12 Gamemastering

A soulless moon shone down upon the jagged coast, its pale light making the autumn wind's icy claws all the more chilling. Rising like some grim lighthouse, the old mansion teetered upon the cliff, the groans of its moldering timbers barely muffled by the crashing of waves upon the rocks below. Leaves rustled in the shadows, as did a faint scraping in the night beyond. Suddenly, an ominous light flickered to life high in one window. The villagers' tales said that the masters of the house were long dead, but perhaps they had once again returned home.

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It's one thing to play a character on an adventure. It's quite another to run the adventure as a Game Master. It's a lot more work, sure, but it can be a lot more rewarding to create an entire world for your friends to explore.

But what exactly *is* a Game Master?

Storyteller: First and foremost, the Game Master is a storyteller. He presents the world and its characters to the players of the game, and it is through the GM that the players interact with them. The Game Master must be able to craft stories and to translate them into a verbal medium.

Entertainer: A Game Master must also be a master at improvisation. He has to be ready to handle anything that his players want to do, to resolve situations and issue rulings quickly enough to keep the pace of the game going at an entertaining clip. A Game Master is on stage, and his players are his audience.

Judge: The Game Master must be the arbiter of everything that occurs in the game. All rule books, including this one, are his tools, but his word is the law. He must not antagonize the players or work to impede their ability to enjoy the game, yet neither should he favor them and coddle them. He should be impartial, fair, and consistent in his administration of the rules.

Inventor: The Game Master's job does not end when the game session does. He must be an inventor as well. By creating NPCs, plots, magic items, spells, worlds, deities, monsters, and everything else, he propels his game's evolution forward, constantly elevating his campaign into something greater.

Player: Just because he's playing dozens of characters during the course of a session doesn't make him any less a player than the others who sit at the table.

STARTING A CAMPAIGN

Before you run a game, you need to know what kind of game you'll be running. Whether you write out the plans for the coming session in a dozen notebooks, scribble down ideas and key NPC stat blocks on a bunch of sticky notes or your computer, or just have a vague idea of a plot and a few names in your head, you'll need to prepare parts of your adventure before the game begins. Some GMs enjoy the challenge of presenting a "sandbox" for the players to explore at their whim, but even then you need to know what kind of things are in that sandbox for the PCs to encounter. And as a general rule, everything you can prepare before the game begins will save you time making decisions during the game. Even more important, preparation beforehand allows you to maintain consistency—few things ruin the suspension of disbelief more for a group of discerning players than having the Game Master call the local innkeeper "Radimus" one session and "Penelope" the next. Preparing for your

adventure beforehand can help you maintain innkeeper gender identities and so much more!

Of course, the backbone of any campaign is the adventures that comprise it, be they an intricately connected series of plots and storylines or an open-ended sandbox of possibility. But where do these adventures come from? There are, essentially, two sources for adventures. You can build your own from scratch, or you can run a published adventure. Both options have different pros and cons, and you certainly don't have to limit yourself to only one choice for the duration of a campaign.

PUBLISHED ADVENTURES

Published adventures are your friend. As a Game Master, you're going to be spending a lot of time as it is preparing for games—and when you don't have time to come up with an adventure, a published adventure can be a godsend. By studying how published adventures are put together, you can hone your own adventure-creating skills. And by running a published adventure for your group, you leave the details of invention and creation to the adventure writer, giving you time to focus on the game play itself.

The most important thing to remember when using a published adventure, though, is that the writer of the adventure doesn't know your group the way *you* know your group. If you know your players are particularly paranoid and assume all helpful NPCs are out to get them, then a published adventure about a kindly cleric who's actually a shapechanged demon probably won't work well for your group. Feel free to change published adventures as you see fit, either while you're reading them or during play. If, for example, one of your players has written into his character's backstory that his father was killed by an orc warlord and he became an adventurer to someday get revenge on that orc, go ahead and change the hobgoblin warlord in the adventure into an orc. Adapting adventures to your group and your play style in this manner is an important part of running published adventures, since it customizes the experience to your group and makes it all the more enjoyable.

Paizo Publishing offers a large variety of published adventures in its Pathfinder Modules line and complete campaigns in the form of its monthly Pathfinder Adventure Path installments. To learn more about these valuable GM resources, please visit **paizo.com**.

BUILDING AN ADVENTURE

There are countless ways to build an adventure. The classic method is to simply write everything out beforehand. While this does get everything you need to know about the adventure down on paper, it's an awful lot of work. If you're the only person who'll ever be running the adventure, it's okay to simply outline the plot, draw

a map of the adventure site, create encounters and stat blocks, and have at it. An adventure need not look like much more than a shopping list—you only really need to write down what you can't easily remember come game time.

One important tip to remember about adventure writing—you're not writing a story. The main characters of the adventure should be the players, and they're missing from the tale when you prepare the adventure. Instead, think of the adventure as an outline for a script. You can have an idea in your head of how things will work out, but if you avoid making assumptions about what your characters will do in the adventure and instead just focus on creating the building blocks of the adventure (such as room descriptions, NPC motivations, stat blocks, and the like), you'll be much more capable of reacting to the unexpected when the PCs do their thing.

Whatever you decide to do in your adventure, there are three elements that, if you prepare them beforehand, will save you a lot of time and anguish in the end—stat blocks, encounters, and treasure.

Stat Blocks

One of the most complex parts of the game is the stat block. Every NPC, every monster, and every timid little forest creature in the campaign world has its own stat block. This isn't to say, of course, that you need to generate a stat block for every creature that appears in your adventure, but you should certainly generate stat blocks for all of the important NPCs and monsters with whom you expect the PCs to interact. The *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* provides more than 300 pre-made monster stat blocks for use in adventures, and that's just the beginning—you can use stat blocks from other monster bestiaries or adventures just as easily in your game. One good trick is to copy a stat block onto a 3×5 card or into a small document you can easily bring up on your computer during the game—you can keep these cards and documents forever to reuse them as needed.

