Modifications

- Restrict certain PCs to certain Checkpoints that only they can succeed on.
- Allow for the Checkpoint successes to "go away" after a period of time or if the enemies fight back.
- Limit how many Checkpoints can be accomplished in a set amount of time. Maybe they can only complete one per month of in-game time.



DEPRECIATION DC

PCs must make a series of Downtime Checks against a DC that slowly lowers as they make successful attempts on their Task. Once an individual succeeds at a Check against the Depreciation DC, the DC drops to a lower DC for any further Checks against the same Depreciation DC. There is one DC that keeps getting lower and lower with each success that is made against it.

This is best used for things like learning a new Skill, crafting an item, or other times when it would take repeated Checks of the same kind to achieve the specific Task. Use Triple Checks when there can be multiple types of Checks that lead toward completion, but these methods are better for representing improvement in the same Skill over time. You can set the DC extremely high at first and make it almost impossible to hit unless they were to get help from others. The DC will drop with each successful Check and eventually hit the target number which represents completing the Task. Combine these rolling methods with the others from Chapter 3 (page 35) to create your own unique methods for these Downtime Checks.

Example: The group's Sorcerer wants to learn how to bend the elements of their *Fire Bolt* from fire to ice. The GM thinks it's a bold Task and tells them the DC is 30 and rules that this would be a Spell Check using their Spellcasting Modifier but would NOT add their Prof. Bonus (since they don't know how to cast cold spells). They start making ineffective attempts and barely put any creativity into it. Their Downtime Checks keep falling far below the DC 30, so the player starts to think outside the box. They spend their Downtime out in the cold winter snow and meditate in it for hours to become one with the cold, the GM is impressed and tells them to make their Spell Check with ADV. But that's not all, the Sorcerer brought the Druid who knows cold spells and *Guidance*. The GM could rule this as the Help Action (for a +2 since they already have ADV) or have them just use *Guidance* for an additional +1d4, but this GM is blown away. They instead rule that the Druid rolls a d10 to symbolize their help AND lets the Druid add their own Spellcasting Modifier to the roll. They get a total of 11 on their roll... now it's time for the Sorcerer to make their Spell Check. They roll with ADV and get a total of 19, but combined with the 11 from the Druid the DC 30 is met! The GM now enters into an amazing description about how creativity and teamwork led to this epic moment.

Modifications

- Allow them to add their Downtime Check totals together across multiple attempts in order to reach the DC. Maybe you have a DC 40 and it takes them a few attempts to eventually get it, then it drops to DC 30.
- Employ Group Checks to allow allies to add the result of their Checks together to try and hit the DC.
- Once they succeed at the Task in this way, they can now make single Checks for the same Task.
- Increase the DC if they fail.
- Use an Erosion DC to make it more difficult.

POINT BUILD CHECKS

A character makes a Downtime Check and if they succeed they get 1 Downtime Point toward that specific Task. Once enough Downtime Points are gained the Task is completed.

This was one of the first homebrew systems I created, so I feel like I have to put it in here! This is a very simple way to track progress towards a goal that a PC wants to spend time and effort toward. I originally applied this to gaining proficiency in a new Skill. Players wanted to do different things for Downtime, so when they wanted to do that Task, they would make the respective Check and I would award points. These Tasks can be as specific or as broad as you want, they can be tied to Skills or Tools, or something entirely made up by the PC. You can change up the number of points gained and the amount of points needed to best fit a system that feels right for you.

Example: The Paladin wants to learn how to ride a horse during combat (but doesn't have any sort of proficiency for it). For each Block of 4hrs he takes to practice riding he makes a Riding Check (Wisdom Check) but is limited to one Check per day. Failure gains no points, success gains 1 point, success by 5 is 2 points, and a natural 20 is 5 points. When he reaches 10 total points he can add 1/2 his Prof. Bonus to his Riding Checks, and at 20 points he gains proficiency in Riding Checks. At 40 points he gains proficiency in exotic mounts such as griffins.

DC Tip: You could also have the total of each successful Check be added together and tracked until it hits a "grand total", and once they get a total of 100 (or whatever number you set) they achieve their goal.



CHAPTER 6: COMBAT



Customize the combat pillar of your game with these rules! There are options to make things more simple or more complex, more deadly, boost roleplay, open up options that were never good before, completely change the way martial play, bring spells to life, and so much more. You can choose which of these rules are universally applied, just affect the PCs, or affect monsters only. You can even have these systems be used for ONE specific combat that you have in the middle of your campaign to test out and get across a unique feel for THIS combat or THAT monster in particular. Let's start off the best way I know how... Roll Initiative!!!

INITIATIVE

These rules all affect the turn order of combat and options, for both PCs and NPCs.



INITIATIVE SYSTEMS

You could always just roll for Initiative, write the order down, then go on through combat. That's a totally fine option that I use all the time. These options can be used for certain types of combats or, if you like them, can become your new default Initiative system.

FLAT MONSTER INITIATIVES

Instead of rolling for a monster's Initiative you assign a flat number.

This can speed up Initiative and make sure that your monsters don't get left behind because you rolled poorly, while also avoiding the lowly Goblin going first, out of nowhere, because you rolled a Nat 20. With this method you have more control over where to place them in Initiative order.

DC Tip: A great place to start would be a Flat Initiative of 10. Which shows an average Initiative, 15 being above average, and 20 or higher would be high!

STAGGERED INITIATIVE

There are two "teams" in this Initiative system: the PC Team and the Monster Team. Everyone rolls for Initiative as usual, but these rolls only determine the Initiative order for your TEAM. Compare the highest PC and the highest Monster to see which side goes first. Whichever side "wins" goes first and is followed by the other side's next fastest individual. The

Initiative order continues to go back and forth alternating between PC and Monster until you have everyone in the Initiative order. Once the Initiative order is set, it doesn't change from round to round and stays the same for the entire combat.

The PCs' Initiative and monsters' Initiative are only compared to each other to see who goes first. After that they are only used to see who goes next on your TEAM. If there are an uneven number of participants then you can still do the same method, but once one team runs out of participants, you fill in the rest into the Initiative order back to back. You can choose to pair up PCs or Monsters in groups of 2 as well to even out the balance on both sides. If there are 4 players and 2 monsters, for example, you can group the players into pairs of 2 to still be able to alternate.

If your PCs are fighting an individual monster, you might not want to use this system and just roll for Initiative normally. If you still choose to, then even if they score terribly they will still go after the first PC. You are the GM, you make the rules!

Example: A combat between 3 PCs and 3 Monsters. The PCs got a 20, 15, and 10 while the Monsters got a 19, 18 and a 1 on their Initiative Checks. First, compare the top two from each team. The PC with 20 vs the Monster with 19, so the PC wins! The PC goes first, followed by the monster that got 19. Then you alternate over to the PC Team, and the PC that got 15 would go next. It doesn't matter that the other monster got 18. We only compare the FIRST from each team, then we alternate. So, AFTER the PC that got 15 would be the monster that got 18, then the PC that got 10, followed by the monster that got 1. Each team takes turns filling in the Initiative order.

You can tell your players that you're using this system, or not. They'll have no idea. They can roll Initiative as usual and so do you, but when you're writing in who goes when, they have no idea that you're just placing the monsters in between each of them. It's up to you if you want to tell them or not, but my players have no idea when I run it normally or when I use Staggered Initiative. I change it up based on the fight and what type of narrative I want for the specific combat.

Modifications

Lead Monster: Instead of rolling Initiative for your side, you can select the order of your monsters and only have the first monster roll Initiative (saving your time also). This roll will determine if your first monster goes before or after the first PC, then you can fill in the Initiative order from there. I like to do this both tactically and narratively to set up the fight how I want.

Chosen Order: If you really want to go crazy with customization of the Initiative order then roll for your first monster to see if it goes before the first player or not. Then just place the rest of the monsters into the Initiative order as you like. I typically like to weave them in and alternate them, but depending on the fight I might want a group of enemies to go really early or really late.

Group Initiative: Both teams choose one "leader" who is the only one that rolls for Initiative. Whichever side wins then gets to choose which of their members goes first. This process



continues going back and forth from side to side with each team getting to choose who goes next in the Initiative order.

DC Tip: Make sure you have good intentions with this system. I'm not trying to screw my players over when I choose where these monsters go. I like the feeling of alternating combat and created this system to consistently give them that feeling. I'll just as often push my monsters DOWN in Initiative as much as I bring them forwards. If more than one of your players has a high initiative bonus (from a class feature or a feat), it's good to not ignore it and arrange the turn order in a way that allows them all to be quick.

SKIRMISH INITIATIVE

There is no roll for Initiative. PCs declare what they're doing all at once, then you roll for everything at the same time.

You are also a part of the Skirmish Initiative as the GM. You say what the monsters are doing as well and everything gets taken care of together. Once everyone says what they're doing, then there's a moment at the table where literally everyone is rolling for the things they said. Once they declare what they're doing, you ask them for their Checks as well as asking them to make Saves, it all happens so fast.

If there's ever a time where the order in which something happens comes into question, then you can do a single Initiative Check between the two parties to see which event happens first. Some people have said that this would slow the game down from having to stop and make all these individual Initiative Checks each time this happens. For myself, this rarely happens and when it does it's usually at a VERY epic moment and the roll to see who goes first is very exciting to see!

This might sound crazy, and it can get a little crazy at the table, but that's exactly why I love this system. I use this all the time when I want things to be fast-paced and crazy, because that's what it feels like when you run combat this way. You might need to be a bit more of an advanced DM for this method since it is so chaotic.

If a PC doesn't speak quick enough to say what they're doing, they forfeit their turn. I usually ask them, "What are you doing?!" I pause slightly, then say, "3, 2, 1..." and if they still haven't said ANYTHING, they lose their turn. This might seem harsh, and if this wouldn't feel good for your players then please don't use it, but my players understand that I'm holding them accountable for acting quickly and enjoy the challenge. I don't use this often, but when I do, I want it to be stressful since that's part of the feeling I am trying to get across.

Modifications

Sand Timers: You can get little sand timers and throw those down on the table as well. At the start of each round they only have 60 seconds (or less) to say what they're going to do, then you pick the timer back up and start rolling for everything to see what happens.

DC Tip: I usually pair this method with theater of the mind, as well. Things are moving so fast and free, I don't want to stop and grab a map and minis, I just dive right in.

TURNS

Initiative separates each player into having their own turns that very strictly keeps them from overlapping. I have always loved to push the boundaries and let players manipulate their turn order for some tactical and epic moments.

TANDEM TURNS

Players with the same Initiative score can choose to take their turns at the same time, interacting with each other simultaneously.

Example: The Barbarian and Fighter are going at the same time. They both charge in and the Fighter uses their first Attack to make a trip attack and knock the target Prone. The Barbarian now gets ADV on his next Attack and gets a critical strike, killing the enemy. They both still have movement left over and 1 Attack each, and they then charge into battle together against the next enemy.

HELD TURNS

After your position is set in the Initiative order you may hold your entire turn until after a specific combatant's turn (enemy or ally). The position that you "held" as your turn in the Initiative order is now your new default position for all future turns.

It just makes sense to me that people can hold their entire turn. They are so quick and ready to act that they could go RIGHT NOW, but they're simply choosing not to go yet. Why does it cost more resources for them to wait and take their turn later if they want to? Sometimes Clerics WANT to go last in combat and don't want to roll high. Held actions are also VERY clunky and can be awkward and confusing. To hold an action you have to declare what the trigger is AND then spend your Reaction once that happens. This all just seems like too much. If your players want to go later in combat or even go together at the same time to pull off some epic combo moves, now they can!

Example: As the battle begins, the Rogue's catlike reflexes allow them to go first, but none of their allies are in position to gain Sneak Attack this round. They hold their turn until after the Paladin goes (knowing they will run into battle). After the Paladin goes, the Rogue now has their full turn to do what they want.

Modification

Held Spot: When a player holds their turn during a round, it resets back to their original position on the next round. There are some strange things you can do with this, and it can get confusing, so be careful if you allow this, but if you do so as an exception, you should be fine.

DC Tip: Watch out for PCs getting two turns in a row if they have an early Initiative and hold their turn till the end of the round. This could lead to a PC going back to back.



VARIANT INITIATIVE CHECKS

You can substitute any Skill Check in place of your Initiative Check if it makes sense in the context of the start of combat, and the GM allows it.

This rule gives players the freedom to be very creative, which is always a good thing. Initiative Checks are pretty basic, and this gives some creative wiggle room for players to plan beforehand to try and start the combat off in a clever way, or a way that would make more sense for their character. The context of what happened in the moments before you ask the PCs to roll Initiative is what matters the most, which really makes them think about what they do before the combat. Here are examples for what different Skill Checks might look like when swapped in for Initiative Checks:

- **Athletics Check:** PC bursts through a door to fight enemies on the other side.
- **Deception Check:** PC wearing a disguise that has been undetected when combat breaks out.
- **Persuasion Check:** PC is trying to convince a group of NPCs not to fight them.
- **Stealth Check:** PC is hiding and sneaking around the edges of the battlefield or hiding in the bushes.
- **Survival Check:** PC Ranger is in their favored terrain and knows how to move well through it.



DC Tip: If I was running this system and a PC was trying to persuade NPCs to not fight them, then failed the Check by rolling a 5, which sparked them to have to roll for Initiative... I think it would be very fitting AND hilarious to have that player's Persuasion Check BE their Initiative and blend it right into combat. So poetic!

ACTION ECONOMY

This is what each character can do in 1 round of combat. Usually all players get is an Action, Movement, and maybe a Bonus Action. These rules are to give GM's creative options to facilitate their players doing more (or less) things during their turn.

INTERACTION ACTION

On a PC's turn, they can use their Interaction to perform 1 Check to gain extra information or interact with the world around them.

Players only have an Action, and then sometimes they have abilities that let them perform a Bonus Action... and apart from their movement, that's IT! Sometimes players are afraid to make big moves or do other cool things because they don't want to "waste their action" on something small. Introducing the concept of an Interaction encourages players to think about what's possible and INTERACT with the environment during combat.

Let them ask questions with their Interaction and maybe give them clues about the enemies' weaknesses or the layout of the battlefield. Even something like the intentions of who an enemy is going to attack next is possible. They could also ask to do something VERY small that you don't want to make them use their Action (or Bonus Action) for. Let them try to flip over a table with their Interaction, and they make a Check and then can proceed with their turn after whatever happens. If they fail that Check they don't feel like they wasted anything because it's just a simple Interaction. You also don't have to make this be a Check of any kind. You can just tell them information based on what they ask, or just have something happen if it's that minor.

This is also great for both new and veteran players. New players can basically ask for help in what to do next and not be afraid to ask questions about what's going on. Veteran players can try and learn more information about what's going on and maybe learn about interesting mechanics.

DC Tip: I've had players ask REALLY interesting questions about the terrain or monsters... and after their question... I was so surprised by how cool of an idea it was that I added it to the combat and it became a cool new mechanic. Let your players think about your world and then run with those thoughts.

MOVEMENT ACTIONS

SPENDING MOVEMENT

On your turn, you can spend 15ft of movement to complete a task. This could include tasks that might normally require a Bonus Action or Action to complete. Some of these might even be things you could do for free, Rules as Written, but sometimes you want to open a door and pick up a weapon.

You can perform any of the following actions by spending 15ft of movement each:

- Draw or sheathe a sword
- Open or close a door
- Withdraw a potion from your backpack
- Pick up a dropped weapon
- Pull a lever or activate a switch
- Pull a torch from a sconce
- Turn a key in a lock (not picking a lock)
- Tap the floor with a 10-foot pole
- Hand an item to another character

5FT STEP

You can spend your full movement to take a 5ft step without taking Opportunity Attacks.

There are many times when you are close to an enemy and REALLY don't want to take a hit, but also NEED your Action to make an Attack or something else important. Now you would be able to take a 5ft Step and still make an Attack.

TRADING DOWN

You can use your Action to perform a Bonus Action.

According to RAW, the different types of Actions are completely separate from each other and are not interchangeable. Despite the common interpretation of Bonus Actions as "Faster Actions," you can't perform 2 Bonus Actions on your turn. I've never seen a player break the game with this request and it usually opens up cool options for them to play how they want.

CONDITIONS

NEW CONDITIONS

These conditions can be used as new effects from enemy casters, monsters, diseases, poisons, potions, and more.

BLEEDING

A Bleeding creature suffers **1d4** Necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns until it regains at least 1 HP. A creature can use its Action to make a **DC 10** Medicine Check. **Success:** It removes the Bleeding condition from itself or another creature it can touch.

BLOODIED

A creature below 1/2 its HP maximum is considered Bloodied. A creature below 1/4 its HP maximum is considered Well-Bloodied.

IMPAIRED

An Impaired creature has DisADV on Attacks, Checks, and Saves that use Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution.

DAZED

A Dazed creature has DisADV on Attacks, Checks, and Saves that use Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.

DEFENSE

Certain effects can alter your AC by strengthening or weakening your defenses against attackers. Defense is measured in levels. An effect can increase or decrease a creature's Defense by one or more levels, as specified in the effect's description.

OVERWHELMED X

You gain a penalty of X on all Attacks, Checks, and Saves that you make.

Example: A creature with Overwhelmed 5 suffers a -5 penalty on Attacks, Checks, and Saves that it makes.

WEAKENED ABILITY X

You gain a penalty of X on Attacks, Checks, and Saves you make with the affected Ability.

Example: A creature with Weakened Strength 2 suffers a -2 penalty on Attacks, Checks, and Saves it makes that use Strength.

DOOMED X

You automatically suffer X amount of Death Save failures that persist until you either remove this condition or reach 3 failed Death Saves and die.

Example: A creature with Doomed 2 suffers 2 Death Save failures and if it falls Unconscious it's only 1 Death Save away from dying. It could also die if it falls Unconscious with Doomed 3.

STAGGERED CONDITION

When a specific trigger happens to a creature it becomes vulnerable to damage for 1 round.

You can cause the Staggered condition a number of ways, not limited to:

- A specific condition you inflict on the creature
- Stacking multiple conditions at the same time
- Dealing damage of a specific type
- Dealing damage of a specific type while the creature is affected by a specific condition (deal Poison damage to a creature who is Poisoned)
- Overcoming damage thresholds on certain parts of the creature
- Moving the creature into a specific location on the battlefield OR being in a special location yourself (a tar pit/prepared *magic circle*)
- Special magic items used against the creature
- Readied Action to Attack a creature in a weak point when it does a specific trigger (readying an Action to strike a Dragon's open maw when it attempts to use its Breath Weapon)

Level	Status	Effect
2	Fortified	+5 AC
1	Protected	+2 AC
0	---	---
-1	Unprotected	-2 AC
-2	Exposed	-5 AC



UPDATED CONDITIONS

These conditions don't impact the game in the way that I feel they should. The Prone condition is mostly useless, Exhaustion is rarely ever used, and Petrified can auto-kill a character from failing a Save. These options give you more ways to use these conditions in your games to find the right ways for you.

GRADUAL PETRIFICATION

It can often feel unfair to use petrification as a mechanic in your games because even the hardest of heroes is only two bad rolls from being stone dead. Gradual Petrification moves the goalposts a little to give you more wiggle room with your petrifying monsters.

A creature that fails its Save against being Petrified becomes Partially Petrified and its body begins turning to stone, with some body parts becoming more solid than others. At the end of each of its turns, a creature who is Partially or Heavily Petrified repeats its Save, becoming more or less Petrified on a success.

Petrified Status	Effect	Save Success	Save Failure
Partially Petrified	Speed halved. DisADV on Dex Saves.	Effect ends.	Become Heavily Petrified.
Heavily Petrified	Stunned.	Become Partially Petrified.	Become Fully Petrified.
Fully Petrified	Turned to Stone.	-	-

You can modify this template based on either your setting's lore or specific creatures in your world. You might have a particularly deadly foe not allow reduced petrification on a successful Save, the Save instead only halting the progress. You could remove the ability to end the effect, making Partially Petrified a longer lasting curse that needs to be treated after the battle.

DC Tip: Something I do to make things easier on the PCs is to allow the petrification to end entirely if they EVER succeed on a Save. This gives them a better chance to shake it off.



ALTERNATIVE EXHAUSTION SYSTEMS

The Exhaustion condition has several levels with different effects that can be hard to remember. Many GMs are also afraid to inflict Exhaustion on their PCs because it can become too punishing. The alternative Exhaustion systems below offer both simple and advanced methods for handling Exhaustion.

Updated Exhaustion

This alternative changes the effects of suffering 1 level of Exhaustion and 3 levels of Exhaustion to -2 and -5 on all d20 rolls, respectively. At 2 levels of Exhaustion your speed is halved, as normal. Suffering 4 levels of Exhaustion makes you vulnerable to all damage, rather than halving your HP Maximum. At 5 levels of Exhaustion your speed is reduced to 5ft instead of 0. 6 levels of Exhaustion still results in death.

Level	Effect
1	-2 penalty on Attacks, Saves, and Checks.
2	Speed is halved.
3	-5 penalty on Attacks, Saves, and Checks.
4	Become vulnerable to all damage.
5	Speed is reduced to 5ft.
6	Death

Simple Dungeon Coach Exhaustion

This alternative Exhaustion system simply reduces your speed by 5ft and imposes a -1 penalty on all Attacks, Saves, Checks, and the DCs of Saves that you force other creatures to make, for each level of Exhaustion you suffer. For example, if you were to suffer 4 levels of Exhaustion, your speed would be reduced by 20ft and you would have a -4 penalty on Attacks, Saves, and Checks that you make.

Level	Effect
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -1 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs. Speed is reduced by 5ft.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs. Speed is reduced by 10ft.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -3 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs. Speed is reduced by 15ft.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -4 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs. Speed is reduced by 20ft.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -5 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs. Speed is reduced by 25ft.
6	Death

Advanced Dungeon Coach Exhaustion

This alternative Exhaustion system builds on top of Simple Dungeon Coach Exhaustion by adding additional side effects beyond 1 level of Exhaustion. These penalties start off small but get worse with each level.

Level	Effect
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• -1 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs• Speed is reduced by 5ft
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• -2 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs• Speed is reduced by 10ft• Can't take Reactions
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• -3 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs• Speed is reduced by 15ft• Can't take Reactions• Can only take an Action or Bonus Action (your choice), not both
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• -4 penalty on Attacks, Saves, Checks, and DCs• Speed is reduced by 20ft• Can't take Reactions• Can only take an Action or Bonus Action (your choice), not both• Can't Concentrate, and can only make 1 Attack when you take the Attack Action
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• -5 penalty on Attacks, Checks, and DCs• Speed is reduced by 25ft• Can't take Reactions• Can only take an Action or Bonus Action (your choice), not both• Can't Concentrate, and can only make 1 Attack when you take the Attack Action• Automatically fail all Saves, and become vulnerable to all damage
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Death

PRONE CONDITION (UPDATED)

If an individual is knocked Prone, they receive the Prone condition. Standing up from this condition costs 15ft of movement (not half) and provokes Opportunity Attacks from combatants within melee range. Additionally, their next Melee or Spell Attack on this turn is done at DisADV.

- A Prone creature's only movement option is to crawl.
- The creature has DisADV on Attacks.
- An Attack against the creature has ADV if the attacker is within 5ft of the creature. Otherwise, the Attack has DisADV.
- The creature can spend 15ft of movement to stand up and thereby end the condition.
- Unless you use all of your movement to stand up, standing up from Prone triggers Opportunity Attacks from creatures within 5ft of you that can see you and imposes DisADV on the next Melee or Spell Attack you make until the end of your turn.

Modification

- If you spend your FULL movement you can choose to either not take any Opportunity Attacks OR remove the DisADV on your next Attack.
- Remove the DisADV on the next Attack entirely.

DEFENSE HOUSE RULES

Depending on how deadly you want your games to be you can change the mechanics that involve how your PCs defend themselves or take damage. These rules let you tweak how durable they are, in either direction, to help better find the balance you're looking for. Combine these with the Death Rules in Chapter 8 for even more options.

MENTAL SAVES DIFFERENTIATION

Currently Saves are usually just a Wisdom Save for the large majority of spells, This feels bad to me. I want to spread out the categories for what each Save does so that it's very clear and obvious what type of effect would be what type of Save.

INTELLIGENCE SAVES

This is a more literal sense of your mind in relation to your literal brain, what you think, and what you see. Anything related to Psychic damage attacks your brain and would be in this category. The stronger someone's mind is the better they would be able to withstand things that do the following:

- Torments and destroys the mind
- Reads a creature's thoughts
- Illusions and hallucinations
- Directly affects mental capacity
- Usually Psychic damage

WISDOM SAVES

This is more of an abstract sense of your willpower. If anything, THIS is the category that's the catch-all for effects that don't fit into Intelligence or Charisma. These are magical effects on your body that you would not be able to fight based on the strength of your body (Constitution).

- Fears
- Affects the senses
- Forced or restricted movement (mentally)
- Deals Necrotic, Psychic, and sometimes Radiant damage



CHARISMA SAVES

These are magic effects against YOU, as in the literal soul of your character, the essence of who they are and their emotions. This has been referred to as one's "force of will", but it's the strength of your sense of self and the ability to control yourself and your emotions. Losing that control of your own actions goes beyond your mind and emotions, and also includes things that move your soul out of your body. Overall, these are things that affect your personality and corrupt the choices you would normally make, either by corrupting emotions or forceful control.

- Charms and possessions
- Emotional changes and soul removal
- Affects one's state of being and place in the world
- Banishment and imprisonment
- Almost never deals damage

IMMOBILE TARGET PENALTIES

When a creature cannot move at all, it doesn't add its Dexterity Modifier to its Dexterity Saves or to its AC (if it's part of its AC). Additionally, even if you do miss, you deal half damage (like a spell).

It has always felt crazy to me when a character tries to Attack an Unconscious or unmoving target... and they miss, dealing ZERO DAMAGE. In these moments I still ask for an Attack to be made, but if they miss I still have them roll for damage, but it only deals half damage. I only use this when it would be IMPOSSIBLE for them to miss the target.

DAMAGE RESIST X

Damage of the specified type is reduced by an amount equal to the bonus.

Example: If you have Fire Resist 10 and take 12 damage, you reduce that 12 by 10 and take 2 damage instead. This would happen with each new instance of damage taken.

Sometimes resistance isn't the best way to communicate a creature's ability to take less damage from a specific type of damage. In my mind a Tiefling should be IMMUNE to tiny little fires, but still take a lot of damage from a Dragon's Breath Weapon. You can better control the amount of damage players are resistant to with this system. If you give the 1st-level Tiefling character Fire Resist 5, that'll feel totally fine when they take minimal Fire damage (5 or less), because they

would take no damage from it. They could even roleplay that they touch flames and take no damage from it, etc. But if that same Tiefling takes 50 damage from a Dragon's Breath Weapon... it wouldn't be reduced by half to 25, which is a BIG reduction in damage for a 1st-level character, it would be reduced to 45 instead ($50 - 5 = 45$).

There are still times when I use normal resistance and I think it's a great and simple method. Resist X just feels better in some situations to mechanically represent what you're wanting to do. There are also a ton of modifications you can use in combat for your monsters.

It's up to you as a GM on what you do on multiple instances of damage on the same turn. *Scorching Ray*, for example, deals 3 instances of Fire damage, but it happens on the same turn. I would personally rule that you total the damage from all 3 instances and then reduce it by the resistance amount. However, if you want it to be more powerful you can apply the resistance to each.

SCALING RESIST X

This system allows for scaling to take place over time or as a character levels up. The Tiefling character could slowly gain more and more Fire resistance at key level ups (usually 5th, 11th, and 17th). Or you could have the Resist X on a character be equal to their level. This usually gives a smooth curve to the resistance, is easy to remember, and isn't as broken as full-on resistance can be.

NEW RESIST TYPES

Think outside the box when it comes to applying this Resist X to different types of damage. Here are some examples of things I've used to create some awesome monsters:

Physical Resist: Resistance against Slashing, Piercing, and Bludgeoning damage.

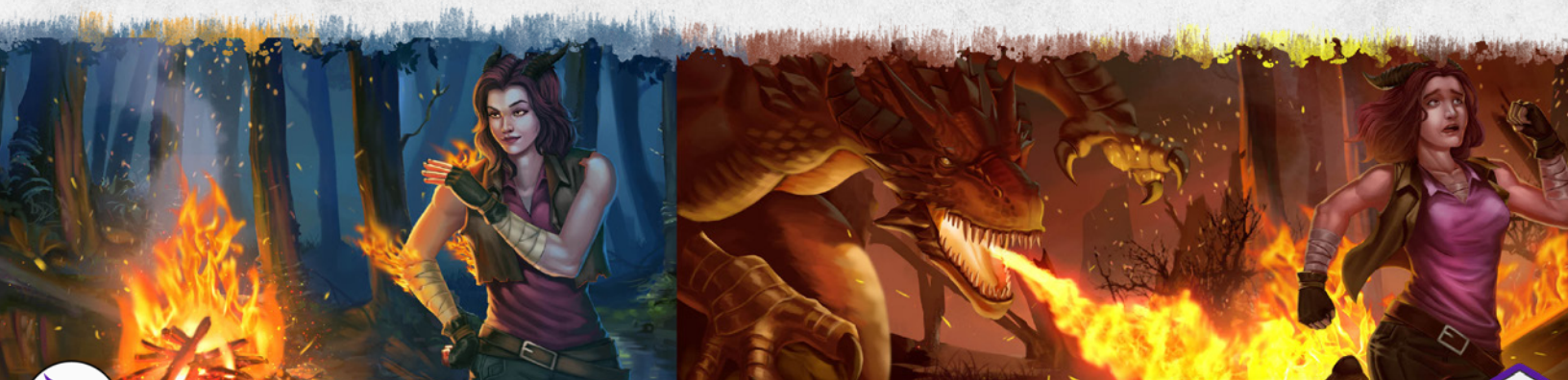
Magic Resist: Resistance against spell damage.

Elemental Resist: Resistance against Fire, Lightning, and Cold damage (or magical Bludgeoning damage from water?).

Erosion Resist: Resistance against Acid, Poison, and Necrotic damage.

Cosmic Resist: Resistance against Radiant and Necrotic damage.

Complete Resist: Resistance against ALL types of damage.



ROUND RESIST X

Instead of the Resist X number being used to reduce each individual instance of damage, it instead reduces the amount of damage from that type during the ROUND of combat and only resets at the beginning of each round. PCs have to work together to take down this Resist X number if they want to deal this type of damage to a creature.

Example: A creature has Lightning Resist 20 as a Round Resist, which means during the 1st round of combat PCs would have to deal OVER 20 points of Lightning damage before they could get through the Resistance. The Sorcerer deals 15 points of Lightning damage on their turn and reduces it down from 20 to 5, then on the Barbarian's turn they also deal 15 points of Lightning damage. The remaining 5 points of Lightning Resist would be gone and the creature would take 10 damage from the carried over amount. This Lightning Resist would reset back to 20 at the beginning of the next round.

I've used this before where the creature was IMMUNE to ALL damage... but it had Lightning Resist 20 for the round. Each PC was capable of dealing Lightning damage and had to work together to be able to deal ANY damage to it. I had to keep in mind not to give creatures like this a lot of HP since it's so hard to damage. It only had 50 HP but it took them multiple rounds to get through the Lightning Resist 20 to be able to damage it.

RESIST TEMP HP X

You can think of this unique Temp HP as an elemental ward, combining the Temp HP and Resist X approaches. This specific Temp HP stacks with other kinds, and is only used up when you take damage of the specified type.

A Cold Temp HP 10 would only reduce Cold damage. Any other source of damage would not be reduced in any way and would deal full damage. Once the Cold Temp HP is used up, it is gone.

MINOR DAMAGE VULNERABILITY

A creature with a Minor Vulnerability takes an additional 50% damage of the specified type (rounded down).

Example: If a creature with Minor Cold Vulnerability takes 10 Cold damage, it instead takes 15 damage ($10 / 2 = 5$, and $10 + 5 = 15$).

GMs are usually very hesitant to give out vulnerabilities to PCs or monsters, since taking DOUBLE damage can be a lot and lead toward quick and untimely deaths. I use normal vulnerability more often than Minor Vulnerability, but this solves the issue of wanting a creature to take more damage from a source, but not too much.

Example: A PC takes massive Fire damage from a Dragon's Breath Weapon. Using a lingering injuries table (see page 207) the player gets Minor Vulnerability as a result. The player's exposure to fire leaves them weakened to this damage type. I'm very hesitant to give a player full vulnerability, so this fits well. Plus, I can give the player a story arc about their recovery to drop this effect as well.

DC Tip: It's very easy to calculate what a player taking 50% extra damage would be. All you need to do is half the amount of damage dealt and add it on top of the original damage total. So if a PC takes 22 damage, half of that is 11 damage, so adding 11 back to the original 22 gets you a total of 33 damage taken.



GLANCING BLOWS

If a creature makes an Attack against you and EXACTLY hits your AC, then the Attack hits (as usual) but it's a Glancing Blow and it deals half damage instead.

Example: Your AC is 18. If a creature's Attack totals below 18, they miss and deal no damage. If a creature's Attack totals above 18, they hit and deal full damage. However, if a creature's Attack totals EXACTLY 18, they hit but only deal half damage.

Keep in mind that this rule will decrease the amount of damage creatures take. Normally, exactly hitting a target's AC would deal full damage, so this does make creatures last longer in combat.

GLANCING BLOW AC RANGE

A creature has a range of numbers that represent its AC. Any attack that lands on or within this number is a Glancing Blow and deals half damage instead.

I use this feature a LOT for monsters that I want to be large and be able to take a TON of damage. If you increase the AC of a monster too high then, yes, this represents it being difficult to kill from having so much armor... but also makes it frustrating for the PCs to be able to hit. It's not fun to constantly miss a creature with 25 AC... that would be a LOT of AC to give a creature. But if you give it a Glancing Blow AC of 20-25, now it's easier to hit but still takes half damage if the attack totals between 20 and 25. They would have to get a 26 or higher to deal FULL damage.

HUMAN SHIELD

When you miss with an Attack against a creature that has full or half cover granted by another creature being in the way, the Attack hits the creature that's granting cover if the Attack would have hit without the bonus to AC. This applies to both Ranged and Melee Attacks.

Example: A creature's AC is 10, and your ally is standing in front of the creature partially blocking them. You rule that the creature would have partial cover and gets a +2 AC on top of their base 10 AC. You make a Ranged Attack against this creature and hope that you don't hit your ally. The creature's AC is now 12 (10+2). If you get a 9 or less, you miss entirely, like you normally would've with the original 10 AC. If you get a 10 or 11, you hit your ally instead, since your total was within 2 of the creature's AC (and +2 is how much your ally is providing as cover). If you get a 12 or higher you hit the creature as usual. If your ally was instead granting +5 to the enemy creature's AC then your ally would be hit on 10,11,12,13, and 14 (the top 5 values of the AC).

Modifications

- Allow for the ally to only take half damage if they're hit in this way.
- Instead of the top part of the AC, have it be the bottom end of the AC. So, the attacker would have to roll a 1 or a 2 on the d20 to hit their ally since the AC they're providing is 2.
- You could bypass this example entirely by allowing the PC to "duck" as a Reaction, or for free.
- You could use this concept in a magic shield. If a creature hits the AC that the shield is granting above its base AC, a magical effect happens. Now the PC knows that when a creature makes an Attack within that AC range something special happens.



GENERAL BATTLEFIELD RULES

IMPROVED KNOCKBACK

When a creature is moved against their will and collides with an object or another creature before reaching the maximum distance of the movement, it takes **1d4** Bludgeoning damage for every 5ft it would've moved.



IMPROVED REACH

Weapons with the Reach property can now attack targets that leave the 5ft threatened range like it could without the Reach property.

DC Tip: It feels like a strange nerf to Reach weapons that they can't make a 5ft Opportunity Attack. I usually only apply this rule to monsters. If you stay within 5ft of it you are fine, but once you start leaving that area, you take Opportunity Attacks.

EXPANDED OPPORTUNITY ATTACKS

Any Action or Interaction that leaves you vulnerable to being Attacked can trigger an Opportunity Attack from enemies within melee range.

