Dragonhead DMG

Behold! This manual and all the secrets it contains is for the Dragonhead Master's eyes only! A curse be upon any banger who dares look inside its covers with either malicious or beneficent intent.

A Well of Goblins

So. *You're the new DM.*

You may have heard a lot of talk about what it takes to be a DM, about how hard it is, about how much work is involved. You may have watched videos where some masterful DM spins amazing stories out of thin air like a Vegas stage magician and thought, "I could never do that!"

Well, crumple up those thoughts into a tight little ball and hackey-sack it into the rafters. *All of that is a lie.* Here is the truth about being a DM.

- **DM-ing is no harder than being a player**. Especially in a Dragonhead game. It is simply different. The world is your character and you get it create it as you go along. Unlike a banger you do not have to worry about your creatures surviving the adventure. Even when the characters knock off your Big Bad Guy there are always more where that came from.

- **The DM is not an Entertainer**. While it doesn't hurt to be entertaining, the DM's purpose is not to amuse the table like some rent for hire birthday clown. Your purpose is to honestly represent the world the adventure takes place in - *as if it actually existed* – and make sure that its inhabitants react to what the characters do in a realistic fashion.

- **The DM is not the Party Leader**. Look at your group of bangers. The person playing the Warlord is most likely the party leader. *It is not you.* While you do deliver the scenario which will point them in the right direction and kick the adventure into gear, what happens after that is up to your players.

- **The DM is not an Author**. Want a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom? Try plotting out a campaign a few weeks in advance. While it is good to plan for the next game session, it is not wise to plan ahead of it. Learn what you need to know for the next session and leave the rest open and unwritten. Going with the flow and seeing where the adventure leads is what makes the game exciting for DMs as well as everyone else.

The DM is a DM and – right this minute – you are going to become one as we embark on a small adventure that hopefully you and your friends know nothing about called **A Well of Goblins**. It shouldn't take more than one to three hours to play. It helps to have read the **Banger's Handbook** (or at

least the section on **Action**) because not everything in it can be covered here. However, we will be providing you with tips and tricks along the way.

To start, read this passage aloud to your bangers....

> Alright. We're going to play a little adventure called **A Well of Goblins**. Each of you needs a 1st level character, at the very least one fighter, one cleric, a wizard and a rogue. Fighters can be any class that knows how to fight such as dwarf, elf, warlord or fighter. All should be of a Good alignment.

That is called a **Text Box**. Think of them as training wheels. Eventually you can take them off but until you figure out how to ride this bike you will want to leave them on, reading text boxes aloud when the moment is right.

Adventure Prep. While your players are off creating their characters read as far as you can into *A Well of Goblins*, skimming if time is short. On the whole it is best to spend a night reading through an adventure before everyone comes together to play it. This is called **Prepping an Adventure**. People appreciate it because no one likes to wait around while you read at the table. Right now, do what you can.

Merlin Roll! Once everybody is done creating characters have them make a merlin roll. What they roll depends on how many bangers are at the table.

- One to Three = **2d6 each.**
- Four to Six = **2d4 each.**

This is the number of merlins they start the game with. Pass out the gold coins (or whatever you are using) and the adventure begins!

The Scenario

A scenario is a short blurb designed to get the adventure moving. It makes sense to email a scenario out to your bangers ahead of the game, but right now just read it aloud to the table.

> While on your way to the small coastal city of Lhamar, you find yourself with ten miles left to go and the sun angling low in the sky. There is no way

you will make it before nightfall, so you decide to pull into a small country tavern called the **Grey Wolf Inn** and call it a night.

Just as the tavern keeper brings you some steaming bowls of lamb stew the door flies open. A woman cries, "Malthazar! They got Jenny. *Goblins got Jenny!*"

And the bowls go crashing to the ground.

In an instant everyone is on their feet and rushing outside, yourselves included. The crowd runs up a hill and into the forest to gather around a decrepit looking pile of rocks with a worm eaten well assembly standing over it.

"The old well," mutters Malthazar the tavern keep, "the water ran foul so we covered it over and had to dig a new one last spring."

The cover has been thrown aside. It is October and the leaves have been falling but there are none atop the lid.

This has been moved recently.

The bucket rope dangles down into the well's shadowy depths. You can just barely see a pin-point reflection of sky on the water below.

"I saw them," says the exasperated woman, "the little orange devils snatched her up and dragged her kicking and screaming into that hole!"

Desperate talk abounds and slowly eyes turn to you. After-all, you are the only ones here wearing armor and carrying weapons.

So what do you do?

That last statement – **so what do you do?** - is an important one. It lets go of the reigns of the game and hands them over to your bangers. The obvious answer is that they should go into the well and try to save the little girl. If they ask around they might figure out that...

- Jenny is the tavern keeper's daughter.

- She is four years old with blonde hair and wearing a simple white dress.

- Nobody knows why the well went bad. It just started sending up a thick snot-like green sleech that no one wanted to touch let alone drink.

- They've had problems with goblins in the past but never anything like this.

- They have no idea where the goblins actually reside, just somewhere off in the hills.

If the bangers decide not to save Jenny the people in the tavern will give them the stink eye and the tavern keep will refuse to serve them. If they persist then you should threaten to move their alignments one step closer to **evil** for doing nothing while the goblins presumably chow down on the little girl.

Ultimately, what happens is what happens. If the bangers do nothing then the adventure ends here. Not the greatest adventure of all time, but they made of it what they did.

The Background

Most adventures come with a background section designed to fill the DM in on everything that is happening behind the scenes. Notice there is no box around this text.

Do not read backgrounds aloud to your players!

The tavern keeper is actually an evil warlock named **Malthazar.** He is in command of 40 or so goblins. The rest of the tavern staff has been charmed into doing his bidding. They have discovered what he believes to be the wreck of an old pirate ship and pulled it into a near-by seaside cave. It contains a treasure chest protected by spectres – the ghosts of the ship's sailors – who are too powerful for Malthazar to defeat.

To remedy the situation, Malthazar used kobolds to dig a cave connecting the seaside caves to the tavern well and set up this ruse with the tavern keeper's daughter (actually a goblin in disguise) to try and lure adventurers into the cave to hopefully fight and defeat the spectres.

If the characters manage to do this Malthazar and the goblins plan to attack the players soon afterwards, hoping to find them weakened from fighting the spectres and an easy defeat.

What Malthazar does not know is that despite being undead the spectres are actually good-aligned creatures with a

mission they cannot abandon. They will not surrender their treasure, but if the characters agree to help them deliver it they may reward them with some of it and help them battle the goblins as well.

The Map

This is a map of the caves leading from the Well to the Haunted Ship. Granted the adventure actually starts at the tavern but that is not important so we won't bother with it.

[cave map]

Do not show the characters this map! Instead give them the **Ghost Map** and a pack of highlighters. Let them draw on it to keep track of where they are and make notes of what they encounter along the way. It's always a good idea to get your bangers to help you run the game whenever you can.

The ghost map shows them the environment but stops short of telling them what the caves contain. Your version of the map is more detailed. Notice the letters in circles, these are regions. The letter is the first letter of the region name. Everything with a circle E belongs to the Eagle Bear. Meanwhile circle S belongs to the Spider Caves. Those caves with a circled letter and number refer to specific places that will be described inside the encounter.

The Well

This is the character's entry point. Let them sweat about how they will safely get down it. Do not feel as if you have to offer any tips. This is their adventure, let them accomplish it on their own. Some important points about the well...

- **Dark**. All of the caves are dark and bangers will need a light source or take a **-6** to everything they do as they stumble about in the dark. The creatures down there can see in the dark and do not have this problem. The tavern keep can easily get them an old lantern if they ask for it.

- **Narrow**. The well is only wide enough for one character to descend at a time.

- **Decrepit**. The rope is old. Roll a **1d10** every time someone gets on it. A **1** will snap it and send them

plummeting. If two characters get on it at the same time a roll of **1** or **2** will snap it.

- **40' Feet Deep**. Luckily there is water at the bottom. If a character falls, roll 1d4 and multiply by 5 to find the damage done. Hitting bottom does impact damage.

- **Green Slime**. The water is nasty and filled with green slime. Thankfully it is harmless, but your bangers don't know this! Let them freak out a bit before revealing this fact.

- **Cave Entrance**. The entrance to the cave complex is even with the bottom of the well

Climbing Down. If the rope holds the characters should have no problem climbing down. If it snaps and they have to climb down by hand the rocks are wet and slippery! Each descent requires a **Hard Agility** check. Depending on the success of their roll...

1: they succeed!

½: they slip and need to make the check again but with a -2 this time.

0: fail and fall. Roll 1d4 x 5i for damage.

Ability Checks. Any time a banger wants to do something which seems risky or challenging ask them for an **Ability Check**. This can be any ability. More often than not it is...

- **Spirit** – for overcoming fear.
- **Muscle** – for feats of physical strength.
- **Wisdom** – for noticing things.
- **Agility** – for acrobatic feats.
- **Luck** – for when you can't think of what to use.

Generally speaking, if they roll an 10 or better they are fine. It is good not to ask for too many checks. Save the dice rolling for the important things!

Hard & Easy. Believe it or not but Hard & Easy is a large part of what makes this game shine. You label a check as Hard or Easy (but mostly Hard) and let the bangers wrack their brains out trying to come up with some creative way to make it easier. You don't have to accept everything they say, but it is good to reward creative thinking when it is truly creative.

The trick to labeling a check hard or easy is to think of the situation as it might seem to a **perfectly normal person.**

An average joe might have a hard time climbing down the well without a rope. A character with a high agility score will still have to make a hard check but will probably do better because of their high agility. Attempting to tailor each challenge to each character only creates more work for yourself and slows down the game. Let it be a hard agility check for everyone.

Ambush!

> On the edge of the firelight you see two small grotesque creatures standing in the mouth of a cave, apparently just as surprised at seeing you as you are at seeing them.
>
> One of them cries or possibly hisses, "Gahhhh!" And levies its spear at you. The other does the same and shouts, "What're you doing here? You ugly! You go back the way you came!"

Near the bottom of the well are two goblins hiding in the shadows. No matter what happens they will not attack except to defend themselves.

Essentially, they want the bangers to chase them so they can haphazardly lead them on the safest route through the cave system. Unfortunately, they will run too far ahead and be ambushed by some marauding lizard men just beyond the cave entrance, leaving the BCs to guide themselves the rest of the way.

If the BCs do attack, Goblins use the following stat block. See *Monsters & Treasure* for help understanding it. Most of the time all you will need are the AC, Hit, and Attack entries. While you may risk roll you creature's scores it is recommended that you use them as is and leave all the risk rolling to the bangers.

Goblin Spearmen. **AC:** 11. **Move:** Walk 3. **Hit:** 11. **Attack:** 1d6m or Spear 1d8p. **SDMG:** -2. **Size:** Tiny. **Size AC:** Sma +1, Med +2. **Abilities:** CB+1, S11, I12, H8, L9. **Talents:** Infravision. **Troubles:** Daylight -2. **Lang:** Goblin, Common. **Align:** Evil.

Goblin 1 (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 2 (S 1 K) O O | O | O

The numbered lines above are **Damage Bars**, one for each goblin. The **S** and **K** you mark with a pencil slash as they

are Stunned or Knocked Down. The 1 between them is the amount of damage that it takes to do this. Erase the slashes as the creatures spend actions to recover from them.

The four **O**'s are hit point circles. You could slash them like a banger but it is easier to just draw a **horizontal** line through them for wear damage and mark tear damage with **vertical** strikes.

The standing pipes **|** separate the damage bars into damage states: Scratched | Injured | Fubar. When tear damage enters Injured all of the creature's checks will take a -2. At Fubar they take a -4. Most creatures will fight until injured and then flee.

In combat, notice that the Goblins have SDMG -2. This means that every damage roll you make for them will take a -2 because of their size. This can never reduce a damage roll to less than 1 point.

Cave Entrance

> You enter a long cave that stretches into the distance. It is barely tall enough for you to move through with a stoop. The walls are rough cut and dripping. The air is cold, dank and smells of fresh earth.

This is the cave the kobolds dug to connect the well to the cave complex. The squiggle on the map represents a **quarter mile** of missing distance.

Now is a good time to discuss marching order: who is in the front, who is in the middle and who is taking up the rear. If using miniatures set them on the table so we don't forget who is where.

If a dwarf or gnome is in the party they will recognize the cave as new and crudely done. A successful **Intellect** check will indicate the work of kobolds, but also a cave much taller than what kobolds normally dig.

After the quarter mile, the cave opens up to a more natural stone walled cave complex with ceilings ranging anywhere from 10 to 40 feet tall.

Lizard Men

Recently a gang of lizard men have discovered these caves and moved into them. They are not a part of Malthazar's plans and uninterested in anything other than finding things to eat. They have fought the wolf spiders and learned not to leave the safety of their territory, even when in pursuit of easy prey.

Random Encounters. Lizard men will be found scattered through-out these caves. Every time the characters enter a cave marked by a circle **L** make a **Percentile Roll** on the table below to figure out what happens. If the bangers ask about this say - "oh it's nothing" - grin and continue on.

80: No Encounter.

60: Lizard Man spotted leaving the cave.

40: Lizard Man sees the party and flees.

20: Three Lizard Men Attack!

1: Five Lizard Men and their Leader Attacks!

Keep in mind there are only 12 Lizard Men in the entire gang. While that should be more than enough, you can never roll more random encounters than there are actual creatures to encounter.

If the characters decide to rest in an empty space, allow them to do so for one encounter (aka 10 minutes) then make the roll again. Remember, these caves are populated areas with creatures moving through them often.

Dice Fudging. Fudging the dice is when you make a hidden roll and pretend the dice rolled an 18 instead of an 81. You may fudge the dice but you should never admit it.

Dragonhead Masters do not fudge dice rolls!

Characters live and die by a roll of the dice so you don't want your bangers blaming you for not fudging a roll when they needed it. It is far better to blame the dice than each other when something goes wrong.

The actual rule when it comes to dice fudging is that you should only fudge the dice to make the game more interesting. And only when you can get away with it.

When rolling out in the open, we recommend a ***Reverse Merlin***. Tell the table you don't like what you rolled, take a merlin out of the discard bowl and flip it to the banger with the fewest number of merlins left. Now roll the dice

again. If there are no merlins in the discard bowl then you just have to play with what you rolled.

Lizard Men. **AC:** 13/10. **Armor:** 4. **Move:** Walk 3, Swim 5. **Hit:** 14. **Attacks:** 1d6m or Morning Star 1d8m. **Abilities:** CB+2, M13, W11, A11. **Lang:** Reptilian, Common. **Talents:** Infravision. **Align:** Neutral.

Lizard Man Leader (S 2 K) O O O O O O O | O O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 1 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 2 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 3 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 4 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 5 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 6 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 7 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 8 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 9 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 10 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Lizard Man 11 (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

L-1.) Fire Room. This large cave is a communal room that opens into the salt-marshes. In its center is a fire pit with a two dead goblins roasting on a spit. When under attack the lizard men will fall back here to defend themselves. Any lizard man not yet encountered in the rest of the caves will be here when the bangers enter it.

L-2.) Lair of the Leader. This is the leader's private chamber. In it will be found a small stash of treasure belonging to the gang.

- 1 Large Gold Gilt Conch Shell (Horn of Blasting).
- Coins: 120 cp, 10 sp, 4 gp.
- 5 pieces Shell Jewelry worth $250
- 1 Silver Ring (Ring of Cold Proof).
- 1 Potion of Clear Blue Fluid (Potion of Floating)

Treasure lists are suggestions. You are under no obligation to give every piece of treasure mentioned to those who find it. If you think the Horn of Blasting is too powerful then leave it out. It is far harder to get rid of a powerful magic item than to give them away, which is one of the reasons why they break so easily.

If bangers do not immediately know what something does? *Let them figure it out on their own.* Do not tell them they have found a *Horn of Blasting.* They found a Large Gold-Gilt Conch Shell. When they blow through it they will quickly discover what it does as it fills the cavern with a thunderous roar.

Magical items which incorporate the name of a power, such as the *Ring of Cold Proof*, grants its wearer that power which can be found in the *Character Compendium*. Meanwhile, those that do not, such as the *Horn of Blasting* and *Potion of Floating* can be found in the *Monsters & Treasure* book.

Any time a character uses a magic item a Luck check should be made to see how it went.

Spider Caves

These caves appear no different from the rest but are home to a very vicious pack of giant wolf spiders who consider the whole cave complex their hunting grounds.

Random Encounters. As with the Lizard Men caves, every time a cave marked by an S is entered roll the percentile dice to see if the bangers encounter something.

50: No Encounter.

30: Lone Wolf Spider.

20: Two Wolf Spiders.

1: Three Wolf Spiders.

Wolf Spider. **AC:** 15/11. **Move:** Walk 5, Cling 4. **Hit:** 15. **Attacks:** Grapple, Bite 1d8m + Paralytic Poison. **Abilities:** CB+2, M12, W12, D16, C14, A13, L11. **Talents:** Infravision +2. **Align:** Neutral.

