Donjon

a game of old-school dungeoneering with an all-new bent

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About this version of *Donjon*

This version of *Donjon* is intended for screen use. It should fit pretty easily on your screen for reading, and can be printed out to put in a three-ring binder sideways. (This is a good idea for conventions.)

It's not as pretty as the print version of *Donjon*, and leaves some blank white spaces, as the text is identical between the two versions.

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Introduction

Welcome to *Donjon*! Either you've played role-playing games before and have decided to check out this one, or by some chance, this is the first role-playing game you've ever come across. Either way, read on.

Donjon is a rip-roaring, make-it-up-as-you-go-along game of bashing down doors, exploring dark dungeons (or *donjons*, as we like to call them), killing monsters, finding loot, and saving the day. It's a fantasy role-playing game because you, the player, play the part of a fictional character in a fantastic world. (You get to play lots of characters if you're the GM.) The best analogy for this is given by Ron Edwards, a bad-ass of a game designer. He likens playing a role-playing game to being in a band: the members get together and decide what kind of music they want to play, one person (the GM) leads off, and the rest of the members add what they have to make something that is, hopefully, exactly what they wanted. Just like with playing music, one member of the band might find a cool riff that no one was expecting, and everyone else jumps on it. *Donjon* is like acid jam-rock. It's made to give players a lot of control: they can bust into guitar and drum solos whenever they wish. If something sounds groovy, then they can go with it. There's no band-leader here to bust your chops.

How this game came to be

Five people sat around a table on a Sunday afternoon, all with piles of dice in front of them. We'd gotten together for an afternoon of role-playing, and decided to play our favorite game from our childhood, a slim red-covered version of the original *Dungeons and Dragons*.

Zak (the Dungeon Master): You're in a small room, with walls made of grey stone and covered with slime. The floor's about a foot deep in water.

Clinton (as an Elf): I look for secret doors. (Rolls some dice.) Success.

Zak: Ok. You find a secret door. It's... um, I don't know... on the left wall.

Clinton: Really? Was that on the map, or did you make that up?

Zak: Made it up. You searched, and were successful, right?

Clinton: Kick-ass.

We suddenly realized we were having fun. We decided to drop the idea of common sense, and had every successful roll have something happen. Whenever I successfully searched for secret doors - there was one. Whenever I listened for noise successfully - there was noise.

It worked like a charm, and I went home with ideas fluttering in my head. A hundred e-mails, dozens of phone calls, and a few edits later, *Donjon* emerged.

What this game is about

This game is about, first and foremost, that sense of wonder you had the first time you played a fantasy role-playing game. (If this is your first game - which strikes me as funny, but great - it's about making sure you get that sense of wonder I did the first time.) I re-

member my first time well. I played original D&D, and my character was an elf. I had no idea what the rules were, but I knew I could swing a sword and cast some spells, and that was cool by me. The rules seemed easy enough, and what I remember enjoying the most was the ability to try *anything*. The rest of the players had been in the game for a while, and did what they were used to. As for me, I tried just about everything I could, and loved it.

I want to make it clear that this game is not a satire. It may produce funny situations, but it's a work of love - an *homage* to what dungeon crawling in your parents' basement was, and what dungeon crawling in your own basement can be. This game's about letting players come up with cool situations and actions. I also remember getting attacked by some huge mosquito-type things called "stirges" that first time I played, and getting frustrated when I couldn't try and drive them away with a huge acrid fire. Mosquitoes don't like smoke, I figured, so why not try the same tactic against these things?

Lastly, this game is about winning. Don't be fooled by the fact that you're all friends: the GM's job is to take whatever you say and twist it around and screw you with it. Think of the GM as a genie - an evil one. You make wishes, and he tries work them to his advantage. The players' job is to not let the GM do this: think of cool actions she can't thwart, build characters that are engines of fun destruction, and smite down all the enemies she can throw at you.

This game is different than what you're probably used to - if you're a hard-core dungeon crawling machine, you've probably not seen mechanics that allow players to drive the situation like these. If you're some sort of narrativist bleeding-edge pansy that's used to having players run everything, you've probably not had the chance to wallow in the blood of your enemies like this.

Acknowledgements and thanks

How to read this book

We've tried to make this book as easy as possible to read. You'll find a few identifying marks throughout the book. Whenever you see indented, italicized text, it contains an example of the concepts being discussed.

This is an example of, strangely, an example.

You'll also note shaded boxes throughout the text. These boxes contain one of the following:

- **Dials.** These are options that the players and GM can decide to "switch." Each box will tell you whether a dial can be switched in play, or if it must be switched before play.

- **Player tips.** Some of the concepts in *Donjon* may have implications that do not seem apparent at first. Player tips contain notes from the author that explain concepts in further detail and help the player to play *Donjon* most effectively.

- **GM tips.** With the players having so much power to narrate in *Donjon*, a GM needs good tips on how to keep them in line. GM tips are full of ways to beat down characters (and players.)

- **Design decisions.** These explain why certain rules are the way they are in *Donjon*.

- **Tables.** Exactly what it sounds like - these are reference tables for running *Donjon*.

Glossary of terms

Ability: A special function of a creature. These are the qualities that define a character or opponent and make them unique. Each type of creature in *Donjon* is made up of different Abilities.

Attribute: The raw capabilities of a creature. This is a common language used to describe how strong, smart, alert, quick, tough, and influential a character or opponent is. Attributes are common to every living thing in *Donjon*.

Class: A character's occupation or role within the group. "Fighter," "Librarian," and "Wizard of Nod" are all suitable Classes.

d20: A die with twenty sides. These are found in hobby stores or behind the bookcase of any gamer.

Donjon: This is different from the dictionary definition, which is a keep in a castle. "Donjon" in the context of this game is an enclosed area in which the player characters move and encounter trouble. This is the area in which an adventure takes place.

Game Master: This player, instead of creating and playing a character, creates the adventure and controls all the opponents during the game. Also known as a GM. In order to show her the utmost respect, I recommend calling her the Donjon Master.

Median: the middle number when arranging three numbers in numerical order. For example, 2 would be the median of the numbers 1, 2, and 5. This is different from the *mean*, or average.

Narrate: This is just a fancy word for "deciding what happens."

Non-player character: Also known as a NPC. This is a fictional character that is not controlled by a player. Instead it is controlled by the GM and is used to interact with the players' characters.

Player character: Also known as a PC. This is a fictional person that a player creates to use as his proxy - like a Monopoly piece - in the game world.

Race: This is not the same as in the real world. In *Donjon* (and most fantasy role-playing games), a Race is actually a different species, usually anthropomorphic. Goblin, ogre, centaur, or human would all be Races.

Saving Throws: These scores are your ability to resist the ill effects of magic.

Scene: This is the basic unit of game-play in *Donjon*. A scene is the whole of any encounter in the game. This encounter does not have to be favorable or unfavorable, but merely a cohesive interaction with the environment which results in a decision. Examples of scenes are a conversation with an NPC, finding an obstacle in the PC's path and finding a way around it, or one entire combat. Merely seeing something interesting, walking down a path, or entering and exiting a room without doing anything do not constitute scenes. Scenes are sometimes called *encounters.*

Test: This is an actual roll of the dice. When you roll dice and the Game Master rolls dice, and you compare the rolls, that is one Test.

Rolling the dice

Donjon uses dice pools for its resolution system. When you see a score referenced in this text, it is referring to a pool of dice equal in number to that score, and all examples in this text assume these dice to be twenty-sided dice, or "d20's."

For resolution in this game, you will be asked to compare rolls (called a *Test.*) This is the core of the game, and is a modification of the technique used for resolution in the role-playing game *Sorcerer.*

Here's how it works. Each player rolls a number of dice depending on the situation. (This is almost always an Ability or saving throw score, plus its associated Attribute.) The two rolls are then compared for successes. Each player looks at his highest die. The player with the lower roll loses, and all dice that the winner has higher than the loser's highest die are called successes.

If both players have the same highest die, set that die aside, and look at the next one. Repeat until there is a winner. The winner takes *all his tied dice* as successes, as well as counting all normal successes. If by chance, all dice are tied, both people add an additional

die to their pool, and compare successes. If by far chance, this results in another tie, repeat until there is a clear winner.

This is not as hard as it sounds. Look at an example:

Player rolls 5 dice: (4, 7, 9, 11, 12)
*GM rolls 4 dice: (6, 12, **15, 18**)*

The GM wins, and her dice that rolled 15 and 18 are successes, for two total successes.

Another example:

*Player rolls 5 dice: (3, **11, 12, 13, 15**)*
GM rolls 5 dice: (5, 8, 10, 13, 15)

The player wins with four successes. The 13's and 15's were tied, so the player and GM looked at the next die. The player's 12 was the highest die, and his 11 and 12 were higher than the GM's 10.

Deciding what to roll

Almost every roll in *Donjon* will be a combination of an Attribute (outlined in Chapter 2: Character Creation) and an applicable Ability. Your GM will help you decide what to roll, but you should get the hang of it easily.

There may be many things you want to do that you do not have an Ability for. In that case, you will roll just an Attribute.

The Law of Successes

The Law of Successes is the most important rule in *Donjon*. The Law of Successes states:

1 success = 1 fact *or* 1 die

What this means is that for every success you get on a roll, you can decide to either state one fact about your action, or carry that success over as a bonus die into another related roll.

For example, Jonathan has stated that his character is looking into the forest for something. He has not stated what the character is looking for, only that he is using his powers of perception to see what's out there. Jim gets three successes on his roll.

He has to decide what to do with these successes. He decides to state two facts: he sees a small group of orcs, and they are busy making a fire. He takes his last success and uses it as a bonus die when rolling to sneak up on the orcs.

Initial concept

The players and GM should sit down before play to discuss the sort of world they want to play in. While *Donjon* is always set in a fantastic world, there are many variations on the fantastic. The world could be like a fairy tale, full of curious goblins, mushroom-cap soldiers, and knights clad in silver on dragonfly mounts. The world could be a gritty Dark Age land, with flesh-eating trolls, demonic sorcerers, and steel stained red with blood everywhere. The world could even be far in the future - characters could explore abandoned lunar stations, using their rayguns and psi-powers to guard against alien predators and zombie spacemen.

Once the players and GM have a good idea of what the world they are going to play in is like, each player should sit down and think about what sort of character they want to play. This can be only a rough idea at this stage, but things to consider are:

- Does my character think first or swing first?

- Does my character make a strong impression on others, or does he skulk in the shadows?

- Does my character often find himself in trouble, or is he always on top of the situation?

- Does my character use magic or a big freaking sword? Or both?

- Does my character dominate a situation with his overbearing wit and charm, or does he grunt and flex his muscles?

Attributes

Once you have a rough outline of the type of character you want to play in your head, you need to create scores for your character's Attributes. The Attributes are:

Virility (Vir), a measure of one's raw strength and power. It is used for physical actions, determining the weight of armor and weapons you can carry, and inflicting damage.

Cerebrality (Cer), intellectual bearing and knowledge. It is used in contests of wit, for spell-casting, and remembering to pack the right supplies for a donjon adventure.

Dial: Seriousness level

An important thing for the group to determine before play is the seriousness level of the game. *Donjon* is a very different sort of game in that the players have the ability to create as much of the outcome as the GM.

Playing a game with high humor can be rewarding, but can also be grating if attempted with the wrong players. Likewise, some players may not enjoy the visceral horror of a grim rust-and-blood sort of game.

This dial must be set before the game begins, and has the settings of: **Monty Python and the Geeks** (over-the-top), **Slapstick** (lots of funny), **Tongue-in-Cheek** (full of allusions to role-playing cliches taken deadly seriously by the *characters*), **Black Humor, Serious,** and **Rust-and-Blood** (fantasy horror). This dial should be set by agreement between the GM and players.

Discernment (Dis), the ability to think clearly and wisely. It is often called "common sense," and used to perceive hidden or unclear things, resist the influence of others, and ignore mind-affecting magic.

Adroitness (Adr), one's capacity for litheness and speed. It is used in actions requiring finesse and skill, attacking with a weapon, and dodging blows.

Wherewithal (Whe), the ability to take and absorb pain and suffering. It is commonly known as "grit," and is used to take damage, exert yourself, and resist body-affecting magic.

Sociality (Soc), a measure of your charismatic charm and power. Persons with a high Sociality may be as frightening as they are compelling. It is used to bargain for goods and convince or intimidate people.

Each Attribute will start with a number between one and six in it. Zero indicates a total lack of ability, three is equivalent to average human ability, and six is superhuman in nature.

To create your character's Attribute scores, you will need three six-sided dice (d6's), exactly like you'd find at the corner store or in a game of *Monopoly*. Roll these dice and look for the median roll. Place this number in your first Attribute. Repeat for all six Attributes in order.

Jonathan is rolling the Attributes for his character, Fiera Thick-heart. His rolls, and the associated Attributes look like this:

Roll: 1, 5, 6 = Virility of 5

Roll: 1, 2, 2 = Cerebrality of 2

Roll: 4, 4, 4 = Discernment of 4

Roll: 2, 5, 5 = Adroitness of 5

Roll: 3, 4, 6 = Wherewithal of 4

Roll: 1, 1, 6 = Sociality of 1

Dial: Attribute generation

The method of attribute generation used here is very random, and will often not result in the type of character a player originally envisioned. It is a type of attribute generation used in the classics of fantasy role-playing, and so I include it out of nostalgia and respect. It can be highly rewarding to let the dice fall where they may. When players have a strong character concept, they need a different option, though.

This dial has three settings:

Standard: The method described in the main text.

Whiff-Proof Standard: If a character's scores add up to 15 or less, that player may re-roll all the scores.

Player-Allocated Bonus: As **Whiff-Proof Standard**, but the player adds add one to one score and subtracts one from one score after rolling.

Player-Chosen Random Rolls: The player rolls 3d6 and records the median rolls as in **Whiff-Proof Standard**. However, he places these rolls in whichever attributes he likes. This setting gives the players options while limiting extremes in attributes.

Player-Allocated: The player is given 21 points to distribute however he likes among the six attributes. No score can be lower than 1 or higher than 6. The setting gives the players the most options, but can produce characters with wild attributes.

The GM sets this dial before play. Each player, however, has the option to turn back the dial to the **Standard** method for his character.

Class or Race

Each player creates his character's Class or Race at this point by simply creating a name for it. A Class or Race may be anything one likes, given that the GM deems it suitable for her campaign. A Class or Race may have a simple name, like "Thief" or "Elf," or a more complex name, like "Knight of the Silver Lance," or "Granite-Bone Troll."

The only real difference between a Class or a Race is nomenclature. A character with a Class is deemed to be human, as humans have a globe-spanning reach that includes myriads of cultures and potential careers. A Race, on the other hand, is a unified group of one species in which all members have the same Abilities. By creating your character with a Race, you are actually defining the entire species.

Examples of Classes: Mercenary, Archaelogist, Purple-Robed Sorcerer, Wilderness Scout, Tinkerer

Examples of Races: Pebble Gnome, Sentient Forest Ape, Red-Nose Goblin, House Ogre, Snap-Tooth Dragon-Kin

No two players within the same group should create characters of the same Class or Race. Party diversity is important in *Donjon*.

Dial: Humans and other races

A GM may determine before the game that humans are not the dominant species, or race, in her campaign. If this is the case, the GM may set this dial to the dominant race, be it elves, goblins, or blue-skinned aliens.

If this dial is set to anything but humans, that race has a plethora of careers - or classes. All other species, including humans, are treated as normal races according to the rules. If, for example, the dominant species is goblins, characters might be: Cave Guard, Pumpkin Bomber, or Grub Hunter.

The GM may also allow all species to have diverse classes. In that case, races work slightly differently: all members of a race (except humans) have the same Main Ability. All characters are assigned a class (so you might have, for example, a Rock Troll with the Class Mountain Raider), which is how their Secondary Abilities are determined.

In all honesty, this is an inferior way to play *Donjon* and should be frowned upon, but the good heart of the author forced my pen to give you the option.

Level

All characters usually start the game at Level 1. Mark this on your character sheet.

GM's may sometimes instruct players to create characters of a higher Level than normal. In that case, create a Level 1 character using this chapter, then use the advancement rules in Chapter 7: Running *Donjon* to increase your character's Level.

Flesh Wounds

Flesh Wounds are a measure of how much damage a character can take before becoming gravely wounded. These are different from other scores that define your character in that you will never roll these. Characters start with few Flesh Wounds; however, these will increase during play as the character grows hardier and learns to suffer more.

Provisions and Wealth

Provisions are a measure of your current state of readiness for donjon adventures. It is an abstract quantification of the goods you are

carrying to help you through trials. These are things like food, rope, ten-foot poles, crampons, and tent stakes.

Wealth is a measure of your finances - gold coins, gems, and the like. This is used to buy weapons and armor, as well as more Provisions.

Saving Throws

Saving Throws are scores used to determine a character's ability to resist magic and misfortune. There are two Saving Throws in *Donjon*.

Save vs. Illusion and Confusion: This saving throw is used to resist all magic that affects the mind, be it illusions, confusion, or other mind-manipulating magic. It is normally rolled with Discernment.

Save vs. Poison, Paralysis, and Transmogrification: This saving throw is used to prevent any sort of natural or magical body manipulation. This could be poison, disease, turning into a frog through magic, paralyzation, or any other body-affecting magic. It is normally rolled with Wherewithal.

Abilities

The last and most important thing you have to do to create a character is determine his Abilities. Abilities are what make a Class or Race unique - things they can do that not everyone else can. In *Donjon*, you invent your character's Abilities.

You must choose one Main Ability, and four Supporting Abilities. A Main Ability is what defines a Race or Class: it is a broad Ability that they are renowned for. A Main Ability should be very versatile.

Supporting Abilities are tangential to the definition of the Race or Class. They are Abilities that help the Race or Class, but are much more specific in nature. Examples of some Classes and Races to illustrate, with each one's Main Ability in italics:

Mercenary: *Hit People With Weapons,* Run and Charge, Knock Down Doors, Intimidate, Take Damage in Melee Combat

Purple-Robed Sorcerer: *Cast Spells*, Understand Demon Languages, Avoid Magic, Lie Convincingly, Damage Demons

Granite-Bone Troll: *Take All Sorts of Damage*, Play Dumb, Eat Rocks and other Hard Things, Leap Across Chasms, Hand-smash

Elf: *Be One With Nature*, Cast Nature Spells, Use Bows, Attack with Longswords, Find Secret Doors

Noble: *Influence People*, Knowledge of Heraldry, Dodge in Melee, Bargain with Authorities, Ride Horses

Note from the above examples the difference between Main Abilities and Supporting Abilities. A Mercenary can use any weapon at his disposal, but an Elf can only use a longsword or bow. (Actually, both can use any weapon. The Elf can only use his Ability with a bow or longsword, though.)

The Granite-Bone Troll can absorb damage from any source, be it a weapon, a falling rock, fire, or magic. The Mercenary can take more damage than the average character, but only in combat. Traps, backstabs, and falling would hurt him like normal.

The Noble can use his Main Ability in any social situation. The Purple-Robed Sorcerer is useful in social situations as well, but only if he is lying.

A Main Ability should affect all of one type of roll - all attack rolls, all damage rolls, all influence rolls, or all attempts to hide. A Supporting Ability should be constrained so that it only works in specific situations.

The constraint on a Supporting Ability can be equipment-based, opponent-based, or any other sort of constraint. Note the Purple-Robed Sorcerer compared to the Granite-Bone Troll. They both have Abilities that let them increase their damage. ("Hand-smash" is used to do more damage when hitting things.) The Purple-Robed Sorcerer can use his Ability whether attacking a demon with magic or a sword. The Granite-Bone Troll, on the other hand, can hurt anything, but he must hit it with his hand.

Because you can invent any Ability you want, you may need to stop here with the GM and define what your Abilities do. If you wanted to backstab, for example, you'd make a "Backstab" Ability. How does Backstab work, though? Your GM will be familiar with these rules, and can help you out with these questions now. (Backstab would add to your damage roll whenever you hit an opponent facing away from you. Alternatively, it could add to your attack roll whenever an opponent is facing away from you. It could not do both, however. This is why it is important to make sure your Abilities are well-defined before play.)

Magic Abilities

You've probably noticed above that the Purple-Robed Sorcerer has "Cast Spells" as his Main Ability, and the Elf has "Cast Nature Spells" as a Supporting Ability. A general Ability to do magic - Cast Spells, Magic-Slinging, or whatever else - must be taken as a Main Ability.