Actions that would provoke an Opportunity Attack include:

- Standing up from Prone
- Drinking a potion
- Loading a crossbow
- Opening a door
- Picking a lock
- Using a complicated mechanism or puzzle
- Casting a spell that has both somatic and material components

EXPANDED FLANKING

A creature can handle a number of hostile targets in their threatened space equal to their Occupancy Score. Once this number is exceeded the creature gains the Flanked condition. Attacks against the creature gain an additional +2 to hit and they can no longer make Opportunity Attacks.

Flanking is a great tactic in combat but it's not rewarded mechanically at all, which feels bad. There is a variant rule which grants ADV, which is too simple and gives away ADV too easily for something so simple. There should be a reward for those who think tactically and it can also be combined interestingly with Opportunity Attacks. This system does add more complex numbers to keep track of, but it can make things MUCH more tactical, especially in larger groups when these rules could really come into play.

DC Tip: You could allow a Flanked creature to make Opportunity Attacks, but this would trigger other Opportunity Attacks from the surrounding enemies.

OCCUPANCY SCORE

The default Occupancy Score of a creature is 1. This means that the creature can only handle 1 hostile creature within 5ft of it. If a 2nd enemy enters this area, this would exceed its Occupancy Score of 1 and the creature would become Flanked.

If a creature is within 5ft of an ally, they can add their Occupancy Scores together to not get as overwhelmed. This is your classic movie scene of two heroes fighting back-to-back since they can fight off more enemies together than apart.

Some creatures might have a much higher Occupancy Score and can handle far more enemies around them. These can be represented by creatures with heavy armor, shields, multiple limbs, multiple heads, or just great combat skills.



SETTING OCCUPANCY SCORE

NPCs: Easy, just choose a number that makes the most sense for the enemy with the default being 1.

PCs: All PCs start off with an Occupancy Score of 1. If the PC is a martial character, the score increases to 2. Wearing a shield also increases the score by 1. Other special class or racial traits the character has can also add to the score, such as with martial-focused spellcaster subclasses.

DC Tip: You can also choose to have a formula of $1 + 1/2$ Prof. Bonus for martial classes, but I think this works best when the GM is able to give this out to characters that it would make sense for, and keep it simple besides that.

COMPOUNDED FLANKING

Each additional hostile creature beyond the Occupancy Score within 5ft gains an additional +2 bonus to its Attacks.

Example: A creature has an Occupancy Score of 1, once a 2nd hostile creature enters within 5ft all flanking creatures would now get a +2 to their Attacks. When a 3rd hostile creature enters within 5ft all Attacks against the target gain a +4, and so on.

DC Tip: I usually have the PC or creature declare who they are targeting or focusing on and THAT target does not get the “flanking bonus”.

THE WHITE FLAG

As soon as the enemy leader is defeated in combat and only the lesser enemies remain, roll a d20 and see what happens to them. Based on the result of the d20, you narratively describe what happens to the enemies and the combat ends.

Example: When the party defeats the leader of the enemy cult you roll a d20 to see how the final moments of the battle conclude. You get an 8, so you describe some of the enemies trying to flee while others attempt a few more spells. You narrate that the PCs continue to mop up those that remain. The players can also interject into this as well, to add more flair. The description can be more or less fatal based on the roll.

Too many times there are a few enemies left in a situation that is no longer threatening and it can drag on and waste precious minutes of play. You're the one that makes a call on when to “wave the white flag” and roll this die, because sometimes there's still tension left in the fight and you need to keep the Initiative order going. The d20 roll gives the “flavor” of what happens. If you roll a 20, maybe the combat really isn't over and they enter into a rage which makes things more dangerous, but if you roll a 1 then maybe they faint on the spot out of pure fear.

MARTIAL FEATURES

IMPROVED 2-HANDED WEAPONS

When you deal damage with a Two-Handed Weapon, you deal additional damage equal to 1.5 times your Strength Modifier (rounded down).

Example: If your Strength Modifier is 4, Attacks you make with Two-Handed Weapons deal an additional 6 damage instead of 4 ($4 / 2 = 2$, and $4 + 2 = 6$).

DC Tip: Two-Handed weapons require the use of both of their hands and rewards them more for their commitment to offense over defense.

EXPANDED TWO-WEAPON FIGHTING

When you take the Attack Action and Attack with a Light Melee Weapon that you're holding in one hand, you can also make the same number of Attacks with a different Light Melee Weapon that you're holding in the other hand. You don't add your Ability Modifier to the damage of the additional Attack(s), unless that Modifier is negative. If either weapon has the Thrown property, you can throw the weapon, instead of making a Melee Attack with it.

Modification

- You can require that a character has Two-Weapon Fighting to gain access to this feature.

EXPANDED MARTIAL ARTS

Your Unarmed Strikes are considered weapons with the Light property for the purposes of engaging in Two-Weapon Fighting.

Using this alternative rule for Two-Weapon Fighting, it's important to consider how a Monk might benefit from a similar change to their Martial Arts feature which allows them to make Unarmed Strikes using a Bonus Action if they Attack with a Monk Weapon or Unarmed Strike as part of the Attack Action. When using Expanded Two-Weapon Fighting, you can also replace the 3rd bullet of the Monk's Martial Arts feature with the following benefit:

Modification

- You can make a Monk's Unarmed Strikes be considered a weapon in general, allowing them to work with other features like a Paladin's Divine Smite.

ADVANCED GRAPPLE OPTIONS

All of these options require a creature that is already Grappled. These can all be reflavored to be something else that the player describes that they do, but the mechanics are what to focus on. If a PC says they want to do something crazy, then think of these options and which would fit the best. If a player is going for a stun, but wants to flavor it in a different way than a Headbutt, they can.



BODY BLOCK

When you have a creature Grappled and you are hit by an Attack, you can use a Reaction to attempt to shield your body with the Grappled creature's body. You must be able to see the attacker, and the Attack cannot originate from the creature you have Grappled. Make a contested Grapple Check against the Grappled creature. **Success:** You halve the damage against you, and the Grappled creature suffers an equal amount of damage.

BODY SLAM

If you move at least 10ft toward a creature, you can use a Bonus Action to attempt to body slam it. Make a contested Grapple Check against the creature. **Success:** You and the creature both fall Prone, it becomes Grappled by you, and it takes Bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength Modifier.

CHOKE HOLD

When you have a creature Grappled you can attempt to choke them out. Make a contested Grapple Check against the creature. **Success:** It begins Suffocating. You can make subsequent attempts on each of your turns, and on a success, you lower the number of rounds until it Suffocates by 1.

GAG

When you have a creature Grappled you can attempt to muffle the creature's mouth to prevent it from speaking. Make a contested Grapple Check against the creature. **Success:** The creature can't speak until the Grapple ends.

DC Tip: Gagging a creature prevents it from casting spells with verbal components.

HEADBUTT

When you have a creature Grappled, you can attempt to bash the creature in the head. Make a contested Grapple Check against the creature. **Success:** The target must make a Constitution Save against your **Strength Save DC**. **Failure:** It is Stunned until the end of its next turn.

PIN

When you have a creature Grappled, you can attempt to pin the creature to the ground. Make a contested Grapple Check against the creature. **Success:** You and the creature both fall Prone. The Grappled creature is now Restrained and your Speed becomes 0 until the Grapple ends.

Your hands are considered tied and unusable until the pin is broken. You can not perform the somatic components of spells and your Attack Action is limited to Unarmed Strikes with an elbow, leg, or your head. When a pinned creature succeeds in escaping a Grapple, they are no longer pinned, but remain Grappled.

DC Tip: This is also included in the Grappler Feat, so if you use these then you should remove that feat from the game (or give additional bonuses to those who want to improve their grapples). Also, you could have the target making the pin choose to NOT fall Prone and instead restrain the target while standing.

SUFFOCATION

A creature can hold its breath for a number of minutes equal to 1 + its Constitution Modifier (minimum of 30 Seconds). When a creature runs out of breath or is choking, it can survive for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution Modifier (minimum of 1 round). At the start of its next turn, it drops to 0 HP and is dying, and it can't regain HP or be stabilized until it can breathe again.

DC Tip: Certain effects and features can cause a creature to begin suffocating immediately, usually by knocking the air out of a creature or by constricting it



SUPLEX

When you have a creature Grappled, you can attempt to slam the creature to the ground, performing a suplex. Make a contested Grapple Check against the creature. **Success:** The creature takes Bludgeoning damage equal to **1d6** + your Strength Modifier, and is knocked Prone. **Failure:** The creature remains Grappled and suffers no other effects. Alternatively, you can choose to end the Grapple to deal extra damage equal to **1d6** + your Strength Modifier.

THROWING CREATURES

As an Action, you can throw a creature that is 1 size smaller than you or smaller.

Friendly Creature: The thrower makes an Athletics Check and the creature being thrown makes an Acrobatics Check. Add the two results together to get the maximum number of feet they can be thrown. You may throw the creature any number of feet, up to this maximum.

If the thrower gets higher than 10, you can round up the total to the nearest 5 (7 becomes 10, 13 becomes 15, etc.). If the creature being thrown gets higher than 10, they land safely on their feet and don't take any damage from losing balance. They take **1d4** Bludgeoning damage for every 5ft they were thrown otherwise.

Enemy Creature: Before you can attempt to throw an enemy, you must have them Grappled. You must make an Athletics Check to determine how far you can throw the creature. If you throw them into a solid object, the thrown creature takes **1d4** Bludgeoning damage for every 5ft they would've been thrown. If you throw this creature into another creature, the damage is split evenly between them. The thrown creature can make a **DC 10** Acrobatics Check. **Success:** It takes half damage.

Same Size Creature: You can follow the rules as above, but cut the totals from the Checks in half.

Dual Throwing Creatures: If two creatures are both throwing a single creature, they both need to have that creature Grappled. Both throwers make Athletics Checks and the results are added together to determine how far it can be thrown. If the creature being thrown is friendly, it can also make an Acrobatics Check (as per the rule above).



MARTIAL TECHNIQUES

MARTIAL ACTIONS

Martial classes or characters that have proficiency with martial weapons gain enhanced versions of the Dash, Disengage, Dodge, and Help Actions, while still maintaining an active combat presence. Upon reaching level 5 these are upgraded and you unlock more Martial Special Attacks.

Martial Dash: You gain extra movement equal to half your speed until the end of the turn, and you can make 1 Weapon Attack against a target within your reach. You don't add your Ability Modifier to the damage of the attack, unless that modifier is negative.

DC Tip: I want to upgrade the options for martial characters and not force them to have to get feats to make useful choices. The Martial Dash option is similar to the Charger feat which means you could still use both together. You would just be able to spend a Bonus Action on an additional Attack.

Martial Disengage: You can make 1 Weapon Attack against a target within your reach. You do not provoke Opportunity Attacks from that target for the rest of the turn. You don't add your Ability Modifier to the damage of the attack, unless that modifier is negative.

Martial Dodge: Until the start of your next turn, any Attack made against you has DisADV if you can see the attacker. During this time, if a creature Attacks you while within your reach, you can make an Attack against it. You don't add your Ability Modifier to the damage of the attacks, unless that modifier is negative.

Martial Help: When you take the Help Action, you distract a creature within your weapon's range with feints or suppressing fire. The first Attack against this creature before the start of your next turn has ADV. On a hit, the Attack deals additional damage equal to the damage die of the weapon you used to perform this action.

MARTIAL EXPERTISE

Upon gaining Extra Attack, you can add your Ability Modifier to the damage of Attacks made using Martial Actions.

The natural progression for this are Martial Special Attacks, which unlock for martial classes at 5th-level as well. This gives them more flexibility with those new Extra Attacks!

MARTIAL SPECIAL ATTACKS

When you make an Attack or hit with an Attack, you can choose to make it a Special Attack by forgoing additional Attacks you can make. Making 2 Attacks will likely deal more damage, but a Special Attack can impose additional penalties on the target.

Example: A character with Extra Attack can make 2 Attacks when it takes the Attack Action. It can choose to make 2 Attacks or make 1 Special Attack by forgoing the 2nd Attack. Using Two Weapon Fighting, a character can also make additional Attacks using a different Light Weapon they are

wielding in a different hand. They can also forgo any of these additional Attacks to make Special Attacks. Similarly, a Monk can forgo additional Attacks granted by Martial Arts or Ki to make Special Attacks.

Each of these Martial Special Attacks have certain requirements, and if the target needs to make a Save, it's against your Strength or Dexterity Save DC (your choice).

DC Tip: How these would work LIVE at the table would be like this:

- *Player makes an Attack*
- *HITS "I'm going to use my Hammer Special Attack"*
- *Target makes their Save and fails*
- *Player rolls for TOTAL damage and the creature falls under the effect.*

Axe: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the Attack and gains the Bleeding condition.

Bow: When you make an Attack against a target within 30ft of you, you can forgo 1 Attack to gain ADV on the Attack and gain additional movement equal to half your speed. On a hit, you don't provoke Opportunity Attacks from the target until the start of your next turn.

Chained: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Strength Save. **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the Attack and drops a weapon or shield it's wielding (your choice) to a space within 10ft of them.

Cleave: While using a Two-Handed Weapon, you can forgo 2 Attacks to make a wide swing with your weapon and choose a target within your reach. You can make a Melee Weapon Attack against that target and up to 2 targets adjacent to it that are also within your reach, using the same Attack and Damage totals against all creatures.

Concussive Strike: While using a weapon that deals Bludgeoning damage, on a hit you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** The target is Stunned until the end of your next turn. Once Stunned from this Special Attack, a creature is immune to the technique for the next 24 hours.

Crossbow: When you make an Attack, you can forgo 1 Attack to gain ADV on the Attack. On a hit, the Attack deals 1 extra die of damage.

Feint: While using a Light Weapon, when you make a Weapon Attack, you can forgo 1 Attack to make a Deception Check contested by the target's Insight Check. **Success:** You gain ADV on your Attack and deal 1 extra die of damage on a hit.

Hammer: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Strength Save. **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the Attack and is knocked 5ft away from you.

Pinpoint Attack: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** The target is Impaired until the end of its next turn.

Puncture: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the Attack and it loses 1 level of Defense for 1 minute (see "Defense" on page 147).

Staff: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Strength or Dexterity Save (target's choice). **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the Attack and falls Prone.

Stagger (Combo): On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** The target becomes vulnerable to the next source of Slashing, Piercing, or Bludgeoning damage it takes before the start of your next turn. You can only do this once per combat.

Sunder Armor: While using a Hammer, Puncture, or Chained Weapon, on a hit against a creature wearing armor, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Constitution Save. **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the Attack and loses 1 level of Defense for 1 minute (see "Defense" on page 147).

Sword: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Dexterity Save. **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the Attack and has DisADV on the next Attack or Check it makes before the end of your next turn.

Thrust: When you make an Attack, you can forgo 1 Attack to lunge with your weapon. The reach of the Attack is increased by 5ft and it deals 1 extra die of damage.

Unarmed: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to force the target to make a Strength or Dexterity Save (target's choice) as you attempt to Grapple or Disarm it (the target has ADV on the Save if it's holding an object with 2 hands). You cannot attempt to Grapple or Disarm a creature that is more than one size larger than you. **Failure:** The target takes 1 extra die of damage from the attack and either becomes Grappled by you or you Disarm it, gaining possession of the object or it falls into an unoccupied space of your choice within 10ft of the creature.

Whip: On a hit, you can forgo 1 Attack to automatically Grapple the target using your whip. To escape the Grapple, the creature must use an Action or a single Attack to make an Acrobatics or Athletics Check against your **Strength** or **Dexterity Save DC** (your choice). **Success:** It escapes being Grappled. You can release the target at any time (no Action required). While a creature is Grappled using your whip, it can still move, but must stay within your weapon's reach. You cannot use your whip to make Attacks, but you can use a Bonus Action to force the creature to make a Strength or Dexterity Save. **Failure:** The target is pulled 5ft closer to you or is knocked Prone (your choice).

DC Tip: You could also grant the ability for whips to target objects in a creature's hands, using the same rules that apply to the Disarm Contest from below.



MARTIAL CONTESTS

These are Martial Actions that require a contested Check between two creatures and cost a single Attack to use.

Disarm: You can forgo 1 Attack to attempt to knock an object from a target's grasp. Make an Attack contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics Check (target's choice). The target has ADV on the Check if it's holding an object with 2 hands, and you have DisADV on your Attack if the creature is more than one size larger than you. **Success:** You gain possession of the object or it falls into an unoccupied space of your choice within 10ft of the creature.

Grapple: You can forgo 1 Attack to attempt to Grapple another creature. Make an Athletics Check contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics Check (target's choice). **Success:** The target becomes Grappled by you and it takes Bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength Modifier.

Shove: You can forgo 1 Attack to attempt to push a target away from you. Make an Athletics Check contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics Check (target's choice). **Success:** You shove the target 5ft away from you or it falls Prone (your choice), and it takes Bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength Modifier.

Swap: You can forgo 1 Attack to attempt to switch places within another creature. Make an Athletics Check contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics Check (target's choice). **Success:** You swap places with the target and it takes Bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength Modifier.

Tackle: You can forgo 1 Attack to attempt to tackle another creature. Make an Athletics Check contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics Check (target's choice). **Failure:** You fall Prone on the opposite side of the target and lose your remaining movement for the turn. **Success:** The target falls Prone, becomes Grappled by you, and it takes Bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength Modifier.

Trip: You can forgo 1 Attack to attempt to trip another creature. Make an Attack contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics Check (target's choice). **Success:** The target falls Prone and it takes Bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength Modifier.

MARTIAL BONUS ACTIONS

Brace: While wearing any armor, as a Bonus Action you select a target to brace yourself against. You increase your Defense by 1 against that target until the start of your next turn (see "Defense" on page 147).

Defensive Stance: While wielding a shield, you can use a Bonus Action to enter a defensive stance until the start of your next turn. For the duration, you gain 1 level of Defense, to a maximum of Protected (see "Defense" on page 147).

Offensive Stance: While wielding any Melee Weapon, as a Bonus Action you can mark a creature that's beyond your reach until the start of your next turn. If the creature moves within your reach during this time, you can use a Reaction to make a Melee Weapon Attack against it.

MARTIAL REACTIONS

Kip Up: While unarmored or wearing light armor, as a Reaction to being knocked Prone, you can make an Acrobatics Check contested by the Attack or Save that knocked you Prone, to immediately stand back up.

Maneuver: As a Reaction, you can switch places with an ally who wants to maneuver into your position. When an allied creature moves into a space you occupy, it can end its move there if you use your Reaction to immediately move into the space it previously occupied. You must be able to move into that space and it can't be more than 5ft away from you. Any creature that could make an Opportunity Attack against you can't do so, but can instead make an Opportunity Attack against the creature entering the space you previously occupied.

Parry: While wielding a Melee Weapon, other than Whips, Chained, or Heavy, when another creature hits you with a Melee Attack, you can use your Reaction to add your Prof. Bonus to your AC for that Attack, potentially causing the Attack to miss you.

Protect: While wielding a shield, when a creature you can see Attacks a target other than you that is within 5ft of you, you can use your Reaction to interpose your shield between your ally and the Attack, granting your ally the AC bonus from your shield against the Attack.

Shield Block: While wielding a shield, when you are hit by an Attack that deals damage, you can use a Reaction to raise your shield against that Attack. You gain a bonus to your Armor Reduction value equal to the AC bonus that the shield grants you (see "Armor Reduction (AR)" on page 169).



RECKLESS ACTIONS

SPRINT

As an Action, you can run in a straight line a distance equal to 5 times your movement. While you are sprinting in this way, Opportunity Attacks are made against you with ADV.

CHARGE

When you take the Dash Action, you can attempt to tackle a creature 1 size larger than you or smaller. Make an Athletics Check contested by the creature's Athletics or Acrobatics Check (target's choice). You gain a +1 bonus to your Check for each 5ft you move, up to a maximum of a +5 bonus. **Success:** The target is knocked Prone, becomes Grappled by you, and takes damage from the tackle. The damage equals **1d12** + your Strength Modifier + (the result of your Check - the result of its Check). **Failure:** If the creature made an Athletics Check, you take 1/2 damage from the tackle and fall Prone in front of the target as it stops you in your tracks. If the creature made an Acrobatics Check, you pass by the target as it dodges you, moving the remainder of your speed and then falling Prone.

RUSHING ATTACK

At the beginning of a round of combat, you can choose to temporarily push yourself forward as you make a Rushing Attack. Until the end of the round, your Initiative increases by a number equal to 5 + your Dexterity Modifier, your speed is doubled, and you have ADV on the first Attack you make. You cannot take a Bonus Action or Reaction for the duration. Immediately after making the Attack, you suffer 1 level of Exhaustion.



ADRENALINE ATTACK

When you make a Weapon Attack, you can choose to turn it into an Adrenaline Attack. When you do so, you gain the following benefits:

- You gain ADV on the Attack.
- You add 1 additional weapon damage die to the Attack.
- You can choose to reroll the Attack's damage dice. You must use the new total.
- On a hit, the Attack becomes a Critical Hit.

Immediately after making the Attack, you suffer 1 level of Exhaustion. You can use this ability once per Short Rest.

TARGETED ATTACKS

You can make an Attack targeting a specific area on a creature to attempt to gain a bonus effect in addition to your normal damage. Targeted Attacks result in either DisADV on the Attack or a boost to the target's AC (usually a +5). If the Attack hits, then there are a number of effects that can happen.

I usually make up these effects on-the-fly, even if it's something as simple as DisADV on the creature's next Attack or reducing its speed. The table below shows some examples but this will usually be something you come up with on-the-fly based on the creature and what the player is even asking to do.

POTENTIAL TARGETED ATTACK EFFECTS

Area	Effect
Eye	Blinded
Wing	Flying sSpeed reduced to 0
Leg	MovementSpeed is halved
Arm/Hand	Drop items being carried

Try and find out what the PC is trying to accomplish with this Targeted Attack, so you know what their intent is. I usually tell them what'll happen if the Attack hits so it's clear what they are risking their attack for. GMs can also negotiate with PCs to see if they want to sacrifice ALL damage in order to gain a desired bonus effect on the creature. Sometimes they really want to slow a creature down WAY more than they want to damage it, so give them that option. Damage is always a good result of an Attack, but maybe the challenge you presented them is more complex than that.

DC Tip: Staggered (see page 147) is also a GREAT thing to use or setting up some big damage!

CREATURE DAMAGE ZONE THRESHOLDS

Instead of Attacks being made with DisADV to gain a bonus effect, these are specific Damage Zones that once you deal enough damage to it and pass the Damage Threshold, a bonus effect is triggered. Essentially, if PCs can individually, or collectively, deal a certain amount of damage to a specific location, they can trigger an effect.



It depends how difficult you want it to be to trigger this Damage Threshold and how much damage it takes to do so. You could also choose to have some of these Attacks be made with DisADV, especially if you have a small threshold of damage required for a large effect.

You can give different parts of the creatures different stats or effects while damaging them. Maybe the creature takes damage every time the party Attacks a specific Damage Zone, or other Damage Zones have a really high AC, or others might even heal the creature when damaged, but if you break the Damage Threshold it could immediately kill it. There are SO many options you can use to create a creature that is really dynamic to face.

When these Damage Thresholds are reached it usually results in some type of negative effect happening to the creature. They could lose access to certain abilities, gain negative status conditions, or even instantly die. Make these effects make sense for what part of the creature they are attacking, as well. Here are some examples of Damage Zones and the effect that happens when you trigger it:

- **Tentacle:** Lose one of its Multiattacks.
- **Dragon's Throat:** Lose access to its Breath Weapon.
- **Rhino Horn:** Lose access to its Charge Attack.
- **Spider's Legs:** Reduce movement by 10 each time the threshold is met.

Example: The party wants to stop a dragon from flying, but this can't be done with one simple Targeted Attack, so instead there is a Damage Threshold of 30 put on this condition. So if a character, or multiple characters, make Targeted Attacks at the wings specifically, then once they've dealt over 30 damage in 1 round, the dragon could be unable to fly for 1 round. This makes players think tactically about if they should try and ground this thing or if they should just Attack it normally for a better chance to hit.



CRITICAL SUCCESS ATTACKS

If you hit a target with an Attack that exceeds the target's AC by 10 or more, you deal an additional die of weapon damage.

Modifications

- Target instead makes a Save and gains 1 of the following conditions: Prone, Impaired, Frightened, or is pushed 10ft away.
- Instead of a bonus damage die, if you get a critical success of +10 or more, you get to Attack again.

CRITICAL STRIKES

CONSISTENT CRITICALS

When you score a Critical Hit, you double the damage dice as normal. You then select 1 die from each source of damage and treat the die as if it rolled its maximum value. You then roll the remaining dice and add any applicable damage modifiers.

Small Example: A Fighter with an Attack of **1d8+5** scores a Critical Hit. To determine the Consistent Critical damage, you double the dice as usual to **2d8**, but you MAX one of the d8's. This means one of the dice is just a flat 8 and then you roll the remaining 1d8 and add your +5 modifier. The total damage is **1d8+8+5**.

Big Example: A monster with a Claw Attack of **4d6+5** scores a Critical Hit. The creatures 4d6 are doubled to 8d6 as usual, but you MAX one of those d6. This means that you only roll 7 of the 8d6 and the 8th one is maxed out to be a 6 (meaning you don't need to roll it), then you of course add its +5 Modifier. The total damage would be **7d6+6+5**.

Complex Example: A Paladin Rogue multiclass (the worst offenders of critical strikes in the game) gets a Critical Hit with their 1d4 dagger, 3d6 Sneak Attack, 1d8 Smite damage, and +5 Dexterity Modifier. The dice would double causing the damage to be **2d4 + 6d6 + 2d8 + 5**. You max out one of EACH source of damage: the dagger, the sneak attack, and the divine smite. You don't roll this maxed out dice, so the final damage result would be: **(1d4 + 4) + (5d6 + 6) + (1d8 + 8) + 5**.

You max out one dice from each source of damage. If you had poison on your blade you would max one weapon damage die and one Poison damage die. If a Dragon's Bite Attack had Piercing damage and Fire damage, one die from the Piercing damage would be maxed and one die from the Fire damage would be maxed.

DC Tip: How I run this at the table is I have the players double the dice and physically have them all in their hand. Then to MAX a die they just take it out of their hand and set in on the max value. This is a very clear way to see it all happen, then they can calculate their damage and add it up as usual.

WEAKENING CRITICALS

When you score a Critical Hit on a target, you can choose to either double your dice as usual or impose DisADV on Attacks, Checks, and Saves the creature makes until the end of its next turn.

Sometimes you want to get across the staggering feeling of receiving a Critical Hit in a different way than just dealing a bunch of damage. This can be used on monsters and PCs to give them DisADV instead.

MOMENTUM CRITICALS

When you roll a Natural 20, you and your allies receive a +1d4 bonus on Attacks, Checks, and Saves you make until the end of combat. When you roll a Natural 1, you and your allies receive a -1d4 penalty instead. This effect can stack multiple times or cancel each other out.

This can lead to some very “swingly” results and really snowball things in one direction or another. That is the intended design behind this and can lead to the feeling of a huge, overwhelming victory or, on the other end, a hopeless feeling of impossibility.

ASSASSINATION MECHANICS

There are plenty of times when a Rogue wants to attempt to assassinate an enemy and they should DEFINITELY die because they didn't see it coming, they are sleeping, etc. These options give GMs more ways to interpret what happens in these situations.

Option 1: You can attempt to assassinate a creature whose guard is completely down. This could mean it's not paying attention, Unarmored, Unconscious, or a mix of the three. Instead of making an Attack, you make a Stealth Check against the target's AC. **Success:** Roll for damage as usual and apply any Sneak Attack bonuses if they apply. You gain a bonus to this damage equal to the difference between your Stealth Check and the target's AC.

Example Damage: The target's AC is 12 and your Stealth Check total is a 26. Add the 14 from the Stealth Check difference ($26 - 12 = 14$) to your normal $1d4 + 4$ Dexterity Modifier + $2d6$ Sneak Attack.

Option 2: Make a Stealth Check against a helpless or unsuspecting creature. If you hit the DC that the GM sets, it dies instantly.

Option 3: Make a Check for their vitals followed by a Stealth Check for assassination OR make a Stealth Check followed by an Attack (basically make them earn it with 1 additional Check).

Option 4: Make an Attack against a helpless target's AC. On a hit, the target immediately falls Unconscious.

COUP DE GRACE

As an Action, you may attempt a killing blow against a Paralyzed, Petrified, Stunned, Surprised, or Unconscious creature with at least 1 HP. You must be wielding a weapon and be within 5ft of the target. An attacker performing a Coup de Grace automatically scores a Critical Hit, after which the target must make a Death Save. **Failure:** They immediately drop to 0 HP.



DUNGEON COACH WEAPON SYSTEMS

WEAPON PROFICIENCIES

BASE RULES

Using the Dungeon Coach Weapon System, Simple Weapons are defined as those having a d6 or smaller damage die, and Martial Weapons are defined as those having a d8 or larger damage die.

VARIANT RULES

This variation of the Dungeon Coach Weapon System provides proficiency with a number of weapon styles as determined by your class. You must be proficient with the weapon and its weapon style to benefit from its passive property and to take Martial Actions using the weapon. For example, if you are proficient with Simple Weapons and the Sword weapon style, you gain the benefit of a Shortsword's passive property and can make Martial Actions using the weapon.

Weapon Styles: Axe, Bow, Chained, Crossbow, Hammer, Puncture, Staff, Sword, Thrust, Unarmed, and Whip.

Exceptions can be made (GM discretion) for classes that would have more combat prowess with weapons, for example: Tempest Domain Cleric, College of Swords Bard, Bladesinger Wizard. If this happens then just move the class UP one tier so they are granted more proficiencies. ALSO, if it's part of their backstory or something cool, a great starting Bonus Level Up Perk would be an extra weapon proficiency! What a great GM!

These variant rules restrict the usage of some of the additional features granted by the system to create opportunities for GMs to limit the scope of how their players can make use of their weapons, and to give players the ability to customize their character to support their preferred playstyle.

See the Weapon Style Proficiency table below to determine the number of weapon style proficiencies you have:

WEAPON STYLE PROFICIENCY TIERS

# of Proficiencies	Classes
1/2 your Prof. Bonus	Bard, Cleric, Druid, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
Your Prof. Bonus	Artificer, Rogue, Monk, Paladin, Psion*, Ranger
2x your Prof. Bonus	Barbarian, Fighter

DC Tip: The Psion is a class published in the "Psion Class Bundle" which is available on The Dungeon Coach website: www.thedungeoncoach.com.

SIMPLE MELEE WEAPONS TABLE

Axe Weapons

Sickle	1d4 Slashing	Light, Thrown (20/60), Concealable
Hand Axe	1d6 Slashing	Light, Thrown (20/60)
Broad Axe	1d6 (1d8) Slashing	Light, Versatile

Chained Weapons

Combat Bola	1d4 Bludgeoning	Light, Thrown (20/60), Special
Nunchucks	1d6 Bludgeoning	Light, Thrown (20/60)
Meteor Hammer	1d6 (1d8) Bludgeoning	Light, Versatile

Hammer Weapons

Club	1d4 Bludgeoning	Light, Thrown (20/60), Concealable
Light Hammer	1d6 Bludgeoning	Light, Thrown (20/60)
Mace	1d6 (1d8) Bludgeoning	Light, Versatile

Puncture Weapons

Climbing Pick	1d4 Piercing	Light, Thrown (20/60), Special
Spiked Hammer	1d6 Piercing	Light, Thrown (20/60)
Pickaxe	1d6 (1d8) Piercing	Light, Versatile

Staff Weapons

Stick	1d4 Bludgeoning	Light, Thrown (20/60), Concealable
Baton	1d6 Bludgeoning	Light, Thrown (20/60)
Quarterstaff	1d6 (1d8) Bludgeoning	Light, Versatile

Sword Weapons

Dagger	1d4 Slashing	Light, Thrown (20/60), Concealable
Machete	1d6 Slashing	Light, Thrown (20/60)
Shortsword/Scimitar	1d6 (1d8) Slashing	Light, Versatile

Thrust Weapons

Stake	1d4 Piercing	Light, Thrown (20/60), Concealable, Aquatic
Javelin	1d6 Piercing	Light, Thrown (20/60), Aquatic
Spear	1d6 (1d8) Piercing	Light, Versatile, Aquatic

Unarmed Weapons

Knuckles/Gauntlets	1d4 Bludgeoning	Light, Ensnaring
Hand Claw	1d4 Slashing	Light, Ensnaring
Hand Hook	1d4 Piercing	Light, Ensnaring

Whip Weapons

Scourge Whip	1d4 Slashing	Light, Reach, Concealable
Snake Whip	1d6 Slashing	Light, Reach

SIMPLE RANGED WEAPONS TABLE

Bow Weapons

Sling	1d4 Bludgeoning	Ammunition (30/120)
Shortbow	1d6 Piercing	Ammunition (80/320), Two-Handed

Crossbow Weapons

Hand Crossbow	2d4 Piercing	Ammunition (30/120), Light, Reload (1), Aquatic
Light Crossbow	2d6 Piercing	Ammunition (80/320), Two-Handed, Reload (1), Aquatic

Special Weapons

Dart	1d4 Piercing	Special, Thrown (20/60)
Throwing Star	1d4 Slashing	Special, Thrown (20/60)
Boomerang	1d6 Bludgeoning	Special, Thrown (20/60)
Blowgun (Needle)	1 Piercing	Special, Ammunition (25/100), Reload (1)

MARTIAL RANGED WEAPONS TABLE

Bow Weapons

Longbow	1d8 Piercing	Ammunition (150/600), Two-Handed
Greatbow	1d10 Piercing	Ammunition (150/600), Two-Handed, Heavy, Special

Crossbow Weapons

Heavy Crossbow	2d8 Piercing	Ammunition (100/400), Two-Handed, Reload (1), Aquatic
Light Ballista	2d10 Piercing	Ammunition (120/480), Two-Handed, Heavy, Reload (1), Aquatic, Unwieldy, Special

Special Weapons

Net	--	Special, Thrown (5/15)
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MARTIAL MELEE WEAPONS TABLE

Axe Weapons

Battleaxe/Scythe	1d8 (1d10) Slashing	Versatile
Halberd	1d10 Slashing	Two-Handed, Reach
Greataxe	1d12 Slashing	Two-Handed, Heavy

Chained Weapons

Flail	1d8 (1d10) Bludgeoning	Versatile
Pole Flail	1d10 Bludgeoning	Two-Handed, Reach
Great Flail	1d12 Bludgeoning	Two-Handed, Heavy

Hammer Weapons

Warhammer/Greatclub	1d8 (1d10) Bludgeoning	Versatile
Lucerne	1d10 Bludgeoning	Two-Handed, Reach
Greatmaul	1d12 Bludgeoning	Two-Handed, Heavy

Puncture Weapons

Morning Star	1d8 (1d10) Piercing	Versatile
Billhook	1d10 Piercing	Two-Handed, Reach
Greatpick/Greatstar	1d12 Piercing	Two-Handed, Heavy

Staff Weapons

Battlestaff	1d8 (1d10) Bludgeoning	Versatile
Longpole	1d10 Bludgeoning	Two-Handed, Reach
Greatstaff	1d12 Bludgeoning	Two-Handed, Heavy

Sword Weapons

Longsword	1d8 (1d10) Slashing	Versatile
Glaive	1d10 Slashing	Two-Handed, Reach
Greatsword	1d12 Slashing	Two-Handed, Heavy

Thrust Weapons

Rapier	1d8 Piercing or Slashing	Aquatic, Special
Trident	1d8 (1d10) Piercing	Versatile, Aquatic
Pike	1d10 Piercing	Two-Handed, Reach, Aquatic
Lance	1d12 Piercing	Two-Handed, Heavy, Reach, Unwieldy, Aquatic

Unarmed Weapons

Boulder Gauntlets	1d10 Bludgeoning	Heavy
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Whip Weapons

Chain Whip	1d8 (1d10) Slashing	Reach, Versatile
Bullwhip	1d10 Slashing	Reach (x2), Heavy, Unwieldy
Great Whip	1d12 Slashing	Reach, Heavy, Unwieldy

WEAPON PROPERTIES

Ammunition: You can use a weapon that has the Ammunition property to make a Ranged Attack only if you have ammunition to fire from the weapon. Each time you Attack with the weapon, you expend one piece of ammunition. Drawing ammunition from a quiver, case, or other container is part of the Attack (you need a free hand to reload using ammunition). At the end of the battle, you can recover half your expended ammunition by taking a minute to use the Search Action.