Think of stat blocks as shorthand versions of character sheets. For a sample stat block, see page 455 of this book—definitions for the various abbreviations in the stat block can be found on pages 11–13. For a more detailed description of how to read a stat block or additional examples of what a stat block looks like, consult the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*.

Designing Encounters

The heart of any adventure is its encounters. An encounter is any event that puts a specific problem before the PCs that they must solve. Most encounters present combat with monsters or hostile NPCs, but there are many other types—a trapped corridor, a political interaction with a suspicious king, a dangerous passage

Table 12-1: Encounter Design

Difficulty	Challenge Rating Equals...
Easy	APL –1
Average	APL
Challenging	APL +1
Hard	APL +2
Epic	APL +3

over a rickety rope bridge, an awkward argument with a friendly NPC who suspects a PC has betrayed him, or anything that adds drama to the game. Brain-teasing puzzles, roleplaying challenges, and skill checks are all classic methods for resolving encounters, but the most complex encounters to build are the most common ones—combat encounters.

When designing a combat encounter, you first decide what level of challenge you want your PCs to face, then follow the steps outlined below.

Step 1—Determine APL: Determine the average level of your player characters—this is their Average Party Level (APL for short). You should round this value to the nearest whole number (this is one of the few exceptions to the round down rule). Note that these encounter creation guidelines assume a group of four or five PCs. If your group contains six or more players, add one to their average level. If your group contains three or fewer players, subtract one from their average level. For example, if your group consists of six players, two of which are 4th level and four of which are 5th level, their APL is 6th (28 total levels, divided by six players, rounding up, and adding one to the final result).

Step 2—Determine CR: Challenge Rating (or CR) is a convenient number used to indicate the relative danger presented by a monster, trap, hazard, or other encounter—the higher the CR, the more dangerous the encounter. Refer to Table 12–1 to determine the Challenge Rating your group should face, depending on the difficulty of the challenge you want and the group's APL.

Step 3—Build the Encounter: Determine the total XP award for the encounter by looking it up by its CR on Table 12–2. This gives you an "XP budget" for the encounter. Every creature, trap, and hazard is worth an amount of XP determined by its CR, as noted on Table 12–2. To build your encounter, simply add creatures, traps, and hazards whose combined XP does not exceed the total XP budget for your encounter. It's easiest to add the highest CR challenges to the encounter first, filling out the remaining total with lesser challenges.

For example, let's say you want your group of six 8th-level PCs to face a challenging encounter against a group of gargoyles (each CR 4) and their stone giant boss (CR 8). The PCs have an APL of 9, and table 12–1 tells you that a challenging encounter for your APL 9

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TABLE 12-2: EXPERIENCE POINT AWARDS

CR	Total XP	Individual XP 1–3	Individual XP 4–5	Individual XP 6+
1/8	50	15	15	10
1/6	65	20	15	10
1/4	100	35	25	15
1/3	135	45	35	25
1/2	200	65	50	35
1	400	135	100	65
2	600	200	150	100
3	800	265	200	135
4	1,200	400	300	200
5	1,600	535	400	265
6	2,400	800	600	400
7	3,200	1,070	800	535
8	4,800	1,600	1,200	800
9	6,400	2,130	1,600	1,070
10	9,600	3,200	2,400	1,600
11	12,800	4,270	3,200	2,130
12	19,200	6,400	4,800	3,200
13	25,600	8,530	6,400	4,270
14	38,400	12,800	9,600	6,400
15	51,200	17,100	12,800	8,530
16	76,800	25,600	19,200	12,800
17	102,400	34,100	25,600	17,100
18	153,600	51,200	38,400	25,600
19	204,800	68,300	51,200	34,100
20	307,200	102,000	76,800	51,200
21	409,600	137,000	102,400	68,300
22	614,400	205,000	153,600	102,400
23	819,200	273,000	204,800	137,000
24	1,228,800	410,000	307,200	204,800
25	1,638,400	546,000	409,600	273,000

TABLE 12-3: HIGH CR EQUIVALENCIES

Number of Creatures	Equal to...
1 Creature	CR
2 Creatures	CR +2
3 Creatures	CR +3
4 Creatures	CR +4
6 Creatures	CR +5
8 Creatures	CR +6
12 Creatures	CR +7
16 Creatures	CR +8

group is a CR 10 encounter—worth 9,600 XP according to Table 12–2. At CR 8, the stone giant is worth 4,800 XP, leaving you with another 4,800 points in your XP budget for the gargoyles. Gargoyles are CR 4 each, and thus worth 1,200 XP apiece, meaning that the encounter can support four gargoyles in its XP budget. You could further refine the encounter by including only three gargoyles, leaving you with 1,200 XP to spend on a trio of Small earth elemental servants (at CR 1, each is worth 400 XP) to further aid the stone giant.

Adding NPCs: Creatures whose Hit Dice are solely a factor of their class levels and not a feature of their race, such as all of the PC races detailed in Chapter 2, are factored into combats a little differently than normal monsters or monsters with class levels. A creature that possesses class levels, but does not have any racial Hit Dice, is factored in as a creature with a CR equal to its class levels –1. A creature that only possesses non-player class levels (such as a warrior or adept—see page 448) is factored in as a creature with a CR equal to its class levels –2. If this reduction would reduce a creature's CR to below 1, its CR drops one step on the following progression for each step below 1 this reduction would make: 1/2, 1/3, 1/4, 1/6, 1/8.

High CR Encounters: The XP values for high-CR encounters can seem quite daunting. Table 12–3 provides some simple formulas to help you manage these large numbers. When using a large number of identical creatures, this chart can help simplify the math by combining them into one CR, making it easier to find their total XP value. For example, using this chart, four CR 8 creatures (worth 4,800 XP each) are equivalent to a CR 12 creature (worth 19,200 XP).