If you want a very specific type of magic, you may take it as a Supporting Ability. Examples would be Cast Nature Spells, Mystical Stealth, Create Illusions, or Psychokinesis.

All these Abilities are spell-based magic, and use the magic system outlined in Chapter 6: Magic. If you make a character that uses spell-based magic, you should read this chapter before play. It tells you how to define your magical style and choose your Magic Words, which you'll have to do to finish making your character.

You do not, however, have to have spell-based magic at all to have a Ability that is magical in nature. For example, if you want to create a spritely little creature whose only magical talent is making light, you could choose "Making Light" as an Ability. If you wanted to have your hands burst into flame in combat, you could choose "Hands of Flame," and define it as adding to your damage when

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Player Tip: Choosing Abilities

The option to choose any Abilities you want for your character may be daunting. Remember that successful actions will let you narrate what happens in the game, and plan your Abilities around that.

If you chose an Ability like "Hear Noise," you could use this at any time, not just when your GM called for a roll. A successful roll would allow you to create an encounter by saying that your character hears footsteps behind him, the sound of a giant eagle in the trees, or the scraping of a huge worm ahead in a tunnel. If you chose an Ability like "Find Secret Doors," you could use this to find a short-cut around big trouble in a dungeon, or even use it to find a way out of a combat that's not going in your character's favor.

Also remember that successes can be used for bonus dice on another roll, and choose Abilities that can be used as "combos."

If you chose an Ability like "Speed of the Ancients," you could use that to increase your initiative in combat. If you chose Abilities like "Run and Charge" and "Strike with Broadsword," you could run at an opponent, using successes to add to your ability to strike him. If you chose Abilities like "Find Treasure" and "Evaluate Worth," you could search for treasure, evaluate the worth of it, and then make a roll to loot, using successes from each roll to build up a huge pool of dice.

punching. Since all Abilities use the same resolution system, and are rated identically, these sorts of Abilities are not over-powering even though they are magical in nature.

Powerful Abilities

Some players may take Abilities the GM determines to be too powerful for her game. This should be very hard to do, as all Abilities are rated identically.

If you are a GM, and a player has an Ability that seems too powerful, discuss a way to tone it back with him. Most powerful Abilities can be translated into a perfectly fine *Donjon* Ability.

> *Jonathan wants to play a Snap-Tooth Dragon-kin. He writes down "Immune to Fire" as a Supporting Ability. His GM notes that there is no sort of "immunity" Ability in Donjon. She asks him, "Wouldn't that work better as 'Resistant to Fire?' That way, we can rate it easier." Jim agrees, and takes "Resistant to Fire."*

If the Ability can absolutely not be toned down to a level appropriate for your game, a good solution is to set a limit on its use with the player. Most powerful Abilities are fine when used only once per encounter. If you are a player, and want an Ability that seems over-powering, suggest this to your GM.

> *Jonathan, the trouble player in this group, also has "Regenerate Damage" as a Supporting Ability. His GM frowns. "But, Nikola," he whines, "I can only use it when I'm damaged." Nikola shakes her head. "That's not nearly limited enough for a Supporting Ability."*
>
> *"What if I make it 'Regenerate Adroitness Damage'?" Jonathan asks.*
>
> *"Ok - that's fair. But, you can only use it once per encounter," Nikola adds. "Otherwise, you could just use it over and over until all your Adroitness damage was healed every encounter."*

Distributing initial dice

At the end of character creation, you should have Flesh Wounds, two Saving Throws, and five Abilities with unallocated scores on your character sheet.. You have 20 initial dice to allocate to these scores however you see fit. However, you may not have more than your Level + 3 in any of these scores.

You should also have a Wealth score and a Provisions score. Set one of these at 5 dice and the other at 3 dice to determine initial Wealth and Provisions.

Your character is now completed and ready for play.

Some examples of character creation

Three players, Robin, Ron, and Jonathan, sit down with the Game Master, Nikola, to make characters for *Donjon*. They have decided that the game will be fairly serious, although none of them object to a little humor, and Nikola has decided that Attributes will be allocated with the "Player-Allocated" method.

Roland the Wilderness Scout

Robin says, "This game, I want to play a character that'll let me narrate a lot. I think someone who can find monsters and know all about them would be best. I'm going to play a human - his Class is 'Wilderness Scout.'" He writes down the Class on his character sheet.

He's got 21 points to allocate to Attributes. He says, "I want this character to be almost supernaturally perceptive, but he's got to be quick, too, so as not to get killed. I'm going to set his Discernment and Adroitness really high. I don't think he's that strong or imposing, though - kind of a smart, quiet guy." He allocates his points and

ends up with Virility 2, Cerebrality 3, Discernment 6, Adroitness 5, Wherewithal 3, and Sociality 2.

Ron says, "Great. Aragorn. Whoopee."

Robin turns to him. "Hey, buddy. If you want to comment, get your head out of that book. Otherwise, keep it to yourself. Anyway, this guy's nothing like Aragorn. He uses a machete, and climbs trees."

For Abilities, Robin already has his Main Ability in mind: "His Main Ability is 'Track Anything.' I should be able to use that to find tracks of people, monsters, or whatever else I want to encounter." For Supporting Abilities, he thinks of three that will help him out: "Sneak in Forests," "Climb Trees," and "Swing Machete." He can't think of another one, though.

Jonathan says, "What about 'Wild Animal Lore'? You could state facts about the creatures you find." Robin thinks that's perfect, and adds it on. (Having other players help you with your character is highly suggested.)

All Robin has left to do is distribute his 20 initial dice. He puts four dice, the maxi-mum, into Roland's Main Ability, as he wants him to be great at it. He wants Roland to be relatively tough, sneaky, and decent in combat, so he puts three dice into Flesh Wounds, "Sneak in Forests," and "Swing Machete." He doesn't particularly care about mind-affecting magic, so only puts one die into Save versus Illusion and Confusion, and puts two dice in everything else.

For Provisions and Wealth, he puts five dice into Provisions and three into Wealth.

Azar the Purple-Robed Sorcerer

Ron's been reading some other role-playing game while Robin made up his character. He looks up and says, "I like the idea playing someone who uses magic, but his magic revolves all around demons. I'll call him a 'Purple-Robed Sorcerer.'"

Jonathan and Robin laugh. "Man, you always play that character."

Ron sneers. "And he always kicks ass, so shut it." He writes down the Class on his character sheet and continues, "This guy's weak as he can be from all the other-worldly forces he's summoned, but he's smart, and his flesh has turned leathery and tough. He's not the sort of guy you'd like to know, but he's powerfully frightening, too." He assigns his Attribute points, and ends up with Virility 1, Cerebrality 6, Discernment 2, Adroitness 3, Wherewithal 5, and Sociality 4.

Ron says, "Well, 'Casting Spells' has got to be my Main Ability. What else can I use to make this character cool?"

Jonathan says, "Um... how about make a different character?"

Ron growls. "Keep it up, man. Just keep it up. We'll see whose character's lame when we're knee-deep in human feces under Da Nang."

Jonathan laughs, "Dude - Da Nang? What?"

"Never mind," Ron grimaces. "Robin - can you help me out here?"

Robin says, "How about 'Understand Demon Languages'? You could roll it to understand what a demon's saying to you, and use the successes to actually state what he said."

Ron agrees. "That's awesome. That and "Damage Demons" in case one gets out of control. Hmm... what else? I'd like to be able to roll some extra dice in Damage Tests against magic, and lie to people. 'Avoid Magic' and 'Lie Convincingly' sound good."

Like Robin, Ron puts four dice into his character's Main Ability, "Cast Spells." He does care about mind-affecting magic, so he puts four dice into Save vs. Illusion and Confusion as well. With only 12 dice left to spend, he puts three into "Lie Convincingly," one into "Save vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification," and two into everything else.

He also puts five dice into Wealth and three dice into Provisions to finish the character.

Fiera the Snap-Tooth Dragon-Kin

Nikola asks Jonathan, "What sort of character are you planning on playing?" Jonathan says, "I was thinking about playing a non-human - maybe a cute female dragon-person."

Robin says, "Dude, you always play chicks."

Jonathan says, "Shut your punk mouth before I shut it for you. Anyway, there's lots of dragon-kin, right?" Nikola nods. "She's one of the Snap-Tooth Dragon-Kin, a group of strong, but non-flying dragon-kin. I think I'll call her Fiera." He writes down Fiera's Race on the character sheet. "She's going to be a bad-ass, but doesn't get along with people well. It's not because she's mean, though, although people think she is - she's actually shy, as she thinks people won't accept her, so she's always trying to prove herself." He takes his 21 points, and allocates them as Virility 5, Cerebrality 3, Discernment 4, Adroitness 4, Wherewithal 4, and Sociality 1.

Ron looks up again. "Man, it's just *Donjon*. Cease with all the backstory and just create your combat-ready chick so we can play already."

Jonathan says, "Hey - I like this character. You're just upset because we're not playing the game you wanted to this week." Ron mutters and looks back down at his book. "Ok, Abilities," Jonathan thinks out loud. "Well, 'Breathe Flame,' of course. And since that's a Main Ability, I can use it in combat, or to destroy flammable things, right, Nikola?" She nods again. "Ok. Let's see. I'm going to add 'Thick Hide' to absorb damage."

Nikola says, "But that's a Supporting Ability. What sort of damage do you want to avoid?"

Jonathan thinks for a second. "All damage from sharp things - they have a hard time getting through her hide. I'm also taking 'Resistant to Fire,' 'Intimidate People,' and 'Regenerate Adroitness Damage.' Remember, we talked about that one, Nikola."

She agrees. "Yeah - it seems to be an alright Ability, as long as you only use it once per scene. What about your dice?"

Jonathan puts four dice into "Intimidate People" to make up for Fiera's low Sociality, and also puts four dice into Flesh Wounds, since she's supposed to be tough. He puts three dice into "Breathe Flame," one into "Regenerate Adroitness Damage," and two into everything else.

He finishes up by putting five dice into Provisions, and three into Wealth.

In *Donjon*, the amount of money and goods your character has is not quantified as some sort of concrete quantity. You won't find references anywhere in the game to "20 doubloons" or any other such nonsense. Instead, your character has a Wealth score, which is an amorphous reference of his current money situation, and a Provisions score, which is a reference of his state of readiness for donjon adventures - basically, how full his backpack is.

The Wealth score is primarily used when your character is in town, shopping for weapons, armor, or other items. It's also used to increase his Provisions score, and bribe or influence people. The Provisions score is only used when out on an adventure.

The Spending Test

All uses of Wealth and Provisions in this chapter use a standard method of resolution called a Spending Test. (You'll find out more about Tests in Chapter 4: Resolution.) The steps involved in a Spending Test are:

1. Decide on a number of dice to take from your Wealth or Provisions score. (This will be indicated in the text.) If the Test is successful, these dice will be lost from your score.

2. If rolling a Wealth Spending Test, add Sociality to the number of dice in your dice pool; if rolling a Provisions Spending Test, add Cerebrality to the number of dice.

3. Roll these dice and compare to a roll by the Game Master. (The number of dice the Game Master rolls will be indicated in the text as well.)

4. If successful, you get the item or service you were trying to purchase. The dice you took from Wealth or Provisions are lost from that score. If unsuccessful, return the dice you took.

The Law of Successes (described briefly in Chapter 1: Basic Concepts, and more fully in Chapter 4: Resolution) does not apply to Spending Tests.

Buying items

Characters may only buy items when in town. In order to buy an item, make a Wealth Spending Test against a number of dice according to Table 3-1: Item and Service Worth. *Markup* is always added to the GM's number of dice. Markup is a score that will differ depending on the town, and the nature of goods the character is trying to buy, and is covered in detail in Chapter 7: Running *Donjon*.

If you succeed in this roll, your character gets the item he was trying to buy. If unsuccessful, your character cannot buy this same item or service from this vendor. He can go to a different blacksmith, coach driver, or inn, if there is one, but this vendor wants nothing more to do with him until his Wealth is increased, or the GM rules that the situation has changed (the characters do a favor for the vendor, a magician casts a spell increasing the character's Sociality, or something of the like.)

Buying more Provisions

The other thing your character can buy in town are Provisions. When at a Provisions vendor, if you want to increase your character's Provisions, make a Wealth Spending Test against your

Table 3-1: Item and Service Worth

Worth	Item or service
Damage Rating	Weapon or armor
0	Cheap stuff (a beer, a night in a stable or common room, a meal)
3	Moderate cost (a 10-mile coach ride, a room for a week, decent information, a silver ornament)
6	Expensive stuff (a trip on board a ship, good information, a cart and horse, a ruby-encrusted gold ring)
9+	Very pricey stuff (a small house, a team of horses, some cows, a pound of rare spice)

The GM may feel free to assign Worth to an object that is between the values above. If an object could be considered of more than moderate cost, but not truly expensive - a fighting dog, for example - you could assign a Worth of 6 or 7 to it.

character's current Provisions, plus the town's Markup for Provisions. All of your successful dice are added to your character's Provisions.

Robin wants to increase his character's Provisions before going adventuring. He has a current Wealth of 9 and Provisions of 4. In addition, his Sociality is 2 and the town's Provisions Markup is 3. He chooses to roll 6 of his Wealth dice in order to increase Provisions. His total roll is 8 dice (6 Wealth + 2 Sociality.) The GM rolls 7 dice (4 Provisions + 3 Markup.) The results are:

*Robin: 3, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, **17, 20***

GM: 2, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16

Robin has two successes, so he increases his character's Provisions by 2 to 6. His Wealth score is now 3.

Using Wealth as influence (buying favors)

You may spend your character's Wealth, either in town or on an adventure, in order to have him bribe or influence an NPC. To do so, make a Wealth Spending Test against the NPC's current Wealth score, plus his Discernment.

If you succeed in this roll, you may add the number of successes you received to the number of dice you roll the next time your character attempts any sort of social proposition with the influenced NPC. (In other words, this roll modifies the roll on your character's social attempt. It is not the social attempt itself.)

Ron's character, Azar, is talking with Baron Duval, the local lord. He needs passage onto his lands in order to hunt for the Scourge of the Golden Dawn, a fiend that he has been tracking. So far the baron's refusing, but Azar has a great deal of money, and decides to curry his favor with some of it. Ron decides to spend 8 of Azar's 12 Wealth. He rolls Azar's 4 Sociality, plus 8 Wealth against Duval's 2 Discernment, plus 10 current Wealth. He succeeds with 2 successes, and loses all 8 dice from his Wealth.

Ron can now add 2 dice to his roll when Azar asks the Baron for his permission to cross his lands.

Selling items

At some point, your character may wish to sell a weapon, a piece of armor, a castle, or some other item. There are two ways this can be done.

Sell the item for Wealth: You roll a number of dice equal to the Worth of the item, plus your Sociality, and the GM rolls your current Wealth score, plus the merchant's Markup. Any successes you have on the roll are added to your character's Wealth. If you fail, the item is still sold - it was not sold for a high enough price that it increased your Wealth. You will note that it is harder to gain Wealth from selling an item when your Wealth is already high.

Use the item in trade: If the GM rules that a vendor would be interested in your character's item, you may add a number of dice equal to its Worth to your roll in a Wealth Spending Test to buy whatever item you are trading it for. If you fail the Test, you have not traded away the item. This usually results in a much better value than selling the item.

If the character is selling a service, the GM and the player must agree on a Worth beforehand. The roll to exchange the service for Wealth, or to use it in trade comes afterwards, when the service is completed.

> *Jonathan's character, Fiera, has a huge axe (with a Worth of 4) that he wishes her to be rid of. Jonathan considers the options:*
>
> *He can have Fiera sell the axe. He would roll Fiera's Sociality of 1, plus 4 dice for the axe, against Fiera's current Wealth of 5, plus the merchant's Markup of 3. He realizes his chances aren't high of making any Wealth.*
>
> *He can have Fiera use the axe in trade. The merchant carries armor, and Fiera could use a chain shirt (Worth of 2). He can make a Wealth Spending Test and spend no Wealth at all, using the axe in trade. He would roll Fiera's Sociality of 1, plus the axe's Worth of 4 against the shirt's 2 Worth, plus the merchant's Markup of 3. He decides to spend two Wealth to increase his chances to 7 dice versus 5, and tries to trade the axe for the chain shirt.*

Weapons and armor

Weapons are concretely quantified in *Donjon*, as is armor. Weapons and armor are what donjon crawling is all about. Weapons and armor are most easily described by their potential for causing or stopping damage, called Damage Rating (DR). DR is calculated by looking at Chart 3-2: Weapons and Armor. Note that the descriptions in this chart are not set-in-stone descriptions. The player can describe his character's weapons and armor however he wants: if the player wants the character to carry a dwarven war-axe and wear bear-skin furs, decide how much potential for damage a dwarven war-axe has, and how much damage bear-skin furs can possibly stop.

However, if you can only use certain weapons (because of a Supporting Ability like 'Swing Elvish Sword') the DR of those weapons must be defined before play.

No mundane weapon (that a human-sized character can wield) or armor can cause or stop more than 4 dice of damage.

Weight
All weapons and armor have a Weight score. The Weight score is always equal to the mundane Damage Rating of the weapon. Weight is measures against a character's Virility to determine ef-
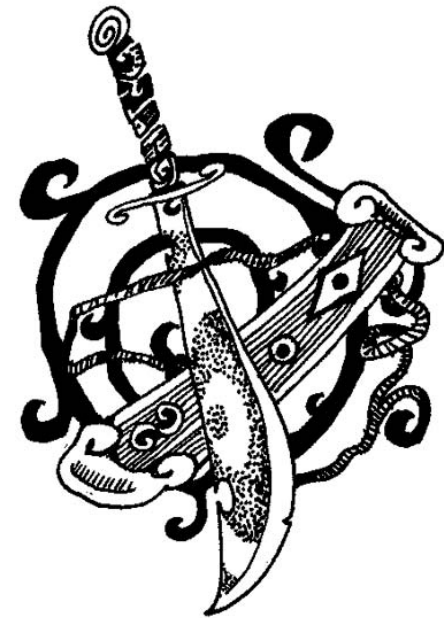
Table 3-2: Weapons and Armor	
Damage Rating	*Example of weapon or armor*
Melee weapons	
-1	Fists and feet
0	Small weapon (sap, dagger)
1	Medium weapon (short sword, mace, hammer, club)
2	Large weapon (broadsword, longsword, warhammer)
3	Huge weapon (halberd, two-handed sword)
+1	Sharp weapon (swords, axes)
Missile weapons	
1	Thrown items
2	Short bow, hand crossbow
3	Long bow, light crossbow
4	Composite bow, heavy crossbow
Armor	
1	Leather or padded armor, shield
2	Studded leather, chain shirt
3	Scale mail, chain armor
4	Plate armor

fects. If the character uses no piece of equipment with a Weight greater than his Virility, there are no effects.

If a weapon has a Weight greater than a character's Virility, the character's chance to hit with that weapon is penalized by the difference between the two scores.

If a character wears armor with a Weight greater than his Virility, his Adroitness is penalized by the difference.

> Robin's character, Roland, has a Virility of 2, Adroitness of 5, and the Supporting Ability "Swing Machete" at 3. Unfortunately, Roland finds himself in the possession of plate armor (DR 4) and a broad sword (DR 3). When Roland is wearing the armor, his Adroitness is penalized 2 dice (Weight 4 - Virility 2.) In addition, if he uses the sword, his chance to hit is lowered by 1 die.

In addition, a chance must have a Virility score higher than a melee weapon's Weight in order to use it in one hand. If a weapon has a Weight equal to or greater than a character's Virility, it must be used two-handed, preventing the character from using it and a shield, torch, or other hand-held object.

Missile weapons
Missile weapons are rated just like melee weapons, by damage. They do not, however, have a score for range, or how far they can shoot. Range is the same for all missile weapons, except thrown items, and is covered in Chapter 5: Combat.

Missile weapons in most role-playing games require some sort of ammunition - arrows, bolts, or bullets. By default, the assumption in *Donjon* is that you have enough of these things that you need not worry about them.

If your GM wants to keep track of ammunition, she will let you know before the game begins. In that case, 10 pieces of ammunition cost the same as a DR 1 weapon (Markup + 1 die).