Aquatic: You do not have DisADV on Attacks made using Aquatic weapons as a result of being underwater.

Concealable: Small and easily hidden, you have ADV on Checks made to hide a Concealable weapon on your person. When you make an Attack against a creature using a hidden weapon that has the Concealable property, you have ADV on the Attack against that creature.

Ensnaring: You can attempt to grapple a creature with an Ensnaring weapon as if it were a free hand.

Heavy: The size of a Heavy weapon makes it difficult to wield. Creatures with less than 15 Strength have DisADV on Attacks they make using a Heavy weapon.

Light: A Light weapon is small and easy to handle. You can use either your Strength or Dexterity Modifier for both the Attack and damage.

DC Tip: The Finesse property has been combined with the Light property. Anything that would require Finesse (like Rogue Sneak Attack) and any weapon that uses Dexterity for its Attack and damage works with this property.

Range: A weapon that can be used to make a Ranged Attack has a range shown in parentheses after the Ammunition or Thrown property. The range lists two numbers, the first is the weapon's normal range in feet, and the second indicates the weapon's long range. When attacking a target beyond normal range, you have DisADV on the Attack. You can't Attack a target beyond the weapon's long range.

Reach: This weapon adds 5ft to your reach when you Attack with it, as well as when extending your reach for an Opportunity Attack.

Reload: The weapon can be fired a number of times equal to its Reload score before you must spend 1 Attack or a Bonus Action to reload. You must have one free hand to reload a weapon.

Thrown: If a weapon has the Thrown property, you can throw the weapon to make a Ranged Attack. If the weapon is a Melee Weapon, you use the same Ability Modifier for the Ranged Attack and damage that you would use for a Melee Attack with the weapon. For example, if you throw a handaxe, you use your Strength, but if you throw a dagger, you can use either your Strength or your Dexterity, since the dagger has the Light property.

Two-Handed: This weapon requires two hands when you Attack with it.

Unwieldy: You have DisADV on Attacks against targets within 5ft of you.

Versatile: This weapon can be used with one or two hands. A damage value in parentheses appears with the property - this is the damage when the weapon is used with two hands to make a Melee Attack.

SPECIAL WEAPONS

Blowgun: When you are hidden and make an Attack against a creature using a blowgun, the Attack doesn't reveal your position if you miss the target or beat its AC by 5 or more. A dose of poison can cover 10 blowgun needles.

Bolas: A Large or smaller creature hit by a thrown bolas as part of a Ranged Weapon Attack is Grappled by the weapon until it is freed. A bola has no effect on creatures that are formless. A creature can use its Action to make a **DC 10** Strength or Dexterity Check. **Success:** It can free itself or another creature within its reach. Dealing 5 Slashing damage to the bola (AC 10) ends the effect and breaks the bola, freeing the creature without harming it.

Boomerang: Any creature proficient with the javelin is also proficient with this weapon. On a miss, a boomerang returns to the thrower's hand.

Climbing Pick: You have ADV on Checks made to climb while wielding a climbing pick.

Dart/Throwing Star: You can draw and hold up to three of these weapons at a time with each hand, but you must make a separate Attack for each.

Greatbow: You use your Strength Modifier for Attack and damage.

Lance: Can be wielded with one hand while you are mounted.

Light Ballista: This weapon takes an Action to deploy and must be in contact with the ground. Once deployed it cannot be moved unless you take another Action to undeploy it. In order to fire this weapon without deploying it you must have a Strength of 20 or higher.

Net: A Large or smaller creature hit by a net is Restrained until it is freed. A net has no effect on creatures that are formless. A creature can use its Attack or Action to make a **DC 10** Strength Check. **Success:** It can free itself or another creature within its reach. Dealing 5 Slashing damage to the net (AC 10) ends the effect and breaks the net, freeing the creature without harming it. You don't have DisADV on Ranged Weapon Attacks that you make with a net as a result of being within 5ft of a hostile creature who can see you and isn't Incapacitated.

Rapier: You can choose to use either your Strength or Dexterity Modifier for Attack and damage. Additionally, you can choose to deal Slashing or Piercing damage.



WEAPON STYLES (PASSIVE)

You only gain the benefits of a weapon style if you are proficient with the weapon.

Axe: When you Attack a creature with an axe, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is Bloodied or Bleeding.

Bow: When you Attack a creature with a bow, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is farther than 30ft away from you.

Chained: When you Attack a creature with a chained weapon, you gain a bonus to your Attack and damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is wielding a shield or is behind 1/2 cover.

Crossbow: When you Attack a creature with a crossbow, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is within 15ft of you.

Hammer: When you Attack a creature with a hammer, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is Prone, Petrified or wearing metal armor. When you Attack an object made of stone, glass, or other similar material with a hammer, your damage deals maximum damage.

Puncture: When you Attack a creature with a puncture weapon, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target has 1 or more levels of Exhaustion, its movement has been reduced, or it has -1 or fewer levels of Defense.

Staff: You have ADV on Opportunity Attacks made with a staff. Opportunity Attacks made against you have DisADV while you are wielding a staff. When you take the Disengage Action and move away from a creature within your reach, you can make an Opportunity Attack with a staff you are wielding against that creature, before leaving your space.

Sword: Once per turn when you Attack a creature with a sword, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if you've damaged the target with an Attack since the start of your last turn. You don't gain this benefit if you Attack another target during this time. When you Attack an object made of rope, vine, or similar material with a sword, your damage deals maximum damage.

Thrust: When you Attack a creature with a thrust weapon, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is Impaired, Prone, or Mounted on a creature no more than one size larger than you.

Unarmed: When you Attack a creature with an unarmed weapon or Unarmed Strike, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is Grappled by you.

Whip: When you Attack a creature with a whip, you gain a bonus to your damage equal to your Prof. Bonus if the target is farther than 5ft away from you.

WEAPON DAMAGE TYPES (CRITS)

Bludgeoning: On a Critical Hit, the target is knocked 5ft in a direction of your choice and falls Prone.

Piercing: On a Critical Hit, the target becomes Impaired until the end of your next turn.

Slashing: On a Critical Hit, the target gains the Bleeding condition.

DUNGEON COACH ARMOR SYSTEMS

I want to give you MULTIPLE ways to upgrade armor in your games! All of us want different things from armor. Some of us want to keep armor the way it is but just add more cool options, BUT others might want a more complex system that truly makes Light Armor FEEL way different than Heavy Armor! These are options you can add to the current RAW system to really SPICE up armor with new rules you can choose from.

GUARD POINTS

Guard Points let each of the 4 different armor types (Unarmored included) FEEL different, giving an active mechanic to armor. Light Armor will be more mobile, Heavy Armor will be tankier, and Medium Armor will be in the middle and can do a little of both, but not better than the others. Each type of armor grants different perks for what those Guard Points can be spent on. Guard Points are used in response to being attacked and do not require you to spend a Reaction.

On your turn you may spend increments of 15ft of movement to gain 1 Guard Point per increment to improve your defensive awareness until the start of your next turn.

DC Tip: If you have a Class Feature for Unarmored Defense or a Racial Trait of Natural Armor then the player and GM can discuss and agree on which of the features of the 4 Armor Types best represents the way your ability or natural armor works. The GM can grant you that ability.

Heavy Guard: If you are hit by an Attack that deals damage while wearing Heavy Armor, you automatically reduce the amount of damage taken by your Prof. Bonus.

Light Guard: If you are targeted by an Attack while wearing Light Armor, you can move to an unoccupied space within 5ft of you that is still within the Attack's range. When you do so, you impose DisADV on the Attack against you.

Medium Guard: If you are the target of an Attack while wearing Medium Armor, you may choose to Increase your AC by 2 against that Attack.

Unarmored Guard: If you are targeted by an Attack while not wearing armor, you can move to an unoccupied space within 15ft of you that is still within the Attack's range. When you do so, you impose DisADV on the Attack against you.



ARMOR PROPERTIES

Armor Properties gives a LOT of new qualities for basic armor. General shopkeepers can sell these new armors or you can add these properties to any armor for it to be more unique.

DC Tip: As a general homebrew, I would say that if armor imposes DisADV to Stealth Checks... it would also impose DisADV to Acrobatics Checks too from being so bulky and cumbersome. This gives you more options to give different armors with different choices.

Bulky: Bulky armor cannot be hidden from plain sight. Bulky armor imposes DisADV on Athletics, Acrobatics, and Constitution Checks to swim, climb, run, and perform similar activities. At the end of a Long Rest, a creature resting in Bulky armor suffers 1 level of Exhaustion.

Decorative: Whether it be brightly colored detail or a gleaming polish, your armor sends a bold declaration of your status. While wearing this armor in military or ceremonial encounters, you gain ADV on Performance and Persuasion Checks on creatures that are indifferent toward you.

Endure (Damage): Choose one of the following damage types: Bludgeoning, Piercing, Slashing, Cold, Fire, Lightning, or Thunder. Whenever you would take damage of the chosen type, reduce it by your Prof. Bonus.

Ergonomic: You may sleep in this armor without incurring any penalties.

Muffled: Armor with this property negates DisADV on Stealth Checks.

DC Tip: If you use the homebrew where armors that impose DisADV on Stealth also impose DisADV on Acrobatics, then this Armor Property also removes DisADV on Acrobatics Checks.

Pocketed: The armor has concealed compartments allowing you to store small items or Concealable weapons discreetly.

Quick-release: You can doff this armor as an Action.

Weighted: While wearing this armor, you gain ADV on Ability Checks and Saves made to avoid being moved against your will or knocked Prone.

DC Tip: For custom armor you can have a number of different properties determined during its creation. You can use different Armor Properties to create some very unique pieces of armor. Combine all these systems with a modular armor system where Light Armor can bear 1 Armor property, Medium Armor 2, and Heavy Armor 3. You can also have it to where +1 and +2 types of armor also gain an additional property.

ARMOR TABLE

Armor Name	Cost	Armor Class (AC)	Strength	Stealth	Acrobatics
Light Armor					
Padded	5 gp	11 + Dex Mod	-	-	DisADV
Leather	25 gp	11 + Dex Mod	-	-	-
Studded Leather	75 gp	12 + Dex Mod	-	-	-
Medium Armor					
Hide	10 gp	12 + Dex Mod (max 2)	-	-	-
Chain shirt	50 gp	13 + Dex Mod (max 2)	-	-	-
Scale mail	100 gp	14 + Dex Mod (max 2)	-	DisADV	-
Breastplate	400 gp	14 + Dex Mod (max 2)	-	-	DisADV
Half plate	750 gp	15 + Dex Mod (max 2)	-	DisADV	DisADV
Heavy Armor					
Ring mail	50 gp	14	-	DisADV	-
Chain mail	150 gp	16	Str 13	DisADV	DisADV
Splint	500 gp	17	Str 15	DisADV	DisADV
Plate	1,500 gp	18	Str 15	DisADV	DisADV



CHALLENGE MODE ARMOR SYSTEM

Sometimes 5th Edition is beautifully simple and I love it for that... but then there are times where I want a combat system to really make different armor types FEEL different and have a system that isn't just "you hit... or you miss". This is more complicated because of the two additional stats we're adding into the game... BUT the nice thing is they are SET, they do not change constantly, and they are super easy to track. You just write them down on your character sheet and it's that simple. Only use this armor system if it sounds like the extra complexity would be worth the fun that you think it adds.

In order to better differentiate the different armor options, we've added two new defensive statistics called Evasion Class (EC) and Armor Reduction (AR) that work alongside the existing Armor Class (AC). Your EC and AC will often be referred to as your EC-AC range that's represented by a couple of numbers. For example, when wearing Plate armor your EC is 10 and your AC is 18, which will be represented as 10-18 and referred to as your EC-AC range.

When an Attack made against you is:

- above your AC, you are hit and take full damage.
- below your EC, you evade the hit and take no damage.
- within your EC-AC range, you are hit but take reduced damage as determined by your AR value (see below).

This system increases the likelihood that you will be able to hit your enemies, same as they will be able to hit you, but depending on your armor (or lack thereof) you will be able to improve your chances of evading a hit (EC) or reducing damage when you are hit (AR). To learn more about the merits of this system and how it can improve your game, read Why Use this System? at the end of this section.

EVASION CLASS (EC)

Your EC is determined by the type of armor you are wearing - or not wearing (in the case of Unarmored). Consult the Evasion Class Table below to determine your EC.

EVASION CLASS TABLE

Unarmored and Light Armor	10 + Dex Mod
Medium Armor	10 + Dex Mod (Max 2)
Heavy Armor	10

Monk EC: 10 + Dex + Wis

Barbarian EC: 10 + Dex

Across every character the EC is always a base of 10, and you always add your Dexterity Modifier unless you are in Heavy Armor, simple as that. Monks have higher EC (adding their Wisdom Modifier) since they are more nimble and agile, while the Barbarian has a lower EC, but will have a higher AR AND still be able to reduce damage they take by 1/2. This is good to keep in mind as a GM if you're wanting to assign an EC to enemies as well, or you can just run standard AC for your enemies for less to keep track of. Here are a few examples of how to use EC in your game.

Light Armor Example: You have a Dexterity Modifier of +3 while wearing Light Armor. So your EC is 13 (10 + 3). You're wearing Leather Armor, so your AC while would be 14 (11 + 3). This would make your EC-AC range 13-14.

If the same character was Unarmored their EC would be 13. However, when not wearing any armor your AC would also be 13, making your EC-AC range 13-13. This means that if you are the target of an Attack with a value of 13, your AR value will reduce the damage, but any Attack score lower or higher and you either evade the Attack, or are hit by it and take normal damage.

Medium Armor Example: You have a Dexterity Modifier of +3 while wearing Medium Armor. So your EC is 12 (10 + a max of 2). Using Breastplate's statistics, your AC would be 16 (14 + 2). This would make your EC-AC range 12-16.

If the same character equipped a shield, their AC would increase by +2. The NEW EC-AC range while wielding a shield would be 12-18

Heavy Armor Example: You have a Dexterity Modifier of +3 while wearing Heavy Armor. So your EC is 10, regardless of your Dexterity Modifier. Using Plate Armor's statistics, your AC would be 18. This would make your EC-AC range 10-18.



ARMOR REDUCTION (AR)

When you are hit by an Attack that falls within your EC-AC range, you reduce the damage of the Attack by an amount equal to your AR value. This represents being partially hit by an Attack, or failing to evade the Attack completely, but also mitigating some of the impact. Regardless of the Attack's damage type, you've found a way to avoid some of its damage and it becomes reduced by your AR value.

Example: You have an EC-AC range of 10-18 with an AR value of 10. If you are hit by an Attack that falls within that range, you reduce the damage by 10. So if the Attack would normally deal 12 damage, it instead deals 2.

Basically anytime you get hit within your EC-AC range you reduce the damage of the Attack by your AR. Everything else is either a full hit or a full miss. There are 4 different options that you can choose for how you want to handle Armor Reduction. Here is how you calculate your AR (my personal favorite is the DC Method).

AR Damage Reduction: For all 3 examples, assume you have an EC-AC of 10-18, and an AR of 10.

- A creature's Attack is a 7 total, that would deal 12 damage → That misses you → you take 0 damage.
- A creature's Attack is a 15 total, that would deal 12 damage → That hits your ARMOR → you REDUCE the 12 damage down by 10, and only take 2 damage.
- A creature's Attack is a 22 total, that would deal 12 damage → That hits YOU (weak spot/ bypasses armor/ etc) → you take the full 12 damage from the hit.

DC Tip: Reminder, Barbarians still halve the damage they take, but always make sure to reduce the damage taken by the Barbarians AR value FIRST, then cut the damage in half.

AR vs Multiple Damage Types: If a source of damage deals multiple different types of damage, you pick the order in which each damage type is reduced by your Armor Reduction.

- When you are hit by a *Flame Tongue* Greatsword (which deals both Slashing and Fire damage), you can choose to reduce the Slashing damage first and the Fire damage second, or vice versa.

AR vs Saving Throws: Your AR reduces the damage you take from effects that deal half damage on a successful Save.

- If you have an AR of 8 and you succeed on a Save against a *Fireball* that would have dealt 20 Fire damage. Since you succeeded on the Save, you would first halve the damage to 10, then you would reduce the damage again by another 8 from your AR and take 2 damage total.

DC METHOD

Armor Reduction Value: AC - EC + Prof. Bonus

This option requires a bit more math to calculate up front, but works the best for all armor types at all levels of gameplay. This method also makes it to where Dexterity doesn't dominate more than it already does. Since your AR is equal to the DIFFERENCE between AC and EC, having a higher EC actually LOWERS your AR value. Adding in the Prof. Bonus also gives a scaling over time effect as the character levels up, even if their AC - EC is 0.

- A character has an AC of 17, an EC of 12, and a Prof. Bonus of 3. So this character's AR Value would be 8 (from 17 - 12 + 3).

Here are a few more examples to show how it impacts the AR of creatures wearing different armor or no armor:

- **Plate:** AC (18) - EC (10) + PB (2 to 6) = AR (10 to 14)
- **Half Plate (+2 Dex):** AC (17) - EC (12) + PB (2 to 6) = AR (7 to 11)
- **Studded Leather (+5 Dex):** AC (17) - EC (15) + PB (2 to 6) = AR (4 to 8)
- **No Armor (+5 Dex):** AC (15) - EC (15) + PB (2 to 6) = AR (2 to 6)

Here are some additional examples of this method working with AC calculations that don't wear armor:

- **Unarmored Defense (+5 Dex & Con/Wis):** AC (20) - EC (15) + PB (2 to 6) = AR (7 to 11)
- **Mage Armor (+5 Dex):** AC (18) - EC (15) + PB (2 to 6) = AR (5 to 9)

Using a Shield: While wearing a shield, your AC increases by 2, but your EC remains unchanged. This ensures that your AR will also increase by 2.



SIMPLE METHOD

Using this first option, your AR is calculated from this formula:

Armor Reduction Value: (AC - 10)

So from the above example with an EC-AC of 10-18, your AC = 18, so then your AR = 8. The best part is that these numbers don't change, so players can record their EC, AC, and AR in the Armor Class section on their character sheet. It's also easy to remember AR is -10 from your AC.

Shield EC: When using this method, anytime a shield grants AC, it also increases your EC by the same amount. This is one way for characters that aren't as nimble to still be able to increase their EC.

SCALING METHOD

In this method you calculate AR based on your Prof. Bonus. It works differently with different kinds of armor and scales with the user in level. This provides a smooth scaling to how the damage reduction grows over time and makes different armor types feel different too.

Example: If you had Heavy Armor and had an EC-AC range of 10-18 (like above) then it also matters what level you are. So let's say you are level 5 and have a Prof. Bonus of +3. Your AR would be 2x that since you are wearing Heavy Armor, so your AR = 6. You would now subtract 6 from any damage that hits you in your EC-AC range.

Armor Type	Armor Reduction (AR)
Unarmored	None
Light Armor	1/2 Prof. Bonus
Medium Armor	Prof. Bonus
Heavy Armor	2x Prof. Bonus



GLANCING BLOWS

This system can EASILY be applied to my EC-AC Armor System. If someone hits you within your EC-AC range then it becomes a Glancing Blow, and you take half damage from the Attack.

The biggest disclaimer here is if you choose this method, lower level characters will be taking a LOT more damage. Since they'll always be taking at least half damage, it cannot be reduced to 0. The upside to this system is that if a character gets hit by a HIGH damage Attack, you can potentially reduce the damage by a lot more than in the other systems. With the other systems, the most you can reduce the damage of an Attack is between 12 and 15 (ish) damage, but with this system you could reduce the damage of an Attack that would normally deal 50 damage down to 25 instead. The higher the character's level, the more likely they are to take bigger hits and see the benefits of this option.

WHY USE THIS SYSTEM?

Here is a list of all the reasons I do LOVE this system and some tips on how to customize it best for your table.

SMOOTHER DAMAGE CURVE

By changing from an all-or-nothing system to a damage-reduction system, combat happens at a faster pace since both sides will whittle each other down faster. Rather than getting hit and taking 30 damage, or avoiding the hit and taking 0, you instead take a hit with reduced damage, for a more consistent trade off of blows during combat.

It can also make each turn feel more meaningful, because rather than missing an Attack and feeling like your turn was wasted, you instead hit with a reduced amount of damage. This can be especially true if your foe is on their last legs and it might need just one more Attack to put them down.

INCREASED COMBAT TENSION

Since both parties in an encounter will be trading blows more often, the threat of death becomes much higher because it's more likely that each combatant will be hit each round. In some situations the players might feel like their characters are too strong, or their foes are too weak, because their characters are high level or armed with powerful items. With this new system, even a group of low power enemies have a chance to hit and deal damage, which makes fighting groups of weaker enemies more cinematic and risky. This increases combat tension and the rewarding feeling that comes with slaying even weaker enemies.

ENABLING THE WARRIOR FANTASY

When a character wearing Heavy Armor gets hit by an Ancient Red Dragon's Claw Attack, they will suffer less damage than their Wizard ally because their Heavy Armor REDUCED the damage.

There will be times where a creature doesn't deal enough damage because the character's AR value is so high it reduces it to 0... which is AWESOME and lets that "tank" feel like a tank too!

DC Tip: Watch my speed training videos if you feel like that would slow down the game.

REDUCING BALANCE CHALLENGES

In the standard system, creating encounters can be difficult because you never know how your players are going to react, how the foes you've assembled will threaten them, or if your creations will fit within the bounded accuracy the game is built around. A GM can create an enemy that has high AC, or battle against a player with high AC, and worry less about it creating a one-sided encounter, because now you know both sides will be able to trade blows with the other. A high AC can grant a tactical advantage, but it won't make you or your foe unhittable or unkillable.

CHARACTER CUSTOMIZATION

As noted, players and monsters will both be taking damage more frequently using this system. Feel free to increase the HP you give your monsters, NPCs, and players if you feel like they need extra health to soak the additional damage. You might want to give characters the maximum amount of HP or allow them to roll their dice twice when leveling up.

Using these new defensive stats, GMs have more knobs to turn that tweak and change the armor you give to your players, or even the monsters that you throw at them.

SYSTEM CUSTOMIZATION

GMs, you DO NOT have to use EC, AC, and AR for your monsters, use whatever armor system you want. You can use a variety of standard AC, Glancing Blows, or this system for whatever makes the most sense for how the monster would take damage. Don't feel like you have to follow the same system!

It's really nice that your EC, AC, and AR do not dynamically change often, unless you cast something like *Shield* or *Shield of Faith*.

For anything in the game that interacts with AC you can choose to have it also affect EC as well. I will give DC Tips in places where I choose to tweak AC or EC for things that make sense to me, you can do the same for the balance right that you are wanting.



DUNGEON COACH SHIELDS SYSTEM

Everything in this shields section works for the base 5th Edition rules as well as Challenge Mode.

SHIELD PROPERTIES

Bulky: This shield can be wielded using one or two hands. When wielding this shield with only one hand, your speed is reduced by 10ft and you have DisADV on Dexterity Checks.

Deployable: As an Action, you can deploy this shield in an unoccupied space within 5ft of you that you can see. While deployed, the shield becomes a 5ft wide wall that grants 3/4 cover to one Medium or smaller creature standing behind it. The shield can be picked up using an Action.

Defensive: The extra armor this shield provides reduces your offensive capabilities while moving. You make all Attacks at DisADV if you've moved since the start of your last turn. This penalty is reset when you start your turn.

Deflecting: When you use Shield Block (see page 158) against a Ranged Attack, you double the AC bonus from your shield against the Attack.

Mounted Defense:

The AC bonus this shield grants you also benefits a Mount you are riding.

Offensive: The damage die of the shield becomes a d8, instead of a d4.



Protective: You can add the shield's AC bonus to your Dexterity Saves against effects that cover an area and deal damage.

Shield Wall: This shield grants an additional +1 bonus to your AC while another creature wielding a shield with the same property is within 5ft of you and is not Incapacitated. Attempts to Grapple you or move through your space are made with DisADV, unless you allow them.

Stable: The hand that holds this shield retains enough manual precision to do the following simple tasks: lift, drop, hold, push, or pull an object or creature, open and close a door or containers, make an Unarmed Strike, or load a Ranged Weapon with the Ammunition property.

Thrown: You can make a Ranged Weapon Attack (range 15/30ft) using the shield. You use the same Ability Modifier for the Attack and damage that you would use for a Melee Attack with the shield. Once thrown, you are not considered to be wielding the shield until you don it again.

CUSTOM SHIELDS

Every shield has a base 3 points used in its construction. You can add points to this, of course, to be able to create even more powerful shields.

The following Shield Properties cost 1 point: +1 AC, Deployable, Deflecting, Mounted Defense, Offensive, Protective, Shield Wall, Stable, Thrown.

You can add BOTH of the Bulky and Defensive Shield Properties for FREE and gain +1 AC.

SHIELD FIGHTING

Instead of using a weapon to make a Melee Weapon Attack, you can use a shield. On a hit, a shield deals Bludgeoning damage equal to **1d4** + your Strength Modifier. If you are proficient with shields, you are proficient with Attacks made using a shield.

SHIELD TABLE					
Armor Name	AC	Properties	Strength	Stealth	Acrobatics
Light Shields					
Light Shield	+1	Stable	-	-	-
Buckler	+2	Defensive	-	-	DisADV
Deflector	+1	Deflecting	-	-	-
Disk Buckler	+1	Thrown	-	-	-
Medium Shield					
Medium Shield	+2	-	-	-	-
Cavalry Shield	+2	Mounted Defense	-	DisADV	-
Kite Shield	+2	Offensive	-	-	DisADV
Heavy Shield					
Tower Shield	+3	Shield Wall	13	DisADV	DisADV
Heavy Shield	+4	Bulky, Defensive, Protective	15	DisADV	DisADV
Bulwark	+4	Bulky, Deployable, Shield Wall	15	DisADV	DisADV



MODIFIED FEATS

NEW FEATS

CLOSE QUARTERS

When you make a Ranged Attack, you don't have DisADV on the Attack as a result of being Prone or within 5ft of a hostile creature that can see you and who isn't Incapacitated. Opportunity Attacks made against you have DisADV.

DC Tip: The Crossbow Expert feat is removed from the game and REPLACED by the Close Quarters feat. If you use the original Crossbow Expert feat... you would break the new crossbows and they would be FAR too powerful. I want bows and crossbows to FEEL different when you use them. The Reload property is not something that I think should be removable by a feat.

GUARDIAN

You have mastered techniques to guard and defend your allies, gaining the following benefits:

You can't be Surprised while you aren't Incapacitated.

When a creature hits a target other than you with a Melee Weapon Attack, you can use a Reaction to perform 1 of the following actions if the target of the Attack is within your reach:

- Reduce the damage of the Attack by an amount equal to your Attack Modifier + your Prof. Bonus, as you deflect the strike away from the target.
- Become the target of the Attack instead, leaping in front of the target before returning to your space.

UPDATED FEATS

CHARGER

You can take the Dash Action using a Bonus Action.

When you take the Dash Action, or move up to 15ft or more in a straight line, and make a Melee Weapon Attack, you can add your Prof. Bonus to the Attack's damage. A creature hit with this Attack must make a Strength Save against your **Strength Save DC. Failure:** The target is knocked Prone or pushed up to 10ft away from you (your choice).

GRAPPLER

You've developed the skills necessary to hold your own in close-quarters grappling. You gain the following benefits:

- You have ADV on Attacks against creatures Grappled by you.
- When a hostile creature's movement provokes an Opportunity Attack from you, you can use a Reaction to Grapple it instead.
- You can use a Bonus Action to attempt to Grapple a creature.



GREAT WEAPON MASTER

On your turn, when you score a Critical Hit with a Melee Weapon or reduce a creature to 0 HP with one, you can make 1 Melee Weapon Attack using a Bonus Action.

Before you make an Attack with a Melee Weapon you are proficient with, you can choose to subtract your Prof. Bonus from the Attack. If the Attack hits, you add twice your Prof. Bonus to the Attack's damage.

LUCKY

When you make an Attack, Check, or Save you can choose to gain ADV on it. You can use this ability 3 times per Long Rest.

DC Tip: Lucky has always felt cheap to me, you can just choose to reroll ANYTIME you want and affect the game in too big of a way in my opinion. My biggest issue with this rule is something that most people don't think about. If a player at the table is about to make a BIG ROLL... something that is of huge importance... I HYPE these moments up at my table, but if that player has the Lucky feat... none of that hype or tension is there, because they could just reroll if they fail. That feels lame to me, if they want to affect the game at CERTAIN moments, then they can choose to do so beforehand.

MOBILE

Your speed is increased by 10ft and when you take the Dash Action, difficult terrain doesn't cost extra movement on that turn.

DC Tip: The Mobile Feat is one of the best feats in the game, so my personal opinion is THIS part of the feat is strong enough and a HUGE boost to your character. So I would rather give the third part of this feat to all martial classes to be able to use as part of Martial Disengage (see page 156).

SENTINEL

You have mastered techniques to thwart a creature's attempt to escape you, gaining the following benefits:

- Whenever you hit a creature with an Opportunity Attack, its speed is reduced by 15ft until the end of its next turn. Creatures provoke Opportunity Attacks from you when attempting to leave your reach, even if they wouldn't normally provoke Opportunity Attacks.
- When a creature within your reach makes an Attack against a target other than you, you can use your Reaction to make a Melee Weapon Attack against the attacking creature.

SHARPSHOOTER

Attacking at long range doesn't impose DisADV on your Ranged Weapon Attacks. Your Ranged Weapon Attacks ignore half cover and three-quarters cover.

Before you make an Attack with a Ranged Weapon you are proficient with, you can choose to subtract your Prof. Bonus from the Attack. If the Attack hits, you add twice your Prof. Bonus to the Attack's damage.

DC Tip: These both scale better than the -5/+10 mechanic and aren't as broken at early levels. Dealing an extra 10 damage at levels 5 and lower is pretty crazy, so this method ties the hit and damage to your Prof. Bonus. You will start off having a -2 to hit for +4 damage and then eventually scale to a -6/+12 at higher levels.

WEAPON MASTER

You gain proficiency with 4 weapon styles of your choice: Staff, Hammer, Axe, Sword, Puncture, Thrust, Whip, Chained, Bow, Crossbow, or Unarmed.

SPELLCASTING

SPELL CHECK

VS SPELLCASTING ABILITY CHECK

Spell Check: d20 + Spellcasting Ability Modifier + Prof. Bonus

Spellcasting Ability Check: d20 + Spellcasting Ability Modifier ONLY

This is a clarification for everyone to understand what kinds of Checks for spells you are asking for. If you think this task they are performing would be something they are proficient in, then ask for a Spell Check. If the character is doing something strange that they normally don't do, or you want to simulate them having a lower Modifier added to their roll, then ask for a Spellcasting Ability Check instead.



CUSTOM SPELL COMPONENTS

Casting spells with rare spell components enhance and modify spells in unique ways.

There are SO many options here that you can give to your PC spellcasters to change the way they cast their spells. The best part is you can give them some CRAZY powerful things since they are tied to the material components that are CONSUMED upon casting the spell. You as the GM are in charge of how rare these things are and can give them as rewards when you see fit. Here are some ideas to get the sparks of inspiration going, but please take this and run with it:

- Change elemental type
- Increase the number of targets hit
- Change from single target to AoE
- Give DisADV on Save the creature makes
- Cast without verbal or somatic components
- Cast at a delayed point in time that you choose
- Cast from a remote location
- Combine effects from two spells into one
- Add an additional condition or damage

2 SPELLS IN 1 TURN

You can cast 2 spells in the same turn as long as at least 1 of the spells is at least 3 levels lower than the maximum spell level you can cast.

Example: The highest level spell that a 9th-level caster can cast is 5th-level. This caster could cast 2 spells in 1 round as long as 1 of the spells is 2nd-level or lower ($5 - 3 = 2$).

SPELL CRITICALS

When a creature rolls a natural 1 on a Save against a spell, you are able to reroll any damage dice from the spell.

Instead of this more subtle effect for spells you could also apply the rules for Critical Strikes with Weapons (see page 160) to spells as well. I personally love Weakening Criticals for spells to show how hard a creature gets hit when they roll a natural 1 on the Save.

OVERCHARGING SPELLS

You can attempt to cast a spell without requiring a spell slot by expending a number of Hit Dice equal to the level of the spell. When you do, make a Spell Check. The DC equals $10 +$ the level of the spell. **Success:** You successfully cast the spell. **Failure:** The spell fails and you take Force damage equal to the Hit Dice expended. This damage cannot be reduced in any way. Whether the spellcasting is successful or fails, you immediately suffer 1 level of Exhaustion.

COUNTERSPELL

ISSUES WITH REGULAR COUNTERSPELL

Side Note: For the entirety of my explanation, the two casters are named “the Caster” and “the Counterspeller”.

Counterspell only costs a Reaction, which is very rarely used by casters in the first place and it shuts down the ACTION of the Caster, basically making them lose their turn. So now, you can cast a Cantrip when you get *Counterspell* cast against you.

Counterspell being a contested Spell Check feels better to me since it gets across that mechanical feeling like two casters are testing their magic against each other... and they literally are with this method.

It feels cheap for *Counterspell* to automatically counter any spell below 3rd-level, this feels off from the spirit of what *Counterspell* is. So I remove the bit about *Counterspell* always shutting down spells cast at a lower level than itself, and just always make the Counterspeller make a Check, or always make it a contested Check.

The level of the Caster plays almost no part in how easily you can *Counterspell*. A level 5 Wizard could *Counterspell* a Lich just as easily as a level 20 Wizard, and vice versa. So now I changed that so you do add your Prof. Bonus to the Check you make to counter the spell. Now the power and capabilities of the caster factor into the contested Check.

Counterspelling *Counterspell*... It's just a mess. Just burns a bunch of spell slots and seems like the GM is a jerk if he has more Counterspellers on the enemy side. Also, if it's a Reaction, it has to be faster than an Action, because you are reacting to something and shutting it down before it happens... but you would have to be extremely fast to even be able to see a *Counterspell* to attempt to *Counterspell* it if it's that fast.

If you want to allow a caster to counter a *Counterspell*... then I would still rule that the original caster who was casting a spell cannot cast *Counterspell* against the counterspeller. Doing so would STOP them from casting their own spell that they were in the middle of casting to *Counterspell* the *Counterspell*... even writing these sentences sounds dumb!



COUNTERSPELL REVISED

3rd-level, Abjuration

Casting Time: 1 Reaction (which you take when you see a creature within 60ft of you casting a spell)

Range: 60ft

Components: S

Duration: Instantaneous

You attempt to interrupt a creature in the process of casting a spell. The target must be casting a spell with a casting time of 1 Action or longer. Make a Spell Check contested by the target's Spell Check. The target adds a bonus to its Check equal to the level of spell they are casting, you add a bonus to your check equal to the level at which you cast *Counterspell*.

Failure: The target's spell succeeds and takes effect. **Success:** The target's spell fails and has no effect. **Tie:** The target's spell fails, has no effect, and both you and the target must roll on the Wild Magic Surge Table. If the target's spell fails, it can immediately cast a Cantrip as part of the same Action it used to cast its spell.

Counterspell Options

- Instead of a contested Spell Check, the Counterspeller rolls against the Caster's Spell Save DC. Both the result and the DC are increased by a number equal to the level of spell being cast.
- You get an additional +2 if you can identify the spell you are counterspelling. Usually this entails making an Arcana Check (**DC = 10 + Spell level**) to identify the spell.
- Alternatively, the difference in spell level could affect BOTH the Counterspeller and the Caster. **Example:** The Counterspeller casts a 3rd-level *Counterspell* against a 6th-level *Fireball*. The Counterspeller has a -3 to their Check, and the Caster gets a +3 to their Check.
- If the Counterspeller and the Caster get the same number on the Check, The Caster loses their spell, and both the Counterspeller and the Caster must roll on the Wild Magic Surge Table.
- I originally didn't let the Counterspeller upcast *Counterspell* due to the "meta" nature that this can be sometimes, especially if they know the spell level. But since there's a chance that it doesn't work because I removed the "auto-cancel" effect, this is fine now.
- Not allowing *Counterspell* to be cast on a *Counterspell*, or only allowing *Counterspell* to affect spells that take an Action to cast (as Bonus Actions and Reactions should be too fast). The logic is that a spell that can fire off in the time of a Reaction would have already finished by the time the opposing caster even saw that they were casting *Counterspell*. The only scenario I can see that this would make sense is if someone spent their turn holding an Action to *Counterspell* a caster, but only because they were focusing solely on that.