Ad Hoc CR Adjustments: While you can adjust a specific monster's CR by advancing it, applying templates, or giving it class levels (rules for all three of these options appear in the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*), you can also adjust an encounter's difficulty by applying ad hoc adjustments to the encounter or creature itself. Listed here are three additional ways you can alter an encounter's difficulty.

Favorable Terrain for the PCs: An encounter against a monster that's out of its favored element (like a yeti encountered in a sweltering cave with lava, or an enormous dragon encountered in a tiny room) gives the PCs an advantage. Build the encounter as normal, but when you award experience for the encounter, do so as if the encounter were one CR lower than its actual CR.

Unfavorable Terrain for the PCs: Monsters are designed with the assumption that they are encountered in their favored terrain—encountering a water-breathing aboleth in an underwater area does not increase the CR for that encounter, even though none of the PCs breathe water. If, on the other hand, the terrain impacts the encounter significantly (such as an encounter against a creature with blindsight in an area that suppresses all light), you can, at your option, increase the effective XP award as if the encounter's CR were one higher.

NPC Gear Adjustments: You can significantly increase or decrease the power level of an NPC with class levels by adjusting the NPC's gear. The combined value of an NPC's

Table 12-4: Character Wealth by Level

PC Level*	Wealth
2	1,000 gp
3	3,000 gp
4	6,000 gp
5	10,500 gp
6	16,000 gp
7	23,500 gp
8	33,000 gp
9	46,000 gp
10	62,000 gp
11	82,000 gp
12	108,000 gp
13	140,000 gp
14	185,000 gp
15	240,000 gp
16	315,000 gp
17	410,000 gp
18	530,000 gp
19	685,000 gp
20	880,000 gp

* For 1st-level PCs, see table 6–1 in Chapter 6.

Table 12-5: Treasure Values per Encounter

Average Party Level	Treasure per Encounter		
	Slow	Medium	Fast
1	170 gp	260 gp	400 gp
2	350 gp	550 gp	800 gp
3	550 gp	800 gp	1,200 gp
4	750 gp	1,150 gp	1,700 gp
5	1,000 gp	1,550 gp	2,300 gp
6	1,350 gp	2,000 gp	3,000 gp
7	1,750 gp	2,600 gp	3,900 gp
8	2,200 gp	3,350 gp	5,000 gp
9	2,850 gp	4,250 gp	6,400 gp
10	3,650 gp	5,450 gp	8,200 gp
11	4,650 gp	7,000 gp	10,500 gp
12	6,000 gp	9,000 gp	13,500 gp
13	7,750 gp	11,600 gp	17,500 gp
14	10,000 gp	15,000 gp	22,000 gp
15	13,000 gp	19,500 gp	29,000 gp
16	16,500 gp	25,000 gp	38,000 gp
17	22,000 gp	32,000 gp	48,000 gp
18	28,000 gp	41,000 gp	62,000 gp
19	35,000 gp	53,000 gp	79,000 gp
20	44,000 gp	67,000 gp	100,000 gp

gear is given in Chapter 14 on Table 14–9. A classed NPC encountered with no gear should have his CR reduced by 1 (provided that loss of gear actually hampers the NPC), while a classed NPC that instead has gear equivalent to that of a PC (as listed on Table 12–4) has a CR of 1 higher than his actual CR. Be careful awarding NPCs this extra gear, though—especially at high levels, where you can blow out your entire adventure's treasure budget in one fell swoop!

Awarding Experience

Pathfinder Roleplaying Game characters advance in level by defeating monsters, overcoming challenges, and completing adventures—in so doing, they earn experience points (XP for short). Although you can award experience points as soon as a challenge is overcome, this can quickly disrupt the flow of game play. It's easier to simply award experience points at the end of a game session—that way, if a character earns enough XP to gain a level, he won't disrupt the game while he levels up his character. He can instead take the time between game sessions to do that.

Keep a list of the CRs of all the monsters, traps, obstacles, and roleplaying encounters the PCs overcome. At the end of each session, award XP to each PC that participated. Each monster, trap, and obstacle awards a set amount of XP, as determined by its CR, regardless of the level of the party in relation to the challenge, although you should never bother awarding XP for challenges that have a CR of 10 or more lower than the APL. Pure roleplaying encounters generally have a CR equal to the average level of the party (although particularly easy or difficult roleplaying encounters might be one higher or lower). There are two methods for awarding XP. While one is more exact, it requires a calculator for ease of use. The other is slightly more abstract.

Exact XP: Once the game session is over, take your list of defeated CR numbers and look up the value of each CR on Table 12–2 under the "Total XP" column. Add up the XP values for each CR and then divide this total by the number of characters—each character earns an amount of XP equal to this number.

Abstract XP: Simply add up the individual XP awards listed for a group of the appropriate size. In this case, the division is done for you—you need only total up all the awards to determine how many XP to award to each PC.

Story Awards: Feel free to award Story Awards when players conclude a major storyline or make an important accomplishment. These awards should be worth double the amount of experience points for a CR equal to the APL. Particularly long or difficult story arcs might award even more, at your discretion as GM.

Placing Treasure

As PCs gain levels, the amount of treasure they carry and use increases as well. The Pathfinder Roleplaying Game assumes that all PCs of equivalent level have roughly equal amounts of treasure and magic items. Since the primary income for a PC derives from treasure and loot gained

from adventuring, it's important to moderate the wealth and hoards you place in your adventures. To aid in placing treasure, the amount of treasure and magic items the PCs receive for their adventures is tied to the Challenge Rating of the encounters they face—the higher an encounter's CR, the more treasure it can award.

Table 12–4 lists the amount of treasure each PC is expected to have at a specific level. Note that this table assumes a standard fantasy game. Low-fantasy games might award only half this value, while high-fantasy games might double the value. It is assumed that some of this treasure is consumed in the course of an adventure (such as potions and scrolls), and that some of the less useful items are sold for half value so more useful gear can be purchased.