Unusual weapons

Unusual weapons can occur quite easily in *Donjon*, as it is so player-driven. When a player has an idea for a weapon that seems very non-traditional, the GM and the player should sit down to figure out the damage (and cost) of the weapon.

Jonathan is playing a character, Fiera, that can blow flame. Flame breath is a pretty unusual weapon, but Nikola, the GM, thinks it's a neat idea. She asks Jonathan how much damage he wants the flame to do.

"Well, it's not that big, but it's flaming, so is three points ok?" Jonathan asks.

"That's fine," says the GM. "That means you'll have to buy a weapon of Worth 3 - what do you call it, though?"

"Maybe Fiera has to eat a special diet," Jonathan says. "I have to buy exotic goods to carry with me to eat."

Provisions

Provisions - assorted donjoneering equipment that isn't used to hit people or avoid being hit - are not listed on your character sheet. This sort of litigious bookkeeping is for lesser games. Instead, your character has one Provisions score. This score is a reference of his general state of preparedness for donjon adventures, and a measure of how much stuff he has in his backpack. When your character is on an adventure, and you wish he had a certain item, make a Provisions Spending Test against a number of dice found on Chart 3-3: Provisions Roll.

If Azar was standing in front of a door that he knew had massive treasure behind it, and his player, Ron, wanted him to pull out a lock-pick that would give him 2 extra dice for opening the door, the GM would roll:

3 dice (automatic) + 2 dice (Ability: Pick Locks 2) = 5 dice.

If you succeed at this roll, you successfully retrieve the item you were looking for from your backpack (or other place of storage.) If you fail this roll, you may not try to retrieve the same item again until you increase your Provisions.

Items can have Abilities, just like characters. These Abilities are Supporting Abilities, and add to the character's dice pool when using them. An item can only have a score in an Ability from 1 to 4 without being magical.

You cannot retrieve weapons, armor, or magic items from your Provisions. If you attempt to retrieve an item that is too big to fit in your backpack or be strapped across your back, you will incur a penalty.

Using Abilities with Wealth and Provisions

In all the cases above, your Abilities may increase the number of dice you get to roll, as explained in Chapter 4: Resolution. Having an Ability like "Evaluate Weapon Worth" can greatly increase your chances of picking up a weapon for a good price. When you have an Ability applicable to any action described in this chapter, you may add its score in dice to your dice pool.

Jonathan's character, Fiera, is buying a two-handed axe, which has a Worth of 4. She has an Ability of "Intimidate People" of 4. He decides to only spend 2 Wealth trying to get the axe, and rolls her 2 spent

Wealth, plus her Sociality of 1, plus her Intimidate Ability of 4, ending up with 7 dice. The GM rolls the axe's Worth of 4, plus the Markup of 3, totaling 7 dice.

Kimberly's character Zoe, a Level 3 Spelunker, has an ability of "Stuff Backpack Full" of 5. She wants to retrieve a glass bottle from her backpack in order to keep a sample of some cave fungus she has found. She takes 1 from her Provisions, and adds her 4 Cerebrality, plus her 5 dice from Stuff Backpack Full, totaling 10 dice she gets to roll. The GM rolls the automatic 3 dice for Provisions, plus the Worth of the item, which she determines to be 2, totaling 5 dice. Zoe's ability greatly increased her chances of having a glass bottle with her, and lowered the amount of Provisions she had to spend.

Permanent possessions

During an adventure, your character will gain all sorts of possessions - goods he rummages from his Provisions and things he finds on enemies' bodies or in treasure caches. You can feel free to have him use all of these during the adventure.

Your character sheet shows your *permanent possessions*, however. (At Level 1, this is one weapon, one piece of armor, and one other possession. You will have a chance to increase the number of permanent possessions your character has through experience.) At the beginning of each adventure, you must erase all possessions except the character's permanent possessions. Which possessions of yours are permanent may change, however; the number of possessions you have at the beginning of an adventure is the important part.

Table 3-3: Provisions Roll	
3 dice	Automatic
+x dice	Item's Worth (see Table 3-3: Item and Service Cost)
+1-4 dice	**or** Item's Ability score (Abilities and Worth do not add together; choose the larger value of the two.)
+3 dice	The item isn't something you'd usually carry (a troll with a lute, for example) or is too large for your Provisions.

The Game Master or player can call for a Test at any time in order to determine if a character can successfully perform an action. As discussed in Chapter 1: Basic Concepts, a Test is a roll of the dice used to determine the success of an action.

Attributes and Abilities

When rolling a Test, the player normally rolls a number of dice equal to his character's Attribute that is most appropriate to the task. Table 4-1: Attribute Appropriateness lists common tasks that fall under each Attribute.

In addition, the player normally adds an appropriate Ability (or Saving Throw) if his character has one. The GM is the final arbiter of whether an Ability is appropriate or not, but it is the player's responsibility to mention if his character has an appropriate Ability. (Only one Ability may be used per action, although if the character has any items with Abilities that are appropriate to the task, their values can be added as well.) A player may add an appropriate Ability score to his die pool any time a Test is mentioned in these rules unless otherwise noted.

Uncontested actions

When a Test is resolved between a character and an obstacle (climbing a wall, looking into the darkness, jumping a chasm), this is called *uncontested*. The player and GM choose the character's most appropriate Attribute for the action, as stated above, and the player rolls this score, adding dice from any appropriate Ability, Saving Throw, or item Ability to find out how many dice he is rolling in

Table 4-1: Attribute Appropriateness	
Attribute	*Common tasks*
Virility	Lifting heavy things Breaking open doors Pulling someone out of a river Climbing a wall or cliff Damaging someone
Cerebrality	Remembering a monster's weakness Solving a puzzle, riddle or math problem Deciphering another language Casting spells
Discernment	Noticing things Resisting mind-affecting magic Empathizing with someone or something Perceiving intentions
Adroitness	Dodging Running a short distance Jumping out of a trap's path Picking locks or pockets
Wherewithal	Resisting damage, body-affecting magic, poison, or disease Running a long distance
Sociality	Convincing a monster not to eat you, a bandit not to rob you, or a king to grant you passage Getting a good deal on your equipment

Table 4-2: Uncontested Difficulties	
Difficulty of task	*GM's dice*
Easy (climbing a fence)	0
Medium (climbing 100 feet with the appropriate equipment)	3
Hard (climbing a tall cliff with equipment, climbing 100 feet with no equipment)	6
Very Hard (climbing a sheer, wet cliff)	9
Crazy (climbing glass)	12
The GM always adds the Donjon Level (Chapter 7: Running *Donjon*) to the number of dice listed above.	

the Test. The GM will roll a number of dice appropriate to the difficulty of the action, as shown on Table 4-2: Uncontested Difficulties.

Robin wants his character, Roland, to swim across a fast-flowing underground river. The most appropriate Attribute for this is Virility, and Roland has no Swimming Ability, but does have a magic ring with the Ability "Magic: Float in Water 2," which is appropriate. The current Donjon Level is 2, and swimming across this particular river is a Hard task.

Robin will roll 4 dice (Roland's Virility of 2, plus 2 dice for the ring) and the GM will roll 8 dice (Donjon Level 2, plus 6 dice for a Hard task.)

When a player requests a test based on a perception-based uncontested action, the difficulty of the Test is determined a bit differently. Since *Donjon* is so player-driven, a player can say, "My character

is peering into the darkness," and he will get to determine what his character sees. In these cases, the GM should set the difficulty according to how much control she wants over the scene. If she wants little control, set the difficulty to Easy. If she wants an average level of control (the default), set the difficulty to Medium. If she wants her way with no changes, set the difficulty to Crazy. Remember that the GM will never have total control, though, even in the face of complete character failure.

After getting across the river, Roland finds a path leading further underground. Robin wants him to look at the ground and find tracks of the last creatures to walk down this path. The GM doesn't have a set idea for what she wants to be down the path, so she sets the difficulty to Medium.

Robin will roll 10 dice (Roland's Discernment of 6, plus an Ability of "Track Anything" of 4), and the GM will roll 5 dice (Donjon Level 2, plus 3 dice for a Medium task.)

Contested actions

When a character attempts a task opposed by another character or NPC, this is a *contested action*. For these Tests, the player rolls normally (Attribute plus modifiers) and the GM does the same for the NPC. If two players' characters are acting against each other, the players each roll normally against each other.

Once on the other side of the river, the party runs into a little goblin scout. The goblin takes off running to alert his friends, and Jonathan wants Fiera to stop him. In order to do so, she'll have to catch up with him. Fiera's sprinting, so the most appropriate Attribute is Adroitness, which is one of her best Attributes.

Jonathan will roll 5 dice (Fiera's Adroitness of 5, and no appropriate Abilities), and the GM will roll 7 dice (the goblin's Adroitness of 5, plus an Ability of "Sprint like Ass is on Fire" of 2.)

The Law of Successes and narration

So, what do you do with all these successes? In *Donjon*, we have a concrete rule as to what each success means. The Law of Successes states:

1 success = 1 fact *or* 1 die

When a player wins a Test, he is left with a number of successes. For each of these successes, he can state one discrete fact about his character's success, or turn the success into a bonus die for a related action. (This action is normally the character's next action. However, it does not necessarily have to be.) The player cannot state irrelevant facts - facts concerning something besides his action - and success in the action is assumed unless the player states otherwise.

Ron's character, Azar, is looking for a secret door, and Jim gets 3 successes on his roll. He uses all three successes for facts, and his facts are:

- *The door has demonic script around it.*

- *It is in the north wall of the room.*

- *There is a key in the keyhole.*

He could have said "The door is unlocked," or "The door is only 3 feet high," or even "Azar finds no door at all."

After a player states his facts, the GM takes these facts and narrates the outcome of the action, making sure to use all the player's facts. The GM can feel free to add new information to the outcome, or expand upon the player's facts.

The GM narrates Azar's attempt to find a secret door: "Azar looks around for a secret door, and pulls back a tapestry **on the north wall***. He finds a door with* **demonic script surrounding it** *and* **a key in the keyhole***, decorated with an ornate skull at the top. Four finger-bones jut out from underneath the door, as if someone tried to claw the door open from the inside."*

If the player fails in his Test, the situation is reversed. The GM's successes can be used to state facts about the player's failure, or they can be used as bonus dice for the GM in a related action by the player's character.

After the GM states his facts, the player has to narrate his character's failure, making sure to use all the GM's facts. Failure in the action is assumed unless the GM says otherwise. The player can

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Design Decision: Hey, I'm better at lower levels!

You'll probably notice quickly that you have a better chance of attempting actions that do not fit any of your Abilities at lower levels. As you increase in levels, the average Donjon Level that you'll be adventuring on will rise, and you'll need Abilities, which rise much faster than Attributes, in order to perform most tasks. For example, a Medium difficulty task on Donjon Level 1 gives the GM 4 dice to roll. A character with even an average Attribute will have a chance at winning. On Donjon Level 10, the same task gives the GM 13 dice, an amount that a character will need an Ability to have a chance against.

This is entirely on purpose. As you play *Donjon*, your character is not the only one to gain experience: you learn how to play as well. At lower levels, players should feel free to try out all sorts of ideas in play, and their chances of succeeding will be higher. As they rise in levels, their choices will have to become more focused. In addition, as you gain levels, you'll gain items, both mundane and magical, that will greatly help you out. You'll find that the perceived disability of higher-level characters is quickly evened out by their equipment.

add new information to this outcome, but the GM may stop his narration at any time. If the player tries to get out of using all the nastiness the GM has thrown at him, the GM should cackle like a

hyena, and then suddenly get very quiet, staring at the player with only one eye. That should teach him.

Later, Azar is attempting to climb a wall. Ron rolls the Test and fails, with the GM garnering 2 successes. The GM's facts are:

• *Azar falls down the wall and lands on a pile of garbage.*

• *Rats leap out of the garbage.*

Ron narrates: "Azar loses his hand-hold on the wall and **slips, landing in a pile of garbage.** *He hears a hissing, and* **rats leap out of the garbage**, *each the size of a dog. One of them starts to metamorph into a human form, and says, 'Master...'"*

Nikola, the GM, stops him. "Hold on there. 'Master?' I don't think so. So, one of them starts to metamorph into a human form and grins evilly at you..." The game continues on.

Failure and damage

Sometimes a Test carries the threat of damage along with it - for example, if the Test is to avoid a trap, climb a tall cliff, or slip under a descending ceiling before it hits the ground. If a failing a Test may cause damage, the GM should announce that to the player before the Test is rolled.

If the Test is failed, any of the GM's successes that she uses for bonus dice are used as bonus dice on a Damage Test. The player rolls his character's Wherewithal score plus modifiers, and the GM either rolls the appropriate Attribute and Ability of the opposing NPC, or if no NPC was opposing, the current Donjon Level, plus modifiers based on the severity of the damage. This is most usually Medium (+3 dice), but can be raised or lowered if the GM feels it is necessary.

The specific effects of damage on characters are detailed in Chapter 5: Combat, but in brief, each success for the GM on a Damage Test removes one Flesh Wound from the character affected.

Jonathan's character, Fiera, is trying to climb the same wall Azar was earlier in the adventure. The GM warns Jonathan that if he fails the Test, Fiera will fall and possibly be damaged. Jonathan goes ahead and rolls the Test, and the GM gets two successes. The GM says, "I'm going to use all of these as bonus dice in the Damage Test."

Fiera has no Ability to absorb damage from falling ("Thick Hide" only protects Fiera from sharp things), so Jonathan just rolls Fiera's Wherewithal of 4, while the GM rolls 7 dice (the current Donjon Level of 2, plus 3 for Medium damage, plus the 2 bonus dice.) This fall is probably going to hurt.

A Test can carry the threat of damage to an item with it. In that case, the GM need not announce the threat beforehand. The GM must state that the item may be damaged as a fact when she succeeds, however, using one success to do so. The player then rolls a Test of the item's Worth, and the GM rolls as above. Each success for the GM on this roll can remove one die from one of the item's mundane Ability scores.

Roland is trying to pick a lock, and has a lockpick with the Ability "Unlock Doors" at 2. Jim rolls the Test, and fails, with the GM getting 3 successes. The GM spends one success to announce the fact, "You hear your lockpick crunch as it twists in the lock," and spends the other two successes as bonus dice on the Damage Test against the item. Robin rolls the lockpick's Ability score of 2, and the GM rolls 4 dice (the Donjon Level of 2, plus the 2 bonus dice.) The GM succeeds in the Damage Test with 1 success, and the lockpick's Ability score drops to 1.

If all of an item's mundane Abilities drop to 0, the item is destroyed. (If an item has no Abilities, one point of damage done to it will destroy it.) Also, the Law of Successes does not apply to Damage Tests. If the player succeeds, his character and character's items have taken no damage, which is his only reward. The GM can use no successes for narration.

COMBAT

Combat is the heart of donjon crawling. For all the fun of narrating new encounters and results, combat is where characters have a license to chew up the scenery and emerge victorious, spoils in hand. In combat, the Law of Successes sometimes acts a bit differently than normal, so read closely to find out exactly what you can and can't do.

Starting a fight

Combat begins any time the GM *or* the players *call for initiative*. Calling for initiative means that you are asking everyone to make Initiative Tests to see when they are allowed to take actions in combat. When calling for initiative, you must name the party your character is attacking, if you are a player, or the party that is attacking the characters, if you are the GM.

In order to make an Initiative Test, each player rolls his character's Level, plus the character's score in Discernment. No other Abilities can be added to this roll. The GM rolls for each NPC in the combat, rolling the NPC's Level, plus Discernment. Write down these numbers, or leave the dice in front of you.

Combat is measured in what we call *flurries*. A flurry does not correspond to any sort of time measurement. Instead, it is a full ex-

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GM Tip: Rolling initiative

If you have to roll initiative for many NPCs of the same type, all with the same Level and Discernment, feel free to roll one Initiative Test for all of them. Each of the NPCs will go on each of the numbers you have rolled.

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change of blows at the end of which all participants have a slight lull in combat as they consider whether they want to continue combat. The GM counts down during the flurry from 20. (If the group is using a die size other than twenty-sided dice, the GM counts down from the highest number on the die.) Whenever the GM calls a number that a player rolled in his Initiative Test, that player's character can perform an action. If the player rolled the number multiple times, his character gets to make multiple actions. When the GM gets to 1, and all actions have been taken, that is the end of the *flurry*. If either side wants to extend the combat, a new flurry begins, with both sides making Initiative Tests. (There is a way to escape from combat - see "Distance and movement" below.) If neither side wants to extend the combat, combat is over.

When their characters are fighting two minotaurs, Robin, Ron, Jonathan, and the GM, Nikola, roll the following for initiative:

Robin: 2, 5, 8, 10, 10, 15, 16, 18
Ron: 2, 3, 10, 20
Jonathan: 10, 13, 14, 17, 19
Nikola (Minotaur 1): 5, 8, 17, 19
Nikola (Minotaur 2): 7, 9, 10, 12

When Nikola counts down, Robin's character will get an action when she calls out 18, 16, 15, 10 (he gets two actions on 10), 8, 5, and 2. Ron's character will go on 20, 10, 3, and 2; and Jonathan's character will go on 19, 17, 14, 13, and 10.

This may seem odd if you've played other role-playing games that have combat to the death, and rounds, and initiative rolls each

round. If you need to, you can think of each flurry as a round, and your character as going many times within that round. This way, though, you get lulls in fighting where each side gets a moment to think, "Is this going the way I want it to?" If not, both sides get the chance to disengage. You can even use this lull to parley with your opponents, offering them the chance to surrender or walk away. Game Masters should be sure to give players a chance to talk amongst themselves before a combat is extended.

Actions

An action is any one task a character can do. This should be simple to adjucate, really - a character can move in an action, or attack one other character, or pull something out of his backpack, or change weapons. The one important thing to remember is that only one normal Test can be made in an action unless stated otherwise. (Damage Tests, saves against magic, and the like do not count.) If you want to perform two Tests, and plan on one giving bonus dice to the other, this will take two actions.

Ties in the Initiative Test

When two characters roll the same number in the Initiative Test, actions progress in the order of the players, moving from the player to the left of the GM around the table clockwise. (Players may want to sit in order of their character's Adroitness scores in order to provide realism, if they like that sort of thing.) This ensures that NPCs will always go last in the case of ties. When each player gets his turn, his character can make only one action - he will get to control his character's next action on the next rotation around the table.

When Nikola, the GM, calls out 10 in the initiative order, Robin gets two actions, Jonathan gets one, Ron gets one, and Minotaur 2 gets one.

Robin is sitting to the GM's left, then Jonathan, get Ron. Their actions occur in the following order: Robin, Jonathan, Ron, Minotaur 2, and then Robin again.

Surprise and initiative-increasing Abilities

It is possible to get more actions during a flurry by using surprise or by having an Ability that could increase your initiative. When surprising someone, simply use successes from an attempt to sneak up on an enemy as bonus dice for your Initiative Test.

Earlier, Robin was trying to have Roland sneak up on the minotaurs, and got three successes in his Test. The number of minotaurs had not been specified, so he spent one success to state, "I sneak up on the two minotaurs," and then spent the other two successes for two extra dice in his Initiative Test.

If several characters are simultaneously sneaking up on NPCs, have each of them roll and use their successes. The GM can feel free to use her successes, if she wins the roll, to catch the characters unawares and increase the NPC's dice in the Initiative Test.

If you have an Ability like "Swift Sword-play" (Supporting Ability) or "Ninja Speed" (Main Ability), you may make a unopposed Test (Medium difficulty) of this Ability, plus your score in the appropriate Attribute (usually Adroitness) and use the successes as bonus dice in your Initiative Test.

Distance and movement

Donjon does not use a traditional system of feet and yards, or meters, or any of that other stuff that hurts the author's head in combat. You are always one of the following distances from your opponents:

- Out of range
- Two actions away
- One action away
- In close

You never begin combat out of range. It is up to whoever initiates combat to decide how far away the opponents are when combat begins.

Once combat begins, you can spend an action to have your character either move closer or further away from his opponents. If his opponent sees him moving, he can abort a later action - scratch off the character's next initiative number, or remove the next initiative die, depending on how the player or GM is tabulating the character's initiative - to *resist* his movement (run away as he gets closer, or chase him if he's running away.) If no one is resisting your movement, you do not have to make a Test at all to move. If someone is resisting your character's movement, you must make a Movement Test against the opponent. Roll your character's Adroitness score, plus a pertinent Ability if you have one, and the GM rolls the same for your character's opponent. If you are successful, your movement is successful (you move one level of distance), and your successes can be spent, as normal, for facts, or for bonus dice on your next movement or attack.

