

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

ESSENTIALS™



## RULES COMPENDIUM™

A GAME REFERENCE FOR ALL PLAYERS

Rob Heinsoo ♦ Andy Collins  
James Wyatt ♦ Jeremy Crawford

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ROLEPLAYING GAME CORE RULES

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## CREDITS

Rules Compendium™ Design and Compilation  
**Jeremy Crawford**

Graphic Designer  
**Mari Kolkowsky**

D&D 4th Edition Design  
**Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins,  
James Wyatt**

Cover Illustration  
**Mike May (front), Adam Paquette (back)**

Additional Design  
**Stephen Schubert, Mike Mearls**

Interior Illustrations  
**Alexey Aparia, Eric Belisle, Kerem Beyit,  
Julie Dillon, Emrah Elmasli, Jason A. Engle,  
Ralph Horsley, Goran Josic, Howard Lyon,  
David Martin, Lee Moyer, Jim Nelson, William  
O'Connor, Adam Paquette, Steve Prescott, Eva  
Widermann, Ben Wootten, James Zhang**

Editing  
**Jennifer Clarke Wilkes (lead), Greg Bilsland**

Managing Editing  
**Kim Mohan, Michele Carter**

Cartographers  
**Jason A. Engle, Mike Schley**

D&D R&D/Book Publishing Director  
**Bill Slavicsek**

D&D Script Design  
**Daniel Reeve**

D&D Creative Manager  
**Christopher Perkins**

Publishing Production Specialist  
**Angelika Lokotz**

D&D Design Manager  
**James Wyatt**

Prepress Manager  
**Jefferson Dunlap**

D&D Senior Creative Art Director  
**Jon Schindehette**

Imaging Technician  
**Carmen Cheung**

D&D Brand Team

**Liz Schuh, Kierin Chase, Laura Tommervik,  
Shelly Mazzanoble, Chris Lindsay, Hilary Ross**

Production Manager  
**Cynda Callaway**

Art Director  
**Mari Kolkowsky**

Building on the Design of Previous Editions by  
**E. Gary Gygax, Dave Arneson, David "Zeb"  
Cook, Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip  
Williams, Richard Baker, Peter Adkison**



U.S., CANADA, ASIA, PACIFIC,  
& LATIN AMERICA  
Wizards of the Coast LLC  
P.O. Box 707  
Renton WA 98057-0707  
+1-800-324-6496

EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS  
Hasbro UK Ltd  
Caswell Way  
Newport, Gwent NP9 0YH  
GREAT BRITAIN  
Please keep this address for your records

WIZARDS OF THE COAST,  
BELGIUM  
Industrialaan 1  
1702 Groot-Bijgaarden  
Belgium  
+32.070.233.277

987654321

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# INTRODUCTION

This book presents the core rules of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® GAME, the premier roleplaying game of fantasy adventure. Whether you're new to the game or a veteran, you'll find rules, guidelines, and examples herein that will help you and your friends play through tales of high fantasy.

The game is vast, as are its rules. This book focuses on the rules that nearly all groups need, and it is structured so that you can read it front to back or hop from one topic to another using the index.

Intended for both players and Dungeon Masters, the rules collected in the following chapters are the most up-to-date versions, reflecting refinements since the current edition was released in 2008.

These rules are in service to your group's fun. Experiment with them, and make them your own. In the 1979

*Dungeon Master's Guide*® rulebook, Gary Gygax, the game's cocreator, introduced the main principles of the rules, many of which have been evident in all of the game's editions. What he said about the game still applies today:

*Whether you're new to the game or a veteran, you'll find rules, guidelines, and examples that will help you and your friends play.*

As a realistic simulation of things from the realm of make-believe, or even as a reflection of medieval or ancient warfare or culture or society, it can be deemed only a dismal failure. Readers who seek the latter must search elsewhere. Those who desire to create and populate imaginary worlds with larger-than-life heroes and villains, who seek relaxation with a fascinating game, and who generally believe games should be fun, not work, will hopefully find this system to their taste.

## A ROLEPLAYING GAME

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is a roleplaying game. In fact, this game invented roleplaying games and started an industry.

A roleplaying game is a storytelling game that has elements of the games of make-believe that many of us played as children. However, a roleplaying game provides form and structure, with robust gameplay and endless possibilities. While the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game uses dice and miniatures or other tokens, the action takes place in the imagination. There, players have the freedom to create anything they can imagine, with an unlimited special-effects budget and the technology to make anything happen.

In the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, each player creates a hero (also called a character or an adventurer), teams up with other adventurers (played by friends),

explores a magical world, and battles monsters. One player takes on the role of the Dungeon Master (DM), the game's lead storyteller and referee. The DM creates adventures for the characters and narrates the action for the players. Having a DM makes the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game infinitely flexible; he or she can react to any situation—any twist suggested by the players—to make each adventure vibrant, exciting, and unexpected.