Table 12–4 can also be used to budget gear for characters starting above 1st level, such as a new character created to replace a dead one. Characters should spend no more than half their total wealth on any single item. For a balanced approach, PCs that are built after 1st level should spend no more than 25% of their wealth on weapons, 25% on armor and protective devices, 25% on other magic items, 15% on disposable items like potions, scrolls, and wands, and 10% on ordinary gear and coins. Different character types might spend their wealth differently than these percentages suggest; for example, arcane casters might spend very little on weapons but a great deal more on other magic items and disposable items.

Table 12–5 lists the amount of treasure each encounter should award based on the average level of the PCs and the speed of the campaign's XP progression (slow, medium, or fast). Easy encounters should award treasure one level lower than the PCs' average level. Challenging, hard, and epic encounters should award treasure one, two, or three levels higher than the PCs' average level, respectively. If you are running a low-fantasy game, cut these values in half. If you are running a high-fantasy game, double these values.

Encounters against NPCs typically award three times the treasure a monster-based encounter awards, due to NPC gear. To compensate, make sure the PCs face off against a pair of additional encounters that award little in the way of treasure. Animals, plants, constructs, mindless undead, oozes, and traps are great "low treasure" encounters. Alternatively, if the PCs face a number of creatures with little or no treasure, they should have the opportunity to acquire a number of significantly more valuable objects sometime in the near future to make up for the imbalance. As a general rule, PCs should not own any magic item worth more than half their total character wealth, so make sure to check before awarding expensive magic items.

Building a Treasure Hoard

While it's often enough to simply tell your players they've found 5,000 gp in gems and 10,000 gp in jewelry, it's generally more interesting to give details. Giving treasure a personality can not only help the verisimilitude of your game, but can sometimes trigger new adventures. The information on the following pages can help you randomly determine types of additional treasure—suggested values are given for many of the objects, but feel free to assign values to the objects as you see fit. It's easiest to place the expensive items first—if you wish, you can even randomly roll magic items, using the tables in Chapter 15, to determine what sort of items are present in the hoard. Once you've consumed a sizable portion of the hoard's value, the remainder can simply be loose coins or nonmagical treasure with values arbitrarily assigned as you see fit.

Coins: Coins in a treasure hoard can consist of copper, silver, gold, and platinum pieces—silver and gold are the most common, but you can divide the coinage as you wish. Coins and their value relative to each other are described at the start of Chapter 6.

Gems: Although you can assign any value to a gemstone, some are inherently more valuable than others. Use the value categories below (and their associated gemstones) as guidelines when assigning values to gemstones.

Low-Quality Gems (10 gp): agates; azurite; blue quartz; hematite; lapis lazuli; malachite; obsidian; rhodochrosite; tigereye; turquoise; freshwater (irregular) pearl

Semi-Precious Gems (50 gp): bloodstone; carnelian; chalcedony; chrysoprase; citrine; jasper; moonstone; onyx; peridot; rock crystal (clear quartz); sard; sardonyx; rose, smoky, or star rose quartz; zircon

Medium Quality Gemstones (100 gp): amber; amethyst; chrysoberyl; coral; red or brown-green garnet; jade; jet; white, golden, pink, or silver pearl; red, red-brown, or deep green spinel; tourmaline

High Quality Gemstones (500 gp): alexandrite; aquamarine; violet garnet; black pearl; deep blue spinel; golden yellow topaz

Jewels (1,000 gp): emerald; white, black, or fire opal; blue sapphire; fiery yellow or rich purple corundum; blue or black star sapphire

Grand Jewels (5,000 gp or more): clearest bright green emerald; diamond; jacinth; ruby

Nonmagical Treasures: This expansive category includes jewelry, fine clothing, trade goods, alchemical items, masterwork objects, and more. Unlike gemstones, many of these objects have set values, but you can always increase an object's value by having it be bejeweled or of particularly fine craftsmanship. This increase in cost doesn't grant additional abilities—a gem-encrusted masterwork cold iron scimitar worth 40,000 gp functions the same as a

typical masterwork cold iron scimitar worth the base price of 330 gp. Listed below are numerous examples of several types of nonmagical treasures, along with typical values.

Fine Artwork (100 gp or more): Although some artwork is composed of precious materials, the value of most paintings, sculptures, works of literature, fine clothing, and the like come from their skill and craftsmanship. Artwork is often bulky or cumbersome to move and fragile to boot, making salvage an adventure in and of itself.

Jewelry, Minor (50 gp): This category includes relatively small pieces of jewelry crafted from materials like brass, bronze, copper, ivory, or even exotic woods, sometimes set with tiny or flawed low-quality gems. Minor jewelry includes rings, bracelets, and earrings.

Jewelry, Normal (100–500 gp): Most jewelry is made of silver, gold, jade, or coral, often ornamented with semi-precious or even medium-quality gemstones. Normal jewelry includes all types of minor jewelry plus armbands, necklaces, and brooches.

Jewelry, Precious (500 gp or more): Truly precious jewelry is crafted from gold, mithral, platinum, or similar rare metals. Such objects include normal jewelry types plus crowns, scepters, pendants, and other large items.

Masterwork Tools (100–300 gp): This category includes masterwork weapons, armor, and skill kits—see Chapter 6 for more details and costs for these items.

Mundane Gear (up to 1,000 gp): There are many valuable items of mundane or alchemical nature detailed in Chapter 6 that can be utilized as treasure. Most of the alchemical items are portable and valuable, but other objects like locks, holy symbols, spyglasses, fine wine, or fine clothing work well as interesting bits of treasure. Trade goods can even serve as treasure—10 pounds of saffron, for example, is worth 150 gp.

Treasure Maps and Other Intelligence (variable): Items like treasure maps, deeds to ships and homes, lists of informants or guard rosters, passwords, and the like can also make fun items of treasure—you can set the value of such items at any amount you wish, and often they can serve double-duty as adventure seeds.