Wolf Spider 1 (S 2 K) O O O O O O O | O O O O | O O O

Wolf Spider 2 (S 2 K) O O O O O O O | O O O O | O O O

Wolf Spider 3 (S 2 K) O O O O O O O | O O O O | O O O

Wolf Spider 4 (S 2 K) O O O O O O O | O O O O | O O O

Wolf Spider 5 (S 2 K) O O O O O O O | O O O O | O O O

Wolf Spider 6 (S 2 K) O O O O O O O | O O O O | O O O

Death From Above! Wolf spiders like to crawl along cave ceilings, looking down with infravision, trying to spot an easy kill. For this they attach a web strand to the rock and bungee down to grapple and bite an opponent - **all in one action** - if the grapple is successful they spring back

up to the ceiling with their prey to web them over and carry them back to S-2 for eventual eating.

This is a surprise attack. Characters need to make a **12 vs Wisdom** save to detect it. If the character fails they lose their action for the round and defend with **SAC** against the attack.

Spider Grapple. Because of its multiple legs, spiders are very good at grappling opponents. Use a **15 vs Dexterity or Muscle** (whichever is better). If a character cannot defeat it they will be grappled and unable to do anything until they do. Escape attempts may be made once per round.

Paralytic Poison. Immediately after a grapple a bite attack will be made. If it does a tear of damage the bitten character should make a **14 vs Constitution** save. Each success for the spider will paralyze the character for **1d6** hours.

Spider Webbing. Wolf Spider webbing is tough stuff! Each round spend wrapping a paralyzed character in webs **adds 5** to its strength, a strength that needs to be beaten by a Muscle check to be broken out of. Thankfully, a sharp weapon will reduce the strength of the webbing by **1 point per 1 tear** of damage done.

S-1.) Rubble Blockades.

Read this the first time the bangers encounter it. The same general thing will be found at each location.

> You come upon a small passageway loosely packed with rubble almost to the ceiling where some of it has been cleared away. To get through you will have to climb up and over the pile. The space at the top is only big enough for one of you to squeeze through at a time.

These piles are what remains of a half-hearted attempt by the goblins to wall in the wolf spiders. The spiders have since moved enough of it away to slip past the blockades.

Getting over the pile should not be a problem, but only one character can do so at a time and a random encounter roll for the spiders should be made as soon as someone reaches the other side.

S-2.) Spider's Lair.

> This cave opens into a large cavern lit by a hole in the ceiling where blue sky can be seen shining through. The place is wall to wall webs with criss-crossing sheets of silk hanging in between. Tangled up in it are the countless desiccated corpses of goblins, kobolds, lizard men and other hapless adventurers. You hear the slight rush of something moving far overhead.

This is the lair of the wolf spiders and any spider not yet encountered will be here now. The ceiling is 40' high and near its top the spiders live in web funnels from which they will attack the characters.

The spiders have no understanding of treasure other than the bodies they feed upon so many of these corpses still possess what their owners once considered treasure. Getting to it is a time-consuming and grisly business:

- Coins: 4d10 ip, 3d10 cp per corpse.
- Various normal weapons: axes, swords, daggers, etc, all somewhat rusty.
- Armor and equipment most rotted beyond use.
- A Long Sword +1 still in its sheathe.
- Alas, no Jenny.

New Characters. If a banger at your table has lost their character and has no one to play. Now is a good time to bring them back into the game. Have them roll up a new character and tell the table that this character has been found bundled up in webs. They start screaming for help as the paralytic poison in their system begins to wear off.

Kobold Caves

These caves were dug by the kobolds Malthazar brought in to do the excavation. Kobolds are small creatures so these caves are **4' tall x 2' wide** at best. Most characters will have to crouch to get through them if not crawl on their hands and knees. This will put a **-2** on everything they do, slow their movement by half and limit their use of weapons to small and stabby things like daggers.

Random Encounters. There are **twenty** kobolds in these caves. In each lettered cave roll 1d100.

  50: No Encounter.

30: One Kobold who will run to warn the others.

10: Three Kobolds who will do likewise.

 1: Cave-In!

If a kobold has managed to escape and warn the rest of the
pack, any roll of **10 to 49** will be a Kobold War Party

Kobold War Party. Kobolds are not smart but they are
crafty. **Three** will stand with shields and spears to snarl
and screech and stab at the enemy. This is done to give **two**
other kobolds time to hide behind them by digging into the
earthen walls of the passageway. The three will fall back
and if the characters pursue, ask for a **Hard Wisdom** check.
Using the best success generated:

2: The ambush is spotted before the kobolds are passed.

1: The ambush is spotted as the kobolds are passed.

½: The hidden kobolds get 1 attack vs SAC.

0: The hidden kobolds get 1 attack vs SAC, characters
do not get to retaliate until the next round.

Kobolds. **AC:** 11/10. **Armor:** 4. **Move:** Walk 3, Dig 1. **Hit:** 11.
Attacks: 1d6m or Spear 1d8p. **SDMG:** -2 **Size:** Tiny. **Size AC:**
Sma +1, Med +2. **Abilities:** CB+1, S12, I8, W11. **Talents:**
Infravision +2. **Lang:** Reptilian. **Align:** Neutral.

Kobold 1 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 2 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 3 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 4 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 5 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 6 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 7 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 8 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 9 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 10 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 11 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 12 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 13 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 14 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 15 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 16 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 17 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 18 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 19 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

Kobold 20 (S 1 K) O O O | O O | O

K-1.) Treasure Cave. When the characters enter this cave whoever is left will be here guarding the pack's treasure stash:

- Nine blue speckled kobold eggs.
- Two barrels of warm skunked ale.
- Three drinking mugs made out of gnome skulls.
- A loose pile of coins (70 ip, 25 cp, 2 gp).
- Four sacks of salted dried rabbit meat.
- 3d12 crude kobold spears which can be used as arrows.

Cave-In! Kobolds dig instinctively so they don't think too much about things like load bearing walls. When a cave-in is rolled, everyone should make a **Luck** check. The lowest roller has just been buried. They need to make a **Muscle vs 18** to pull themselves free.

Buried characters will take **1 point of wear damage each round** from the crushing weight on top of them. If knocked unconscious they suffocate and die. Other characters can help dig the character out. Each **round of digging removes 1 point** of strength from the 18 the buried character needs to beat.

Eagle Bear

These caves are the abode of one of the few things the wolf spiders fear and will not risk going near - an eagle bear - basically a grizzly bear with the head of an eagle. In each lettered cave roll 1d100

80: No Encounter.

40: Eagle Bear Noises.

30: Eagle Bear Pellet.

1: The Eagle Bear!

Eagle Bear Noises. Unless on the prowl, Eagle Bears are not quiet creatures. Rolling up a noise encounter will cause the bangers to hear one of the following from somewhere off in the caves. No one knows what they noises mean, but they mean quite a lot to the Eagle Bear. Roll 1d100 and say quite loudly:

80: Pa-KRAAAAACT!

60: Chuggawuggawuggawugga.

40: RRRRReant! RRRRReant! RRRRReant!

20: GNOOOOOOOOoct.

1: Ur WHA Wauckt!

Eagle Bear Pellets. These large gum-drop shaped piles of sod are not gum-drops. They are the densely-packed remains of those the eagle bear has eaten. Picking through one will produce mostly bones but occasionally some treasure. Roll 1d100:

95: 1 Large Ruby worth $1000.

90: Dagger +1.

80: 10 Gold Pieces.

70: 6 Silver Pieces.

50: 4 Copper Pieces.

1: Nothing of value.

Eagle Bear. **AC:** 14/10. **Armor:** 3. **Move:** Walk 4. **Hit:** 15. **Attacks:** 2 Claws 1d4m, 1 Bite 1d6m. **SDMG:** +1d4. **Size:** Big. **Abilities:** CB+3, M14, W11, D8, C11, A11. **Talents:** Night Vision. **Align:** Neutral.

Eagle Bear (S 6 K) O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O | O O O O O O O O | O O O O O O O O

E1.) Forest Exit. This cave opens into the forest about a half mile behind the Grey Wolf Inn where the adventure started.

New Characters. As with the Spider Caves this is another good place to bring in new characters, ones running through the caves fleeing the dreaded eagle bear.

Hydra's Lair

> You enter a large damp cave that wreaks of death and decay. It is for the most part flooded with the exception of a small rocky ridge along its eastern edge. The ridge is about one foot wide and five steps long. Black water sloshes over it in places.

If they haven't learned it yet, here your bangers will learn an important lesson – *you do not fight everything you encounter* - hiding beneath the waves is a six headed hydra the size of a small dragon. *A very powerful foe!*

The goblins enjoy dragging corpses to this cave and feeding them to the beast. Because of this the hydra sees all humanoids as food, especially goblins. If the characters are weak when they encounter the hydra you can put a few bodies floating in the water and say she just finished feeding and isn't interested in them. She may peck at the characters to amuse herself but that is it.

Horror From the Deep. When the bangers encounter the hydra, *do not call it a hydra*. With rare monsters it is more fun to describe the beast and let the bangers figure it out.

> A large reptilian head snakes up out of the water to take a look at you. Its beak is as long as a short sword and lined with gnarly hooks and ridges. Its neck is frilled and its scales glisten in the fire light. The head turns curiously as it examines you. As it does so another head just like it rises up from the deep, and then another, and another....

The Ridge. Marked by a dotted line on the map, this ridge is slippery. Anyone trying to cross it should make an **Agility** check:

> **1:** You make it across!
>
> **½:** You slip on the wet rocks, make this check again with a -2.
>
> **0:** Splush! You go tumbling into the water.

Splush! The water is nearly 30' deep and anyone falling into it will be easy pickings for the hydra, defending with **SAC**. Characters who do not have the Swim form of movement need to make an **Agility** check. If they fail they sink to the bone littered bottom of the pit. Succeed and their **swim speed is their success count**. Wearing heavy armor or carrying a lot of equipment will only make this check harder.

Ocean Exit. There is an underwater tunnel leading out of this cave. It takes **40 steps** of swimming to reach the ocean's surface on the other side. Characters take **1 point of wear** damage for every **5 rounds** they hold their breath.

Hydra. **AC:** 14/10. **Armor:** 6. **Move:** Walk 2, Swim 4. **Hit:** 15. **Attacks:** 1 Bite Per Head 1d6m. **Size:** Huge. **Abilities:** CB+3, M13, I8, W11, C13, A11. **Lang:** Reptilian. **Align:** Neutral. **Special:** The hydra loses 1 head with every 10 points of damage it takes. Once all of its heads are gone it dies.

Hydra Head 1 (S 2 K) O O O O O | O O O | O O

Hydra Head 2 (S 2 K) O O O O O | O O O | O O

Hydra Head 3 (S 2 K) O O O O O | O O O | O O

Hydra Head 4 (S 2 K) O O O O O | O O O | O O

Hydra Head 5 (S 2 K) O O O O O | O O O | O O

Hydra Head 6 (S 2 K) O O O O O | O O O | O O

Although the size of the hydra is huge, it's heads are medium-sized and that is why there is no SDMG for them.

The Haunted Ship

> The cave around you opens into a rocky cavern, one filled with the sounds of crashing waves. The path rises up, hits a ledge and slopes down a long slate surface leading to the water's edge. A fresh gust of sea breeze washes over you.
>
> *How tall is this cavern?*
>
> Tall enough to fit an entire schooner that has been pulled up out of the water and held in place with ropes tied to bolts hammered into the cave walls.
>
> The ship is a wreck.
>
> Its masts have been sheared off and there is a gaping hole in its hull. Some paint is still clinging to its wood, so you guess it hasn't been submerged for too long, but barnacles are growing over its entirety and seaweed drapes its hand rails.
>
> Up on deck you see a flash of golden hair and a bit of white dress. "Help Me Plees-" screams a high pitched voice.
>
> *And then nothing.*

This is the goal of the adventure. Characters who enter the ship through the hole in its hull will be able to climb over its broken timbers and enter the main cabin. If they do so read them this:

> You enter the ship's main cabin to find it littered with bones and rusty weapons and armor, all thrown

> to the low side of the slanting floor and piled up
> around a large padlocked treasure chest. Just to
> your left is a ladder leading to the upper deck.

The bones do not do anything until the treasure chest is approached. Then they will lift up and swirl together to form six **Spectres**. Far more than animated skeletons, these are the ghosts of the sailors who swore an oath to protect and deliver the treasure in the chest. They will attack anyone who does not flee. Unfortunately they themselves cannot leave the ship.

Spectres. **AC:** 15/11. **Armor:** 20. **HP:** 5. **Move:** Hover 8. **Hit:** 15. **Attacks:** Chilling Touch 1d8s. **Abilities:** CB+3, S16, M3, W12, D18, A12, L11. **Talents:** Night Vision. **Troubles:** Daylight Removes Chilling Touch. **Lang:** Common. **Align:** Good.

Spectre 1 (S 1 K) O O O O O

Spectre 2 (S 1 K) O O O O O

Spectre 3 (S 1 K) O O O O O

Spectre 4 (S 1 K) O O O O O

Spectre 5 (S 1 K) O O O O O

Spectre 6 (S 1 K) O O O O O

Spectres can be fought with normal weapons but it is not an easy task. Damage states mean nothing to them. If anyone manages to do 5 or more points of damage to a Spectre its bones will fall to the ground but the ghost itself will not die. As long as its mission remains unfulfilled, a day later the spectre will return to that spot at full strength.

Chilling Touch. The specter's touch does sharp damage and kills the flesh it touches. Gamewise, instead of doing tear damage it does **scar** damage.

Daylight. Daylight washes out the body of a spectre and robs it of its chilling touch.

A Break in the Battle. Because spectres are undead and not thinking clearly they will lash out at whatever approaches their treasure. However, if a good-aligned cleric attempts a **Turn Unbelievers** on them they will stop and stand silently, coming to the realization that they are in the presence of someone who is just as good as they are, possibly moreso. If it happens read them this...

> The ghosts stand suddenly still. Human faces
> resolve from the unearthly blue smoke surrounding

their floating skulls. A memory of armor gives them shape and soon you find yourself standing before six paladins in platemail.

"We are all that remains of the Knights of the Silver Spire" says one with a hoarse whisper, "honor-bound to deliver this chest to Amian the Elder in Lhamar.

"A storm followed us into port and sank our ship before we could reach the shore. *So close and yet so far away.* This wreck is our final resting place and from it we cannot leave **but You!** *You can make the journey for us!* Swear upon your honor and all that is good that you will deliver the map inside this chest to Amian!

"Do this and you may split the rest of the treasure amongst yourselves. It is of no use to us now. *But heed our words!* No one may look upon the map or open its tube! No one but Amian the Elder of Lhamar."

If the characters agree and swear on their honor to deliver the map, the spectres will stand aside and let them open the chest. The key for it has been hidden near-by under a pile of refuse. The chest contains.

- Coins: 5gp, 10sp, 30cp per character.
- 4 Diamonds worth $250 each.
- 6 Rubies worth $150.
- 12 Emeralds and Sapphires worth $100 each.
- 1 Necklace worth $400.
- 1 Bone tube containing a map leading to the *Tomb of the Dragon Slayer*.

The tube has been sealed with red wax and is protected by a magical booby trap. Anyone who breaks the seal without first uttering its pass-phrase (which is known only to Amian of Lhamar) will set off a cavalcade of lightning bolts doing **3d12i** in damage to everyone within 5 steps. It will also destroy the map within.

Topside

If the characters go up the ladder leading to the deck of the ship, read them this.

> Barely above the crashing waves you hear someone crying, a whine and a whimper and the sucking of snot. Near the bow of the ship you spy a small figure with golden hair in a white dress sitting with her knees drawn up to her chest. She is huddled in tight against the base of the bowsprit.

Jump Scare! If they call to her the girl will not respond, but if they get close enough, Jenny will suddenly reveal herself to be a goblin in a dress and wig and attack! Gamewise this is a Sneak Attack pitting a **Jenny's 12 vs Wisdom** (Jenny gets an easy for being in disguise).

If Jenny wins she will take full advantage of the attack. Otherwise she will use her action to jump onto one of the ropes holding the boat in place and scurry to the safety of the cave walls.

Jenny. **AC**: 11. **Move**: Walk 3. **Hit**: 11. **Attack**: 1d6m. **SDMG**: -2. **Size**: Tiny. **Size AC**: Sma +1, Med +2. **Abilities**: CB+1, S11, I12, H8, L9. **Talents**: Infravision. **Troubles**: Daylight -2. **Lang**: Goblin, Common. **Align**: Evil.

Goblin 1 (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Final Battle

If the characters look down from the deck of the ship or try to leave the cave with the treasure chest they will encounter Malthazar still looking like the tavern keeper but now surrounded by a small army of 40 goblins.

Now it is time for you to speak as Malthazar to the table. He is **haughty, confident** and **arrogant**. If the BCs give him the chest he says he will let them leave unharmed. He just wants the map. Malthazar knows about the booby trap on the tube and cannot be fooled into opening it.

If the bangers do this Malthazar will stand by his word until he gets his way then order the goblins to cut them down as they try to leave the cave.

If they do not, Malthazar will order the goblins to storm the ship, presuming the spectres to be gone seeing as the characters are somehow still alive. The goblins know about

the spectres and will fight the characters before attempting to fight them.