An adventure is the heart of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. It's like a fantasy movie or novel, except that the players' group of characters (often referred to as the adventuring group, or the party) are the stars of the story. The DM sets the scene, but no one knows what's going to happen until the adventurers do something, and then anything can happen! The group might explore a dark dungeon, a ruined city, a lost temple deep in a jungle, or a lava-filled cavern beneath a mysterious mountain. The adventurers can solve puzzles, talk with other characters, battle all kinds of fantastic monsters, and discover fabulous magic items and other treasure.

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is a cooperative game in which a group of friends works together to complete each adventure and have fun. It's a storytelling game where the only limit is a player's imagination. It's a fantasy-adventure game, building on the traditions of the greatest fantasy stories of all time.

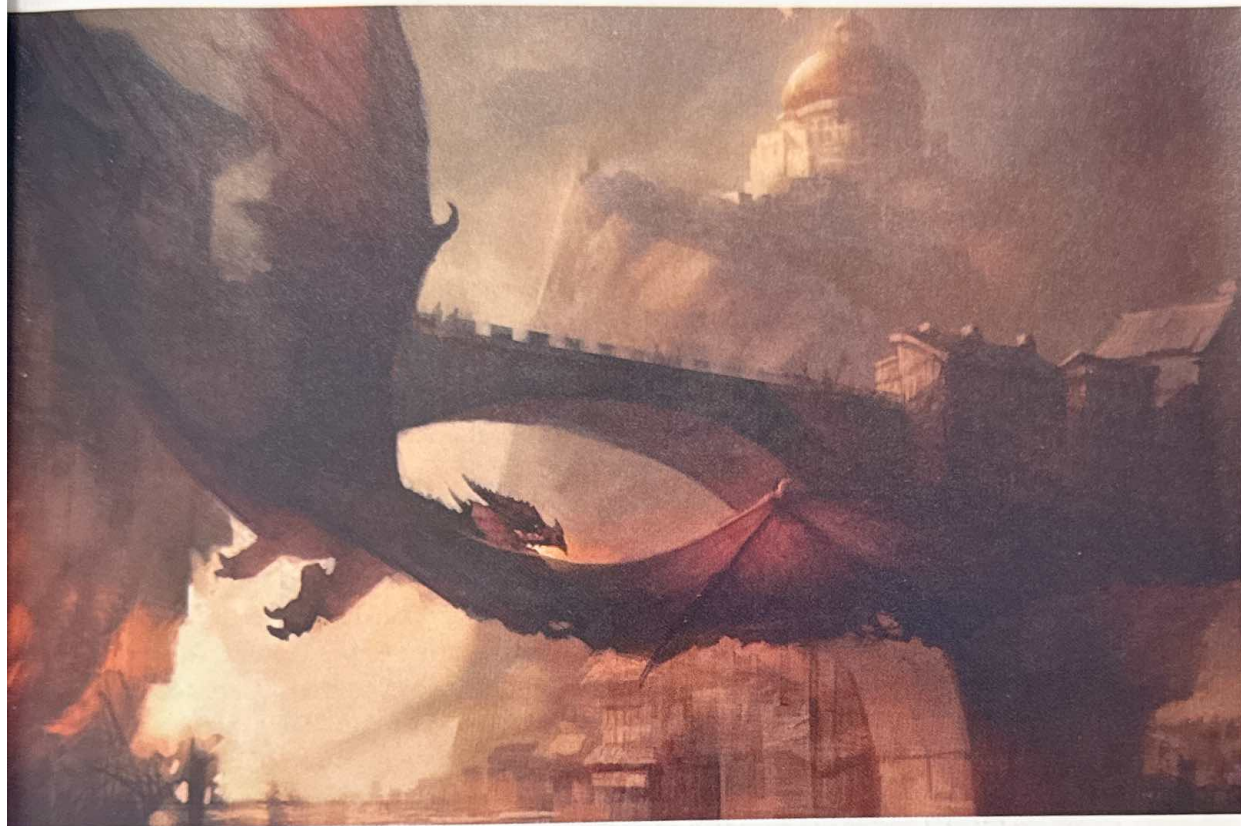
The game has no real end; when one story or quest wraps up, another one can begin, woven in an ongoing story called a campaign. Many people who play the game keep their campaigns going for months or years, meeting with their friends every week or so to pick up the story where they left off. The adventurers grow in might as the game continues. Each monster defeated, each adventure completed, and each treasure recovered not only adds to the continuing story, but also earns the adventurers new powers and other abilities. This increase in might is reflected by an adventurer's level.

There's no winning and losing in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game—at least, not the way those terms are usually understood. The DM and the players

## TRY IT!

When you play an adventurer, you put yourself into his or her boots and make decisions as if you were that person. You decide which door your adventurer opens next. You decide whether to attack a monster, to negotiate with a villain, or to attempt a dangerous quest. You can make these decisions based on your adventurer's personality, motivations, and goals, and you can even speak in character if you like. Within the boundaries set by the Dungeon Master, you control what your adventurer can do and say in the game.