Magic Items: Of course, the discovery of a magic item is the true prize for any adventurer. You should take care with the placement of magic items in a hoard—it's generally more satisfying for many players to find a magic item rather than purchase it, so there's no crime in placing items that happen to be those your players can use! An extensive list of magic items (and their costs) is given in Chapter 15.

Although you should generally place items with careful consideration of their likely effects on your campaign, it can be fun and save time to generate magic items in a treasure hoard randomly. You can "purchase" random die rolls of magic items for a treasure hoard at the following prices, subtracting the indicated amount from your treasure budget and then rolling on the appropriate column on table 15–2 in Chapter 15 to determine what item is in the treasure hoard. Take care with this approach, though! It's easy, through the luck (or unluck) of the dice to bloat your game with too much treasure or deprive it of the same. Random magic item placement should always be tempered with good common sense by the GM.

Magic Item Category	Average Value
Minor Item	1,000 gp
Medium Item	10,000 gp
Major Item	40,000 gp

PREPARING FOR THE GAME

Your job as Game Master begins well before the game session does. Your most important duty before a game is, of course, to prepare for that game. This means reading up on the adventure you'll be running (or perhaps even designing the adventure), preparing any props or handouts you might need to give the PCs, prepping the play area for guests, and so on. In the days leading up to the game, you should resolve any out-of-game issues that your players have—email is a great way to do this, since it creates its own written record you can use to add to your campaign journal (see page 403). This includes helping players level up their characters; answering questions they may have about using non-core rules and supplements for spells, feats, and the like; and providing them with answers to questions they have about the game world.
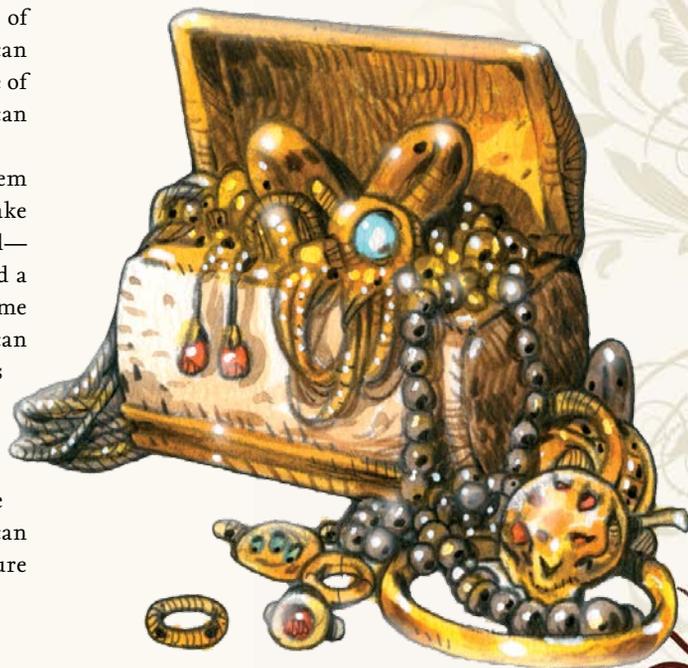
For example, say one of your PCs is searching for his missing sister, who was abducted years ago by a thieves' guild. You can drop in clues about this sister in the game, but between games, the PC might want to spend a few days investigating a lead in the local underworld or at the City Hall of Records. Personal quests like these are a great way for a player to build his character's history and personality, but they can get in the way of gaming when other players are at the table. If you can't afford to spend one-on-one time with players, handling these side-quests via email is a great way to take care of the situation.

You should also ensure that all of the players can make the game, and if not all of them can, decide if the game should be canceled or not. There are few things more frustrating than realizing that half your group can't play, especially if some of the players had to drive a long way to reach the game. If a player is absent, decide what happens to his PC. Can someone else play him? Does he gain experience and treasure as usual?

Make sure that accommodations are met. If your game session's going to last a long time, think about where folks can go for lunch or dinner—if you're planning on providing food, make sure it's ready to go before the game begins. Many tables organize responsibilities among the players—if a GM hosts the game at his house, the players might split up the task of providing drinks, snacks, or meals. Try to use common sense here—while it's tempting to load up with potato chips and soda pop, gaming is no excuse for poor health! Of course, if your home is not the hosting site for the game, that doesn't let you off the hook. You as GM are the organizing force for the gathering—you're technically throwing the party, and it's your responsibility to see that your players have a comfortable, enjoyable place to game, otherwise the game itself will suffer.

DURING THE GAME

The bulk of this book provides the rules you need to adjudicate the game and run things, but there are many other problems and events that can come up that require you to think quickly before they become disruptive. Listed here are several of the more common speed bumps and problems that you'll invariably be called upon to handle during the game.

Cheating and Fudging: We all know that cheating is bad. But sometimes, as a GM, you might find yourself in a situation where cheating might improve the game. We prefer to call this "fudging" rather than cheating, and while you should try to avoid it when you can, you are the law in your world, and you shouldn't feel bound by the dice. A GM should be impartial and fair, and in theory, that's what random dice results help support. Some players have trouble putting trust in their GM, but dice

offer something that's irrefutable and truly non-partisan (as long as the dice aren't doctored or loaded, of course). Still, it's no good if a single roll of the dice would result in a premature end to your campaign, or a character's death when they did everything right.

Likewise, don't feel bound to the predetermined plot of an encounter or the rules as written. Feel free to adjust the results or interpret things creatively—especially in cases where you as the GM made a poor assumption to begin with. For example, you might design an encounter against a band of werewolves, only to realize too late that none of the PCs have silver weapons and therefore can't hurt them. In this case, it's okay to cheat and say that these werewolves are hurt by normal weapons, or to have the town guard (armed with silver arrows) show up at the last minute to save the PCs. As long as you can keep such developments to a minimum, these on-the-spot adjustments can even enhance the game—so the town guard saved the PCs, but now that they have, it can give you leverage over the PCs to send them on their next quest as repayment to the guards!