Malthazar. 5th Level Warlock. **AC:** 17/14. **Armor:** 1. **Move:** Walk 4. **Hit:** 12. **Attacks:** Sword 1d8s or Spell. **Abilities:** CB+5, S12, I14, C11, H14, L12, G18, **Talents:** Dive For Cover +2, Grappling +2, Slip-Thru +5. **Lang:** Common, Goblin, Read & Write. **Align:** Evil. **Treasure:** Bracers of Defense +2.

Malthazar (S 2 K) O O O O O O | O O O | O O O

Malthazar's spell book is not with him but hidden under some floorboards back at the tavern. He can cast the following spells. If you need help, their full descriptions can be found in the *Character Compendium*. While you can skip the risk rolling with the goblins, it is a good idea to risk roll Malthazar's spell casting attempts.

- **Arcane Lasso**, Hit 16, Aspects: Grapple from afar. Short Range, Dur Conc.

- **Breath Water**, Hit 16, Aspects: Each success = 1 person. Dur 1 Day.

- **Charcoal Grip**, Hit 17, Aspects: Punch +2 PS or Weapon dmg +1ps. Fire, SEP, Dur Encounter.

- **Charm**, Hit 17, Aspects: Automatic Ecstatic reaction. Close Range, Def Spirit.

- **Detect Magic**, Hit 17, Aspects: See by the light of magic. Dur Conc.

- **Fire Proof**, Hit 15, Aspects: Immune to fire. Dur Encounter.

- **Magic Missile**, Hit 17, DMG 1d6s, Aspects: Short Range, Def AC.

- **Sphere of Force**, Hit 15, Aspects: Beat Double Strength to break. Small Dome, Dur Conc.

On his person Malthazar has a Long Sword, Knife (hidden inside jacket), Light Clothing, Cloak, Leather Boots, Heavy Gloves, and a Money Pouch containing 20cp, 12 sp, 5 gp. He would wear some decent armor but at this point he is still dressed as the tavern keeper.

Goblins. **AC:** 11. **Move:** Walk 3. **Hit:** 11. **Attack:** 1d6m. **SDMG:** -2. **Size:** Tiny. **Size AC:** Sma +1, Med +2. **Abilities:** CB+1, S11, I12, H8, L9. **Talents:** Infravision. **Troubles:** Daylight -2. **Lang:** Goblin, Common. **Align:** Evil.

Goblin 1 (S 1 K) O O | O | O   **Goblin 2** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 3 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 4** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 5 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 6** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 7 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 8** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 9 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 10** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 11 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 12** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 13 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 14** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 15 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 16** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 17 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 18** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 19 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 20** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 21 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 22** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 23 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 24** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 25 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 26** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 27 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 28** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 29 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 30** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 31 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 32** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 33 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 34** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 35 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 36** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 37 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 38** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 39 (S 1 K) O O | O | O **Goblin 40** (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Mass Combat. Forty goblins is a lot! You will want to declare this a battle with Malthazar leading the goblin forces for initiative.

If bangers make an effort to guard each others back then they will only be attacked by **1d4** goblins each. Characters who do not guard their back will be attacked by **1d8** goblins. The goblins who do not attack will screech and holler and egg the others on from a safe distance.

Fighting on a Slant. It is good to remember that the ship is on a **45 degree slant**. Fighting will not be easy and everyone but the Spectres will take a **Hit -2**.

Tumbling Down the Deck. Anyone who gets knocked down while on deck will need to make an **Agility** check or go rolling down the incline and be chucked over the side. This does **Blunt 8** points of falling damage to whoever it happens to.

Cutting the Ropes. If the characters decide to cut the ropes holding the ship in place, there are six ropes tied to cleats on the deck. It takes **5 tears of damage** from a sharp weapon to cut each rope.

With the cutting of the last rope the ship will lurch and plunge down the slope with surprising speed, enough to carry it back out into the water where it will immediately begin to sink.

Goblins don't like water or daylight so any caught out in it will panic and attempt to swim ashore. This ruckus will attract the hydra who will swim out of her cave and start to feast, gobbling down as many of the little orange devils as she can.

The spectres will go to their final resting place while the characters make one last discovery. Despite all of the treasure inside it, the treasure chest is air tight and can be used as floatation device.

Malthazar's End? Malthazar will not fight to the death but flee once injured, possibly running into the ocean, casting Breath Water on himself and seeming to disappear under the waves. If the characters do end up swimming off with the treasure chest, he will follow them, plodding along the sea bed and plotting to get the map some other way, some other day.

And here ends *A Well of Goblins*.

For Now....

Afterward

Most movies have a run time between 90 and 120 minutes. *That is not an accident.* From countless films, theater

productions, college classrooms and church services, someone figured out that between 90 and 120 minutes is the most anyone can take sitting in one spot before needing a break. The same goes for rpgs.

Calling It Quits. While gaming it is good to keep a quiet eye on the clock and at the 90 minute mark either call for a break so people can stand up, move around and chit-chat a bit before reconvening for another 90 minutes of gaming – *a double feature of sorts* - or push through to 120 minutes and call it a night.

While RPGs are games without end that can sprawl on indefinitely, most people have day jobs and other considerations. Knowing when to quit is the halmark of a good DM. Calling it quits right before something interesting happens (as opposed to right afterwards) is a **cliff-hanger** and a great way to keep your players coming back for more.

Getting Feedback. Just because the game is over doesn't mean everyone needs to leave. Now is the time to talk about the adventure. *Listen to your bangers.* Try to pick up on what they liked, what they didn't and what they suspect will happen next. Just be careful not to agree to anything. No matter how great an idea may be, it's best to nod and say, "hmm, maybe, *possibly*." This way it will still carry some surprise when you do work the idea into the next game or at least it won't sting so bad when you don't.

Keep A Journal. After everyone has left is a good time to open up a document, date it, and write an adventure journal entry. Try to recall what just happened. Not only will this help you possibly weeks or months down the line as you try to remember the name you whipped up on the fly for the tavern keeper's wife (Mertrude? Melida? Mellll-dammit!), but it is also a good way to review what you did. To ruminate on what worked, what didn't and what has been done to death. You just fought a goblin horde. Do you really want to fight another any time soon?

Plan For the Next Session. Another good reason to keep a journal is that it helps generate ideas for your next gaming session, or at least get you thinking about it. Good ideas take time to percolate, so writing about the session will give your mind a few days to mill the matter over and come up with some interesting solutions.

Character Sheets Stay with You. Whatever you do, be sure to collect those character sheets! While your players may have created them, those characters exist in your world as a

feature of your campaign. Nothing is more awkward or annoying than having to play around the sudden disappearance of *Nickarus the Mighty* because it's Sunday and his Nickarus needs to do his laundry.

If Nick's player cares enough to want to take the character sheet home then he will care enough to come back and play Nickarus again. When a character is finally retired from the game then you can let it go. Until then, Nickarus's character sheet stays with you. You're not taking their characters away from your players. You are making sure they come back to play those characters again.

Leveling Up

Another good thing to do after the adventure has ended and before everyone has left is to handle the matters of experience points and level advancement. How you do this is between you and your group. *Whatever works best.*

Treasure For XP. Dragonhead recommends in-game advancement, namely ***Treasure For XP***. With it characters divvy up their treasure and take it to a guild, school, university or private master who trains them, trading treasure for XP. This does require the creation of learning institutions in your world but that can be a lot of fun as the institutions themselves become like characters, working to enforce the taboos of a class (*your wizard wears armor!!!*) and coming up with missions for the characters to embark on. After all, treasure troves large enough to support advancement through the upper levels should become increasingly hard to come by. *There is only so much gold in the world.* Instead the guild might have a mission of some import they would like the characters to embark on. Perhaps a priceless magical item needs to be recovered, something worth a ton of truly advantageous XP enhancing secrets that they don't give out to just anyone.

Natural Advancement. Unfortunately, Treasure for XP does not make much sense with some character classes, especially those that live in the wilderness and harbor a disdain for society such as the Barbarian, Ranger and Sorcerer. Barbarians in particular are not known for their colleges and universities.

For these classes you can still use Treasure for XP just say they blew it on carousing or gave it away and that they gained **half its value in XP** from the experience of acquiring the treasure itself. Gamewise we are still

exchanging treasure for XP. We are just cutting out the middle man of a learning institution.

Characters who exist in a world devoid of treasure should be rewarded XP for simply surviving. Give the character 1d4 x 1,000 XP for every season they spend adventuring. However they gain nothing should they decide to settle down in one place and live out a normal life. If anything the reverse might happen causing them to slowly lose levels as time slips by.

Milestone Advancement. Another method of leveling up is **Milestone Advancement.** Here characters are rewarded for accomplishing certain tasks with XP. This works well in worlds that have no educational centers. The only problem is that in practice it can be hard justifying the XP you give in relation to what your bangers have done. In *A Well of Goblins* did they save Jenny? Did they try to save Jenny? Did one of them get chomped on by the eagle bear? How much is all of that worth?

With milestone advancement you may end up spending a lot of time and energy trying to contend with what you once gave out in the past verses what you want to give them now. Bangers remember such things and once you give them a heap of XP for accomplishing one certain task, they may go out of their way to do something similar in hopes of hitting yet another XP motherload.

Another problem with Milestone XP is the matter of time. The players handbook recommends 1 year of training to increase 1 level no matter how much treasure a character heaps on a place of learning. With Milestone XP you may have a character do so much in such a short time that they jump from first to fourteenth level over what turns out to be a matter of weeks.

Flat Leveling. A third method that works is called **Flat Leveling.** After a night of gaming you simply tell everyone to level up, gaining whatever XP they need to reach the next level. *Nothing is easier than that!* However, many players find this to be the least rewarding form of advancement since it doesn't hinge on anything they have done. They are being leveled up because you need them to level up for the next adventure.

The truth about leveling up is that it is a hollow reward. It does not make the game any easier, just different. It justifies you bringing in stranger and more dangerous creatures without fear of squashing delicate low-level characters. Unfortunately, as characters increase in level they also increase in power. Eventually you will run out of

things to challenge them with. This is why level advancement tops out at 14. In theory you could keep leveling up indefinitely, but eventually you will hit a wall where characters become so powerful and even your bangers will want to retire them and start over from first.

Player Performance. One method we don't recommend is **Player Performance**. This is where you judge the other people at the table and give them XP for their ability to play the game, giving out points for role-playing, puzzle solving, knowing the rules or being engaged with the adventure.

While this may sound good on the surface, if you have people at the table who aren't into the game it is best to figure out why. Penalizing them with fewer XP for not playing your way isn't going to make them any happier about the situation. Maybe they don't know what they are doing and are afraid to say anything. It could be that your adventures are not living up to their expectations. Maybe they just don't like the character they've been playing and want to try someone different. It could be that they don't like Dragonhead itself and want to play some other game. Kinda weird but those people are out there.

If you come upon something like this it is best to talk to the person in private and figure out what isn't working and what can be done that you both can agree upon. Otherwise people may stop showing up and that is the worst thing that could happen.

A World Without a World

Dragonhead is not a game world in the classical sense where it represents a place that has been mapped out and given an assortment of place names, major NPCS and a history of important happenings. It is more of a toolkit you use to create a fantasy world of your own design, one often pieced together on the fly as you and your friends adventure through it.

Which is one of the prime reasons behind what is known as the *pseudo-medieval reality* that most fantasy worlds exist in. By keeping the world technologically simple you don't have to worry about your BCs having too much fore-knowledge of the place. It is perfectly acceptable for them to play characters who grew up in the same small village and barely know anything about the world beyond its walls. How many continents are there? What are the capital cities? Is the world flat, round or even concave? What are the stars? You will figure out the answers to these questions when the need arises. Until then the truth is anybody's guess. Or *more importantly*, by being the creator of this realm it is your guess to make in time.

With all of that said, there are a few conventions Dragonhead plays off of which need to be heeded, for example the way that magic works or the nature of alignment. These were put in place to give the game a foundation to build on and provide the world with some consistency. You are free to change them as you see fit, just don't be surprised when you end up changing a lot more than you bargained for.

Dark Age Adventure

Dragonhead is not so much about Medieval Europe as a medieval state of mind. It takes place in a Dark Age. The funny thing about dark ages is that the people living in them rarely realize just how dark they are. To them this is a bright age. There once was an empire which ruled over all the land but it fell in some cataclysm that is barely understood or even remembered by anyone still alive. The decrepit vine-covered ruins of this lost world still pepper the landscape and there is a sense of loss when one

ruminates on it, but all of that is desperately old news. *Civilization is on the rebound!*

On the Bright Side. What once were fortresses have expanded beyond their walls to become citadels and in some places even small cities. Homesteaders are venturing back out into the wilderness to hack down the forest and reclaim the land. Sailors are building ships to investigate rumors of old trading routes and distant exotic ports. The past is gone and on the whole there is nowhere to go but up.

Denizens Abound. Yet a lot still stands in the way. Monsters that long ago had been chased to the edges of the earth and off into the mists of legend have been slithering their way back and thriving in the desolation. Newly minted kings and queens have been plotting to amass more power by rapidly expanding the borders of their kingdoms. Many are ruthless and will let nothing stand in their way. Magic is being re-discovered. It is an awesome inexplicable force which is rumored to have led to the empire's downfall and may still yet wreak havoc once again.

Treasure of the Ancients. And of course, endless rumors abound of lost treasure – chests bursting with gold, silver, gemstones and jewelry – hidden deep beneath ancient ruins waiting for someone foolhardy enough to go searching for it. Such stories make it achingly hard for a peasant to be content with planting potatoes season after season. Say it loud but not too proud - *po-tate-toes* - is that the best life has to offer? A dusty old map looking suspiciously like ones homeland is usually all it takes to spark an adventure.

Technologies Lost. When that distant empire fell, civilization did not fall all the way back to the stone age. The basics of farming and textile production were kept in tact but many advanced technological wonders were lost. Gunpowder does not exist. Electricity has yet to be harnessed. Steam-power is barely an inkling in a gnome's eye. When people herd their sheep between the towering bone-like remnants of the aqueducts they barely understand their purpose let alone how anyone could stack stones so high without having them topple over.

Steel is Real. One technology which was not lost is metallurgy. While most of the empire's mines shut down and were swallowed up by the earth, small town smiths did what they could to hold onto what they know and have maintained the secret of hardening iron into steel. Of course, without mines and trade routes, this metal does not come cheaply! Iron is sparse and salvaged whenever possible, providing

yet even more reasons to venture into the ruins, looking for anything that time has not reduced to rust.

Communication is Limited. There are no printing presses. Writing is done with quill and ink on cured animal skin called vellum. This task is typically done by professional scribes who are few and far between. Most people cannot read or write more than a handful of words and no one is ashamed of it. They enjoy talking to each other and cannot understand why anyone would want to spend so much time alone, muttering to themselves in silence as they read words off a page. *Is this some kind of magic?* People who can read are often treated with great suspicion.

A Lawless Land. Because very little is written down, literally there are no laws. Where you do find a court, often sitting at the head of it is a self-appointed potentate whose word is law. Beneath them are various other vassels - dukes, barons, counts and knights – all of whom have the same power over those they lord over. In the end, the law is whatever the powerful want it to be.

Cataclysms Make Strange Bedfellows. Many of the settlements in this world grew out of refugee encampments made by people fleeing the chaos of collapsing cities. While much of this history has been forgotten, it does much to explain why there are towns where elves, dwarves, humans and other friendly humanoids live as neighbors far removed from their traditional homelands.

A Heroic Age. Worlds burgeoning with millions of people often forget how important just one person can be. Not this one. In this age you have your friends and that is it. Maybe a rider can be sent to a near-by town to plead for assistance, but it could be days before anyone responds. When trouble arises, people deal with it on their own as best they can. It is from the fire of these trials that heroes emerge.

Heroism is not about picking on someone half your size. It's not about picking on someone your own size. It's about picking on someone twice your size who has been picking on people half your size. If the bangers do not answer the call then who will?

Languages

Languages define the societies that speak them. In a world with vast tracts of wilderness and blurry, shifting, sometimes non-existent borders, the language a character

speaks will often be used by locals to determine whether or not that character belongs and can be trusted. Depending on the area, not speaking the local language could mean nothing more than being given a menu of inflated prices or it could mean being arrested as a spy.

Languages are important.

Gamewise, you do not need to actually invent the words of a language for your game. Having someone simply say they are speaking in Common or Elvish is more than enough. You may however, create as many languages as you like. The following are a few we created for the game and are often used by fantasy worlds.

Common. Common is the language of trade. It is called Common because it is the most common language spoken in any civilized or semi-civilized land. Like English or Spanish it may have a distinct regional name but Common is preferred since the idea of it is so easily understood.

Because Common is so widely spoken it does not convey the same sense of trust or loyalty that other more distinct languages convey. People will be happy to find that a character speaks it - because now they can make trade - but no one is going to trust a character for speaking Common.

Draconic. This is the language of dragons and it is as old and cryptic as the beasts themselves. It is a telepathic language often only spoken between the minds of dragons. When it is even known, draconic is known for being able to convey large amounts of information in a flash of time. For the same reason it is never spoken aloud and attempting to do so usually amounts in a jangled mess of gibberish.