If a character moves out of range, he is out of the combat. If a character is two actions away, he gets a penalty of 3 dice to attack with a missile weapon, cannot throw a thrown weapon, and cannot engage in a melee attack. If a character is one action away, he gets no penalty to attack with missile or thrown weapons, but cannot engage in a melee attack. If a character is in close, he gets a penalty of 6 dice to attack with a missile weapon, 3 dice to attack with a thrown weapon, and can attack normally with melee attacks.

If a character is in close and attempts to run away, his opponent gets a free attack on him. If the opponent is resisting the movement, and wins the Movement Test he can use his successes to add bonus dice to this attack.

The author will be very up-front here and tell you that this is a huge abstraction. It works well, but the GM will have to arbitrate at times, especially if there are many combatants, and they all move

around. If a player cannot figure out how far his character is from an opponent, ask the GM, who will know or make up something.

Before the party rolled initiative, as talked about above, they discussed how they wanted to execute the attack on the two minotaurs.

Robin: "Well, Roland's already snuck up behind them, so he's in close. Jonathan, don't you think that Fiera should just leap into the fray? She's not sneaky, and doesn't have any missile weapons."

Jonathan: "That sounds like a good idea, and it'll distract them from noticing Roland or Azar. Ron, Azar's casting spells, right?"

Ron: "Yup. I'm going to start him down the tunnel, two actions away. Wait - Nikola, can I see two actions away in here?"

Nikola: "Not well, but if Jonathan has Fiera breathing fire all the time, it should be bright enough for you to target the minotaurs. Also, Jonathan, you're either going to have to start one action away, as the minotaurs notice Fiera, or you could try to have her sneak in close."

Jonathan: "That's ok - I'll jump out of the shadows one action away, and rush in."

The party begins the combat, and as it continues, the last minotaur left tries to run away. Robin aborts his next action to have Roland chase him, so they both make a Movement test against each other. Nikola wins with two successes, using them for the minotaur's next Movement Test, and putting the minotaur at one action away. Robin has an action next, and chases the minotaur. Robin wins this time, though, getting a whopping five successes, and moves in close with the minotaur again. On its next action, Nikola has the minotaur continue to run, but Robin uses his five successes he kept for bonus dice in this Movement Test. Robin and Nikola roll again (with Robin aborting yet another action) and Robin wins again, with three successes, keeping the minotaur in close. He gets a free attack with Roland, as the minotaur was in close

and Nikola failed the Test. He chooses to use the three successes from the Movement Test as bonus dice again, and gets three bonus dice on his attack, killing the minotaur.

Attacking and defending

To have your character make an attack on one of his actions, declare who your character (the *attacker*) is attacking (the *defender*), and make an Attack Test of Adroitness, plus any applicable attack Ability. Both missile and melee attacks are made in this fashion.

The defender can either *actively defend (parry)* or *passively defend (dodge)*. To parry, the defender must abort a later action. The character then defends, rolling his Adroitness, plus applicable attack Ability in the Test. Either a melee weapon or a spell (a fiery shield, for instance) can be used to actively defend. Only melee attacks can be actively defended against, not missile weapons or spells. The winner of this Test damages his opponent, whether it is the attacker or defender. This can be thought of as a *counter-attack*: it is treated exactly as an attack back on the attacker if the defender is successful. To dodge, the defender does not have to abort a later action. This does mean that a defender can defend against an infinite number of attacks. The defender rolls his Adroitness, plus any sort of dodging or avoidance Ability. If the defender succeeds, he does not damage the attacker in any way, and these successes are lost.

If the attacker wins, he damages his opponent. The successes on this roll can be used as bonus dice on the Damage Test or another related action, or can be used to state facts about the attack. While using them as bonus dice on the Damage Test is most common, using them as facts or as bonus dice elsewhere is a great way to ma-nipulate your opponents into falling down into holes, tripping over roots, or smashing into each other.

Earlier in the fight, Fiera was fighting one of the minotaurs. She had three actions left (on 14, 13, and 10), and the minotaur had two actions left (on 8 and 5). She attacked once, with Jonathan rolling her 4 Adroitness plus Breathe Flame Ability of 3 for seven total dice. The minotaur had no sort of dodging Ability, and Nikola decided to actively dodge the attack, scratching off the minotaur's next action at 8, leaving the minotaur with one action at 5. She rolled the minotaur's 2 Adroitness plus "Kill with Axe" Ability of 4 for six total dice, and Jonathan ended up with two successes, damaging the minotaur. Jonathan had Fiera attack the minotaur again at 13, and Nikola had the minotaur actively defend again, losing its last action at 5. It barely succeeded this time, though, and hit Fiera, damaging her.

Fiera has one more action, however, and the minotaur has none. Jonathan has her attack the minotaur one more time, and all Nikola can do is have the minotaur passively defend, rolling only its 2 Adroitness.

Player Tip: Charging

You can use successes in a Movement Test as bonus dice on a related roll, including your next Movement Test, if it's right afterwards, or your next attack. This means, if a NPC is resisting your movement towards him, or running away, you can charge him. (If he is standing still, you do not make a Movement Test, and so have no bonus dice. Chalk it up to him being able to prepare for your charge.) Take those successes from running at the NPC and roll it over into a shattering attack, stopping him in hiss tracks for good.

Of course, you might have some sort of charging Ability. In that case, you can add its score to your attack after moving towards an opponent no matter whether the opponent runs or stands his ground.

Player Tip: Using everything you have

Remember that your character can do a whole lot more than just run around, attack, and defend in a combat. If you are fighting a difficult opponent, it's in your character's best interest to use all his Abilities, in order to gain successes for bonus dice.

For example, if you were playing a Charlatan, with an Ability of "Distract Stupid People and Things," and were fighting a tough Ogre, you might have your character exclaim, "Hey, look over there!" with one action. Since the Ogre's Cerebrality is painfully low, it would probably fail this Test. You can take your successes from this Test and use them as bonus dice to pop the Ogre in the back on your next action as it stares off in the distance, trying to find what you were pointing at.

Damage and injury

If you succeed in an Attack Test, whether you were attacking or actively defending, you get a chance to make a Damage Test against your opponent. A Damage Test is made by rolling your Virility, plus weapon Damage Rating if you are using one, plus an applicable Ability against your opponent's Wherewithal, plus armor Damage Rating, plus an applicable Ability, if they have one. As stated in Chapter 4: Resolution, the Law of Successes does not apply to a Damage Test in the normal manner. You can use successes in this roll to do one of two things:

Remove Flesh Wounds from the opponent on a one-for-one basis. Flesh Wounds are the currency of character health. When reduced to zero Flesh Wounds, NPCs fall down unconscious and can be slain with a stroke; PCs fare a bit better, but have a chance to die as soon as they are reduced to zero Flesh Wounds.

Damage the opponent's Attributes. In order to damage an Attribute, spend one success to state what you are doing as a fact. ("I slash him across the eyes, lowering Discernment!") Further successes can be spent to lower that Attribute like Flesh Wounds. If you want to get wild and split your successes between Attributes, you can, by spending more successes on more facts. (You may even spend some successes on Flesh Wounds, and some on Attributes. Just remember to spend one success for a fact per Attribute you wish to damage.) If a character has no Flesh Wounds, you do not have to spend successes on facts to damage Attributes.

When Jonathan has Fiera attack the minotaur this on her last action at 10, he gets to roll seven total dice, while Nikola only gets to roll two dice for the minotaur's Adroitness. Jonathan succeeds with a

whopping four successes. Jonathan then makes a Damage Test versus the minotaur, rolling Fiera's Virility of 5, plus her breath weapon's Damage Rating of 3, plus the four bonus dice from his attack successes for 12 dice. Nikola rolls the minotaur's Wherewithal of 6, plus its Main Ability of Tough Hide of 5 for 11 dice. Jonathan's not so sure Fiera's massive attack is going to do any damage, but he ends up with three successes. He could remove three Flesh Wounds from the minotaur, dropping it from 6 to 3 Flesh Wounds, but he doubts Fiera will get in as good of an attack again. With the minotaur's formidable Attributes and Abilities, he needs to guarantee her success next time, and instead spends one damage success to declare, "Fiera's flame breath sears the minotaur's hide, withering its torso," and uses the other two successes to remove two dice from Wherewithal. The minotaur will still be formidable, but has two less dice to roll when defending against damage now.

Death

All NPCs fall down unconscious when reduced to zero Flesh Wounds. It takes only one attack, which requires no Test whatsoever, to kill the NPC once he is unconscious. PCs, on the other hand, are treated a bit nicer. They do not collapse at zero Flesh Wounds. Instead, they must have zero Flesh Wounds and be *smashed* in order to fall unconscious. To smash a PC, the NPC must roll a Damage Test against the PC and have every one of his dice come up as a success. When smashed, PCs fall unconscious, and can be killed with one attack, like NPCs. PCs always roll one die in Damage Tests, even when their Wherewithal is reduced to zero.

The minotaur Fiera is fighting has made a bit of a come-back, and has hit Fiera repeatedly, knocking her to 0 Flesh Wounds. She's still stand-

ing and fighting, but just barely. The minotaur hits Fiera again, and Nikola rolls seven dice in a Damage Test, getting three successes against Jonathan. She uses all three successes to lower Fiera's Wherewithal from 4 to 1. (Since Fiera had no Flesh Wounds, Nikola didn't have to spend one of her successes to have the minotaur damage Fiera's Wherewithal.) If all seven of Nikola's dice had come up successes, Fiera would have been knocked unconscious.

Healing

Player characters heal one die or Flesh Wound of damage at the beginning of every scene. (For a definition of a *scene*, see Chapter 1: Basic Concepts.) Damage to Attributes is always healed first, starting with the lowest Attribute score. Once all Attributes are healed, Flesh Wounds are then healed. All damage is healed between adventures. Characters can, of course, be healed by magic, as detailed in Chapter 6: Magic.

After the party emerges victorious, Fiera, Roland, and Azar move on, finding a tunnel leading down that the minotaurs must have come from. Finding this tunnel is the beginning of a new scene, so all three of the characters heal one die or Flesh Wound of damage. Roland and Azar only took damage to their Flesh Wounds during the fight with the minotaurs, but Fiera has damage to her Wherewithal, so one die of damage to it is removed. When it returns to 4, healing will be applied to her Flesh Wounds.

The magic system in *Donjon* is designed to provide a very flexible, yet easy way for your character to put on the beat-down. It is based around a very magical system of dice manipulation and word play. Instead of a list of spells, your character has a list of Magic Words that he can use. You will make up spells on the fly using these Words. Your character also does not have a maximum number of times per day that he can cast spells. Instead, he may cast spells as often as you like as long as he doesn't have to strain himself.

"Magic" in *Donjon* doesn't just refer to hoary old wizards throwing fireballs or summoning demons. "Magic" is any supernatural ability to alter reality. These rules should work for priests granted powers by their god, psychics using the preternatural powers of their mind, or traditional magicians just as well.

Magic Words

When you create a character that can cast magic, you get to choose a number of Words that show the types of magic he or she can cast at the beginning of the game. If your character has magic as his Main Ability, choose four Magic Words. These can be any noun, verb, or adjective in your native language. (Articles, such as "a" and "the," and pronouns, such as "she" and "it," are right out for obvious reasons. As for adverbs - I never liked them in eighth grade, and I swore I'd have my revenge on them someday. The day is now.)

When Ron was creating his Purple-Robed Sorcerer character, Azar, he chose the following Words:

fiery, madness, demon, cloud

If you have magic as a Supporting Ability, your character is more limited. You must choose two Magic Words, both of which can be reasonably considered to be associated with your type of magic.

Ron, Jonathan, and Robin are all making characters for another game where every character has magic as a Supporting Ability. They come up with the following Magic Abilities, and Words to go along with them:

Nature Magic - tree, squirrel

Shadow Magic - sneaky, tendrils

Bardic Magic - courage, calm

You will get the chance to add more Magic Words to your character as you go up in experience and levels.

Casting spells

In order to have your character cast a spell, you must follow the following steps:

Gathering Magic Power

Your character has to spend at least one action gathering Magic Power before he can cast a spell. While you might have an idea at this point what sort of spell you want to cast, it is not necessary to. Gathering Magic Power is normally an Easy uncontested action, although the GM can change this to a Medium or even Hard task is the character is distracted, hurt, or uncomfortable. The difficulty

Table 6-1: Spell Effects	
Number of Words used (effects)	*Spell Dice*
1 Word	Free
2 Words	1 die
3 Words	2 dice
4 Words	4 dice
5 Words	8 dice
Number of people affected	*Spell Dice*
1 person	Free
A small group (around 5)	1 die
A large group (around 25)	2 dice
A city block	4 dice
Crazy numbers of people	8 or more dice
Time affected	*Spell Dice*
Instantaneous	Free
One flurry	Free
On e scene or combat	1 die
One day	2 dice
One week	4 dice
One month	8 dice
Longer	A whole lot of dice

may also rise if in an area where magic is harder to cast.

To have your character gather Magic Power, roll a Test of your character's Cerebrality plus spell-casting Ability against the difficulty. If successful, your number of successes are your *Spell Dice* - dice you get to use to state facts about or add bonus dice to your spell. The facts you can state are restricted, however - they are further explained in the section below. If you were unsuccessful in this Test, the GM may use her successes either as bonus dice against the next time you try to gather magic power, or as facts to state anything that may have happened as a result of your failed attempt to gather Magic Power.

You may find that you want more Spell Dice than you get with your first roll. In that case, you may attempt to gather more Magic Power by spending another action to roll again. You must take a penalty of one die from your spell-casting Ability every time you do this, though, as you are straining your power. (These penalties are removed after a good night's rest.) If you ever reach zero dice in your casting spells Ability, you may not cast any more spells until you are rested.

If you are successful when you roll again, you may add your successes to your Spell Dice. If unsuccessful, however, the GM's successes are subtracted from your Spell

Dice. (If the GM has more successes than you have spell dice, she can use the remainder as bonus dice against the next time you try to gather magic power, or as facts about your botched attempt.)

Ron decides he wants Azar to cast a spell. The party's in a Level 3 donjon, and Azar has Cerebrality of 6 and Cast Spells at 4. Ron rolls the Test against the GM and gets three successes, giving him three Spell Dice. That's enough to cast a decent spell, but Ron's got big plans and decides to strain his power in order to get more. He takes a penalty, dropping his Cast Spells to 3, and rolls again, rolling only nine dice this time against the GM's 3. He gets two more successes for five total Spell Dice.

He's not in danger of being attacked right now, and decides to push his luck once more in order to build up a tremendous pool of Spell Dice. He drops his Cast Spells to 2 and rolls eight dice. Unfortunately, he fails this time, and the GM gets one success. He loses one Spell Die, dropping him to four total Spell Dice. He can't afford to take any more penalties, and decides to release the spell.

Your character may hold Magic Power in reserve until you choose to have him release the spell. However, a few rules apply while doing this.

First, your character is quite noticeable to other people and creatures while holding Magic Power. You should define what your character's Power looks like before play, and it should be very visible. If you are playing a holy cleric, he could be suffused with light. If you are playing a thief that uses shadow magic, his skin could grow darker and his eyes grow black. The more Magic Power your character is holding, the more pronounced the visual effects will be.

When Azar is holding Magic Power, a large horned shadow falls over him, reflecting the demons he has mastered to learn his power.

Second, the number of Spell Dice you are holding are added as a bonus to the GM's dice whenever you do anything active, as you've got to maintain your concentration to hold them. You can passively defend (dodge) and make Damage Tests and Saving Throw Tests without the GM getting a bonus, but that's all.

Third, if your character is hit while holding Magic Power, it may backfire. If hit, roll a Test of Wherewithal plus your spell-casting Ability against the number of Spell Dice you are holding, plus the amount of successes your opponent rolled on his Damage Test. (Even if your opponent rolled no successes, you must still make this test. Also, the Law of Successes does not apply to this Test at all.) If you succeed, you manage to hold on to your Magic Power. If you fail, however, you lose all control of your Magic Power, which is released in a mystic explosion. You, and everyone within two meters (or six feet, or whatever - everyone close) must make a Damage Test against the number of Spell Dice you were holding.

Defining the spell

Spell Dice are used to define your spell. First, you have to name the spell. Choose a number of your Magic Words you wish to use in your spell. As shown in Table 6-1, the first Word is free, but you must pay one Spell Die for each other Word. Each Word you use will give the spell one more effect. Take these Words and think of a good name for the spell. You may add other mundane words as filler, but they cannot be the focus of the spell.

Decide what effect each Word will have. Your GM or fellow players may have ideas for you. For example, the word "fog" might be used to create a thick fog to hide in, or it could be used to fog the minds of men. It could even be used to deal damage to enemies, if you made a spell called "Choking Fog" or "Acid Fog." Uses like this that stray too far from the meaning of a word, though, will give your GM bonus dice. (GMs - feel free to use three extra dice on your roll if a player pushes the meaning of one of his Magic Words too far.)

Next, decide the range of the spell's effect. This is measured both in the number of characters it will affect, and in the amount of time it will last. Table 6-1 shows the number of Spell Dice you will need to spend for each level of range.

Finally, release the spell. You will roll your Cerebrality plus spell-casting Ability plus any remaining Spell Dice you have in a Test for each effect of the spell. The GM will roll a number of dice depending on the effect, as explained in the GM Tip: Figuring out what to roll in Spell Tests.

Example 1: a simple spell

Roland, Fiera, and Azar are in a combat with a gang of bandits that have ambushed them. Ron decides to have Azar cast a spell to help them out. He makes his Test to gather Magic Power, and ends up with 2 Spell Dice. That's not a lot of dice, so he decides not to spend any of them on extra Magic Words or range for the spell. He chooses one Word, "fiery," and defines the spell as merely doing damage to one character. He names the spell "Azar's Fiery Cascade," and Azar aims it at the bandit leader. Ron rolls Azar's Cerebrality plus "Casting Spells" Ability plus 2 Spell Dice in a Damage Test against the bandit leader, scoring 5 successes and slaying the leader where he stands.

Example 2: a bit more complicated spell

Azar sees a small group of goblins coming towards him in the forest. Ron decides have Azar cast a spell, and looks over his Magic Words. He sees "cloud" and thinks that he could use that to cloud the goblins' minds. He rolls to gather Magic Power and gets a whopping nine Spell Dice.

Since he has not announced the spell yet, he can still change anything he wants. He's gone up a level recently and added a new Word, "reversal." Ron thinks that the goblins might make a good group of friends or fodder for Azar and revises his plan. He spends one Spell Die to affect a small group, and another two Spell Dice to affect them for the entire day,

leaving him six Spell Dice to use as bonus dice.

He names the spell "Undeniable Racial Role Reversal" and casts it. Each goblin gets a chance to resist: each rolls his Discernment plus Save versus Illusion and Confusion against Azar's Cerebrality plus "Casting Spells" Ability plus six bonus dice.

