Lamentations
of the
Flame Princess
Weird Fantasy Role-Playing

Referee

This Book is Compost

This book may be completely useless to you. It is a book of procedures and advice, but there are few rules contained in it. You may very well know a better way to do things.

This book is not wedded to any particular set of rules. You could jettison the Rules book in this box and use a completely different set of rules and the majority of this Referee book will still be fully functional with those rules.

As with any role-playing publication, read through, consider what is written, and disregard with extreme prejudice anything that you don't like.

Credits

What is a Referee

"What lies ahead will require the use of all your skill, put a strain on your imagination, bring your creativity to the fore, test your patience, and exhaust your free time. Being a [Referee] is no matter to be taken lightly!" – Gary Gygax

Being a Referee is like being an artist, a manager, an accountant, and that crazy old guy that lives in the park that everyone avoids because he's always talking to himself, all in one. Although hopefully you won't be talking to yourself. At least not while anyone is listening.

Welcome to the Referee book. You will find that this book is much more loosely written than the other material in this game. This is me, the author, James Edward Raggi IV, talking to you, the reader. I have been running role-playing games since the winter of 1984 – 1985, I've also played in a variety of games, and I will be giving you some advice I picked up along the way. You don't need to slavishly adhere to any of this (I am a far better writer than I am a Referee, for sure), but by contrasting your preferences to what I write here, you can get a better handle on how you want to present a game. The only important thing is to have an ethic behind your decisions, an overarching idea, and not just randomly squirm around in your running of a game.

A Referee has three prime duties:

* Presenting challenges and activities to do within the game, generally in units of play called Adventures
* Creating a Campaign which encompasses all of the adventures that take place, forming a stable framework around them
* Running the actual game sessions in a disinterested and impartial manner

In addition, the Referee has a secondary duty of being the group leader and organizer.

Generally, one of three types of people becomes a role-playing Referee:

* The guy that loves having power over his friends
* The guy that gets stuck with the job because nobody else in the group wants to do it, and someone has to or else nobody plays
* The guy who is extremely imaginative and is very enthusiastic about presenting his creations to the group

Honestly, it's the second guy that is most likely to become the best Referee. The first guy will likely be unpleasant to play under, and the third guy is likely to become upset as the players run roughshod over all of his carefully constructed ideas. However, with discipline, all three types can become quite decent Referees.

Now you may think all this makes it sound like being a Referee is an awful, overly effortful undertaking all for the sake of playing a damn game.

And you'd be right.

But there's one thing that makes it all worth it. One thing that validates every spare moment making maps, coming up with tables and lists and ideas of how to entertain those… those… *players*… who show up every session expecting to be entertained.

The Referee *is* the game. The Referee becomes the de facto leader of an entire little real-life social clique. Referees make all the magic happen.

Now put away that social life, pick up that graph paper, and let's get to work.

Rules

The rules to a role-playing game are more of a rough concept than anything that actually governs play. In some ways, they define the game world and act somewhat like the laws of nature within the world. Players base their in-game decisions on the rules, as well they should. The rules tell them how the world behaves. "Falls cause this much damage, an average man has this many hit points and attacks are made at this rate with armor being this effect against a set range of damage done by particular weapons."

The rules are not there to define what actions are allowed or disallowed, but rather to resolve situations which come up in the course of play. They will fail you. They do not, can not, cover all possible actions that a player would wish to perform..

One of the Referee's prime duties is to recognize when the rules do not adequately cover a given situation in play and then to invent a way to resolve the present situation outside of the rules, but in the spirit of the overall rules.

The Fundamentals

Here are the fundamental parts of this game:

* The six ability scores which give certain adjustments for all characters
* Character classes with abilities separate from ability scores
* Levels gained by experience points and the accumulation of abilities based on that level
* Hit points, armor class, how to hit
* Saving throws
* Memorized/prepared spells

And that's it. What the ability scores are, what they adjust, what the classes are and what their powers are, what experience is awarded for, what happens when one gains a level, and the categories of saving throws, all of these things can be changed. Everything not related to these points is

completely irrelevant for defining what the game is and can be discarded or modified or replaced as you like.

You are the Referee. If you don't like something, change it.

But it is always a good idea to understand rules and see what they are trying to do before you decide they should be changed or replaced.

Rule Zero

The Referee is the final authority in *all* matters for his campaign, above the letter and the spirit of the rules.

The rules are not the game. The game is what happens at the table when all the participants are playing. With RPGs being such open-ended games, the situations that come up in play, even if nominally covered by the rules, may not be well-served by the rules.

In this instance, the Referee should make a ruling, and that's that.

Just as rules do not limit the character's actions to what is contained in them, so too do they not grant unlimited freedom just because a certain action is not specifically prohibited. If a character is trying to do something that is ridiculous ("The rules don't say I can't use my torch underwater!"), feel free to allow common sense to prevail over the rules (or gaps therein) and over the wishes of the players.

Rule One

The Referee shall realize that Rule 0 is for the purpose establishing the desired atmosphere for his campaign, and not as an excuse to abuse players or a license to be a despot at the game table. Rules should be applied consistently, both for and against players, and players should be advised of any permanent rules changes in a Referee's campaign ahead of time.

Rule 1 can be summed up by, "Don't be a dick." The Referee's role is to challenge players, not victimize them.

Dice and Randomness

Dice rule the game. Even the Referee, who makes all decisions within the game, cedes authority to the dice once they start rolling.

The trick is to know when to call for a roll and when not to. If you make the decision to roll the dice, or if the situation dictates the roll of the dice, you must be prepared to use the result. Hours of preparation may be ruined by an odd result of a roll. Characters may be killed by things never intended to be a serious threat, and serious threats may be reduced to toothless jokes by bad die rolling. Anything can happen when the dice are rolled.

This is a feature, not a bug. The most important thing about RPGs, the thing that makes them worth playing and the thing that has drawn people to this hobby for almost forty years now, is that nobody knows what will happen! The outcomes of most any action are unpredictable, and it is that unpredictability that creates excitement in the game.

Don't make the finding of vital clues dependent on a single die roll unless you really are willing to stop the adventure short if the roll fails, for one example. Even if the chances are heavily in favor of the PCs being able to continue on under a random table scheme, whether it's a roll to determine foraging for needed food or getting lost or just about anything, the possibility on a die roll that it will come up as the one adventure-killing result is there. This must be accounted for in your preparations.

Finding Your Groove

Nobody starts off being a good Referee. It takes time and a lot of practice actually running games. Your first attempts will hopefully be *enjoyable* but they won't be *good*.

Don't worry.

First level characters are wonderful for the budding Referee. They are entirely disposable and quickly replaceable. A new Referee, even an experienced Referee with a group of new players or players unfamiliar to him, will have some adjusting to do. It is likely that some incorrect assumptions between players and Referee will result in character slaughter.

If the characters are first level, this is not a problem. Nobody should ever feel guilty about killing a first level character, and nobody should ever get upset that their first level character dies. It is during this developmental time in a campaign that everything about the campaign is established: The campaign tone, the Referee's style, the facts of the campaign world. Taking shortcuts because some people think first level characters are "lame" also shortcuts the greater rewards of a campaign. Those seeds are sewn early on, when PCs are minor, negligible parts of the world and not yet ready to be major players in it.

Player and Referee skill can also be measured by the level of characters in a campaign. A group of players that begin with first level characters and work their way to tenth level, for instance, will be vastly more effective in play with those characters than a group that just receives those same tenth level characters at the beginning of a campaign.

And by the same token, an experienced Referee will provide appropriate and exciting challenges for those tenth level characters if they've been built up over time. A new Referee running a game for experienced players with high level characters will have their adventures eaten alive.

Being a good player requires playing many different character types in a variety of campaigns run by different Referees. And being a good Referee means having run games for a great variety of players in a wide range of circumstances.

There are no shortcuts. There is just play. Lots and lots of play.

So don't worry if you're new and you suck. Just try. Learn what works, and keep doing that. When you stumble, adjust your game and don't trip over the same thing again. Don't worry about your players. New players won't know the difference, and they'll understand your problems because they're learning too. Experienced players will remember that they too used to be new and clueless, and will help you.

Players who give you a hard time because you're learning are the type of players you won't want to have around anyway even after you become an experienced Referee.

Now go and master this game.

The Weird

"The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain--a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space." – HP Lovecraft, Supernatural Horror in Literature

The main thing that separates a Weird Tale from a conventional horror story is the forces completely out of the control of those who encounter them. A thing that cannot be explained, cannot be defeated, cannot be solved.

This is easy to do in a story, as the writer can easily manipulate the entire tale in order to serve the purpose of inducing the reader to feel as the writer wishes. In a role-playing game, this is not so simple.

Player characters must have agency. They cannot be puppets or mere observers to events. The Referee is *not* telling a story (this must be stressed as often as possible), but presenting an environment and situations within that environment. The story is the summation of what happens during play.

Fear, Terror, and Sanity

The feelings of vulnerability and helplessness are important to Weird tales. Unfortunately, fantasy literature, motion pictures, and gaming have all conspired to murder these feelings – and don't even get me started on "horror" examples of the same. Knowledge equals power, it is said, familiarity equals boredom, and empowerment is an easier sell than fear.

Take away player knowledge by using your own creations. Destroy familiarity by not using, or by subverting, cliché elements of game worlds or adventures. Players may show up expecting the usual six-ability-scores-

with-classes game, with opponents taken out of a manual and treasure generated off of a chart or list. Don't give it to them! As soon as it is established that the "standards" of the genre are gone, players will take notice, come off auto-pilot and start interacting with the world. And then you can hammer them with the Weird.

In game terms, particularly horrifying or bizarre happenings or circumstances can trigger a Loyalty/Morale roll for NPCs in order to continue on/not run away. But Referees should refrain from imposing any sort of fear or sanity rules upon player characters. Before long they will be acting in ways that the locals will consider insane anyway (professional adventurers do not act like normal civilized folks!), and it is but a cheap effect to try to simulate fear by rolling a die and saying, "You're scared stiff!"

It is suggested that you use as "normal" a campaign world as possible. If monsters and magic are everywhere in a world, then fear and terror becomes harder to portray. If the average villager has never seen a monster, never encountered a real magician, then those who deal with such regularly (the PCs) will be distrusted and shunned, and that villager's reactions to supernatural events can then be used to highlight to the players how macabre the situation really is.

The average game will quickly see PCs becoming well-acquainted with the supernatural, and so it might be difficult to come up with something frightening after they've already dealt with the living dead, skeletons, and a cult engaging in human sacrifice. The best way to instill fear in the players (and even so, it will not be true fear, but rather a concern for their characters within the game) on a regular basis is to make terrifying situations terrifying. In many games, player success is assumed, leaving the adventure details to be mere dressing. In a game where character death and/or failure are forever possible, then players will respect things that are supposed to be fearsome within the game. They won't need to be poked with any rule, because they will know that if their characters act rashly or nonchalantly towards the supernatural, the supernatural will kill them.

How Graphic?

It is assumed that players of this game are either mature or willingly juvenile (both work well for the strange and horrific), and so a Referee exploring the Weird can push the content of his games past the usual limits of "family entertainment" and perhaps even general good taste. To truly inspire wonder, or generate a sense of dread, or to engage modern players in an "olde tyme" setting and get them to suspend disbelief and accept the game as anything but absolute farce, you've got to be willing to take creative chances and push yourself to come up with ideas that work. And to do it session after session over the long course of a campaign? It's difficult, and of course many sessions will deal with far more mundane situations, but truly nothing makes refereeing more satisfying than knowing a player has been put into a situation they could not previously even conceive of.

Go for it.

But when dealing with surreal, mind-bending horror, one must be careful. Although everything that happens in a role-playing game is pure fiction, it is still an immersive pastime and people can be uncomfortable with participating in actions and situations which they might enjoy reading or viewing in more passive media.

To be plain: Just because a player enjoys watching pornography or excessively violent horror movies or any other "extreme" content does not mean he wants to act any such thing out with or in the presence of other people. With other media, you observe stories that other people tell. In a role-playing game, you are *participating*. Be careful.

Know your players. Communicate outside of the game, and find where the limits lie. Your job as Referee is not to shock, scare, scandalize, or assault the senses. Respect for the real person sitting before you playing the game comes before any idea for the game you actually have. A player truly offended by the content of a game will very likely not play with you again.

Mystery

It is quite essential to presenting a Weird atmosphere that the players, and characters, not have a true understanding of the situation as it is presented to them. They may come to realize what exactly is going on, but they very well may not.

The best way to keep mystery alive in gaming is to never use stock elements as a focus in adventures. Don't just pull a monster out of a book. Don't pull a magic item out of a table. Come up with an idea divorced from gaming first, and then apply the game to it. Mold the rules to the idea.

And when players encounter this new and unusual thing, they will have no procedure for it. They'll be forced to role-play their attempts to understand, use, interact with, or destroy the element in question, because the game books will provide absolutely no help.

The ability to create this mystery is why a verisimilitudinous campaign world is recommended. If everything is fantastic (as it is in Sword and Planet genre stories and games), then nothing really is. It's exotic, to be sure, and this isn't to disparage the enjoyment of such things, but it becomes very difficult to differentiate "normal" from "abnormal" in a game world that is fundamentally alien from the start. With a real-world, pseudo-historical base, players can more easily tell when things just aren't right.

Science and Magic

This is a fantasy role-playing game, generally assumed to be taking place in a pseudo-historical setting. Part of that "fantasy role-playing game" experience is the presence of other races (elves, dwarfs, and halflings from the rules, for starters) and magic.

But there can also be science, and not all magic has to come from the rules.

Stories are full of odd things that are built or conjured once and never repeated. If it helps to build an adventure hook, or creates the story of a location or situation, then as Referee you are fully authorized to simply make it so.

The important thing to remember is that just because it is "Science!" or "Magic!" does not mean it can be replicated. In most fantasy worlds, the populations and society at large are ignorant of scientific principles. Even the mightiest of wizards do not do true scientific research, because magic is art, not science. If one madman creates a formula for surviving death, or builds some sort of strange machine, there is no reason to allow a player character to replicate it if he has the opportunity to examine it or analyze it in-depth. In effect, it is "magic" in its own way, save that it does not radiate magic when a detection spell is cast.

Magic can be handled the same way. While it is encouraged that Referees invent all sorts of bizarre spells and have them available to be discovered in spell books for player characters to learn, not all magic abilities must be cataloged in this way. If you wish a particular character to have a particular trait or ability, then that's all the justification needed.

The Referee is not bound by the same rules as the players. The players and their characters represent the mundane world. Yes, they can grow to be extraordinary examples of that mundane world, but for all the potential fighting prowess and magical abilities, they are still mere mortals founded in the everyday, exploring out into the bizarre.

If it can be explained by logic or anything in nature, or by the rules of the game, it isn't Weird.

The Twist

Every good Weird Tale has a strange twist which turns the original premise on its head. Now a good role-playing adventure certainly can't be structured as a proper story, as that removes the agency of the player characters. But the twist can still be used.

This should be conceived at the very start of location or adventure creation. There is the general setup, the Who What Where Why How. There is the initial presentation of the adventure to the players and from their characters' perspective. But at the heart of the matter is something unexpected, or unintuitive given the basic premise, that will mentally disarm those learning of it.

This is not to say that there should be random, nonsensical twists. The very best twists are those with hidden clues and signs, so that when they are revealed, those concerned don't feel ripped off, but rather have that double amazement that not only were they taken in, but they should have seen it coming. Start with your twist and work backwards from there to conceal it.

An example: You want to feature a vampire as the "bad guy" for an adventure. But wait! This vampire will walk in the daylight and be forced to hide from the moonlight! What a twist! Wanting to keep this a secret until the PCs show up at the vampire's lair at high noon in an attempt to catch it in its slumber, you set up all the clues and victims and happenings to be misleading and ambiguous. One man that is found dead (with *bite marks*!) in the morning in an out of the way area will be assumed to have been murdered the previous night, but only careful questioning will reveal that there were still hours of daylight left after he was last seen. Another victim is deathly ill and can't place the time of the attack precisely. Any number of contrivances leading up to the reveal of who and where the vampire is can be set up, and it's up to the players to look past the obvious, or fall victim to a nasty surprise at the end.

Never worry if a twist is original, because it's all been done. Never worry if it turns out that a twist is too obvious and the players see it coming far in advance. It will happen, so just stick with it and ride it out. The players will appreciate that sometimes they can get ahead of the Referee a little bit. So too will players sometimes never become aware of the twist at all, and the Referee should make no effort to steer players towards it.

Remember that not all adventure and activities need be infected by the Weird. Also remember that even when the Weird is involved, it's not

always necessary to use a twist. Red herrings can keep players guessing and distract them from any of the above concerns.

Keep players off guard by never being predictable as a Referee.

The Adventure

What is an Adventure?

An adventure is the basic unit of play in role-playing. When the players gather to play, the situation or scenario they play is the adventure. Adventures may be episodes of a continuing campaign or they may just be played on their own.

Adventure Form

Adventures commonly follow just a few general forms, each of which has its own characteristics. These are detailed below, but remember these are just broad generalizations. Once you have some experience with writing and running adventures, you will find that you are freely combining these types of adventures.

Event

Event-based adventures involve some greater event in the game world occurring, and the characters become involved because they are present as the event unfolds. These can be natural disasters such as earthquakes or tidal waves or hurricanes, or more political events like a civil war, foreign invasion, or even the sudden imposition of draconian laws, to smaller scale events such as bandit attacks, a fire in the building one is occupying, monster attacks, or anything that demands that action be taken now in order to not get swept away by the event.

Event adventures are often written in the form of timelines, where certain things will happen at certain times no matter what the players do. The important decisions that the players make are often in between the important timeline events, with their decisions influencing how prepared and advantageous their position is when the next thing happens.

Event-based adventures can be difficult to run. In the first place, players may feel forced into a particular storyline. Even easygoing players who

follow most any adventure hook may take offense at being pushed into an adventure without being properly "asked" through an in-game hook. Also, when is an adventure over? Riots and fires don't last forever, but things like the aftermath of an earthquake, or larger events like a civil war, invasion, or zombie apocalypse are bigger than any single adventure. Knowing what the adventure is supposed to be within the event, and when the present adventure ends and when the event becomes a backdrop for other events, are important considerations when designing Event adventures.