Dwarvish. The language of the dwarves grew up in the mines and is fascinating for its monotonous precision. To the untrained ear it sounds like a bunch of grunting, but to someone who is keen on its various nuances – *grunt, grunt, grunt* – could easily be a blacksmith's work list or it could be the highest poetry of yore. Those who cannot tell the difference are not true dwarves or so most dwarves believe.

Elvish. Elvish is a high, lilting, beautiful language which almost sounds like music and is routinely judged by elves for its musical nature. This creates a strange situation where ideas are often valued more for how they are presented rather than the information they contain. Anyone who cannot sing their thoughts with refinement and style are often ignored in favor of those who can. Something

which says more about elven culture than most elves would like to have known.

Goblin. Goblins are outcasts in the worlds of humanoids, often existing on the fringes of civilization. While the language may be called Goblin it is spoken by far more than just Goblins. It has grown in popularity to where pretty much any subhumanoid who does not get along with the speakers of Common will speak it. You could almost call Goblin the Common of the subhumanoid world - the *other trade language* – the one spoken by those who prefer to pillage the speakers of Common than trade with them.

Gnomish. Gnomes developed their language not to isolate themselves from the rest of the world but to better understand it. They built their language in the way that gnomes build everything, quite pragmatically and in a ramshackle fashion. What works – works - and they don't really care how it sounds. This makes Gnomish almost the complete opposite of Elvish. It is loaded with jargon and has a way of speaking mathematical formulas which guarantees error-less understanding despite sounding like nails on a chalkboard.

Law & Chaos. While they do not sound anything like each other, these two secret languages largely serve the same clandestine purpose and that is to let those who speak it talk to one another with confidence that they are on the same side and no one can listen in. Moreso than any language listed here, Law and Chaos are cryptic, intentionally hard to learn, and closely guarded secrets by those who speak them. They are not taught to just anyone. If any language runs the risk of getting its speaker killed, Law and Chaos are it.

Reptilian. It is rumored that before the rise of humanoids, lizard people known as Reptilians ruled the world. This is a distant remnant of that language, so distant that among the few scholars who know of its existence no one knows how to speak it. For them it is an enigmatic written language. They have just enough knowledge to make some sense of the glyphs they find carved in stone. Pronouncing it is a mystery.

Ironically enough, those creatures who actively speak Reptilian (such as kobolds and lizard men) do not recognize the writing. They simply know it as their language. They do not know how to write or read it and are often lost on the concept yet speak Reptilian quite fluently.

Despite the fact that dragons appear to be giant lizards, Reptilian and Draconic are totally different languages.

Subterranean. When you live deep under the earth, you tend to get separated from the surface world and begin speaking in ways they would not understand. Subterranean is spoken in these shadowy realms and despite being a completely different language it does bear a disturbing similarity to Elvish. To those who actually speak it, Subterranean is known as *Chthonic* and its speakers are the *Chthonians*.

Law & Chaos

There is law and chaos and then there is **Law** and **Chaos**. When capitalized they are actually the names of secret organizations. The force of Law is determined to re-establish civilization and possibly the former empire. The force of Chaos is interested in making sure this never happens. Both have their reasons and believe in them vehemently. The two generally work by infiltrating ruling powers and using their influence to further their agendas.

Allegiance. Most of the world does not know Law and Chaos exist and swears allegiance to neither. Many rulers are despots who may talk incessantly about the rule of law but are only interested in supporting those causes that further their own rule. The last thing they want is some group calling itself the Law telling them what to do. Likewise, while the world may be a chaotic place where might makes right, most people are not interested in making it any worse than it already is. They may naturally gravitate towards the rule of Law without even realizing that they are doing so.

Agents of Fortune. Ironically, Law and Chaos are not as different from each other as they may seem. In places where Chaos rules, the forces of Law may be actively undermining this rule and acting more like a force of chaos than that of the law. Meanwhile the forces of Chaos are concerned with solidifying their rule in those places they have conquered and have been known to act quite autocratically to make sure that they keep it. This can get confusing, but it's good to know that both Law & Chaos are out there when you need them.

Magical Topography

Magic is more than just a power certain characters know how to wield, it is by nature an invisible force that lays over the land. When a character casts a spell they are drawing up that magical force and concentrating it into the strange cat's cradle of a spell which will cause the magic to manifest in the form the character desires. Because of this, the location of where a spell is cast can often be just as important as knowing how it is done.

Some lands are more magically charged than others. Broadly speaking, magical topography can be narrowed down into three different kinds of land: Vortexes, Dead Zones and Weird Lands.

Vortexes. A magical vortex is essentially a well-spring of magical power. Any use of magic in it will gain a casting bonus based on the amount of ambient magical energy surging through the area. This usually ranges from a paltry +1 to an astounding +10.

Vortexes are often invisible to the naked eye, but those who regularly use magic will feel it humming and vibrant in the air. Those able to see by the light of magic will find it eye-stingingly bright.

No one knows what causes a vortex to come into being or how long they will last, but vortexes can be found all throughout the universe. It is not uncommon for powerful magic-users to rush to such places and try to establish a citadel on top of one before somebody else does.

Dead Zones. A dead zone is the opposite of a vortex. It is an area that has had the magical power sucked out of it. Any magic-user moving through one will feel weak, sick, queasy. When they go to use their magical powers they suffer a penalty based on how devoid of magic the area is. Usually this ranges from a tepid -1 to a leaden -10.

The ability to see magic often fails in such areas, seeing nothing but total darkness or stark shadows of what is actually there. Wizard courts and prisons are commonly built in dead zones. Like a vortex there is no apparent rhyme or reason as to why dead zones exist where they do. They just do.

Weird Lands. If a vortex is a wellspring and a dead zone a desert, then a weird land – or simply a Weird - is a river with white water rapids. These surge with magical power but there is also something about the area which causes that power to twist and turn and manifest itself in utterly

bizarre ways. This is how you get floating mountains, singing trees and raspberry flavored light, among other things.

Characters using magical powers in a weird do so at their own risk. They may gain a bonus from the extra energy, but there is always the chance that the weirdness will corrupt the spell, possibly causing a cast of magic missile to pelt ones enemies with cupcakes instead.

For this strangeness, roll **1d10** and add the magic modifier of the weird to it. If the total adds up to **10 or more** then the spell goes awry and it is left to you the DM to figure out how the weird has changed it. Otherwise the area operates just like a vortex.

Divine Magic. The dirty little secret of divine magic is that while it may operate differently from arcane magic and seem to be an entirely different force that is all window dressing. *Magic is magic.* The divinities only cast the spell for the character who is praying for it. It is the ability of the character to pray in earnest which determines how much assistance they are given. The power behind the spell comes from the area surrounding the character and it will be effected by magical topography.

A land mass can carry an alignment just like a character. Dead zones, weirds and vortexes may be consecrated good or evil. This doesn't change the magical properties of the place but it may interfere with the delivery of a divine spell. An evil vortex +4 will still give a +4 to a good character's divine magic, but if the strength of that spell cannot beat the strength of the evil in the area then it fails. See the spell **Consecrate** for more on how this works.

This is yet another reason why the divinities are as territorial as they are. If too much land is consecrated good or evil the lesser divinity may be shut out altogether. Good will triumph! *Or possibly Evil.*

Magical Atlases. If spell books are valuable beyond belief for those who know how to use them, magical atlases place a close second. These are incredibly rare bound books of maps purporting to show where different kinds of magical lands exist and of what intensity. *Some may even be accurate.* The quality bonus an atlas possesses is often a reflection of this accuracy.

Gate Glyphs. Many magical atlases include gate glyph information that can be used by a magic-user to Teleport directly to that spot or possibly use the spell **Dimension Gate** to open a portal to that point. Dimension Gate in

particular can be a very deadly way of transporting an entire army over vast distances to show up behind enemy lines or sometimes even inside an enemy stronghold. Because of this, any ruling power that knows about Gate Glyphs and Dimensional Gates will do what they can to control them. If they cannot control them then they will do what they can to destroy them. This often includes destroying any characters possessing the knowledge of how to make a gate work.

Wilderness Adventure

When it comes to the spaces inbetween the places where we adventure we often hand-wave the overland travel needed to get there, but as the old adage goes – *sometimes it's not the destination but the journey that tries to kill you.*

It's All About the Map. To do wilderness adventure right you need a map of the area. These are typically made using hex paper where each hex equals **5 miles**. Geographical features such as towns, cities, roads, streams and coastlines are drawn in pencil. Terrains such as forests, fields and mountains are colored with highlighters.

Lay the map flat on the table and let the players use a pawn of some sort to keep track of where they are on it. This map should be a ghost map and not include any information you don't want the BCs to know.

Travel Speed. Miles are used because character movement rates are roughly equivalent to *Miles Per Hour*. No group can move faster than its **slowest member**, so when the day begins, ask the party how many hours they plan to travel as well as the speed of its slowest member. Multiply the speed by the hours and divide the total by 5 as in *five miles per hex*. This creates the party's travel speed.

$$\textbf{Travel} = (\text{Speed} \times \text{Hours}) / \text{Scale}.$$

A party with a speed of 4 intent on hiking 10 hours has a travel speed of 8 (4 x 10 = 40 / 5 = 8) and can move 8 hexes per day across the map.

Day by Day. From here the game moves day by day, with the players moving their pawn the entire distance they will travel before stopping to set up camp.

If the party wants they may travel by night and sleep during the day. They can also skip the sleep to travel both night and day. They will reach their destination sooner but be a complete wreck once they get there (see *Rest & Recovery* in the BHB for more).

Terrain. All of this assumes that the ground beneath the character's feet is either road or open field. Other types of terrain will slow the characters, increasing the number of hexes it takes to go through a single hex of it. For example:

    2 Hex: Bramble, Forest, Hills, Jungle, Mud, Sand, Shallow Water, Snow, Swamp.

    3 Hex: Canyons, Cliffs, Deep or Rapid Water, Glaciers, Gorges, Mountains.

So if the party can move 8 hexes a day and two of those hexes are forest? They will only move 6 hexes across the map since it takes 4 hexes of movement to get through the forest.

Impassible Terrain. Three hex terrain such as cliffs and mountains are considered impassable. Every character in the party should make an **Agility** check. Anyone failing the check will cause the party to lose even more movement. This is time lost to helping the fallen character get out of whatever mess they got themselves into.

> **Passing the Impassible**
> **Check**: Agility
>
> **1**: You make it through.
> **½**: Try again at -2.
> **0**: Party loses 1 hex of travel, take **1d8b** damage.
> **X**: Party loses 2 hex of travel, take **1d20b** damage.

Armor does not protect against this damage. The check only needs to be made once for every **10 hexes** of consecutive travel through impassible terrain.

Random Encounters. Like the encounters in *A Well of Goblins* the different named regions in a wilderness area should have their own 1d100 encounter tables. There should also be a general encounter table for everywhere else.

Once per day and **once per night** random encounters should be rolled, right after the players finish moving their pawn.

If the characters have moved through different named regions then the **last one** they moved through is the one to use and the encounter will happen in that area. Otherwise use the general encounter table.

Day & Night. Some regions use different tables for day and night encounters. Others, like the one below, use slash numbers.

    60/70: No Encounter.

    50/60: Watering Hole.

> 30/40: Thunderstorm.
>
> 10/20: Getting Lost.
>
> 1/ -: Elven Scouting Party.
>
> -/ 1: Hobgoblin War Band.

The number before the slash is the day number and the number after it is the night number. Encounters with a – dash will not occur at that time. The elven scouting party will only be encountered during the day and the hobgoblins only at night.

Seeing It Coming. During the day, when something happens it is customary to give characters a **Wisdom** check to see if they spot it from a distance. **Wilderness Survival** will help with this check.

Under the cover of night a **Wisdom Competition** should be held to see if a sneak attack is possible (see *Surprise Attacks* in the BHB).

Vision. When it comes to the limits of a character's vision, a character on the ground without anything blocking ones sight can see into **an adjacent hex**. Every **20'** one rises above the ground adds another hex of vision to a limit of **ten hexes**.

For this the ability to fly definitely helps, but it is good to remember that an airborne character can be easily seen from the ground and may alert the creatures in the area to the presence of the characters.

Staying Put. If the party decides not to travel and just stay where they are, such as when sleeping, roll **twice** on the encounter table and use the **greater** of the two rolls. Obviously, characters that haven't gone anywhere cannot get lost so ignore such encounters.

When it comes to just how rejuvenated the characters will be when a random encounter rudely awakens them, roll **1d6:**

> 5: Fully Rejuvenated.
> 3: Half Rejuvenated.
> 1: Not Rejuvenated.

Getting Lost. Just because the bangers have a map in front of them doesn't mean they won't get lost. **Getting Lost** is a common entry on most encounter tables. If the party has been traveling along a well-defined road or trail or following a body of water then ignore Getting Lost and roll again.

Otherwise, move the character's pawn to the hex they started the day in and roll **1d8** to find the direction they veered off towards:

- **8:** North
- **7:** North-East
- **6:** East
- **5:** South-East
- **4:** South
- **3:** South-West
- **2:** West
- **1:** North-West

Move the pawn in a straight line in that direction for as many hexes as **half their travel speed**, ignoring matters of terrain. The idea being that they spent the entire day wandering in circles and here is where they eventually ended up.

Now everyone should make a **Wisdom** check. Having an actual map of the area (not the BCs ghost map) will make this check easier.

> ## Are We Still Lost?
> **Check:** Wisdom + Navigation
>
> **1:** You've figured out where you are.
> **½:** Lost and you negate someone else figuring it out.
> **0:** Lost and you negate two other characters figuring it out.
> **X:** So hopelessly lost you negate anyone in the party figuring it out.

Scoring more than one success gives a character conviction. Each success needs to be negated to keep the party lost. If no one figures it out the party remains lost and every time it moves a random direction roll should be made again.

Should the party stumble upon a landmark or some impassible terrain they will find themselves there and no longer be lost. Lost characters will not enter impassible terrain involuntarily.

Exhaustion. Right before a random encounter begins, round down the number of hours spent traveling to the nearest even number and roll that die. This is the amount of wear damage each member of the party will have suffered from the day's journey.

So if you had planned to travel for 10 hours, roll a 1d10. If a 6 results, everyone will be down by 6 hit points when the encounter begins.

Exhaustion will never do enough damage to knock a character unconscious but it can go up to 1 point short of it. If nothing is rolled on the encounter table and the party is planning on sleeping then exhaustion can be ignored.

Forced Marching. A forced march will increase the party's travel time by **half** but also add a **+3** to the exhaustion roll.

Heavy Equipment. Carrying more equipment than normal, such as a big treasure chest, will add to exhaustion, typically by **+1** for every **two people** needed to carry it stretcher style.

Climate. Likewise, being hit by rain, snow or sleet along the way will add to the exhaustion roll.

Normal Precipitation = +1

Heavy Precipitation = +2

Temperature can be exhausting. The number on the left is for those who are dressed for it and the number on the right is for those who are not.

Normal Heat & Cold: +0 / +1

Intense Heat & Cold: +1 / +2

Extreme Heat & Cold: +2 / +4

Bringing It All Together. That covers a lot of territory (pun intended) but in truth wilderness adventure moves quite quickly once you know how it's done. You do need a map, and for each day of travel...

1. Travel Speed = (Slowest Speed x Hours of Travel) / Map Scale
2. Let the players move their pawn across the map.
3. Roll for an encounter using the last named terrain the party moved through.
4. Roll for exhaustion.
5. Make a Wisdom check to see if the players see it coming.
6. Deal with the encounter.

At night or when the characters are asleep and not traveling...

1. Roll for an encounter twice using the region the BCs camped in. Use the greater of the two rolls.
2. Figure out just how rejuvenated the sleeping characters are.

3. When needed, run a Wisdom Competition for a sneak attack.

4. Deal with the encounter.

Switching Gears. While Wilderness Adventure can feel a bit like a game inside a game, it's good to remember that you can switch out of it at any time.

If after rolling up a roving hobgoblin war band the BCs decide not to engage it but quietly track them back to their lair? *Go for it!* Don't bother with counting hexes. Move their pawn to *H1: The Hobgoblins Hideout* and play it from there.

Adventure Creation

An adventure module is a snapshot of a place frozen in time right before your bangers enter the picture to mess it all up. Structurally speaking a module can be divided into four parts: a Scenario, a Background, a Map and some Encounters. There is also a fifth part – an Idea – which tends to kick off the frenzy of creation.

The Bright Idea

As much as it helps, you don't need to have some bright idea to begin designing your adventure. Simply force your way forward. Often a bright idea will reveal itself in time as you pull together the adventure's various parts. If you truly need an idea to start with, consider one of these time-tested classics.

Destroy the Rampaging Monsters. There are monsters off in the hills and the BCs are needed to hit them head-on before they tear another village to pieces.

Clean out a Ruin. On the edge of the kingdom an old castle has been discovered that could be a valuable fortification. The king has promised a reward to anyone who can explore it and secure it.

Recover a Lost Artifact. Long ago somebody put something of incredible importance in a safe secret place. *Now it has been forgotten.* Hard times have fallen on the land and it is up to the bangers to bring it back.