Divine Intervention: The literary term for it is *deus ex machina*—"god from the machine." This is what happens in a story when a plot device manifests in an unexpected (and usually unsatisfying) way to resolve a story element, typically in a way that renders the actions of the main characters meaningless. Even great authors use *deus ex machina* to resolve stories now and then, so don't be afraid to use it in your game if things are looking grim. The town guard rushing in to save the PCs from the werewolves in the previous paragraph is an excellent example of *deus ex machina*, but so is the old classic of "divine intervention." In this case, the PCs are faced with an impossible situation and you, as the GM, change the situation so that they can now achieve their goals, perhaps after a PC begs for aid from his deity.

You can quantify divine interventions, if you wish, at the start of a campaign. Tell every player that they get a fixed number of interventions during the campaign (it's often best to limit this to just one such intervention). Thereafter, the PC can use this divine intervention to save himself or the party, perhaps by preventing an effect that would otherwise cause a character's death, or to suddenly manifest an escape from a deathtrap. You, as the GM, have full power over how the intervention resolves, of course, so players won't be able to use divine intervention to bypass plot elements you know they can handle—if a player tries this, simply tell him that his request for intervention is denied and that he can save his intervention for when it's truly needed.

GM Fiat: The GM is the law of the game. His reading of the rules should be respected and adhered to. It's easy to get hung up on complicated aspects of the game during play, but the game is never enhanced by long, drawn-out

arguments over these complications between players and GM. When complications involving rules interpretations occur, listen to the player and make the decision as quickly as you can on how to resolve the situation. If the rule in question isn't one you're familiar with, you can go with the player's interpretation but with the knowledge that after the game you'll read up on the rules and, with the next session, will have an official ruling in play. Alternatively, you can simply rule that something works in a way that helps the story move on, despite the most logical or impassioned arguments from the players. Even then, you owe it to your players to spend time after the game researching the rule to make sure your ruling was fair—and if not, make amends the next game as necessary.

One handy rule to keep under your belt is the Fiat Rule—simply grant a player a +2 or a −2 bonus or penalty to a die roll if no one at the table is precisely sure how a situation might be handled by the rules. For example, a character who attempts to trip an iron golem in a room where the floor is magnetized could gain a +2 bonus on his attempt at your discretion, since the magnetic pull exerted by the floor helps pull the golem down.

Handling PC Death: Eventually, through bad luck or bad tactics, a player character is going to die in your game. Other events, such as petrification, paralysis, sleep, and stunning can have a similar effect on the game as PC death, and the following advice should apply to those effects as well.

When a PC dies, his player no longer has any input into the game (unless he has a cohort or other allied NPC he can start playing). That player has to sit at the table quietly, watching and waiting while everyone else continues to have fun with the game. In some cases, the effect is only temporary, with another player able to step in to restore the PC to life (or cure his petrification, remove his paralysis, or whatever), but nevertheless, when a player stops playing the game because his character's been removed from the action, you as a GM have a problem on your hands.

When such an event occurs, keep going with the game; try to resolve the current conflict or combat as quickly as possible so that the players can move on to addressing the problem of their dead ally. If there's no way to restore the dead PC to life and the party needs to retreat to the city to pay for a resurrection, don't delay that event by forcing the PCs to endure additional wandering monsters; just gloss over the return to civilization as best you can so you can get the unlucky player back into the game as quickly as you can. A PC death is often a great time to end the session, in fact, since you can then handle the resurrection details out of game via email.

If the player of a dead character prefers instead to move on to a new character, let him create his new character at the table. In this case, that player need not sit around bored—the act of creating a new character is involving

enough that you can continue to run the game for the surviving PCs, after all. Once the player's new character is done, let the other players take a 5 or 10 minute break while you step aside to talk to the player and learn about his new character, and to work with the player on a way to introduce the new character into the game as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

One other thing that PC death can do is bloat surviving player treasure. If your group simply splits up the dead PC's gear or sells it, the surviving players can become obscenely over-geared for their level. If this doesn't bother you, you should at least work to ensure that the new PC has gear equal in power to that now possessed by the rest of the party. It's usually a much easier solution to simply assume that the old PC's gear goes away, either being buried with his body or sent on to his surviving kin. One pretty handy way to solve the situation is to introduce the player's new character as a prisoner that the PCs rescue, and to have the old PC's gear be given to the new PC to equip him for the remainder of the adventure. Of course, this isn't always a graceful solution, but it can be a good one to keep treasure levels under control until the new PC can sell off parts of his old character's gear to purchase new gear. In this situation, consider letting the PC get full resale value for his gear, since you don't want to penalize him for losing a character by saddling him with half the gear he used to have.

Rolling Dice: Some GMs prefer to roll all of their dice in front of the players, letting the results fall where they may. Others prefer to make all rolls behind a screen, hiding the results from the PCs so that, if they need to, they can fudge the dice results to make the game do what they want. Neither way is the "correct" way; choose whichever you wish, or even mix and match as feels right for you.

The only time you should not reveal the results of a die roll to the player character is when knowledge of the roll's result would give the player knowledge he shouldn't have.

A good example of this is saving throws against effects that the player shouldn't necessarily realize his character has been exposed to (such as a disease or a subtle, long-acting poison).

Troublesome Players: Play the game long enough and eventually you'll find yourself with a troublemaking player—it's just an unfortunate fact of any pastime that involves multiple people interacting in a team-oriented event. To a certain extent, you can rely on other players to help mediate problems with a troublemaker, but sometimes you'll need to step in and ask the player in question to cease his inappropriate behavior. Don't be afraid to ask the troublemaker to leave the game session if he won't correct his behavior after a polite but firm request. If tempers are running hot among multiple players, don't hesitate to call the game session early and break up, giving the players time to cool down and get over the event.

CAMPAIGN TIPS

So now you have an adventure or two ready for your players to experience. While you can certainly keep these adventures as separate entities, and perhaps even have your players make new characters each time you start a new adventure, the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game assumes that your players will keep their same characters as they go from adventure to adventure, growing more powerful as they accumulate experience and treasure.