Exploration

Travel through unknown and unbounded areas can be an adventure in itself. Whether there is a specific goal or not, wandering through unknown terrain presents certain dangers and challenges not present in other adventure forms, and these challenges and dangers are unique depending on both the type of environments being traversed and specific areas as well.

The Exploration adventure type is more than a large-scale Location because it can never be "cleared" or thoroughly scouted. Even deciding to tame a small area of land in the wilderness can become a full-time campaign, as passing through an area doesn't mean seeing everything in it, and even if completely cleared of all hostiles will be quickly "restocked." Nature abhors a vacuum and all that.

Weird New World is an example of an Exploration adventure.

Exploration adventures are dead-easy to set up, and fairly easy to run. All that is required for an exploration adventure is a map of territory unknown to the players, and either a list of features to be encountered, or random generation tables, to fill in the map. Referees that are skilled at running games without preparation don't need anything more than this, but of course more time and effort can be made to detail an Exploration adventure before playing.

As long as the environment to be explored is interesting, either for its features (parts of the landscape) or contents (the encounters or "quest" to be fulfilled within the environment), it is suitable for adventure.

The Sandbox

There is a method of adventure-writing called the Sandbox. Basically, a section of wilderness is mapped out and then the players are let loose to explore as they will, without any demanding adventure hooks to drive them.

This method is essentially an Exploration adventure, with multiple individual, self-contained Locations placed within the greater landscape. As the PCs explore and they learn more about the environment, these campaigns will resemble other types of campaigns, only with the situations and consequences of the players' own actions driving play rather than hooks being offered by the Referee.

Megadungeons, those dungeons which are never-ending in their scope and are intended to carry entire campaigns within their depths, also roughly fall under this same Sandbox category.

Simple sandboxes are static, as the world stands still until the PCs move to each location. Advanced sandboxes are a good deal more difficult, as any number of events will play out beyond the awareness of the PCs. In this style of play the Referee advanced timelines of various events and characters so that what the PCs encounter will be wildly different depending on when they arrive at certain areas.

Location

A location-based adventure is one that is concerned with an easily identifiable single area, be it a dungeon, tower, castle, estate, cavern, or some such. The location is mapped to scale, the individual areas within this location are detailed, and the adventure consists of the characters entering this location and experiencing the different areas. Once the location is explored, it's effectively finished as an adventure area.

Tower of the Stargazer is an example of a Location adventure.

Exploration of large finite areas (islands, large cave systems) can straddle the line between being an Exploration or a Location adventure. And of course many Locations may be found during an Exploration adventure.

Location adventures are the easiest to create and to run. The interesting points and the rewards and the challenges are in a contained environment. Making an excellent adventure out of a location is no easier than making an excellent adventure from the other possibilities, but it is much harder to make a bad adventure from a location.

Personage

A personage-based adventure is all about character interaction. NPCs are planning, plotting, and acting, and only through interacting with the NPCs and learning their motivations and connections and using this information can the party advance its own goals.

This is by far the most difficult type of adventure to properly execute. In all other adventure types, there is a definite feeling of doing something tangible. In this adventure format, there is often a lot of talking, which many find to be the least enjoyable activity in this sort of game – whether your definition of "this sort" is adventure, fantasy, horror, pulp, or something similar. There is the danger of a Personage adventure crawling up its own rear end if the Referee buys into the notion that swordplay and monsters and magic are somehow lowbrow and that character interaction is inherently more sophisticated or better.

Still, if done right, it will cement the reality of both characters and setting like no other adventure type.

Personage adventures are related to Event adventures in much the same manner that Location and Exploration adventures are related. They are different magnitudes of the same concept. In an Event, the players are caught in a situation that can't be avoided. An earthquake and its aftermath will affect everyone. A foreign invasion can't be ignored by anyone in

the invaded area. A Personage adventure is a far smaller, and dare I say, personal issue. Perhaps a merchant is trying to squeeze out his competitors in the local marketplace. Perhaps a love affair is having dire consequences for those close to the couple (think Romeo and Juliet). These are adventures that can be intense and important to those involved, but it is quite possible to avoid involvement.

Adventure Basics

No matter the adventure type, there are elements that need to be addressed in order to keep the adventure focused and memorable. Again, following the paths that answering these questions will open up is not a guarantee of creating an excellent adventure, but it sure is a great defense against creating a bad one.

Who?

Who are the NPCs that the players will encounter? Potential friends, foes, and those in between must be detailed, with game stats in most cases but general personality and motivations must certainly be known to the Referee. The exact amount of information prepared for any particular NPC depends on the role they are expected to take in the adventure. The NPC section of this book has more information and advice for developing your NPCs.

Note that the NPCs do not necessarily have to meet the PCs for it to be relevant in terms of this question, and neither do they need be present in the adventure at all! The classic dungeon complex, whether full of beasts or laying empty, was built by someone for some purpose, and detailing Who built it and why will give the entire adventure a memorable character that it would not otherwise have if such effort was not given to the setting.

Know Who is in your adventure and Who is behind the elements of your adventure.

What?

This is the meat of the adventure. What is the point of this adventure? What is the goal? What is to be done? All details flow from this. What are the obstacles preventing this from being easily done?

This is perhaps the easiest of all adventure-building questions, as it usually contains the initial spark of an idea, all the cool stuff that inspires a Referee to make such an adventure in the first place. "It would be cool for there to be a quest for some golden idol, with a rival adventuring group also searching for it at the same time!" "I really liked that story about Shub-Niggurath I just read, so maybe I'll do an adventure about a cult terrorizing a city!" The possibilities, as they say, are endless.

But the "What" is not always the first inspiration. If the inspiration for an adventure came from elsewhere (usually a "Where?" concern – "I want an adventure to take place inside a volcano!"), the "What" of an adventure is still crucial, because the backdrop for an adventure, no matter how awesome it may be, is still only the backdrop. The players have to be doing something in that environment.

Make sure it's interesting. And remember that "interesting" does not have to mean "original." Playing RPGs isn't like telling a story. Remember that the criteria for judging successful role-playing is based on how interesting and/or exciting the participants think it is during play, not how interesting and/or exciting the in-game sequence of events seem during a later recitation.

So if a bit of originality helps keep interest when telling a story, in RPGs, uncertainty and the ability to make a difference in the course of events keeps interest.

Where?

Every adventure has to take place somewhere or other. So Where is the adventure? Is it in an underground complex? A city? Some portion of wilderness? In a single room? The details of the location must be known

by the Referee and described well enough that the Referee can present it properly to the players and answer any questions they may have during the course of the game.

The workshop from the second adventure in the Tutorial book makes for a wonderful example. The map shows the size of the room, where the exits are, and the basics of the contents. The Referee should have notes describing the exact nature of each of the elements, in particular for this room the colors of the potions on the workbench and what effect each has when imbibed (and/or mixed!).

Why?

Why are the PCs involved? The setup to any adventure must have decent reasons, sometimes called "hooks," to inspire players to want to play the adventure. This shouldn't be too difficult, as players who show up to play want to play! Those that show up and then act like they need to be impressed in order to actually play once present are not players you want in your group to begin with. But the effort must be made in order to facilitate the illusion that the characters are real people in a real world doing things because they are motivated to do them.

At the same time, Why are the PCs the ones to be involved in the situation? Why isn't someone else looting that tomb, saving that princess, solving that mystery? Again, it shouldn't be difficult to answer these questions, for if there's nothing for the PCs to do there's no game. But a few minutes

of thought and a token effort to provide an actual in-game explanation can have unexpected benefits. Inventing answers for all of these questions develops the game world, may suggest future adventures as the players react to certain information about the way things are in the game, and help form a guide to resolving what happens if the PCs do things you never expected them to do during the adventure.

How?

How do the PCs fit into all of this, and How does the adventure turn from a concept and a setup into actual play? You've answered Why the PCs might get involved, but How will that be presented to them? How will they get to where the adventure is located? How will they get to interact with the NPCs involved? How will the PCs achieve the goals of the adventure?
The important thing to remember is that the assumed answers to these How questions must not be definite. There should be multiple answers if at all possible, even if there is a primary and obvious answer to be presented.

For example, say that the adventure involves the PCs traveling to an evil shrine down a river. What you have planned for the adventure is that the characters will have to hire a boat and the boatman will insist on going a certain way to get to the shrine for one reason or another. But the PCs pool together their money and discover they have enough to buy their own boat, and decide to go a different way, just so they are not at an NPC's mercy. An inflexible Referee will just say, "You can't do that." A flexible Referee may decide that several waterways intersect and there are other ways to travel to this shrine. However, any planned encounters along the route the boatman would have taken them – whether they were dangerous or contained clues – would be missed.

The Five Elements of Every Good Adventure

Deadly Situations

There is a reason why the common man doesn't throw down his laborer tools and march off into dungeons and wilderness. Adventuring is a job with a very high mortality rate.

This should (potentially) apply to PCs. If they go into a dark hole filled with monsters, or work to stop the machinations of an evil cult (or mad scientist) (or evil wizard), if they sign up to be special agents in war, if they help the peasants revolt against the local noble, they are putting themselves in danger. This should not be mock danger.

Every adventure should have elements in it that the Referee fully expects to slaughter the party if they are not approached intelligently. This can be in the form of a monster that is clearly beyond the ability of the party to fight, or a devious trap that really is designed to kill whoever triggers it, or any number of things that could lay a character low.

This is not unfair, and this is not antagonistic refereeing. This is including true challenge into the game and making sure that the players take their play seriously, else their characters won't survive to advance and participate in adventures of greater scale. A Referee presiding over a game in which player characters never do seem to die is surely not presenting a great enough challenge for his group.

This is not to say that every situation in an adventure should be deadly. In fact, most situations should not even be equal challenges to the PCs, as you don't want them to retreat and rest after every hostile situation. But the deadly elements should be there, and there should be clues as to the presence and nature of the threat, to give the opportunity for good play to make a difference in how the adventure turns out. Randomly killing characters proves nothing about a Referee's skill and it just pisses off the players.

But the players have to know that the entire world isn't scaled to their characters' capabilities. Their characters are part of the world and exist within it. They are not gods walking the earth.

Freedom of Choice

Every adventure must have meaningful choices that the players must make, and these choices must significantly alter the flow of the adventure for them to have any meaning.

The absolute key to good gaming is the ability of players to choose their characters' actions. Any adventure which dictates what a character thinks or feels or does (barring magical enchantments, of course) is a terrible adventure.

"Barring magical enchantments" is an exception, but one that must be used with care. In the Tutorial adventure, for example, Iri-Khan's Charm could have lasted for days, or weeks, or months. But that's a very lame thing to do, taking away control of a player's character like that. Khan's releasing of the Charm may have seemed convenient, but it's good gaming. Long-lasting enchantments and curses are not strictly forbidden, however. They merely need to be done in ways that still allow the player to control his character. A curse that dictates that a character will act in certain ways in certain situations is fair game as long as those situations are rare. In the case of long-term curses, the player should be secretly informed that they are cursed, and in what way. A good player will keep this information from the other players and make decisions for his character based on the nature of the curse. A bad player will contrive ways to communicate this information to the other players and behave in ways that subvert the nature of the curse.

The choices made must be real choices. "Floating locations" of the "Well, whichever inn they stop at will be where the adventure happens" sort is not a real choice, it's an illusion. Some Referees disagree, and feel that unused locations may be recycled into other adventures, so long as the

players did not make a conscious decision to avoid the location to begin with.

Choices should not only be offered, but forced: Things are happening, and the players have to do something, and none of the options seem to be all good. Of course, if they choose not to decide, they still have made a choice and the consequences should be different (and perhaps more severe?) than if they'd done something.

Note that "Freedom of Choice" does not mean total freedom to do anything, at any time. The situation at any particular point in time may definitely suggest, if not require, a certain course of action, and circumstances will always reward some behaviors over others. Certain tricks or traps may cut off a party's escape, forcing them to find another way out.

But an adventure should never be a "you have to do this, in this order, with this outcome." Player actions should be able to have a direct effect on how an adventure plays out, even to the point of completely unraveling the adventure to the players' advantage.

A good rule of thumb: Ask yourself, "Are the situations the PCs will face a logical conclusion of the course of action they have chosen to take, or are they being put in these situations solely because I want them to do certain things?"

A good way to prevent the "railroading" of players (more on this later) is to simply have no set resolution for an adventure. Exploration and location-based adventures are easiest to leave without conclusion, while event and personage adventures can be quite difficult to avoid steering towards a pre-defined outcome.

Just remember that while there may be more important forces at work in the greater game world, the game as it is played at the table by the real people present is all about the PCs and the choices they make. So make sure they indeed have such choices they can make.

Success and Failure

A good adventure is designed so that the PCs have a reasonable chance of success and a reasonable chance of failure during the adventure, and the sign of a quality Referee is the ability to let the characters succeed or fail by their own devices without influencing the outcome either way. If the adventure is more or less random exploration and treasure hunting, this means hiding the treasure in clever places, or having it guarded by fiendish traps and fierce guardians, so that the PCs not finding the treasure is a truly possible outcome. For more plot-based adventures, the failure to achieve the adventure goals must always be a possibility.

As a Referee, your job is to be completely impartial during game play. You have absolute power at the game table and can bequeath success or mandate failure at any time. Doing either of those things ruins the game, as both give no incentive to play well.

Do not fudge the dice. Luck is a part of the game, and the dice are there for a reason. Resist the temptation of sparing characters that fail or even die due to "bad luck" or a "stupid die roll."

Good game play will tip the scales of fortune and those that rely on pure luck deserve what they get, for good or for ill. At the same time, if an incredibly lucky roll derails the entire adventure and gives the players a quick victory, it should stand. It needs to work both ways. When the dice go badly for the players, they should be thinking of how to not let a roll of the die be the sole determiner of their fates. And when the dice go a little too well for the players, the Referee should note what he needs to do to prevent a single die roll from determining the course of an entire adventure.

Note that failure does not have to mean the death of the adventurers. Unsolved mysteries, unfound hidden chambers, pure cowardice, and simply missing obvious things are all possibilities that could lead to failure without new characters needing to be rolled up.

There are consequences of deciding to play this way.

The party is just lost and sitting around because they didn't find the secret door that leads to the next section of the dungeon? Tough. It goes unexplored.

The party missed a vital clue and has no idea where to turn next in a murder investigation? Tough. The killer gets away.

There are too many options to choose from, and the players are disorganized and can't agree on an option and look to the Referee for guidance? Tough.

This does mean that "save the world" style adventures, and others with unpleasant campaign ramifications, should be avoided unless you are perfectly willing to change the face of the campaign if the PCs fail to complete your pre-decided "victory" conditions.

Playing this way also means that the game can "stop" at any time because a battle wipes out the PCs, or some other disastrous result that means the mission will come to an abrupt end. Oh well. Of course success is always more fun than failure, but if failure is not an option, then the success is but an illusion, it's fake, it's a lie. And by taking the attitude that the end result determines the fun of the game, then suddenly the process of playing the game is not fun in and of itself.

Be prepared for both character success and character failure. It's all good and well to say, "Let them fail!" but even if that is the end of the adventure, that should not be the end of the game. There is a whole wide campaign world out there. Players may be demoralized if they hit a dead end in an adventure and spend time milling about expecting that you will tell them how to proceed. But if they literally do not have anything else they could be doing if they were just willing to drop the current situation, then you have seeded adventure hooks in your campaign quite poorly.

Rewards

Players generally like their characters, they like success, and they like to feel they are accomplishing something when they sit down to play. Saying,

"You should enjoy the very experience of playing this game!" is all good and well but if there are no tangible in-character rewards, players will become unhappy.

There are two standards that adventure rewards must meet: They must be enough, and they must be not enough.

They must be enough that everyone involved doesn't think that they've completely wasted their time... and not enough to leave anybody really satisfied with what they have. They need more! Where next to plunder?

Rewards can come in many forms. The standard reward in these sorts of games is treasure and experience points for the characters. Magical items are another common reward (that perhaps shouldn't be quite so common). In-character favors and personal connections are a type of reward that isn't commonly used in this sort of game, but in a continuing campaign this could be extremely valuable.

Be sure to mix and match available rewards in your adventures. Make sure some of the rewards are easily earned, but of course make the more worthwhile rewards the most difficult to earn.

Note that concealing the rewards well may wind with the players not finding them. That's just tough. As a Referee, just make sure the rewards are there. Don't help the players to actually find them.

Another important factor to remember when coming up with the rewards in an adventure is that rewards do change the game. Rewards increase character power levels, as magical items give characters new capabilities and treasure gives characters experience which allows them to gain levels.

An adventure at 1st level is a different beast than an adventure at 4th level, for example. The rate of reward directly controls, it effectively *is*, the pace at which the game changes due to power level.

Variety

No rule is universal, and even things which are necessary for good adventures aren't necessary to place in *every* adventure. If you run a frequently-played campaign, playing once a week, that's going to be 52 sessions in a year. This is great fun, intensely rewarding, and also a large commitment and a lot of work.

Change elements of your adventures, and change them often. Tone, genre, environment, foes, goals, pacing, style, rewards, everything. If you can identify an element of an adventure, you can change it and twist it and do something different. Stylistic patterns will naturally occur in a campaign, and the Referee shouldn't see them as a bad thing, but they should be identified and occasionally intentionally shrugged off. Purposefully establishing a rhythm, a way of doing a certain thing, just so you can surprise the players later by breaking that rhythm is one long-term trick that pays off.

Keeping a campaign fresh through constant variety is the key to maintaining interest, for the players and for yourself.

Railroading

Repeat after me:

"My adventures and campaigns will have no pre-set endings. Characters are not required to act as I wish them to act during the course of the game. It is natural player behavior to trash scenarios and take the game to places unforeseen."

One more time. Say it out loud.

"My adventures and campaigns will have no pre-set endings. Characters are not required to act as I wish them to act during the course of the game. It is natural player behavior to trash scenarios and take the game to places unforeseen."

Got it?