Example 3: a complicated spell, indeed

As the group of characters travels on, they later run into a group of nasty trolls. Ron, Robin, and Jonathan realize their characters don't have much of a chance against these guys, and Ron decides to have Azar cast a spell to get rid of them all. Robin and Jonathan have Roland and Fiera distract the trolls while Ron has Azar stand back and gather Magic Power. In three actions, he's built up 10 Spell Dice. He decides to use four Words: fiery, cloud, madness, and gnawing (his newest Word.) That takes three Spell Dice out of the mix. He's also going to affect the entire group of four trolls, so that takes another Spell Die, leaving him with six. He casts "Hellish Fiery Cloud of Gnawing Madness," and the effects are:

Fiery: *He's going to do damage to the trolls.*

Cloud: *This should make an actual fiery cloud around the trolls, reducing their chances of seeing him.*

Gnawing: *The cloud will inspire hunger in the trolls.*
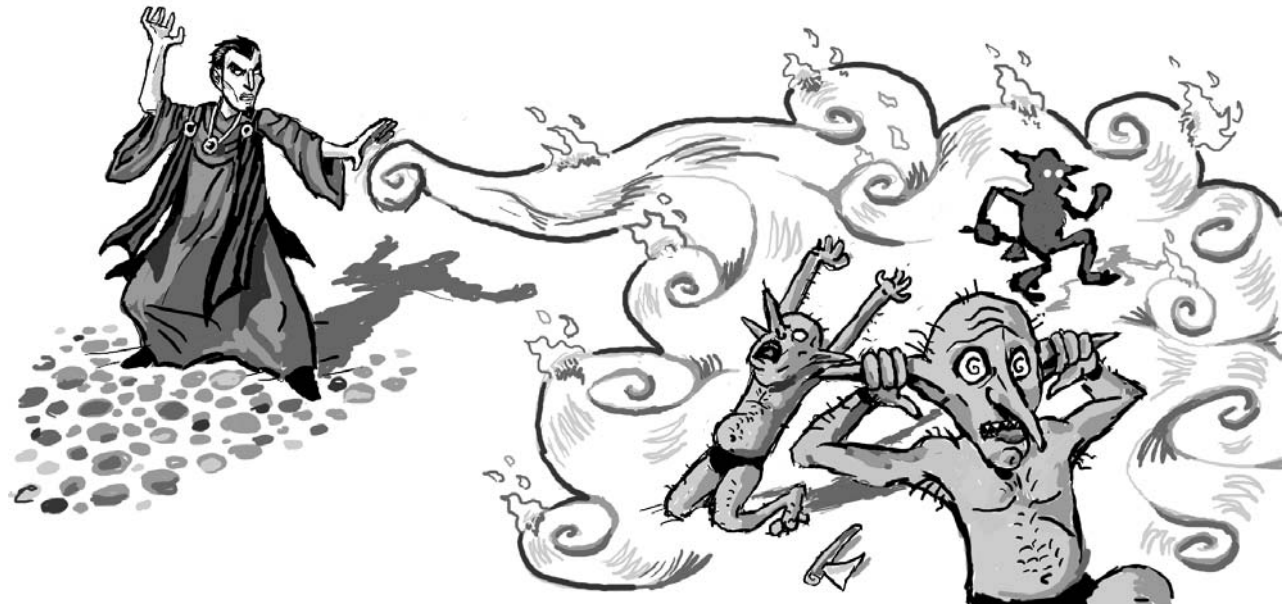
Madness: *Lastly, the spell should confuse the trolls into attacking and eating the first thing the see (hopefully, each other.)*

Each troll will have to roll against each effect. They'll first roll Wherewithal in a Damage Test. (They would normally roll Wherewithal, plus their "Regenerate" Main Ability, but they have a weakness against fire.) They then roll Wherewithal plus Save versus Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification in order to not be blinded; Wherewithal plus the Saving Throw again in order to resist hunger; and then Discernment plus Save versus Illusion and Confusion to not be driven mad.

Ron will roll his Cerebrality plus "Casting Spells" Ability plus six bonus dice only once, and all the trolls' rolls will be compared against that.

GM Tip: Figuring out what to roll in Spell Tests

Figuring out what to roll in Spell Tests seems pretty difficult. The player can try anything with a spell, so you've got to think on your feet. Here's some good guidelines for different spells, though.

If the player is having his character try to damage someone, it's easy. The player's roll is treated as a Damage Test against the opponent.

If the player is having his character try to affect someone physically (make them weaker, shrink them, blind them, change them into a chicken), roll the opponent's Wherewithal plus Save versus Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification.

If the player is having his character try to affect someone mentally, roll the opponent's Discernment plus Save versus Illusion and Confusion.

If the player succeeds affecting someone with a spell, his successes are treated normally: he can use them to state facts, or apply penalties to the opponent. Unlike normal, though, these penalties last for as long as the spell lasts. Be harsh with these, though - if a player turns his opponent into a chicken with a spell, the opponent will still have all of his normal statistics. Make the player spend the rest of his dice to apply penalties to the opponent. In example 3 in this section, the player Ron has his character cast a spell to blind his opponents. If he succeeds, they are not automatically blinded. Instead, they'll have a number of penalties equal to the number of his successes to see anything. In that same example, the spell was meant to make the opponents hungry. If that effect succeeds, the opponents will have a number of penalties equal to the number of his successes whenever they try to do anything besides kill and eat.

The above applies to unwilling targets. As for willing targets, or no target at all, the player will have to roll against an uncontested difficulty. As the GM, you'll have to set the difficulty. For something like making a floating light, the difficulty should be Easy. To do something harder, like teleport 100 miles, the difficulty should be Medium.

You can feel free to use other statistics if you feel they are pertinent to the roll. For example, if the player is having his character heal someone, the difficulty could be the amount of damage the character affected has taken so far. (So, if the character had lost four Flesh Wounds, and one point of Virility, the GM would roll five dice, with the spell-caster's successes healing damage on a one-for-one basis.)

If a spell-caster was trying to summon a monster, the GM might roll a number of dice equal to the Level of the monster. (Of course, then the character has to cast a spell to control the monster, which would be affecting it mentally.)

If a player fails when casting a spell, you get to narrate what happens. You may use your successes as penalties against the player. (For example, if a player tried to summon a monster and failed, I might, as a GM, have the monster appear, but use my successes as a bonus any time the player had his character try and control the monster.) *You do not have to use your successes, however.* I emphasize this because it goes against the GM-versus-player aspect that *Donjon* normally has. Sometimes, with spells, it's either too time-consuming to think of a way to get back at players, or just too nasty, ruining the fun of everyone involved. Use your good sense here.

Magic items

Any item in *Donjon* can be a magic item. Items, as mentioned in Chapter 3: Money and Goods, are rated by their Worth. A magic item's Worth is measured by adding up all its mundane Abilities (Damage Rating is a mundane Ability for these purposes), plus the Worth of each of its magic Abilities, as shown on Table 6-2: Magic Item Worth.

There is literally no limit to what a magic item can do. GMs should work with players, using the same guidelines as for creating Abilities, to make the neatest magic items possible. As you'll see in Chapter 7: Running Donjon, players will get the chance to make up all sorts of magic items for themselves.
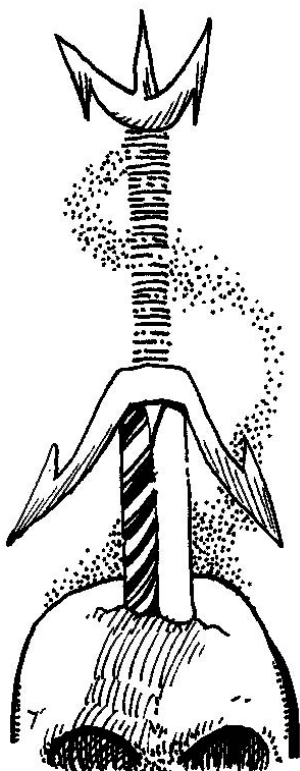
Whenever designing a magic item, you can give it curse dice. Curse dice are exactly what they sound like - dice that give a penalty to some sort of action when carrying the magic item. They also lower the Worth of the item, making it easier to find, create, or buy. No matter who is designing a magic item, the curse granted by curse dice is always decided by the GM. (I mentioned earlier that players get to make up magic items, and that you'll see how in Chapter 7. Basically, when looting a monster's corpse, you get to decide what your character might find on it. You can give the item curse dice to make it easier to find - but the GM gets to decide what the curse applies to, and doesn't even have to tell you until the curse actually applies.)

Creating a magic item

A character with an Ability to cast spells may try to create magic items. To do so, he must have collected raw materials equal to the Worth of the magic item he is trying to make. (Subtract a number of dice from Wealth equal to the Worth of the item.) The item's qualities must fit within the scope the caster's Magic Words, as well. Magic items can only be created between adventures.

Roll to gather Magic Power as normal, then roll the character's Cerebrality plus spell-casting Ability plus Spell Dice versus the Worth of the item. If successful, the character has made the magic item. His successes are the raw materials left over, and can be added to Wealth. (Wealth cannot rise above its previous level, obviously.) If unsuccessful, the raw materials were not enough, and the GM's successes show how much more Wealth must be spent in order to attempt to create the item again.

The player can choose to add curse dice to the item, per normal, to reduce its Worth.

Table 6-2: Magic Bonus Worth	
Type of bonus	*Worth*
Magic Attribute score bonus (Ex. *+1 to Cerebrality*)	4/bonus die
General magic bonus (Ex. *+2 to attack*)	2/bonus die
Specific magic bonus (Ex. *+2 to attack undead*)	1/bonus die
One time magic bonus (Ex. *Potion of Healing 5*)	1/bonus die
Mundane Ability	1/Ability die
Magic curse (Ex. *-2 to parry*)	-1/penalty die

In designing *Donjon*, I tried to make the game I've always wanted to play. It holds tight to the trappings of first-generation fantasy role-playing games by valuing the ideas of adventuring deep below the earth, killing monsters, and amassing treasure. At the same time, it strips away long-standing ideas such as tabulation of gold coins, carefully planned adventures by one GM, and specific rules for each situation. That's all well and good, but when I finished the rules so far, I wondered, "How in the world is someone supposed to run this thing? The players get to do whatever they want - they even get to throw new situations into the adventure."

Here's what I came up with. Running *Donjon* requires a different mindset than running a lot of role-playing games, but I hope it's as enjoyable for you as it has been for me.

The Gameplay Flowchart

Every adventure in *Donjon* will consist of basically the same elements. These pre-defined parts of each adventure help to bring order to the chaotic action that will happen in a game of *Donjon*, and keep the game flowing, bringing fun to the players, and wealth and adventure to the characters. Note that an adventure may take more than one game session, so each of these elements may not occur every time you meet for a game.

Town

Each adventure should begin in some semblance of civilization. This does not necessarily mean a town: it could be a large city, a barbarian camp, a wilderness fort, a small village, a (friendly) wizard's tower, or anywhere else that people are gathered and the characters are marginally safe.

For our purposes, we call this *Town*. When creating an adventure, the starting Town must be defined in terms of its resources and cost. Steps in creating a town are:

1. Create a name and personality for the Town.

This seems self-evident, but a good name goes a long way toward evoking the sense of a Town. "Weilheim" sounds like a Germanic stronghold, while "Snowleaf Pass" sounds like a wooded mountain outpost. After deciding on a name for the Town, decide the types of people (and races) that live there, the size of the town, and its personality towards strangers.

2. Determine the Town's resources.

Resources are broken down into weapons and armor, Provisions, and hospitality (inn rooms, food, and travel.) As discussed in Chapter 3: Money and Goods, normal Provisions are not bought piece-by-piece as in most role-playing games, but the ability to purchase Provisions must still be quantified. Decide on a cap to the Worth of weapons and armor that can be bought in the Town (this can be split into two separate caps), a cap for Provisions, and a cap for hospitality. Feel free to make separate caps for other goods if the Town has a resource it is particularly wealthy or poor in. As a general rule, large cities should have higher caps, and small or remote villages should have lower caps.

These caps are used when buying goods. A player cannot have his character attempt to purchase anything of a Worth higher than its associated cap. He also cannot spend more of his character's Wealth to increase Provisions than the Provisions cap.

3. Determine Markups.

Prices will differ in Towns depending on attitudes towards strangers and amounts of resources. The Markup of a town is a number of

bonus dice that will be applied to the GM's roll whenever a player has his character buy anything in town, including Provisions. This can be one set Markup, or can be different for each type of resources. (This is a good way to represent a particularly irascible shopkeeper.) The average Markup is three dice.

4. Determine adventure hook(s).

The characters will embark on their adventure from the Town, so you should have one or more adventure hooks for the Town. Create events or persons that will introduce the characters to the adventure.

Example Town 1: Weilheim

Weilheim is a walled fortress-city on the eastern reaches of the Empire, made to halt the intrusions of orc-kind. The population is mostly human, and somewhat xenophobic.

Resources:

Weapons and Armor: 4 (Markup 3) - Good solid weapons are to be had here.

Provisions: 7 (Markup 5) - Everything an adventure could need can be had here, as excursions into orc-land are common. However, the local merchants will charge you sorely for their goods.

Hospitality: 10 (Markup 7) - The city's wealth and opulance have produced some of the highest quality living. However, this has caused exorbitant rates.

Example Town 2: Snowleaf Pass

Snowleaf Pass is a beautiful little village nestled in the Highland Mountains, surrounded by pine and cedar forests. The village contains as many

elfs as humans. Travelers are commonplace, as the village lies along the best road through the mountains.

Weapons: 3 (Markup 4) The weapon quality is good here, and supplies are to be had for merchant caravans, but steel is uncommon.

Armor: 3 (Markup 5) Rarer than weapons is armor, as it needs even more steel. The local elfs make a great Damage Rating 2 wooden armor that has a Weight of only 1, though. (Worth 3)

Provisions: 6 (Markup 1) The amount of merchants that come through has saturated the market with a supply of cheap but sturdy goods.

Hospitality: 5 (Markup 3) The nicest inn in town (there's only two) has only four separate rooms, but a large, nice, rowdy common room. Their ales are exquisite, made from the purest mountain water.

Town is a time for players to relax and characters to shop and socialize. All goods they will need for their adventure should be bought at this time. This part is under rather strict GM control - the only real actions should be shopping and getting the adventure hook. (There's something to be said for the occasional bar brawl. However, Tests outside of shopping should be kept to a minimum, and the GM has the power to revoke the Law of Successes at any time in Town.)

The GM should provide the players with the adventure hook soon into the time in Town, so their characters may get the supplies they think they will need for the adventure. This part can and should be railroaded. Do not let the characters avoid the adventure by laying about and spending their money on ale - bring the adventure hook to them.

The adventure hook should always provide the characters (and players) with something that will appeal to their natures. As most characters are selfish bastards, this is pretty easy. Protecting a town from

goblins is not a very good adventure hook - it's much too easy to turn down for most characters. Protecting a town from goblins because the mayor will give the characters the contents of the coffers is a good hook - it grabs both selfish and altruistic characters. The main points in a hook are to provide enticement and a clear end goal. Because *Donjon* is so player-driven, there should always be what we call a *Big Bad*, or a problem that the characters must overcome to complete the adventure. Once adventuring, the players can create and narrate to their hearts' content, but the adventure will not be complete until the Big Bad is defeated. The Big Bad is often a powerful monster, but could be the destruction of a cursed item, the taking of a magical stone, or the aversion of a nasty curse.

Once the characters have the hook, give them a further chance to buy goods, then push them on their way.

The Adventure Revealed

Creating an adventure, and its hook, is not a very hard process in *Donjon*. Each hook is made up of the following parts:

1. Goal

This is one sentence that describes what the adventure is about. Good examples are "stop the incursion of goblins into the town," or "recover the lost sceptre of the King," or something simple like, "clean out a treasure-filled donjon."

2. Environment

You should create an environment for your adventure. This is often a dungeon or cave structure, but need not be limited to that. An adventure can take place in any closed environment. To clarify, the environment the characters adventure in needs to have a limited scope. An adventure cannot take place on the wide-open plains. It could take place in one forest, or in a cave, or in the sewers. There

needs to be defined limits to where the adventure will take place. Good examples of environments for adventures are: under the city, inside a ruined temple, inside a hollowed-out titan-sized tree, in the broken ruins of an ancient city, or in a dragon's cave.

The environment specified helps you and your players know what sort of encounters the characters will have.

3. Chapters

Chapters are a measure of the length and difficulty of an adventure. Some adventures may be simple one-chapter adventures: cleaning out a small cave, for example. A dungeon that is 5 levels deep would be a five-chapter adventure, one at each level. These chapters can even be split over different environments: if the road to a cave is fraught with bandits, the trip to the cave could be the first chapter of the adventure.

Decide how many chapters you want the adventure to have, and set the Donjon Level for each - the average Level of encounters to be found there. Make notes about the types of encounters that should happen in each chapter.

Chapter 1: Road to the temple (Donjon Level 3) - Bandits, wolves, forest goblins

Chapter 2: First floor of the temple (Donjon Level 5) - Minor undead, scavenging orcs

Chapter 3: Second floor of the temple (Donjon Level 6) - Worse undead - mummies and the like

Chapter 4: Third floor of the temple (Donjon Level 7) - Mummy and vampire priests

The Donjon Level represents not only the average Level of encounters to be found in a chapter, but a measure of how difficult the

chapter should be for the characters. Level 5 characters should have an easy time on the road above (Chapter 1), a moderately hard time in Chapter 2, and increasing difficulty in the following chapters. Remember that difficulties for uncontested actions are based off of Donjon Level - characters will be capable of feats on lower Donjon Levels that will become much more difficult as Donjon Levels rise.

4. Big Bad

The Big Bad will be the climatic encounter of the adventure. As mentioned above, this will often be a powerful opponent, but could be anything from a puzzle to be solved, to a curse to be lifted, to a relic that must be retrieved. The Big Bad is the embodiment of the adventure, and defeating it will solve the problem: if the adventure goal is "stop the incursion of goblins into the town," the Big Bad would be the goblin chieftain.

The Big Bad should be of a higher Level than the last chapter of the adventure if it is an opponent. This opponent should be fully created before the adventure using the rules below for creating NPCs.

5. Enticement

This is what the characters will get for completing the adventure. This could be a promised reward, or something to be found by defeating the Big Bad. This could be money, or a magic item, or something more ephemeral like the respect of an entire town. This could be a title, a piece of land, or a position, and can be quantified in any way. (For example, the respect of an entire town could reduce all Markups in the town by a die.)

An example of a sketched-out adventure:

Goal: *steal the Heart of Nok from a temple full of evil dead*

Environment: *a submerged temple in the middle of a dark swamp*

Chapters:

Chapter 1: Through the swamp (Level 5) - A dark, wet, nasty swamp. Opponents: big-ass snakes, crocodiles, carnivorous fish, and a swamp hag.

Chapter 2: Into the temple (Level 6) - The above-ground level of the temple. Opponents: undead crocodiles, wet zombie hordes, and nasty oozes.

Chapter 3: Down in the temple (Level 8) - The first level below ground, this place is wet, drippy, and dank. Opponents: horrible swampy demons, brutal zombies (including undead swamp animals), crazed cultists, some dead and some alive.

Chapter 4: The temple's heart (Level 10) - A smaller level further below, the very center of evil. Opponents: the priests of Nok, and the Big Bad, their undead archbishop.

Big Bad: *The Archbishop of Nok, an undead nightmare of a man, powerful in sorcery. The Heart of Nok is in his chest, and sustains his undeath. (Level 12) He will have a number of Priests of Nok equaling the number of the player characters with him (Level 10).*

Enticement: *The Temple of Celestia will reward the characters with powerful blessed items for stealing the Heart of Nok and returning it to* them to destroy. *(Alternately, there's plenty of evil cultists in the world that would pay fortunes for the Heart.)*

Into the Deeps!

Once you've gotten your players out of town, the game will shift into dungeon-crawling mode. In this section of the adventure, the game should move from strict DM control to more player control. As the DM, your job is to set goals and plan encounters, but the players will tend to narrate the flow of other events heavily.

Chapters

For each chapter, you should have several scenes pre-made, ready to use. Using the example of "stealing the Heart of Nok" above, here's a few scenes for the first chapter of the adventure:

The characters run across a deep muddy current about 20 feet deep and 50 feet across. The water is filled with carnivorous fish and water snakes, but there is a rotting tree that has fallen across the water, providing a rough bridge. Crossing the log requires an Adroitness Test versus Medium difficulty. The log is very slippery, though, so the characters get a penalty to their roll equal to the Damage Rating of any armor they are wearing. The log is also quite rotten - if more than one character gets on the log at one time, roll a Test in reverse. The GM rolls the characters' combined Wherewithal and the characters roll six dice. If the GM gets any successes, the log breaks; with no successes, it merely begins to crack.

The characters find an old hut in the swamp. If they enter it, a wizened swamp hag (Level 6) will attack them, using magic to animate vines to shoot through the windows and grab them (treat as Level 4 creatures).

Another adventurer is near his end on a patch of land. He's on the ground and has only one Flesh Wound left, and is surrounded by Level 5 crocodiles - twice as many as there are party members. Do the characters try to save him or not?

As the characters move through the adventure, the players will be making up their own encounters. Make sure to improvise new scenes from the facts the players state. However, a set of five to ten scenes written up will focus the adventure. As the GM, use the players' facts to work your way to these pre-written scenes. (It's easier than it sounds. I invented this method for creating *Donjon* adventures while running them. It became simple to work my own encounters into the adventure. In addition, sometimes the players run out of ideas. You have to be ready to use your own, or the adventure will slow down unnecessarily.)