SPELL DUELS

When another creature that you can see begins casting a spell, you can use your Reaction to attempt to counter their spell with a spell of your own. The target spell and the spell that you cast must be within the same school of magic, be of 1st-level or higher, have a casting time of 1 Action, and overlap with each other if both spells cover an area of effect (such as a cone, cube, cylinder, line, or sphere).

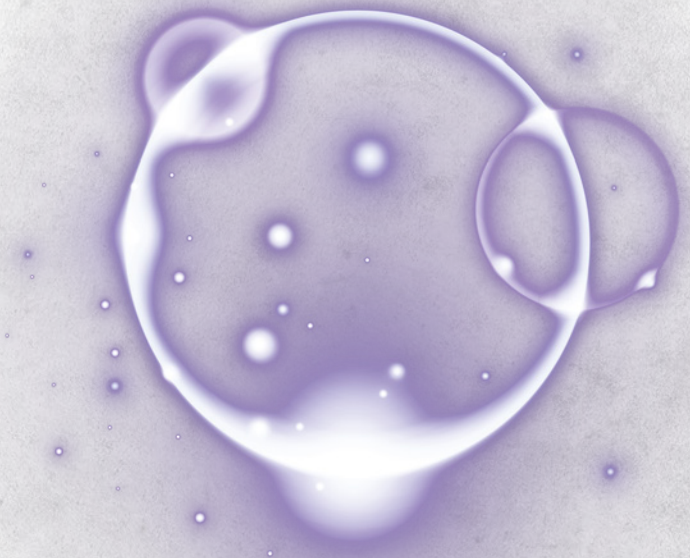
Example: Another creature casts *Cone of Cold*, you can use your Reaction to cast another Evocation spell, such as *Cone of Cold*, *Fireball*, *Lightning Bolt*, or *Ice Storm* to attempt to counter their spell, provided the area both spells cover are overlapping.

Make a Spell Check contested by the target's Spell Check. You both add an amount equal to the spell level you are casting to your Check as well. **Failure:** The target caster's spell succeeds and takes effect. **Success:** The target caster's spell fails and has no effect. **Tie:** The target caster's spell fails, has no effect, and both you and the target caster must roll on the Wild Magic Surge Table.

If the target caster's spell fails, they can immediately cast a cantrip as part of the same Action they used to cast their spell.

SCHOOLS OF MAGIC

The GM can say no to a spell working in a Spell Duel against another spell if they feel like it would not make sense conceptually. *Dominate Person* and *Sleep* are nowhere near the same kind of spell, but they are both in the Enchantment School. A GM could rule that you could not counter *Dominate Person* with *Sleep* for that reason, or you could rule that it DOES work and you flavor the description as *Sleep* countering them by putting them to sleep momentarily as they try and cast the spell. A possible modification could be that you can use a spell outside of the school of magic, if you provide creative reasoning as to how it would work and the GM approves of this.



EXPANDED SPELL DUELS CHART

Compare the results of the Caster with the results of the Counterspeller

Difference	Result
Caster wins by 5 or more	Spell goes off as normal and the Counterspeller gets a Spell Misfire
Caster wins	Spell goes off as normal
Tie	Both spells fail and they both roll on the Wild Magic Surge Table
Counterspeller wins	Spell is canceled
Counterspeller wins by 5 or more	Spell is canceled and the Caster gets a Spell Misfire

Spell Misfire: When you cast a spell and get Spell Misfire something bad happens with the spell that is an unintended and negative result. This is completely up to the GM not only what happens here (if anything at all) but how severe of a problem it is when it happens. Here are examples of Spell Misfires to show you a glimpse into what is possible:

- *Dominate Person* is used to counterspell *Modify Memory*, which has a Spell Misfire as the result. Now the caster who casts *Modify Memory* could forget the last 24 hours of activities, gain a false memory of the NPC being a friend of theirs, or even forget the *Modify Memory* spell all together.
- *Mass Suggestion* has a Spell Misfire when the counterspeller successfully counters by more than 5, with *Sleep*. Now not only does *Mass Suggestion* not go off on the intended targets, instead, *Mass Sleep* goes off on his allies and they all have to make a Constitution Save or fall asleep for 1 round. These are the types of on-the-fly rulings you can have fun with.
- *Detect Thoughts* has a Spell Misfire when counterspelled by *Tongues*. For the next minute, the caster hears the thoughts of those around him, but in a language they don't know. The cacophony causes them to have DisADV on Wisdom Checks and Saves.
- *Polymorph* has a Spell Misfire when counterspelled by *Alter Self*. The caster's feet become those of an animal, and the caster falls Prone. Standing up requires a DC 15 Acrobatics Check, as the body is not used to having different appendages.
- *Daylight* has a Spell Misfire when counterspelled by *Darkness*. The caster and nearby allies lose their shadows, which imposes DisADV on Charisma Saves and dampens their emotions.



CHAPTER 7: MASS COMBAT



DUNGEON COACH MASS COMBAT

Many fantasy adventures include warring factions engaging in open combat on a great battlefield with the players at the center of it all. To help convey the gravity of such an epic conflict, a different type of combat system is needed. How do you represent Mass Combat mechanically? This section provides rules for handling massive battles to help create cinematic combat adventures.

SYSTEM OVERVIEW CONCEPTS

I've worked on this system for 3 years now and it's a full combat system that truly fits in perfectly with 5th Edition. The entire core of this is based around the combat pillar that already exists and connects into everything players are already used to. This makes it very familiar for both new and old players to operate within. The extension pieces are very intuitive and feel just like combat at a large scale, which is the goal.

INTRODUCTION MINI BATTLE

No matter which of the following methods you use, you should start small. If your players have never run the system, then throwing them into a HUGE battle is the last thing you want to do. Starting small gives them time to get used to the mechanics and get a taste of what the system is like. Then when you scale up the complexity, they will have something to reference back to as you add more mechanics or things to keep track of... or you could just keep it simple if it worked the first time. I present multiple options here because your group might not want a lot of mechanics, and you might not want this battle to last for hours.

You also don't want to throw new mechanics at players where there's a lot of risk. It would feel really bad if the fate of the kingdom was at stake and you threw a new mass combat system at them and they didn't understand it, so they performed poorly... and then the kingdom was lost. Starting off with a smaller scale Battle leading up to the bigger conflicts solves this problem.

BATTLE TERMS

Army: One side in a Battle. An Army is made up of the Units on its side.

Battle: A Battle represents a combat encounter between warring Combat Units or Armies.

Combat Unit: A group of non-key NPCs (or creatures) that work in unison on the battlefield.

Solo Unit: A PC or Key NPC acting alone on the battlefield.

Structure: A Structure represents a defensible building, tower, fort, or castle.

Unit: A significant participant in a Battle made up of one or more creatures.

Unit Battle Type: The type of troops in the Combat Unit: Scout, Infantry, Archery, Caster, Cavalry, and Siege.

Unit Class Type: The types of troops based on the classes in the game: Paladin, Wizard, Barbarian, Druid, etc.

Unit Creature Type: The types of creatures in the Combat Unit: Undead, Fey, Celestial, Fiend, etc.

COMBAT UNITS

Combat Units have Ability Scores and stats just like normal monsters and should feel very similar. There are also MANY more different types of possible Units than I could ever list out. There are Unit Battle Types for different troops that the Unit is made of, Unit Creature Types for what types of Humanoids (or monsters) make up the Unit, and Unit Class for giving units a flavor of class (like a group of Paladins or Monks).

ABILITY SCORES

Each Unit has a stat block similar to a monster stat block. These are designed in a similarly efficient way to give all of the information needed to make any roll you need to. Units might need to cross a difficult area, see if they notice something, or understand something that they might need to make a Check for. With these stats you will know how to handle anything that comes up for the Unit as a whole. Ability Scores work pretty much the same as for PCs, but they can be flavored in any way you want.

Example: Wisdom for a group of Archers would represent their general battle awareness, but the Wisdom for a Unit of Clerics might be flavored as a divine sense of some kind increasing the Unit's readiness for danger. The list below details what each Ability Score represents for a unit.

Strength (Str): How physically strong the Unit is for overcoming physical challenges (Strength Saves and climbing castle walls).

Dexterity (Dex): Ability to maneuver quickly and avoid damage (Dexterity Saves and Initiative Checks).

Constitution (Con): Endurance and the ability to shrug off damage (Constitution Saves and Exhaustion).

Intelligence (Int): How well the Unit can execute complex instructions or battle tactics and measures knowledge of enemy Units (Intelligence Saves and military tactics or knowledge).

Wisdom (Wis): How perceptive and aware a Unit is, as well as its ability to navigate the battlefield (Wisdom Saves and Perception Checks).

Charisma (Cha): Resilience and courage to keep fighting, also known as a Unit's morale (Charisma Saves and Morale Checks).

UNIT STATS

These are straightforward stats just like you would normally see in a monster's stat block. HP and AC go hand in hand to show the durability of the Unit and function exactly the same as usual. Movement is a bit different because of the scale that these combats usually happen at.



Experience Level (EL): How trained the Unit is within their Unit Battle Type. Level 1 is Untrained, Level 2 is Skilled, Level 3 is Veteran, and Level 4 is Elite. A Unit's Prof. Bonus is equal to its Experience Level, making it more capable in combat at higher levels.

Hit Points (HP): A Unit's HP represents the amount of creatures able to fight within the Unit. This depends on the number of troops that start off in a Unit. For example, if a Unit with a HP maximum of 100 that contains 1,000 soldiers takes 50 damage, this would represent 50% of their troops being wounded, killed, running away in fear, or being unable to continue fighting. If a Unit regains HP through an ability or magic, this represents either previously wounded soldiers being patched up, troops returning to the fight, or dead soldiers being brought back to life.

Armor Class (AC): How difficult it is to hit this Unit. The default AC of a Unit is 10. You can also use any of the AC systems presented in Chapter 6 (see page 143).

Movement (Speed): The amount of Squares a Unit can travel on their turn. The distance of a Square can scale and change for different Battles but the default size is 30ft.

Range: A Unit can make an Attack from this many Squares away. A Melee Unit would have a Range of 1 Square, since they have to be 1 Square away (adjacent) to make an Attack. A Ranged Attack would be considered 2 Squares or farther.

Attack Modifier (Attack): This is the number that you add to the d20 when a Unit makes an Attack.

Damage Die: The dice you roll, adding the Unit's Prof. Bonus, to determine how much damage it deals.

Prof. Bonus (PB): This is the bonus you would add to all things the Unit is proficient in. This includes Checks, Saves, Attacks, and damage. If you want to grant a Unit proficiency with a Skill or Save, then it would add its Prof. Bonus to the result of its roll.

Attacking and dealing damage with Units is very simple. Each unit has a Range for its Attack, and if it hits you roll the Damage Die + its Prof. Bonus for the damage. Each Unit has one Attack and they all work the same for each Unit.

UNIT TYPES

Mass Combat includes the following Unit Types: Battle Type, Creature Type, and Class Type. Each Combat Unit has a Battle Type and a Creature Type determined by the type of creatures in the Unit and their armaments. Some Units can also have a Class Type if you want to represent a Unit of Barbarians or Sorcerers with unique features.

BATTLE TYPES

Different types of Units gain special properties that grant them distinct advantages or disadvantages in Battle. A Unit's Battle Type is determined by the armaments of the creatures within the unit. There are 6 different Unit Battle Types:

- **Archery Unit:** Archers.
- **Caster Unit:** Spellcasters.
- **Cavalry Unit:** Mounted Combatants.
- **Infantry Unit:** Foot Soldiers.
- **Scout Unit:** Forward Observers.
- **Siege Unit:** Soldiers operating a Siege Weapon (i.e. Trebuchet).



Sea or Sky Themes: You can change the theme of these Unit Battle Types to better represent battles in the sea or sky. You can grant Units a Swimming or Flying Speed, or Unit Features that are better suited for seafaring or sky battles.

Example: You could change Infantry Units to become Boarding Parties that maneuver small skiffs, or winged warriors wielding pikes, that attack enemy ships to slay their crew. Siege Units could become Water or Air Vehicles (sea or airships) carrying siege weapons, like Ballistas, Cannons, or Trebuchets. Cavalry Units could be lighter, faster sea or air ships that are well suited for performing fast raids on enemy ships.

CREATURE TYPES

There are as many Creature Types as there are creatures in your game. Everything from Humans to Elves, and Dragonborn to Undead armies can be created and controlled as allies or enemies in these Battles. These can become more unique in battle by giving them features specifically connected to what types of creatures they are. Undead could have a chance to come back to life, Fey could have charming effects, and Dragonborn could have a Breath Weapon Attack. More of these features are outlined on page 195.

Feel free to mix and match features to inspire the flavor and feel for what you want these creatures to represent. You could also look into the Battle and Class Type Features and re-flavor them to be a Creature Type feature.

Example: You have an Infantry Unit of Orcs. Give them Class Features of a Barbarian for them to make a bloodcrazed charge into battle, or give them a feature from a Cavalry Unit that makes them run faster. Maybe you want them all to be shamans and give them magic abilities to buff other surrounding units. You can go ANY direction you want with these Creature Types and really make some unique armies!

CLASS TYPES

Each class in the game has distinct features and characteristics that make them iconic. Granting a Unit Class Type features is optional, but you can add them to any Unit to add an additional layer of customization. Units with Class Type features represent a large group of NPCs of the same class forming together to create a Unit. You can expand on this by mixing and matching different Class Type features, like a Ranger Unit that takes inspiration from Rogue features for Stealth and Sneak Attack.

Example: Maybe you have a Warlock Unit that are all Hexblades, and you want them to have green flame surrounding their blades. Take one of the Paladin Class Type Features that puts Radiant damage on all Attacks and change the damage from Radiant to Fire.

CREATING UNITS

Creating Units is a simple process. Each Unit Type has a base stat block that includes its Ability Scores and battle stats. You can modify a Unit's stat block as needed to reflect the characteristics and abilities you want them to have, just like homebrewing a monster. You can also add unique features to these Units based on its size, the type of creatures in it, and the creature commanding it (if any). There are base stat blocks for each Unit Battle Type below that you can use to start from, and then increase or decrease stats to make a Unit stronger or weaker. You could use the default stat blocks and default features only, or make them your own by changing the stats and adding more features.

CUSTOM UNIT STATS & FEATURES

Each Unit starts with certain default features based on its Battle Type. There are also additional feature options you could assign to Units based on their Creature Type or Class Type. The GM can choose to change the default stats to show Units are more or less powerful.

When running Mass Combat, all of your Units will usually be of a similar scale and ability level, allowing you to run a balanced and fun encounter. However, you can play with the balance of powers by making different tweaks to achieve the theme and feel you want from the battle.

- You can represent a greater degree of training by giving Units on one side of the battle more features or a higher Experience Level, displaying their greater tactical knowledge and experience through access to more abilities.
- You can represent stronger weapons and armor by increasing the damage, HP, or even the AC of your Units.
- You can adjust the scale of Units if you want to create soldiers that are more sturdy or more frail. A Unit with 30 HP that represents 100 troops would have sturdier soldiers than a Unit with 30 HP that represents 500 troops.
- You can play with scale further if you want to introduce the threat of much larger forces or creatures. A Unit of a much greater size might flip the rules for Solo Units, having ADV against Combat Units and even Resistance to damage from them.

You can use the options in combination or in part to customize the theme you want for your Mass Combat. Whether that feeling is something like Spartans holding Thermopylae against impossible odds or more like, "The heroes decimate the Undead hordes."

Example: An Infantry Unit starts with Combat Rush, whereas a Scout Unit starts out with Forward Spotter. Depending on if these Units are Undead, Elves, Dragonborn, etc. you might give them more features on top of their default Battle Type features (see page 193).



CHOOSING A FEATURE

When assigning new features to a Unit, you can choose a feature from 1 of the following lists if it meets the prerequisites for the feature: General Features, Battle Type Features, Creature Type Features, or Class Type Features. Choosing a feature from 1 of several lists enables similar Units to specialize differently, allowing each Unit to be customized based on its unique training, experiences, creature composition, or mission.

Example: When an Infantry Unit made of Orc Barbarians gains a feature, it can choose from 1 of the following lists: General, Battle Type (Infantry), Creature Type (Orc), or Class Type (Barbarian). Or you can, of course, create a new homebrew feature yourself.

CASTER UNITS

These Units represent groups of creatures that cast spells or possess supernatural abilities similar to spells. Caster Units have an Action that allows them to deal greater damage using some of their magical power. They have a number of spell slots of varying levels as determined by their Experience Level. Caster Units expend spell slots to cast powerful Spell Effects (Instantaneous or Continuous) using the Mass Combat Spellcasting rules, rather than to cast spells using normal Spellcasting rules.

Using the Mass Combat Spellcasting rules, Caster Battle Features are designed to differentiate Caster Units, so they don't all feel and perform the same in Battle. A Caster Unit with a feature from the Necromancy list will feel different in Battle than a Caster Unit with a feature from the Illusion list. Choosing a Caster Unit's Battle Features can change the nature of the power they wield, so keep this in mind when choosing which features to grant your Caster Units.

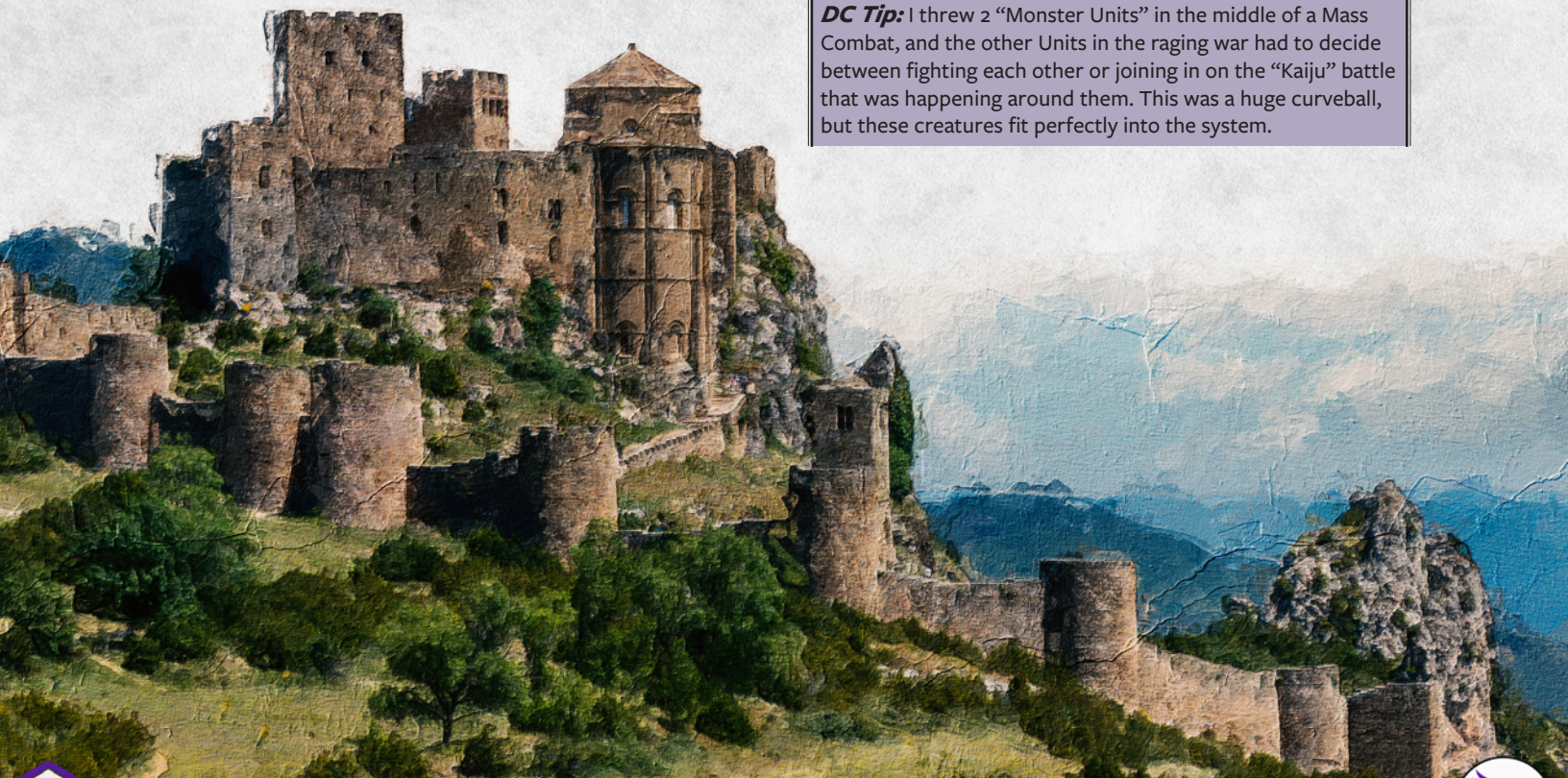
SIEGE UNITS

These Units should be terrifying on a battlefield and you can give them very unique features and stats to best represent them mechanically. You can increase or decrease their combat effectiveness to help balance these Units, such as increasing its movement but reducing its Attack. There are many ways to tweak this type of Unit to be any number of things. Below are some ideas to take and run with for your own Siege Units.

- Increase the range to be over 10 Squares for a sniper ballista that the opposing Units have to destroy before the bulk of their army can enter the battle space.
- Increase the damage to be insane BUT have the Siege Unit only be able to shoot once every other round. It has to spend an Action to reload or charge back up before it can use its devastating attack on the next round.
- Give it a very HIGH AC against Melee Attacks (sturdy construction) and a very LOW AC against Ranged Attacks (susceptible to aerial assault), or the other way around.
- Have this Siege Unit be a CREATURE that is alive and moving across the battlefield. This could be a huge beast, or even a Giant or Dragon! It being considered a Unit makes it easily used in Battle and allows for some epic monsters to be a part of the Mass Combat.

Example: If you give this Unit resistance to damage against Units this also applies to Solo Units. This means that if a Solo Unit attacks a HUGE monster like this then hits it and rolls 12 for damage... it would get halved to 6 (for attacking a Unit) and then halved AGAIN to only 3 for this massive creature being resistant to all damage. You could apply double vulnerability, too, meaning this creature attacking a Unit would deal double damage and attacking a Solo Unit would deal quadruple! This would really make the players have to be careful of this behemoth of a monster!

DC Tip: I threw 2 "Monster Units" in the middle of a Mass Combat, and the other Units in the raging war had to decide between fighting each other or joining in on the "Kaiju" battle that was happening around them. This was a huge curveball, but these creatures fit perfectly into the system.



UNIT STAT BLOCKS

These stat blocks represent a Skilled Unit for each Battle Type. These Units are trained and proficient at what they do, but they are by no means Veterans or Elite Units. You can take these stat blocks and increase or decrease their stats to match the caliber of army you want.

ARCHERY UNIT

Creature Type and Size Varies

AC: 12

HP: 20

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+0	+0	+1	+0

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Speed: 1 Square

ACTIONS

Volley of Arrows: Ranged Weapon Attack, 5 Squares, **+3** to hit, **1d4+2** Piercing damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Steady Aim: At the start of its turn, the Unit can forgo all of its movement to choose to gain 1 of the following benefits on the next Attack it makes before the end of its turn: **+2** Range, **+2** bonus to Ranged Attacks, or double damage dice.

CASTER UNIT

Creature Type and Size Varies

AC: 12

HP: 20

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+0	+0	+2	+2	+2

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Speed: 1 Square

ACTIONS

Magic Blast: Ranged Spell Attack, 4 Squares, **+3** to hit, **1d8+2** Acid, Cold, Fire, Thunder, Lightning, Necrotic, Poison, Psychic, or Radiant damage (choose one).

Magic Strike: Melee Spell Attack, 1 Square, **+3** to hit, **1d12+2** Acid, Cold, Fire, Thunder, Lightning, Necrotic, Poison, Psychic, or Radiant damage (choose one).

Spell Slots: (+3 to hit, **DC 13**)

- **1st-Level:** 2 Slots
- **2nd-Level:** 1 Slot

CAVALRY UNIT

Creature Type and Size Varies

AC: 14

HP: 40

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+0	+0	+2	+2	+2

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Speed: 3 Squares

STRENGTHS

Mobility: Opportunity Attacks are made at DisADV against the Cavalry Unit.

ACTIONS

Charging Strike: Melee Weapon Attack, 1 Square, **+4** to hit, **1d8+2** Bludgeoning, Piercing, or Slashing damage (choose one).

Trample: When the Unit takes the Dash Action, it can use a Bonus Action to make 1 Melee Weapon Attack and move through space occupied by other Units, but it can't end its turn in a space occupied by another Unit, unless it's a Solo Unit.

DC Tip: You can turn a Scout, Infantry, Archery, or Caster Unit, into a Cavalry Unit of the same kind by granting it the Trample feature and increasing its HP by 5 x EL, its speed to 3 Squares, and its Charging Strike damage die by 1 size (a d6 becomes a d8).

INFANTRY UNIT

Creature Type and Size Varies

AC: 14

HP: 30

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+0	+1	+0	+0	+0

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Speed: 1 Square

STRENGTHS

Combat Rush: Can move 1 additional square when taking the Dash Action.

ACTIONS

Martial Strike: Melee Weapon Attack, 1 Square, **+3** to hit, **1d6+2** Bludgeoning, Piercing, or Slashing damage (choose one).



SCOUT UNIT

Creature Type and Size Varies

AC: 12

HP: 20

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+0	+0	+1	+0

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Speed: 2 Squares

STRENGTHS

Keen Senses: Has ADV on Perception Checks.

ACTIONS

Recon Strike: Melee Weapon Attack, 1 Square, **+3** to hit, **1d6+2** Bludgeoning, Piercing, or Slashing damage (choose one).

Forward Spotter: Choose 1 enemy Unit within 3 Squares. Allied Units have ADV on Ranged Attacks against the chosen Unit until the start of this Unit's next turn.

SIEGE UNIT

Creature Type and Size Varies

Armor Class: 14

Hit Points: 50

Speed: 1 Square

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+0	+3	+0	+3	+2

Proficiency Bonus: +2

STRENGTHS

Fortified Structure: Has resistance to damage from Scout, Infantry, Archery, Cavalry, and Caster Units..

WEAKNESSES

Fixed Firing Apparatus: Can either move or take the Attack Action on its turn, not both.

ACTIONS

Siege Bombardment: Ranged Weapon Attack, 8 Squares, **+5** to hit, **1d12+2** Bludgeoning damage. Can't hit targets within 2 Squares of this Siege Unit.

SIZE AND SCALE

All of the rules presented here work with any size of Mass Combat battle that you want to run. If you want the full armies of two kingdoms to clash, 100,000 soldiers in each Army, then you can use the exact same mechanics as a small tactical skirmish of 100 vs. 100. The mechanics are here to help you navigate multiple Units that act independently or commanded by the players.

SCALING UNIT SIZE

Units are represented by HP, so if one Combat Unit has 20 HP, that could represent 20 soldiers where 1 HP is 1 soldier, or that 20 HP could represent 2,000 soldiers where 1 HP is 100 soldiers. Mechanically it's the same and you just scale the thematic size of the Units up or down depending on what kind of battle you are running. The same is true for the scale of the battle mats you use. I will refer to movement as 1 Square of movement. This could represent 30ft instead of the standard 5ft, or it could represent 100ft and you could play it like a massive bird's eye view of a countryside as you tactically move troops around.

DC Tip: If you scale things too far out then it will be difficult to track PCs' individual movements on the battlefield, but with some systems you don't even need to track movement like this, especially if you use one of the Skill Challenge methods in Chapter 3.

Here are a couple military organization charts that you can use as references when scaling your Mass Combat battles up into the thousands, 10's of thousands, or 100's of thousands of soldiers.

ARMY MILITARY ORGANIZATION

Size	Combat Unit	Number of Soldiers	Leadership Rank
1	Squad	10	Sergeant
2	Platoon	40 (4 Squads)	Lieutenant
3	Company	160 (4 Platoons)	Captain
4	Battalion	800 (5 Companies)	Colonel
5	Brigade	4,000 (5 Battalions)	Brigadier General
6	Division	10,000 (2-3 Brigades)	Major General
7	Corps	40,000 (4 Divisions)	Lieutenant General
8	Army	200,000 (5 Corps)	General
9	Alliance	500,000 (2+ Armies)	Allied Commander

NAVAL MILITARY ORGANIZATION

Size	Combat Unit	Number of Soldiers	Leadership Rank
1	Skiff	5	Ensign
2	Patrol Boat	20	Lieutenant
3	Ship	80	Captain
4	Flotilla	400 (2-5 Ships)	Commodore
5	Division	2,000 (2-5 Flotillas)	Rear Admiral (Lower)
6	Strike Group	5,000 (2-3 Divisions)	Rear Admiral (Upper)
7	Battle Group	20,000 (2-4 Strike Groups)	Vice Admiral
8	Fleet	100,000 (2-5 Battle Groups)	Admiral
9	Alliance	250,000 (2+ Fleets)	Fleet Admiral

DC Note: Naval ships include 1 crewman for every 1 soldier, so the total crew equals twice the number of soldiers.



SCALING BATTLE TIME

Time also scales in Mass Combat. These battles won't take a number of seconds of in-game time, it could rage on for hours or more. There are no mechanics for this, it's purely thematic on your end as a GM to get across the scope of this battle and how it plays out. You can do this with cinematic exposition or literally explain this concept to them so they can imagine what their character is going through.

I tell my players at the table that each round of combat is around 10 to 30 seconds due to the massive size on the battlefield and how long it would take huge groups of troops to move and battle each other. BUT the game mechanics of time for how long abilities, spells, etc. last are not affected and are scaled up in the same way. So, a spell that normally lasts for 1 minute would still last 10 ROUNDS of combat, even though thematically 1 minute might only be 2 rounds or even 1 depending on the scale of your Battle.

DC Tip: This is a moment where players have to suspend their disbelief and you can flavor it however you want. The tensions are high so their spells are boosted, maybe the other magic users around them are helping them to increase the potency and duration of their casting OR are also casting the spell themselves.

UNITS IN BATTLE

This section provides rules for managing a Battle with Combat Units and Solo Units on the battlefield.

POSTURING PHASE

Before rolling for Initiative, there's a period of time when running Mass Combat where each Army can see each other... but they are not within striking range. This is called POSTURING and is a tactical phase of movement leading up to an all out Battle. This is that cinematic moment when both sides square off against each other for an epic stare down, battle speeches, or A CHARGE! Once an Army decides to move towards another, the POSTURING begins.

The Posturing Phase begins with each Army rolling a d20. Each Army is ranked from the highest to the lowest result, with the highest result taking its turn first, followed in succession until the lowest result takes its turn last. During its turn, an Army will decide what Actions its Units will take or where they will move. This will continue until a Unit targets an Enemy Unit with an Attack, Spell Effect, or other harmful effect. When that happens, all Units will roll Initiative, and the Battle will begin.

DC Tip: Basically, there's no surprise round, but there could totally be some guerilla warfare type of tactics that you could use to surprise your enemy during a Mass Combat... that would be EPIC

!

UNIT INITIATIVE ORDER

Units in Mass Combat have two types of Initiative scores that are used to determine their order in Battle. Each Unit has a Macro Initiative based on its Battle Type that determines its general Initiative order during a Battle, and a Micro Initiative that determines the Initiative order of Units of the same Battle Type.

MACRO INITIATIVE

Each Unit Battle Type has a specific place within the Macro Initiative Order. Solo Units go on Initiative 10, Scout Units on 9, Cavalry Units on 8, Infantry Units on 7, Archery Units on 6, Caster Units on 5, and Siege Units on 4. These Macro Initiative scores are shown in the table below.

MACRO INITIATIVE ORDER

Initiative	Unit
------------	------

10	Solo
----	------

9	Scout
---	-------

8	Cavalry
---	---------

7	Infantry
---	----------

6	Archery
---	---------

5	Caster
---	--------

4	Siege
---	-------

MICRO INITIATIVE

Units that share a Battle Type roll Initiative using normal Initiative rules for Combat. Units of the same Battle Type with a higher Initiative score go before other Units of the same Battle Type with a lower Initiative score.

Solo Units going first every round works very well for keeping things organized. The PCs all go on the same Macro Initiative and can have SOME time for tactical Battle strategy before going into the next round. More on this in the Commanding a Unit section below.

Example: In a battle between an Elven Army and an Orc Army, both having Infantry Units and Archery Units, all Infantry Units take their turn on Macro Initiative 7 and all Archery Units take their turn on Macro Initiative 6. However, each Army will roll Initiative to determine which of their Infantry Units goes first or second in the Battle, and do the same on Macro Initiative 6 for their Archery Units.

Assume the Elven Army gets a 12 for its Infantry and a 15 for its Archery, and the Orc Army gets a 5 for its Infantry and a 19 for its Archery. On Macro Initiative 7, the Infantry Units will take their turn, with the Elven Infantry Unit (Initiative 12) going before the Orc Infantry Unit (Initiative 5). On Macro Initiative 6, the Archery Units will take their turn, with the Orc Archery Unit (Initiative 19) going before the Elven Archery Unit (Initiative 15).

DC Tip: A shortcut I use to roll Initiative for ALL of the Units at the same time is to roll 6d20 and apply them in order to each of the Units. If the d20 is an 11-20 then the allies side (PCs) goes first, and if it's a 1-10 then the enemies (GM) go first for that Unit. This is a quick way to randomly assign them if they have similar scores.

ACTIONS IN COMBAT

In a Battle, groups of creatures form Units that act in unison on their turn. On a Unit's turn it can take 1 Action, 1 Bonus Action (if it has one), 1 Reaction, and use its movement to move up to its Speed. A Unit can use its Action to take the Dash Action, Help Action, Dodge Action, Disengage Action, or any other special Actions it might have. A Unit has a stat block that represents all the creatures within the Unit.

MOVEMENT

Distance on a battlefield can be expressed using Squares of variable sizes. The size of the Square can be as large as you need it to be, and is usually determined by the size and Range of the Units involved. You could use 30ft Squares to represent the movement of small, tactical groups of Units like platoons of Infantry or Archers. You could also use 300ft squares to represent the movement of very large, strategic groups of Units like Armies that are moving through a kingdom.

The standard square size for Mass Combat is 30ft, since the distance and Range of most game effects are 30ft, 60ft, 90ft, 120ft, or 150ft - increments of 30ft. A Unit's movement is equal to its Speed divided by the distance of 1 Square. When using 30ft Squares, a Unit with a Speed of 30ft can move 1 Square. Alternatively, a unit with a Speed of 120ft can move 4 Squares.

SPECIAL ATTACKS

The Range and area of Attacks and effects produced by a Unit must be rounded to the nearest 1-Square increment. If 1 Square is 30ft, then the range of a Unit's special attack must be rounded to the nearest 30ft increment. Any effect with a Range less than 1 Square is considered 1 Square for the purpose of determining its Range in Mass Combat. For example, a Caster Unit casting *Burning Hands*, which can cover a 15ft area cone, would instead have a Range of 1 Square (30ft).

MORALE CHECKS

War can be a frightening and demoralizing experience, especially when your allies begin to fall and you smell death on the air. When a Unit suffers a heavy loss, an overwhelming enemy force rallies against them, or imminent death seems certain the GM can call for a Morale Check. The GM determines when an event requires a Morale Check and sets the DC accordingly. A Unit's Charisma represents its resolve in the face of great danger, so a failed Morale Check can break its resolve and swing the tide of battle. However, certain types of Units would not be deterred by anything - such as a brigade of lifeless Constructs controlled by a powerful Wizard. These and other types of creatures might not need to even make Morale Checks.

DC Tip: I see Morale as a Charisma based stat but I could totally see Wisdom being used to account for the fear component of this. In my head, I picture the battle speeches and confidence on the battlefield being Charisma, but that's your call as a GM.

Morale Check: A Unit makes a Charisma Save. **Failure:** The Unit is removed from the Battle. This represents the Unit surrendering, being destroyed, or fleeing in terror. A Unit is considered destroyed on a failed Morale Check because a fleeing Unit is just as ineffective as a dead one. Here are some examples of different types of Morale Checks across different DCs. Keep in mind that these apply to both sides of the Battle, as you can cause enemies to make Morale Checks as well. You can tweak these as you wish based on what happens in YOUR Battles.