Definition

Railroading is roughly defined as not allowing players the freedom of choice for their characters for the purpose of making sure an adventure runs in the way the Referee intends. No matter what the players do, and no matter what the dice say, the adventure will come to a predetermined end. The "railroad" name comes from the idea that the adventurers are on a train track, and must follow those tracks until they reach the station. To go off the tracks is to derail everything, so the Referee, acting as conductor, does everything possible to keep the train on the tracks.

This is an awful thing in a game.

Basically, railroading happens when the players' choices do not impact the events in an adventure.

If a certain sequence of events is really necessary for a game to function properly, the Referee should discuss it with the players out-of-character before play. "Hey guys, I have a great idea for an adventure, but it'll require you doing *this* at *that* point in order to get to the good stuff. Is that cool?" Since the players are showing up to the table to game, they'll usually be quite accommodating. Of course you can always just present it as an in-game choice, but the danger is that the players won't recognize the adventure hook, or won't care to follow it even if they recognize it. Stopping a game to explain such things out-of-character, or using strong-arm tactics in-game to make sure the "proper" actions are taken, can completely ruin the role-playing experience for many people.

Remember, the *entire game* is the answer to the question, "What do you do?" There must be meaningful choices leading to different outcomes, or the question is meaningless, and so then is the game also meaningless.

A quick piece of advice for avoiding railroading: Never narrate what the PCs do, or at least be very ready to accept corrections if a player points out that his guy is doing something different instead. *Never* narrate what

a player character feels. Merely describe situations, tell what the character sees and hears and smells, and always let the player decide how their character responds.

Definition of What it is Not

Railroading is not anything that prevents PCs from doing whatever they want, whenever they want.

Consequences
Adventure locations are not static, and as characters adventure, their decisions will leave a mark on the world. As characters adventure more and more, the results of their adventures will be a palpable, physical thing. Allies of enemies vanquished will be unhappy. The Dark Evil not quite eliminated in the proper way will awaken. The residents of that one village where the PCs killed that one guy (in self defense, but all the villagers know is they found a corpse and the travelers had skipped town!) will be hostile if they ever see the PCs again.

All of these actions taken during play, and an infinite variety of alternate possibilities, have consequences. Introducing those consequences into play, against the PCs, is not railroading. Freedom of action is not freedom from consequences of those actions.

Situational Events
Adventures are often constructed with pinch points. They'll often have a reasonable freedom of choice and movement, but certain triggers in an adventure then restrict choice. As long as the decision to pull that trigger, or at least the decision to take the action that unwittingly pulls that trigger, is freely made by the players, then the more restricted situation that the party finds itself in is not railroading.

Random Events
If using random tables to generate events in your campaign, the results of those rolls are never railroading. Railroading requires a *willful* and *circumstantially unreasonable* restriction on character action. A randomly

generated circumstance or challenge cannot be a willful restriction made by the Referee, so…

OBSTACLES

Every adventure is going to have obstacles for the PCs. In fact, an adventure is pretty much just a series of obstacles, with the hook and the rewards being simply window dressing to the whole affair. This doesn't mean that those are unimportant, it just means that at the end of the day it's going to be the struggle that the players remember, so you need to pay due attention to it. Players may forgive "an old man approaches you in the tavern" as a way to get them into the adventure – they did show up to play after all – and they might consider a big pile of gold to be a suitable, if boring, final treasure/reward, but if all the tough stuff between the two is uninspired and mundane, then the most fantastic adventure hook and the most spectacular treasure won't really mean a thing.

Encounters

Encounters are those situations where the PCs meet NPCs or monsters. It does not have to be a hostile situation to be an encounter; indeed, even meeting a kindly Cleric on the road who is generous with healing spells is considered an "encounter."

When setting up an encounter, there are a couple of things to keep in mind.

What is the purpose of this encounter? Every encounter should have an in-game purpose or justification, but not necessarily be connected to any plot or storyline that is happening. Sometimes the setting will dictate encounters, as a cave lair of a primitive tribe will have certain things that need to be there for the tribe to make sense as a whole, and the same goes for a village, or fortress. More fantastic locations may need a little more thinking. *Of course* those demonic lava lizards in the chamber below the erupting volcano are there because you think the party needs a fight right around there, but the game will be altogether more satisfying if there is a reason that makes sense within the setting for them to be there as well.

How does this encounter relate to other encounters placed in the adventure? It is all well and good to create a large adventure environment with a great amount of variety, but make sure things that are close together can coexist. It is very important that you don't sidetrack players with nonsensical things that are entirely irrelevant as real mysteries will become the focus of the adventure.

Encounters should not often be static occurrences. Even when an encounter is noted in a specific place, and the NPC/monster will most often be in that place, circumstances should always dictate what happens during actual play. In a fortress where all of the designated guard posts are listed as standard encounter areas (those planned and detailed ahead of time), for instance, the guards will not all simply wait at their posts. If there is a general alarm raised, or suspicious noises nearby, the guardsmen will act appropriately. Remember that in the game all of these NPCs and monsters aren't supposed to be game elements, they're actual living beings. They should behave as such.

Even in adventures designed to be combat-heavy, do not place too many combat encounters, and certainly not too many evenly-matched combat encounters. While you might think you are making an action-packed exciting adventure, what you will really be doing is causing a lot of downtime between fights as the players seek to rest and recover and avoid all of these tooth-and-nail battles.

For a combat heavy adventure, it is actually best to make each individual encounter quite weak in comparison to the PCs. Not pathetically so (although there should be some of those), but weak enough that the party doesn't consider the average encounter to be a *real* danger. In this way, you don't encourage frequent retreat-and-rest, and the question of stopping or pressing on becomes an actual decision rather than a mathematical equation.

Just don't forget the rather strong or overwhelming possible encounters as well!

Traps

Traps are often designed to incapacitate, restrain, or kill those that set them off.

A very brief and incomplete list of common traps:

* Area that Fills with Water
* Closing Walls/Lowering Ceiling (with or without spikes)
* Collapsing Ceiling
* Gas
* Net
* Pendulum Blade
* Pits (with or without spikes)
* Poison Needles (commonly in locks)
* Snare
* Tripwire (triggering another trap type)

Traps may be as simple or convoluted as you like, and a hallmark of the expert Referee is the ability to come up with absolutely fiendish traps. Traps need not be simple mechanical devices, and they need not have simple effects. When adding the possibility of magic to the idea of a booby trap, you'll quickly be able to come up with more ideas than you could possibly ever use.

Four things must be thought through before placing any trap. First, what triggers it? Second, what are the effects of the trap once triggered? Third, how do people who are supposed to be in the area avoid the trap? And last, why hasn't the trap been triggered by all the wandering monsters (and regular nearby inhabitants)?

In instances such as a tomb or mad wizard's lair or some such, these are easily answered. Nobody is supposed to be there, period, and it makes sense to booby-trap the living hell out of the place. Locations with living inhabitants, not so much. But each trap should have a clear purpose.

Think before placing traps. Really, there is no quota for placing traps and they should never be thrown in there "just because."

Be descriptive about placed traps. It should be possible to detect and disarm almost any trap without making a die roll. In fact, if the proper way of dealing with a trap is nothing more than a couple of Specialist skill rolls, then the trap is boring and no good. You can do better.

"Gotcha" traps keep players on their toes, but are also detrimental to game play. Merely entering an area shouldn't be enough to trigger a trap, and with the slow rate of exploration movement, it should be assumed that the party is on the lookout for such traps as a default condition. But barring PCs moving at a full normal walk, there should be some specific action that triggers a trap. Poison needle traps are a perfect example here. If a character does not attempt to open a chest or pick its lock, they have no problem. It's only by taking a specific action that they put themselves in danger.

Not that this is a screed against pit traps and the like. They have their place – especially if nobody is bothering to use a ten foot pole anymore. The problem with such traps is that they are often in areas where many creatures travel. Not even the most diligently trained or fiendishly clever beast will walk amongst traps unless there is an ongoing siege or other desperate situation. Any "triggered just by standing or walking in a particular place" trap that does more than sound an alarm is simply not going to be found in areas where people, or creatures, ever go.

Obvious, no-roll-needed-to-find-them traps are simply awesome. They dare the players. For example, there might be a six-armed statue with weapons in each hand, and a hole in its base and a gem in the statue's forehead. This is effectively a big flashing warning sign to players that something will happen if they fool around with this thing. But chances are, they won't be able to resist.

The last consideration to make is whether this trap is effective. Too many Referees place traps as "obstacles" in their adventures to be "overcome." Traps should be placed with the full intention of being triggered. Whoever

set the trap was certainly aiming to kill (or imprison, or immobilize, or whatever) whoever triggers it, and was certainly trying to keep people out of a specific area, so it must be able to do what it sets out to do or the whole thing's worthless. If you're going to place a death trap, set it up in a way that will kill, and count on a character dying from that trap during the adventure. When (if!) the traps are discovered and bypassed, it becomes a real accomplishment (even if it was dead easy and the players don't understand what might have happened), and not just something that happened because it's "supposed to" in these types of games.

Tricks

Tricks are the features within a game that are designed to delay, distract, and generally drive players crazy. They have a lot of overlap with traps, as they can be dangerous and even deadly, but they are not designed to be simply disarmed or avoided, but *figured out*.

This is where the Referee gets to go completely wild. Anything can be a trick. This is where you can throw in your logic puzzles, riddles, chess games, a dozen pools of liquid that all do different things, talking doors, anything of the sort.

Here is a list of more mundane and common tricks. Remember, this doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of possibilities; these just deal with mapping or preventing easy comings-and-goings…

* Chutes that drop PCs to areas below
* Door hidden by an object covering it
* One-Way Door: It can be opened easily from one side, but not at all from the other.
* Rooms or passages which rise or lower, or spin without those inside knowing
* Sliding walls which block certain passages
* Stairs which collapse, sliding everyone to the bottom

Tricks are most often attached to objects. Statues, doors, idols, altars, pools, machines… anything! Such tricks are usually triggered on an if/then

basis. If the player does a certain thing, then it has a certain effect. Maybe it reveals a clue, subjects the triggering character (or an area) to a spell effect, gives an item… anything can happen.

Again, there should be a purpose, or at least an origin, of the particular trick. It shouldn't be purely random and out of context with its surroundings. Other than that… go nuts.

MAPS

Maps are a classic prop in gaming, to the point where many gamers pass time by drawing maps to places they will never use in a game, nor develop in any greater detail. People like drawing maps. Make maps a major part of your game and players will respond.

When is a Map Needed?

When the spatial relationship between areas is important, you need a map. A multi-level underground complex always needs a map, as the vertical connecting points need to be lined up, if nothing else. Most underground complexes need maps anyway, as movement rates are important for a good many reasons.

For other sorts of adventures, a map is always handy because you never know where players will go and they're going to notice the lack of consistency if you're just making things up in your head. It's all good and well to say, "The villages are three hours' journey apart," and then talk about a third village that's two miles off the path from the second village, but you'd better have accurate information handy when players want to go between the first and third villages direct.

Use maps.

Communicating Maps to Players

As players move through the adventure environment, the environment should be communicated verbally. Maps should never be shown to players

(unless of course it is a map that their characters actually find). One or more players will have to learn to interpret the Referee's description and make their own map as they adventure, if they want to have a record of where they've been. The Example of Play in the Tutorial book depicts this process.

There will be exceptions, of course. Some adventure locations may be excessively complex and impossible to communicate effectively. In these limited cases, a Referee might help the player out with his sketch. However, Referees shouldn't correct minor errors made in maps. If an entire complex, for example a realistically rendered cavern, is beyond all ability to communicate without constant Referee sketches, then the players will have to make-do with approximate descriptions. The exploration movement rate, which allows for mapping with exact measurements, is still not equivalent to full-fledged surveying.

This is, by the way, why most gaming maps follow a grid. Realistic structures and maps are difficult to communicate, so for the purposes of gaming expediency the maps conform to graph or hex paper.

If players don't want to make their own map, they don't have to. But that doesn't mean you show them any of your maps.

Good vs. Bad Maps

A map is good when it tells you what you need to know. The artistic quality of the map, beyond that which allows the map to be clearly read, is of secondary concern. Useful maps are better than pretty maps, although admittedly useful and pretty maps are awesome.

A superior map gives players choices as to where to go and what to do, it allows players to plan effective strategies and make discoveries just for having made the map!

A bad map is boring to look at and imparts no further information than a textual description would. Linear maps are no good. Very simple locations don't always need to have an official map.

Potential Experience Awards

When designing an adventure, one thing you must decide on ahead of time is what the total experience award is likely to be. This can drive the entire process of adventure design. A good rule of thumb is that you total the amount of experience the party needs to gain a level (so a group of five first level Fighters would have 10,000 for this number) and have the adventure have a quarter to one-third of the experience necessary to gain the level.

If everything went mathematically perfectly during the game, this means that a party would level up every three to four sessions. However, this perfection should be quite rare. Treasure will be missed, not every possible foe will be confronted or defeated, PCs will die, there will be retainers that will be getting shares, so you should perhaps consider that it may take five to ten sessions between levels – perhaps much more at higher levels.

Placing Treasure

Once you know how much experience you wish to have available in a particular adventure, you have got to place it within the adventure. The vast majority of experience in an adventure is gained by treasure, not by defeating enemies.

Treasure is generally divided into three forms: *Treasure* which is both valuable and worth experience points, money and goods which have value but aren't counted for experience, and magical treasure.

First, the dividing line between "money" and "treasure," which items of worth give an experience point value and which do not, must be determined by the Referee. It should be obvious when it is found and players should be given this information immediately. It should never be a mystery whether a stash is experience or just a bit of cash. In general, purely political, criminal, or economic gains do not count for experience, while treasure that is gained through legitimate adventuring (that adven-

turing involving exploring of unknown areas) does count for experience purposes.

As appropriate treasure amounts for an adventure grow as the characters increase in level, transporting the treasure should be a more and more challenging experience. Not all treasure should be placed as coins, and certainly not as easily-transported gems or jewelry. Great works of art, either fragile or not easily moved, are a wonderful way to represent treasure. Would a party even think to take those large paintings off the walls? How would they get them back to town without damaging them? And that magnificent statue, sculpted by one of the masters… how to move it?

Treasure should also be spread around the adventure. Placing all of the adventure's treasure at "the end," or beyond only the greatest challenges, is somewhat unfair. Lesser amounts should be available here and there, some in quite hidden places. To place the vast majority of treasure at the end forces the players' hand and really makes it difficult to choose to go on or not; that choice is obvious if no gain has been made halfway through. Deciding to be safe and take far longer to accumulate treasure and advance in levels versus taking more risks for the hopes of quicker advancement should be a choice to be made by the party.

Magical items will be discussed more later, but they should be quite rare. Actively useful magical items should never be less than vital to the history or development of an adventure, and never placed "just because." Less obviously useful items and one- or limited-use items, can be placed a bit more liberally but still never haphazardly. Magical items, even if sold, are not counted as "treasure" for experience point purposes. Besides, who would sell a magic item? What kind of farcical campaign is being run if a magical item is so useless as to be discarded or surrendered, even for money?
Remember that not all treasure need be cashed in to count for experience. If the PCs' mission is to retrieve some valuable item, and they complete their mission and return the item to civilization or other safe haven, that item should count for experience equal to its value, even if it is turned over to a third-party quest-giver and never cashed out for gold.

Adventure Pacing

Common gaming wisdom today states that if the action has slowed and the players either don't know what to do or don't want to do anything, the Referee should make something happen to give the players something to react to. I declare that this ruins the pro-active element in traditional gaming, causes the Referee to be biased towards character action, and creates a disincentive for players to control their own destiny.

But what do you do if all the obstacles described in the Success and Failure section actually stop the party?

You do nothing.

If a player complains that he's bored and that nothing is happening, look at him and say, "I agree. So are you going to do something or not?"

It is not the Referee's job during a session to provide excitement for his playing group. His job is to administer the setting and resolve character actions. If the characters are taking no action and are not interacting with the setting, then the Referee has literally nothing to do. The players are wasting his time.

However, this advice depends on the PCs actually having other things they can do! If the players are only presented one possible adventure, and they run into a roadblock in that adventure, then it's not the players' fault if the game just grinds to a halt.

If there are multiple adventure hooks floating about (as there should be!), then a roadblock in one place doesn't stop play cold. The players' stubbornness might at that point, refusing to accept that they can't go on in one place, but that really isn't your problem. Yet it is *vital* that the Referee makes it clear that there are other things to do. Too many Referees indulge in "this is the adventure of the week and this is what you will be doing" play-styles, so it is essential that a good Referee never falls into this habit, and important that players know the Referee is not working

under common, and inferior, methods. As long as players know that there is adventure in every direction, the Referee never need worry about the outcome of any particular adventure.

Other common standards of pacing become obsolete when dealing with a player-driven adventure. Traditional games commonly feature a "retreat, rest, and recharge" element of play, and in fact almost demand such a thing. This creates a bit of difficulty in trying to structure an exciting adventure if the party is going back to rest after every fight of even slight challenge.

Don't let the players turn the game into a series of "Scout out the next room, ambush the beasties, collect the loot, and then retreat back to camp and get all the spells back." Or don't let them complain of monotony and boredom if that is what they choose to do. Missions with time limits are a possibility, but the meticulous planning needed to make such an adventure just challenging enough to get the PCs to the climax will tend to cause the Referee to become too invested in the adventure outcome.

The first reliable way to control pacing issues is through the proper use of wandering monsters and random encounters (described below). Never skip a random encounter check, and never hand-waive the results. Do this for the area that the PCs decide to rest as well. If their recuperation is not just a matter of saying, "We go back to camp," maybe the players won't be so quick to do so.

Time

Time management is an oft-overlooked aspect of adventure gaming. So many things are dependent on time, and yet so many players and Referees disregard it as a factor in their games.

Keep a strict record of time! This wisdom was presented in bold in an important early gaming publication and has been laughed at ever since. But it's excellent advice. Endless searching for secret doors and traps takes but a second to roll for the players, but a good deal of time for the characters. How long does that torch burn? How quickly is that lantern

burning oil? How long does that spell last? So many Referees simply make sure that there's a torch or lantern present (and if the Referee is on the ball, he might make sure that somebody with a free hand is actually the one carrying it) and then ignore it. Players will pick up the pace if the torches and lanterns keep going out… and keeping close track of encumbrance means they can't just buy a hundred flasks of oil, either. These oft-ignored rules aren't there to simply be a pain the ass, they are there to push play along in a system that otherwise rewards characters moving at a snail's pace.