So, what happens between adventures? What is the world that those adventures take place in? Who lives there, and what do NPCs who don't take part in the adventures do? The answers to these questions and more comprise your world, or setting, and the specific progression of adventures your PCs undertake in this setting is known as a campaign.

Many published campaign settings exist—the *Pathfinder Chronicles Campaign Setting* is the assumed setting for most games that use the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game rules, but it is by no means the only one. Dozens of publishers offer intriguing and detailed settings to choose from—you can even use settings from games that use rules quite different than those presented in this book, or settings that are inspired by or lifted directly from a favorite series of books or movies. But for some, the most rewarding part of being a Game Master is the act of creating your own campaign setting and running it for your players.

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The act of creating a campaign is no less daunting than creating a world. It can quickly become overwhelming, especially when you start to consider all of the areas you'll need to become an expert at. If your world has multiple moons, how does that affect tides? If you choose a specific shape for your main continent, what does that do to trade winds? Where do the deserts go, and where do the swamps go? How many rivers is too many? What impact would a technologically advanced nation of warriors have on the neighboring shamanistic barbarians? Does your world have chocolate and coffee and avocados? What's the tallest mountain in your world, and why is it the tallest? Are there salmon and trout in your world, and if there's not, what do the bears eat instead? If you have a nation modeled on ancient Japan, does that mean you need to learn Japanese in order to name NPCs who live there? Is there gunpowder in your world, and if not, why not? Is the world's core molten? If it's not, how would that impact your world's magnetosphere—would there still be a north pole? How much does a longsword weigh if your campaign world is half the size of Earth? What happens if your campaign world is shaped like a ring?

For these reasons, it's generally best to assume an Earth-like baseline for your first campaign world. Another handy tip is to avoid detailing everything at once. Staying just one step ahead of your players is often all you need to do—if you know that the first adventure they'll be going on is an exploration of an abandoned fort, don't worry about detailing anything but the surrounding 5-mile area, along with, perhaps, a small village for them to start the adventure in. If you know that the second adventure's going to be in a haunted mine in the mountains, you then have as long as it takes the PCs to explore that abandoned fort to detail the area between your first village and the badlands to the east where the mine's located. By creating only what you need to run the next few games, you slowly but surely build a larger whole, while at the same time maintaining your sanity.

Yet still, the lure of building an entire campaign setting is great. In a lot of ways, creating your own world is like an entirely different game in and of itself—a Game Master thus gets to play the game more often than his players, since when the actual session isn't going, the GM gets to design cities and evil temples and nations and dungeons and monsters to his heart's content. The *Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide* provides a wealth of advanced advice and tools you can use to build your campaign world, but the remainder of this chapter covers a number of different topics to aid you. These topics barely scratch the surface of the implications and ideas you'll be facing when creating your own campaign world, but they can get you started.

Cost of Living

An adventurer's primary source of income is treasure, and his primary purchases are tools and items he needs to continue adventuring—spell components, weapons, magic items, potions, and the like. Yet what about things like food? Rent? Taxes? Bribes? Idle purchases?

You can certainly handle these minor expenditures in detail during play, but tracking every time a PC pays for a room, buys water, or pays a gate tax can swiftly become obnoxious and tiresome. If you're not really into tracking these minor costs of living, you can choose to simply ignore these small payments. A more realistic and easier-to-use method is to have PCs pay a recurring cost of living tax. At the start of every game month, a PC must pay an amount of gold equal to the lifestyle bracket he wishes to live in—if he can't afford his desired bracket, he drops down to the first one he can afford.

Destitute (0 gp/month): The PC is homeless and lives in the wilderness or on the streets. A destitute character must track every purchase, and may need to resort to Survival checks or theft to feed himself.

Poor (3 gp/month): The PC lives in common rooms of taverns, with his parents, or in some other communal situation—this is the lifestyle of most untrained laborers and commoners. He need not track purchases of meals or taxes that cost 1 sp or less.

Average (10 gp/month): The PC lives in his own apartment, small house, or similar location—this is the lifestyle of most trained or skilled experts or warriors. He can secure any nonmagical item worth 1 gp or less from his home in 1d10 minutes, and need not track purchases of common meals or taxes that cost 1 gp or less.

Wealthy (100 gp/month): The PC has a sizable home or a nice suite of rooms in a fine inn. He can secure any nonmagical item worth 5 gp or less from his belongings in his home in 1d10 minutes, and need only track purchases of meals or taxes in excess of 10 gp.

Extravagant (1,000 gp/month): The PC lives in a mansion, castle, or other extravagant home—he might even own the building in question. This is the lifestyle of most aristocrats. He can secure any nonmagical item worth 25 gp or less from his belongings in his home in 1d10 minutes. He need only track purchases of meals or taxes in excess of 100 gp.

Monstrous Characters

You should decide on how exotic your world is at the start. The Pathfinder Roleplaying Game assumes a baseline that all PCs, and thus the majority of the civilized world's NPCs, are of one of the seven races presented in Chapter 2. You might want to narrow those choices—perhaps there are only humans in your world, or perhaps one or more of the races in Chapter 2 are rare enough to be nearly legends on

Alternative Races

Only more experienced GMs should consider allowing players to play anything other than the races presented in Chapter 2, but if you want to start experimenting, the following races from the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* are good choices for races that are close in power to those listed in Chapter 2.

- Aasimar
- Goblin
- Hobgoblin
- Kobold
- Merfolk
- Mite
- Orc
- Tengu
- Tiefling

The following races are somewhat more powerful, due to the fact that they possess racial Hit Dice, exceptional ability score modifiers, natural attacks, or other unusual abilities. These races are intended as monstrous foes, not as PC races, and if you allow players to play one of these creatures, you should allow characters who pick from the list above or from the seven core races to start play at 2nd level.