DC 10

- A Unit's HP reaches 1/2 or 1/4 of its HP maximum.
- An enemy Solo Unit enters the Battle (the BBEG showing up would be quite scary).
- An enemy Unit scores a Critical Hit.
- A nearby Allied Unit dies.

DC 15

- A Unit takes damage from a single source equal to or greater than 1/2 its HP maximum.
- An enemy Solo Unit uses a special ability that triggers a Morale Check.

DC 20

- An enemy Solo Unit kills 2 or more Allied Units in 1 Turn.

DC Tip: The PCs should play a large role in these Morale Checks. They can be given features that grant them ADV on these Checks, or grant them immunity while commanding a Unit. PCs need to feel like their presence is felt on the battlefield and affecting Morale Checks in this way is a great way to do that.



UNIT SAVE DC

If a Combat Unit forces another Unit to make a Save, the Combat Unit's **Unit Save DC** equals **11 + its Prof. Bonus**.

Example: The **Unit Save DC** of an Untrained Unit would be **DC 12**. Alternatively, the **Unit Save DC** for an Elite Unit would be **DC 15**. In general, Units have low modifiers for their Saves, so forcing them to make Saves can be a strong tactic.

SOLO UNITS

A PC or important NPC is considered a Solo Unit when it participates in a Battle. Its game statistics remain the same.

MOVEMENT

A Solo Unit's Speed gets converted into Squares using the Movement rules in the Units in Battle section. However, a Solo Unit can freely move through or share the space of an Allied Combat Unit.

DC Tip: The conversion is usually 30ft = 1 Square of movement, so most Solo Units will all be 1 square. If a player has a Speed of 45ft or higher you could give them an extra Square that they can use every other turn, so once they go 2 Squares, the next turn they can only go 1.

TAKING DAMAGE

Solo Units are vulnerable to damage from Combat Units, and Combat Units have resistance to damage from Solo Units. These damage adjustments represent the trade of blows between an individual creature fighting a group of creatures.

DC Tip: As the size of Units in your Mass Combat increases, you might want to adjust this further, granting Combat Units immunity to damage from Solo Units or grant Combat Units quadruple damage against Solo Units. A lone warrior turning the tide against 20 soldiers is epic, but a single archer taking down a division of thousands might break suspension of disbelief.

SAVES VS COMBAT UNITS

Combat Units automatically succeed on Saves they make against effects originating from Solo Units. When a Combat Unit becomes Bloodied (1/2 or less its HP maximum), it loses its ability to automatically succeed, and makes its Save with ADV instead.

COMMANDING A UNIT

Great Battles can feel grand and epic when they create opportunities for the PCs to take the role of heroic champions battling malevolent armies and villains. In Mass Combat, PCs can take command of other Units to add their might to the Unit they command, making the whole Unit stronger. Your players don't want to feel like a small blip on the battlefield, they want to be heroic commanders turning the tide of battle.

TAKING COMMAND

A Solo Unit can use an Action to take command of a Combat Unit that's within 1 Square of it until the start of the Solo Unit's next turn. When it does, the Solo Unit enters the Combat Unit's space, takes command of the Combat Unit, and its turn immediately ends.



SOLO UNIT INITIATIVE

Solo Units go first in the Macro Initiative, which they can use to decide if they are going to act on their own OR if they are going to take command of a Combat Unit. If a Solo Unit takes command of a Combat Unit, the Solo Unit decides what the Combat Unit does on its turn in the Combat Unit Initiative Order. The Solo Unit has full control of the Combat Unit including what Actions or Bonus Actions it takes and where it moves.

Example: A Solo Unit takes its turns on Macro Initiative 10, and an Infantry Unit takes its turn on Macro Initiative 6. If the Solo Unit uses its Action to take command of the Infantry Unit, its turn immediately ends. During the Infantry Unit's turn on Macro Initiative 6, the Solo Unit decides what the Infantry Unit does during its turn. At the start of the Solo Unit's next turn on Macro Initiative 10, it can use an Action to take command of the Infantry Unit again, or do something else with its turn.

Example: In the first round of the Battle, an evil Necromancer NPC acting as a Solo Unit uses its Action to summon an Undead Infantry Unit (cool ability I just made up), casts a fear type of spell effect to force an enemy Unit within 5 Squares to make a Morale Check, and then ends its turn. In the next round of battle, during the Solo Unit Initiative, the Necromancer Solo Unit takes command of the Undead Infantry Unit it summoned on its previous turn. On the Undead Infantry Unit's turn, the Necromancer Solo Unit casts a spell effect that empowers the Undead Infantry Unit with unholy power causing its many skeletal bodies to glow with a ghostly aura. The first Attack that the Undead Infantry Unit makes gains a +5 bonus to its Attacks and damage, and if this Attack kills a Unit, the target rises as an Undead Unit of the same kind under the Necromancer Solo Unit's control.

DC Tip: This example shows the various things you can do with this system. At the end of the day, these Units are so similar to monster stat blocks that you can easily give them unique abilities for some EPIC Battles. Also an enemy Unit that can cause Morale Checks is VERY strong (since the Unit is gone if they fail).

ABILITY MODIFIERS AND MOVEMENT

When a commanded Combat Unit makes an Attack, Save, or Check it uses its Ability Modifiers or the Ability Modifiers of the Solo Unit commanding it, whichever is higher. A commanded Combat Unit's Speed is equal to the Speed of whichever Unit has the higher Speed.

DC Tip: This represents that two Units are stronger together than apart. This is also another layer to the tactics involved when deciding whether a PC should take command of a Combat Unit or act individually as a Solo Unit. This also assumes that if a Solo Unit takes command of a Cavalry Unit that they are probably also riding a horse.

TAKING DAMAGE

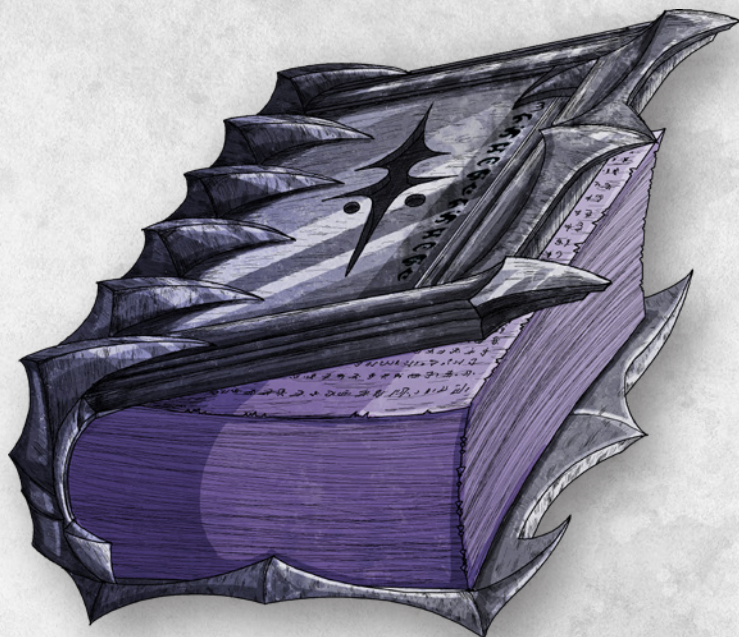
When a commanded Combat Unit takes damage, the Combat Unit takes full damage and the Solo Unit takes half of the damage. For example, if a commanded Combat Unit is attacked by an enemy Unit and suffers 6 damage from the Attack, the Combat Unit takes 6 damage and the Solo Unit takes 3 damage.

MAKING AN ATTACK

When a commanded Combat Unit makes an Attack, it uses its own Ability Modifiers, damage dice and Prof. Bonus or those of its commanding Solo Unit, whichever is higher.

Example: If a Fighter takes command of an Infantry Unit, the Fighter can command the Infantry Unit to make a Melee Weapon Attack, since that Attack is listed in the Infantry Unit's stat block. Since the Fighter is likely to have a higher Attack Modifier and Prof. Bonus, the Infantry Unit uses the Fighter's statistics when making the Attack.

Example: If a Wizard takes command of a Caster Unit, the Wizard can command the Caster Unit to make a Ranged Spell Attack, since that Attack is listed in the Caster Unit's stat block. When it does, it can use the Wizard's Attack Modifier and Prof. Bonus when it makes the Attack. Alternatively, if the Caster Unit expends one of its own spell slots to cast a Spell Effect, such as the Damage spell effect, it can use the Wizard's **Unit Save DC** when determining the DC of the spell effect.



SHARED FEATURES

When a Solo Unit commands a Combat Unit, the Combat Unit gains all of the features that the Solo Unit currently has. The Unit now benefits from any special effects such as buffs, auras, and other abilities. Whatever the Solo Unit can do, the Combat Unit can now also do (at the GM's discretion). There might be different situations that would not make sense for the entire group to be able to do, like the example below.

When a feature is used that has a limited number of uses it is consumed as usual to grant the effect to both the Solo Unit and the commanded Unit. A commanded Combat Unit loses any benefits it gained from its commanding Solo Unit if the Solo Unit ends its turn in a different space than the Combat Unit.

DC Tip: Basically, if the Solo Unit has a feature that it benefits from, then the Combat Unit also benefits from that feature. Additionally, any spells cast use the Mass Combat Spellcasting system below.

Example 1: If a Rogue takes command of a Scout Unit, the Rogue can command the Scout Unit to make a Melee Weapon Attack, since that Attack is listed in the Scout Unit's stat block. If the Scout Unit has ADV on the Attack it gains the benefits of the Rogue's Sneak Attack, allowing it to add extra Sneak Attack damage dice to the Attack.

Example 2: If a Ranger takes command of an Archery Unit, the Ranger can command the Archery Unit to make a Ranged Weapon Attack, since that Attack is listed in the Archery Unit's stat block. If the Ranger is 5th-level or higher, the Archery Unit gains the benefits of the Ranger's Extra Attack, which allows the Archery Unit to Attack twice when it takes the Attack Action.

Example 3: If a Barbarian takes command of an Infantry Unit, the Barbarian and Infantry Unit can both begin to Rage. When they do, the Barbarian expends a use of its Rage.

Example 4: If a Paladin takes command of an Infantry Unit, the Infantry Unit gains the benefits of the Paladin's Divine Health, assuming the Paladin is at least 3rd-level. If the Paladin ends its turn in a different space than the Infantry Unit, the Infantry Unit no longer benefits from the Paladin's Divine Health.

Example 5: If a Sorcerer takes command of a Caster Unit, the Caster Unit can produce a spell effect by expending one of the Sorcerer's spell slots or one of its own. Additionally, it can choose to produce a spell effect that it knows or one that the Sorcerer knows.

Example 6: A Tiedling Rogue has *Hellish Rebuke*. They would be able to use this as a Solo Unit, but not grant this effect to their ENTIRE Unit, unless it would make sense that the Unit they are commanding could do this. If they were a Unit of Tiedlings also, then this WOULD make sense.

PUSHING THE LIMITS

Some things your PCs might want to try within this system will push the limits or touch on gray areas that you might need to make a ruling on. Some features might be VERY strong when applied in a Mass Combat setting and might need to be kept in check with some of these methods.

Depending on what the PC says they want to do, they might only be able to do it every other round, OR you might ask them for a Skill Check of some kind to see if this thing they want to do is possible. If the Check is successful, then it works and something cool happens. If the Check fails, then you can have the PC lose their Action or Bonus Action, etc., or have it be at no cost to them and let them take their turn as normal after.

A Barbarian's Reckless Attack would now grant ADV to the entire Unit as they follow the Barbarian into their rage-filled charge. All of the soldiers alongside the Paladin blades glow with holy light when the Paladin casts Divine Smite. Abilities like Wild Shape might get a little strange to explain, but if you push the limits here and come up with something creative it can lead to some awesome moments. Maybe you rule that the Wild Shape grants the Infantry additional animalistic features and some Temp HP. Now they have 10 Temp HP and deal an extra **1d4** damage on their Attacks while they have that Temp HP. Some of my favorite moments are coming up with simple mechanics to reward the PC's choices. I have entire lists of features and options you can look through to inspire you on what's possible here, but, for your group, think about what your players are capable of and be prepared for what they might do.

Example 1: A Monks' Stunning Strike would still cost a Ki Point as normal to trigger a Constitution Save from the enemy Unit. This could be roleplayed beforehand as the Monk training their Unit to know key pressure points on the enemy to Stun the entire Unit.

Example 2: A Druid wants to use Wild Shape to shapeshift into a Giant Spider for some epic web tactics they have planned. You have some options on how this player could do this for their entire Combat Unit. Maybe they are commanding a group of Druids, then they ALL just shapeshift into Giant Spiders, perfect. Maybe you flavor the Wild Shape, instead, as them summoning hundreds of spiders to their aid in this massive battle. I put the pressure of creativity on the PCs to come up with awesome stuff, and if it sounds like it would work, I allow it... if it's a stretch... then I don't.

DC Tip: If there are features that your PCs can use that you feel break the Mass Combat system, then talk to the player and congratulate them on being this creative, then implement a tweak to bring it in line with what's intended. Maybe they can only use it a certain amount of times, or once per Long Rest, since it pushes the limits of their bodies further because everything is at a larger scale.



LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Special NPC Units such as the generals of an Army, boss monsters, or the main villain NPC could have Legendary Actions in Mass Combat. These work the same as usual and can only be used in between other Units' turns which reset at the start of their turn. You can give these special units any number of Legendary Actions, usually between 1 to 3. Below is a list of example Legendary Actions that a commanded Combat Unit might take, but feel free to add your own.

Attack!: A Unit of your choice can use its Reaction to immediately make an Attack against an enemy Unit of your choice within its range that both of you can see.

Hold the Line!: A Unit of your choice can immediately use its Reaction to take the Dodge Action.

Rally!: A Unit of your choice regains 1d8 HP.

Tactical Maneuver: Each Unit of your choice within 1 Square of you can immediately move up to half its Speed in a direction of your choice.

War Cry: A Unit of your choice gains a bonus 1d8 to the next Attack or Check it makes before the end of its next turn.

DC Tip: If one of your PCs is acting as GENERAL of the Army, you could give them Legendary Actions to represent this command over the Battle. You could also give ONE Legendary Action to each PC as well. This would be a very rare and unique thing to give a PC and is very powerful, so give this out sparingly.

SHOWDOWN BATTLES

When a Solo Unit engages another Solo Unit in battle, the GM can choose to run the scenario as a Showdown. When they do, the PC or NPC from each Unit can engage each other using normal combat rules until either one wins or chooses to retreat.

How commanded Combat Units react when a Showdown Battle occurs is left for the GM to determine. They might continue to fight, providing a backdrop of carnage to the showdown. They might hold their lines, creating a still space within the battlefield. They might be terror struck by a battle between high level characters, making Morale Checks whenever the opponent does something impressive to avoid disbanding and fleeing. Whichever approach you decide to take will depend on the tone and context you want from the combat.

These Showdown Battles happen alongside the rest of the Battle going on around them. If a PC or NPC is commanding a Combat Unit then they separate at the start of the Showdown. Since the map of the battlefield you are using would be at a much larger scale you can have this showdown happen in theater of the mind, or in a separate mini map at normal scale combat dimensions. There are many ways to run Showdown Battles, but they can be an epic addition to any Mass Combat.

- Other PCs can come join the Showdown if they were not a part of it to begin with. They just need to get within 1 square of the Showdown and move into the Showdown Zone.
- Once there is a winner of the Showdown, or someone retreats, you can have the losing side's forces make a Morale Check to help turn the tides of battle.
- You can have minions come in to aid the villain NPC that can be explained as their troops running into the Combat from the Battle they are in.

DC Tip: I personally bring out a small map on the side or battle riser platforms to show the combatants minis on the battlefield. I then use the minis to help facilitate theater of the mind for the showdown.

STRUCTURES

Structures like towers, forts, castles, and other defensible buildings are strategic points of interest during a battle. A group of 100 soldiers protected behind the walls of a fortified tower could potentially repel an Attack from an Army 10 times its size.

OCCUPYING A STRUCTURE

Once during its turn, a Solo Unit can use an Action to occupy a Structure that shares its space. When it does, the Unit takes command of the structure and gains special actions called Lair Actions while occupying it



LAIR ACTIONS

The types of Lair Actions a Unit can take are determined by the type of Structure it's occupying and the Allied Units within the Structure. On Initiative count 20 (losing all Initiative ties), it can use 1 of its Lair Action options. It can't do so while unable to take Actions. If surprised, it can't use one until after its first turn in the combat. When a Unit takes a Lair Action, it can choose from the options below if it meets its prerequisites.

Hot Oil: When using a Tower, Fort, or Castle, boiling oil can be poured from the structure onto all creatures within 1 Square Range of the structure. Each creature in the area must make a **DC 15 Constitution Save**. **Failure:** It takes **1d12 Fire** damage.

Muster Troops: Allied Units within the Structure gain ADV on their Attacks and deal an extra **1d4** damage.

Rock Launch: When using a Siege Unit, giant rocks can be slung from the structure. Make a Ranged Attack of 3 Squares Range with a 1 Square radius. Each Unit in the area must make a **DC 15 Dexterity Save**. **Failure:** It takes **1d12 Bludgeoning** damage. **Success:** It takes half damage.

DC Tip: I would treat ballista or catapults as Siege Units, but if there was one MASSIVE one, or a completely stationary one, I would treat it like a Lair Action to make it more unique or scary.

Trap Ward: When using a Caster Unit, a ward can be placed on the ground on a Square within a 2 Squares Range of the Structure. Any creature that moves onto this specified Square must make a **DC 15 Constitution Save**. **Failure:** It takes **1d12 Lightning** damage. **Success:** It takes half damage.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

You can also add regional effects based on the Structure's location, its people, and its fortifications. Here are a few regional effect options:

Illumination: The Structure is guarded with torches and lights. Units in the Structure have ADV on Perception Checks that rely on sight.

Loyal Subjects: The followers of this Army are loyal till death. Units within the Structure have ADV on Morale Checks.

Rough Landscape: Moats, trenches, other obstacles block the way of Units traveling through the area near the Structure. This area within 1 Square of the Structure is difficult terrain.

MASS COMBAT SPELLCASTING

Spellcasting works differently in Mass Combat. When a Unit casts a spell during a Battle in Mass Combat, it doesn't choose a spell from its spell list. It instead chooses from a list of spell effects that resemble the spells it can normally cast. These spell effects can be flavored in any number of ways. If you want to deal damage it could be described as a swarm of insects, bolts of fire, mental attacks, etc. These options allow spellcasters to affect the battlefield in a wide variety of ways, while avoiding any issues that arise from trying to make traditional spellcasting work in Mass Combat.

DC Tip: Keep in mind these are a UNIT of multiple spellcasters combining their powers together to accomplish things that could not be done alone!

WHY NOT NORMAL SPELLCASTING

Using normal spellcasting rules, spells normally affect between 1 and 6 creatures, and deal damage and/or impose conditions designed with this in mind. These rules don't translate well to Mass Combat, where you are targeting and affecting Units that are comprised of dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of creatures. These new Mass Combat Spellcasting rules allow Caster Units to wield magic and function as spellcasters in a way that works better in a conflict where you are targeting hundreds of creatures, rather than a handful.

MAGICAL AFFINITY

A Unit can only choose a spell effect if it has the ability to cast a spell with a similar effect using normal spellcasting rules. If an effect deals damage, the Unit can choose what type of damage it deals, but it can only choose a type of damage produced from a spell it can cast using normal spellcasting rules.

DC Tip: If there's a spell effect listed that closely fits a spell that a PC can cast, and they can creatively re-flavor it to make sense, let them do it! The spells that PCs can cast with this system should resemble the spells they can normally cast in regular combat.

AT HIGHER LEVELS

The potency of a spell effect, and the number of Units it can target, is determined by the level of the spell slot expended. If a Unit expends a spell slot of 2nd-level or higher, it can choose 1 additional target for each level beyond 1st-level. It can choose the same target multiple times.

Example: A Unit that expends a 3rd-level spell slot can target up to 3 Units with a spell effect. If it has the ability to cast spells that deal damage, restore a creature's HP, or increase a creature's Speed, then it can choose similar spell effects from those listed below. If it only has spells that deal Fire, Cold, or Lightning damage, then it can only choose to deal one of those types of damage when it produces a spell effect that deals damage.

The Unit can expend its 3rd-level spell slot to produce a damaging spell effect with Fire damage that targets 3 Units, targets the same Unit 3 times (for an effect 3 times greater than normal), or some combination in-between. Alternatively, it can choose to produce a spell effect that can restore HP instead.

SPELL EFFECTS

A Unit that has the ability to cast a spell of 1st-level or higher can produce the spell effects from those listed in the Instantaneous and Continuous sections below. If a spell effect forces a Unit to make a Save, it uses your **Unit Save DC**.



INSTANTANEOUS

The spell effects listed below don't require Concentration, have a duration that's either Instantaneous or lasts until the start of your next turn, and effects 1 Unit of your choice within 4 Squares.

- **AC:** The target gains a +5 bonus or -5 penalty to its AC for the duration.
- **D20:** The target gains a +5 bonus or -5 penalty (your choice) to the first Attack, Check, or Save it makes within the duration.
- **Damage:** The target must make a Constitution or Dexterity Save (your choice). **Failure:** It takes **2d8** damage. **Success:** It takes half damage.
- **Healing:** The target regains an amount of HP equal to 2d8.
- **Modify Damage:** The target adds or subtracts (your choice) 2d8 damage to the next Attack it makes within the duration.
- **Speed:** The target's Speed increases or decreases (your choice) by 3 Squares for the duration.
- **Temp HP:** The target gains an amount of Temp HP equal to **2d8**.

Example 1: A Cleric Unit might want to bless their allies with holy weapons. It could expend a 3rd-level spell slot to target 3 Units with the Damage spell effect, choosing Radiant as the type of damage. It can choose the same target more than once, stacking the effect on a Unit multiple times. It could choose 1 Unit to gain a bonus **6d8** Radiant damage (targeted 3 times) on its next Attack, or choose 3 different Units to gain a bonus **2d8** Radiant damage each on their next Attack. Alternatively, it could choose 1 Unit to gain a bonus **2d8** Radiant damage (targeted once) on its next Attack, and a second Unit to gain a bonus **4d8** Radiant damage (targeted twice) on its next Attack.

Example 2: A Sorcerer Unit might want to shoot out rays of fire (or some other element it can cast). It expends a 4th-level spell slot to deal **2d8** damage to 4 different units or **8d8** damage to a single Unit. This damage could be described as one huge explosion covering a wide range, or a single concentrated blast depending on the targets selected.

Example 3: A Druid Unit might want to protect its allies with increased AC. It expends a 2nd-level spell slot and can choose to increase one Unit's AC by 10 or 2 different Units AC by 5. They could describe this as a *Barkskin* type of effect as usual or that woodland creatures come to its aid and protect its allies. The same could be described for a reduction of AC on Enemy Units. Perhaps thorny brambles wrap around them to decrease AC or the forest creatures distract them to lower their defenses. Possible descriptions are endless!

CONTINUOUS

The spell effects listed below require Concentration, have a duration of 1 minute (10 rounds), and effects 1 Unit or Square of your choice within 4 Squares.

Damage Effects

Damage: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target must make a Dexterity or Constitution Save (your choice) **Failure:** The target takes **1d6** damage at the start of each of its turns for the duration. It can repeat its Save at the end of each of its turns.
- **Square:** An Enemy Unit that enters the Square for the first time on its turn must make a Dexterity or Constitution Save (your choice). **Failure:** It takes **1d6** damage.

Damage Bonus: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target adds **1d6** damage to Attacks it makes for the duration, or until you lose Concentration.
- **Square:** Allied Units add **1d6** damage to Attacks they make while within the Square.

Damage Penalty: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target must make a Dexterity, Constitution, or Wisdom Save (your choice) **Failure:** The target subtracts 1d6 damage from Attacks it makes for the duration, or until you lose Concentration. It can repeat its Save at the end of each of its turns.
- **Square:** Enemy Units subtract 1d6 damage from Attacks they make while within the Square.

Health Effects

Healing: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target regains 1d6 HP at the start of each of its turns for the duration.
- **Square:** Allied Units that enter the Square for the first time on their turn regain 1d6 HP.

Temp HP: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target gains 1d6 Temp HP at the start of each of its turns for the duration.
- **Square:** Allied Units that enter the Square for the first time on their turn gain 1d6 Temp HP.

Movement Effects

Speed Bonus: Choose an Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target's Speed increases by 1 Square for the duration, or until you lose Concentration.
- **Square:** Allied Units have their Speed increased by 1 Square until the end of their turn.

Speed Penalty: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target must make a Dexterity, Constitution, or Wisdom Save (your choice). **Failure:** The target's Speed decreases by 1 Square for the duration, or until you lose Concentration. It can repeat its Save at the end of each of its turns.
- **Square:** Enemy Units that enter the Square have their Speed reduced by 1 Square until the end of their turn.



Armor Class Effects

AC Bonus: Choose an Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target gains a +2 bonus to its AC for the duration, or until you lose Concentration.
- **Square:** Allied Units gain a +2 bonus to their AC while within the Square.

AC Penalty: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target must make a Dexterity or Constitution Save (your choice). **Failure:** The target suffers a -2 penalty to its AC for the duration, or until you lose Concentration. It can repeat its Save at the end of each of its turns.
- **Square:** Enemy Units suffer a -2 penalty to their AC while within the Square.

Roll Modification Effects

D20 Bonus: Choose an Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target gains a +2 bonus to Attacks, Checks, and Saves it makes for the duration, or until you lose Concentration.
- **Square:** Allied Units gain a +2 bonus to Attacks, Checks, and Saves they make while within the Square.

D20 Penalty: Choose a Unit or a Square.

- **Unit:** The target must make a Charisma Save. **Failure:** The target suffers a -2 penalty to Attacks, Checks, and Saves it makes for the duration, or until you lose Concentration. It can repeat its Save at the end of each of its turns.
- **Square:** Enemy Units suffer a -2 penalty to Attacks, Checks, and Saves they make while within the Square.

Example 4: A Wizard Unit wants to speed up his Allied Units so they can get across the battlefield to the enemies faster. They choose the Speed spell effect and expend a 5th-level spell slot. The Wizard Unit could choose 5 different Units to increase their Speed by 1 Square each, or supercharge one Unit to have a +5 Squares of movement... which would be insane to watch the unit literally fly across the battlefield. This being a Continuous effect would have a huge impact on the possible tactics due to the increased mobility. This also could be applied to enemy Units to be similar to *Slow* as well, reducing their movement each round.

Example 5: A Warlock Unit wants to call upon his patron to grant protection to their allies. They choose the Temp HP spell effect and expend a 3rd-level spell slot. The Warlock Unit can choose 3 Units in range to grant 1d6 Temp HP to (or 3d6 to one Unit, etc). Instead they could choose to pick a Square on the ground that grants an Allied Unit 3d6 Temp HP at the start of their turn before they charge into combat. This square could grant different units that start their turn inside of it over the course of the 10 round duration.

CANTRIP CASTING

These are spell effects that you can cast without expending a spell slot. You can choose any effect from the Continuous Spell Effects options, but the duration only lasts until the end of your next turn. The only effect that can't be replicated is the healing feature, since this could cause an infinite amount of healing to be possible outside of combat.

ADDITIONAL SPELLCASTING FEATURES

This spellcasting system addresses almost ANY spell effects you could possibly think of, BUT there are some effects that just don't fit well into the system. Spell effects like flying, revival, mind control, and teleportation would be too complicated to add into the system described above.

So, instead, there's a list organized by school of magic in the Caster Features section (see page 193) that the GM can choose to grant a Solo or Caster Unit. These features require 1st-level spell slots to cast (just as the rest of the system does) but they have different levels of balance and power to them. If a PC has the ability to cast spells that are outside the capabilities of this Mass Combat Spellcasting System, then those features should cover what they are trying to accomplish.

DC Tip: You want to make sure your PCs can cast the spells that they are used to casting. Let them shop through the spell effects, or glance through them yourself, and let them know that on top of being able to do what's outlined in the Mass Combat Spellcasting, they can also do whatever features you allow them to from that list.

BATTLE FEATURES

Units of different Battle Types, Creature Types, or Class Types have a wide variety of features that you can use to make them feel unique. There are also General Features that can be applied to any kind of Unit. These are meant to be a source of inspiration and flavor for your armies! Use some of the Class Features to inspire you to make a Creature Type, or you could use a General Feature that you feel should be a Fighter Class Feature instead. These are all just compartmentalized ideas to use as you see fit for war!

DC Tip: You could also give a Unit negative features to help to balance it in the context of a fight. Giving them weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and drawbacks can give you more freedom to increase some of the Units other features to create some dynamic Units!

GENERAL FEATURES

Aerial: You have a Flying Speed and don't provoke Opportunity Attacks while flying.

Amphibious: You have a Swimming Speed and can breathe air and water.

Anti-Magic: At the end of your turn, you can end 1 spell effect on yourself.

Intimidation: When you reduce another Unit to 0 HP, all enemy Units within 1 Square must make a Morale Check against your **Unit Save DC**.

Last Stand: While Bloodied (1/2 HP maximum or less), you have ADV on Attacks, Checks and Saves.

Lead the Charge: When you take the Dash Action, Allied Units within 1 Square of you can use their Reaction to move up to their Speed toward a direction of your choice.



Mage Bane: When an enemy Unit within 1 Square of you casts a spell effect, you can use a Reaction to make a Melee Weapon Attack against the Unit.

Morale Surge: When you succeed on a Morale Check, you can move up to 1/2 your Speed in a direction of your choice. When you do, you gain ADV on the next Attack you make before the end of your next turn.

Nimble: Your Dexterity Modifier increases by 1, and you have ADV on all Dexterity Checks.

Perceptive: Your Wisdom Modifier increases by 1, and you have ADV on all Wisdom Checks.

Rally: You can use a Bonus Action to make a DC 13 Morale Check. **Success:** You gain Temp HP equal to 1d8 + your Prof. Bonus.

Resilient: Your Charisma Modifier increases by 1, and you have ADV on all Charisma Checks.

Retaliation: Whenever you are hit by a Melee Attack, the attacking Unit takes 1d4 damage.

Ruthless: You have ADV on Attacks against Units with less HP than you.

Siege Breaker: You ignore the Fortified Structure feature of Siege Units.

Self-Destruction: When you are reduced to 0 HP, each enemy Unit within 1 Square of you takes an amount of damage equal to your Damage Die as the soldiers in your Unit ferociously fight til death.

Stalwart: Your Constitution Modifier increases by 1, and you have ADV on all Constitution Checks.

Strong: Your Strength Modifier increases by 1, and you have ADV on all Strength Checks.

Tactical: Your Intelligence Modifier increases by 1, and you have ADV on all Intelligence Checks.

Victory Rush: When you reduce another Unit to 0 HP, you regain 1d8 HP and gain ADV on the next Attack, Check, or Save you make before the end of your next turn.

Waterborne: While submerged in water, you have resistance to damage from Units that don't have this feature.

BATTLE TYPE FEATURES

These features are categorized based on what type of units would have them. Don't be afraid to mix and match these features across Battle Types to create unique Combat Units. Maybe there's a group of VERY fast Infantry, give them some of the mobility features of a Cavalry Unit.

ARCHERY FEATURES

Rain of Arrows: Choose 1 Unit within 3 Squares. The target must make a Dexterity Save against your **Unit Save DC**. **Failure:** The target takes 2d8 damage.

Steady Aim: At the start of its turn, the Unit can forgo all of its movement to choose to gain 1 of the following benefits on the next Attack it makes before the end of its turn: +2 Range, +2 bonus to Ranged Attacks, or double Damage Dice.

Tactical Retreat: You can use a Bonus Action to take the Disengage Action.

CASTER FEATURES

These spell effects don't fit within the framework of the Mass Combat Spellcasting system but a Unit's spell slots can be used in the same way to create the effects listed below. If characters can trigger effects similar to those listed below then the GM can give them access to these options to use their spell slots on. As long as the player can creatively come up with a description of how they cast these effects and the GM approves it, characters can cast any of the below spells using their spell slots. Each spell slot spent by a Caster Unit or Solo Unit grants a spell effect that can be spread around to multiple targets or concentrated onto one for an amplified effect.

Abjuration

Anti-Magic: Choose 1 Unit or Square within 4 Squares.

- **Unit:** Spell effects on the target are suspended for the duration.
- **Square:** Spell effects are suspended on Units while within the Square.

Dispel Magic: Choose 1 Unit or Square within 4 Squares. 1 spell effect of your choice affecting the target immediately ends for that target.

Energy Resistance: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target gains resistance to a damage type of your choice for the next 10 Rounds, or until you lose Concentration. Alternatively, you can choose to grant the target immunity to the chosen damage type until the start of your next turn.

Conjuration

Impassable Barrier: Choose 1 unoccupied Square within 4 Squares. You create an impassable structure of pure force in the Square for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. Units that lack a Flying Speed can't enter this space. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Might of Minions: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target gains 1d10 Temp HP. While it has this Temp HP, it adds an extra 1d4 damage to its Weapon Attacks.

Obscuring Cloud: Choose a Square within 4 Squares. You create a cloud that obscures vision within the Square for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. A Unit's Range is reduced to 1 while it occupies the square, unless it has Truesight.

Tactical Teleport: Choose 1 unoccupied Square within 3 Squares. You teleport yourself, or a willing Unit within 3 Squares of you, to the chosen location.

Ward of Minions: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target gains 1d10 Temp HP. While it has this Temp HP, it gains a +2 bonus to its AC.



Divination

Divine Weakness: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. You grant ADV on Attacks made against the target within the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Farseeing: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The range of the target's Ranged Attacks increases by 1 for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Foresight: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target has ADV on Attacks it makes within the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Pierce the Veil: Choose a Square within 4 Squares. Hidden or Invisible Units within the Square are made visible to Allied Units for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Enchantment

Distract Enemy: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target must make a Wisdom Save against your **Unit Save DC**. **Failure:** You impose DisADV on the target's Attacks made within the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. It can repeat its Save at the end of each of its turns. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Entrhall Enemy: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target must make a Charisma Save against your **Unit Save DC** to avoid being Charmed. A Charmed target must make a Charisma Save each time it attempts to Attack a Unit other than you within the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. **Failure:** It wastes its Attack. During this time, the target can only move towards you if it decides to move. It can repeat its Save at the end of each of its turns. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Evocation

Superb Damage: When you cast a spell effect that deals damage, the target takes extra damage equal to your Prof. Bonus.

Superb Healing: When you cast a spell effect that restores HP, the target regains extra HP equal to your Prof. Bonus.

Illusion

Illusory Banner: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target's appearance changes to match another Unit of your choice (including its Creature Type) within range for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration. Other Units that share its appearance consider it an Allied Unit for the duration, ignoring it when engaging in Battle unless it targets the other Unit with a harmful action. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Illusory Minions: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. When a Unit makes an Attack against the target for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration, the attacker must roll a d20 to determine if it hits the Unit or the illusory minions. If the attacker rolls a 5 or lower, the Attack hits illusory minions instead. Alternatively, you can choose to change the duration to last until the start of your next turn and forgo the need to concentrate.

Invisibility: Choose 1 Unit or Square within 4 Squares.

- **Unit:** The target becomes Invisible for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration.
- **Square:** Units are Invisible while within the Square.

Necromancy

Army of the Dead: When a Unit within 4 Squares of you dies, you can use a Reaction to reanimate it into an Undead Unit of the same type. When you do, its statistics remain the same, except its HP becomes 5 and its Creature Type becomes Undead.

Transfer Life: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target must make a Constitution Save against your **Unit Save DC**. A willing Unit can choose to fail its Save. **Failure:** It takes **1d8** Necrotic damage, and you or an Allied Unit within 1 Square of you or the target regains an amount of HP equal to the damage dealt.

Transmutation

Flight of Feet: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. The target gains a Flying Speed of 2 Squares for the next minute, or until you lose Concentration.

Modify Size: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. You can choose to increase or decrease the size of the Unit for 1 minute (choose one), or until you lose Concentration.

- **Increase:** The target's size increases, giving it a 1d4 bonus to damage and ADV on all Strength Checks and Saves.
- **Decrease:** The target's size decreases, allowing it to occupy the same Square as another Unit.