Let's use light as an example. Adventures often take place underground, and no PC race can see in the dark. So how to deal with the problem? Multiple torches and lanterns take up space and someone needs a free hand to hold the thing. But they only last a limited time. Spellcasters can use a spell instead, but most usually think that resource is better spent in another way. Planning for light is an important consideration in an adventure, and dealing with the issue does limit, in its own small way, what the party is able to accomplish. If you just hand-wave the issue, "Oh, somebody's got a torch, that's covered then for the whole adventure," the game takes on a different tone, one where planning and choices really don't matter.

The same can be said with trap checking at every door, in every passage, and searching for secret doors in every room. In many ways, this is a smart thing to do, for a serious adventure will reward this behavior. But where is the challenge if there is no recording of the passage of time, or any consequences for spending this much time searching? You might as well not even place any traps for a half-decent party, or bother making any doors secret. There must be a balance, a choice to be made by the players, between thoroughness and expediency. Adventures usually take place in *hostile environments*. They should be treated as such.

An adventure may be constructed so that such concerns are not real, but they should have other dangers that exist *because* the PCs have no time pressures.

Random Encounters

Random encounters are encounters and situations that PCs may run into that are not a pre-planned part of an adventure. They are a surprise to both the players and the Referee.

Random encounters are checked once every set period of time, and this will vary from location to location. You might decide, in one dungeon, that encounters will be checked once every three turns, and in another place you might decide that there needs to be a random encounter check once every six turns.

In underground areas, or other spaces where game movement by turn is important, checks should be made every few turns. But in wilderness travel, where often entire game days pass in a matter of real-world moments, checks should be made far less often, perhaps two or three times per game day, depending on circumstances.

When a check is called for, it is traditionally made on a d6, with a 1 meaning an encounter occurs. Depending on the adventure or situation, checks can occur much more frequently and with a greater chance of an encounter. Certainly if the PCs make a lot of noise (such as breaking down doors, arguing in the middle of a passage about their next course of action, etc.), a check could be made on the spot no matter when the next scheduled check was supposed to be made.

Deciding how closely the players' behavior is mirrored in the game world is something a Referee must do and communicate to the players. If the players spend twenty real-life minutes deciding what to do at any particular point, does that equal two full turns in the game? If players are excited and raise their voices and talk over each other in such negotiations, does that mean their characters are doing the same?

When a random encounter does occur, the Referee should consult a table he has prepared for this purpose. This table should be unique to every area, and the entries on a table should help define the experience of adventuring in an area.

Random encounters encourage players to not spend exhaustive amounts of time on searches and fiddling with absolutely everything. If searching every last section of wall for secret doors means a potential parade of enemies stumbling across them, they might keep moving, complete their map, and then figure out likely places that the doors might be. Play will move much faster. Also, if every adventure location has unique random encounters, those encounters help the location be more memorably unique in your players' minds.

Note that random encounter tables do not have to be, and should not be, simply lists of hostile encounters! Appropriate and atmospheric happenings are perfectly legitimate random "encounters." Neutral or friendly encounters can provide an unexpected twist. A cave-in, flash flood, creeping mist, or other random event can easily fill a random encounter table slot. A good practice is to make some sort of "background element" into a random encounter. Perhaps some far-off sound, or shifting of the ground, something of that nature. On one slot on the table, that's all there is. On another slot, it is the harbinger to an attack or other dangerous event. When that same thing happens next time, if there was a battle previously, the players will go immediately on their guard, whether there is reason to or not! If there was not a battle last time, they may well completely ignore it, much to their eventual chagrin.

Random encounters are a wonderful tool. They keep players from ever feeling secure about their position in an adventure location, they can turn tense situations into complete chaos, and they are just good all around fun.

When coming up with random encounters, while most of the possible encounters should not be major battles, there should be at least one possible encounter that will be a roughly equal, major fight, and one entry which will probably be too much for the party to stand toe to toe with.

Take care that the random charts make sense within the adventuring environment. These creatures roaming around will also be coming into contact with the placed creatures. Why aren't they killing each other? If

they are random monsters, it's a good bet their lair isn't keyed on the map. Where do they live? How do they get from there to the dungeon? If the party is closing doors behind them as they go, many creatures won't be able to "randomly" appear.

One solution is to make random monsters connected to a keyed area. This can happen in several ways. The first is to just assume that every (or most, or whatever's appropriate) keyed area's inhabitants have an extra member or two running around the environment. The second is to increase the number of creatures in the set encounter areas, and assume that a certain number of them are gone at any particular time, and it is those creatures that turn into random encounters.

Note that completely tamed areas can still have a wide variety of random encounters. Roads in civilized lands always have travelers on them, and creating customized encounter tables for different areas of civilization can help differentiate Vaguely English Barony A from Vaguely English Barony B. "There sure are a lot of beggars in this area, Lars."

Using Published Adventures

Over the past 35+ years, a tremendous number of adventures have been published that are compatible with Weird Fantasy Role-Playing.

Published adventures have one downside: Because they are not your creations, you need to read and study them well in advance, and take note of how all the details fit together in ways that may not be apparent (or at all mentioned) in the text.
Published adventures have three important advantages:

They will expand your capabilities as a Referee. Because you are working from someone else's ideas, the adventure should be different than anything you would present, perhaps radically so. This is a great advantage, as the one shortcoming of a Referee that presents only his own adventures is that they are indeed all his. No Referee is so creative as to create an entire world from whole cloth and adventure after adventure for his players without his stylistic trademarks being left all over them. This unique

quality of a Referee is a good thing most of the time, but a great Referee is also flexible and willing to experiment and learn. Running adventures written by a variety of authors is a useful means of learning flexibility.

At the same time, the players will be doubly challenged. If they have played under a particular Referee for some time, certain things will be considered standard. Those unique qualities of a Referee may create "business as usual" procedures on the player end. Using an adventure written by someone else forces them out of any sense of being on autopilot, removes any chance of guessing the dangers based on knowing the style of the Referee, and forces players to prove their skill under a whole new set of adventure assumptions.

The third thing is that it is difficult to be an impartial Referee with your regular home group. Honestly, if you're running games for your friends, and creating the adventures too, there is hesitation to really go all-out in challenging them. Is it fair to use their particular playing style as a basis for defeating them in an adventure? Are you really trying to challenge them when writing an adventure and then acting as an unbiased Referee during actual play and discovering whether the players are up to the challenge? Chances are you're balancing things in favor of your party, at least ever so slightly. You know you are. Published adventures give you the opportunity to be the disinterested game master. You are not responsible for the adventure or its contents, the writers don't know your group, so it's a neutral ground. You can play the adventure to its fullest potential, being as dastardly as you like with the monsters and bad guys, without feeling any guilt or questioning whether you've made something unfair. Let the dice fall where they may!

Some Referees are great creative thinkers and make excellent adventures, but not every Referee can manage these things. Running a great game requires different skills than creating a great adventure. Never feel like you're doing something wrong just because you didn't write everything that you use in your campaign.

Fit the Adventure to the Campaign

Very few adventures are ready to be inserted as-is into your campaign. Generally the geography and cultural surroundings of an adventure are fairly unique. You need to figure out exactly how this adventure fits in to your campaign world, and file off the bits that conflict with the world. Most of the time, changing some minor appearance detail and changing names to suit your campaign is enough.

You should also carefully scan the adventure for hazardous treasures and other potential reward issues. Adventure writers will have a wildly different idea of what appropriate treasures should be, and you need to make sure you're not dumping an undue amount of treasure or magic items into your game.

Because adventures written by others do have much different base assumptions than adventures you devise for your own campaign, it will often be necessary to isolate the adventure location to explain why things that are true in the adventure are not true in the greater campaign at large. But that shouldn't be too big an issue, as adventures happen away from home anyway!

Don't Change Anything Else!

The very advantage of using adventures written by others is defeated if you change every detail to more closely match your style. After you take away the elements that could harm your campaign and change the names and other such details to fit your campaign, leave the adventures alone. Run them in the spirit they were written. Try to get in the head of the writer, and run it as you imagine the writer running the thing. It will challenge you and expand your abilities as a Referee, it will challenge your players and expand their abilities, and these are good things.

The Campaign

"Beneath the magic, derring-do, and other glamour, an imaginary world has to work right." – Poul Anderson

What is a Campaign?

A campaign is the overall environment in which all of your adventures take place. That is to say, if your adventures each take place in a specific local environment, then the campaign is the greater world around those locations.

Campaign play is the default assumption for Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, but of course the game can be played simply as a succession of episodic adventures with nothing between them.

The Campaign Concept

There are two primary means to constructing your campaign: Through Prior Design or by Accumulated Play.

Accumulated Play means the campaign world is a blank slate but for what occurs in play. The first adventure establishes facts about the campaign world, and every subsequent adventure adds to the campaign, but nothing exists until it is established in play. Most of this establishment will be formed by answering player questions, and as they ask about their characters' surroundings, you will be setting precedent to be followed forever more. This style of campaign building tends to be fast, loose, and full of really crazy ideas.

Most of the rest of this section is of no real use to you if you're using the accumulated play method. Simply make an adventure. Then make another one. And play!

Then there is the Prior Design approach. This involves designing a world beforehand and making a great many decisions about play ahead of time. The great disadvantage to this method is that once set, a good many later

ideas may be unusable within the campaign without breaking the consistency of the setting. The advantage of this method is it very much promotes the idea of the campaign world as a real place with an identity of its own beyond what the players are doing within it. Players appreciate the feeling of exploring an actual place rather than being constantly reminded that they are in a mere game construct.

Expanding Your Milieu

All of the advice given for constructing a campaign world is best applied locally, for as much background and territory needed for the characters' current adventures to make sense. Other areas can be defined in general terms, but the fine details should be left until they are needed, if for no other reason than you'll always have great ideas that come to you well after the start of a campaign.

As characters travel, more areas that begin as mere concepts can be filled in and become true locations. Your world will grow organically.

The true richness of the campaign world will not reveal itself with any single group of characters or even players. Only by continuing to use, and develop, the same campaign world over the course of many games with multiple groups adventuring in different areas of the game world over a course of years will the campaign world reach its fullest potential.

The Big Picture

Do note that while this game reflects the author's Western and Northern European historical, literary, and mythological tastes, your campaign is free to make different assumptions. Class names, spell lists, and what equipment is available for purchase are all allowed to be changed according to Referee wishes. In fact, the opening of this book, about it being compost, applies to all RPG material ever produced. If the Referee wants it to be different in his game, then different it is. It's that simple.

In this way you could decide that your campaign could have an Asian flavor, an Aztec or other Native American flavor, Egyptian, Roman,

Greek, Arab, Indian, or even something not based on a real-world Earth culture or time period, whether it be inspired by literature or other media or your own imagination. Whatever form of fantasy you feel attached to and comfortable with is OK to pursue.

Adventure locations, they can be wild and far out and without concern for any sort of internal consistency if you wish. Even if you decide your campaign will feel something like the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne, you can have aliens landing in the mountains, krakens in the ocean, and pixies kidnapping children in the forests. But the campaign world as a whole, especially the civilized, "safe" areas, should feel familiar to your players so the game sessions are about the adventure, the exciting bits, and not all about learning the very basics of the world that the characters have taken for granted since birth.

The most important thing to remember is that the campaign world, self-contained creation it may be, exists first and foremost to be adventured within by the players. Don't make a design so airtight that there is no room for a crew of anarchistic ne'er-do-wells to run around and screw everything up. But what the campaign world is about does not need to match what the players will be doing in it. The campaign world is the backdrop, the setting for the adventures, and should be independently conceived.

Using Earth as a Setting

You might ask, "If you're suggesting to us that the baseline situation in the game world should be realistic, why not just use the real world and its history?"

Great question, and the answer is simply: "People know too much about it, and not enough about it." No one person is an expert in every area of knowledge that would be required to accurately model the real world, even if it will be altered for fantasy purposes. The problem is a good number of people are highly educated about specific topics.

If you are saying, "This campaign takes place in the historical Real World, but with Weird elements," these educated folk will make assumptions based on their knowledge in the game. If you, as a Referee, don't have this knowledge, it's going to break their belief in the game world as you contradict what they know in their specialized area. If you have a particularly well-educated and diverse group of players, this will be a problem with every player at your table.

Or, perhaps the Referee is the best-educated person at the table when it comes to historical matters. This is great, unless he makes assumptions about things people are "supposed to know" about history, and things could very well fall apart when he realizes that isn't the case.

Fact: People are generally ignorant of the world around them unless it pertains to a past or present job or hobby. Their ignorance about historical matters is far greater.

Also fact: Gamers generally hate having their immersion in the game disrupted whereas they may fully enjoy a game that doesn't falsely advertise such a level of immersion in the first place.

Saying "The Knights of Yobbo-Toy is an order similar to the Knights Templar," for your own campaign world establishes many associations and references in players' minds. They get a good thumbnail, a rough idea, yet they realize these aren't the Templars and will be accepting of information which is new or horribly inaccurate historically. If you use Historic Earth as your setting and then introduce the actual Knights Templar, any change or departure from player expectations (even if a player's expectation is based on incorrect knowledge of the subject!) is going to create friction and disrupt game play. Even two fully educated people may disagree about interpretations of how a real-life group would act towards situations common in the game but non-existent in history (undead, magic, etc). Settling these issues will sidetrack the game.

It is recommended that you focus on creating a verisimilitudinous campaign world rather than striving for a realistic one. The Referee should

be the final authority about the campaign world, and using the Real World gives authority to the world beyond the Referee's. Avoid that.

Using a Published Campaign Setting

There are many settings created specifically for use in role-playing games, and many more already-detailed settings in literature, and choosing to use one of those for your campaign could save a lot of effort in creating a campaign world, and will also save a lot of time if you are already quite familiar with the setting.

Of Canon and Eternal Woe

Using available settings for your campaign has the same risks of using the real world, with the potential for even greater silliness. Some settings have upwards of one hundred published books about them, not to mention unofficial interpretations and additions on the internet and elsewhere.

How much of it are you going to use? All of it? A specific subset? Elements that you cherry-pick out of all available sources, while not including other elements?

How are your players going to react to this? What happens when you decide that your campaign will take place in Famous World, and one of your players starts quoting chapter and verse from some failed novel published twenty years ago that's set in that world? Do you warp your campaign to the vision of writers you haven't even thought to read, or do you basically penalize the player by dismissing his in-depth knowledge about the setting you've told him you're using?

Avoid the issue. If using an extant setting for your campaign, define which specific sources you will be drawing from so the players clearly know what is "real" in your campaign and what is not.

The Campaign Map

The defining element of any aspect of any world is geography. It determines everything from lifestyles and cultural development to

available resources and trade routes, prime settlement areas and therefore population density patterns, territory worth fighting over, and how cosmopolitan certain areas are. It's *huge*. Whether you draw a map and then decide everything that follows, or decide how you want things to be and then draw a map to support that, geography must be a prime concern, and must be treated as a creative priority.

You don't need to be any sort of college wiz kid to draw maps as long as you keep a few things in mind. Rivers flow downhill. Large amounts of vegetation needs decent amounts of water. Settlements will only exist where there is water and food available, and large settlements will only exist on major trade routes. Water allows people, commerce allows size. This isn't just nitpicking, as realistically conceived worlds allow players to make sensible decisions without the Referee needing to give them an inordinate amount of description or exposition.

Even if doing the top-down prior design campaign approach, you only need to fully detail the areas which the players actually travel to. All other areas can remain rough ideas, a large-scale map with major features and cities without small-scale details, until they are actually visited.

Adventure Locations

When developing the details of your campaign, you have to think about where the adventures will be had. Since these areas are where actual play will tend to be focused, it should be a first priority. Of course you don't have to plan too far ahead, but most adventures do not happen at home, and if they are too close to the civilized areas, then the powers-that-be will have taken care of the problem (and if they can't, characters at the start of a new campaign aren't likely to be able to either!). So plot out those areas off the beaten path where adventures are most likely to happen.

The Wilds

Surrounding adventure locations will generally be areas where man simply doesn't go. Being away from towns and villages and well-traveled roads isn't enough to really be "the wilds." True wilds are not roamed by hunters

or trappers, prospectors or loggers. Nobody but adventurers and well-prepared explorers, bandits, and unfriendly creatures can be found there.

Each distinct wilderness area should have its own random encounter tables. You don't want every dark forest to feel the same, and you don't want every mountain range to be identical. The first adventure locations should probably have few, if any, random encounters, because beginning characters probably can't survive running wilderness battles and then the adventure location, but beyond the first three or four adventures, you should introduce the tables so the players realize the difference between civilization and the wilderness.

Monster Placement

In addition to adventure locations and random encounters, you also might want to assign specific monsters to specific locations in the wilderness. These become adventure locations anyway, for all intents and purposes, but perhaps without all the detail that normal adventures require. Deciding that these woods are the lair of a satyr gives the place a distinct feeling, as does deciding that those hills hold the lair of a fearsome dragon. As with normal encounters placed in adventures, you will have to decide how these placed creatures interact with the world around them.

Civilization

Civilization is a straightjacket for adventure. Government and its enforcers abhor powerful individuals acting as they will, they abhor chaos and unleashed danger, they abhor the unknown, and it is these which are the heart of adventure. Characters, especially low-level characters, need a safe haven in which to retreat. Pure economic gain, that is treasure that is simply money and not *treasure*, does not provide experience.

It is recommended that civilized areas conform to real-world norms as much as possible. Magic-Users do not sit on the throne, priests in the church are not Clerics to heal the wounds of the populace. Civilized lands suffer famine, plague, oppression, poverty, and all the ills that pre-industrial society had to offer. The poor are *poor*. The people have little

power, and wouldn't know what to do with it if they had it. Honest labor perhaps allows one a bite to eat and a roof against the rain, maybe, but it is not in any way a guarantee of a *life*. Player Characters have the wealth to be above the worst of it, but surely they want to escape such drudgery – else why become an adventurer?