- Boggard
- Bugbear
- Dark Creeper
- Drow
- Duergar
- Gnoll
- Lizardfolk
- Morlock
- Svirfneblin

their own. In these cases, you should inform your players that their choices for races are reduced, as appropriate.

On the other end of things, perhaps your world is much more extravagant than the implied world. In this case, you might allow your players to play characters of races other than those detailed in Chapter 2. The *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* has many non-standard races to choose from, but you should note that most of these are significantly more powerful than those presented in Chapter 2. Any race that grants racial Hit Dice is probably too potent a choice for most campaigns. As a general guideline, you should advise your players to choose races of roughly equal power, using a creature's racial HD (not its CR) as a general guideline. Characters who wish instead to play standard races should be allowed to start at higher level, so that their total HD match the highest HD held by a non-standard race in the party.

ENDING THE CAMPAIGN

In the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, 20th level represents the top end of power most mortals can hope to achieve, yet this certainly doesn't mean that your campaign needs to go all the way to 20th level. If you aren't running an open-ended campaign where the PCs set the pace and the goals, you should pick a level at which you wish the campaign's story arc to end. Talk this over with your players to make sure you're picking a level range that they're comfortable with as well. Note that you can also extend or shorten the length of a campaign by selecting a slow or fast XP progression. If you choose to run a campaign with a level cap of lower than 20th, consider placing your new level cap at a point where it feels like the last level achievable is something worthy. Odd-numbered levels are generally better than even-numbered ones, since most spellcasters achieve a new level of spell on odd-numbered levels. Multiples of 5 are good as well, since these multiples represent the last level before a new iterative attack. Stopping at 9th level is a good choice, since that allows the players to achieve capstone abilities like a bard's inspire greatness, a druid's venom immunity, a sorcerer's 3rd bloodline power, and *teleport* and *raise dead* as capstone spells. Likewise, 13th level works well, giving capstone abilities like a monk's spell resistance or spells like *greater teleport*, *limited wish*, and *resurrection*. Setting level caps of lower than 20th allows you to use them as soft limits—if your campaign's story arc goes beyond what you'd originally planned, your players can continue to gain levels and new abilities beyond what you estimated. Since the classes presented in Chapter 3 don't have additional rules provided beyond 20th level, setting a campaign arc to end at 20th level requires great timing and, invariably, some manipulation on your part as GM to make sure the story winds up before the PCs reach enough XP to theoretically hit 21st level.

Beyond 20th Level

Although Chapter 3 doesn't describe what happens after 20th level, this isn't to say that there are no resources available to you should you wish to continue your campaign on to 21st level and beyond. Rules for epic-level play like this exist in numerous products that are compatible with the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, although in many cases these alternative rules can provide unanticipated problems. For example, if your campaign world is populated by creatures and villains who, at the upper limit of power, can challenge a 20th-level character, where will epic-level PCs go for challenges? You might be looking at creating an entirely new campaign setting, one set on different planes, planets, or dimensions from the one where your players spent their first 20 levels, and that's a lot of work.

Paizo Publishing may eventually publish rules to take your game into these epic realms, but if you can't wait and would rather not use existing open content rules for epic-level play, you can use the following brief guidelines to continue beyond 20th level. Note that these guidelines aren't robust enough to keep the game vibrant and interesting on

their own for much longer past 20th level, but they should do in a pinch for a campaign that needs, say, 22 or 23 experience levels to wrap up. Likewise, you can use these rules to create super-powerful NPCs for 20th-level characters to face.

Experience Points: To gain a level beyond 20th, a character must double the experience points needed to achieve the previous level. Thus, assuming the medium XP progression, a 20th-level character needs 2,100,000 XP to become 21st level, since he needed 1,050,000 XP to reach 20th level from 19th. He'd then need 4,200,000 XP to reach 22nd level, 8,400,000 XP to reach 23rd, and so on.

Scaling Powers: Hit dice, base attack bonuses, and saving throws continue to increase at the same rate beyond 20th level, as appropriate for the class in question. Note that no character can have more than 4 attacks based on its base attack bonus. Note also that, before long, the difference between good saving throws and poor saving throws becomes awkwardly large—the further you get from 20th level, the more noticeable this difference grows, and for high-level characters, bolstering their poor saving throws should become increasingly important. Class abilities that have a set, increasing rate, such as a barbarian's damage reduction, a fighter's bonus feats and weapon training, a paladin's smite evil, or a rogue's sneak attack continue to progress at the appropriate rate.

Spells: A spellcaster's caster level continues to increase by one for each level beyond 20th level. Every odd-numbered level, a spellcaster gains access to a new level of spell one above his previous maximum level, gaining one spell slot in that new level. These spell slots can be used to prepare or cast spells adjusted by metamagic feats or any known spell of lower levels. Every even-numbered level, a spellcaster gains additional spell slots equal to the highest level spell he can currently cast. He can split these new slots any way he wants among the slots he currently has access to.

For example, a 21st-level wizard gains a single 10th-level spell slot, in which he can prepare any spell of level 1st through 9th, or in which he can prepare a metamagic spell that results in an effective spell level of 10 (such as extended *summon monster IX*, or quickened *disintegrate*). At 22nd level he gains 10 spell-levels' worth of new spell slots, and can gain 10 1st-level spells per day, two 5th-level spells per day, one 7th-level and one 3rd-level spell per day, or one more 10th-level spell per day. At 23rd level, he gains a single 11th-level spell slot, and so on.

Spellcasters who have a limited number of spells known (such as bards and sorcerers) can opt out of the benefits they gain (either a new level of spells or a number of spell slots) for that level and in exchange learn two more spells of any level they can currently cast.

You might want to further adjust the rate of spell level gain for classes (like paladins and rangers) who gain spells more slowly than more dedicated spellcaster classes.

Multiclassing/Prestige Classes: The simplest way to progress beyond 20th level is to simply multiclass or take levels in a prestige class, in which case you gain all of the abilities of the new class level normally. This effectively treats 20th level as a hard limit for class level, but not as a hard limit for total character level.