Stop an Ancient Evil. Some dark and mysterious force is taking over the minds of people in power. It is up to the BCs to figure out what it is, where it is coming from, and how to put an end to it.

Placate the Gods. Crops have failed and clerics are blaming it on an angry god. Now a sacrifice must be made and it is up to the bangers to escort a procession through dangerous lands to an ancient temple and make sure that it happens.

Defy the Gods. Someone a character loves has been chosen to be sacrificed to an angry god. It is up to the bangers to raid the procession leading to the ancient temple and make sure this does not happen, but do they dare defy the gods?

Rescue Captives. Those damn royals! They can't keep their princesses away from the dragons. Now the king is sobbing

his eyes out and begging for your bangers to bring her back. *Yet again.*

Shipwrecked. Last night the ship the characters were on was savaged by a storm. Morning dawns with them waking up on the beach of a mysterious tropical island, sans ship. At night, drums thunder in the distance.

Caravan. Someone has hired the bangers to help escort a caravan through a desert. Don't worry, nothing could possibly go wrong out among the distant shifting sands.

Vagaries of Lady Luck. The bangers lost a bet and now need to do something profoundly stupid to maintain their honor. Undoubtedly, a mountain spewing steam into the air will be involved.

Investigate the Unknown. What's out there? Dark caves? Craggy mountains? Strange standing stones arranged in an arcane celestial pattern?

Let's go check it out!

Setting

There is no better place to start than where it all takes place. Dragonhead has no real world. The stuff it contains is loosely based on ancient/medieval times with inspiration drawn from a broad stretch of mythology. This means you can write into it just about anything you want. While it may be tempting to sit down and spend a few days (weeks, years...) hammering out a complete description of the world, it is best to leave most of it largely unknown and only add in features as needed.

Environment. Start with the environment the adventure will take place in. Note that many creatures in the Bestiary have these same environmental tags attached to them. First choose a temperature range with the big five being, from hot to cold...

```
Torrid
Tropical
Temperate
Frigid
Arctic
```

Next choose a land mass describing the general area...

```
Badlands
Canyons
Caverns
Desert
```

```
Forest
Hills
Jungle
Mountains
Ocean
Prairie
Ruins
Rural
Savanna
Subterranean
Swamp
Tundra
Urban
```

Time of the Season. Spring, Summer, Autumn or Winter. What time of the year will the adventure take place? Granted, seasons mean more to some environments than others, but they can be terribly important when dealing with the communities that depend on them.

> **Spring.** While often thought of as the brightest and liveliest of times, spring does have a dark side. People are emerging cold and hungry from the long winter. Supplies are running thin and many are willing to pillage their neighbors when necessary. Most wars of aggression begin in the springtime. Strangers are not welcome.
>
> **Summer.** All the world is busy at work, too busy for anything that does not demand immediate attention. In warmer regions the heat is so unbearable that people sleep through the day and work into the night. Characters wearing heavy armor should be prepared to cook inside those metal casings.
>
> **Autumn.** In agricultural societies this is the most important part of the year. Everyone is needed to bring in the final harvest. It is a happy time of unbridled gluttony and yet the leaves are falling and there is a chill in the air. The bitter cold of winter is on its way.
>
> **Winter.** A snow covered field can be a beautiful sight but do not underestimate it, winter is the death of the year. Everyone is cooped up inside and trying to make their food reserves last for as long as possible. The boredom can be unbearable. What better time is there to go out and do some adventuring?

A Place For it to Happen. A "dungeon" is any area where an adventure can take place. It does not have to be underground or even enclosed. The dark part of an enchanted forest or a broad stretch of mountain peaks can be a dungeon. Admittedly though, some of our favorite places are underground. If you can't think of anything, try one of

these classics. Many of which are typically abandoned or
shunned with good reason.

```
Abandoned Cities
Ancient Temples
Castles and Palaces
Caves and Caverns
Cemeteries and Graveyards
Crypts, Tombs and Pyramids
Forests, Glades and Fairy Rings
Fortresses, Keeps, Towers and Strongholds
Ghost Towns
Mining Operations
Standing Stones
Volcanoes
```

Making Maps. Traditionally, at this point you would get
out a sheet of graph paper and some pencils and sketch out
a map of the place. If this works then fine. Otherwise you
might want to skip ahead to the next step and figure out
what creatures the adventure will contain. In the making of
A Well of Goblins, the cave map connecting all the
encounters was the very last thing we did.

If making maps is not your strong point go ahead and make
one anyways. The maps that come with professionally made
modules look nice because they need to. *Your maps do not.*
Maps serve the purpose of linking encounters. As long as
the players do not see your notes then they will never know
that your *Grand Mausoleum of the Arch-Lich Suponez* is
little more than a bunch of blobs connected by lines
scribbled on the back of a cocktail napkin.

It is generally a good idea to **avoid** using professionally
made modules as a guide to what an adventure module should
be like. There is a world of difference between what you
write for yourself and what professionals write for mass
consumption. Until you come up with an idea you believe you
can sell, it's best to write as simply and self-servingly
as possible.

Creatures

On the whole, nothing is more important than the creatures
your bangers will encounter. They need to be something more
than just mannequins in a room that come to life when the
characters enter it. They should be a presence in an area,
aware of their surroundings, free to roam and respond to
all that is going on.

Picking Creatures. Create a list of the creatures you would like to bring to the game. Some questions you might want to ask of them....

Are They In The Right Environment? You don't have to limit yourself to just one environment, but if you roam outside the zone the adventure takes place in then you should have a compelling reason for doing so. Fire Giants found shivering in the arctic? There is a reason for that and it can't be good.

Why Are They Here? Which creatures simply live in the area and which ones are on a mission from distant lands? Who wants to be there and who would rather be somewhere else?

Do Creatures Get Along With Each Other? Elves and Orcs fight like cats and dogs. To get them working together let alone living together is quite a stretch. If neighboring creatures do not get along, where have they set up borders? Are they actively fighting or has a truce been struck between them? If they are working together then why?

Who is the Mastermind? Is there a command structure at work among these creatures? Who gives the orders? Who set things up? Are they even still alive? Does the mastermind answer to a higher power the characters will eventually discover somewhere down the line?

Where Is The Food Coming From? Everything alive needs to eat. Who is feeding all of these creatures? Do they feed themselves? If not, what or whom do they feed upon? Are they starving? Do the characters look tasty to them?

What Comes Out At Night? Deep underground day and night merge into one, but everywhere else there is day and night and often what goes on in one does not go on during the other.

Where Is The Treasure Hidden? Creatures are going to have different ideas about what is valuable, but on the whole treasure is not going to be just scattered all over the place. Creatures are going to horde their treasure in some place safe, not just from the characters but from other denizens living in the dungeon.

What Haven't We Done Before? This is probably the most important question of the bunch. Think of your group in particular. While it may be fun to revisit old favorite encounters it doesn't take long before fighting and re-fighting the same creatures gets

stale. Unless, of course, some new spin can be taken on the encounter.

You don't have to answer all of these questions and there are countless adventures which overlook them quite glaringly, but as much as bangers like to be surprised they truly enjoy things that have been fully thought out and in some strange way makes sense.

Creature Levels. When it comes to the matter of creature levels and how many intensity levels should a character possess when compared to them?

It should be said that characters are not contractually obliged to fight everything they encounter. The hydra in *A Well of Goblins* is a perfect example. The characters are really meant to run past it. Killing the hydra is not their mission. If it were then – yes – a hydra is way too high level a creature to be putting in front of them.

As an adventure designer it is good to keep in mind just how powerful the characters exploring your dungeon will be, but it is even better to let that place be what it is rather than stymie the adventure by trying to force its inhabitants to fit into some kind of level limitation scheme. Give your bangers a mix of things to run over and run away from and let them figure out the best way to handle it all.

Cutting the Clutter. Monsters are designed with the idea that their stat block will be copied out of the Monsters & Treasure assortment and pasted into the adventure you are creating. On the whole, the less text you have to look at the easier your adventure will run. It is always a good idea to read through these blocks and prune out anything that doesn't need to be there. Level, Frequency and Environments often do not need to be included. Size AC can often be trimmed down to just Small and Medium since most BCs will be of that size.

Hit Point Bars. Even HP can be left out. Yes, you read that right. The **HP:** 4. doesn't need to be in the stat block because we often copy/paste one line of damage circles for each creature beneath it, for example:

Goblin 1 (S 1 K) O O | O | O

Goblin 2 (S 1 K) O O | O | O

If you mention an attribute once, there's no reason to mention it twice.

Encounters

Now that you have some creatures assembled break them into groups and give each a letter. On your map use that letter to define the area. For example:

```
A = Ham Hacker Orcs.
B = Black Haggis.
C = Kobolds.
D = Pork Devil Orcs.
```

Random Encounters. Traditionally, random encounters happen in between encounters. Something done to keep adventurers moving instead of hanging out in the hallways. While this does work, the presence of hall-monitors can be annoying and eat up valuable game time with otherwise meaningless battles.

In *A Well of Goblins* we got rid of the halls. The map identifies dozens of caves which can be thought of as hallways but there are really only eight different encounters in the whole thing. Random tables are used inside the encounters to make sure the same thing doesn't happen everywhere. Not only does this ratchet up the tension as the dice are rolled while the characters move around but it also makes the place seem more alive and unpredictable.

Creating Threshold Tables. Making a threshold table is easy. Create a list of the different possible encounters in the area. Order them according to danger with the most dangerous encounters on the bottom. The bottom-most item always starts at 1. The others increment, typically by 5 and 10 point amounts, until the top-most item is reached. That top item tops out at 100.

If you want something to have a greater chance of occurring, decrease its line number. If the top-most item is 80, it will have a 20% chance of occurring. Drop it to 70 and you increase it to 30%.

Area Numbering. If an area is defined by a letter then its smaller parts should use that letter and number. On the whole, the fewer written words you have to deal with the better. Rather than writing out a description for every nook and cranny, try creating a list of titles and use your imagination to fill them in as needed.

```
A1 = Guard Room.

A2 = Sleeping Area.
```

```
A3 = Weapon's Cache.

A4 = Prisoner's Cave.

A5 = Broom Closet.
```

Do you really need a written description of what's in the broom closet? Only if something valuable has been hidden there.

You could even skip the list altogether and just write the labels directly on the map. That way you won't have to bounce back and forth between your notes and the map. Of course, whether or not your map can support that amount of clutter depends on your map making skills.

Written Descriptions. Another thing professionally-made adventures often include which need to be handled with care are text boxes. If you are new to the realm of TTRPGs, be aware that there are gamers out there who absolutely revile text boxes. There is no way to hide the fact that you are reading off of a page and they will hold your feet to the fire if they catch you doing so.

In truth, text-boxes are not as bad as they seem, especially when someone is new to DM-ing and not really sure of what to say, or if the encounter needs something very specifically said where you don't want to say too much or too little before the characters start asking questions.

The problem with text boxes is that it often feels as if the description in the box is happening separate from all that the characters are doing, or that the game has been put on hold while the DM rambles out a description of what stands before them.

Descriptive Lists. A popular alternative to text-boxes are descriptive lists. Essentially a list of details laid out with the most obvious ones at the top. You don't read the list so much as glance at it to fire your imagination. For a cave where the orcs have been stashing weapons stolen off of the adventurers they have killed....

- Dank musty cave.

- Slick and slimy floor.

- Strange smell of rancid cheese.

- Pile of swords with rusty bent blades.

- Skulls with mouldering helmets still attached to them.

What to Describe. Describing everything is not only exhausting, it gets tedious quick. The general rule of description is that *nobody describes unimportant things*.

If you ramble on with a ten-minute monologue about a scene depicted in a tapestry? That had better bear some serious importance to the adventure at hand.

Often less is more and a little bit of description goes a very long way. If you describe the cave floor as slick and slimy, not only will your bangers start to wonder if they will have a hard time crossing it or fighting on it (otherwise, why did you mention it?), but they will also assume that the floor will remain slick and slimy until you say otherwise.

Active Description. As with everything else, put your work into what matters. Notice that *A Web of Goblins* does not use text boxes for every encounter. It uses them right at the start and for interesting occurrences like the hydra's appearance. The module skips the text box for one of the most important points, namely Malthazar's re-appearance at the end of the adventure. Why? Because there are so many different ways in which this encounter could happen it was decided that it was best to leave it up to the DM to handle the encounter as it happens.

Traps & Doors

Traps are often mechanical devices set up as guards that never sleep. Simple mechanical traps come with a number of values that follow it in parenthesis, ex: **Pendulum Blade (secret 13, hit 14, dmg 1d12s)**. Secret is the strength at which the trap has been hidden. Any character looking for the trap will need to beat it with a Wisdom check to discover the blade without setting it off. Hit is the trap's attack score. DMG is the damage it does. These two are treated just like a creature attack. AC defends against it.

Pit Traps. Pit traps work in the same way as mechanical traps except they have a fall instead of a hit and damage roll, ex: **Pit Trap (secret 13, fall 10' spiked)**. A character who falls into this one will fall ten feet onto a bed of spikes. Basically, a fall does half the damage fallen in damage points. For more on how *Falling* and *Traps* work see their entries in the *Adventure* section of the *Banger's Handbook*.

Trap Placement. Traps are a mixed bag. Some bangers love them. Nothing says you are getting close to something that matters quite like encountering a trap. Others see them as a waste of time and a thrill-less way of chipping away at their characters.

When you go to place a trap make sure it makes sense. Do realize that traps are often set by inhabitants who have to live around them. Traps do not belong in high traffic areas. Simple traps may be openly baited with treasure. Sometimes the treasure itself is a trap and the actual treasure is hidden elsewhere in the room.

Obvious Traps. If bangers have any resounding problem with traps it is that they feel obliged to search for them. *Everywhere.* If you place traps with no rhyme or reason then bangers will feel obliged to search for them in tombs, forests, taverns, castles, churches, libraries, ballrooms, bathrooms – and while this may seem funny at first it gets tedious quick and is a very hard habit to break.

One way to avoid this problem is ***do not hide your traps***. Either leave them out in the open or mark their presence, possibly with the remains of whoever last fell afoul of it. Copious amounts of dust will build up in an area after a long time spent with no one moving through it. An open pit may not be as big a threat as a secret one, but when the bangers encounter it they will know that they are dealing with a trap of some sort and start thinking inventively which is what you want.

Is this simply an open pit? Is the other side rigged to drop them in once they leap over it? Will a weighted block swing down from the ceiling to sweep them all into it if they get too close?

This kind of thinking is what makes an adventure fun, but you don't want to have it happening all the time.

Doors. In day to day life we go through doors without much thought – not in an adventure – in an adventure every door is the gateway to a potential life changing event. If the door is closed the characters are going to want to listen at it. They will check it for traps. If locked they will either pick the lock or bash it down. They will do pretty much everything except walk through the @#$*%&@$! door. Even when a door is left open they will treat it with great suspicion. Doors are portals and portals are dangerous.

Sometimes it can take just as long for a party to move through a doorway as it does for them to move through the room beyond it.

This is something to keep in mind when planning out your adventure. Even when the door is just a normal door it is best to think of it as a trap because it may consume just as much time at the table. Note that aside from a few blocked passageways, there are no doors in *A Well of*

Goblins. Partly this is because it all takes place in a cave complex, and partly it is because the adventure was designed to be completed in a single night.

Mazes & Puzzles

Adventures are about things happening, not about what stops things from happening, and that is the big problem with Mazes & Puzzles. A DM will often concoct an intriguing test of wits for the BCs to solve and place it as a roadblock in the middle of an adventure. It is not the challenge of the puzzle that is the problem. *It is the reward.* Simply continuing forward is not enough. For a puzzle to be worth the effort of solving it, the puzzle needs to lead to something monumental, something that will change the nature of the adventure itself.

The Excalibur. Consider the sword in the stone from the movie Excalibur. This may not seem like much of a puzzle. Whoever draws the sword from the stone is the rightful heir to the king. Yet everyone who tries to draw the sword fails except for Arthur who is the lost son of Uther Pendragon.

Or is he?

Merlin claims that he is, but Merlin could be lying. We don't really know what happened to the child he took from Uther Pendragon.

The truth is that Arthur is the only person to try drawing the sword for someone other than himself. That is why the Excalibur releases. It is never expressly said as such but the theme weaves its way through the entire movie. The sword only serves those who serve others. Any time the power of the Excalibur is used out of self-interest it is lost and only an act of virtue can recover it. This is why the movie is called *Excalibur* and not *King Arthur*.

Arthur as a character does not need to draw the sword. He had probably passed it countless times throughout his childhood. He could have easily grown old and died without ever even touching it. The puzzle exists not as a roadblock to action but as a local enigma. Arthur solves the puzzle without thinking yet he solves it for the right reason. What does he gain for this? Not just a powerful sword, he gains the kingship of England as well as a civil war that breaks out because of it. Arthur will need to prove to the other lords that he is a worthy king, heal a fractured land and bring the noble light of Camelot to a darkened age.

What Arthur gains is not a sword but a reason to exist, a reason to be reknown.

The adventure is irrevocably changed.