Ocean Master: Choose 1 Unit within 4 Squares. For the next minute, the target can breathe water and gains a Swimming Speed of 3 Squares.

Transmute Water: Choose 1 Square within 4 Squares.

- **Create:** The Square becomes flooded with water.
- **Destroy:** Visible water or fog within the Square immediately disappears.



CAVALRY FEATURES

Combat Rush: You can move 1 additional Square when taking the Dash Action.

Higher Position: You have ADV on Melee Attacks against unmounted Units.

Mobility: Opportunity Attacks against you are made with DisADV.

Stampede: As an Action you can cause each Unit you move completely through to make a Strength Save. **Failure:** It takes **1d10 + Prof. Bonus** damage.

Trample: When you take the Dash Action, you can use a Bonus Action to make 1 Melee Weapon Attack and move through space occupied by other Units, but can't end your turn in a space occupied by another Unit, unless it's a Solo Unit.

INFANTRY FEATURES

Combat Rush: You can move 1 additional square when taking the Dash Action.

Defensive Formation: You can use a Bonus Action to grant a +2 bonus to the AC of an Allied Unit within 1 Square of you.

Locate, Close With, and Destroy: You have ADV on Checks made to detect the location of enemy Units within 1 Square of you. You have ADV on the first Attack you make against an enemy Unit during a Battle.

Repel by Fire and Maneuver: Enemy Units have DisADV on the first Attack they make against you during a Battle.

SCOUT FEATURES

Covert Bounding: While you are hidden, you can move up to your Speed in the open without revealing yourself.

Entrenchment: You can take the Hide Action as a Bonus Action. While hidden, other Units have DisADV on Attacks and Checks made to detect this Unit.

Forward Spotter: Choose 1 enemy Unit within 3 Squares. Allied Units have ADV on Ranged Attacks against the chosen Unit until the start of this Unit's next turn.

Superior Mobility: You don't provoke Opportunity Attacks.

SIEGE FEATURES

You can also use any of the Caster Features to flavor them as a Siege Unit ability as well. You can have Siege Units be magically charged in some way to create spell effects or have powerful mundane effects that could be flavored as some of the damaging effects like spells would. Most of these Siege Features are more focused around this Unit being a mobile structure of some kind.

Deploy: You can't use any features or make any Attacks until you take an Action to Deploy. Once Deployed, you can no longer move until you take an Action to Undeploy.

Earth Breaker: When you make an Attack against a target, the area around the target becomes difficult terrain, reducing the Speed of Units who enter the Square by 1 until the end of their turn.

Explosive Impact: When you make an Attack against a target, Units within 1 Square of the target take **1d4** damage from the Attack.

CREATURE TYPE FEATURES

If you want the type of creature your Unit is to have a mechanical effect in Battle, these are for you! Not all Dwarves, Orcs, Dragonborn, etc. act the same, you can mechanically give whatever effects you want to them. It would be much different to fight an army of Dragonborn that can breathe fire compared to an army of Undead that keep coming back to life! These are some examples of what you could do to make your Units even more unique based on their Creature Type.

ABERRATION

Aberrant Fortitude: You gain resistance to Psychic damage, and have ADV on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma Saves.

Cerebral Assault: Choose 1 Unit within 3 Squares. The target must make an Intelligence Save against your **Unit Save DC**. **Failure:** The target takes **2d6** Psychic damage.

BEAST

Apex Predator: You have ADV on Perception Checks, you can see Invisible creatures, and your Speed increases by 1 Square.

Pact Tactics: You have ADV on Attacks against Units if an Allied Unit is within 1 Square of the target.

CELESTIAL

Healing Touch: Choose 1 Unit within 1 Square. The target regains 1d6 HP.

Holy Fortitude: You have resistance to Necrotic and Radiant damage.

CONSTRUCTS

Prime Instructions: You automatically succeed on Morale Checks.

Unyielding Form: You are immune to critical hits and to spell effects that modify your form against your will.

DRAGON

Draconic Breath: When you make an Attack, you can add an extra **1d6** damage of the type associated with your Draconic Ancestry.

Draconic Resistance: You have resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage. Additionally, you have resistance to the damage type associated with your Draconic Ancestry.

Primordial Being: When you force a Unit to make a Morale Check, it receives a 1d4 penalty to its Check.



ELEMENTAL

Elemental Resistance: You have resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage. Additionally, you have resistance to the damage type associated with your Elemental Heritage: Air (Lightning), Earth (Acid), Fire (Fire), or Water (Cold).

FEY

Magic Resistance: You have resistance to damage from spells and you make Saves against spell effects with ADV.

Teleportation: Choose 1 unoccupied Square within 3 Squares. You teleport to the location.

FIEND

Fiendish Destruction: When you reduce a Unit to Well-Bloodied (1/4 HP maximum or lower), it's immediately destroyed.

Demon

Demonic Resistance: You gain resistance to Poison damage and 1 damage type of your choice.

Relentless Fortitude: You gain 1d4 Temp HP at the start of each of your turns.

Devil

Infernal Resistance: You gain resistance to Fire and Poison damage.

Magical Darkness: Choose 1 Square within 3 Squares. You heavily obscure the area in darkness, rendering Units in the Square Invisible to non-devil Units.

Yugoloth

Teleportation: Choose 1 unoccupied Square within 3 Squares. You teleport to the location.

Yugoloth Resistance: You gain resistance to Acid and Poison damage.

GIANT

Breaker of Mortals: When you hit a Unit with an Attack, you can choose 1 Unit within 1 Square of the target. The chosen Unit takes 1d6 damage from the Attack.

Primordial Being: When you force a Unit to make a Morale Check, it receives a 1d4 penalty to its Check.

Primordial Resistance: You have resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage. When you take damage, you can roll a d6 and reduce the damage by an amount equal to the result of the roll.

HUMANOID

Dragonborn: You have resistance to the damage type associated with your Draconic Ancestry.

Dwarf: You have resistance to Poison damage and your AC increases by 1.

Elf: You are immune to being Charmed and you can cast 1 cantrip spell effect or Caster Feature of your choice.

Gnoll: When attacking a Unit that's Bloodied (1/2 HP maximum or lower) you deal an extra 1d6 damage to the target.

Gnome: You are able to take the Hide Action while in terrain that contains trees, brush, structures, or other objects that can provide basic cover (not in an open field). While hidden, the first Attack you make has ADV.

Goblin: When you take the Dash Action, you can take the Attack Action as part of the same Action if you move within 1 Square of an Enemy Unit.

Halfling: Once per Battle, you can choose to gain ADV on an Attack, Check, or Save you make.

Human: You gain 1 General Feature or Battle Feature (for your type) of your choice.

Kobold: As a Bonus Action you can set a trap in the Square you are currently occupying. If an Enemy Unit enters the Square they take damage equal to your damage die + your Prof. Bonus.

Orc: While you are Bloodied (1/2 HP maximum or lower), you gain ADV on your Attacks.

Tiefling: You gain resistance to Fire or Poison damage (choose one). Once per Battle, after taking damage, you can deal 1d6 Fire damage to the Unit that damaged you.

MONSTROSITY

Magic Resistance: You have resistance to damage from spells and you make Saves against spell effects with ADV.

Monstrous Resolve: When you fail a Morale Check, instead of fleeing, you Attack the nearest hostile Unit. The target is chosen by the GM.

OOZE

Acidic Touch: When you hit a Unit with a Melee Attack, the target's AC is reduced by 2 until the end of your next turn. A target can't be affected by this feature more than once at a time.

Adhesive Form: When you hit a Unit with a Melee Attack, the target's Speed is reduced by 1 until the end of your next turn.

Amorphous Resistance: You gain resistance to Acid, Piercing, and Slashing damage.

PLANT

Nature's Stride: You are immune to effects that reduce your Speed.

Regrowth: When you start your turn in a Square made of soil or water, you regain 1d6 HP.

UNDEAD

Undying Fortitude: Upon being reduced to 0 HP, make a DC 10 Constitution Save. **Success:** You drop to 1 HP instead.

Unholy Resistance: You gain resistance to Necrotic and Poison damage.



CLASS TYPE FEATURES

These features help to create Units that are groups of NPCs of all one class coming together. These just serve as a source of inspiration that you can use to flavor other types of Units or create entire Units of a class. Give your Scout Unit features from Ranger or Rogue, or combine Cavalry Unit Features with Paladin Class Features to create a very unique Paladin Cavalry Unit.

Some Units might gain access to Mass Combat Spellcasting or Extra Attack. The GM can give out those features as listed below, but the rest are Features specific to the Class Type and can help Units feel more like their respective classes.

Extra Attack: You can make 2 Attacks instead of 1 when you take the Attack Action.

Spellcasting: The Unit has access to spell slots to use for Mass Combat Spellcasting. Additionally, the GM could grant properties from 1 or more Caster Unit Features.

DC Tip: In general, I give Units two 1st-level spell slots and one 2nd-level spell slot, but you can increase or decrease that depending on the power of the Unit and how much “ammo” you want to give them.

ARTIFICER

Flash of Genius (3/LR): When you or an Allied Unit that you can see within 1 Square of you makes a Check or Save, you can use a Reaction to grant a bonus to the total equal to your Intelligence Modifier.

Magical Engineer: When you produce a Continuous spell effect on a Unit, it lasts 1 hour instead of 1 minute.

BARBARIAN

Rage (3/LR): You can use a Bonus Action for you and your Unit to enter a Rage.

Reckless Attack: The first time you make an Attack on your turn, you can choose to gain ADV on that Attack and subsequent Attacks you make, until the end of your turn. When you use this feature, Attacks made against you have ADV until the start of your next turn.

BARD

Bardic Inspiration (3/LR): You can use a Bonus Action to grant a Unit within 3 Squares of you a d10 Bardic Inspiration Die.

Countercharm (3/LR): When an Allied Unit within 3 Squares of you fails a Morale Check, you can use a Reaction to allow it to reroll its Save, potentially turning the failure into a success.

CLERIC

Piety Support: When a Combat Unit you command uses the Help Action, the target Unit also gains 1d10 Temp HP.

Turn Undead (3/LR): Each Undead Unit within 1 Square of you must make a Morale Check against your **Unit Save DC**. **Failure:** The creature is turned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

DRUID

Wild Companion (3/LR): You can use an Action to summon an Untrained Beast Unit.

Wild Shape (3/LR): You can use an Action to transform into a Solo Beast Unit for 1 minute. While you are transformed, you gain 10 Temp HP and a Beast Feature of your choice.

FIGHTER

Indomitable (3/LR): When you fail a Save, you can choose to succeed instead.

Second Wind (3/LR): You use a Bonus Action to regain 1d10 HP.

MONK

Martial Arts: You can use a Bonus Action to make an additional Attack or take the Dash, Disengage, or Dodge Action.

Unhindered Movement: Your Speed increases by 1 Square, you don't provoke Opportunity Attacks, and you ignore difficult terrain and spell effects that reduce your Speed.

PALADIN

Improved Divine Smite: Your Melee Attacks deal an extra 1d6 Radiant damage.

Lay on Hands (3/LR): You can use an Action to restore up to 15 HP to a Unit.

PSION

Mind Strike: You can use an Action to unleash a telekinetic blast. Choose a Unit within 1 Square. The target must make an Intelligence Save against your **Unit Save DC**. **Failure:** It takes 1d6 Psychic damage and can't use Reactions until the end of your next turn.

Telekinesis: You can use an Action to shove a Unit within 1 Square of you. The target must make a Strength Save against your **Unit Save DC**. **Failure:** It takes 1d6 Force damage and falls Prone.

RANGER

Mass Hunters Mark: You can use a Bonus Action to select another enemy Unit on the battlefield to focus on. All Attacks that you or your Unit make against it deal an additional 1d6 damage.

Land Stride: Moving through mundane Difficult Terrain costs a Combat Unit you command no extra movement. Additionally, you have ADV on Saves against spell effects that reduce your Speed.

ROGUE

Cunning Action: You or your Unit can take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide Action as a Bonus Action.

Evasion: When you or your Unit are subjected to an effect that allows a Dexterity Save to take only half damage, instead take no damage on a successful Save, and only half damage on a failure.



Tricky Attack: Once per turn, you or your Unit can deal extra damage to one Unit they hit with an Attack if they make the Attack with ADV. The extra damage is a number of d6s equal to the Unit's Prof Bonus. You don't need ADV on the Attack if another enemy of the target is within 1 Square of them.

SORCERER

Innate Maelstrom: Whenever a Combat Unit you command deals damage to a Unit using a 1st-level or higher spell slot, you add your Prof. Bonus to the damage total.

Sorcery Point Fuel: You have 5 Sorcery Points and can spend them to modify the spells, cantrips, and Attacks you make. You can add +2 to the total of your damage, or any d20 roll you make by expending a Sorcery Point. You can do this once per turn.

WARLOCK

Curse: When a Combat Unit you command uses a cantrip to impose DisADV on the next Attack of an enemy Unit, you can also deal 1d10 Force damage to that Unit.

Patron Fuel: When engaged in Mass Combat you gain 1 additional spell slot identical to the highest level spell slot you have. Your Patron grants you this boon when you roll for Initiative and you lose it once the combat is over.

WIZARD

Arcane Dome: As an Action you can increase the AC of all Allied Units within one Square by 2. This effect lasts for as long as you maintain Concentration, or until the end of the Battle.

School Specialization: Choose one of the Caster Features from one school of magic. You can cast the selected ability as an Action without expending a spell slot a number of times equal to the Unit's Prof. Bonus.

OPTIONAL ADVANCED UNITS

UNIT LEVEL VARIANT RULE

If you want to use this system over a longer period of time and give the PCs opportunities to customize these Units themselves, then you could apply a system for how Units are awarded features. You can have them go through training that costs a certain amount of gold (see page 199) or you could have them automatically gain a feature when they level up. For example, if an Infantry Unit increases in level from Skilled (level 2) to Veteran (level 3) it can choose 1 new feature.

FUNDING A UNIT

Waging a war can be expensive. I usually include my PCs in the expenses of a war. If your group wants to fund and operate their own army, then here is a simple price structure for how it works. There is an entry cost to become an Untrained Unit. You must pay that price for each NPC soldier that joins the Unit. Depending on the size and scale of the armies you are building, this can get expensive quickly. The tables below show the cost to fund Units of different Battle Types and Experience Levels within your military. You can hire unskilled commoners at the Untrained daily rate to join your military, paying that rate each day that they serve in your military.

STANDARD COMBAT UNITS

A Unit of 10,000 Untrained Infantry would cost 1,000gp per day to pay for supplies and wages, whereas 10,000 Elite Infantry would cost 20,000gp per day.

Level	Experience	Scout	Infantry	Archery	Caster
1	Untrained	1sp	1sp	1sp	1gp
2	Skilled	5sp	5sp	5sp	5gp
3	Veteran	1gp	1gp	1gp	10gp
4	Elite	2gp	2gp	2gp	20gp

SPECIAL MOVEMENT COMBAT UNITS

A Unit of 10,000 Untrained Cavalry would cost 10,000gp per day to pay for supplies and wages, whereas 10,000 Elite Cavalry would cost 100,000gp per day.

Level	Experience	Cavalry	Amphibious	Aerial
1	Untrained	1gp	2gp	2gp
2	Skilled	2gp	5gp	5gp
3	Veteran	5gp	10gp	10gp
4	Elite	10gp	20gp	20gp

VEHICLE COMBAT UNITS

Siege Units, or themed Naval or Airship Units, have a flat cost that has the same upkeep cost equal to the number of Infantry it takes to operate the Unit. 20 soldiers is a good baseline for the smallest size of one of these Units. The table below represents the smallest Unit of its kind. Additionally, the costs associated with these units fully covers the daily upkeep of the crew and maintenance of the vehicle.

Level	Experience	Siege	Naval	Airship
1	Untrained	1gp	2gp	3gp
2	Skilled	5gp	10gp	15gp
3	Veteran	10gp	20gp	30gp
4	Elite	20gp	40gp	60gp



UPGRADING A UNIT

It takes time and training (or combat experience) to increase a Unit's Experience Level. You can train a Unit for a certain amount of time and spend 100x its daily rate to increase its Experience Level by 1. A Unit can only gain 1 Experience Level at a time: Untrained becomes Skilled, Skilled becomes Veteran, and Veteran becomes Elite. The amount of time spent training the Unit depends on its current Experience Level. It takes 3 months to go from Untrained to Skilled, 6 months from Skilled to Veteran, and 9 months from Veteran to Elite.

DC Tip: The amount of time required to train a Unit should match your campaign and the pacing of your plot. Feel free to manipulate the time required as needed to work best for your table.

CHANGING BATTLE TYPE

Creatures in a Unit can be transferred to a Unit of a different Battle Type, but you must pay a portion of the Untrained daily rate for each creature that wants to become a new Unit Battle Type. For example, a Skilled Infantry Unit can become an Untrained Siege Unit by spending time training and paying 1/2 the cost of training a new Siege Unit.

COMBAT UNIT EXPERIENCE LEVEL CHARTS

These are baseline statistics that I've designed for you to tweak and scale for yourself. If you start to increase or decrease the health of these units, you should think about the damage they can deal and the Modifiers they have. I wanted to provide 4 different levels for each Unit Battle Type, so that armies of Elite Infantry would be much more powerful than that of Untrained Infantry.

ARCHERY UNIT CHART

Stat Type	Untrained	Skilled	Veteran	Elite
HP	15	20	25	30
AC	11	12	13	14
Move	1	1	1	1
Range	4	5	6	7
Attack	+1	+3	+5	+7
Dmg	1d4	1d4	1d6	1d6
Prof	+1	+2	+3	+4
Str	+0	+0	+1	+1
Dex	+0	+1	+2	+3
Con	+0	+0	+1	+2
Int	+0	+0	+1	+2
Wis	+0	+1	+2	+3
Cha	+0	+0	+1	+2

CASTER UNIT CHART

Stat Type	Untrained	Skilled	Veteran	Elite
HP	15	20	25	30
AC	11	12	13	14
Move	1	1	1	1
Range	4	4	5	5
Attack	+2	+4	+6	+8
Dmg	1d6	1d8	1d10	1d12
Prof	+1	+2	+3	+4
Str	+0	+0	+1	+1
Dex	+0	+0	+1	+1
Con	+0	+0	+1	+1
Int	+1	+2	+3	+4
Wis	+1	+2	+3	+4
Cha	+1	+2	+3	+4

CAVALRY UNIT CHART

Stat Type	Untrained	Skilled	Veteran	Elite
HP	25	40	55	70
AC	13	14	15	16
Move	2	2	3	3
Range	1	1	1	1
Attack	+2	+4	+6	+8
Dmg	1d6	1d8	1d10	1d12
Prof	+1	+2	+3	+4
Str	+1	+2	+3	+4
Dex	+1	+2	+3	+4
Con	+1	+2	+3	+4
Int	+0	+1	+2	+3
Wis	+1	+1	+2	+2
Cha	+0	+1	+2	+3

INFANTRY UNIT CHART

Stat Type	Untrained	Skilled	Veteran	Elite
HP	20	30	40	50
AC	13	14	15	16
Move	1	1	1	1
Range	1	1	1	1
Attack	+1	+3	+5	+7
Dmg	1d4	1d6	1d8	1d10
Prof	+1	+2	+3	+4
Str	+0	+1	+2	+3
Dex	+0	+0	+1	+2
Con	+0	+1	+2	+3
Int	+0	+0	+1	+2
Wis	+0	+0	+1	+1
Cha	+0	+0	+1	+2



SCOUT UNIT CHART

Stat Type	Untrained	Skilled	Veteran	Elite
HP	15	20	25	30
AC	11	12	13	14
Move	2	2	2	2
Range	1	1	1	1
Attack	+1	+3	+5	+7
Dmg	1d4	1d6	1d6	1d8
Prof	+1	+2	+3	+4
Str	+0	+0	+1	+1
Dex	+0	+1	+2	+3
Con	+0	+0	+1	+2
Int	+0	+0	+1	+2
Wis	+0	+1	+2	+3
Cha	+0	+0	+1	+2

SIEGE UNIT CHART

Stat Type	Untrained	Skilled	Veteran	Elite
HP	25	50	75	100
AC	12	14	16	18
Move	1	1	1	1
Range	7	8	9	10
Attack	+3	+5	+7	+9
Dmg	1d10	1d12	2d8	2d10
Prof	+1	+2	+3	+4
Str	+2	+3	+4	+5
Dex	+0	+0	+0	+0
Con	+2	+3	+4	+5
Int	+0	+0	+1	+1
Wis	+2	+3	+4	+5
Cha	+1	+2	+3	+4

MASS COMBAT GM TIPS

Now that the system has been completely laid out, here are a few practical tips from running this system to help make things easier on you and for your players. As you run Mass Combats you will come up with your own tricks and shortcuts as well!

- Pre-roll all of your Initiative Checks for ALL Battle Types for both Armies and all enemy Solo Units. This lets you only have to focus on the PCs' numbers, and you can go down the list in the Unit Initiative Order to see what the final overall order is.
- Have the PCs, or yourself, write down their individual Initiative score somewhere so when they go from commanding a Unit to a Solo Unit you can easily remember where they go in Initiative Order.
- When a Solo Unit takes command over a Combat Unit, have the Solo Unit's miniature replace whatever mini is representing the Combat Unit and place it in front of them. This helps keep track of what Unit they are commanding and they can keep it there until they leave the Unit. I usually use color coded beads or stones for Units (you know those flat glass marble things at craft stores?).
- You could use flat bases, or even coins, to represent Units, and when a Solo Unit takes command over them just place their miniature on top of the flat token.



CHAPTER 8: DEATH & RESURRECTION



MENTAL & PHYSICAL STRESS

ROLEPLAY TABLES

I don't think there are enough roleplay tables' for us to throw "roleplay effects" at players. So many times consequences come in the form of a negative mechanic to inflict on the players that lowers their rolls or reduces their impact in combat. Sometimes we don't want to PUNISH our PCs in a big way, so use these to get across physical or mental stress in a more unique way. These tables give a roleplay cue for players to know that their character is suffering and also gives a subtle mechanic that you can choose to inflict or choose to ignore as the GM. Many times I just tell the player the roleplay component and DON'T inflict the mechanical component on them. What a LOT of this depends on is when you use these tables, whether they get a Save or not against the effect, the duration of the effect, and how you can recover or cure them.

WHEN TO USE THEM

When your party has something extremely stressful happen, you can have them roll on either of these tables. I am purposefully vague when I say "stress" because it depends on how stressful it is for each character. Take these as inspiration and adjust them to fit more closely to what is going on. Consider how some of these effects might alter a social encounter, or adjust the character's reaction to a particular event. Don't be afraid to remind a player of their effect, should a moment arise where they may have an opportunity to incorporate it.

Physical Stress

Traveling on foot across mountainous terrain for days at a time... would be very exhausting for most parties. You could totally have the group make Constitution Saves for levels of Exhaustion... but what if you didn't want to be as punishing? You could instead have them roll on the Physical Stress Table, and they could have a more varied and less mechanically restrictive "punishment". Maybe there is a mountain-born person in the group and they wouldn't have to make the roll but the rest of the party does. These moments can help players feel more unique too, when something that would be stressful or strenuous on others aren't so bad for them.

When a player goes Unconscious and is brought back to consciousness... That is a STRESSFUL event. I have other rules in this book that are more mechanically punishing for this (see "Death Save Rules" on page 208). You could just have any player that goes Unconscious roll on the Physical (or Mental) Stress Table and they would have a little bit of roleplay flavor and a small subtle mechanic to deal with for a bit after having that near death experience.

Here are some examples of when to use Physical Stress:

- When a PC hasn't taken a Full Rest in over 5 days
- When a PC fails a Constitution Save by 5 or more
- As an effect from a monster
- Traveling through a difficult environment

Mental Stress

Entering into a cave of spiders might not affect most characters, but the one that has a phobia of spiders might be stressed out enough to have some sort of negative effect. Currently there isn't a way to give this moment something that wouldn't be too mechanically punishing, but with these you can have them roll on the Mental Stress Table and see how this spider phobia is affecting them. You could also just choose an effect from the table that makes the most sense for the situation.

What if the entire group witnesses an important NPC die in front of them and they COULD have saved them? That would be a pretty stressful moment mentally. You could have them roll on the table, or maybe let your players look at the table and they can choose an effect from it that feels like how their character would respond to this trauma. In some situations, you can give your players a chance to customize their roleplay in this way so they can still be in control of their character's emotions.

Here are some examples of when to use Mental Stress:

- Witnessing something traumatic
- Failing a Wisdom Save by more than 5
- Side effect of a monster's ability that frightens a PC
- Traveling into an extremely dangerous/scary area

MORE Stress

If you're wanting to dial things up even further and really make these mechanics more punishing, there are also tables I have in this book to address just that. These Stress Tables are mainly directed at roleplay and NON-combat scenarios. The Lingering Injuries and Terror Tables below are more focused on combat and more punishing in that regard.

SAVE OR NO SAVE?

It's up to you as the GM on what it takes for someone to roll on this table. The severity of what happened or how the player is feeling about their character can give many different ways to go about it.

Save: Once a stressful event happens you have the PC make a Save against it. Usually this would be a Constitution Save against Physical Stress and a Wisdom Save against Mental Stress. If they fail that Save, THEN they would roll on the Stress Table and see what result they get.

No Save: If something happens that is extremely traumatic for that character, they don't even get a Save, they immediately roll on the Stress Table. Maybe it's connected to their backstory or a core goal or value of theirs that shakes them to their core. It usually feels bad to inflict a punishment on a PC without a Save... but since these tables are just roleplay tables with light mechanics (if you even choose to use them), it doesn't feel as bad to do this.



Player Inflicted: I've had players inflict these conditions on themselves. Once the players know that I have access to tables like this, I've seen them go through something that they interpreted as very stressful for their character and asked to roll on the table. This is great inspiration for them to increase their ability to roleplay through stressful events. I've had players finish a HUGE combat where they felt like they were pushed to the limits, and they wanted to roll on the table as well.

DURATION

As a GM, I never liked being restricted by the duration of certain effects on roll tables. As GMs, we have a MUCH better pulse check on the game to determine how long certain effects should last. Should it be just a small moment, where this effect takes place over a minute, and then it's over? Should it last for "forever", until the PC figures out a way to cure it? YOU are the best judge of what would be the best for the story/experience of the players. How big of an impact do you want this to have in the game?

Another way to enforce the duration is to give the character multiple Save attempts over time, and once they succeed on the Save, the effect ends. Now, how often you let them make these Saves is up to you! You might let PCs make Saves at the end of each round to try and fight it off mid-combat, or you might only let a PC make a Save to end this effect once every day. You can even have the trigger be based on something they have to DO to even get a chance to make a Save.

Here's a list of ideas for duration from longest to shortest:

- Until they "Recover" (see Recovery below)
- 1 Week
- Full Rest in Town (see "Full Rest" on page 126)
- 1 Day
- Long Rest
- Short Rest
- Full Duration of Combat
- 1 Round of Combat

Example: The group is just told about there being a spy in their guild... There is a plot to assassinate one of the party members and nobody can be trusted. The GM wants to really get across the stress of this moment and asks everyone for a Wisdom Save. One of the players fails and has to roll on the Mental Stress Table and gets a 3: Paranoid. The GM chooses to ignore all of the mechanical effects and really just focuses on the PARANOID part. They whisper to the player that they start to feel extremely paranoid and someone in their own party might be out to get them... truly nobody can be trusted. How long does this effect last? The GM decides that this effect will remain until one of the party members proves to them that they are not trying to kill them. What does this look like? That's up for them to figure out, but now there is a great problem and source of tension that the group has to overcome together.

DC Tip: Make sure you talk to your group about some of these things. Often people play these games to escape the mental stresses of our world, so make sure to talk to each player one-on-one to know if they feel comfortable with it and if everyone feels safe at the table.



RECOVERY

This directly ties into the duration of how long these effects last. Sometimes the duration is not based on a set amount of time passing, but based on a specific recovery condition being met. Maybe they have to find a specific person that can help, or cast a specific spell, or they have to accomplish a certain thing to overcome this effect.

There can be progression to this recovery as well. It doesn't have to be a flip of the switch type of condition, it can be a process (see "Adversity System" on page 81). I like to tie this progress to the PCs' ACTIONS instead of their rolls. Yes, I do ask them to roll for things but it's only to flavor or increase what they could do (or decrease if they make bad choices of course). Below is a list of recovery examples.

Physical Recovery

- Medicine Check to fix it right away. Pass the Check and the injury is gone.
- Multiple successful Medicine Checks. Pass the Check x number of times and the injury is healed. You can limit the number of times per day this can be done.
- Multiple Medicine Checks up to a threshold value. Medicine Check results are recorded by the GM and added together up to a certain threshold. Once that number is reached, the injury is fixed.
- Healing for a certain amount of HP. The points would not go to their HP pool, but instead toward healing the injury.
- Healing Threshold. Require a certain amount of healing to be done all at once for it to have an effect. Small amounts

of healing (below the threshold) would have no effect. For example, taking 1 healing potion might not be enough to have an effect, but in conjunction with other healing spells, it would be enough to get over the threshold and heal the injury.

- Powerful spells like *Heal* or *Regeneration*.

Mental Recovery

- Wisdom Save given every set amount of time to shake it off, themselves.
- Allow allies to "help" them with this.
- Magical effects from spells like *Calm Emotions*.
- Stronger magical effects like *Remove Curse*, *Lesser Restoration* or *Greater Restoration*.
- Simple things like being a certain distance away from danger, or being safe in a town.
- Accomplishments, like defeating a strong foe or completing a big quest.

PHYSICAL STRESS TABLE

In the same way as the Mental Stress Table, these can be purely roleplay focused, or you could introduce DisADV, or worse. You can have these issues get worse over time if something is not done, and THEN they start having a negative impact mechanically until they can figure out a way to overcome this physical stress.

PHYSICAL STRESS TABLE (D12)

1	Chronic Fatigue	Your body has difficulty with continuous physical activity and you feel a tightness in your chest. If you do not take a Short or Long Rest directly after a combat that lasted more than 5 rounds, you suffer one level of Exhaustion.
2	Nauseous	Your stomach aches and you feel nauseous. You vomit most anything you try to eat. Any healing you receive from healing potions is halved.
3	Arthritis	Some of your joints become stiff and rigid and it hurts to move them. You have DisADV on Dexterity Checks.
4	Sores/Rash	Painful sores/rash cover your body and it causes you pain to have your skin touched. You take an extra die of damage from Bludgeoning, Piercing, or Slashing sources.
5	Hazy	Your eyes are hard to open, and everything looks hazy and blurred. You have DisADV on Perception Checks involving sight.
6	Migraine	Your head constantly aches, which makes it hard to think. You have DisADV on all Intelligence Checks.
7	Sensitivity	You are extremely sensitive to sounds and even normal talking hurts your head. You have DisADV on Charisma Checks to speak with others and are vulnerable to Thunder damage.
8	Cough	You develop an uncontrollable cough that creeps up every now and then. You have DisADV on Stealth Checks.
9	Frail	Your muscles are barely working and it aches to even move. You have DisADV on Strength Checks.
10	Muffled	You have a ringing in your ears and everything sounds muffled. You have DisADV on Perception Checks involving hearing.
11	Dizzy	Your balance is off and everything feels like it's slowly spinning. You have DisADV on Acrobatics and Athletics Checks.
12	Narcoleptic	You are extremely sleepy and it's very hard to stay awake. You might randomly have DisADV on a Check from almost falling asleep.



MENTAL STRESS TABLE (D12)

1	Phobic	You are afraid of whatever caused you to roll on this table. You are Frightened while this stress is present.
2	Dread	You feel an overwhelming sense of dread. Until you succeed on something substantial, you have DisADV on all Charisma, Intelligence, and Wisdom Checks.
3	Paranoid	You no longer trust even your closest allies. You no longer count as a friendly creature to anyone, nor does anyone count as a friendly creature to you, in regards to abilities or spells. The only creature your beneficial spells and abilities can target is yourself.
4	Hallucinations	Strange visions and voiceless whispers occasionally tug at your perception. You begin to see and hear things that aren't there and have DisADV on Perception Checks.
5	Hysterical	Your speech becomes flustered, frantic, or hard to understand. You have DisADV on all Charisma Checks.
6	Broken Will	Your willpower has crumbled, leaving your mind vulnerable. You have DisADV on Wisdom Checks and Saves.
7	Jittery	You become easily spooked or startled. You have DisADV on Initiative Checks.
8	Distracted	Your mind has grown scattered and easily clouded. You have DisADV on Intelligence Checks.
9	Compulsive	You begin to exhibit a mild, compulsive habit (hoarding, cleaning things, repeating words). You have DisADV on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma Saves.
10	Partial Amnesia	You don't remember certain things about your past or recent events. You have DisADV on Intelligence Checks to remember anything.
11	Trusting	You become too eager to accept others at face value. You have DisADV on Insight Checks.
12	Doubtful	You've lost confidence in the face of danger. You have DisADV on Attacks once combat starts, until you land your first hit, then you regain at least some level of confidence.

MENTAL STRESS TABLE

This is what the character feels. As a GM you can give DisADV on Attacks, Checks, or Saves that make sense based on the circumstances. At the same time, if your players roleplay it right, you can also award Inspiration. This table can play as big or as small of a role as you want it to.

DC Tip: You can also use the tables from the Adversity System on page 81 to help show a mental strain on a character. Make sure you talk with your PC first before implementing the full system.

COMBAT TABLES

This section is to help you represent traumatic experiences in a mechanical way. If you see some crazy, scary stuff that freaks you out, you might be traumatized and have a madness style lasting effect of some kind. If you had a boulder crush a character's body, you might have a Lingering Injury that you have to deal with now. You also have to respect players' boundaries with what they are comfortable with happening to their character. There also needs to be a spectrum of injuries that affect the characters in bigger and bigger ways, both mechanically and thematically. These systems provide both a system to represent these issues of varying degrees, but also ways to recover from these injuries and be stronger than before!

LINGERING INJURIES

When a creature takes over half of their HP maximum in damage from a single blow, it must make a **DC 15** Constitution Save. **Failure:** It must roll on the Lingering Injuries Table.

Lingering Injuries is a very popular system that I feel gets out of hand and misused at most tables and in turn, gets a bad reputation. There are some key things I think that all Lingering Injuries tables need in order to not cause it to feel bad and overbearing on the game.



Player Choice

You need to maintain player agency while using this table, and give the player a choice on how to flavor things. There shouldn't be a way for a character's body to be permanently damaged from the table. There is a big difference between the mechanical punishment of what they roll and the literal punishment of what that does to their character's body. You will notice that there are ZERO options on this table where a PC loses a limb, eye, or gets permanently scarred. There is always an option on those selections where you can CHOOSE to, "Lose a leg OR break a leg." Both can be mechanically identical, which the player has NO control over, but the flavor of what happened to their character is 100% up to them. If they think it would be cool to lose a limb in battle... DO IT!

Why Use Lingerin g Injuries?

Epic injuries sustained from huge battles can make combat feel more perilous without actually making it more dangerous at all. Even if you use this system, most of the time these injuries will not happen, but just this rule being in the game, and the players knowing about it, adds a level of tension and suspense! If you use some variant rules, you can make them happen more often, but that's in your control. These also provide more challenges to overcome in combat, and makes players have to work together to prevent these from happening and avoid taking this kind of damage. The lingering aspect of these is one of my favorite parts, so that the effects of the battle LINGER on after it is over, and a PC has to figure out how to recover.

These can also give you epic war stories to tell about some crazy situations as you pick up battle scars as signs of these battles. They can also shape and change your character in unique ways. Combine these with the Mental Stress Table and you can have a unique character arc for a PC out of nowhere.

Example: A Sorcerer I played was hit for over half their HP maximum from a huge ball of fire. The result on the table was a HUGE SCAR and I decided to have it be a major scar on my chest. The character was also mentally traumatized by fire so badly that they gave up casting fire spells entirely. This might sound like a crazy adjustment, but I love to play characters in this way, really diving into what is going on in their heads, and seeing if they can work it out. Through some emotional roleplay scenes with the other characters in the group, he was able to cast fire again, and ended up wearing an open chested robe to show off his scar and not be ashamed anymore.