For each chapter, you will want to decide on a number of scenes the characters must move through before moving to the next chapter. While the players may try to state facts to move to the next chapter, you'll need to work in encounters to keep them in place until you are ready to move on.
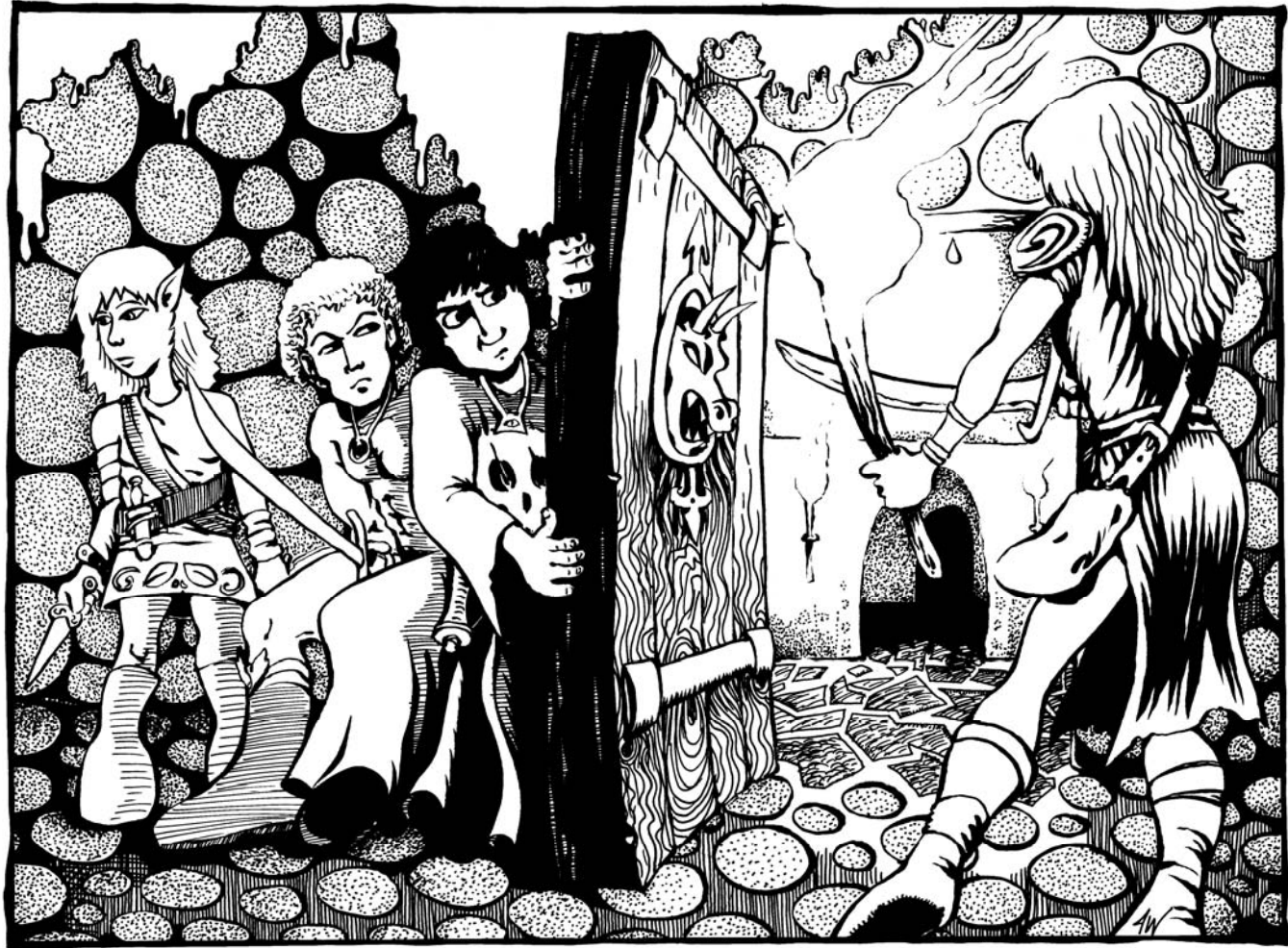
An example of working players' facts into an encounter.

Robin: (trying to move on to chapter 2 of the adventure early) Roland's looking around for a secret door.

GM: In the middle of the swamp?

Robin: Well, the temple door might be hidden in the ground or under moss or something.

GM: Well, ok.

Robin: I got 2 successes. I'm using them both for facts:

- Roland finds a slab of marble in the ground.

- It has ancient runes of Nok on it.

GM: Alright. He finds this slab of marble with runes in it. Do you want him to try to move it aside?

Robin: Yep.

GM: It moves easily, and you see a hole underneath filled with water. A skull bobs to the top. (Nikola, the GM, starts a pre-planned scene here.)

There will be times where this might be hard to do - keeping characters in one chapter. Part of this is just the contract between the GM and players - that they're all dedicated to maximizing everyone's fun - but the other part of it is that it actually is a contest for the GM to keep the players where he wants them. The players have the power to manipulate stuff, so she has to stay on her guard.

Monsters and NPCs

While the characters, by the players' own design, may encounter all sorts of friendly and not-so-friendly NPCs during an adventure, it is wise to have the most common NPCs made up before-hand. As you create more NPCs, you'll build a library of friends and opponents that your players' characters can encounter. The process to create NPCs is designed to be easy, so you can make new ones on the fly if need be.

Unlike some role-playing games, monsters - that is, very unfriendly and often stupid NPCs - of the same type are not always of the same Level. It is easy to create a monster of a certain Level, and scale that monster for new adventures. If you are creating a commonly-found monster, you should create the a monster of the lowest Level that it is normally found at, and then file it away to scale up for later adventures.

To create an NPC, use the following steps:

First, decide on its Level. NPCs in a chapter of the adventure may be one Level above or below the Donjon Level of the chapter. As a rule of thumb, opponents - NPCs that the characters will fight - of one Level below the Donjon Level come in groups anywhere from the number of player characters up to three times the number of player characters. Opponents of the same Level usually come in groups ranging from half the number of PCs up to twice the number of PCs, and opponents of a Level above the Donjon Level come in groups ranging from one up to the number of PCs.

After deciding on the Level of the NPC, create its Attributes. Distribute 18 points, plus one for every three levels of the opponent, among the six Attributes. Monsters can have Attributes of zero if they have no capability with an Attribute. (No monster can have a Wherewithal of zero, however.)

Create five Abilities for the NPC. If you become stymied thinking of Abilities, add seemingly non-useful Abilities (Carpentry, or Racial Lore, for example.) The point is to come up with these quickly, and Abilities that were previously thought of as useless sometimes create fun stories of their own. Distribute 15 + (5 x NPC's Level) dice between these Abilities, and the NPC's Saving Throws and Flesh Wounds. Remember that Abilities, Saving Throws, and Flesh Wounds may not be higher than the NPC's Level + 3.

Make a description for the NPC, and you should be done.

An example monster for the above example adventure:

Name: *Undead Crocodile*

Level: *6*

Attributes:
Virility 7
Cerebrality 1
Discernment 2
Adroitness 3
Wherewithal 6
Sociality 1

Save vs. Illusion and Confusion: *2*

Save vs. Poison, Paralysis, and Transmogrification: *6*

Flesh Wounds: *9*

Abilities:
Bite Through Anything (add to Damage Tests): 8
Chomp on Prey: 5
Swim in Lakes and Swamps: 6
Move Quietly in Water: 6
Undead Flesh (resist damage from non-magic weapons): 3

(This monster is made to maximize its damage. It only has 8 dice to attack - not a lot for a Level 6 monster - but if it lands a hit, it's rolling 15 dice, plus bonus dice from its successes to hit, in the Damage Test. Thoroughly nasty.)

GM Tip: Monsters and special abilities

NPC's, monsters especially, may have special abilities that you want to use. This is often the case when importing monsters from another fantasy role-playing game. Do not underestimate the flexibility of the Ability system. If you have a creature you want to import from another game that has, for example, immunity to non-magic weapons, this can be easily made into a Supporting Ability, as it is specific to one type of damage. Make a "Resistant to Non-Magic Weapons" Ability, and add dice into it. Note that the creature is not actually immune to damage from non-magic weapons now, but has an Ability that it can use in Damage Tests against all non-magic weapons. This is not a flaw, but part of the *Donjon* design philosophy.

On the other hand, a monster may have a special weakness that you wish to incorporate. If a creature has an Ability that works under all but very specific circumstances, you may add a weakness to it. When this weakness is used in the game, the creature cannot use its Ability. If you add a weakness to a creature's Ability, add one die to the Ability's score. A creature cannot have more than two weaknesses attached to an Ability - the Ability should be rewritten if it is weakened by so many things.

When making a troll - with regenerative powers, as seen in other fantasy role-playing games - you might assign it the Main Ability "Regenerate from Anything" as an Ability it can add in all Damage Tests. However, if you wanted it to not be able to regenerate from fire, you could add one die to its Main Ability and write it as "Regenerate from Anything (except Fire)."

Players may actually introduce weaknesses to monsters when fighting them. If so, it's easy to add the weakness right then, and increase the monster's Ability by one.

Experience

Once the characters have overcome an encounter, there's two things on the players' minds: experience and treasure.

Experience can come from three sources in *Donjon*: winning combat, goal awards, and entertaining everyone. The first method, winning combat, is familiar to anyone who has played a fantasy role-playing game before. After an encounter involving combat is over, the GM should total the Levels of every opponent the characters overcame. This does not necessarily mean that they killed or knocked out the opponents, although it normally does. If they used strategy to get rid of the opponents, they can be considered to have overcome the opponents. If the opponents run away to fight another day, though - no experience for the characters.

Take this total and divide it by the number of characters in the party, rounding like normal people with an elementary school education are taught to round numbers. (I don't understand why role-playing games have this fetish with telling you how to round numbers. It's as if every role-playing game designer, by weird chance, hates his third grade teacher, and so decides to buck the system by saying "round down," or "round up," or "round sideways on Thursday." Round like you're supposed to, and if you don't know how, seek some adult education. Stay in school. Don't do drugs. Drink milk.) Give this many experience points to each player.

Goal awards are given when the players achieve a goal that does not involve combat. This might be finding a hidden entrance to a temple, getting a relic they're searching for, or overcoming an obstacle. For each goal award, set the difficulty of the goal to achieve. (This is normally the exact same as the difficulty for whatever the player had to roll against - if the character has to cross a river, and swimming across it is an Medium task, then the goal difficulty would be Medium.) When the characters complete the goal, give each player a number of experience points equal to the Donjon Level, modified by the difficulty of the task. (This is the same as the number of dice a GM rolls for an uncontested task - 0 for Easy, 3 for Medium, 6 for Hard, 9 for Very Hard, and 12 for Crazy.)

In any and all actions, the GM may allocate one to three experience points to a player for entertaining everyone. If the player phrases an action, inside combat or out, in a manner that evokes emotional response among the GM and other players, be it laughter, tears, mirth, pithiness, nausea, or otherwise, the GM may give that player experience points relative to the amount of response. In other words, if a player makes the GM chuckle, he gets an extra experience point. If he makes the GM shed a tear and call his mom after the game, he gets two. If he makes the GM beat his chest and bellow, cursing God, he gets three.

Treasure

Treasure in *Donjon* comes in two forms: treasure looted from opponents and treasure caches.

When a combat is over, all opponents that are knocked out or dead can be looted. The players must decide which character gets to loot each body. The player who rolls decides whether he is looking for money or items. If he is looking for money, he rolls the opponent's Level in a Test against his own current Wealth. (Note the reversal - we are looking for successes in the roll representing the opponent's Level.) Any successes are added to the character's Wealth score. If there are no successes, the money found was not sufficient to raise the character's Wealth.

If the player is looking for items, he must decide exactly what he wants his character to find. In most role-playing games, the GM would tell the players what is on the opponent's body, or would roll randomly. In *Donjon*, the player decides what he wants his character

to find and then rolls to see if the item was there. The higher the Worth of an item, the less of a chance that the item will be found. Items have a Worth as noted in Chapter 3: Money and Goods, and again in Chapter 6: Magic. Normally, when a player has his character loot a body for items, he's looking for a magic item, although he can look for a mundane item.

A few examples:

A potion of Leaping 5 (Total Worth 5)

A magic dagger that glows in the dark - Attack 2 (Worth +4), Make Light 3 (Worth +6), Damage Rating 1 (Total Worth 11)

A wand that shoots flame from it - Burn with Flame 5 (Total Worth 10)

Fish-scale armor that helps you swim - Swim like a Fish 4 (Worth +8), Breathe Underwater 3 (Worth +6), Damage Rating 3 (Total Worth 17)

The player rolls the opponent's Level in a Test against the item's Worth. If successful, the character gets the item; if unsuccessful, nothing was found on the body. Successes for the player or GM in this Test cannot be used per the Law of Successes.

Robin wants a new broadsword for his character, Roland. The party has killed a level 8 Undead Orc Chieftain. He decides Roland's looking for a broadsword with Magic Abilities of Attack 2 and Defend 1. (The broadsword has a mundane Damage Rating of 3.) The total Worth of

the sword is (2 x 2) + (1 x 2) + 3 = 9. Robin rolls eight dice for the Orc's Level, while the GM rolls nine dice for the item's Worth. Robin ends up with two successes, and Roland finds the item.

Treasure caches use all the rules above, and are treasures that the party happens to find adventuring. The GM sets the Level of the cache. However, each character gets a chance to search through a treasure cache once, with all players rolling the same Level.

Players should remember that they can add curse dice to an item in order to lower its Worth, and increase their chances of finding it. For each curse die you give an item, the GM gives it one penalty die when doing some activity. The GM does not have to let you know what the curse is until it takes effect.

Climax

Potential *Donjon* GM's may be scratching their head by this point. "So, my players can make their own encounters, establish weaknesses for monsters, and find whatever treasure they want. How in the world do I get them to the end of an adventure?" The answer is, "You don't." Rather, you and your players work together to get them to the end of the adventure. They will know from their adventure hook what they are looking for. They will create the path by which they find it. When you reach a point in the adventure where they have chewed up all the encounters you planned for them, and they have enough clues to find the Big Bad, set them at it.

If the climatic encounter of an adventure is a fight with an opponent, feel free to make this opponent of any Level. It is not recommended, however, that you make the opponent of a level higher than the last chapter's Donjon Level + 3. If you examine the math behind resolution in this game, you will find that characters will have an extremely hard time fighting an opponent three or more levels above them - even a large party will have little hope. It is a good idea, in order to make the scene climatic, but not intensely deadly, to use one really Big Bad Guy, and then have his henchmen or retainers, opponents of roughly the same level as the party. Create the Big Bad Guy as you would create any other NPC.

If you want the players to defeat the Big Bad Guy outright, then use all rules for other NPCs. If, on the other hand, you want to give the Big Bad a chance to escape and be a reoccurring villain, treat him as a PC in regards to damage. (PCs must be knocked to zero Flesh Wounds and *slammed* in order to be knocked out.) If you decide to treat the Big Bad like a PC, it's often not a good idea to tell the players. If you have him fall to his death, or be blasted by electrical bolts, or whatever, they'll think he's dead - which makes it all the more fun when he shows back up. Definitely give the players full experience for thwarting a Big Bad, even if you plan on re-using him.

GM Tip: Pre-defined treasure

One might ask (if one were prone to asking all sorts of questions) when a player pulls a Sword of Killing Little Elf-People off of an opponent, "Why wasn't he using that the whole time?"

Unfortunately for the GM, *Donjon* at least attempts to balance the power between the GM and player. You can give your NPCs equipment and allow them to use it in combat. However, that means the players will be able to get their grubby little hands on it afterwards. It does give you the satisfaction that you made up the equipment, however.

There is one nasty caveat to giving your NPCs equipment: if the total Worth of a NPC's equipment is not equal to or greater than his Level, the player characters still get to loot the body for player-created equipment on top of the pre-defined equipment the NPC had. The moral: as long as you're giving the Orc Chieftain a magic axe, you might as well make it a bad-ass one.

Back to Town

After the Big Bad is defeated, the players will probably want to get back to town as soon as possible in order to cash in their experience and perhaps go up a Level. The method by which they get back to town is up to the GM - she may require them to explore the entire way out and back to town, she may make it a quick part of the adventure with minimal encounters, or she may just frame into Town with the next scene, assuming they made it back fine.

The recommended method is to make the travel back quick with no encounters of any importance. One random encounter per chapter of the adventure is probably enough, and makes sure the players don't wear their characters to the bone before deciding to leave the donjon, but doesn't get in the way too much.

Advancement

Once back in town, the players add up all the experience they've gained to see if their characters can go up a Level. The amount of experience needed to attain a level is shown in Table 7-1: Experience Chart.

Upon reaching a new Level, a character receives five Leveling Dice. These dice can be applied to any Ability or Saving Throw,

Table 7-1: Experience Chart		
Level	*Exp.*	*New character qualities*
1	0	
2	30	+1 possession or Magic Word
3	90	+1 to any Attribute score *or* a new Supporting Ability
4	180	+1 possession or Magic Word
5	300	
6	450	+1 possession or Magic Word, +1 to any Attribute score *or* a new Supporting Ability
7	630	
8	840	+1 possession or Magic Word
9	1080	+1 to any Attribute score *or* a new Supporting Ability
10	1350	+1 possession or Magic Word
11	1650	
12	1980	+1 possession or Magic Word, +1 to any Attribute score *or* a new Supporting Ability
13	2340	
14	2730	+1 possession or Magic Word
15	3150	+1 to any Attribute score *or* a new Supporting Ability
16	3600	+1 possession or Magic Word
17	4080	
18	4590	+1 possession or Magic Word, +1 to any Attribute score *or* a new Supporting Ability
19	5130	
20	5700	+1 possession or Magic Word

or to Flesh Wounds. Remember that none of these scores may be higher than the character's new Level + 3.

In addition, as shown on Table 7-1, a character gains a die in one Attribute every third level. A player may increase one of his character's Attributes over 6 with this. Anything over six is supernatural, though, and will be noticable as such. It's a good idea to make the player explain, for example, why he has a Virility of 8. Alternatively, a player can add a new Supporting Ability to his character instead of gaining a die to an Attribute. This Supporting Ability starts at a score of 1, and can then be increased like any other Ability.

Lastly, a character can gain a new permanent possession or Magic Word - the choice is up to the player - every other level. The permanent possession can be a slot for a weapon, armor, or other item, as shown on the character sheet.

Dial: Advancement

You'll notice that the advancement chart is built on a base of 30 points. In order to gain a Level, a character must have a number of experience points using the following formula:

If the character's current Level is n, he needs $(n \times 30) + ((n\text{-}1) \times 30) + ((n - 2 \times 30) + ... (1 \times 30)$ experience points to get to the next level. You can use this to figure out the experience points needed to achieve levels beyond 20.

If characters progress too fast or too slow for your tastes, you can change this chart easily. Make a new rate of experience (called r) equal to any number between 10 (incredibly fast) and 100 (*very* slow). The new formula is:

$(n \times r) + ((n - 1) \times r) + ((n - 2) \times r) + ... (1 \times r)$

For this sample adventure, I've tried to create an environment that will fit as many styles of play as possible. The humor level in this adventure can be jacked way up, or the horror pushed to the forefront. In doing so, I've created a pretty generic donjon crawling adventure, which I suggest Game Masters modify for their group. The setting is very fanciful, with sentient plants, tiny rock elementals, and magic gems. Further adventures will be distributed as "Donjon Paks." According to this scheme, this adventure is known as "Donjon Pak A1: A Fungus Among Us."

Adventure synopsis

In "A Fungus Among Us," the adventurers find themselves in a farming village called Amerla on the edge of the Crimson Forest, a dark, frightening place that most people avoid. The town's prize possession, the Emerald of Cissila, has been stolen in the night, and it's up to the adventurers to retrieve it. To do so, they'll have to find their way into the forest, spelunk in a dark cavern, and go up against the Mushroom King himself.

Town

The village of Amerla is a quaint little farming village on the river Nylo, near the edge of the dreaded Crimson Forest, a wood filled with red wolves and blood goblins. The village is surrounded by a 10-foot wooden wall, but is friendly to strangers. The gates are left open during the day, but at night, the village is protected from goblin attacks by a local archers' militia that mans the walls. The mayor of the village, Grizzold, is a nature wizard who uses his powers to make sure that the village's fields are always plentiful with crops. His powers are expanded by the Emerald of Cissila, a fist-sized gem that gives two extra Spell Dice when casting spells that affect plant life. (Worth 10 - 4 for magic properties, and 6 for the gem itself.) The gem was stolen in the night, though, and tracks lead into the Crimson Forest.