You don't have to put an Excalibur in your adventure, but it is a good model for how a maze or puzzle should work. A good puzzle doesn't stop the adventure from happening, it amplifies it, it changes the way the adventure will continue and helps keep your bangers interested in what might happen next.

Treasure

In a big way Dragonhead is a game is about treasure hunting. Maybe your bangers will not come across something as earth-shaking as the Excalibur, but they will certainly be wanting to. The question is, what do you give them?

Wealth. Coins, gemstones, jewelry, anything that amounts to big numbers behind a dollar sign. Aside from food and equipment there is not a whole lot to spend money on with the exception of training which is where most of a character's money should go, typically at a rate of 1 XP per $1 which is 1/100th of a gold piece. This exchange rate is a good thing to keep in mind. In some variants of the original game gold is cheaper than dirt. In Dragonhead, gold should be as rare as it actually is. Platinum even rarer!

If you don't trade treasure for XP then it is best to consider just what all of that wealth is good for. Without high-price tag items like land-holdings and sailing ships it could very well add up to just a big pile of glitz and quickly lose its impact.

Quality & Magic Items. The problem with magic items is that the increase in power they bring can easily eclipse a character's actual level and ruin the challenge of your adventure. An adventure without challenge is little more than a chore, so give these things out sparingly and never pass up a legitimate excuse to steal them back.

In this game, quality items are expensive and magical items are priceless. Of course, nothing is truly priceless and most learning institutions will exchange magic items for XP at a rate determined by you the DM.

Miscellaneous Items. Miscellaneous magical items are the strange unpredictable ones. These are often the most fun to bring into a game because their quirks almost create

something like a mini-adventure inside of your current adventure. Encountering *Boots of Dancing* or the *Bottomless Coin Pouch* will not be forgotten any time soon. Once again, it is good not to hit the characters with too much at once otherwise they could be overwhelmed.

Treasure Lists. With all of this said, when you go to build a list of treasure items that can be found in a location, it is best to err on the side of largess. It is far easier for a DM to trim back a big list than pull something interesting out of thin air.

NPCs

If you don't know by now, NPC stands for **Non-Player Character**. Originally it was supposed to be a character in the party that the DM would run to help fill out its ranks. In the years since it has come to stand for anything important enough to warrant a name inside the adventure.

While many NPCs can be friendly and helpful to the party, the ones who matter most are your adversaries, the NPCs who pull the strings that give your bangers a hard time, causing the adventure to be exciting. Malthazar and Jenny are just such NPCs inside *A Well of Goblins*.

Continuous Interaction. What separates a good NPC from a run of the mill creature is the amount of *continuous interaction* they have with the characters. A big boss who only shows up to be killed in the very last encounter is not a good NPC. Even in a short adventure such as *A Well of Goblins*, Malthazar the tavern keeper is both the first character the bangers meet as well as the last. He is different when he appears the second time, but the bangers already know him by name. Care was taken in the writing of its scenario to mention the name twice without beating the BCs over the head with it.

Big Bads. Someone powerful who is a presence that has been there throughout the course of the adventure, antagonizing the characters and taking delight in their folly, someone who they then defeat during the last encounter of the night (or did they?) makes for a good NPC Big Bad. Pulling this off does take some creativity. An NPC who shows up in person, multiple times, is going to need a quick and easy escape route. The vampire was made for this. Able to break apart into a swarm or bats or drift of fog makes it uncatchable. Being immortal means they can toy with the BCs at their choosing. Having to sleep during the day means

that the BCs will also have some time free to do what they can do before the inevitable nightfall.

Vampires, however, are also a bit hackneyed. In its place you might try a creature with telepathic powers (dragons, *hint, hint*) or the ability to scry the adventurers, watching and communicating with them from afar. Rulers who run spy networks able to send the characters discouraging, cryptic or even encouraging letters make for great antagonists.

Hiding in Plain Sight. The evil mastermind might even be hiding in plain site as a member of the party. This is one of the hardest NPCs to pull off since it requires coordinating with people at the table without giving away any secrets. You could try taking command of a character at the appropriate moment but this approach rarely sits well with whoever is running that character at the time. If the party has any hirelings or retainers traveling with them? How do they know there is not a spy hiding among them?

Driving Desires. A critically important consideration when it comes to setting up your NPCs is nailing down their motivations for doing whatever it is they are trying to do. Being mustache-twirlingly EVIL is often not enough. What is the desire that drives them? What could they somehow get the characters to do that they cannot do for themselves? Malthazar wants the map to the Tomb of the Dragonslayer but he cannot defeat the spectres on his own, so he tries to trick a good aligned cleric into doing it for him. *But why does Malthazar want the map?*

Stay tuned for the answer to that one.

Plans Not Plots. If you were to dissect a story and track its characters from decision to decision you would uncover its plot. Adventures do not have plots for just that reason. The adventure has not yet been run so we don't know what will happen. Forcing player decisions to follow a preordained path is known as *railroading*.

Do not do this.

This doesn't mean all adventure modules should all be aimless setting pieces. It means that your NPCs should have plans inside their heads. They should have an idea of how they want things to unfold so they can get to that driving desire. Whether the BCs play along with these plans or do what they can to foil them will show up in the game.

Background & Scenario

To finish off your adventure you need to write two introductions for it. A background and a scenario, often written in that order.

Background. The Background is for the DM. This should be an overview of everything leading up to the point where the adventurers enter the picture, as well as some ideas on where it might go from there. Backgrounds should be very general and counting on the rest of the module to fill in the details.

Even if the adventure is purely for your own use, it is still a good idea to do this step and not rely on memory. Ten years down the line you may dig the module out of whatever box you stored it in and you do not want to be stuck wondering – *what the hell was I thinking?* - a background exists to answer exactly that question.

Scenario. The last thing you write is the scenario, a short story-like essay designed to be read aloud to the table to kick off the adventure. Its purpose is to set the mood, point everyone in the right direction and get things going. While it is considered bad taste for a DM to take control of the characters and force their actions, some liberties may be taken while writing the scenario, moreso here than at any other point in the game.

Try to keep the scenario short, no more than one page at best, especially if you will actually be reading the scenario at the table. These days it is better to email the scenario to your bangers ahead of the game so they can read it on their own time and ask you any questions they may have. And if in answering these questions you find yourselves playing by correspondence?

So much the better!

Wilderness

With wilderness adventure we pull back into the sky to see everything from a distance. It is what we use to get the party from place to place and for that reason it is entirely **optional**. Most of the time you can simply say that the party spends a few days hiking out to the location and no one will bat an eye.

However, if you really want the adventure to feel real here is how to build the wilderness part of your adventure. For

advice on running it see *Wilderness Adventure* also in this book.

Map Making. Wilderness maps are made using hex paper where each hex represents **5 miles** of distance. You can scale the map to other distances but since characters move with speeds measured in *miles per hour* it is a good idea to stick with *miles*.

On the map, pencil in the solid features such as roads, streams, coastlines, cities, villages and the edges of terrain. Color in the different terrains using highlighters. Leave some space in the corner for a compass pointing north and a guide to what the glyphs and colors mean. Be sure to include the hex speeds for the different terrains:

> **2 Hex:** Bramble, Forest, Hills, Jungle, Mud, Sand, Shallow Water, Snow, Swamp.

> **3 Hex:** Canyons, Cliffs, Deep or Rapid Water, Glaciers, Gorges, Mountains.

Three hex terrain is considered impassible. The characters can still move through it but not easily so use it sparingly.

Once finished, make a copy of the map for your players to use as a **Ghost Map** and continue writing on your map all the information you don't want them to know until they discover it.

Encounters. Creating wilderness encounters is no different from creating normal encounters. A **letter** is used to designate a region, one often defined by the terrain it occurs in, such as *D = The Dark Forest*, *B = The Burning Desert*, or *H = The Hobgoblin Bluffs*.

Specific encounters are placed inside these regions using a letter and number written inside a hex like *H1 = Hobgoblin Hideout*. More often than not this will be the entrance to a separate adventure which will require its own map and encounters, etc.

Named regions should be given a 1d100 random roll table to tell us what the BCs may encounter or have happen to them while wandering through the area. As with the random roll tables in *A Well of Goblins*, the top-most item should be **No Encounter** and everything else gets progressively worse from there.

Unlike normal adventure encounters there is often no limit to the number of creatures one can encounter in the great outdoors. A party of BCs may find themselves fighting band

after band of lizard men while traversing their swamps and never seem to run out.

Not all encounters need to be with dangerous creatures. Heavy rain, snow or a landslide makes for good wilderness encounters as does the ever-present risk of getting lost. Beneficial encounters are also possible with entries for fresh water springs, foragable plants, and game that can be hunted for food such as turkey, pheasants or deer.

Day & Night. It is a different world at night and what happens during the day rarely happens at night, or at least not with the same frequency. While you can make separate tables for day and night encounters, it is often easier to make one table using different line numbers like so:

> 60/70: No Encounter.
>
> 50/60: Watering Hole.
>
> 30/40: Thunderstorm.
>
> 10/20: Getting Lost.
>
> 1/ -: Elven Scouting Party.
>
> -/ 1: Hobgoblin War Band.

With this table, day values are to the left of the slash and night values on the right. Anything with a dash – will not happen at that time. The elven scouting party will only be encountered during the day and the hobgoblin war band only at night, possibly because of each other.

General Encounters. You should also create a General Encounters table. This is what will be used any time a named encounter table is not.

Weather Conditions. Adverse weather conditions can do anything you want them to. During a Thunderstorm you could have everyone make a **Luck** check and if anyone crashes it they are struck by a lighting bolt.

One thing all weather does is exhaust those who endure it, so be sure to write down somewhere just how much this adds to the party's exhaustion roll.

Creating Classes

To create a new class, first come up with an iconic idea of the character the class stands to create. Flush this out with a paragraph or two of description. Follow the steps in this section to make sure you cover the bases of what a class needs to have. And as a very last step, go back through with a calculator and add up the point values – known as **Vitae** - given each one. This will provide the class with its level advancement scheme.

There is a small amount of method to this madness and it revolves around the idea that the more beneficial a class is – the more stuff it provides a character – the harder it should be to advance. Otherwise, we are really just making stuff up.

Here are the most common class considerations presented in the order in which they are normally contemplated and written down.

Existence, Calling or Transformation? There are three kinds of classes. Yours needs to fit into one of them.

An **Existence** is a class a character is born into. They are biological in nature and less likely to give a character advantages which increase with the character's level, yet more likely to give a character benefits (such as the elf's *Keen Senses*) for just being one.

A **Calling** is a class that gives a character's life a sense of purpose. These classes are human by default, largely because humans provide us with an empty canvas to work with. Unlike an existence, callings are less likely to give a character anything for choosing the calling and more likely to give the character an advantage for advancing its level.

A **Transformation** is a class caused by something that happens to a character while adventuring. Generally the transformation starts out small, but as the character advances in level it begins to take the character over and truly transforms them into something otherworldly.

Description. It is too soon to flat out write a description of the class. Often this is saved for the very last step of class creation. However, it does not hurt to jot down some ideas about what the class should entail. You want bright bold ideas that pop in the imagination. Don't worry about the characters of a class being different from each other

because they will be different. Worry about fixating on an almost platonic ideal of what you want the class to be.

Special Talents. Special talents are beneficial traits one gets from the calling, such as the Halfling's *Hairy Feet +1* or the Cleric's *Turn Unbelievers*. If it can be summed up by a strength bonus of some sort, it is customary to add that bonus to the title. The halfing's hairy feet come with a number of perks but for the most part it provides a +1 to sneaking around so we tack a +1 onto its title.

When it comes to determining the talent's vitae pick somewhere between 1 and 10, typically one of the three below. Those talents that kick in once a certain level is reached should cost less than the ones a character gets for simply acquiring the class, however this is often balanced out by the innate power of the talent itself. It is good not to give a character anything too powerful without a decent investment of XP in the class.

- Somewhat = 3
- Middling = 5
- Very = 10

Special Troubles. Special troubles are the flipside of talents. These are features which may cause a character problems right from the start, such as the Halflings love of comfort or the Wizards inability to work with Warlocks.

Like a talent, troubles carry a vitae from 1 to 10 but these remove points based on just how problematic they may be. Most troubles come with acquiring a class, but it is not unheard of to have a few kick in at the higher levels.

- Somewhat = -3
- Middling = -5
- Very = -10

Literate! Dragonhead characters are illiterate by default, but certain callings require that a character know how to read, specifically those that involve spell-casting. This means a character will need to have an Intellect score of 10 at the very least. If the class demands literacy give it a **-5** vitae for being a middling trouble.

Prime Abilities. It used to be that a character needed to have certain minimum ability scores to qualify for a class. Dragonhead – largely through its secondary abilities – is set up so that any character can be of any class no matter what their ability scores may be. However, those lacking

high scores in the class's prime abilities are just not going to be very good at doing what they do.

There are no vitae values here. After a class is finished consider the activities the class will normally engage in and pick three of the seven main abilities to be its primes, typically with the first one being the most important.

Base HP. This is the number of hit points that characters made of this class will start with. Typically it is one of the following with 6 HP being the most common....

- 4 HP = 0
- 6 HP = 5
- 8 HP = 10
- 10 HP = 15
- 12 HP = 20
- 14 HP = 25
- 16 HP = 30

Class & Attributes Bonuses. The class bonuses list is essentially a list of game considerations that a character's class bonus can be used with. Many such as *Grapple* are named after entries in the *Adventure* section of the *Banger's Handbook*. Some will be more valuable than others, but class customization is not rocket science. It's not even gnome science. We use a flat vitae rate that depends on how much of a bonus one gets from the class.

- Full +2 = 12
- Full +1 = 8
- Full = 5
- Half = 3

Melee would be a Full. **Melee ½** would be a Half. **Melee +1** would be a Full +1 and so on. If the bonus comes with a caveat attached, such as the Elf's "Chases, forests only" then subtract **2** vitae from it. The same goes for questionable skills such as the Halfling's ability to make terrible puns.

Agility is a problem child. Where the other secondary abilities often have just one use, Agility gets used for a wide range of things such as...

- Dive For Cover
- Chases
- Climbing

- FAC

- Grappling

- Jumping & Leaping

- Slip-Thru

- Swimming

It is better to mention these individually than blanket them all with an Agility class bonus. In fact, consider it a hard rule that classes should not provide Agility bonuses. It is just far too generous. You will hate yourself for letting it into your game.

Magic. There are three kinds of magic in the game: Spellcasting, Divine Power and Natural Casting. The one you choose does not matter. They are all fairly balanced. Just be sure to mention which one the class deals with if it deals with magic at all.

For vitae, what matters most is the **number** of abilities that goes into creating a character's Magic bonus.

- One Stat = 50 (ex: Int)

- Two Stats = 25 (ex: Spi + Int / 2)

- Three Stats = 10 (ex: Spi + Int + Cha / 3)

The abilities used do not matter, but the more abilities you add to the equation the harder it will be for a character to improve their magic bonus, making it less advantageous.

Spell Availability. On the whole, it is not good to leave someone with open access to everything. It is much better to limit them in a way that makes sense, such as the Cleric only being able to cast Divine spells without having to grovel for it.

It is also a good idea to limit the spells one has available to them via **frequency**. Abundant, Common and Uncommon are good frequencies for starters. Mythic should always be left off-limits without an exceedingly good reason for it.

How generous is the class with the spells it makes available to characters?

- Not = 5

- Somewhat = 10

- Very = 20

Arms & Armor. How restrictive is the class towards what a character can wield or wear? Generally speaking...

- Not = 12

- Somewhat = 8

- Very = 4

Equipment. How generous is the class with the amount of free stuff it provides?

- Not = 2

- Somewhat = 4

- Very = 8

Movement. Most characters are assumed to be a humanoid of some sort. Humans walk with a speed of 3, 4 or 5 depending on how athletic they are. Different forms of locomotion can make for interesting and exciting classes. Body size will alter a character's movement speed, so when it comes to deciding on a speed it is best to imagine the character as medium or man-sized. Our favorite forms of movement and their cost per point of speed are...

- Walk = 1

- Swim = 1

- Climb = 1

- Cling = 2

- Hop = 2

- Hover = 3

- Dig = 5

- Fly = 7

- Glide = 4

A class providing Walk 4 would cost 4 vitae. **Climb** means the character can move like a monkey through the trees. **Cling** lets one move like a gecko or spider. **Hover** lets a character float a few feet above the ground, held aloft by mysterious forces. **Glide** means the character can fly but only downwards or on a powerful draft of wind. The rest are self-explanatory.

Certain classes (mostly callings) may add to the speed of movement an amount based on the character's class bonus, essentially letting higher level characters move faster than low level ones. Something like: *Walk 4 + ½ Class Bonus*. A fourth level character would have Walk 6 as its base speed. Point-wise...

- Add Full Class Bonus = 8.

- Add ½ Class Bonus = 4.

Size. Size does matter and for characters there are five of them. Tiny, Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large. Tiny and Small will remove vitae from the total. Large and Extra add it. Medium is "man-sized" and considered the default for characters. Feel free to copy these lists of alterations into the class description but leave off the vitae at the end.