More Causes

If you want to increase the chance of Lingerin g Injuries to happen, there are a few modifications you can make. This should depend on your group and how open they are to this since this affects PCs FAR more than NPCs.

Raise the Save DC: Increase the DC on the Constitution Save that is triggered from the massive damage. You can have it be a static 20, or have it equal half the damage dealt to cause it. So if you have a HP maximum of 100 and get hit for 50 damage, this would cause a **DC 25** Constitution Save to avoid a Lingerin g Injury.

No Save: When you trigger a Lingerin g Injury Save... you automatically fail and roll on the Table. This system removes there being a "Save confirmation" on getting a Lingerin g Injury. This is a very viable option and would be my go-to if players wanted this to be a bigger part of the game. So for the base rule, if you EVER take half your HP maximum in damage from a single blow, then you automatically roll on the table for a Lingerin g Injury.

Critical Hits: When an enemy scores a Critical Hit on you, make a **DC 15** Constitution Save against a Lingerin g Injury. Be careful here, since it would feel bad to get a horrible injury from a small baddie's shank, so think of when the injury would make sense.

Specific Monsters/Spell Effects: Give an effect to certain monsters or casters that the PCs fight to have them roll on the Lingerin g Injuries Table if they fail a Save. A spell like *Power Word Pain* could inflict this as its effect instead.

Death Saves: Any time a character makes a Death Save and returns to consciousness, they make a **DC 15** Constitution Save, OR you could have it be where they automatically roll on the Lingerin g Injuries Table if they roll a 1-5 on a Death Save, failing it by 5.

Character Creation Uses

Let your players roll on this table before you start your game and see what they get. This could give them some unique flavor things, and if they are not comfortable with what they got, give them one reroll or just leave them with nothing. I've had a player roll on the table and get "lose an arm" but they chose an interesting way to handle it. They told me, "I want to start the game off with 2 arms... but at some point in the campaign when I least expect it... take one of my arms." I was taken aback by this choice they made, but I loved it and have a plan now. If that character EVER takes massive damage, or rolls a Nat 1 on a Save against big damage, or a huge creature lands a Critical Hit on him... I'm taking his arm off. This hasn't happened yet at the point of writing this book... but I am waiting! These moments wouldn't have been possible if we didn't have this come up during character creation.



LINGERING INJURIES TABLE (D20)

1	Lose (or break) a leg or foot: Your movement is halved and you have DisADV on all Dexterity Checks due to your lack of balance.	11	Weak point or painful scar: You take an extra 1d6 damage when hit with the same damage type that caused the injury.
2	Lose (or break) an arm or hand: You can only hold one object at a time and you can't make any Attacks with Two-Handed Weapons.	12	Contusion or deep bruise: You lose the ability to act quickly. You can no longer take a Reaction.
3	Lose an eye (blurred vision): You have DisADV on Ranged Attacks and Perception Checks based on sight.	13	Minor Concussion: You have DisADV on Intelligence Checks and Saves.
4	Lose an ear (ringing in ears): You are vulnerable to Thunder damage and have DisADV on Perception Checks based on hearing.	14	Broken ribs: You have DisADV on Strength and Dexterity Checks.
5	Impaled or punctured lung: On each of your turns while this object is inside of you, you can take either an Action or a Bonus Action (not both). Once removed you now have an "Internal Injury" (see #10 on this table).	15	Lose a finger (broken hand): You have DisADV on Sleight of Hand Checks and any Ability Check that involves the use of Thieves' Tools.
6	Skull fracture or other broken bones: You have DisADV on Attacks and all Strength, Dexterity and Constitution Checks. Additionally, you always fail Concentration Checks.	16	Limp: Your base movement is reduced by 5.
7	Festering wound: Your HP maximum is reduced by 1 at the end of each day.	17	Horrible scar.
8	Fragile: Any time you take damage, you take an additional 1d6 damage of the same type.	18	Teeth knocked out, large scar.
9	Major Concussion: You have DisADV on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma Checks and Concentration Checks.	19	Minor small scar.
10	Internal injury: You have DisADV on Attacks.	20	Adrenaline Surge: You gain a number of Temp HP equal to the result of 1 Hit Die + your Constitution Modifier. Additionally, until the end of your next turn, you can take the Dash Action as a Bonus Action and your Strength Modifier is doubled.

MADNESS & TERROR TABLE (D20)

1	The character falls Unconscious.	11	The character is in a state of shock and becomes Paralyzed until an ally can touch them to snap them out of it, or until they take damage.
2	The character becomes Incapacitated and spends the duration screaming, laughing, or weeping (lost their mind).	12	The character is Frightened as long as there are any hostile creatures in view.
3	The character becomes Frightened and must use their Action and movement each round to get as far away from the source of the fear as possible.	13	The character must use their Action each round to Attack the nearest hostile creature.
4	The character retreats into his or her mind and becomes Paralyzed. The effect ends if the character takes any damage.	14	The character is Frightened unless they are within 10ft of an ally.
5	The character experiences vivid hallucinations and has DisADV on all Ability Checks and Attacks.	15	The character is Frightened of the source of fear until it lands a hit/helps land a hit on the source.
6	The character experiences uncontrollable shivers, tremors, or tics, which imposes DisADV on Strength or Dexterity based Attacks, Checks, and Saves.	16	The character becomes attached to something that they see as their lucky charm (could be a person or an object) and has DisADV on Attacks, Checks, and Saves while more than 30ft from it.
7	The character feels compelled to repeat a specific activity over and over. This can be small RP stuff, or in combat. They must repeat the same Action they took last round, even if the target is already Incapacitated, or attempt to cast a spell they don't have a spell slot for.	17	The character is Frightened unless they are within 30ft of an ally.
8	Whenever the character takes damage, they must make a DC 15 Wisdom Save. Failure: They are confused as per <i>Confusion</i> until the end of their next turn.	18	The character suffers extreme paranoia. The character has DisADV on Wisdom and Charisma Checks.
9	The character begins babbling and is incapable of normal speech or spellcasting.	19	The character loses the ability to speak coherently. They can only say nouns, but they're still able to cast spells.
10	The character is fearful and unsure of their surroundings. The character has a -2 penalty to AC until the end of combat.	20	The character digs deep and shakes off the fear, gaining confidence to push forward. Additionally, they gain ADV on their next Wisdom Save.



MADNESS & TERROR TABLE

Sometimes the injuries we sustain are mental, instead of physical, from the traumas of what can happen in battle. Other systems like the Mental Stress Table or the Adversity System focus on the journey and the roleplay aspects of what goes on in a character's mind, while this system focuses more on the mechanical combat aspects.

This table is a fear table that you can use to enhance the level of horror at your table beyond the simple mechanics of the Frightened condition. This can also be used as a substitution for Madness when a person's mind is pushed past its limit.

DEATH SAVE RULES

Death Saves represent the struggle of a character fighting for their life in this world. Do they get saved by their allies, fight through and stabilize, or does their soul leave their body and pass on? This is an incredibly important moment in a game. If a character dies, the player can no longer play them. That is the biggest consequence that could possibly happen! Yes, there are resurrection spells that I will get into later on in this chapter, but even THAT should have some weight behind it. There is also a concept where a character becomes more important and valuable to a player if there is the threat of them losing it. If characters were immortal and they could just “respawn” every time they die, there wouldn't be nearly as much excitement and connection to the characters, because they are basically video game characters that you can do whatever you want with because they will always come back.

With death being a very important part of the game, the mechanics of how it works should reflect that. Currently it feels like a joke that a character can go Unconscious then get healed for 1 HP and be back to normal. This “whack-a-mole” process can happen over and over again without anything bad happening. Currently it is actually MORE optimal to NOT heal someone, let them fall Unconscious, then heal them after they drop. This should NEVER be more optimal and a PC going Unconscious should be something PCs avoid at all costs. So, currently Death Saves are not represented in a way that feels accurate or gets across the feeling of tension, pressure, or importance that it should.

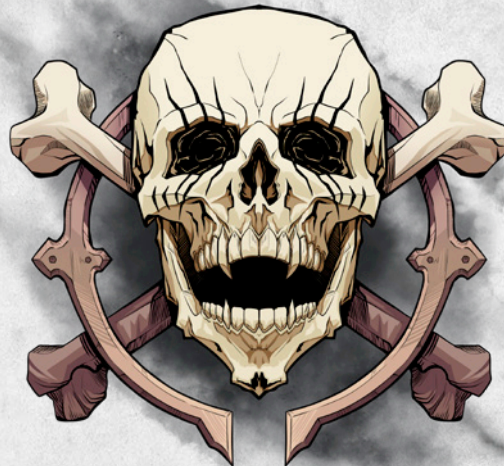
If your character was walking the line between life and death, it should feel like that, and not just the mechanics in the game, but the energy around the table. All those potential feelings of suspense and tension never happen. With so many ways to revive players it's not even that big of a deal if the worst-case scenario actually does happen. Just have a player cast a 3rd-level spell and they are alive again. Here are some options on how I would go about fixing it.

This was one of the FIRST homebrews I ever came up with, so this has a soft spot in my heart. I don't want to kill my PCs, I just want to establish a general threat of death that is both FELT and represented well mechanically. Players should respect it and want to do everything in their power to protect their characters and their allies. With these rules combined with the rules in the Resurrection System (page 212) you should have the perfect system to establish the looming threat of death at your table. Think about the balance overall and implement rules that feel the most fair. Maybe you increase the chance to die, but make it easier to resurrect a character. Maybe you make it really hard to die but then, if they do, resurrection doesn't exist in your world. Talk with your group about this because these are their characters whose lives literally hang in the balance of these rules.

DEATH SAVE MODIFICATIONS

The following rules will be presented approximately in order from least strict to most strict as far as the increase in difficulty goes. These first few rules start off as slight quality of life modifications for standard Death Saves and then build up to more impactful rules. You can create a subtle increase to the deadliness of your game to stop some of those issues we discussed, or you can implement an extremely deadly system that your players should probably have backup characters on standby for. You should choose which rule is the right setting for you, and even mix and match methods for your best results.

A great example would be removing the standard rule that you can instantly stabilize someone with a **DC 10** Medicine Check. I don't have this rule be a default part of my game and think that each situation is different. Below are some other rules than you can use in place of this stabilization Medicine Check, but feel free to have more deadly injuries cause more difficult scenarios to get out of.



HEROIC STABILIZATION

When a character succeeds on 3 of their Death Saves they come back to consciousness at 1 HP instead of stabilizing at 0 HP and remaining Unconscious.

I use this rule at my table because it feels lame when a PC spends multiple turns ONLY rolling Death Saves, then completes with 3 Saves... and now just gets skipped entirely as they lie there doing nothing. It also feels EPIC to have a character stand up and wipe the blood off their mouth, ready for more. If the party's only healer falls Unconscious and there are no healing potions available, then this creates a strange problem where one PC is just STUCK Unconscious. I think the fantasy of this makes it feel much better for these characters as they are able to stand back up and fight. They already spent multiple rounds Unconscious, basically doing nothing, so I feel like they have been sitting on the sidelines enough as far as consequences go, especially if you use some of the other rules presented in this chapter.

You could instead have the Unconscious player keep making Death Saves after they stabilize and if they get a Natural 20 then they come back at 1 HP. This was how I originally ruled it... but there is just such a low chance for this to happen that, for myself, it feels much better that they come back up at 3 successes.

HELP ACTION FOR DEATH SAVES

A creature may take the Help Action to give another creature ADV on their next Death Save.

This is a spot for you to be as strict as you want for the requirements of a character to be able to grant another character ADV in this way. You could have it come down to a Check and the character must complete a **DC 10** Check of some kind to be able to grant the ADV. If they fail, nothing bad

happens but they wouldn't be able to give the dying creature ADV. I usually don't ask for a Check in these moments. I want to reward PCs for giving up their whole turn to help a fallen ally. It would feel really bad for a player to sacrifice their entire Action, then fail a Check, not be able to help... then their ally dies in their arms. I feel like characters would have more closure if they were able to grant that ADV and they STILL fail. It seems like an easier situation to stomach.

In general, I want this to be described in some way that makes sense, even if it's something as simple as, "I put pressure on the wound," that works for me. This has to be something that makes sense for them to be able to do. This helps paint the picture of HOW they are helping this situation. You can even have if they need to make a Check or not be based on how creative what they say they do is.

MEDICINE CHECK HELP

A character must make a **DC 15** Medicine Check to attempt to bring their ally back. **Success:** The Unconscious character gains an automatic success on a Death Save. **Failure:** Nothing bad happens.

This is similar to allowing other PCs to grant ADV to a dying character, but this takes it one step further and lets them be able to actually MAKE a Check for them. I also rule that they CANNOT hurt the dying character because it would feel absolutely TERRIBLE if one PC caused the death of another PC. That is just something I personally don't want at my table. So, if they are not successful, that doesn't mean that their efforts brought their friend closer to dying, it just didn't HELP.

This can also be extended into other types of Checks as well. If you wanted to have a Cleric that was out of healing spells try and channel their god's energies to help bring them back, I would totally make that a Religion Check. If the big strong Barbarian wants to make a Strength Check to describe putting pressure on their wounds or performing CPR, then make it a Strength Check. Let the players come up with creative ways to help their friend and try to literally SAVE them.

AUTO DEATH SAVE FAILURES WHILE UNCONSCIOUS

When a creature is Unconscious and takes any damage, they automatically fail 1 Death Save. If the damage meets or exceeds 50% of the creature's HP maximum, they automatically fail 2 Death Saves. If the damage meets or exceeds 100% of the creature's HP maximum, they automatically fail 3 Death Saves and are instantly dead.

It has always felt so dumb to me that any damage is 1 failed Death Save, but a Melee Attack is 2 failed Death Saves. You could get hit with a *Fireball* at point blank range and that's only 1 failed Save, but get stabbed by a little goblin and that is somehow 2 failed Saves. This also increases the threat of someone being dead, as they could get multiple Death Saves from any big Attack, making their party want to get them up as soon as they can! This both helps and hurts the PCs because Melee Attacks aren't a guaranteed fail of 2 Death Saves, which is nice, but now ANY damage source could give you more failures if they deal enough damage to you.



If you want to make this more challenging, you could change it from a percentage of their HP maximum to a flat number for all characters. For a long time, I ran it as each chunk of 20 damage was an additional failed Death Save. If you took 1-19 damage that was one failure, 20-39 damage was 2 failures and 40 damage and above was an automatic death. I personally like this because it makes Unconscious characters very weak to damage while they are helpless on the ground, which feels right to me. You can take these threshold numbers and increase them over time as the players level up, as well.

SECRET DEATH SAVES

All Death Saves a PC makes are “Secret Rolls”. The player rolls them in secret and only themselves and the GM knows the result. The rest of the group is left unaware about whether their friend is about to die, at 2 failures, or will be ok, at 2 successes.

This rule will freak out your players hardcore. Not knowing if their friend is about to live or die is crazy. Then, when one of those 2 things actually happens, you start to describe what is happening and the players are on the edge of their seats listening to it. You are either describing their character epically standing up or taking their final breath.

There is an entire section on Secret Rolls (page 76), as well. You can also have the player whose character is making those Saves be unaware of the result as well. This would mean that only YOU know the result of each Save. This is a great amount of tension and suspense, but can also leave a window of doubt open about if you fudged the numbers or not. For me, it has

nothing to do with trust and has more to do with the player who is about to lose their character. I like to have the player know the result of these Saves because they can watch their character slip away, and I don't mean that in some messed up sort of way. I think there is some closure in them seeing the process happen instead of being told that their character is dead out of nowhere when they didn't see it coming. There is also a sense of accountability between the GM and player about the result of this dice, which is especially important when it comes to something as big as the death of a character.

PERMANENT DEATH SAVES

When a character fails a Death Save, that failure stays with them until a set period of time has passed. This can be anywhere from the end of a combat, Short Rest, Long Rest, or Full Rest. Once this period of time has passed their Death Saves reset back to zero. Any Death Save successes still reset upon coming back to consciousness.

This is one of the most subtle changes you can make that impact the game in a clean and simple way. I have run this for years at my table, and this is all it takes to make players NOT okay with their character falling Unconscious and rolling Death Saves, since once they collect a Death Save, it stays with them. For most campaigns, I have it be that the Death Saves reset once the combat is over, then they erase the failed Saves and are back to normal. I've also had it take a Long Rest to reset, as well, which is a very good option for showing that the injuries they sustained are still with them until they can truly REST.



POISONED DEATH SAVES

When a character is Poisoned, they also make their Death Saves with DisADV.

This just makes sense and makes being Poisoned that much scarier when going Unconscious. This is very situational and rarely happens but, when it does, it's a scary thing!

SCALING DEATH SAVES

The DC for Death Saves increases by 5 each time you fail a Death Save.

This means when you first fall Unconscious the Death Save DC is 10, as usual. As soon as you fail a Save, that character's Death Save DC is now increased by 5 to a new total of 15. The DC continues to increase in this way with each failed Save.

TEMPORARY EXHAUSTION

If a character has failed a Death Save during a round of combat, they automatically gain one level of Exhaustion when the combat is over.

The rush of combat fades and the injuries you sustained kick in. This is a smooth and subtle way to weave in some Exhaustion into your games. See my Exhaustion Rules on page 103 for more options to connect to this system. You can also have them gain a level of Exhaustion just for going Unconscious at all, which would take a lot out of someone.

EXHAUSTIVE DEATH SAVES

When a character gets reduced to 0 HP and they are brought back to consciousness by any means, they automatically suffer a level of Exhaustion.

Almost dying is a grueling process that would take a LOT out of you. So it makes sense that you would be more affected or drained. You could also add a **DC 15** Constitution Save upon returning to consciousness to see if they suffer the level of Exhaustion or not. This would make it less punishing of a rule for sure. If they get a Natural 1 they would suffer 2 levels of Exhaustion, or if they get a Natural 20 they get an Adrenaline Surge.

Adrenaline Surge: Gain Temp HP equal to (1 Hit Dice + Constitution Modifier) and they make all Attacks, Checks, and Save with ADV while they have this Temp HP.

WOUNDED X CONDITION

When a character regains consciousness after being Unconscious, they receive the Wounded 1 condition. When a character with Wounded 1 falls Unconscious they start with 1 Death Save already failed, and are now only 2 failed Saves away from dying. If a character with the Wounded 1 condition falls Unconscious and returns back to consciousness their condition worsens to Wounded 2. When a character with Wounded 2 falls Unconscious they start with 2 Death Saves already failed, and are now only 1 failed Save away from dying. Returning back to consciousness with the Wounded 2 condition escalates to Wounded 3. If a character with the

Wounded 3 condition is reduced to 0 HP, they automatically fail 3 Death Saves and die immediately.

I think this system is one of the most brutal but addresses the issues with Death Saves amazingly. My favorite part is that if you have the Wounded 3 condition and get taken to 0 HP, you die outright. THAT is a feature missing from the current rules that I feel would be EPIC and intense. If you had the Wounded 3 condition... your life is literally on the edge! This stops the "whack-a-mole" effect in its tracks and inflicts a worse and worse Wounded condition on characters that keep going back and forth from conscious to Unconscious.

This is very similar to my Permanent Death Saves rule but, instead of the Death Save failures being permanent, you get a stacking Wounded level that starts you off with failures and could even kill you. You can also have the Wounded condition require a Short Rest, Long Rest, or Full Rest for it to wear off, or just have it reset back to nothing after combat is over. Keep in mind that a PC would have to go Unconscious THREE TIMES for them to get Wounded 3, so that is a very rare thing to happen, but when it does... It's so epic!

FINAL STAND

When you get reduced to 0 HP, instead of falling Unconscious, you can choose to take one Final Stand. You stand up and immediately take a full turn with full resources, apart from HP. You have your full movement, Action, Bonus Action, and Reaction to take and once this Final Stand is completed, your character falls to the ground dead.

This rule... is nuts! This rule exists solely because one of my players requested it during an extreme moment in a game. They were in a huge boss fight against a big villain and another PCs family was in danger. Things were down to the wire



and SO CLOSE, the Cleric went down and the player asked me, "I cannot let this happen... I will give up my life to save everyone else... How can I do that?" It was a shocking moment for myself and everyone else at the table. I came up with this rule at that moment at the table. I didn't want them to just be given a free win, even at the cost of their own life... they had to earn it. So I told them I will give you ONE turn right now, at full power, so make it count. I think I even let them cast a spell as an Action and Bonus Action at this moment, but they WENT OFF and truly went out in a blaze of glory, saving everyone with their Final Stand. The other players at the table told him, "NO, don't do it!" but this is what he wanted, and it was a beautiful moment.

DUNGEON COACH METHOD

These are the default rules that have been the perfect fit for me at my table. They feel fair and realistic, and give the players that sense of urgency you expect in a high stakes fight by leaving in Permanent Death Saves If you fail a Death Save, you are literally closer to death until you are safe enough to rest up and recover from such a blow. If someone does fall Unconscious, you better get them up because not only do Death Save failures remain, but any big hits they take in such a weakened state, could outright kill them!

I like to set the thresholds for Auto Death Saves as a number instead of a % of their HP to increase the threat level of lying Unconscious on the battlefield. Overall I have rules on both ends to find the right balance that I want at my own table. If the group wants to run a more gritty game then my go-tos would be either the Exhaustion Death Saves or Wounded condition, because the Wounded condition is one of my favorites!

I also show the players some love by letting them work together on saving each other and letting them stand back up on their own. I want my players to know that I'm on their side by giving buffs to what they can do, but also establish a true threat of death so that they respect it and know how important their decisions are.

- Heroic Stabilization
- Help Action for Death Saves
- Medicine Check Help
- Auto Death Save Failures while Unconscious
- Permanent Death Saves
- Final Stand

RESURRECTION SYSTEM

Resurrection and how easy or difficult it is to perform in your games is a BIG part of your world. The characters' lives literally depend on it. What expectations your players have for resurrection needs to be discussed during Session 0. Is it possible? Are there consequences to it? How does it even work? These are questions you need to ask yourself and make sure to present what these "resurrection mechanics" are in your game.

I tell my group that if they die at low levels in the game when they are too weak to either know someone who can perform a resurrection or perform one themselves, then they are probably permanently dead. Unless low level players find some kind of powerful NPC that would perform this powerful spell, then they wouldn't be able to bring their character back and they would have to create a new one. I make sure that this concept is known because I believe that the fact that they could LOSE their character makes it mean that much more to them. You must also balance this with making sure they don't feel like their character is destined for death or that they shouldn't get too attached because they'll probably just die anyway and need to make a new character. Players need to know that you are not "out to get them" and the fate of their character is in their hands.

PROBLEMS WITH RESURRECTION

The standard rules have no mention of any resurrection mechanics... it just happens. There is a 100% success rate for casting a spell to bring someone back from the dead... yet we have to make a Skill Check to lift something heavy. I don't believe something this complex should happen perfectly just by simply casting a spell and then BOOM the character is back. That feels VERY anticlimactic and there isn't even a great moment at the table when it happens.

How many movies have we seen where the characters are gathered around a fallen ally and each gets a moment to say something. Then some over-the-top thing might happen like a character crying over their friend's lifeless body for it to then start glowing and the magic starts to kick in. These moments are non-existent in a game where someone can just cast a spell and then you're back alive instantly.

Why would other players get super excited when they knew it was going to work 100% and they didn't play a role in the character coming back? Especially when a spell was cast and now they're good to go again. There needs to be a system in place for this that brings a group together to share in the loss of a character, and through this process they might be able to bring them back.



NO CONSEQUENCES

I think it's strange that a character can DIE (the worst thing that could happen to a character) and come back totally fine and have no issues whatsoever. I am not a mean GM by any means but I do think that there's SOMETHING that the PC has to overcome from such a large moment in their lives. There are many options you can choose from in this section, but I feel there needs to be something temporary that they can recover from or something permanent to show that it happened. This doesn't have to be mechanical in nature and can be purely roleplay oriented, or just a visual mark on the character. There are specifically situational mechanics that you can add just to give a LITTLE bit of flavor to a PC's death to help THEM feel more unique from the process too. These don't have to be purely negative either... maybe they have a side effect that they can see into the Ethereal Plane from time to time? How spooky!

THERE'S ALWAYS HOPE

I want to make sure that my players know that THEY are in control of the fate of a character when it dies. Do they move on entirely? Does the group start a quest to bring them back? Do they bring in a temporary character to play until the group is strong enough to bring their original character back? I follow up a character's death with a one-on-one conversation about what they want their original characters... and their new character's fate to be. I've had players see it as their character going out in a heroic moment, and they were at peace with that, so we could move on and create something brand new! I've had players still want that character so we

talked about what that would look like, then I gave them generic information and had them make a new "temporary character" that was tied to their original character's backstory. They came back and helped the party on a quest to revive their original character. It was a great side quest that also connected to other PCs' backstories as well. The rest of the party didn't know what was going on, they thought that this was just a simple side quest in honor of their fallen ally. Once the big final combat happened, they obtained a crystal capable of reviving their original character. The player then sacrificed their temporary character in a blaze of glory to save some of the PCs. When the combat was over they had the crystal and used it to revive the original character... but now they had to deal with the burden of that character sacrificing themselves for them to live.

Through this system you can focus on the dice telling a story. The PCs might have done everything they could to bring them back... but the dice might tell a different story, and that's okay. Maybe you only allow ONE resurrection to be attempted, and if it's a failure then that character is permanently dead and the group has to move on. I personally play off of the player whose character died. I ask them how they feel and see what they want to do. It's MY personal preference that once an attempt is made, the character is gone forever, the spirit passes into another plane and the player can focus on telling a story with a new character. BUT if they still want to play their original character, I will find a way to make it work! It might be extremely difficult, but I will create mechanics or possibilities for them to go and "earn back" their character.



There are so many options that you have as a GM to be able to control the story and what is possible. You can choose how many hurdles they have to jump through for revival to be possible. You can give them a magic item with a one-time-use revival that requires expensive crystals to work. You can ban resurrection in your games from either a mechanical standpoint, as in it doesn't work at all, or maybe there is a lore reason and resurrection magic is banned because it's in the School of Necromancy! You can make them perform a Skill Challenge to bring a character back, or just have it work automatically. They can have the tools at their disposal and things fall into their lap, or you can make them jump through hoops and go on multiple side quests to bring back their friend. You need to have a good understanding of your players and their comfort levels to best navigate this and keep everyone on the same page.

RESURRECTION CHALLENGE

If a resurrection spell is cast on a dead character's body, a ritual called a Resurrection Challenge begins. Other PCs can help in this process by making up to 3 Offerings to try and bring the character back. These Offerings are Skill Checks based on what they described that they do to help. After these 3 Offerings are attempted, the dead PC rolls one final d20 against their Resurrection DC. The 3 Offerings that the PCs make have a chance to lower that DC before the final roll. For each offering, the GM will ask for a Skill Check to see if the PC's Offering succeeds or fails. What Check they make entirely depends on what they describe that they are doing to help. Each successful Offering reduces the Resurrection DC by 3, each failure does nothing. For the final roll, if the dead PC beats the Resurrection DC, they are revived and come back to life. If they fail the DC, then the character's soul moves onto the afterlife and they are truly dead.

Example: A character dies for the first time and has a Resurrection DC of 10. Two of the Offerings are a success, and lower the Resurrection DC by 3 each, and the third one is a failure, which has no effect. The Resurrection DC is now lowered by 6 (3 for each success) for a new Resurrection DC of 4.

There are 2 key components to this system - the Resurrection DC and the Offerings. Both of these can be customized and altered to fit the right difficulty for how hard it is to bring a dead character back to life. The later sections in this chapter cover what interesting things might happen once a resurrection is successful.

RESURRECTION DC

Resurrection DC: $8 + (\text{Number of deaths} \times 2)$

This means that the first time a character dies, their Resurrection DC would be 10, since they have never been resurrected before. So the first DC they have to roll against to come back would be a 10. This is purposefully designed to mirror a Death Save that has a DC of 10. I personally like these numbers because they feel right, but you're completely free to tweak them as you see fit.

You can change the base in order to make it harder from the start to revive a character or you can change the Modifier that is added for each death. A version I've done before for a more gritty game is to have the Resurrection DC be $(10 + 5 \text{ per resurrection})$. This means the first DC is still 10, but then it jumps to 15, then 20, and so on. That is my next favorite setup for using this system.

You can also think outside the box and have different things affect this number as well. Maybe a Hag asks the PC for a "piece of their soul" in exchange for a favor... and this unknowingly increases their Resurrection DC by 1 or more. Be careful with this because you don't want the player to feel cheated, but it's a new mechanic in the game that can be manipulated now.

DC Tip: Very rarely can players get THAT much added to the roll, but a Natural 1 on the final roll is an automatic failure no matter what... because there is always a chance it can fail, and death is a scary thing!

RESURRECTION OFFERINGS

These Offerings are Skill Checks that a GM asks the PCs to make based on what they described that they did to help the ritual. These Checks do not have to be a literal offering of something physical, there are many different things you can do. Below, I will provide multiple examples of what my own players have come up with over the years. The creativity on both sides, for both what the character does and what Check I ask them to make is one of my favorite parts to this.

As the GM, you set the DC for each of these Offering Skill Checks. I personally stick to the Set DCs by 5's Method (see "Set DCs by 5s" on page 37) so that it truly feels fair and everyone can be on the same page and not argue about a DC being 13 vs 14. I usually have the DC for this be 15 for a normal Check that is a pretty standard offering, nothing special. This feels fair from this being a large task to accomplish, but if the PC puts more or less into it, I adjust by 5. If they put some real thought, heart, creativity, or compassion into it, I immediately drop the DC down to 10 or even 5 on some occasions. You're not trying to have your players feel like you are out to get them here... these can be emotionally vulnerable moments for groups, make sure you understand that and are empathetic to what they are feeling. On the other hand, if the PC comes up with some crazy idea that they put no thought into, or they're just messing around in a situation that doesn't call for it, I'll make the DC be 20. This is up to you to set the tone for how serious or humorous this ritual is.



If a player comes up with something amazing and profound that absolutely floors you... it is 100% within your power to just grant the success and not ask for a Check. I've had players bring the entire group to tears with something they do in this moment, and I would HATE to sabotage that by asking them to make a Check and it fails. This is very rare, but know that it's always an option. A lot of these moments should have a COST associated with it, so don't just give things away too freely. A great example of this was a Warlock that was going to give up his patron's powers and grant them to the dead PC in order to bring them back. I was floored by this offering and told them, "If you go through with this you will no longer have access to the list of spells that your patron gives you." They understood this and agreed, so I didn't ask them for a Check at all and asked him to roleplay what he said to his patron, then I described it working and it being an automatic success. True sacrifice is a beautiful thing to watch.

DC Tip: If a moment during a Resurrection Challenge hits you hard, you might even grant a success to the overall challenge as a whole.

Another option you have is to make the DC of the Offerings equal the DC of the Resurrection DC. If the final roll is going to be made against a DC 12 Resurrection DC, then that could be a great number to "set the bar" for the entire challenge. I've used this method before and love it. You just don't have any wiggle room as the GM to raise or lower the DC, BUT this can be good in some ways because it takes any blame of a potential PC death off of you for setting the DC too high.

Just like in normal Skill Challenges, PCs can help each other with their Offerings. If a PC chooses to "help", then they cannot make an Offering attempt themselves. This leads to some creative options where players can brainstorm about who they can bring in to help at this moment. I've had groups travel around and pick up key NPCs from this person's life and backstory to really make sure this ritual went as best as it could. The 3 PCs got 3 NPCs to help them with each of the 3 Offerings to give them the best chance they could have. The player whose character was at stake was blown away by the thoughtfulness that the group put in to save their character.

Depending on the size of your party, you might want to increase the number of Offerings required. Most of my campaigns have been with 4 players, so having 3 Offerings works out great. One PC drops, and the others each have a chance to do something. If you run a group of 6, then maybe 3 Offerings wouldn't be enough, unless they start to pair up and help each other. If you do increase the number of Offerings then I would lower the amount it reduces the Resurrection DC by, from 3 down to 2.

Lastly is that YOU, as the GM, know what your players' higher and lower Modifiers are. If you LOVE what they ask to do, make sure to set them up for success by asking them for a Check that you KNOW they have a high Modifier in. If they do something that really hits you hard, you can even grant them ADV on their roll, "Because the GM said so." You granting this ADV will show other players that they will be rewarded for engaging in the world you created.

EXAMPLE OFFERINGS

Here are some examples where I give the description of what the PC wanted to do, then in parentheses, what Check I asked them to make. You could come up with a different Check that you might ask in the moment that makes more sense to you, but I'm just trying to show you how diverse this can be.

- A Cleric calling for their god to help. (Religion Check)
- A Druid gathering strange smelling herbs to rub on the chest of the PC to help guide their soul back. (Nature Check)
- A Wizard sets up arcane glyphs from the Divination School of Magic to try to divine a pathway for the soul to follow back. (Arcana Check)
- An Artificer or Rogue trying to carefully remove shards from the body with their tools. This focuses more on the physical and less on the soul, but is a completely viable idea and shouldn't be shot down. (Thieves'/Tinker's Tools Check)
- A PC yelling at the dead character's lifeless body in a passionate plea for them to return. (Charisma Check, plus ADV if I tear up)
- A PC gets a sentimental item, places it on the dead character's chest, and says some kind words. These are the times when a PC does something awesome, but if their Charisma is terrible you don't want to punish them by asking for a Check that they would be bad at. I asked them to make a Flat d20 roll plus double their Prof. Bonus. I know this is a VERY generic roll, but since Charisma Check came to mind first and I knew they had a +0 to that... I instead went for this. THIS is also a great example of a moment... that I could totally see myself just counting as an automatic success because of the huge moment it was at the table.
- A Barbarian slaps the dead character to wake them up as they exclaim, "Nobody kills you but me!" This was an inside joke between these two characters for literal years... and it choked me up hard. I had them make an Attack with ADV and let them add their Rage bonus to the total as well. For moments like that... that are truly an unforgettable moment at the table... give out as many bonuses as you can, out of respect for the moment that just happened.
- A Lightning Sorcerer lies Unconscious and the Barbarian wants to go into a Rage and shock them with Lightning damage like a defibrillator, which is extremely creative. It was also something I gave these 2 characters a special Bonus Level Up Perk for, where they wouldn't deal damage to each other but instead can supercharge the Lightning damage each of them could do. Since this was so creative, I awarded the Barbarian ADV on the roll and let them make a Constitution Check + Prof. Bonus to shoot lightning out of their body into the Sorcerer's body.



GM GUIDANCE

This is a very vulnerable and creative process, and you are putting the PCs on the spot to save their friend. The choices they make about what to do can directly impact if a character is brought back or not, so be there as a guide for them in navigating these moments.

Players might not be used to this type of creative application of their skills and may need some help thinking about what's even possible. They also might not know how your world or the magic within it works to be able to come up with options. Make sure you establish an open dialogue where they can think out loud and you can offer them as much help as they need to think through this. Help them brainstorm in these moments so that if this character doesn't make it through the ritual, at least everyone at the table will feel like they did their best.

Whatever the PCs come up with, it's your call on if that is a "good idea" and would work... or a "less good idea" and might not work as well. You need to find the balance between challenging your players to think outside the box and come up with things while also not shooting down ideas that they put a lot of thought into.

Example: What if a PC said that they were going to get a healing potion and pour it into the dead character's mouth? What would you do as the GM? You could let them make a Medicine Check and have it work somehow. You could vaguely warn them that this might not work how they think it's going to and see if they change their mind, or you could straight up tell them, "That won't work, they're already dead." It's your game and you know how the magic works inside of it. It's up to YOU how much you communicate that with your group and whether you let them discover that it was a "bad idea" or help guide them to a better option. This happened to me and I had the player make an Intelligence Check to see if their character would know how potions worked in this world, and if that would help or not. They rolled a Natural 1 and I told them, "Yes, this is a great idea and will TOTALLY work." I didn't even set a DC for this and I just told them to roll a Flat d20, and as soon as the dice hit the table I said, "It has no effect." This was a funny moment at the table and broke up some of the intensity of the moment, which for this group I felt was a good thing. The other 2 Offerings in this example were already successes and now it came down to the final roll. The Resurrection DC was 12 and the 2 successes brought it down to 6 total. The final roll was a 17, and the resurrection was a success! After the celebration ended I asked the PC who poured the potion in their mouth to roll some dice... they said the result was 10... I looked over to the newly revived character and told them... "You have a familiar herbal taste in your mouth and you somehow heal for 10 HP." There was now another round of laughter as the absolute fail of the potion kicked in after the resurrection to cap off the whole moment.