Exciting adventures in civilized areas are quite possible (even commonplace in some campaigns). Activities which would seem "mundane" yet still quite exciting (think of every non-supernatural thriller or crime drama you've ever seen) can be used as adventure fodder, but this is distinct from what this game normally terms "adventure." If the focus of a campaign is on exploration, the recovery of lost treasure, and contact with Weird forces, then the adventures should primarily be *out there*.

Yet there are elements such as haunted houses, hidden cults, secret temples, and all sorts of strangeness which do happen, and in some cases can only happen, in the heart of civilization. But even these are distinct from everyday life, as the local powers do not interfere and these things do not (openly) impact everyday life. They are "out there," away from the world, even while situated in the middle of it.

Religion

Religion is the most powerful factor of any civilization of consequence. For fantasy/non-technological settings, in emulating any sort of historical era, decisions made about religion will define the greater features of a civilization.

That said, religion can be completely transparent in the campaign world if you don't wish to deal with it. Many games actively encourage keeping religious matters "off-camera" so as to not risk real-life religious feelings becoming entwined with depictions of in-game fictitious religious practices.

Fantasy settings have the great advantage of not needing to use real-world religions in the game. One always could use them, of course, but some

players may take great offense, especially when a real religion is used as a vehicle for rather weird and horrific game plots.

Creating a religion from the imagination is both very easy and very difficult. It's easy because all you need to do is come up with four or five quick facts about the religion, and that can be enough if religious matters aren't all that important in your campaign world. However, in a game that often has multiple pantheons of gods existing side by side, with many demons and other things masquerading as gods and providing hooks for adventures, there is more work to do.

Answer these following questions for each religion in your campaign:

* What is the god's name, including epithets?
* What is the god's sphere of influence?
* What does the god look like? Is the god male, female, both, or neither?
* What is the origin of the god?
* What does the god's places of worship look like?
* What are the common rituals done in honor of the god?
* How do the priests of the religion dress?
* When are the major holy days of the religion, and what do they represent?
* What is the god's symbol?
* What is the religion's attitude towards other gods?
* What is the religion's attitude towards heretical practices?
* What is the religion's attitude towards non-believers?
* What is important to followers of the religion?
* How might one please the religion?
* How might one offend the religion?
* Does the religion claim any sacred animals, monsters, devices, or phenomena?
* Are there any unusual actions that the priests of the religion perform?

Note that the answers to these questions should be from the point of view of the religious organization and *not* the deity itself, and only the questions that impact the characters need to be answered ahead of time. As with all

campaign preparation, worry only about what is likely to appear in actual play.

Also keep in mind that in cultures whose religion includes an entire pantheon of gods, people (and clerics) will worship the pantheon as a whole, and those who single out any particular god to the exclusion of others will not be in the mainstream of society.

In all cultures, followers of minority faiths will have to deal with the followers of the primary faith. Even in enlightened and tolerant societies, the common rabble will not often be quite so enlightened and tolerant. In some cases, it may be illegal to practice certain religions, or to not be a part of the "home" religion. Religious criminals have a very low recidivism rate because they are generally executed immediately, and often not by the authorities.

Also remember that in a pre-modern age, religion is not a private matter and is not something simply practiced every week during services. Religion permeates every aspect of life, from the foods eaten to the clothes that are allowed to be worn. Think of the most archaic restrictions and practices from the history of real-world faiths, and then factor in that rulers will also seize greater levels of control using religion as an excuse, without those laws really having much to do with religion.

All religions are local phenomena. Religions that grow to be great do so because the political entity from the area the religion originates from has itself spread out. But unless part of a current or former empire, most areas will have their own practices and their own gods.

Note that this entire section speaks of religion and belief, and not actual deities. The nature of divinity, and the truth of the religions of the world, are entirely up to the campaign Referee. The only question that needs to be considered is, "Where do Clerics get their magical power?" Maybe the religions worship real gods who grant spells. Maybe there are no gods, and it is the Cleric's own supreme will that powers the magic (which makes spells like Commune interesting…). Maybe the mass belief of the religion's followers creates a magical "well" of power from which Clerics

draw. Or maybe the real answer is something else entirely. *You never have to answer this question, by the way, or even make a decision about the religious truth of your campaign*.

… and then we have cults. Cults are awesome for gaming, because they always worship some foul demon (what if all gods are demons?) and threaten the stability of the society they secretly exist within, and are full of all sorts of Weirdness that allow a Referee to exercise the full extent of his imaginative powers. You can go to the outer limits of your imagination to come up with obscure gods and rather unpleasant means of worship.

Cosmology and the Gods

A final word, relating to the development of religions and gods in your campaign. Many games and game worlds (and mythologies!) not only detail the truth about the gods, but also the makeup of the greater cosmos. Where the gods live, what alternate dimensions exist, how to travel between them, that sort of thing.

The best way to handle this is to never define the layout of the planes or dimensions or the dwelling places of divine (or infernal) beings. Keep it as folklore and legends within the campaign. This different sources have different and contradictory beliefs, and the players can never know who is wrong. As soon as this sort of thing is codified, it removes mystery from the setting, and if you or the players know The Big Picture, then the campaign world, which is the *important* picture, seems small in comparison.

This isn't to say you can't have adventures dealing with other dimensions or such things, just don't codify the relationship between the one dimension in the current dimension and any others. Keep it mysterious.

Culture

Government. Song. Dance. Fashion. Theater. Art. Craftsmanship. Games. Scholarship. Philosophy. Architecture. Food. Technology.

Even aside from religion, which will be a huge influence on all of the above, societies will be different from one another through basic habits and lifestyles. Inventing all of these things from scratch for a game campaign is a very intense and time-consuming job – at least it is if the final result is to feel like a living, breathing culture – and so this is why many campaign worlds work from a historical base. "It's like 15th Century England," for example, says a great deal, even if it winds up being a series of popular misconceptions about what that exactly means. Everyone at the table will get the general idea and that's enough to get the world out of the way and get directly to the adventure.

Languages

Language, like religion, is a great indicator of cultural similarities. Information about a campaign world can be subtly imparted by designating which languages are spoken where, and the presence of the language rules requires a Referee to come up with at least a rough list of languages, and their relationship to one another, when planning a campaign world.

Avoid "racial" languages. Yes, different races will likely have different languages than humans, but only if they have isolated societies. And at distance these races will have different cultures and languages, just like humans do.

There is no need to go into real-world depth as far as your campaign's languages, but putting just a bit of effort beyond having a "Common Tongue" (a default language spoken everywhere in a campaign world) in your campaign world will do wonders to further the illusion that it is a real place.

Town and Social Structure

The social dynamics of a population center will vary greatly depending on the dominant culture (and having multiple cultures present in one area will change that dynamic as well). It really is difficult to generalize.

However, some things will be universal. Any sizeable community that we'd recognize as a "town" – with a large population and commerce – requires a huge amount of farmers or fishermen to provide food for it. The ability to simply buy food, instead of having to grow it oneself, is quite rare, so any town will have an entire network of smaller farming villages around it. The general populace will be quite poor by modern standards, with entire families living in smaller one or two room houses, with few possessions beyond personal tools, clothing, and cooking implements. Socialization is primarily done around worship services or at public houses.

Commerce will be regulated by guilds who decide who may sell and what the prices will be. Strangers will not find bargains. One may escape the guild monopolies by dealing with the criminal underworld, but this has its own complications.

Streets will be narrow and dark. On cloudy or moonless nights it will almost be as dark outdoors as in dungeon corridors. Fire is rivaled only by plague as the greatest fear of a city dweller. There will not be streetlights of any sort without guards, so only the richer districts in town will be lit.

Towns of any size will be walled, and getting into a city will cost money, as city gates (along with bridges and other such points) will always require a toll.

Of course PCs will quickly acquire enough money that all of this will merely be a nuisance rather than the state of daily life. But make no mistake, the lower classes toil and break their backs until they die. In the country they are covered in dirt, in the city they are covered with the filth of the masses.

Regardless of social station, arms and armor will simply not be tolerated in towns and cities. Commoners will generally flee at the sight of armed men if possible, with the local authorities being summoned quickly. "Gentlemen" (and ladies, let us not forget, as forcing historical prejudices

and restrictions on female PCs in a fantasy game is more than slightly low and a bad idea… it can exist for the populace at large, but the PCs should generally be treated in equal esteem until an individual's actions dictate otherwise) can get away with carrying minor weapons or rapiers in town (that's why that weapon is included as its own entry in the weapon charts, after all), but anything heavier, no way. Referees will have to determine how the authorities detect and deal with such offenses in his campaign.

There can always be exceptions to the general rules of campaign civilization. Frontier towns will not be so restrictive as the populace will be expected to fend for itself. A city ruled by thieves will look different than one ruled by a traditional power structure. There are as many exceptions as can be imagined, but as in all things, the less constant a "standard" is, the less unusual the exceptions will be.

Scarcity

Just because something is in the equipment lists doesn't mean you have to have it in the campaign world. Moreover, just because something exists in the campaign world doesn't mean that it is available everywhere in the world, or that it will be available at the same price in every location.

The Referee is encouraged to develop customized equipment and price lists for different regions of his campaign world.

Fees and Taxes

Fees and taxes are not part of the normal price lists, and are only assumed for the Property rules. If you assume that only landowners pay taxes, it can simplify the game immeasurably, at the expense of realism.

Adding this layer of realism isn't so hard. Just come up with minor fees to use bridges, gates, etc. Adding a percentage to the cost of certain types of goods (certainly weapons and armor, although taxes should never be applied to beginning equipment) is also an easy way to represent general taxation. Windfall taxes (all that treasure that the PCs are carting

around…) are another great means of letting the players know that there are greater authorities in the world, but if you use these taxes you may find that the players spend more time trying to evade taxes than actually adventuring.

LAW AND ORDER

Every authority has a means to enforce its power.

Keep in mind that if using a historical base for a campaign world that the treatment of criminals could be absolutely brutal. Executions, dismemberment and mutilation, branding, and crippling have all been legitimate punishments in history, with civil rights and fair trials being unknown in many times and places.

Guards and watchmen would primarily be 0 level characters, so PCs in many ways outclass them at the start of play. Yet unless under official sanction, most every common adventuring activity will be illegal in civilized lands. If someone dies, *even justifiably beyond any shadow of a doubt* in terms of good-and-bad, the local authorities will be after the perpetrators if they are known. If guardsmen or other authorities are killed, rewards and bounty hunters will come into play. Tomb raiding is most certainly a capital crime.

PCs should respect the power of the law in a campaign, even if this respect just means avoiding notice while engaging in illegal activity, or else the campaign will be entirely about fighting and avoiding the law.

At the same time, players will be perhaps expecting and assuming a more modern, liberal approach to law and order. Any oppressive government by those standards, no matter how "realistic" or "historically accurate" it may be, could derail the focus of the campaign as players rebel against the assault on their freedom. Beware how heavy-handed you are in establishing the laws and their enforcement in your campaign.

Remember that "rights" in a historical context often means in legal terms, "Whatever the authorities declare is right." Not to say that there aren't

fine details within the law or lawyers to argue them, but such things generally concern business and land disputes and other things that concern only the very wealthy.

PCs as Landowners

The retainer charts and equipment lists show that the average person in the campaign world is assumed to not have very much money. Even the starting money that PCs receive puts them in a significantly greater economic position than common folk, even if most of that gets immediately tied up in adventuring equipment. The rules for gaining experience being treasure-based, along with an examination of how much experience characters need to advance even a single level, make it clear that PCs will be accumulating great amounts of money over the course of their adventuring careers.

But what to do with all this money?

Magic-Users have ready uses for their money, as do Clerics to a lesser extent. Others can surely find ways to get rid of piles of cash, such as hiring Retainers and equipping them handsomely. But there will still be large amounts of cash in the hands of the PCs.

A good Referee will make it difficult for PCs to carry massive amounts of gold around with them. Even if they get smart and invest in gems and jewelry to make their money more portable, the risk of carrying great sums of money should always be great. Where to keep it? In a room at the inn? On the horses outside an adventuring location, guarded by retainers of questionable loyalty? Players will protest and complain if you have their belongings robbed without their having a chance to chase down the thief, but at some point it's their own damn fault.

Inns are priced depending on their quality, and lower quality inns should have a markedly higher chance of having customers' rooms robbed. If retainers are left to guard vast sums of money, there should be morale checks to see if they just take the money and run, because that money is surely *years'* worth of pay. And when such theft does happen, it is not

supposed to be an adventure hook. That money (along with whatever other belongings) is just gone. The players will be furious and they will attempt to track and investigate and find their stolen wealth, but barring fantastic means of tracking them down, there is no reason for you to allow them to bring the matter to a satisfactory (for them) conclusion. Not that thieves are completely untraceable, but PCs need to prioritize their time: Do they want to chase thieves to recover old wealth, or do they want to adventure and win new treasure?

Owning property is a great way for PCs to use their money, and the Property rules, along with the Investment rules, are intended to be a solution to the "problem" of characters accumulating hundreds of thousands of gold pieces worth of treasure over the course of their careers. By investing in land, and the attendant retainers, the PCs get to spend some money, have a place to actually put all the money they will recover from adventuring, and generally it helps them to care about the campaign world. Political upheaval and the threat of war will become serious concerns for them as they now have something at stake.

Of course the PCs will still be away from their property and wealth a good deal of the time (this is a game about adventuring, after all), but the risk that absence brings to their wealth shouldn't be so great as it is when they travel with it. At least one member of the staff is likely to be loyal, if the players are intelligent about the money they pay. They can hire guards. And they'll likely have very specific ideas about security when it is clear that they need it.

So "You've been robbed!" becomes a cruel Referee trick in this case, whereas it was once a justified occurrence. Property should be more secure, and players who intelligently approach such things should be rewarded by not having to really worry about it.

Territory Development

The property rules assume that a player is merely buying land and a house, and not attempting to become an actual ruler of an area. If they do want to actually rule land, then things become more complicated. The greater

ruler will want more than taxes, he'll expect military service. If the character was not properly granted lands and a title from the ruling monarch, there will be political upheaval and the rival local nobles will surely be greatly offended by the establishment of a new domain, and the monarch will likely be unhappy as well. War may be a result.

If a PC wants to become an actual sovereign ruler, thereby no longer paying taxes according to the rules, then he has a problem. In a civilized area, such an action will surely bring war, and a king will bring all necessary force to bear to crush such a rebel. In the trackless wilderness, this will not be a problem, but a ruler without subjects isn't much of a ruler at all.

A land without its ruler suffers, and becoming a ruler should effectively end a character's career as an adventurer. If the player thought it was unfair that his room at the inn was getting robbed, just wait until he learns firsthand what political corruption will do to his treasury if he's spending any appreciable amount of his time in unexplored wilderness or in deep dungeons instead of actively ruling his land.

Interactions of Different Cultures

People fear things different from them, and in worlds with poor education, slow communication, and a very real supernatural presence, xenophobia and all the superstition in the world become the default state amongst the people of the world.

Those speaking the same language and having the same religion may be seen as kindred spirits (and these cultures will share a common history in most cases), and all others are suspect. Merchant and ruling and scholar classes will have a better understanding of the world, although their biases will still be strong.

Foreigners will generally not be trusted, even by those who benefit from their presence. Those of different races will be treated even worse. Look to real world history (and even current events in some areas) where certain classes of people were blamed for bad weather and natural catastrophes

and supernatural phenomena that wasn't real. Imagine how much worse it would be in a world where magic is real.

And some of the accusations may in fact be true.

NPCs

Non Player Characters are every human or demi-human or intelligent being in the world that is not directly controlled by a player. Townsfolk, rulers, soldiers, retainers, bandits, small children, lepers, all of it. Sometimes the definition of NPC overlaps with that of the monster, but if it can communicate with the PCs, for our purposes here it is an NPC.

The Importance of NPCs

NPCs are the element that separates a proper role-playing game from some lesser combat or exploration simulation. Through NPCs a Referee communicates information, conveys the tone of the setting, creates the illusion of reality within the game, and allows the players to display the personalities and quirks of their own characters.

Imagine a game with no towns, no villages, no nations, no factions. No churches, no guilds, no simple farmers, no shopkeepers, no pilgrims, no children. No rival adventurers, no evil villains, no damsels in distress, no despicable spies, no saboteurs.

Boring!

The Role of the NPC

Every NPC has two roles: What he does in the game world when there is no game play involved, and how the NPC interacts with the players.

Sometimes the two roles are identical. The villainous Sheriff of a territory certainly comes into conflict with the PCs as a result of what he's theoretically doing when the PCs are not around, for example.

Sometimes the roles are not identical, but the character is so inconsequential that they might as well be. The woman selling fruit in a market stall certainly has a life beyond selling rations to the PCs, but who cares? Only

a foolish or insane Referee will flesh out the lives of these incidental characters.

Some may say that since outside of their place in the game, meaning outside of their interaction with the PCs, the character is just a figment of the imagination and so none of them need any more detail than that. And that is true, for many games.

But some games are just as much about character and setting as they are adventure and exploration. Sometimes a player will take an unexplained interest in an NPC. Sometimes a Referee, killing time or just for fun, lures a player into caring more about an incidental character that is really unimportant to the matter at hand. At these points such lines of inquiry can be discouraged in favor of moving on to the "real adventure." But the Referee can also create real depth to his campaign by encouraging such things.

An NPC that is a true character would have a full life, if all this was real. Friends, family, hopes, disappointments, habits, hobbies, a personal history. Players interested in exploring the world as if it were real, interested in getting to know the "supporting cast" as if they were real, will be interested in all of this.

There is no need to spend great amounts of time on this. Simply make it all up as you go along, and jot down notes to keep it all straight. Come up with a record-keeping system to keep track of which NPCs you've already named, where they are, and what information you've revealed (or prepared) for them. Players will appreciate seeing familiar faces when they travel through territory they've been to previously. And they may not notice or appreciate it if all of these familiar NPCs have consistent personalities, but they will surely notice if they do not.

Sometimes the detail of certain characters is the adventure!