The characters can find out about the theft from most people in Amerla. Planting season has just passed and now is the time when the mayor's power is most needed, so the farmers are in a panic. When the characters question locals, they'll be redirected to the mayor, a kindly older man. Mayor Grizzold tells them that he found spores all over the room where the Emerald was kept, leading him to believe that the gem was stolen by servants of the Mushroom King, a sentient fungus that lives deep within a cave in the middle of the Crimson Forest. He offers to give the characters Potions of Toughness 2 (adds 2 dice to all defensive Damage Tests for a scene), and will have the local blacksmith and tanner make each of them a weapon or piece of armor up to Damage Rating 3 if they find and return the Emerald. (There's the secondary enticement of the gem itself. Evil or greedy characters may want to steal the Emerald and run.)

One thing that the characters may notice in Amerla is other groups of adventurers milling around. If you want to introduce the idea that they may be racing against other adventurers in order to get to the gem first, go right ahead.

Resources and Markups

Weapons and Armor 3 (Markup 3) - The local blacksmith and tanner are a married couple, and have good, well-priced goods. (When I ran this adventure, I had the blacksmith and tanner both be male. The characters were surprised that such a small little farming village was so progressive in allowing same-sex marriage.)

Provisions 5 (Markup 2) - Only a moderate amount of Provisions are to be found here, but a cheap prices.

Hospitality 3 (Markup 1) - There's not a lot to do in Amerla, but it's dirt-cheap.

Adventure chapters

The adventure has three chapters:

Chapter 1: Through the Crimson Forest - (Donjon Level 1) This chapter takes place in a dark forest not far from the town. Light is filtered through the translucent leaves of the red oak, the most common tree in this forest, painting everything the color of blood, and providing camouflage for blood goblins, the most common antagonists here. Other opponents: red wolves, other adventurers.

Chapter 2: Into the Caves - (Donjon Level 1) The characters find a rock cave and enter it, looking for the Mushroom King. In this damp upper level of the cave, they have to deal with the local wildlife and an unwanted stalker. Opponents: snakes, living ooze, poison toads, daolites, and an orc hermit.
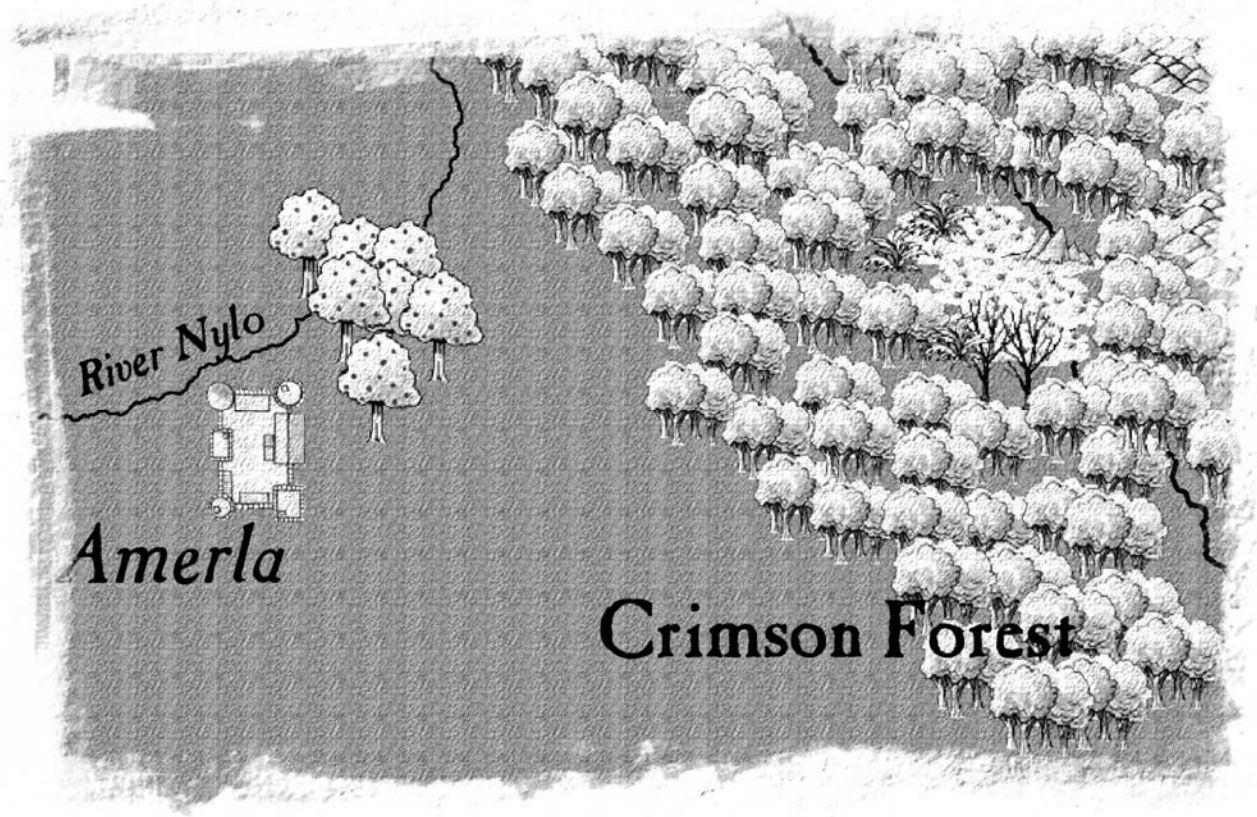
Chapter 3: Spores Below -(Donjon Level 2) This lower section of the cave is knee-deep in water, and full of fungus. Opponents: sporegobs, spraycaps, and the Mushroom King.

Chapter 1: Through the Crimson Forest

This chapter may well be the first chapter ever for your players in *Donjon.* As such, let them warm up here. Provide a good mix of combat and non-combat encounters, and don't overwhelm them in combat.

The forest is lush and full of life, and casts a red hue on everything. The ground is moist, and covered in translucent red leaves. Try and punctuate all the players' actions with comments about how the forest sounds (full of birds and cracking branches), smells (like mulch and life, sweet and rotting), and looks (bathed in red light.)

Encounters

I recommend five or more encounters before the characters are able to find the cave entrance. (Remember, some of these encounters will be made up by the players.) I always set it on the other side of the river in the swamp (see the rock formation on the map.)

- The characters come across a hollowed-out tree. It's of Hard difficulty to climb from the outside (Medium difficulty from the inside, if the players think of that), but there's a glint of treasure in a giant bird's nest above (a Level 4 treasure cache.) This encounter is good for introducing combat (a giant bird attacks them in the air) or for finding the way to the cave entrance by scouting from above the forest canopy (7 experience points goal award for scouting from the top of the tree.)

- Another adventurer is heard yelling in the woods. When sighted, he's surrounded by goblins, one for each player character,

and appears to be heavily wounded. Do the characters save him? (4 experience points goal award for saving his life.)

- A hunter's rope trap is in the woods. Characters should roll a Discernment Test versus Medium difficulty to notice it. If caught in it, it's an Adroitness plus any weapon Ability Test versus Hard difficulty to get down. If a character cuts himself down, make a Damage Test (players can use their previous successes as bonus dice) against six dice for the fall.

- The characters find themselves surrounded by red wolves, which ambush them.

- Other adventurers are following the party, hoping the characters will lead them to the cave. Have a character roll a Discernment Test to notice them.

- A tree has fallen across the Nylo River in the Crimson Forest, which seems to be the only way across without swimming through the fast-moving water. The tree's slippery, though, and players have to make an Adroitness Test against Easy difficulty to make it across without falling off. If more than one character gets on the log at a time, have them roll Discernment versus Medium difficulty to get off the log before it breaks. There's snakes in the river, to top things off. (This is usually the last encounter I run before the next chapter. It's very fun, in that most times I've ended up with a fight in the river. If players fall in, swimming against the current is Hard. Give everyone 4 experience points for making it across the river.)

Chapter 2: Into the Cave

The interior of the cave is warm and moist, and stinks of mold. You should emphasize the darkness and the cramped-ness of the cavern: feel free to impose a 2-die penalty on all character actions when in a cramped spot. The darkness is a problem - one of the characters is going to have to pull out a torch from his Provisions.

Encounters

- A group of daolites set a cave-in trap. The trap is Hard to notice, and Hard to avoid. If a character is hit, make a Damage Test against 3 dice (plus bonus dice from trap successes.) Players get 7 experience points if no one is harmed, 4 if they notice the trap before it falls on them, and only 1 if they merely get through it alive.

- The characters come across a well of water full of glowing spores. If anyone drinks the water, have them roll a Save vs. Poison, Paralyzation, and Transmogrification at Hard difficulty. (6 dice, plus 2 for the Donjon Level.) If they succeed, they heal one die or Flesh Wound per success. (No Law of Successes applies here.) If you succeed, they lose one Flesh Wound per success.

- An orc hermit that lives in the cave is trailing the party. He hates the Mushroom King, but can't take him on alone. If never noticed, he'll attack the party as they return from fighting the Mushroom King. If noticed - well, the characters will have to figure out what to do. His real motivation is just a good conversation, though, which he hasn't had in years. If any of the characters talk to him like a human, he'll respond well. Allow any character that talks to him a Medium Discernment Test to figure this out.(1-7 experience points depending on the outcome.)

- Poison toads ambush the characters from the walls.

- The characters come across a chasm, which is Hard to jump. If they fall in, they land in water, full of glowing spores. You have a few options here - have them follow the spores to the well, where they can swim out. (Make a Wherewithal Test at Medium difficulty for each action to not swallow water.) They could also follow the underground river out of the cave, or you could have it come up behind the Mushroom King in the level below. Basically, the chasm and its underground river are your machine to manipulate the party however you please.

- A small tunnel streams light through it. To crawl through, a character has to make an Adroitness Test at Easy difficulty. What's on the other side is up to you - maybe they're above ground, or maybe in a hidden cavern with a treasure cache, or maybe in some blood goblin cave. (1 experience point goal award for going up the tunnel.)

- Treasure (a Level 4 cache) glints from the bottom of a pit. However, the pit's also full of snakes (2 x the number of party members.) (When I ran this, I had a character in the party with a "Find Trapdoors" Ability. After falling in the pit, he used it, and I dumped him into the next Chapter.)

Chapter 3: Spores Below

This final chapter to "A Fungus Among Us" should be short and sweet. Descending into the deepest part of the cave, the characters find themselves knee-deep in absolutely funky water, complete with floating, glowing spores in it. The walls here glow with phosphoresce, so there's no need for torches. (Although they might be useful, as I mention below.) I would use a minimum of encounters on this level, as the main point is to defeat the Mushroom King.

Encounters

- Unless one of the players manages to narrate something else, or the characters entered through a backwards route into here (see the chasm encounter in Chapter 2), the very first encounter should be with some sporegobs, typically one or two less than the number of PCs. The sporegobs try to run away to report to the Mushroom King. If the players defeat them all, they'll be at an advantage later. Any sporegobs who get away should be added to the Mushroom King's guard.

- If the Mushroom King has been alerted to the character's presence, he uses a spell to try and kill them early. The knee-deep water moves, thrashing around and creating a current that tries to throw the characters to the ground (Medium Virility Test) and then dash them against a wall (Damage Test against 5 dice, plus successes, if the previous Test was unsuccessful.) If any character is knocked down, the Mushroom King keeps this up - the key is for the players to help each other, using their successes to add to their friends' rolls. As soon as they all stay up, the current dies down. (4 experience point goal award for coming out alive.)

- The characters find a mushroom-tending room, and see a blood goblin stuck to the floor with goop. They can release him or leave him to be mushroom food.

The Big Bad

The Mushroom King is a bad-ass. He has some serious magic, and is tended by a number of sporegobs equal to half the number of PCs (remember how I feel about rounding), plus any that escaped before. In addition, he has two spraycaps that flame will work very well against. The Mushroom King has the Emerald of Cissila embedded in his cap-head, and is at the top of a rocky incline that takes an Easy Adroitness Test to get up in one action in the heat of combat.

If the Mushroom King is defeated, his sporegobs run, although the spraycaps are immobile and will continue to spray fumes out.

Going back to Town

I don't recommend too many encounters on the way home from this adventure. The only important one is the Orc Hermit. If the characters never noticed him, he'll be waiting for them in the level above. Even if they met, if he's alive, he may try to attack the characters if he thinks he can get away with it.

Blood Goblin

Level 1

Attributes
Virility 2
Cerebrality 4
Discernment 3
Adroitness 4
Wherewithal 2
Sociality 3

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 3
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 3

Flesh Wounds 2

Abilities
Hunt 2
Hide on Red Background 3
Wicked Bite (adds to Damage Tests) 3
Dodge in Combat 2
Hear Noise 2

Notes
Blood Goblins are nasty little savages. They subsist on the blood of animals - including humans - and have a wicked set of jagged teeth that allow for ripping and tearing of flesh. They tend to travel in packs, and rarely leave the Crimson Forest's natural camouflage. Their homes are built of fallen limbs and leaves, normally covering a small hole in the ground. They are cowards, and flee when outnumbered two-to-one.

Human, Fighter

Level 1

Attributes
Virility 4
Cerebrality 2
Discernment 2
Adroitness 3
Wherewithal 4
Sociality 3

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 2
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 3

Flesh Wounds 3

Abilities
Beat People 3
Run and Charge 2
Knock Down Doors 3
Intimidate through Muscles 2
Take Damage in Combat 2

Equipment
Chain shirt (DR 2)
Broadsword (DR 3)

Notes
These are your standard adventurer types, not that smart, and ready to kill anything that moves for money and goods.

Human, Thief

Level 1

Attributes
Virility 2
Cerebrality 3
Discernment 3
Adroitness 5
Wherewithal 2
Sociality 3

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 2
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 2

Flesh Wounds 2

Abilities
Sneak 4
Knife 'Em in the Ribs 3
Backstab (adds to damage when attacking from behind) 2
Pick Pockets 3
Hear Noise 2

Equipment
Short sword (DR 2)
Shield (DR 1)

Notes
These are your standard thief types. Don't turn your back on them, or they'll jam a sharp point between your ribs and strip your body before you can blink.

Human, Wizard

Level 1

Attributes
Virility 1
Cerebrality 5
Discernment 4
Adroitness 2
Wherewithal 3
Sociality 3

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 3
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 2

Flesh Wounds 2

Abilities
Cast Spells 4
Dodge in Combat 3
Lie 3
Avoid Damage from Magic 1
Speak Elvish 2

Equipment
Dagger (DR 1)
Potion of Speed (+2 to Adroitness for one scene)

Magic Words
fire, blind, heal, rat

Notes
These are your standard wizard types, scheming for power, and ready to hide behind anyone long enough to stab them in the back.
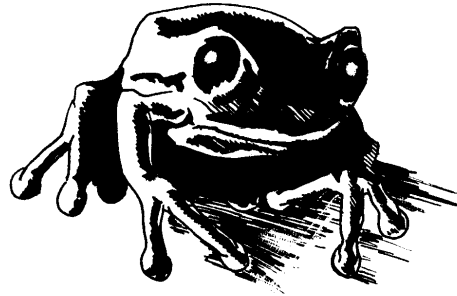
Poison Toad

Level 1

Attributes
Virility 2
Cerebrality 2
Discernment 4
Adroitness 6
Wherewithal 3
Sociality 1

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 1
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 4

Flesh Wounds 1

Abilities
Corrosive Poison (adds to bite or spit Damage Tests) 3
Aim Spit 2
Jump 3
Stick to Walls 3
Annoy with 'Hrrmph' Sound 3

Notes
Nobody likes a Poison Toad. They stick to everything, and have corrosive saliva which hurts like hell, and can eat through wood, leather, metal, rock, and anything else. In combat, the GM should use all of their abilities, with the first action being a jump, the second sticking to a wall (rolling the successes from the jump over), and the third being a leaping attack (with even more successes rolled over.) Of course, they can just spit, too. Their sticking to walls Ability is quite useful for ambushes, as well.

Snake

Level 1

Attributes
Virility 2
Cerebrality 5
Discernment 4
Adroitness 4
Wherewithal 2
Sociality 3

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 4
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 2
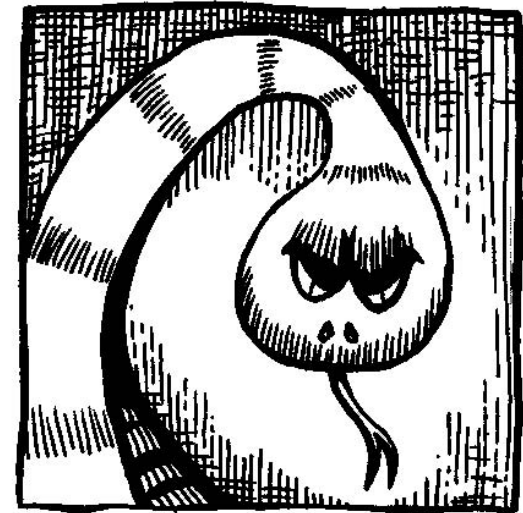
Flesh Wounds 2

Abilities
Bite 3
Poison Prey 4
Dodge in Combat 2
Hide under Rocks 2
Run Away 2

Notes
The Snake's "Poison Prey" Ability adds to Damage Tests: however, the recipient gets to add his Saving Throw vs. Poison in the Damage Test, as well.

Snakes always damage Adroitness and Discernment first because of their poison.

Red Wolf
Level 2

Attributes
Virility 3
Cerebrality 1
Discernment 4
Adroitness 3
Wherewithal 3
Sociality 4

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 2
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 3

Flesh Wounds 2

Abilities
Track Blood 4
Hide on Red Background 3
Tooth and Claw (attack) 4
Howl 4
Pack Attack 3

Notes
Red Wolves are one of the most common threats in the Crimson Forest. Their combination of Abilities makes them frightening opponents. "Track Blood" can be used to track any injured character, and can be used in a test of Discernment plus "Track Blood" against Discernment plus a perception-based Ability to add bonus dice to an Initiative Test.

"Howl" can be used to intimidate anyone, giving them penalties to their next roll, and "Pack Attack" adds to damage whenever more than one Red Wolf is attacking an opponent.

Daolites
Level 2

Attributes
Virility 5
Cerebrality 2
Discernment 2
Adroitness 2
Wherewithal 6
Sociality 1

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 1
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 5

Flesh Wounds 5

Abilities
Absorb Damage (except from air magic) 4
Merge with Rock 3
Paralyze with Touch 3
Knock Down 2
Stomp 3

Notes
Daolites are tiny (about 1-2 feet tall) earth elementals, or *genies*. They tend to stay merged with local rocks, but when angered, they pop out to attack. Their Abilities are a little odd when using them: "Paralyze with Touch" requires a successful attack. Roll Cerebrality, plus the Ability, plus any bonus dice from the attack against the opponent's Wherewithal, plus Save vs. Poison, Paralysis and Transmogrification. Success means the opponent is frozen for x actions, where x equals your number of successes. "Knock Down" and "Stomp" are attack and damage abilities, respectively.

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2002

Living Ooze
Level 1

Attributes
Virility 2
Cerebrality 0
Discernment 3
Adroitness 2
Wherewithal 6
Sociality 0

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 4
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Trans-mogrification 1

Flesh Wounds 3

Abilities
Acid Burn 4
Take Damage from Cutting Weapons 3
Look Like Slime 1
Destroy Items 2
Ooze Along 1

Notes
Living Ooze is theorized by many alchemists to be the building blocks of modern life. It displays little intelligence, but has all the requisites of a living being. It secretes a burning acid that can eat through almost anything. The "Destroy Items" Ability can be used in Damage Tests, but the GM can only use the successes to destroy a character's equipment if used.

Orc Hermit
Level 3

Attributes
Virility 2
Cerebrality 3
Discernment 6
Adroitness 2
Wherewithal 4
Sociality 2

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 3
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 3

Flesh Wounds 5

Abilities
Kill 6
Hide in Shadows 3
Dodge in Combat 2
Intimidate 3
Ruminate 5

Notes
Grakvar, the Orc Hermit, has been hiding in these caves for years after a blood goblin attack wounded his leg, leaving him with a permanent limp. He'd kill the Mushroom King if he could, but doesn't think he's powerful enough to.