You can also make Offerings yourself, as the GM. Don't be afraid to step in if the moment is right. Sometimes this might come from you wanting to set an example of how these work and you can roleplay an NPC doing something, explaining what Check they would make, and rolling the dice in front of the screen as if you were a PC for a moment. This is a great

way to lead by example for players unfamiliar with this system. There have also been times where I stepped up as a beloved NPC that was very close to the dead character. One PC had a wife that they had established, over the course of years, across the timeline of the campaign. They made it a big deal to go find his wife and bring her into this ritual to try to help. Since the PCs put so much importance on this NPC, as soon as it came time to do the ritual, I was the first one to speak up. I roleplayed the wife talking to her fallen husband saying the things that she never got to say. It was an emotional moment for myself and everyone else, but I wanted to show this group what type of emotions this can bring out. I also ended the speech with an inside joke to lighten the mood. I then came up with a number for what made sense for her Modifier for this roll. I told the group that she's going to roll a d20 +7 (which felt fair compared to their Modifiers and with the importance of the NPC) and I rolled it in front of the group. These are rare, but beautiful, moments where you get to feel like a PC for a second. Don't be afraid to step in if the other players are wanting you to or are hesitant themselves. You can help show them how this system works and what is possible.

RESURRECTION DESCRIPTION

Your descriptions of this resurrection process really need to bring this moment to life (see what I did there?). When I describe these rituals I usually have something tangible representing the 3 Offering attempts. Once the ritual starts, you can have 3 glowing tethers of energy stream out from the spell into the body. When a PC gets a success on an Offering, one of the tethers glows brighter, when they fail, one of the tethers fades away. You can describe these as orbs of light, an image of the actual dead character's ghost that starts to fade, or have crystals orbiting the ritual that either lock in and glow brightly or shatter mid air. These tangible representations of the Offerings help to guide the narrative story that is being told here to help paint the visual of what is happening, all leading to the final roll.



RESURRECTION RESTRICTIONS

How does resurrection work? How prevalent is it in your world? Are there requirements or restrictions in place on the spells? These limitations on resurrection can come from your world's lore in the form of banning resurrection because of its ties to the School of Necromancy. The limitations could also come from a mechanical balance reason that you, as the GM, want to implement, and then you can fill in the lore implications from there.

There are many ways to restrict resurrection to make it more or less difficult. These categories will also help to flesh out the lore of your world on top of the aspects of resurrection that you want to limit to make it more challenging. These go hand in hand with Death Save Rules to paint the picture of both how easy it is to die and how hard it is to reverse death.

Resurrection should be a challenging journey for players to go through if they so choose. For me, resurrection magic is hard to find, and even if you can find someone who can cast resurrection spells, it will come at a great cost of some kind, and even after you have all that, it still has a chance to fail. Now you might be starting to see the big picture of what is possible with making your own resurrection system.

SPELL RESTRICTIONS & MODIFICATIONS

There are 5 spells in the game (6 if you count *Wish*) that can bring a dead character back to life. The first spell is the 3rd-level *Revivify*, then every other level spell adds a new and more powerful version of a resurrection. *Raise Dead* and *Reincarnate* are 5th-level, *Resurrection* is 7th-level, then *True Resurrection* is 9th-level. Each of these spells can have unique properties that scale up in power and requirements. Here is a chart to show how each spell works in relation to each other and how they've been modified to fit into the Resurrection Challenge System.

Once Per Spell: Once you are revived by one of these spells, the next attempt must use a spell of a higher level. If you used *Raise Dead*, now you can only be brought back with *Resurrection* or *True Resurrection*.

Longer Time Adjustment: If you want to give more time to your spells, here are alternate times for how long a creature can be dead before the spell won't work anymore. *Revivify* = 1 minute, *Raise Dead* and *Reincarnate* = 1 week, *Resurrection* = 1 year, *True Resurrection* = 100 years, *Wish* = Infinity.

REVIVIFY

Here are some things I did at my table with *Revivify*. You can cast *Revivify* out of combat to start a resurrection ritual just like any other resurrection spell, there is just a higher Resurrection DC from using a weaker spell (shown in the table below).

But what about during combat? In my experience, it feels too rushed to have a Resurrection Challenge mid-combat. If a resurrection spell is cast during combat, I have the dead PC make a Death Save against their Resurrection DC, if they succeed, they are back, if they fail they can no longer be revived with *Revivify* and a resurrection spell of a higher level must be used.

I changed the window of *Revivify* from 1 minute to 1 round of combat from the initial moment they are reduced to 0. I want there to be a sense of urgency to get them back up as fast as possible. Another homebrew I use is that if you cast *Revivify* on someone within 1 round, then the Resurrection DC is "normal" but each round after increases the Resurrection DC by 1, up to a maximum of +10, to the DC if you cast the spell at the last second (since the max window is 1 minute).

I used to remove *Revivify* as a resurrection option because I thought it was too powerful. It's a 3rd-level spell that can bring a character back to life, and that just seems too strong for a 5th-level character. The spell is only an Action to cast, while even *True Resurrection* takes 1 hour to cast. Now yes, the drawback is you have to do it within 1 minute, but the utility of this spell is crazy! There are other options I have gone with since then, like increasing the material component cost or making accelerants as described below:

- You could still start a Resurrection Challenge mid-combat. You can have players sacrifice an Action or Bonus Action to make their Offering on their turn, or make it a free action if you want to be nice.
- Replace *Revivify* with a unique spell component that can be used as an accelerant to any resurrection spell. It changes the casting time of the spell from 1 hour to 1 Action and allows for use in combat. Making it require a resource adds another cost and another resource that you can control the availability of.
- You can remove this spell from your game entirely if you don't want there to be access to "battle rezzes" on-the-fly. If you want to keep it as something they would have to do after combat, then maybe removing this spell is an option.

MODIFIED RESURRECTION SPELL CHART

Spell Name	Spell Lvl	Player Lvl	Time Limit	Cost	Body Needed?	Res DC Modifier (Changes the Res DC)
<i>Revivify</i>	3rd	5th	1 Round	1,000gp	Yes	+5
<i>Raise Dead</i> and <i>Reincarnate</i>	5th	9th	1 day	5,000gp	Yes	+2
<i>Resurrection</i>	7th	13th	10 days	20,000gp	Yes 51%	0
<i>True Resurrection</i>	9th	17th	10 years	50,000gp	Yes 1%	-2



REINCARNATE

I think this is a fascinating spell, but I run it a little differently at my game table. For *Reincarnate*, you need a body... but it doesn't have to be the original creature's body. To cast this spell, you need a piece of a body that you want the SPIRIT to come from and a full and complete body that will be the new vessel for the spirit. The caster would clearly set this up in their ritual to make sure which is which. The vessel is a body that you gather in some way that will be the new body of the spirit, and the spell will put the dead character's soul into this new body.

It never made sense to me how *Reincarnate* worked. A player would roll on a table of some kind to be reincarnated as a RANDOM creature... but... where did that creature come from? Does a random creature get created from nothing? That never made sense to me, so something I think is much cooler is that the body has to be obtained in some way and THAT is the new body. This allows for some player agency in what they come back as, but then also creates a unique problem of how to get this new body. Do they go out and kill someone to have THAT body? Do they go to a cemetery and dig someone up? Keep in mind that villains have access to this spell and could even come back in the bodies of fallen allies if their bodies are not secured. This would make the cemeteries of key figures a heavily guarded place to protect from "body snatchers".

The spell follows the same rules and time windows as the same 5th-level spell of *Raise Dead*, but this is the only resurrection spell that can be upcast at a higher level. If you upcast it to 7th-level, you gain the 10 year time window of *Resurrection*. If you cast it at 9th-level, you gain the 100 year time window of *True Resurrection*. The spell still works the same way mechanically, and needs a piece of a body for the spirit and an entire body for the vessel. You could have the higher level versions of *Reincarnate* also regenerate the vessel body and make sure it's fully functional. Maybe the vessel's body is damaged in some way, and the upcast spell would still fully restore the body.

RAISE DEAD

This modification feels very reasonable to me with players having to be 9th-level to cast it. A tweak that I use is that you have 1 day to cast the spell for it to be "normal", but each day after increases the Resurrection DC by 1 up to a maximum of 10 days, then it's no longer possible to revive someone with this spell.

RESURRECTION

This, in my mind, is the "baseline" for resurrection (how fitting right?). I see *Raise Dead* as a slightly weaker version and *True Resurrection* as the more powerful version. You're able to have more time with this one, less penalties, and you don't even need a full body anymore. All you need is 51% of the body and the spell will regenerate the rest. You have no penalties within 10 days, and each chunk of 10 days increases the Resurrection DC by 1 up to a maximum of 100 days, then it is no longer possible.

TRUE RESURRECTION

This is the "holy grail" of resurrection magic! This has the longest duration of 10 years at its base level. I have a homebrew where I lower the Resurrection DC by 5 when using *True Resurrection*. Every 10 years that pass increases the DC by 1 up to a maximum of 100 years (at 100 years there would be a +10 to the Resurrection DC). There being a limit on the time window here gives a closure to death, and once a certain time is passed, that creature can no longer be revived. There is another rule called Spirit Tether that I implement if I want to push the limits on this.

SPIRIT TETHER

You can implement this system into your game in a number of ways. It can be a potion, herb, material component, enchantment, or even a cantrip that extends the window of time a creature can be revived. Spirit Tether's effectiveness can change depending on the situation or when used in conjunction with the 5 resurrection spells themselves. You can create potion effects or spell effects that increase how long a creature has to be revived by 10 rounds, 10 days, 10 years, 100 years, or more. This mechanic in your world creates a very unique resource that can lengthen the window of time a creature can be revived.

You need to use a Spirit Tether on a body that's spirit has not left yet. You cannot "turn back time" with this material. If 12 days have already passed, that means you could no longer use *Revivify*, *Raise Dead*, or *Reincarnate* since their maximum windows have already been passed. But if you were to have an ally fall in combat and used a Spirit Tether potion, cantrip, or magic item on them within 1 round, you could now extend that duration and keep the soul RIGHT THERE and still be able to use *Revivify* even after 1 minute has passed. You can allow players to extend these windows as long as you would like based on how difficult you want this to be.

This is why I have strict windows that each of the 5 resurrection spells can follow, because THIS mechanic allows those to be extended in some way. Maybe effects like this need a unique herb called a Spirit Root that has to be used to make the potion, or is consumed when casting a spell, and this resource is heavily regulated in your world. It can be heavily fought over by both good and bad guys to extend the window to bring back their fallen heroes.

SCARCE RESOURCE

If you don't want to limit the resurrection spells you can target the spell components instead. If you want resurrecting someone to be more difficult, just make it harder to find the spell components required to cast resurrection spells. Instead of a generic diamond, it has to be an extremely rare "Black Diamond" or a specific type of herb that must be consumed in the casting of the spell. The availability of this material is regulated by you, so maybe it's widely available in some locations and not in others. Maybe the villains of your world have a huge supply and the good guys don't have ANY. The party can go on quests to obtain this material, or use it wisely when they do have it! Think about how the availability of this resource could affect your world.



RESURRECTION SIDE EFFECTS

We have implemented rules for restrictions BEFORE casting a spell to revive someone, then a Resurrection Challenge System to use DURING resurrection, now let's think about what happens AFTER. These are side effects that can happen after a creature is brought back from the dead.

SOUL PINNING

Each character that resurrects another character can only do so ONCE. The process of bringing someone back from the dead requires the caster to use a part of their own soul to help PIN the spirit of the dead character back into their body. If the same character dies again, the same caster can not cast a resurrection spell on them, or it fails immediately.

DC Tip: I've had a player barter with their character's OWN life to bypass this restriction... and I allowed them to make that sacrifice... so epic!

BODY DISAPPEARING UPON REVIVAL

A character dies and loses their right arm in battle and the party recovers the body, but the arm is left behind. A crazed necromancer finds the arm and holds onto it for some creepy ritual magic they could perform. Let's say the dead character is brought back with *Resurrection* and their body is restored to new once the revival happens. Any remaining body parts vanish upon the revival of the original body. This means that the right arm that was chopped off now disappears since the original body has now been restored.

CONTINGENT RESURRECTION

A character is resurrected, but with a condition. This can be anything, and heavily depends on how they were resurrected. Was a Warlock's evil patron involved and now they have to take a level in Warlock on their next level up to follow the pact they made? Are they brought back for a specific purpose and they now must go accomplish a quest of some kind? Maybe they die after the quest is complete, or possibly they've proven themselves and are allowed to live. Maybe there is a condition that they must never steal again (or some other deed), and if they do, they immediately die on the spot. These can be very interesting ways to add a twist to a character coming back to life.

CONSEQUENCES OF RESURRECTION

When you die, something happens to you. You come back... but you are changed somehow. This table can be used along with the Lingered Injuries Table (see page 207) as something that happens when you are brought back that leaves you a little different than you were before. For physical issues, use the Lingered Injuries and Physical Stress Tables. For mental issues, use the Madness & Terror Table or Mental Stress Table, but for death specific consequences that have a little twist to them, use this d20 Resurrection Consequences Table.

You could also only use these consequences when using lower level spells, causing you to roll on the table. *Revivify* makes you roll twice and *Raise Dead* makes you roll once. You can have the spell that was cast play as big or as small of a role as you want. These effects don't have to be permanent, and the process of recovery can be as long as you want. It can be a new permanent thing for the character to overcome or something that lasts for just one session. The choice is yours.

RESURRECTION CONSEQUENCES TABLE (D20)

1	Your soul goes into the next closest dead body.	11	You are now vulnerable to the damage type that killed you.
2	You are now in debt to a Celestial or a Fiend (do you know which?).	12	One of your eyes is now milky-white and you cannot see out of it (or this eye can see into the Ethereal Plane).
3	Your memory is affected and you forget some events chosen by the GM (could also forget languages, skills, or class features).	13	You have memory loss regarding a part of your background and now forget one NPC of the GM's choice.
4	You can now see ghosts on the Ethereal Plane, if there are any near you.	14	Food no longer tastes good, and you barely need any to survive.
5	Normal animals feel uneasy around you and avoid you at all costs.	15	Your eyes are a strange new color (or just gray).
6	You can hear a voice calling your name off in the distance... but for what?	16	You immediately become Frightened if similar circumstances or creatures to how you were killed are around you.
7	Your body is always cold to the touch... are you still dead?	17	You now are uneasy and have difficulty killing living creatures now that you know what death was like.
8	Roll a d6 (1 is Strength, 2 is Dexterity, and so on). That stat is reduced down to 4, slowly recovering over time.	18	You take a level in either Warlock, Cleric, or Paladin to better serve a deity of some kind that you think had a hand in bringing you back.
9	Your legs are stiff and hard to move (your speed is reduced by 10ft).	19	If you drop below 1/2 your HP maximum you must succeed on a Wisdom Save or become Frightened, having flashbacks of your death.
10	You pick up a Madness condition (see the Madness & Terror Table on page 208).	20	Nothing happens.



GLOSSARY

4-Way Defense Challenge: (pg. 59) A Mass Combat Skill Challenge where the party has to defend 4 zones, each requiring its own Skill Challenge to determine the difficulty of the subsequent combat.

5ft Step: (pg. 147) Spending all of your movement to move 5ft without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

Action Attunements: (pg. 23) Using an Action to attune to an item.

ADV & DisADV Stacking: (pg. 17) Multiple sources of ADV or DisADV stack together with a +2 or -2 modifier for each instance.

Adversity Check: (pg. 81) A Check made to see how a character reacts to certain situations, utilizing the Adversity Die.

Adversity Die: (pg. 81) A die representing the strength of a character's mental preparedness, well-being, and resolve.

Adversity System: (pg. 81) A system indicating the central struggle in a PC's life utilizing an Adversity Die.

Aid Ally: (pg. 44) An Action you can take within a Skill Challenge to attempt to aid another PC.

Air Tax: (pg. 13) Checks and Saves made to avoid losing air due to strenuous circumstances.

Armor Properties: (pg. 166) Armor properties interact with game mechanics that grant special bonuses or penalties when wearing armor of that type. Armor properties include: Bulky, Decorative, Endure, Ergonomic, Muffled, Pocketed, Quick-release, and Weighted.

Armor Reduction Value: (pg. 168) An Attack with a result that scores within your EC/AC Range deals reduced damage determined by your Armor Reduction Value (AR).

Army: (pg. 178) One side in a Battle. An Army is made up of the Units on its side.

Battle: (pg. 178) A Battle represents a combat encounter between warring Combat Units or Armies.

Bleeding: (pg. 147) A condition that makes the creature suffer 1d4 Necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns until it regains at least 1 HP.

Blocks of Downtime: (pg. 140) Sections of Downtime that the GM separates into chunks of time.

Bloodied: (pg. 147) A condition that applies to a creature below 1/2 its HP maximum. A creature below 1/4 its HP maximum is considered Well-Bloodied.

Bonus Level Up Perks: (pg. 20) Extra features given to PCs when they level up or at specific story beats.

Challenge DCs: (pg. 38) New types of DCs that potentially require multiple Checks to beat and resolve, such as Contest DCs, Group DCs, Depreciation DCs, Erosion DCs, and Conflict Contests.

Challenge Mode Armor System: (pg. 167) A system that utilizes Evasion Class (EC), Armor Reduction (AR), and Armor Class (AC).

Chase Points: (pg. 54) Points you use to do things during a Chase Scene.

Chase Scene: (pg. 53) An encounter that involves 2 or more creatures in a chase, where at least 1 creature is attempting to flee to safety while being pursued by at least 1 other creature.

Checkpoint Challenge: (pg. 52) A challenge that requires the players to make multiple Checks where each success signifies moving to the next Checkpoint and a certain number of Checkpoints are required to accomplish something.

Combat Breath Save: (pg. 13) A Save made in order to avoid falling Unconscious while having no air left.

Combat Skill Challenges: (pg. 47) Skill Challenges that occur within combat where each failure has a negative consequence.

Combat Unit: (pg. 178) A group of non-key NPCs (or creatures) that work in unison on the battlefield.

Combat Unit Experience Level: (pg. 179) How trained the Unit is within their Unit Battle Type. The 4 Experience Levels are: Untrained, Skilled, Veteran, and Elite.

Complete Resist: (pg. 150) Resistance against ALL types of damage.

Complication: (pg. 53) In a Chase Scene, a Setback or obstacle of some kind that slows down Participants in the Chase Scene.

Compounded Flanking: (pg. 154) Each additional hostile creature beyond the Occupancy Score within 5ft gains an additional +2 bonus to its Attacks.

Contest DC: (pg. 38) When a creature makes a Check to do something and their result becomes the DC to contest what they've done.

Cosmic Resist: (pg. 150) Resistance against Radiant and Necrotic damage.

Coup De Grace: (pg. 161) As an Action, you may attempt a killing blow against a Paralyzed, Petrified, Stunned, Surprised, or Unconscious creature with at least 1 HP.

Damage Resist X: (pg. 150) Damage of the specified type is reduced by an amount equal to the bonus.

Dangerous Activity: (pg. 124) Any activity that causes extreme injury or stress, such as engaging in combat with a hostile creature.

Dazed: (pg. 147) A condition that applies DisADV on Attacks, Checks, and Saves that use Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.

Defense: (pg. 147) Certain effects can alter a creature's AC by strengthening or weakening its defenses against attackers. Defense is measured in levels.

Depreciation DC: (pg. 40) A DC that lowers whenever a creature succeeds on it.

Difficulty Thresholds XP: (pg. 24) Award XP based on difficulty of encounter and character level instead of monster CR.

Disposition: (pg. 62) An NPC's attitude towards a PC categorized in 5 stages: Enemy, Unfriendly, Neutral, Friendly, Ally.

Disposition Check DCs: (pg. 63) The DC of this Check is determined by the NPC's Disposition toward the PC and whether or not they will benefit from helping the PC.

Doomed X: (pg. 147) A condition under which a creature automatically suffers X amount of Death Save failures that persist until it either removes this condition or reaches 3 failed Death Saves and dies.

Downtime: (pg. 130) Downtime is when your PCs are given a period of time to accomplish whatever tasks they desire on their own or in groups.

Downtime Check: (pg. 140) A Skill Check that best fits the Task a PC is trying to accomplish during Downtime.

Dynamic DC: (pg. 47) DC that can change throughout the Skill Challenge.

EC/AC Range: (pg. 167) This is the range of numbers determined by your Evasion Class and Armor Class.

Elemental Resist: (pg. 150) Resistance against Fire, Lightning, and Cold damage.

Equipment Slots: (pg. 22) Characters can equip 1 item in each Equipment Slot.

Erosion DC: (pg. 40) A DC that lowers when a creature succeeds on it, by an amount equal to the difference between the DC and the result. The task is complete once the DC is set to 0 in this way.

Erosion Resist: (pg. 150) Resistance against Acid, Poison, and Necrotic damage.

Escape Check: (pg. 54) In a Chase Scene, when the Quarry gets far enough away, they make this Check to try to get away and end the chase on a success.

Evasion Class: (pg. 167) Your Evasion Class (EC) is used to determine if an Attack hits you or not. An Attack with a result below your Evasion Class misses you, dealing no damage unless otherwise stated.

Fate Roll: (pg. 17) A Flat d20 roll made to decide the outcome of a given situation.

Flashback Sequence: (pg. 79) This is when you temporarily go back in time to play out a scene from the past.

Flat Ability Check: (pg. 42) A d20 roll adding a specific Ability Score Modifier.

Forced March: (pg. 100) Traveling beyond 8 hours in one day, which can cause Exhaustion.

Full Rest: (pg. 126) A 24hr or longer period (determined by the GM based on the pacing of the story). It must be spent in an area of safety, such as an inn, where you can eat well, rest, and recover.

Guard Points: (pg. 165) A PC can spend their movement to gain 1 or more Guard Points which they can use to perform special actions determined by the type of armor they are wearing, if any.

Glancing Blow: (pg. 152) Hitting exactly the creature's AC results in half damage.

Glancing Blow AC Range: (pg. 152) A creature has a range of numbers that represent its AC. Any attack that lands on or within this number is a Glancing Blow and deals half damage instead.

Gradual Petrification: (pg. 148) A condition that subjects the creature to different stages of Petrification based on the outcome of the Save.

Group DC: (pg. 39) A DC that multiple creatures can attempt a Check against, totaling each of their individual results to succeed.

Half Rest: (pg. 125) Variant resting rule that allows you to take a 4hr rest called a Half Rest, which is half the length of a Long Rest.

Held Turn: (pg. 145) Ability to hold entire turns until after another creature's turn (setting new place within the Initiative order).

Help Check: (pg. 16) Checks made in order to perform the Help Action.

Help Dice: (pg. 16) When you take the Help Action, you roll a d10 and add the result to the aided creature's next Ability Check or Attack.

Heroic Inspiration: (pg. 33) Inspiration Points that can be saved up and spent in varying amounts on specific powers.

Hit Dice Erosion: (pg. 127) Temporary reduction of maximum number of Hit Dice.

I Have Just the Thing: (pg. 30) PC says they have an item that they currently don't have, but explains a "flashback" where they could have obtained it from a person or place that they visited somewhat recently.

I Know Someone: (pg. 30) PC says that they know someone who can help with a current issue the party is having.

Immobile Target Penalties: (pg. 150) When a creature can't move at all, it doesn't add its Dexterity Modifier to its Dexterity Saves or to its AC.

Impaired: (pg. 147) A condition that applies DisADV on Attacks, Checks, and Saves that use Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution.

Influence Points: (pg. 65) A grading system for determining the shifts in an NPC's Disposition.

Interaction Action: (pg. 146) Making a Check to analyze the surroundings or interact with something in the world without using an Action.

Just as I Planned: (pg. 30) PC says they had made preparations beforehand to benefit them in their current situation.

Known DC: (pg. 47) When the DC of the Skill Challenge is known by the players.

Lead Pursuer: (pg. 53) In a Chase Scene, the Pursuer who is currently closest to the Quarry.

Leveled Healing Potion: (pg. 15) A healing potion with an assigned number of d6 that allows players to add their Con Mod to each die rolled.

Light Activity: (pg. 124) Non-strenuous activity that requires little effort, such as talking, reading, eating, bandaging wounds, and standing watch.

Lingering Injuries: (pg. 205) A mechanical effect that represents a lasting and nasty injury received during combat or other dangerous situations.

Long Rest Meal Ticket: (pg. 92) A PC must expend a ration to gain the benefits of a Long Rest.

Lost Roll: (pg. 106) A Flat d20 roll that determines if anyone gets lost or not.

Macro Initiative: (pg. 184) Each Unit Battle Type has a specific place within the Macro Initiative Order.

Magic Resist: (pg. 150) Resistance against spell damage.

Marching Order: (pg. 100) The formation the party is traveling in, and the position of each party member in a line from front to back.

Martial Action: (pg. 156) Martial classes or characters that have proficiency with martial weapons gain enhanced versions of the Dash, Disengage, Dodge, and Help Actions, while still maintaining an active combat presence.

Martial Bonus Action: (pg. 158) Special Bonus Actions that you can take to gain offensive or defensive advantages in combat.

Martial Contest: (pg. 158) Special maneuvers resolved by contested Checks between opposing creatures.

Martial Expertise: (pg. 156) Upon gaining Extra Attack, you can add your Ability Modifier to the damage of Attacks made using Martial Actions.

Martial Special Attack: (pg. 156) When you make an Attack or hit with an Attack, you can choose to make it a Special Attack by forgoing additional Attacks.

Mass Combat: (pg. 178) Combat on a large scale, generally involving armies, that are difficult to manage using normal combat rules.

Mass Combat Skill Challenge: (pg. 57) A Skill Challenge to present the cinematic challenge of a massive combat.

Mental Stress: (pg. 202) An effect that can be applied to a character, NPC, or monster after something extremely mentally stressful happens.

Micro Initiative: (pg. 184) Units that share a Battle Type roll Initiative using normal Initiative rules for Combat.

Minor Damage Vulnerability: (pg. 151) Damage vulnerability that increases damage dealt by 50% instead of 100%.

Morale Check: (pg. 185) When a Unit suffers a heavy loss, an overwhelming enemy force rallies against them, or imminent death seems certain the GM can call for a Morale Check, which is a Charisma Save.

No Activity: (pg. 124) Sleeping, meditating, or contemplating while idle.

Occupancy Score: (pg. 153) A score that represents how many enemies at a time a single creature can handle within 5ft of them before becoming flanked.

One Round Defense Challenge: (pg. 57) A type of Mass Combat Skill Challenge that has the goal of defending a specific location.

One Round Skill Challenge: (pg. 51) A Skill Challenge shortened to 1 round, where each participant makes 1 Check and the result is determined by the number of successes vs failures.

Overwhelmed X: (pg. 147) A condition under which a creature gains a penalty of X on all Attacks, Checks, and Saves that it makes.

Paired Travel Check: (pg. 111) Checks made back to back by 2 different PCs in different travel roles. The first Check influences the subsequent one, and the second Check determines the outcome of the situation.

Participant: (pg. 53) In a Chase Scene, either a Quarry or a Pursuer (can be multiple of each and PCs could be on either end of this chase).

Periods of Downtime: (pg. 140) The full length of Downtime as a whole.

Physical Resist: (pg. 150) Resistance against Slashing, Piercing, and Bludgeoning damage.

Physical Stress: (pg. 202) An effect that can be applied to a character, NPC, or monster after something extremely physically stressful happens.

Player Led Inspiration: (pg. 29) Inspiration players give to each other, rather than being given by the GM.

Primary Save: (pg. 19) Dexterity, Constitution, and Wisdom Saves.

Profession Check: (pg. 47) A Check made based on your profession, usually using a Tool you are proficient with.

Pursuer: (pg. 53) In a Chase Scene, a creature that is in pursuit of the Quarry and chasing after them.

Quality Time Check: (pg. 85) During periods of rest or Downtime, when two PCs have a moment together, one player can make a Quality Time Check.

Quarry: (pg. 53) A creature that is running away from a Pursuer in a Chase Scene.

Quick Rest: (pg. 124) A period of Light Activity at least 10 minutes long.

Reckless Action: (pg. 159) These are special Actions you can take in combat to inflict bonus penalties on the target if you succeed on the appropriate Checks or Contests, or if certain conditions are met.

Recovery: (pg. 204) Various story elements or Checks needed to recover from a Physical or Mental Stress effect.

Reputation System: (pg. 66) A system for measuring a certain faction's or individual's attitude towards the PCs.

Resist Temp HP X: (pg. 151) Temp HP against a certain damage type.

Rest Role: (pg. 128) A position or activity a PC can fulfill during a rest to gain special benefits which include: Alchemist, Appraiser, Cartographer, Cook, Crafter, Entertainer, Forager, Idle, Lookout, Medic, Mentor, Poisoner, Quartermaster, and Refuge.

Resurrection Challenge: (pg. 214) A series of Skill Checks performed by PCs or NPCs in order to successfully revive a dead ally.

Resurrection DC: (pg. 214) DC for a Resurrection Challenge, and is generally $8 + (\text{Number of deaths} \times 2)$.

Resurrection Offering: (pg. 214) A roleplay moment where a PC attempts to aid in a Resurrection Challenge, resulting in the subsequent Skill Check affecting the Resurrection DC.

Role Based Travel Check: (pg. 110) Checks made based on your Travel Role that have an outcome on traveling.

Roleplay Travel Check: (pg. 112) A Travel Check that has no mechanical consequence, and simply impacts roleplay.

Round Resist X: (pg. 151) Time-limited damage resistance.

Safe Haven: (pg. 53) In a Chase Scene, the destination of the Quarry (usually some sort of base or hideout).

Scaling Resist X: (pg. 150) Leveled scaling damage resistance.

Secondary Save: (pg. 19) Strength, Intelligence, and Charisma Saves.

Secret DC: (pg. 47) When the DC of the Skill Challenge isn't revealed to the players.

Secret Roll: (pg. 76) When the GM asks a player to roll a d20 without telling them what Skill Modifier to use, in order to maintain immersion and avoid metagaming.

Setback (Player): (pg. 29) A self-imposed disadvantage taken by a player to grant themselves future inspiration.

Setback (Travel): (pg. 102) An event that slows travel down in some way.

Shared Fall Damage: (pg. 14) When a creature falls onto another creature.

Shield Block: (pg. 158) While wielding a shield, when you are hit by an Attack that deals damage, you can use a Reaction to raise your shield against that Attack. You gain a bonus to your Armor Reduction value equal to the AC bonus that the shield grants you.

Shield Properties: (pg. 171) Shield properties interact with game mechanics that grant special bonuses or penalties when wielding shields of that type. Shield properties include: Bulky, Deployable, Defensive, Deflecting, Mounted Defense, Offensive, Protective, Shield Wall, Stable, and Thrown.

Shortcut: (pg. 102) An event that speeds travel up in some way.

Skill Challenge: (pg. 42) A challenge set up in rounds that has players make Checks each round, attempting to reach a specified number of successes before 3 failures.

Solo Unit: (pg. 178) A PC or Key NPC acting alone on the battlefield.

Special Weapons: (pg. 164) These weapons have unique weapon properties that are not shared by other weapons. Special weapons include: Blowgun, Bolas, Boomerang, Climbing Pick, Dart or Throwing Star, Greatbow, Lance, Light Ballista, Net, and Rapier.

Spell Check: (pg. 173) $d20 + \text{Spellcasting Ability Modifier} + \text{Prof. Bonus}$.

Spell Duel: (pg. 175) When another creature that you can see begins casting a spell, you can use your Reaction to attempt to counter their spell with a spell of your own.

Spell Misfire: (pg. 176) When you cast a spell and get Spell Misfire something bad happens with the spell that is an unintended and negative result.

Spellcasting Ability Check: (pg. 173) $d20 + \text{Spellcasting Ability Modifier}$ ONLY.

Squares: (pg. 179) A measure of distance (usually in 30ft increments) used in Mass Combat.

Staggered: (pg. 147) A condition under which a creature becomes vulnerable to damage for 1 round.

Static DC: (pg. 47) DC that stays the same throughout the Skill Challenge.

Stones: (pg. 93) A simple form of measurement for carrying capacity and encumbrance.

Strenuous Activity: (pg. 124) Any activity that requires physical exertion, such as traveling, foraging, exercising, training, or casting spells.

Stressful Event: (pg. 202) An event that can trigger a roll or a specific effect on a Mental or Physical Stress Table.

Structure: (pg. 178) A Structure represents a defensible building, tower, fort, or castle.

Suffocation: (pg. 155) A creature can hold its breath for a number of minutes equal to $1 + \text{its Constitution Modifier}$ (minimum of 30 seconds).

Supply Check: (pg. 90) A Check made by rolling the Supply Die, which determines if supplies decrease or not.

Supply Die: (pg. 90) A die (ranging from a d4 to d12) that represents the amount of supplies the group has.

Tandem Turn: (pg. 145) When players with the same Initiative score take their turns at the same time.

Targeted Attack: (pg. 159) You can make an Attack targeting a specific area on a creature to attempt to gain a bonus effect in addition to your normal damage.

Task: (pg. 140) Something PCs are trying to accomplish during Downtime. This can be anything from learning a Skill, crafting an item, or going on a quest.

Tension Dice: (pg. 87) A pool of dice that build up in the center of the table that represent the growing feeling of dread from something bad that is about to happen.

Terminal Velocity Damage: (pg. 14) An escalating falling damage amplification.

That Reminds Me: (pg. 30) PC says they remember something about a topic and briefly describes how they possibly know about it.

The GM Deal: (pg. 78) When a player offers up some kind of resource to the GM in order to ask for something in return.

Thematic Progression: (pg. 74) A character only earns a class feature, feat, or any other ability if it makes sense based on the actions of that character leading up to that moment.

Trading Down: (pg. 147) Using an Action to perform a Bonus Action.

Travel Check: (pg. 106) Used to cover a variety of different travel related challenges that arise during a journey.

Travel DC: (pg. 99) Represents the difficulty of traveling from one specific place to another and is used for navigation, staying on course, avoiding danger, and other travel activities.

Travel Role: (pg. 108) A job you take when traveling to determine how you help the group, such as Navigator, Scout, or Defender.

Unit (Chase Scene): (pg. 53) In a Chase Scene, a measurement of distance between Participants in the Chase Scene. These can be any distance you want to match the scale of the chase but the default distance is 30ft.

Unit (Mass Combat): (pg. 178) A significant participant in a Battle made up of one or more creatures.

Unit Battle Type: (pg. 178) The type of troops in the Combat Unit: Scout, Infantry, Archery, Caster, Cavalry, and Siege.

Unit Class Type: (pg. 178) The types of troops based on the classes in the game.

Unit Creature Type: (pg. 178) The types of creatures in the Combat Unit.

Unit Initiative Order: (pg. 184) Units in Mass Combat have two types of Initiative scores that are used to determine their order in Battle.

Unit Save DC: (pg. 186) A Combat Unit's Unit Save DC equals 11 + its Prof. Bonus.

Variant Initiative Check: (pg. 146) Using different Skill Checks instead of a Dex Check for Initiative (if circumstances allow).

Weakened Ability X: (pg. 147) A condition under which a creature gains a penalty of X on Attacks, Checks, and Saves it makes with the affected Ability.

Wealth Tier: (pg. 95) An estimate for how much gold you have, allowing you to easily buy things below your bracket, and can be affected by the gain or loss of gold.

Weapon Properties: (pg. 164) Weapon properties interact with game mechanics that grant special bonuses or penalties when wielding weapons of that type. Weapon properties include: Ammunition, Aquatic, Concealable, Ensnaring, Heavy, Light, Range, Reach, Reload, Special (see Special Weapons), Thrown, Two-Handed, Unwieldy, and Versatile.

Weapon Styles: (pg. 165) A PC can gain proficiency with wielding certain types of weapons that grant special benefits. These types of weapons are categorized into Weapon Styles, which include: Axe, Bow, Chained, Crossbow, hammer, Puncture, Staff, Sword, Thrust, Unarmed, and Whip.

Wounded X Condition: (pg. 211) When a PC is reduced to 0 HP, they immediately suffer a number of Death Save failures equal to the value of their Wounded Condition.

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