The trick is to know your players. Some players will be bored to death by this sort of thing. To others, this will be the one thing about role-playing that allows them to enjoy it at all. Most will be somewhere in between,

with their attitudes changing session to session depending on their mood and what other things are happening.

Generating the Stats

NPC stats are the least important part of a character and also the easiest to create.

Do not randomly roll ability scores for most NPCs. Start with 10s across the board for ability scores. The average NPC is average. Then lower below-average stats and raise above-average stats as dictated by the needs of the character.

The vast majority of NPCs in the game world should be 0 level, and this includes rank-and-file soldiers and guardsmen. Zero level characters have d6 hit points, but of course the more physical types should have closer to 6 and more sedentary or sickly types closer to 1. Giving a class and levels to an NPC means that this character is *special*, and requires some thought and detail.

Don't cheat on the scores. A Referee is perfectly capable of just assign a big villain or rival or whoever 18s across the board with maximum possible hit points, but that's crap to do. It's lazy refereeing and a sign that you can't deliver a true challenge without pumped up stats. But you don't want the Ultra-Dangerous Enemy Leader to just be a normal guy.

So a quick rule of thumb: Average NPCs that don't need a name unless a player asks just have average stats. The big important powerful personalities get +3 in modifiers to spread around. Whether this means one 18 giving a +3 modifier, or three 13s for +1 each is up to you. Next-step-down NPCs get +2 in modifiers, and more common "lieutenant" personalities just get a +1. If you want to give more plusses, you then have to assign a minus somewhere.

Quick and easy.

NPC Personalities

An NPC's personality is a separate thing from their role in the game or their profession. There is an old screenwriting exercise: Describe the character without referencing their looks, profession, or motivation. NPCs aren't just there to die, and you never know who might become a recurring NPC in your campaign. You don't need full write-ups for everyone, but just a few one-word notes to riff off of and to keep the characterization consistent from appearance to appearance can go a long way into making your players comfortable about investing importance in an NPC.

Breaking the Rules

Remember that NPCs do not have to be built using the same rules as PCs. If you want a character to have some sort of strange power or ability, then just assign it. However, this sort of thing should be rare, and always an important point of an adventure. The more you give special and unique abilities to NPCs, the more potential there is there that players will find their characters less special. Avoid that.

Monsters

One staple in fantasy and horror fiction and gaming is the monster. From the fire breathing dragon to the werewolf to the fairies to fierce man-eating apes, unnatural creatures are an important part of the proceedings. However, fantasy gaming tends to overuse monsters, turning adventures into a safari.

Less is more. A monster should be the centerpiece of an adventure, a sign that things aren't right. Their presence should be consistent with the setting and the situation, not outside concerns like, "There needs to be a fight here, that would be exciting." When making out-of-game decisions, implement nothing without justifying the results in-game.

And always be conservative. One monster played up as a central focus to an adventure will be more memorable than any of the twenty monsters packing in a forty-room dungeon would be. Once a monster makes an appearance, it won't be so interesting, and definitely not as threatening, as it was the first time. Stretch the use of monsters out over time.

You are in no rush.

In role-playing games, animals are also considered "monsters." So the guard dog, pack of wolves, that grizzly bear, they are all monsters for the purposes of role-playing games. Prehistoric versions of real world monsters may roam your campaign world, and giant versions of natural animals are common in many settings. The giant snake and giant spider are *classics*. Things that could be part of a natural world can be more easily inserted into adventures without disrupting the natural flow of the setting. Still, be conservative with the more beastly examples or "you are attacked by a giant snake!" will quickly become as mundane and about as exciting as, "the housecat hisses at you!"

You will note that unlike almost every role-playing game ever, there is no "stock" list of monsters included with this game. Because monsters should be unnatural and hopefully a little terrifying, using stock examples goes against the purpose of using monsters to begin with. Again, this is

from an in-game perspective. That the players need challenges and fights is understood, but the temptation is always too great to skim through a standard monster list to lazily fill out an adventure. Don't do this. Not ever!

Let the scenario and the setting and the situation decide what monster would be appropriate. Take a moment and think something up for yourself. If you do use established monster books, if something jumps out at you, put it aside and design an adventure around that monster that you find interesting. But don't pull one out simply for the sake of filling out Room 5b on a map. Players can tell when something is inspired and when something is included "just because."

So avoid lazy monster placement and embrace creative monster invention. As a campaign moves along, a Referee should have a notebook of creatures utterly unique to that campaign.

When detailing monsters, there are only a few stats which are essential to their use in the game. Most of the details of a monster such as their appearance, behavior, the things that make them interesting, have nothing to do with statistics or game mechanics. Yet the mechanics are important, especially for combat purposes.

Even creatures you do not intend to use as combatants should still have these stats noted. You never know what players will decide to do, and during a game anything can happen. That benevolent leprechaun that was just there to talk might end up in combat with a pack of wild dogs for all you know.

The essential stats that define monsters:

* **Armor Class** How difficult the monster is to hit. This should relate to how tough the monster's hide is, as well as quickness if that is a factor. There will be a tendency to represent a monster's toughness with AC. Do not do this! Monsters, even those with thick, hard shelled or chitinous skin, should have ACs relatable to characters (the unarmored 12 to plate mail 18) in most cases. Even tough, monstrous

creatures will be hurt by an average man swinging at it, after all, and in this game where only Fighters improve with their attacks, an ever-escalating AC figure for tough monsters will make the rest of a party useless in a fight.

✱ **Hit Dice** This determines how many hit points a monster has (1d8 per Hit Die), how well the monster fights (Attack Bonus +1 per Hit Die), what their saving throw values are (as a Fighter of the same level), and how much experience is gained for defeating it, so this is possibly the most important of the monster's stats. Whereas the hit points of characters represent a variety of factors, for monsters hit points are a measure of physical toughness.

✱ **Movement** This is most easily figured as it relates to humans. 120' is the standard character movement rate, and thinking "half/twice/as as fast as a man" is much easier than figuring out land-speeds and such. The movement rate of monsters can also be used to encourage certain behavior in PCs. By making exceedingly tough monsters slower than an unencumbered character, but faster than a heavily encumbered character, you can encourage players to keep their characters lightly equipped. Monsters can have different methods of movement, such as flight, jumping, swimming, tunneling, etc., each with a different movement rate.

✱ **Number of Attacks** This is simply the number of times a monster can hit in one combat round. Unlike characters, monsters can be assigned multiple attacks. Monsters with distinct methods of attacking, or the ability to damage more than one enemy at once, may have multiple attacks. Multiple attacks increase the deadliness of a creature more than any single other factor, so beware when assigning them.

✱ **Damage per Attack** Each attack needs its own damage information. Keep in mind how much a sword does (1d8), how many hit points an average human has (1d6), and the fact that monsters shouldn't auto-kill people as result of a hit.

✱ **Morale:** Unthinking, fearless monsters should be Morale 12. Cowardly, sniveling creatures should be about 5 or 6. Your "average" fearsome, courageous monster should be about a 9.

✱ **Special Abilities** These are the added abilities that a creature has that allow them to ignore certain rules or give them extra abilities above and beyond simple stats and basic attacks. Camouflage, a poison

attack, fire-breathing, immunity to certain weapons, mind control, flinging mucus which slows the victim down… a monster can do anything you wish the monster to do, but after coming up with the concept you should describe it in terms of how it works in relation to the rules and characters that will come into contact with the creature before it is introduced in play.

Aside from these game stats, everything else about a monster is pure imagination.

But everything is not always made from scratch. Many monsters, unique as they may be, fall into common categories. These categories can be a great shorthand method for eyeballing the general behavior of a monster, as well as suggesting special abilities.

Animals

Many "monsters" in games, literature, and life, are simply animals. They may be fearsome, they may be relentless killers, and in fiction they may be entirely impossible, but they'll conform to animal behaviors. They eat, they breed, they crap. They have territories, patterns of behavior, and generally could be studied in their natural habitat.

This does not make them any less fearsome (think of man-eating sharks, hungry polar bears, or even a rather aggressive guard dog) or bizarre (think of various deep-sea creatures, the platypus, and various insects and their creations). When creating great beasts, whether giant or prehistoric or slightly changed variations on real world beasts, or truly bizarre, unrealistic creatures, thinking of them as animals may help create credibility around the creature as you present them as a (Weird) part of your natural landscape.

As for the capabilities of animals, remember that pound for pound, almost everything is far more deadly and much faster than a human being. A decent ballpark figure for HD and attacks could be:

Weight (in pounds)	Hit Dice	Primary Attack	Secondary Attack
< 100	1	d4	1 point
100	2	d6	d3
250	4	d8	d4
500	6	d10	d6
1,000	8	2d6	d8
2,000	10	2d8	d10
5,000	15	d20	2d6
10,000	20	2d10	2d8

Note that this is not a hard and fast rule. Domesticated herbivores, for instance, should have half the listed Hit Dice and attack capabilities.

Constructs

Constructs are any monsters that are purposefully crafted, assembled, or otherwise created: Frankenstein's monster, the Golem of Prague, empty suits of armor or statues that come to life, that sort of thing. Many will be mindless servants, but others will be fully independent and perhaps even freethinking creatures.

Constructs will often be made out of material other than flesh, and their Armor Class and/or Hit Dice should reflect this. Solid metal would probably be AC 22+, stone 20+, wood 15+, etc.

Humanoids

Humanoids are basically man-like creatures who have a gimmick and are present merely to give PCs intelligent, organized opponents which can be slaughtered wholesale with little reflection, remorse, or consequence.

They're not useless in fantasy gaming, but are nearly always overused. Certainly an abundance of humanoids will detract from any sense of the

Weird that your campaign may generate. Too many commonplace nonhuman societies give the entire campaign an exotic flavor that works against horror and Weirdness. If everything is fantastic, then nothing is.

Whenever you think to introduce a humanoid, just ask yourself, "Why would these not work as humans?" Much of the time it is of the desire to not portray humans of a barbaric bent as savages. Resist this impulse – 19th and early 20th century literature, not to mention the entirety of human history, is full of, shall we say, "racially insensitive" portrayals. Cultures clash in any campaign world even remotely connected to humanity. If your players enjoy such drama (and can handle the disconnect from how "civilized" Westerners behave in the real world), then play it up. If they don't, that's all the more reason for them to go off into the unknown to escape such happenings.

Dwarfs, Elves, and Halflings get a pass from this because the stereotypical examples of each race are generally so ingrained in fantasy fans' brains that their presence is considered normal. But even these should be quite limited within a campaign except when chosen as PCs. Tribalism and distrust will rule the day.

However, there are good answers to the question, "Why would these not work as humans?" and thus good uses of humanoids. The trick is not to stoop to cliché in their presentation, and don't overuse them. Don't make any of the races globe-spanning entities. Localize them. And you don't need an entirely new race every time you change the monster's Hit Dice.

Oozes and Slimes

… and jellies and puddings and molds and all sorts of fun have been part of fantasy gaming and horror films for ages. Sometimes more trap than monster (especially those that are stationary or simply fall on their targets with no further attack capability), slimes are always good for instilling fear in players for their poor characters.

But the "ooze" category can apply to much more than your common everyday man-eating gelatin. Many of the Lovecraftian horrors including

Cthulhu, shoggoths, and the like, could be considered "ooze" creatures in terms of the rules, if not form.

The most important mechanical elements of Oozes and Slimes are their immunities and special attacks. Typically oozes, being made out of sludge, have limited vulnerability to normal physical attacks. Having no internal structure, they can squeeze through the tiniest spaces. They also tend to be highly acidic, eating through a wide variety of materials, including the armor of their victims and weapons used to attack them.

Oozes will tend to have one particular form of attack they are absolutely immune to (say, cold, or heat, or lightning) and/or have strange reactions to, a particular form of attack that they are especially vulnerable to, and perhaps a few attacks that have different effects than usual.

Horrific oozes will have power over the mind. Charm, Confusion, and straight-up mental assaults are all abilities that these amorphous entities have possessed in various literature and gaming sources.

Undead

The undead are, even more than otherworldly demons, the ultimate in transgression and corruption. Even demons are natural inhabitants of *somewhere*, no matter how alien that place might be. The undead simply are an offense.

With this in mind, above all other such consideration for monsters, only use undead in your adventures if there is a reason for undead. The first time that they are used as random combat fodder, their mystique is lost.

Undead traditionally have a number of possible special abilities:

Durable Undead don't feel pain or experience shock. Often, one has to hack them to pieces to stop them at all. This is simulated in various ways. Skeletal undead might only take one point of damage from stabbing/thrusting weapon hits. Another possibility is to have only attacks which do the upper half of their damage potential actually do damage at

all (for example, if a weapon does d6 damage, only damage rolls of 4 – 6 actually affect the creature), as minor wounds are ignored.

Enchanted Even if in physical form, some undead are enchanted creatures and immune to mundane weapons. Magical weapons will hit these types, and usually weapons of another specific material such as wood, silver, cold iron, etc.

Energy Drain The most feared and hated of all undead abilities. On a successful hit in combat, the character simply loses a level of experience with no saving throw. This is supposed to simulate the trauma and terror of being touched by the unliving and the loss of vitality this brings. For those wanting a severe effect that's perhaps equally as bad but doesn't involve losing abilities, try using a permanent CON drain that lowers the victim's CON to the next lowest modifier. For example, if a character with 12 CON is energy-drained (modifier: 0), his CON falls to 8 (modifier -1). Still brutal, but does not involve the loss of gained experience or acquired abilities, and the bookkeeping is easier as well. Alternately, the victim may be aged by some notable amount.

Immunities While most other undead abilities are mix-and-match, this is universal. All undead are immune to magic that affects the mind, and some other magic as well. They are immune to any poisonous or paralytic effect as well. Sleep, Charm, Hold, and Cold spells have no effect on the undead. However, they are susceptible to the Turn Undead spell and Holy Water damages them.

Infectious Certain undead are so infested with disease that they slowly kill those they damage. Those damaged by such undead must making a saving throw or turn into the same type of undead within a set period of time.

Insubstantiality Spirits not bound to bodies may not be able to interact with the physical world. They can walk through walls, are immune to being hit with weapons, etc. It gets worse if the spirit is able to touch the physical world when it wishes, as this means it can touch but can't be

touched. And it gets horrifying if it's also invisible… Magic and magical weapons do affect insubstantial undead.

Invisibility Ghostly undead may not be able to be seen. In some cases this is something the spirit can control, in some cases not. Invisible spirits do not become visible when they attack.

Paralyzation The necromantic touch of the dead sends a paralyzing chill through their victims, and so any successful hit by a monster with this ability paralyzes the victim for a period of time if a saving throw is failed.

The abilities that undead may possess are unlimited, as evidenced by vampire myths around the world and the odd zombies of Lucio Fulci's City of the Living Dead.

Goodman Games publishes the *Random Esoteric Creature Generator for Classic Fantasy Role-Playing Games and Their Modern Simulacra*, written by myself. It's not just a random creature generator, but a massive idea bank for creating your own monsters.

Magic Items

Magic is power, and how that power is distributed will probably define a game more than the actual setting details, activities performed, or even the rules used. Magic in the hands of a character in some ways defines that character, and a character with a surplus of magical capabilities will be as a god walking upon the Earth. In order to preserve the grounded nature of a campaign, the existence of, and access to, magic items must be strictly controlled. Keep magic rare, keep magic unique, and above all, keep magic mysterious.

However, in a fantasy game, and certainly even (especially?) in a Weird fantasy game, there will be magical artifacts present in the game world. When including magic items in an adventure or as part of the activities within the world, simply be sure, even more so than with monsters, that the item in question is justifiable entirely in in-game terms. The details of a magic item should always be conceived in terms that would be applicable to the characters in the game world, as if it was real, with the game mechanics and justification coming after.

Here are some tips and strategies to creating effective, interesting, and *magical* (to players as well as characters) magic items:

✳ *All* magic items are artifacts, unique items of great power, and not mere tools or trinkets or armaments.
✳ Never create a magic item that merely improves game mechanics. No +1 swords, +1 shields, or anything of the sort. Such items are the standard in fantasy gaming, and allow characters to face much greater threats. This seemingly increases the options and scope of the campaign, but this quickly means that the average person, even squads of well-armed 0 level men, are absolutely no bother to PCs. Characters of equal level to the PCs then have to be equipped with equivalent magic items or else they too will be hopelessly outmatched, and at that point your game world is lit up with magic like a Christmas tree. Escalation will be unavoidable. The game rules and the magic spells are built with the assumption that the world at large is mundane, and

magic items are vanishingly rare. Place magical treasure in your campaign accordingly.

✳ Before a magic item is placed in your game, know its history. If you can't be arsed to invent a suitable origin for the thing, and a history of how it came to be in this particular place, then chances are there is no justification for the item to be there. Magic items should never be placed "just because," and magic items should never be treated as standard elements to a game.

✳ Most magic items have no obvious combat or adventuring function, and many will not be portable. Are you placing only magic items that are useful to adventuring types?

✳ Most magic items should be usable only under certain conditions. Perhaps a certain action needs to be taken before the item works (a sacrifice?), only under certain conditions, certain time periods, etc.

✳ Most magic items should have some sort of usage limitation on them, rather than allowing constant use. Whether this be charges, a certain number of uses in a set period of time, or other limitation, is up to you.

✳ Many magic items should have a very specific function, perhaps involving a specific location.

✳ Magic items should have specific methods of activation.

✳ Magic items should have some negative effect to them. Magic is not technology to be used for mortals' gain. It is dangerous and fickle. There should be side effects to its use.

✳ Note that potions, scrolls, and staves and wands, because there are standard generation methods given in the Magic book, can be more liberally placed.

✳ Note that Dispel Magic can permanently disenchant items in this game. Enemy casters will be well aware of the transitory nature of magic in the world, and will act accordingly, both in aggressively attacking their enemies' items, and in protecting their own.