Extra Large:

- Index x2, HP x1.5, Distance x1.25
- SDMG +2
- Dodging, Hiding & Slip-Thru -4.
- Size AC: Big +1, Hug +2, Mas +3, Hum +4.
- Vitae: **20**

Large:

- Index x1.5, HP x1.25, Distance x1
- SDMG +1
- Dodging, Hiding & Slip-Thru -2.
- Size AC: Ext +1, Big +2, Hug +3, Mas +4.
- Vitae: **10**

Small:

- Index x.75, HP x0.8, Distance x1
- SDMG -1
- Dodging, Hiding & Slip-Thru +2.
- Size AC: Med +1, Lar +2, Ext +3, Big +4.
- Vitae: **-10**

Tiny:

- Index x.5, HP x0.6, Distance x0.75
- SDMG -2
- Dodging, Hiding & Slip-Thru +4.
- Size AC: Sma +1, Med +2, Lar +3, Ext +4.
- Vitae: **-20**

Level Advancement

And now for what all of this number juggling adds up to. Multiply your **Total Vitae by 25** and use the level advancement scheme whose XP amount for **first level** is **greater than or equal** to that number.

The Fighter, that most vanilla of classes, comes to a vitae
total of 73. Multiplied by 25 this equals 1,825 XP which
gives it the Level Advancement 1.5 scheme. Cut 14 vitae and
you could drop it to 1,475 XP which would use the Level
Advancement 1 scheme.

Level Incrementation. If you were wondering about how these
levels increment, note the difference between levels. With
Level Advancement 2...

It takes 2,000 XP to get to level 1.

It takes 4,000 XP to get from level 1 to level 2.

It takes 6,000 XP to get from level 2 to level 3.

It takes 8,000 XP to get from level 3 to level 4.

It takes 10,000 XP to get from level 4 to level 5.

See the pattern? The amount of XP separating each level
increases by the *starting amount* of the first level. Follow
this pattern and you can keep these levels incrementing
indefinitely.

If you find yourself with too many XP to fit into any of
the following schemes then the class is probably being a
bit too generous. Go back, trim out some items and try
again.

Level Advancement 1

        1 = 1,000
        2 = 3,000
        3 = 6,000
        4 = 10,000
        5 = 15,000
        6 = 21,000
        7 = 28,000
        8 = 36,000
        9 = 45,000
        10 = 55,000
        11 = 66,000
        12 = 78,000
        13 = 91,000
        14 = 105,000

Level Advancement 1.5

        1 = 1,500
        2 = 4,500
        3 = 9,000
        4 = 15,000
        5 = 22,500
        6 = 31,500

```
    7  = 42,000
    8  = 54,000
    9  = 67,500
   10  = 82,500
   11  = 99,000
   12  = 117,000
   13  = 136,500
   14  = 157,500
```

Level Advancement 2

```
    1  = 2,000
    2  = 6,000
    3  = 12,000
    4  = 20,000
    5  = 30,000
    6  = 42,000
    7  = 56,000
    8  = 72,000
    9  = 90,000
   10  = 110,000
   11  = 132,000
   12  = 156,000
   13  = 182,000
   14  = 210,000
```

Level Advancement 2.5

```
    1  = 2,500
    2  = 7,500
    3  = 15,000
    4  = 25,000
    5  = 37,500
    6  = 52,500
    7  = 70,000
    8  = 90,000
    9  = 112,500
   10  = 137,500
   11  = 165,000
   12  = 195,000
   13  = 227,500
   14  = 262,500
```

Level Advancement 3

```
    1  = 3,000
    2  = 9,000
    3  = 18,000
    4  = 30,000
    5  = 45,000
    6  = 63,000
    7  = 84,000
```

```
8  = 108,000
9  = 135,000
10 = 165,000
11 = 198,000
12 = 234,000
13 = 273,000
14 = 315,000
```

Level Advancement 3.5

```
1  = 3,500
2  = 10,500
3  = 21,000
4  = 35,000
5  = 52,500
6  = 73,500
7  = 98,000
8  = 126,000
9  = 157,500
10 = 192,500
11 = 231,000
12 = 273,000
13 = 318,500
14 = 367,500
```

Level Advancement 4

```
1  = 4,000
2  = 12,000
3  = 24,000
4  = 40,000
5  = 60,000
6  = 84,000
7  = 112,000
8  = 144,000
9  = 180,000
10 = 220,000
11 = 264,000
12 = 312,000
13 = 364,000
14 = 420,000
```

Level Advancement 4.5

```
1  = 4,500
2  = 13,500
3  = 27,000
4  = 45,000
5  = 67,500
6  = 94,500
7  = 126,000
8  = 162,000
```

```
9 = 202,500
10 = 247,500
11 = 297,000
12 = 351,000
13 = 409,500
14 = 472,500
```

Level Advancement 5

```
1 = 5,000
2 = 15,000
3 = 30,000
4 = 50,000
5 = 75,000
6 = 105,000
7 = 140,000
8 = 180,000
9 = 225,000
10 = 275,000
11 = 330,000
12 = 390,000
13 = 455,000
14 = 525,000
```

Level Advancement Example. So let's dissect a Dwarf – actually the Dwarf class - and see how it matches up.

Special Talents

- Night Vision: 3

- Toxic Resistance +2: 5

- Magic Resistance +2: 5

Special Troubles

- Stocky -1: -3

Primary Abilities

- Muscle, Constitution, Spirit.

Base HP

- 12: 20

Class Bonuses:

- Detecting safe & sloping passage-ways: 5

- Geology: 5

- Navigating underground: 5

- Surprise Attacks, detecting them: 5

Attribute Bonuses:

- FAC: 5

- Melee: 5
- Ranged: 5

Arms & Armor

- no restrictions: 12

Equipment

- somewhat generous: 4

Movement

- walk 3: 3

Added together, all of that comes to 84 points. Multiplied by 25 it equals 2,100 XP. This is greater than 2,000 but less than 2,500 so dwarves use the Level Advancement 2 scheme.

Why Is This In The DMG? Aren't classes primarily a banger consideration? Yes - they are - yet those characters exist in your world, so while bangers may have a great interest in creating classes which are more like the characters they want to run, you are the one who will need to work around them. On the whole, class creation is something best done with input from the entire group. Ask your bangers what they want and work it into what you need.

Creating Monsters

Monsters are fun to create. Unlike characters and classes, there are no real rules governing their creation. You can give them whatever seems right and make stuff up. However it should also be said that **consistency** has its merits, some big ones being that it makes your world seem more real and makes your game easier to manage. There is not much separating a Wraith from a Spectre but if both have an attack called Chilling Touch and it operates differently for each of them – that is going to be a pain to work around.

When it comes to creating a new monster one of the best places to start is the **Monsters & Treasures** assortment. Look to see if there isn't something already there which resembles it. If there is then adapt it. Copy it and make a derivation of sorts. If you truly do need to go against the grain of what has already been written then be sure to ask yourself why and if the change is worth it.

Dragonhead monsters are exceedingly simple and generally made of three parts: a Stat Block, a Hit Point Line, and a Description. Often it helps to brainstorm a creature design, write out its stat block and hit points, and lastly finish up with a description.

Monsters & Creatures? Is there a difference? *Not really.* A monster is what we call the stat block and description. A creature is what a monster becomes when the DM brings it into the game. The two terms are interchangeable.

Stat Blocks

The stats of a creature can be spread out with each cluster of stats on a separate line or packed together into a single paragraph. Either way, it's good to present them in the same order beginning with level.

Level. This is meant to be comparable to a character's level, but unlike characters, monsters do not gain XP or increase in level. They just have the level you give them. When converting a monster from the original game, its level is its Hit Dice.

Armor Class. While you can guess a monster's AC, on the whole it is best to treat it like a character's AC and use its ability scores to determine its values.

FAC = Agility + ½ Level.

SAC = Luck.

Armor. When not wearing any actual armor, a monster's armor depends largely on the thickness of its hide.

Thin = 1 – 3
Light = 4 – 6
Medium = 7 – 9
Heavy = 10 – 12
Xtra-Hvy = 13 – 15
Super = 16 – 20
Tank = 21 – 30

The world is made for average people by average people, so one way to think about armor is to see it as the amount of damage needed to stop a single successful attack. If an arrow does 1d6 damage then armor designed to stop arrows should protect against at least 6 points of damage. This doesn't take into account multiple successes but that is the risk of combat.

HP. HP stands for hit points and this is the monster's total count of them. Figuring it out will be handled later.

Movement. This is how a monster moves and how fast. The eight common forms of movement are...

- **Walk** – for walking about on legs of some sort.
- **Swim** – for swimming through liquid.
- **Fly** – for flying through the air.
- **Glide** – for drifting through the air.
- **Climb** – for climbing like a monkey.
- **Cling** – for clinging to surfaces like a spider.
- **Dig** – for tunneling through dirt.
- **Hop** – for moving like a frog or kangaroo.
- **Hover** – for floating a few feet above the ground.

For speeds it is good to think in terms of miles per hour. Most humans will move with a speed of 3 to 5 mph depending on how healthy they are. It is also good to keep in mind that running will double this speed and sprinting triples it.

When converting a monster from the original game, for those that use the " inch marker try dividing by 3 and replace it with a description of the movement. The Spectre's 15"/30" becomes Walk 5, Fly 10.

When a ' foot marker is used, use the **Rate Per Round** figure (commonly put in parenthesis) divided by 10. A Halflings 90' (30') becomes Walk 3.

Hit. This is an all-purpose hit score used with any attack the monster makes. You could just pick a number based on how good a fighter it is.

- **Superb Fighter**: 19 - 22.
- **Talented Fighter**: 15 - 18.
- **Fights To Survive**: 11 - 14.
- **Does Not Fight To Survive**: 7 - 10.
- **Does Not Know How To Fight**: 3 – 6.

Or, once you have some ability scores, you could treat it like a character's secondary abilities.

- **Melee** = Mus + Dex / 2.
- **Throw** = Mus + Dex / 2.
- **Ranged** = Dex + Wis / 2.

Be sure to add its level to each. For an all-purpose hit score write something like *Hit: 12*. With different scores be sure to tag them so we can tell them apart like *Hit: M12 T10 R14, for Melee 12, Thrown 10 and Ranged 14.*

Attacks. These are the attacks a monster can make, the number of times per round and the damage rolled for each. Where the original game might have *Attacks: 1 bite. Damage: 1-8 + Poison.* In Dragonhead you would write *Attacks: Bite 1d8 + Poison.*

If a monster can make more than one attack per round you should separate them with a **comma**. Instead of writing *Attacks: 2 claws / 1 bite. Damage: 1-6 / 1-6 / 3-24.* Write *Attacks: Claw 1d6m, Claw 1d6m, Bite 3d8m.* You could condense this even further to *Attacks: 2 Claws 1d6m, Bite 3d8m.*

If the creature has a choice of attacks, be sure to inject the word – **or** – between them such as *Attacks: 2 Claws 1d6m or Bite 3d8m.*

For damage rolls, the dice are a fairly predictable measure of force.

- **1d4** = light blow.
- **1d6** = medium blow.
- **1d8** = typical blow.
- **1d10** = heavy blow.

- **1d12** = extra-heavy blow.

For damage type, attacks that stab use Pierce. Those that slice use Sharp. Blunt trauma uses Blunt. Concussive force uses Impact. And nearly everything else is Mixed. When in doubt go with Mixed.

SDMG. A bite attack doing 3d8 for damage is massively over-powered because Dragonhead uses **Size Damage** or SDMG to scale damage to match the influence of a creature's size.

When you go to figure out damage rolls, it is best to first imagine the creature as **Medium** in size, even when it is supposed to be as big as a castle. For a dragon - *Attacks: 2 Claws 1d6m, Bite 1d8m* - is spot on providing you add an SDMG modifier right after it.

Size	Example	Damage
Gargantuan	Ancient Dragon	+3d20
Titanic	Kraken	+2d20
Gigantic	Epic Dragon	+1d20
Enormous	Brontosaurus	+2d10
Humongous	Mature Dragon	+1d12
Massive	Large Giant	+1d8
Huge	Small Giant	+1d6
Big	Ogre	+1d4
Xtra	Bugbear	+2
Large	Hobgoblin	+1
Medium	Human	+0
Small	Halfling	-1
Tiny	Pixie	-2
Teeny	Sprite	-3

While a bite of 1d8m may not seem very impressive. In the jaws of a massive dragon it does 2d8m. A gigantic dragon would bite for 1d8 + 1d20m. Meanwhile a tiny pseudo-dragon would bite for just 1d8-2m.

The good thing about this is that not only does it make it easy to create size-derivative creatures but it also lets you give them normal attacks. Giants are essentially over-sized humans. You can outfit them with any weapon a normal human might wield by tacking an extra roll of 1d6 onto the damage.

Size: When the size of a monster is something other than Medium, be sure to follow it with a body size, writing

something like *Size: Huge*. Characters fighting it are going to want to know this for their Size AC bonus.

Size AC: Size AC begins with the next size larger than itself and provides a +1 per size level until +4 is reached. For a medium-sized monster use *Size AC: Lar +1, Ext +2, Big +3, Hug +4.*

Abilities. The first ability is not an ability but the creature's **CB** or **Class Bonus** and typically **equal to its level,** provided you are not artificially pumping up the level to reflect some advantage that the creature has such as a huge body size or dangerous power.

For the actual abilities, they are the same as the character abilities and use similar scores.

> **16 – 18** is Excellent.

> **13 – 15** is Pretty Good.

> **9 – 12** is Average.

> **6 – 8** is Sub-par.

> **3 – 5** is Pathetic.

A score of 10 is perfectly average. To cut down on clutter any ability with a 10 we leave out of the abilities list. For the same reason we also use only the first letter of an ability to identify it.

> **S** = Spirit

> **M** = Muscle

> **I** = Intellect

> **W** = Wisdom

> **D** = Dexterity

> **C** = Constitution

> **H** = Charisma

> **A** = Agility

> **E** = Melee

> **R** = Ranged

> **T** = Throw

> **G** = Magic

> **L** = Luck

When a letter is taken by a previous ability we use the next letter in the name, hence the reason why Magic is a G. M and A have already been taken by Muscle and Agility.

Our giant level 4 Spider could have *Abilities: CB+4, M13, I9, W12, A11, L11.* Dexterity and Constitution are not there because they have a 10.

Even though we are often pulling things out of thin air when we create a monster, it is still good practice to follow the rules of character creation. For the two remaining secondary abilities try...

- **Agility** = Mus + Dex /2.
- **Luck** = Cha + Wis / 2.

Powers. For powers, list the names of the monster's powers and follow each with its Hit score. This is typically the monster's Magic and the spell's Difficulty. Unless you have a reason to do otherwise use *Spirit + Wisdom / 2* to for the Magic score, or just pick a number the way we did earlier.

- **Superb Magic-User:** 19 - 22.
- **Talented Magic-User:** 15 - 18.
- **Uses Magic Daily:** 11 - 14.
- **Uses Magic Weekly:** 7 - 10.
- **Barely Uses Its Powers At All:** 3 – 6.

If you do need to make up powers, be sure to describe how they work at the end of the monster's description.

Talents & Troubles. These are treated much like powers. Hopefully you will be able to find a fitting definition for what you need later in the DMG. Otherwise you'll just have to make them up and include it in the monster description.

One way in which talents and troubles differ from powers is that they often modify ability checks instead of being something you use. This is done through a bonus attached to the name. A monster with *Infravision +3* can see heat signatures far better than other creatures bearing just *Infravision*. During a game you would make a Wisdom check +3 when using it.

Lang. Languages are important. Especially in this game where your ability to talk to a monster might make the difference between befriending it and feeding it. Try...

- Common
- Draconic
- Dwarvish
- Elvish
- Goblin

- Gnomish
- Law or Chaos
- Reptilian
- Subterranean

If a monster does not speak a language then leave languages out. If nothing is mentioned then it is safe to assume that the creature has an animal intelligence. It can communicate with barks, grunts, snorts, chirps and such, but cannot articulate words.

Align. Dragonhead uses Good/Neutral/Evil. If you want to include Lawful and Chaotic you may but realize that these represent something very different. Law and Chaos are Allegiances. Alignments are dispositions that are changed by way of ones actions.

To show an allegiance to the forces of Law or Chaos it is best to write it in as a language and leave them out of alignment.

Freq. Frequency is about how often the monster will be encountered and the number of creatures one is likely to encounter. The eight standard frequencies are:

- Abundant
- Common
- Uncommon
- Rare
- Very Rare
- Extremely Rare
- Individual
- Mythical

For the encounter number? Any die roll that seems right will suffice, but with individual creatures there can be only one.

Env. This is a list of environments the creature will commonly be found in. The first item typically describes a temperature range. If nothing is mentioned then Temperate is assumed.

- Torrid
- Tropical
- Temperate
- Frigid

- Arctic

The rest are different types of environments such as:

- Badlands

- Canyons

- Caves

- Desert

- Forest

- Hills

- Jungle

- Marsh

- Mountains

- Ocean

- Prairie

- Ruins

- Rural

- Savanna

- Seaside

- Subterranean

- Swamp

- Tundra

- Urban

If a monster is something like a goblin that can turn up anywhere we don't give it an environment. Environments as a whole should only be mentioned when a monster is ecologically locked to just a few regions.