More than anything, he's lonely, although he acts that out in anger most of the time.

Snake, Big

Level 2

Attributes

Virility 2
Cerebrality 4
Discernment 3
Adroitness 4
Wherewithal 2
Sociality 3

Saving Throws

Vs. Illusion and Confusion 5
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 2

Flesh Wounds 3

Abilities

Hypnotize 5
Bite 4
Sharp Fangs 2
Recoil Away from Blows 2
Swim 2

Notes

Big Snakes range from about 6 up to 10 feet in length, and are intensely smart. They often hypnotize foes (Cerebrality, plus Ability test versus Discernment plus Save vs. Illusion and Confusion) before biting into them.

Sporegobs

Level 1

Attributes

Virility 4
Cerebrality 2
Discernment 2
Adroitness 3
Wherewithal 5
Sociality 2

Saving Throws

Vs. Illusion and Confusion 2
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 2

Flesh Wounds 3

Abilities

Eat and Heal 3
Punch 3
Fungal Blast (adds to Damage Tests) 3
Take Non-Cutting Damage 2
Run 2

Notes

Sporegobs are anthropomorphic fungi about 4 feet in height. Their punches release a choking blast of spores.

To use the "Eat and Heal" Ability, they must bite an opponent (with no pertinent Ability to bite.) The GM can then add Eat and Heal to the Damage Test. For every point of damage they do with a Damage Test, they heal one Flesh Wound. Their Flesh Wounds cannot exceed their maximum Flesh Wounds, however.

Spraycaps
Level 1

Attributes
Virility 4
Cerebrality 1
Discernment 1
Adroitness 0 (cannot move - all dice when attacking with a cutting weapon are successes)
Wherewithal 5
Sociality 0

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 1
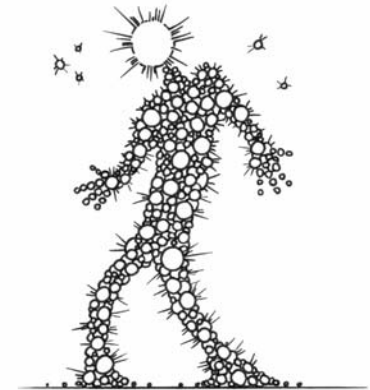*Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification* 1

Flesh Wounds 3

Abilities
Fungal Bloom 4
Take Non-Cutting Damage 3
Retailatory Damage 3

Notes
Sporecaps are nothing more than big mushrooms. On each action, they release a cloud of spores which chokes all non-fungi within one action of them. (Fungal Bloom to hit, Virility in Damage Test.) This cloud is highly flammable, though, and if any target has an open flame, *all creatures*, including the Sporecap, within one action take damage as the cloud bursts into flame. If hit themselves, they do spray out more spores at their attacker. The GM rolls Retaliatory Damage, plus the amount of Damage the Spraycap took in a Damage Test against the opponent.

Mushroom King
Level 4

Attributes
Virility 3
Cerebrality 4
Discernment 3
Adroitness 2
Wherewithal 4
Sociality 3

Saving Throws
Vs. Illusion and Confusion 3
Vs. Poison, Polymorph, and Transmogrification 4

Flesh Wounds 6

Abilities
Be Worshipped 6
Fungal Blast (ranged attack) 4
Powerful Spores (damage) 3
Mushroom Magic 5
Absorb Non-cutting Damage 4

Magic Words
grow, stench

Notes
The Mushroom King can add bonus dice to any of his subjects' actions by commanding them, and rolling Sociality, plus Be Worshipped against their level. Add successes to the subject's next action as bonus dice.

These appendixes aren't here just to fill pages, really. I was going to charge you the same amount for this game with or without them. The first appendix, "How to Make Your Own Role-Playing Game (Cheap)" was originally published on The Forge (http://www.indie-rpgs.com) as "The Indie Publishing Primer; or, Making a (Web-Based) Game on Less than $100." I've upped the amount from $100, done some more research, and applied it to hard copy books as well, so check it out even if you've read the original article. I'm not going to tell you how to design a game, but I'll tell you how to get it printed.

The second one, "Things I Like," is just that - a list of games, web sites, and other stuff you should take a look at. There's a lot of neat self-published games out there, many of which are even better than *Donjon*, if you can believe it.

How to Make Your Own Role-Playing Game (Cheap)

I've spent too much money on "justifiable" expenses for working on games. I've bought art for $100; I've gone to CompUSA and bought Adobe Acrobat; and I should have paid an incredible amount on Adobe Pagemaker, Photoshop, and Microsoft Word. (Luckily, I have a CD-R and flexible morals, but both of those come with a cost, too.)

And I've just made, at this point, enough to cover the costs. (Hopefully, *Donjon* will change that.)

How do you avoid this? How can you put a game online and make some money without spending everything from your day job? There's a hundred options, but here's the ones I've found from my research.

Writing and Layout

There's absolutely no need to have a $100 word processor, or worse yet, an expensive desktop publishing program for a good game. For those used to Microsoft Word, there's free software online that's completely compatible and easy to use. OpenOffice (http://www.openoffice.org) is an office suite available for download, incorporating nearly every feature found in Microsoft Office, with file filters for compatibility, in case you need to exchange information with other people working with you on your game. (OpenOffice is available for Windows, Linux, and Solaris.)

AbiWord (http://www.abiword.com) is another option, a free word processor developed by the open-source community available for Windows, Unix, Linux, and BeOS. AbiWord doesn't have all the features of Microsoft Word, but its simplicity may appeal to many who tire from StarOffice's cluttered interface. (It's my word processor of choice.)

A last option is Gobe Productive (http://www.gobe.com), which costs $75 for Windows. However, it integrates a complete office suite into the software, allowing you to do word processing, illustration, art touch-up, and simple layout all with the same program. (It

also does spreadsheets - good for keeping track of how much you're spending on publishing your game.)

Word processors are not necessary to publish a game, though: the HTML format may fit the needs of many game authors. While it may take a while to learn HTML, it is relatively easy, and allows for freedom of layout. HTML may be written and edited in anything from a text editor to advanced text-based editors such as Arachnophilia, 1st Page, Coffee Cup HTML Editor, to WYSIWYG editors such as FrontPage Express (free from Microsoft) or Netscape Composer (free with Netscape). All of the above editors can be found with a search on Google (http://www.google.com).

No matter what you choose to use, layout can be relatively complex in HTML, with horizontal lines, nested tables to make columns and boxes, included art, and more. HTML primers are a-plenty online, with Webmonkey (http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/) being one of the most well-known and respected, and W3Schools (http://www.w3schools.com) having the best I've seen. If you have to pick up a book, I'd recommend *HTML & XHTML: The Definitive Guide by O'Reilly and Associates*. It's pricey at $35, but is as cheap as computer books get these days, and is well worth it. You may well be able to find an older edition (it's the fourth) at a used bookstore cheaply. (I still use my first edition copy I bought for 23,000 won - $11 at the time - from an underground bookstore in Seoul, Korea.)

Art

Art can be the most expensive part of your project, and often is for big-press projects. For the independent author, though, there are options. First - and I can't stress this enough - scam it from your friends. There's not a single person gaming today who doesn't have that friend that draws like a professional and works at, usually, Quick-E-Mart. You're not cheating them - give them credit in your

work. If it does well, then they have a credential to show to other companies, and if it does really well, companies may be calling them. Almost every artist I know has been more than happy to donate art, and most of its been of higher quality than normal RPG art. Drew Baker, who I've never met, gave me free art whenever I asked for my incredibly short-lived online magazine, RPGevolution. One day, walking through my local game store, I notice a cover with a familiar style and open it up - it's Drew Baker. Promotion is an amazing tool - which we'll cover more on later - and should be used and freely given by all independent artists.

Even better is finding an artist to work with that actually is interested in your game. The best example I can think of is John Wick and Thomas Denmark. I can't imagine Orkworld without Thomas Denmark, actually. While the majority of the text is written by John, the game is an obvious joint effort and it shows in its quality. The breadth and consistency of work Thomas brought to the game was incredible, and moreso, it was personal. The love in Thomas' art was readily apparent, and by finding a collaborator with an artistic streak, you can bring that sort of consistency, and hopefully, that sort of enthusiasm to your work.

Your other free option is web-based clip art. This can be extremely spotty. Much of the clip art out there is garbage, but you can find the occasional rare quality piece, especially - for some reason - in medieval woodcuts. clipart.com and The Open Directory (http://www.dmoz.org) section on clip art are good places to start for free clip art.

On the paying side of clip art, I've never been disappointed at ArtToday (http://www.arttoday.com), a subscription service with over 1,900,000 clip art images, plus photographs and fonts (great for making headers and the like).

The site, notably used by Grey Ghost Games for the Fudge RPG, charges for the work of compiling and sorting out these public domain images at the rate of $7.95 for one week, or $49.95 for 3 months, with rates going down per week after that. This ranges into the expensive, but the fact that they offer one-week subscriptions does help. By making a good list of images you're looking for, you could feasibly buy only a week's worth of time and get everything you need. In addition, buying an account with a few friends or other game designers may be a good idea. As the images are public domain, there's no copyright laws being broken by sharing access. (Note: the site does not smile on this idea. It may be a good idea for one person to have an account and look for images for you. Multiple logins from different IP addresses all at the same time is not the best thought. And the site's run by good people, so try to obey their rules.)

Lastly, do think about paying for some art. Most artists will be willing to work with you, especially when you're making a game for such little profit. Look around on the web and find some artists that you like and give them an offer. I got the idea long ago from Ron Edwards (http://www.sorcerer-rpg.com) to basically lease art from artists - I pay for the rights to use their art in one game, and they retain all other rights. They can even sell the art again. By making a deal like this, an artist might be willing to come down on his price.

Layout

Layout is where the money usually flies out of your wallet. Adobe Pagemaker, QuarkXPress, and Adobe InDesign, the big three layout programs, are hundreds of dollars each. If you want to offer your game as anything but a web page, you'll need to do some layout, though.

Your first option is using the tools at your command. If you're using Microsoft Word, OpenOffice, or AbiWord, you can do simple layout. I laid out my first two games completely in word processors, and they turned out alright. (I would have never tried to lay out *Donjon* in a word processor, though.) If you're using Gobe Productive, you're in even more luck - it is made to do simple layout.

For heavy-duty layout, I can't recommend Serif's Page Plus 8 (http://www.serif.com - $85) enough. *Donjon* is completely laid out in Page Plus, and it handled it beautifully. Features like a built-in word processor help tremendously, and the price is below any other layout program. If you plan to make more than one game, I suggest getting this product.

If you're stuck on using one of the "big three," find a college student. They get extreme discounts buying software from college bookstores - you might be able to find PageMaker, InDesign, or Quark for under $100. Most college students will do anything for free beer, so this plan shouldn't be too hard.

Making a PDF

If you're not going to print your game, you're going to need to distribute online. You may decide you don't want to distribute your game as an Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) file. Web pages may work well for you, and regardless of what others say, you can sell a web page. By password protecting the "members only" section of your site, you can sell access to your work on the web that way. (This model has been highly successful with the Internet adult industry.)

The most common method of online distribution, though, is PDF. (You'll also have to make PDFs if you're making a hard-copy book and using a product that your printer doesn't take files from - like

Page Plus.) Unfortunately, Adobe Acrobat, the program most commonly used to make PDFs is expensive - $250 in stores. This may be a time to collaborate again: if one person is designated the "PDF guy," several people making games could pitch in for the cost and utilize the program.

A better idea, though, is Adobe's new Create PDF Online service (https://createpdf.adobe.com/). Seemingly without regard for profit, Adobe's created a website where you can upload an unlimited amount of files (in a huge variety of formats including Microsoft Office formats, image files, HTML, and other file formats, including Postscript) to convert to PDF for $10 a month. Testing out the site myself, it seems easy for those with moderate computer experience. The files are converted immediately and can either be downloaded from the site or e-mailed to you. The one limitation is that uploaded files cannot be bigger than 100MB and cannot have a processing time of more than 10 minutes. This isn't a huge problem, but if you've got a graphics-laden 256-page book you want to convert to PDF, you might be out of luck. The other downfall is that you can not take advantage of all the features of the PDF format with this tool - you do not have the ability to edit the PDF afterwards, change the file information, add bookmarks, or add hyperlinks from the document. Still, it's a cheap alternative to laying out $250 or corrupting your immortal soul by pirating software.

Web Hosting and Selling
Web hosting is a big mess. Trying to decide where to put this thing is - not can be, but is - a total pain in the arse. Here's what you have to look at:

- Do I want to pay for this thing?

- How much to I want to pay?

- Do I even know what I'm doing?

- Will people shoot me for pop-up ads? (Yes.)

- How long of a web site address are people willing to type to buy my game? (Again, I have the answer - not very bloody long.)

There is the free web hosting option, a la Tripod.com, Freeservers.com, and others. I don't want to say this - but these can work for you. I chose the above two because they offer personalized domains like 'http://yourgame.triservers.com,' which is a big bonus over the drug-addled madness that can occur such as 'http://users.freecrap.com/BigApple/~game43a2/'. In addition, if you don't understand the web, user interfaces are integrated with these sites to ease uploading files and organizing your web site. So what's the downside? Ads, ads, and more ads. With these free web hosting options, you're going to at least see banner ads, and recently, more and more pop-up ads. (According to articles, the world of advertising have discovered that people don't click on banner ads - one reason not to get one to advertise your game, by the way. What they didn't undercover is that pop-up ads make people never want to come back to your site.) Utilize these if you need to, but you will eventually want to graduate from these free sites.

Once you've decided that you don't want your readers clawing their eyes out, you have to decide who to purchase your web hosting from. There's no way I can give you a list of all the hosts to consider, but you might check out the below sites:

- The Open Directory listing of web host directories (http://dmoz.org/Computers/Internet/Web_Design_and_Development/Hosting/Directories/)

- Top Hosts (http://www.tophosts.com/)

- Find A Host (http://www.smesource.com/Hosting/)

- Web Hosts Online (http://www.webhostsonline.com/)

I personally use Pair (http://www.pair.com) and Dreamhost (http://www.dreamhost.com) for different sites, and like them very much. They're a bit expensive, though. I recommend, more than anything, to ask someone you know who they are hosting their web site with. You'll find out what they've been satisfied with and what they haven't. In the Internet economy, the owners of a web host can change overnight - people who were good a year ago may have awful service now.

Lastly, do as I've mentioned with other things above, if you can: scam from friends. They may already have a good host with a good price that you can also use. Many hosts offer services where more than one domain name can be connected to the same account, allowing several people to go into together on a web hosting account.

As far as selling your game on your website goes, there's a few credit card processing companies out there to go with. PayPal (http://www.paypal.com) is well-known, and charges less per sell than most sites I've seen. There are other options, but I have to recommend PayPal heartily, though, not because I have vested interest in it, but because it is relatively well-known. People can be paranoid about their credit cards, and name familiarity helps you sell. In addition, PayPal has relatively nice web panels to see your transactions and find out how your sales are.

Printing
The first thing I have to say is: *you do not have to print your game.* You can sell PDFs online, or even give your game away if you want.

Printing your game is expensive, and ties you up in a way you may not want. Printing does not make your game more valid.

That said, how can you print on the cheap? If you're interested in printing large quantities to send to distributors and what-not, check out the information at Wizard's Attic (http://www.wizards-attic.com/Publishers.html). It's great stuff, and will tell you all sorts of things I don't know.

If you're interested in printing 20 copies at a time to sell off your website, here's some ideas. I'm less experienced with this, I'll admit, but in the time I've done it, I've found one thing: Kinko's is more expensive than any place else. Look around - Office Depot has great prices, and so does Costco, if you're a member. I highly recommend printing one master copy of your game, as well - printing costs much more than copying. If you have a friend with a laser printer, or a boss who doesn't mind you using the office printer, try to print your original copy for free - it can cost more than 10 times the cost of copying.

Conclusion
There's no one true way to publish your game. There's no one way to publish it cheaply, either. The traditional system of publishing and distribution works for its members, and only marginally. It certainly isn't the easiest or always the best way. If some piece of advice in here helps, I'm more than glad. The cardinal rule of publishing your independent game is this: do it. Do not be cowed by anything or anyone. Find others interested in independent publishing, create a support circle, and absolutely go with it.

Things I Like

Websites

The Forge (http://www.indie-rpgs.com) - The Forge supports two things: creator-owned games (like this one), and innovation in role-playing games. I have to give the disclaimer: I run the technical side of this site, so I'm a little biased.

RPGnet (http://www.rpg.net) - RPGnet is *the* role-playing game site on the Internet. There's no better place to get buzz going about your game, and their readership is tremendous. Their reviews matter - if you can get your game reviewed there, you're going to see a lot of people talking about your game.

GamingReport (http://www.gamingreport.com) and **RPGNews** (http://www.rpgnews.rpghost.com) - Great places to send press releases to - they'll publish any role-playing news they get.

OpenRoleplaying.org (http://www.openroleplaying.org) - A web site dedicated to "open source" and free role-playing games. This site doesn't have the traffic it deserves: you can help start a real community here.

Game Publishing FAQ (http://www.rpgpublishing.com) - A great resource for information on publishing your role-playing game through traditional routes.

Elfwood (http://elfwood.lysator.liu.se) - An awesome place to look for artists.

Creator-Owned Role-Playing Games

Sorcerer (http://www.sorcerer-rpg.com) - *Sorcerer,* by Ron Edwards, is not only a kick-ass game, but it is *the* standard for success in creator-owned role-playing games. Ron's taken his game from an ASCII file, to a commercial PDF, to a beautiful book. Check out the website for more information, and check out Adept Press (http://www.adept-press.com),. Ron's game company, for information on *Elfs* (irreverent fantasy role-playing that should appeal to *Donjon* fans) and *Trollbabe* (kick-ass non-annoying feminist fantasy role-playing.)

octaNe (http://www.memento-mori.com/octane) - Cars, guns, petrol, and psychotronia - *octaNe* is the post-apocalyptic role-playing game that rocks all the time. Fans of *Mad Max* and *Six-String Samurai* will dig it.

The Pool and **The Questing Beast** (http://www.randomordercreations.com) - James West's *The Pool* is a mind-blowing little piece of game design. It's like Go - a minute to learn, a lifetime to master. It should be required reading for anyone writing a role-playing game today.

Dread (http://www.dread-rpg.com) - *Dread*'s like *Call of Cthulhu* - you're ordinary people faced with horrors from beyond, and will probably die or go insane fighting them, except it's like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in that you better win, or the world is screwed, except it's full of angels and demons, neither of which are very nice. It's hard to explain in a sentence, but it's a bad-ass horror game.

Dust Devils (http://www.chimera.info/dustdevils/) - *Dust Devils* is an Old West role-playing game, where players portray gunslingers, gamblers, cowboys and outlaws who must not only survive in a rugged land, but conquer their inner Devil - those dark secrets that keep folks from being honest and decent. I kind of stole this description from the web site, but it's on the money.

Kayfabe (http://www.angelfire.com/games3/errantknight/) - *Kayfabe* is, believe it or not, a wrestling role-playing game, and it's pretty

damn good, as well. Like real wrestling, players don't compete to have their characters win matches - it's all planned out ahead of time and orchestrated. Instead, you try to earn fame and fortune for your character. I think it's one of the coolest ideas for an RPG I've ever seen.

The Riddle of Steel (http://www.theriddleofsteel.com) - *The Riddle of Steel* doesn't need my help selling it - it's doing great. Still, if you haven't heard of it, run to the store and buy it now. It's hard-edged fantasy role-playing, and gets me, at least, in two ways: it's full of the critical hit charts you remember from old-school games, charts that let you drive the point of your sword through a character's eye and into his brain, or destroy his genitals, or remove his intestine. I love those things. On top of that, though, it has this Spiritual Attribute system which rocks for story-driven games - you literally kick more ass when you care about something. It's that simple, but you wouldn't believe how well it works.

Harlekin-Maus Games (http://www.harlekin-maus.com) - Zak Arntson, my cohort in designing this game, has a web site full of little bizarre games that rock out. *Fungeon* is a brother to this game, and fun as can be. Look for *Cthonian*, his upcoming game, which should let you kick Lovecraftian ass in new and fun ways.