Possible magic item forms (and note that function does not at all have to follow form, or be at all related to it…):

Abacus	Bench	Cap
Acorn	Beret	Cape
Amulet	Berry	Caravel
Anchor	Bill-Guisarme	Carpet
Ankh	Blanket	Carriage
Anklet	Blouse	Cart
Antenna	Blowpipe	Carving
Anvil	Bone	Carving/Etching
Apple	Bonnet	Castanets
Apron	Book	Catapult
Arm	Boots	Cauldron
Armor	Bottle	Cello
Arrow	Bow	Censer
Astrolabe	Bowl	Cestus
Awl	Box	Chain
Backpack	Bracelet	Chair
Badge	Bracers	Chariot
Bagpipes	Brass Knuckles	Chest
Balance Scale	Brassiere	Chimes
Ball	Brazier	Choker
Ballista	Breeches	Circlet
Balloon	Brooch	Clasp
Balm	Broom	Cloak
Banner	Brush	Clothes Rack
Bardiche	Bucket	Coat
Barge	Buckle	Coffin
Barrel	Bugle	Coin
Basket	Building	Cot
Bass	Bullet	Crate
Battering Ram	Button	Cream
Battle Axe	Cabinet	Crossbow
Beacon	Cage	Crowbar
Beaker	Campfire	Crown
Bed	Can	Crystal
Bell	Candle	Crystal Ball
Bellows	Cane	Cube
Belt	Canoe/Rowboat	Cup

Curtains	Gem	Jug
Cymbal	Girdle	Kayak
Dagger	Glaive	Key
Dart	Glaive-Guisarme	Kilt
Deck of Cards	Gloves	Kite
Desk	Goblet	Knife
Diaper	Gong	Ladder
Dice	Gown	Lance
Disc	Guisarme	Lantern
Door	Guisarme-Voulge	Lasso
Drawing	Halberd	Lens
Dress	Hammer	Liquid
Drum	Hammer, War	Lock
Dust	Hammock	Locket
Earring	Hand	Longship
Egg	Hand Axe	Lucern Hammer
Elixir	Handkerchief	Lute
Eye	Harp (Hand/Floor)	Mace
Fan	Harpsichord	Machine
Fauchard	Hat, Formal	Magic Circle
Feedbag	Hat, Stovepipe	Mantle
Figurehead	Hat, Wide Brimmed	Marble
Figurine	Head	Mask
Finger	Helm (Pot/Great)	Mast
Flail	Holy Symbol	Medal/Medallion
Flask	Hookah	Military Pick
Floating Stone	Horn	Mirror
Flower	Horseshoes	Miscellaneous Piercing
Flute	Hose	Mittens
Foot	Hourglass	Moccasins
Footstool	Incense	Monocle
Forge	Ink	Morning Star
Fork	Inkwell	Mug
Fountain	Jacket	Muzzle
Galleon	Jar	Nail
Gauntlets	Javelin	Necklace
Gel	Jerkin	Needle

Net	Rickshaw	Spoon
Oar	Ring	Stairs
Oil	Robe	Statue
Orb	Rope	Stockings
Painting	Rudder	Stone
Pan Pipes	Ruff	String
Pants	Sack	Stuffed Animal
Parka	Saddle	Sundial
Partisan	Saddlebag	Suspenders
Peg Leg	Sandals	Sword, Long
Perfume	Sarcophagus	Sword, Short
Phylactery	Sash	Sword, Two-Handed
Pigments	Saw	Table
Pike	Scarab	Tablet
Pill	Scarf	Tambourine
Pin	Scepter	Tapestry
Pipe	Screen	Tent
Pipe Organ	Scroll	Thread
Plate	Scythe	Tiara
Plectrum	Seeds	Toe Ring
Pole	Shell	Tooth
Poncho	Shelving	Torch
Pot	Shirt	Trebuchet
Pouch	Skirt	Tree
Powder	Skull	Triangle
Powder/Dust	Skullcap	Trident
Prism	Sled	Tub
Purse	Sledge	Tuba
Pyramid	Sleeping Bag	Turban
Quarrel	Sling	Urn
Quarterstaff	Slippers	Vest
Quill	Snowshoes	Vial
Rack	Soap	Violin
Raft	Sofa	Voulge
Rake	Spade	Wagon
Ranseur	Spear	Wall
Rattle	Spetum	Waterskin

Wax	Whistle	Xylophone
Wheel	Window	Yoke
Whip	Wing	

Other Topics

Gathering Players

Contact gamers that you know, and ask your non-gamer friends if they'd like to play.

A lot of gamers know other gamers already. A lot of gamers even have friends. Present the game and the time for game play you've decided to them.

Some of them might say "Well, I'd love to play, but I'm free on this day, not that one." If several people say the same thing, and that other day is good for you, consider changing it.

Ask your friends to join your game. ALL of them. Even people you don't know all that well. Co-workers. Classmates. One of the worst things people can do is only game with close friends. This often cripples one's ability to find a game, as if these certain other people don't want to game, that's it. Branch out. New people bring new perspectives and new challenges and every good role-player will welcome such things. Don't drop old friends over gaming (did that even need to be said?), but if they are getting in the way of your gaming, you need new *gaming* friends.

Role-playing historically has a poor reputation in some quarters, but this needs to be forgotten. When asking the acquaintances, don't act ashamed of gaming by doing things like cornering "certain" people away from everyone else. Be plain and don't do anything to suggest that what you're asking is odd or socially awkward. Just ask. If someone says no, that's that. If someone is rude in response to you, then that should tell you what you need to know about that person.

One important point: if someone says "I might be able to show up now and again," don't count on him showing up at all.

So maybe you've got some people that want to play. Maybe you don't. Maybe you just moved to a new area and don't know anyone, much less

gamers. Not a problem. In fact, it may be preferable. It's always good to meet new people that have something in common with you.

Advertise Your Game

If you do not personally know enough people interested in your game, you have to advertise the fact that you will be running a game. The cheapest way to advertise for new players is to make a flyer.

Flyers need to have a few vital pieces of information on them: The game to be played, when and where it will be played, contact information, and most importantly, a flashy picture. The importance of listing the time to be played on the flyer can not be underestimated. You can waste a lot of time dealing with people that want to play but are only available at times you are unavailable, and even time coordinating with people that do have compatible schedules can be saved by just putting possible times on the flyer.

Flyers can be constructed using a computer, but it doesn't require high-tech know-how. Just cut and paste something together if you must. Just make sure there is something about your flyer that stands out – whether the paper it's printed on is bright and eye-catching, or use a spectacular piece of art. Print a bunch at home or run down to your local copy shop and get 20 copies run off. Make tear-away tabs with your contact information (email and/or phone number). Don't forget to cut the tabs before placing the flyer, and always tear a tab or two off before hanging them up, as that gives the idea that there is interest.

Now you've got the flyer, put them everywhere!

Do you have a local game store? Put a flyer there, of course. Comic book shops might be a good place for the fantasy-inclined. General hobby shops, even if they have no other gaming material, are excellent for finding people. Bookstores often have bulletin boards, and that's always a good bet. Libraries! If grocery stores or convenience stores in your area have bulletin boards, use them! Also post flyers in those areas where people post flyers and posters for upcoming concerts, and on school or office

community boards. If there's a bulletin board that you know about, get a flyer up on it. However, make sure not to be a nuisance to the community. Don't post your flyer where it would *not* be welcome.

Note that while some places may be better for snagging gamer-types (bookstores and comics stores), you're not looking specifically for *gamers*. You're looking for people who might be interested in *playing in your game*.

Unless you live in a sparsely populated village, you're going to get responses. This works.

There are other methods for recruiting for your game. Many internet sites, both general interest and role-playing specific, have virtual bulletin boards. Don't just make a text posting on such a site! If possible, post a graphic of your flyer so it grabs interest.
The local newspaper likely runs classified ads, and most communities have free advertising circulars as well. These options might cost a little bit of money, but not so much, and there are times when you have to go the extra mile to get a game together.

Screening Potential Players

Once people start contacting you, you'll want to start arranging meetings. Go out for a drink or something. Kind of like a date. In fact, the goal is the same as a date, but perhaps with less at stake. You're attempting to see if this person is compatible with your ideas for a fun time. Gathering a group of complete strangers together and expecting everything to go smoothly is rather optimistic. Be sure to do this screening somewhere other than your home. Neutral territory is always good for meeting new people, especially when the entire point is to figure out if you want to be around them at all.

No, this isn't perfect, and no, you won't screen out all the complete freaks. In fact, your house may be full of weird people if everything works out. Role-players tend to be a creative, idiosyncratic bunch. Putting aside your personal prejudices would be recommended. You're not looking for people

that you want to be "friends" with - that's nice if it happens, but what you're looking for here are people that you can game with, and this screening is just a way to make a basic effort to find out if these people are idiots. What you're basically looking for is a person that can be respectful around strangers. Who cares what religion they are, as long as they aren't going to go all Biblical (or blasphemous) at the game table. If someone doesn't bathe (you know, *that* stereotype), best to find out before gathering your players. Come up with a few conversational cues that will bring up a few sensitive things. If someone is homophobic or racist or sexist, you want to find that out before exposing a group of strangers (who may include women, gays, or ethnic minorities) to them – that will kill a group before it gets started.

Also talk about your gaming goals - a completely reasonable, pleasant, respectful person could still be a complete disaster and drain on your game if he's showing up with one thing in mind and you're presenting quite a different thing in your game. Do talk about what games you've played, what problems you've had at the game table in the past and how you've resolved them. See what experiences like that this other person has had. Find out how committed they're willing to be about the game and what potential responsibilities they would have that could pop up from time to time on game day.

This step is a fair bit of work, but you'll be seeing a lot of this person if they join your group, and if you're shy about meeting and talking to them, what kind of Referee are you going to be? It's a job that really doesn't work with shy people with no people skills.

Do not have a strict idea of who you want to be answering your ads. You might get the unemployed, the underage, and the disabled. You might get people that have never role-played before and have no real idea what it is. Be patient with them all, and don't immediately dismiss people without actually talking to them.

With enough responses, it is guaranteed you're going to get a completely unsuitable freak or two, but you'll also have a good pool of promising

players to work with. And because you were up-front about game-day on your flyer, it's even a pool that can show up to game with you.

If the number of appropriate people are equal to or less than the maximum size you've decided for your group, then great! You can go to the next step! If you have attracted more interested people than you want to have in your group, you're going to have to make decisions of who to not invite to the game. Do contact the people that you do not select, don't just ignore them or not let them know. If it's someone you'd be interested in gaming with if not for group capacity issues, do let them know and do be ready to contact them when a chair becomes free at your table. Reasonable people will understand, unreasonable people you don't want around anyway, and if you connect up to a larger gamer community around you, you can get a bit of a good reputation if you have a "waiting list" of people wanting to get into your game.

Start Playing

Once the group is assembled, there's nothing left to do but begin play. Consider the first couple of games to be "test" games. If there needs to be adjustments made to the group (remember, groups of strangers won't always get along), do so. And once the issues are cleared up, you are on your way to many years of good gaming, and hopefully many years of new friendships.

This is all a fair amount of work, but then so is conducting a role-playing campaign. If you want to play and there's no obvious pool of players, you are going to have to make an effort. Everything in this world requires effort, but few things pay off in the end like making that effort for something you do for no reason other than enjoying it. It is important to never cancel the game if you can help it. There will be games when people don't show up, or too few people to continue the regular game. Have a variety of card and board games (gamer related rather than mass-market stuff if you can find it) just to help establish that "This day is game day," to establish attendance habits from the people that can be there every session. Those people are the core of your group and you do not want to

give them a reason to think they should always have other plans in case the game is canceled again.

Make the game area as pleasant as possible. Be a good host. Clean the place up. Bake fresh bread or rolls for the group. It's a simple and inexpensive thing to do and if your group is filled with younger people or single guys, home-cooked anything will impress them to no end.

Yes, the assumption is the game location will be at the Referee's house, but even if that's not the case the Referee is still the group leader and he should act as a host wherever the game is played. If a player (or two) doesn't show up, the game goes on. If the Referee doesn't show up, there is a big problem.

Handling Troublesome Players

Role-playing gaming is a social hobby, requiring at the very least a mutual understanding that everyone present will do what they can to maintain respect at the table. However, there will be times when people simply don't get along.

The Referee has to listen to his players, for without them there is no game. If one player is making the rest miserable, he must either change his behavior, or he must be removed from the game. If there is an irreconcilable split of opinion among the group as a whole, then the Referee must decide which group he prefers to play with and side with them.

Communication and compromise is best when it works, but this hobby invites a strong investment in it. Approaches and attitudes can't always co-exist. Referees should do what they have to do in order to keep the peace and continue gaming.

And by all means, if players are in agreement that the game is suffering because of the Referee, they are well within their rights to remove the Referee from his post.

Alignment

In all honesty, Alignment in this game is purely a game construct to allow certain spells to operate in a traditional manner. The meaning of "Law, Neutrality, and Chaos" is intentionally vague, and not much in the way of explanation is given for what exactly Law means.

So it is not necessary to worry about it any more than "Chaotic is for magical beings, Neutrality is for normal beings." If you want to involve Alignment in your cosmology, it is recommended that you read the works of Michael Moorcock and Poul Anderson, as the basic ideas of Alignment were originally taken from their works.

Replacement Characters

Characters will die. It is part of the game. In terms of including the player, a new character should be immediately created and the Referee has a responsibility to get that character into the game quickly. Even if there is no convenient in-game explanation for it, the Referee has to get the new character into the mix.

But there are other issues to consider. Do all new characters start at level 1 with zero XP? If so, how do you handle parties with great level disparities? If the group is all 5th – 6th level, for instance, it will be difficult to replace a fallen character and have a first level character be able to contribute equally.

At the same time, there should be a reward in-game for survival. Just handing over a new character an equal level to those who didn't manage to die seems a little unfair. There are several ways to work things so that the new character isn't so far behind the party while at the same time penalizing character death in the game so it is desirable to avoid.

* New characters start with half the XP of the deceased character
* The new character starts at a level equivalent to half the amount of XP the deceased character had, but starts with 0 XP.

✸ The player takes control of one of his deceased character's henchmen instead of starting over at first level

The details of your policy dealing with replacement characters is not so important as long as you actually have one and communicate that policy to the players at the start of the campaign. It may affect how they play their characters.

Excellence in Gaming

As the first words in this book said, this work is merely one possible set of procedures, with infinite other possibilities available to you. Following the advice in this book may help you run a good game. But because styles are so unique, the advice in this book may hinder your ability produce the best game possible.

Excellence in gaming goes beyond casual enjoyment of the game. It requires a greater commitment to the game, and requires greater time and effort than just casual playing. This focus is not for everyone, but many people find it quite rewarding.

To start your journey, you simply need to play. When you want to take that next step, you need to step back and examine your gaming.

"Ask Yourself Why"

Role-playing games give a Referee unlimited opportunities. The Referee can literally do anything within the context of the game. However, indulging one's every whim is not to the advantage of the individual. Discipline and focus are the keys to excellent gaming.

But sometimes the temptation to follow the muse is indeed overwhelming. Strange ideas, perhaps inspired by a movie or odd item in the news, demands to be included in the game. This keeps the creative process of managing a campaign fun rather than work, so it should not be discouraged. But sacrificing the integrity of a campaign for the sake of a passing

fancy is not worth it. Many campaigns have been tanked as a result of, "I have a great idea!"

Whenever you have an idea that you want to put in the game that at first seems out of sorts, just ask yourself "Why?" Not in real world terms, but in game world terms. "Why is this here? Why is this happening? Why? Why? Why?" As long as you can invent answers that fit into the grand scheme of the campaign, then whatever it is cannot hurt the campaign simply by its presence. Each answer to "Why?" may trigger more questions as more elements are brought into the discussion. Follow those tracks. As soon as you can not reasonably invent reasons why something or other makes sense in the milieu you have created, you know to stop asking why and to begin removing elements of your idea.

Say you want to introduce a kingdom that has flying airships without having flying airships be a regular part of the entire campaign world, with citizens of the kingdom using them the way others travel by sea. If this one kingdom has them, why don't others? Why hasn't one been captured and studied to learn the secret of air travel? Why hasn't anyone involved in their construction sold the secrets to their construction or defected to a foreign power or allied himself with a would-be ruler? Whether the airship is magical or technological in nature, these would be concerns. OK, say that the secret of their making has been lost – some ancient knowledge or magical process that nobody can figure out anymore (and for some reason can't be divined from studying one of the remaining ships). If the ships are limited in number, why would they be used for shipping and transportation and not strictly reserved for military use? Hmm, perhaps the ships are extremely fragile, with any real amount of damage causing them to lose flight capabilities, so they have little military value and no use for pirates who would use them to plunder. So why were these ships restricted to just this one kingdom or area back in the days when they were able to be built? Surely isolation wouldn't be an issue for a people building flying ships. Obviously the people using them now aren't of the same civilization that originally built them, which helps explain why they can't build anymore. And because these ships are fragile, overland travel is too risky, and therefore the ships are only used in this one area well within the settled and calm areas well within their borders.

Because It's Fun!/Cool!/Awesome!

Players always want to test to see what they can get away with. It's natural, as this game advertises that player skill matters. It's only natural that they would want to see exactly where their limits are. It is these limits that will define the tone of your entire campaign.

This most often becomes an issue during combat. Because combat is abstractly resolved using "to-hit rolls" and "hit points" which do not represent exact blows and wounds, any sort of narration can be attached to the mechanics. Players, influenced by all sorts of media, may try a variety of stunts, ranging from attacking multiple foes and other rules-disallowed maneuvers to pure spectacle, wishing to do flips and acrobatics (while in armor) during fights. There is no right or wrong answer how to handle this, but there is this:

Define the tone of the campaign and communicate this tone to the players before play begins. Then when a player wants to do something against the tone of the game, you can say "no" with extreme prejudice.

You are presenting a world for the players to explore, not a theme park to amuse them. Only you can know where the dividing line is between those two in your own campaign, so be sure you do know it.

Because the Players Like It!

This is the worst reason on Earth to include something in your campaign. A Referee is not a monkey that dances for the benefit of his players. It is very important for players to enjoy playing in a Referee's campaign, else the Referee will have no players, but that enjoyment should not dominate all other considerations in making decisions for the campaign.