Hit Points

The traditional way to figure out a monster's hit points is to roll a **1d8 for each level** or multiply its level by **4**. We recommend treating it like a character. Start with a Base HP of **6** (give or take a few points as desired) and add to it what the monster has for **Spirit, Muscle** and **Constitution** using the following table.

```
30: +40
29: +38
28: +36
27: +34
26: +32
```

```
25: +30
24: +28
23: +26
22: +24
21: +22
20: +20
19: +18
18: +16
17: +14
16: +12
15: +10
14: +8
13: +6
12: +4
11: +2
 9:  0
 7: -2
 5: -4
 3: -6
 1: -8
```

Last but not least, multiply the monster's hit point total by its body size hit point multiplier.

	Size	= HP Multiplier
1	**Teeny**	= 0.4
2	**Tiny**	= 0.6
3	**Small**	= 0.8
4	**Medium**	= 1
5	**Large**	= 1.25
6	**Extra**	= 1.5
7	**Big**	= 2
8	**Huge**	= 3
9	**Massive**	= 5
10	**Humongous**	= 10
11	**Enormous**	= 20
12	**Gigantic**	= 50
13	**Titanic**	= 100
14	**Gargantuan**	= 200

Or you can just pull a number out of thin air. Sometimes, as in the case of the Hydra, that is what you have to do. These formulas don't make any sense otherwise. In the end, be sure to put it as **HP** in the stat block and write out a damage line like this one.

Goblin (S 1 K) O O | O | O

With this line each O is a hit point. The 1 is its Stun Point (1/5th the total HP). For damage states, cut the total hit points in **half** and count backwards that many

points from the right, place a | between that point and the next. Now cut the number in **half** and do it again.

Descriptions

A monster description is a free-flow area for anything you want to say about the creature which the stat block does not already cover. It should include explanations for any unique powers, talents or troubles mentioned in the stat block.

Headlines. Headlines are often used at the start of a paragraph to make sections easy to find. For example, this paragraph has **Headlines** as its headline.

Inside a paragraph, use **bold** print to highlight die rolls, modifiers, ability names or anything a reader might quickly skim the passage to find.

Crashes

The best way to handle a crash is to think of the situation at hand and go with whatever seems right. If that doesn't work, take look at the description of what is in use. Many magic spells and items come with their own unique ways of crashing. Last but not least, try your luck with one of these crash tables. Roll **1d100** and that is what you get.

Not every entry on these tables will work with every situation. When you roll up something that makes no sense, like a Helmet Spin for a character not wearing a helmet, roll again.

Crash Strength. Many entries will need a strength that is independent of what the character rolled. To get it, consider the level of the character who crashed and roll one of the following:

> **1 to 5** = 3d6
>
> **6 to 10** = 4d6
>
> **11 to 15** = 5d6

Melee Combat

This table is for crashes that happen while fighting in close quarters.

90: Stun Yourself. You hit yourself with your own weapon. Not enough to do any damage, but enough to shock you out of your next action.

80: Trip-N-Fall. You stumble over your own feet and fall to the floor. You lose your next action and need to spend another action standing back up.

70: Fling Weapon Away. Whatever was in your hand is now sailing across the room.

65: Stuck Weapon. You lodge your weapon into a chair, table, wall, etc. it will take a **Muscle vs Crash** to pull it free.

60: Shield Strap Bust. That shield on your arm is now laying on the ground, impossible to use because of a busted strap.

55: Something In My Eye. Something got in your eye. Suffer a **-4** until you spend an action wiping it clean.

50: Helmet Spin. Your chin strap just busted and you are now wearing it backwards. This will blind you until you spend an action taking it off.

45: Not So Funny Bone. Yow! Something swiped you in a sensitive spot. Suffer a **-4** for the next **1d6 rounds**.

40: Shatter Weapon. You hit something which proved to be harder than your weapon and shattered it.

35: Hiccups! You are attacked by a massive case of the hiccups. Lose your action every round until you get it under control with a **Spirit vs Crash** check.

30: Twisted Ankle. Crap! Movement drops by **half** with no running or sprinting for the rest of the day.

25: Sprained Wrist. Stop using your primary hand or suffer a **-4** to everything you do with it. This lasts a day.

20: Charley Horse. A muscle in one of your legs spasms, causing immense pain and stealing away your next **2d6 actions**.

15: Hit Ally. Oops. You just smacked a random ally with your attack, throwing your weapon if necessary. All allies should make a **Luck** check and whoever produces the lowest strength is hit by it. The attack uses **Crash vs SAC**.

10: Hit Yourself. You hit yourself with your own weapon in a serious way. Use the **Crash vs SAC** to find the damage done.

5: Broken Bone. You break a small yet sensitive bone. This causes **1 tear** of damage and you take a **-1 hindrance** to everything you do until that point is healed.

1: Heart Attack or Stroke. The pressure is too much! Make a **Crash vs Constitution** check. Save or die!

Missile Combat

This table you would use when crashing while trying to fire a missile weapon of some sort.

80: Choke! You go to pull the trigger or release the bowstring but for some reason you choke. Lose your next action shaking it off.

70: Trip-N-Fall. While aiming your shot you stumbled over something and now are on the floor. Lose your next action and spend one standing back up.

60: Juggle Weapon. You lose your grip on your weapon and start to juggle it about. Make a **Crash vs Dexterity** save. Fail and you drop the weapon.

50: Nervous Shakes. You start to shake uncontrollably. Lose an action every round until you get it under control with a **Crash vs Spirit** save.

40: Something In My Eye. A speck of something just got in your eye. Suffer a **-4** until you spend an action wiping it clean.

30: Youch! In firing your weapon you shock yourself, possibly crunching a finger or scraping a bow string across your wrist. Lose the next **1d6 actions**.

20: Ammo Spill. Whatever you were carrying your ammo in? It just broke open and spilled all over the floor.

10: Break Weapon. Something went snap! Your weapon breaks and won't work again until repaired.

5: Hit Wrong Target. You accidentally target an ally standing close to whatever you were trying to hit. If no one is there then the shot ricochets. Every ally should make a **Luck** check and the one with the lowest strength is hit, **Crash vs SAC.**

1: Heart Attack or Stroke. The pressure is too much! Make a **Crash vs Constitution** check. Save or die!

Magic Items

This table is for the users of magic items design to effect others, such as wands, staves and rods.

90: Flowers. A bouquet of flowers pops out of the business end of whatever magic item you were using.

80: Trip-N-Fall. While using the item you somehow tripped over your own feet and are now flat on the floor. Lose your next action as well as another one standing up.

70: Juggle Item. You lose your grip and start to juggle the item about. Make a **Crash vs Dexterity** save. Fail and you drop it and send it skidding across the floor.

60: Perception Warp. A loose leak of magic distorts your perceptions. Lose your next **1d6 actions** as your senses recover.

50: Sparks. The item sparks, shudders, smokes and makes a terrible grinding noise. It now has a permanent **Hit -1.**

40: Whap! The item lets loose a concussive blast of force doing **2d6i damage** to you and anyone in a **Blast 2** area surrounding it. The item now has a permanent **Hit -1**.

30: Autofrodo! That magical ring you were trying to use just sliced off your finger. Take **Pierce 1** damage and lose a finger.

20: Shatter. Whatever that item was, it is now a twinkling cloud of precious confetti.

15: Toast. The item suddenly turns hot and burns your hand. Take **1d6s** damage. The item itself is now toast and cannot be repaired.

10: Ricochet. Every ally in the room should make a **Luck** check. Whoever rolls the lowest is hit by it, **Crash vs SAC**.

5: Wrong Side Around. The item works! Too bad you had it pointing at yourself.

1: Explode! The item goes boom, doing **3d6b** damage to everyone in a **Blast 3** area. You take **double damage** because you are holding it. Diving for cover is not an option.

Magic Potions

These apply mainly to the consumers of potions but can be used with any magic item designed to effect the character who uses it.

90 : Hives. You break out in a rash of nasty looking bumps. They'll go away in time.

80 : Color Change. Your skin changes an interesting shade of some other color. This will wear off in **1d6** days.

70: Spazz Out. You lose the next **1d6 actions** as your body shudders uncontrollably.

60: Mislabeled. That potion isn't what you thought it was. The DM will tell you what you actually drank, probably a Chaun potion.

50: Psychedelic. Your perceptions distort. Take a **-2** to everything you do for the rest of the **encounter**.

45: Vomit. That potion did not sit well. Spend the next **2d6 actions** puking forth a rainbow of colored oil.

40 : Bloat. You suddenly expand to **twice** your normal size. This takes **1d6 hours** to wear off. During this time your movement rate **halves** and you take a **-4** to everything you do.

35: Instant Intoxication. Take a **-4** to everything you do. This slowly wears off, losing a **-1 every two hours**.

30: Paralytic Poison. You are paralyzed for **1d6** hours.

25: Knock Out Drug. You are knocked unconscious for **1d6** hours.

20: Sudden Shrink. Spend the rest of the encounter at **1 inch** tall. You gain AC +6 against all attacks but have just 1 hit point.

15: Psychotic Reaction. The DM takes control of your character for the rest of the encounter and uses it to attack allies.

10: Newt. You turn into a newt, and in that shape you will remain for **1d4 months** or until someone casts polymorph on you.

5: Lethal Poison. Crash vs Constitution. Save or die!

1: Explode! Crash vs Luck. Fail and you go boom! Everyone in a **Blast 3** area around you takes **3d6i damage**. You die, obviously.

Spell-Casting

These crashes primarily effect spell-casters, but more than a few can be used with any crash of a magic power.

90: Eldritch Mutation. Over the next few days your body will mutate, changing in some strange way such as a change in skin or hair color, the growth of scales or horns or webbing between your digits. This won't effect your character's performance but it will help tell the world what you've been up to.

80: Flabbermouth. You lose the ability to speak anything but gibberish for the rest of the day. You can still cast spells, but communication with others is impossible.

70: Wrong Spell. Close your eyes and drop a finger on your Attacks list. The spell closest to it which isn't the one you were trying to cast is what you actually cast.

65: Scatterbrain. Any check you make for the rest of the day will need to beat the strength of this crash or fail automatically.

60: Wrong Target. With a harmful spell, all of your allies should make a **Luck** check. Whoever rolls the lowest is hit using the strength of the crash.

55: Bounce Back. Instead of casting a spell on someone else you cast it on yourself using the strength of the crash.

50: Brain Drain. All those awesome spells you know by heart? *Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle, gone.* You need to hit the spell book and spend an hour remembering how to cast each one.

45 : Disintegration. You cast the spell so badly the pages for it in your spell book just turned to dust.

40: Naked. Poof! All of your equipment including everything you are wearing just teleported one mile in a random direction.

35: Teleport. Poof! All your stuff remains in one spot and you teleport one mile in a random direction.

30: Arcane Fire. Runaway arcane power turns you into a blazing inferno. Take **1d6b damage** every round until it is put out. Armor does not help, but stop, drop and roll might.

25: Brain Fry. Lose 1 point of Intellect, Wisdom or Charisma. Your choice.

20: Decrepit. Lose 1 point or Muscle, Dexterity or Constitution. Your choice.

15: Demoniac Possession. You left the door to your mind open in the wrong neighborhood. A demon now controls your body (or angel if evil) and the DM controls your character. This possession lasts **1d4** days.

10: Paradox Regulator. Reality does not appreciate being messed with by amateurs. Within **1d6** days your character will be visited by a mirror image of yourself. Prepare for a duel to the death.

5: Polymorph. You turn yourself into a potted plant. In that shape, completely cut off from your powers, you will remain for **1d4** months or until someone can cast a polymorph spell to turn you back.

1: Explode! In a massive cavalcade of arcane energy you explode. Everyone in a blast 3 area around you takes **3d6b** damage.

Book Binding 101

We did say that this is old school gaming right? And nothing is quite so old school as playing with rules that are kept in a fat three-ring binder overflowing with pages. While you do not need to do this, if you are interested in expanding upon the Dragonhead rules then it is recommended. Take a trip to your local office supplies store and pick up five things.

- 3 three-ring binders.
- 1 ream of 28lbs 3-hole drilled printer paper
- 1 package of tabbed dividers.

In the first binder print out and pop in the Banger's Handbook and Character Compendium. This binder you can give to your players for making characters and such.

In the second binder do the same with the Master's Guide and Monsters & Treasure assortment. This binder is for Dragonhead Master eyes only.

In the third binder goes everything you create for your current campaign: characters, creatures, maps, your adventure journal, etc. This binder is for your eyes only. If another person in your group wants to try DM-ing an adventure they should start up a campaign binder of their own. This way you can keep your two campaigns separate.

Castles in the Clouds. Since we live in the 21st century and cloud-computing lets people share and edit documents online, we do make available the white pages of these rulebooks as .doc files at our website **www.chameleondream.com/dragonhead.** These you may share and edit with your friends. All we ask is that you do not post them openly on the internet for anyone to find.

In many ways it is easier to work with computer files than paper. You can make changes where you need them and most word processors come with a navigator that lets you turn numbered headings into a clickable index. However, computer files are easily misplaced, destroyed and require a computer to access them. Many of us stare at a computer screen day in and day out as a part of our day jobs. One of the great things about table-top RPGs is how they let us get away from these machines and back to something more tangible. Printing the books out on paper helps keep the computers away from your table.

Plus, having everything printed out and packed away in a binder will gives you an interesting artifact. Something to someday pull out of the closet or down from the bookshelf and use to remember all the great times you and your friends had adventuring in dangerous worlds far away from our own.

What Does It Mean to be Old School?

I have been writing, trashing and re-inventing games pretty much my whole life. So like a modern city, Dragonhead sits atop the ashes and catacombs of countless other games to have come before it. I can't tell you where it all began, but I can tell you where the Dragonhead project begins and that is in the early summer of 2020.

Once all the craziness of that dreaded year had become the new normal I found myself needing something to take my mind off of it. Under quarantine, actually playing a game was out of the question. At the same time I wasn't interested in going back to hammer away at all that I had been doing before the pandemic hit. I needed something new, something exciting and engaging yet also something familiar and definitely not digital.

I ended up revisiting an old quest from a few years back. A thought experiment really. Someone online had asked the question – *if you could go back in time and put a different game in the box of the first RPG you ever played what would it be?* For me that box was B/X D&D, purchased by my mom because I was entering a new school in the sixth grade and saw it as a good way to make friends. I told her all the cool kids were doing it and in 1982 I was not wrong.

For Dragonhead I dug out my old B/X booklets, read them over and spent a lot of time thinking back on the way we used to play in junior high and possibly more importantly the *why* of how we played. Nowadays role-playing has morphed into a form of community theater with dice, but back then there was no sense of "time in the spotlight." The table was not a stage on which we performed. We were there for the adventure. We would have tried scaling Mt. Everest if we could. As it was White Plume Mountain was far more accessible.

We gamed – rules as written – to see if we could do it, to revel in the experience and maybe brag a bit once it was over. These were our suburban rites of passage. Even when the dungeon got the better of us, you ultimately felt better about yourself for being able to step up to the challenge. A bit like the video games of the era – Sinistar, Tempest, Robotron and Defender – we admired the adventures we played for their difficulty as well as the

excitement. I believe this is why Tomb of Horrors still tops many lists of favorite adventure modules, despite being essentially a giant fantasy-tinged rube-goldberg mouse trap. It meant something if you could survive it, or even survive a few rooms of it. Of course, if you role-play for drama and character interaction then Tomb of Horrors is not just NOT for you, it probably sits atop your list of least favorite adventures of all time.

So I know that Dragonhead is not going to be everyone's favorite game. There are parts of it which are hopelessly anachronistic. I personally am not a big fan of bean-counting yet DH has hit points, experience points, weight-based encumbrance, it expects you to count your ammo. Challenge success is comparative. You have to subtract the defense from the offense for every action. Too much subtraction is a big faux pas in the world of game design.

Here's the deal though, all of that is terribly realistic, and that was important to us back then. We weren't die hard simulationists, but we wanted our fantasies to feel real. Otherwise you might as well watch a movie or read a book. Nothing wrong there, except it didn't carry the same appeal. We were an ambitious bunch of kids who were eager to grow up and prove themselves to the world, to make a dent in it or die trying. If we couldn't do that because we needed our moms to drive us everywhere, at least we could do it while charging on a warhorse across the golden fields of Greyhawk.

My mind keeps gravitating back to that original quandary – *if you could put a game into that box what would it be?* – this feels a bit like a Back to the Future spin-off where Marty McFly needs to go back in time to give himself a better game to fix his screwed up life. However, the closer I come to calling this project complete the more it feels like I had that backwards. The story of Dragonhead is the story of a kid in junior high needing to jump in his time machine and shoot forward into the future to drop his game off on his future self saying, "hey mister, you got lost somewhere along the way. This is what you should be playing."

And he might right.

-Jerry D McDonnell

6/12/20

Version 0.7

Got tips, hints, advice, feedback? Now is the time to let us know about it! Tell us what you think by writing Jerry at biglizard@chameleondream.com.

Feel free to share this doc with your friends but please do not post without permission, bundle it up with other games, or try to sell it to anyone for any amount.