Of course nothing should be done at the players' expense (although this can be difficult to judge when one prime Referee duty is to provide challenges, obstacles, and opponents for the characters), and the best things are those which both fit seamlessly into a campaign and are greatly

enjoyed by players, but this will not always happen. Sometimes the players will pursue courses of action which do not at all interest the Referee, but he must remain impartial as he runs these parts of the game. And so does the pendulum swing the other way, and things will happen in the campaign which the players may find dull or disagreeable. The Referee must be aware of such things and do everything possible to move the game past this point, but not to the degree that such things are omitted entirely if there was a logical and valid lead-in to the undesired situation.

A campaign may be meaningless without people to play in it, but a campaign is bigger than anyone playing in it currently. It is easier to find new players than it is to resurrect interest in an idea that has been poisoned by bad decisions. Your first duty as a Referee, over and above the enjoyment of your players, is to protect your campaign, as that is the very foundation of what you have to contribute to any gaming group.

Fun

The purpose of games is, ultimately, to have fun. But worrying about the "fun" of any particular detail of the game is the surest way to suck the fun right out of it. When preparing an adventure or a campaign, when running a game, don't worry about "fun." Never ask if something is "fun."

Worry about whether it's *good*. Worry about whether it's *interesting*. Worry if it advances the ideas you have about your campaign.

A well-run, interesting campaign will provide unlimited hours of fun for all involved. A campaign expressly designed to provide the most "fun" will likely succeed for only a certain value of "fun."

Don't micro-manage the fun right out of your game.

What Else is Out There?

Weird Fantasy Role-Playing is merely a variation on a series of games that have been released beginning in 1974. Therefore, LotFP Weird Fantasy Role-Playing is unofficially, but fully, compatible with a wide variety of games. In fact, retaining compatibility was one of the highest priorities when creating the unique elements of this game.

These games are often called "Old School" or "Traditional" games, because the underlying "engine" has remained unchanged for over 30 years. In the past several years, the release of games based on the older, out of print games, using the Open Game License, have given individuals the opportunity to share and publish versions and supplements for the game, legally and legitimately. This simultaneously fed off of and inspired enthusiasm for these games, and it is this resurgence that has inspired and allowed Weird Fantasy Role-Playing to be conceived, written, and published. This game is a hopefully unique twist on something that others have developed.

This allows you to use an amazing library of gaming adventures and supplements in your LotFP games. This also allows you to easily bring ideas that you like from Weird Fantasy Role-Playing into other games and vice versa without greatly changing the entire game.

Compatibility Issues

All of these games are similar enough to be cross-compatible, but each one has its own quirks and small differences that can trip a Referee up if he's not paying attention.

General Concerns

Most of the differences between Weird Fantasy Role-Playing and similar games are in the process of play. Encumbrance, spell casting, saving throws, initiative, and so much more are different than other games, sometimes to the point where entire subsystems have been completely replaced. However, this causes no compatibility problems. Simply use

the Weird Fantasy Role-Playing rules and adventures will not suffer for it.

When it comes to defining characteristics of characters and monsters, there are true concerns.

For example, many other games impose restrictions on certain classes concerning what weapons and/or armor they are allowed to use. Weird Fantasy Role-Playing has no restrictions, but this should not be a problem. Simply use characters in published sources as described, but if circumstances allow it and it makes sense to do so, they will upgrade their equipment.

Alignment

Other games use Alignment as a morality marker separating the good guys and the bad guys. When using other games' material, consider any Magic-Users or those showing innate magic powers or coming from other planes of existence to be Chaotic, and all others to be Neutral unless there is a clear case for the creature in question to be Lawful.

When converting Weird Fantasy Role-Playing material to other games, be aware that there are two ways these games measure alignment.

Some games use the same three alignments that this game does, but Lawful, Chaotic, and Neutral have different meanings. Lawful means The Good Guys, Chaotic means The Bad Guys, and Neutral means Doesn't Much Care About Good Guys and Bad Guys.

Other games use a nine-alignment system: Lawful Good, Lawful Neutral, Lawful Evil, Chaotic Good, Chaotic Neutral, Chaotic Evil, Neutral Good, Neutral Evil, Neutral. This is more of a specific morality system, so check against the specific definitions of these alignments in the game's rule book and assign an alignment based on the character's known traits.

Saving Throws

No game in this little family seems to use the same saving throw categories, and at least one has gotten rid of multiple categories altogether in favor of a single saving throw score. When an adventure or supplement written for one of these other games calls for a saving throw, instead of using their categories, determine which category the situation would fall under using the Weird Fantasy Role-Playing rules.

Clerics

In Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, Turn Undead is a spell. In other games, Turn Undead is an innate ability that Clerics possess. When Clerics appear in supplements and adventures published by other companies, simply review whether there is a need for the Cleric to have Turn Undead at the time they are encountered. If there is, simply swap out a first level spell for Turn Undead.

Thieves and Specialists

The Specialist class is a unique creation of Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, and does not appear in any similar games. However, it is based almost directly on the Thief class which does appear in various games. It is also sometimes called a Rogue.

Several common abilities in other games have been modified somewhat for Weird Fantasy Role-Playing. Sleight of Hand replaces what is commonly called Pick Pockets, Stealth replaces both Hide in Shadows and Move Silently, and Tinkering replaces Open Locks.

Unlike those versions of the Thief, which use percentile-based skills, Specialist skills are d6 based. If percentages are given in a stat block, conversion is easy.

* Remember that a 6 in 6 skill still requires die rolling, and a double 6 still fails.

1 in 6	16 2/3%
2 in 6	33 1/3%
3 in 6	50%
4 in 6	66 2/3%
5 in 6	83 1/3%
6 in 6*	97.22%

Other games follow a steady progression rather than allowing a Specialist to customize their skills. Use the following table for a rough conversion of an assumed Thief/Specialist skill spread:

Level	Climbing	Find Traps	Languages	Sleight of Hand	Sneak Attack	Stealth	Tinkering
1	5 in 6	1 in 6	1 in 6	2 in 6	x2	1 in 6	2 in 6
2	5 in 6	1 in 6	1 in 6	2 in 6	x2	1 in 6	2 in 6
3	5 in 6	2 in 6	1 in 6	2 in 6	x2	1 in 6	2 in 6
4	5 in 6	2 in 6	1 in 6	2 in 6	x2	2 in 6	2 in 6
5	5 in 6	2 in 6	1 in 6	2 in 6	x3	2 in 6	2 in 6
6	6 in 6	2 in 6	2 in 6	3 in 6	x3	2 in 6	3 in 6
7	6 in 6	3 in 6	2 in 6	3 in 6	x3	3 in 6	3 in 6
8	6 in 6	3 in 6	2 in 6	3 in 6	x3	3 in 6	3 in 6
9	6 in 6	3 in 6	2 in 6	3 in 6	x4	3 in 6	3 in 6
10	6 in 6	3 in 6	2 in 6	4 in 6	x4	4 in 6	4 in 6
11	6 in 6	4 in 6	3 in 6	4 in 6	x4	4 in 6	4 in 6

Race vs Class vs Multiclass

Some games which are otherwise quite similar to Weird Fantasy Role-Playing use separate races and classes. So instead of being just a Dwarf, a character can be a Dwarf Cleric, or Dwarf Thief, for instance. When encountering this sort of thing, simply combine all the special abilities of both the race and class in Weird Fantasy Role-Playing terms.

Some other games also allow characters to be more than one class at a time. Again, just combine all the abilities of the race and classes.

It should be noted that Weird Fantasy Role-Playing uses the most simplified format for race and class purposefully. It allows the quickest character creation, promotes the idea that humans are the dominant race in a campaign, and helps take the focus of the game away from where it

doesn't belong ("What can my character do?") and places it where it belongs ("What is my character doing?").

Odd Classes and Races

"Advanced" or "First Edition" games will have all sorts of added classes: Rangers, Assassins, Paladins, Druids, Illusionists, and Monks most commonly. Bards, Cavaliers or Knights, and Barbarians are also common sights.

Simply treat Barbarians, Cavaliers, Knights, Paladins, and Rangers as Fighters. Assassins and Bards are Specialists. If the adventure or supplement text mentions specific powers that these classes might have in other games, just grant it to the particular NPC. They don't have to follow all the same rules as PCs, after all.

Druids, Illusionists, and Monks are more difficult to convert. The quickest solution would be to say that Druids simply become Clerics and Illusionists become Magic-Users, but it is not so simple. Druids and Illusionists have their own unique spell lists, and even though many traditional Illusionist spells have been brought into the Magic-User spell list in Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, an Illusionist character presented in an adventure or supplement will probably have many spells that aren't in the rules here. The Druid is an even worse case, as few of their spells have been brought over into the Cleric spell lists here.

Monks are an anomaly even in the games that originally presented them, with a great list of special abilities unique to them. If all else fails, simply call them Fighters who are able to inflict Minor, Medium, or Large weapon damage with their bare hands at levels 4, 7, and 10 respectively.

If you have easy access to the original game texts that these classes come from, you can of course run them as originally intended.

Additional races are easier to convert. All Elf sub-races become plain Elves for rules purposes, Dwarf sub-races become simple Dwarfs. Gnomes can be considered Halflings, and Half-Orcs become humans.

These changes are merely in rules terms; they can remain as Gnomes or Half-Orcs or whatever in terms of the campaign world.

Spells

Different games use different spell lists. They all look similar and do similar things, but none are identical to any of the others, in names or effects. For spells that have the same names as those in Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, or nearly so, simply use the description in these rules.

Spell progressions are another area where different games are all slightly different. You could alter the listed prepared spells in adventures and supplements to match Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, but it is often easier just to leave them as they are, not worrying if they can cast a spell less here or one more there. Do the same thing if a spell is listed at a different level in material published for another game – just use it as it is, that one time it's used there.

If a spell appears on a list of prepared spells for a monster or NPC in a published adventure or supplement that is not in these rules, you have three choices. Change the spell to one in these rules, reference the spell details from the original source, or just make up details about the spell according to its name.

Remember that spells on Magic-User scrolls or in spellbooks may well become a regular part of your campaign, so consider that when deciding how to handle these spells.

Magic Items

Other game systems have standardized magical item lists and it is expected that characters will gain useful magical items almost from their very first adventures. This is contrary to the recommended state of things in Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, and it is here that most adventures not written specifically for Weird Fantasy Role-Playing need to be edited. Most combat-ready magical items, including armor, weapons, rings, cloaks, etc., should simply be deemed non-magical. Go ahead and make them

ornately decorated examples and thus valuable as treasure, but try to avoid including things in your adventures that inflate AC and chances to hit and damage. Some such items are integral to the plot or situation in the adventures or supplements and can not be completely disregarded, but they should be saddled with appropriate drawbacks to put them more in line with the Weird Fantasy Role-Playing outlook.

One-use magic items can probably be left alone, because at most they can upset the balance of one encounter or situation. Items with a limited number of uses, such as staves or wands, a somewhat more problematic but in general will not destroy a game so long as there are not a steady stream of such items being introduced.

Permanent items without direct combat applications are much more difficult. Some of them are quite Weird, but all effectively give super powers to a character, often without much in the way of penalties. Putting limits on these sorts of items before introducing them into play would be one solution, or substituting monetary treasure instead would be another.

In all cases, because Weird Fantasy Role-Playing does not describe stock magic items, the Referee will have to make a judgment call about what these items can do. Items that duplicate spell effects are easy enough to judge. However, when confronted by an item that is not so easily converted, the Referee may choose to consult the original text of the game the supplement was specifically written for, or simply make up an effect based on the name of the item, which does not necessarily have to resemble the "correct" function of the item at all.

Unlike its effect in other games, Dispel Magic is able to permanently disenchant magic items in Weird Fantasy Role-Playing. However, players become attached to their magic items, and often come to identify them as integral parts of a character, and may be offended by the use of a spell to take away their character's special thingy. Referees shouldn't hesitate to do so when it in fact makes sense for the situation, but intentionally setting up an adventure or encounter for the purpose of getting rid of PC items should be considered bad form.

Monsters

All other games have standard bestiaries. This is usually not a problem, as adventures and supplements you might use with Weird Fantasy Role-Playing give stat blocks. In most cases, it is only AC that needs to be converted at all.

Of course, since most of these games do use standard bestiaries, the majority of the monsters listed will be standard and by-the-book, and that's not very Weird. Take a few minutes to create new descriptions of these creatures so they do not seem familiar to your players. It is not necessary to change the actual statistics.

Because some of these monsters are so standardized, in some instances there are no stat blocks. You can either reference the rules the module or supplement is specifically designed for, or simply make up the stats yourself.

Armor

Cross-compatible games generally have their own Armor Class schemes. Most are similar enough to simply ignore the differences during play, but for one factor: The most traditional of these games use a descending Armor Class. That is, AC uses smaller numbers to represent better armor.

Below is a handy conversion chart, using Leather, Chain, and Plate armor AC values for reference.

High level characters and powerful monsters in other systems tend to have inflated ACs. When using such characters and monsters under the Weird Fantasy Role-Playing system, simply adjust the statistics to more sane levels.

Also keep in mind that in the other systems, shields do not give an extra bonus against missile fire so that must be taken into account.

Weird Fantasy Role-Playing	0e / S&W Desc. AC	S&W Asc. AC	Basic Fantasy RPG	Labyrinth Lord	1e OSRIC
12	9	10	11	9	10
13	8	11	12		9
14	7	12	13	8	8
15	6	13	14	7	7
16	5	14	15	5	5
17	4	15	16	4	4
18	3	16	17	3	3
19	2	17	18	2	2
20	1	18	19	1	1
21	0	19	20	0	0
22	-1	20	21	-1	-1
23	-2	21	22	-2	-2
24	-3	22	23	-3	-3
25	-4	23	24	-4	-4
26	-5	24	25	-5	-5
27	-6	25	26	-6	-6

Companies Making Adventures and Supplements for Traditional RPGs

Over the past several years, there has been a Renaissance of interest in both playing and publishing for the family of games that Weird Fantasy Role-Playing now joins. LotFP will continue to support these games as well as its own with future adventure releases.

It should be noted that none of these companies at the time of this writing are making material specifically for Weird Fantasy Role-Playing. Many are supporting their own game lines, but because these game lines have the same lineage (and are based on the same Open Game Content that Weird Fantasy Role-Playing uses), the material can be used more or less

interchangeably with this game, and all material published under the Lamentations of the Flame Princess banner can be used with these games. Mix and match, use what most appeals to you and jettison the rest, no matter what label they are published under.

Here is a partial list of companies releasing high quality material. There are also an almost infinite number of hobbyists releasing material, both for money and for free, physical print and pdf, and there is really a limitless amount of original and new game material to be found on message boards and blogs.

Basic Fantasy Role-Playing Game
Before developing Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, BFRPG was my game of choice. In addition to a simple, yet comprehensive rules set, there are a variety of adventures and supplements available for use with it detailing new spells, monsters, classes, and more.
www.basicfantasy.org

Brave Halfling Publishing
Brave Halfling publishes Swords & Wizardry Whitebox, an even simpler version of the Swords & Wizardry game (including releasing it as a boxed set!), as well as support material and adventures for Labyrinth Lord.
http://bravehalfling.com/

Expeditious Retreat Press
This company publishes a series of Advanced Adventures using the OSRIC rules (essentially First Edition) which are readily compatible with all of the games described here, as well as the monster book Malevolent and Benign for these games. Their Magical Society series might be of interest for ideas in putting together a campaign world.
www.xrpshop.citymax.com

Fight On! Magazine
Fight On! calls itself "A fanzine for the Old School Renaissance." It is a freewheeling, wildly adventurous magazine that just packs infectious enthusiasm for our form of gaming. Highly recommended!
www.fightonmagazine.com

Goblinoid Games
Labyrinth Lord is the closest game currently available rules-wise to Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, yet promoting a more high-fantasy feel. They have published extensive rules options, adventures, supplements, and play aids to support their game. Goblinoid Games also publishes a post-apocalyptic science fantasy game Mutant Future, which is compatible with all of the games listed here and has unique rules for mutations and technological experimentation. (Labyrinth Lord and Mutant Future are trademarks of Daniel Proctor.)
www.goblinoidgames.com

Goodman Games
Goodman Games publishes a good deal of material for these sorts of games. Most notable are The Dungeon Alphabet by Michael Curtis, which is an inspirational work more than a how-to guide, The Random Esoteric Creature Generator for Classic Role-Playing Games and Their Modern Simulacra by James Edward Raggi IV, and the Points of Light books by Robert Conley. They also have a small number of adventure modules suited to the game as well as other system-neutral releases.
www.goodman-games.com

Lamentations of the Flame Princess
The publisher of Weird Fantasy Role-Playing produces adventure modules that are not specifically for any particular game, but are compatible with all of the games mentioned here. If you enjoy Weird Fantasy Role-Playing, you'll also enjoy the other material we put out.
www.lotfp.com/RPG/

Mythmere Games/Black Blade Publishing
These companies jointly publish the Swords & Wizardry game and supplements, and Knockspell, a gaming magazine focused on the games discussed here. Matthew Finch, developer of Swords & Wizardry, is one of the better adventure writers of the modern age, and certainly captures the Weird vibe better than most. Highly recommended.
www.swordsandwizardry.com
www.black-blade-publishing.com

OSRIC

OSRIC is a freely available set of rules emulating the first advanced edition of the game with the title that cannot be mentioned for legal reasons.
www.knights-n-knaves.com/osric/

Pied Piper Publishing

Rob Kuntz is a veteran of the Wisconsin RPG scene from the days before the first RPG had ever been published, and through his Pied Piper label releases a variety of high quality adventures and Referee aids. Of particular interest is the never-before-published material from the very dawn of the hobby.
http://pied-piper-publishing.com/

Rogue Games

Rogue Games publishes a number of games, but for present purposes the important item is the adventure module The Cursed Chateau, which surely fits under the designation "Weird." Its author, James Maliszewski, writes the hugely influential (and deservedly so!) blog Grognardia.
www.rogue-games.net

The Society of Torch, Pole, and Rope

This is the personal label of Michael Curtis, author of The Dungeon Alphabet. His big release to date has been the megadungeon project Stonehell Dungeon and its support material, which has been met with pretty much universal acclaim.
http://poleandrope.blogspot.com/