Your hero can attempt anything you can think of. Want to talk to the dragon instead of fighting it? Want to disguise yourself as an orc and sneak into the foul lair? Go ahead and give it a try. An adventurer's actions might work, or they might fail spectacularly, but either way the player contributed to the unfolding story and had fun.



participate together in an exciting story of bold adventurers confronting deadly perils. Sometimes an adventurer might come to a grisly end, torn apart by ferocious monsters or done in by a nefarious villain. Even so, the other adventurers can search for powerful magic to revive their fallen comrade, or the player might choose to create a new character to carry on. The group might fail to complete an adventure successfully, but if everyone had a good time and created a memorable story, they all win.

## A Fantastic World

The world of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is a place of magic and monsters, of brave warriors and spectacular adventures. It begins with a basis of medieval fantasy and then adds the creatures, places, and powers that make the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS world unique.

The world of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is ancient, built upon and beneath the ruins of past empires, leaving the landscape dotted with places of adventure and mystery. Legends and artifacts of past empires still survive—as do terrible menaces. Although minor realms exist, they are widely scattered points of light in the surrounding darkness that shrouds the world. Monsters and supernatural creatures prowl the dark spaces. Some are threats, others are willing to aid the adventurers, and many fall into both camps and might react differently depending on how the adventurers approach them.

## THE HISTORY OF THE GAME

Before roleplaying games, before computer games, before trading card games, there were wargames. Using metal miniatures to simulate famous battles from history, wargamers were the original hobby gamers. In 1971, Gary Gygax created *Chainmail*®, a set of rules that added fantastic creatures and magic into the traditional wargame. In 1972, Dave Arneson approached Gygax with a new take on the subject; instead of controlling an army, each player would play a single character, a hero. Instead of fighting each other, the heroes would cooperate to defeat villains and gain rewards. This combination of rules, miniatures, cooperation, and imagination created a totally new entertainment experience, and in 1974 Gygax and Arneson published the first set of roleplaying game rules with TSR Hobbies, Inc.: the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*® roleplaying game.

In 1977, the rules were rewritten and repackaged into a new form with the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* Basic Set, and suddenly the game was on its way to becoming a phenomenon. A year later, the first edition of the *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game was published in a series of hardcover books.

Throughout the 1980s, the game experienced remarkable growth. Novels, a cartoon series, computer games, and the first campaign settings (*GREYHAWK*®, *FORGOTTEN REALMS*®, and *DRAGONLANCE*®) were released, and in 1989 the second edition of the AD&D game took the world by storm. The 1990s started out strong, with the release of more campaign settings (including *RAVENLOFT*®, *DARK SUN*®, and *PLANESCAPE*™), but as the decade was drawing to a close, the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* juggernaut was losing steam. In 1997, Wizards of the Coast purchased TSR and moved its creative staff to Seattle to begin work on the third edition of the game.

In 2000, the third edition of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* was released, and it was hailed as an innovation in game mechanics. During this period, *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* reached new heights of popularity, celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, and published a vast collection of rulebooks, supplements, and adventures.

In 2008, the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game reached a new milestone with its latest edition. This edition builds on what has gone before, introducing and refining various game elements.

Over the years, *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* has grown and made its mark on popular culture. It has inspired multiple generations of gamers, writers, computer game designers, filmmakers, and more with its ability to expand the imagination and inspire creativity. Whether you were with it from the beginning or just discovered it today, the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game is your key to a world of fantasy and adventure.

Magic is everywhere. People believe in and accept the power that magic provides. True masters of magic, however, are rare. At some point, all adventurers rely on magic. Wizards and warlocks draw power from the fabric of the universe. Clerics and paladins call down the wrath of their gods to sear their foes with divine radiance, or they invoke their gods' mercy to heal wounds. Fighters and

rogues don't use magical powers, but their expertise with magic weapons makes them masters of the battlefield. At the highest levels of play, even nonmagical adventurers perform deeds that no mortal could dream of doing without magic.

## WHAT'S IN A GAME

All DUNGEONS & DRAGONS games have several basic components: at least one player (five players works best), a Dungeon Master, an adventure, and game books and accessories, including dice.

### Players

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS players fill two distinct roles in the game: controlling the players' characters—also called adventurers—and acting as the Dungeon Master. These roles aren't mutually exclusive, and a player can roleplay an adventurer today and run an adventure for the other players tomorrow. Although everyone who plays the game is technically a player, this book usually refers to players as those who run the adventurers.

Each player creates an adventurer, part of a team that delves into dungeons, battles monsters, and explores the world's dark wilderness. Like the protagonists of a novel, a movie, or a video game, adventurers stand at the center of the game's action.

### The Dungeon Master

The Dungeon Master controls the pace of the story and referees the action along the way. Every DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game needs a DM. The DM has several parts to play in the game.

- ◆ **Adventure Builder:** The DM creates adventures, or selects published ones, for the other players to experience.
- ◆ **Narrator:** The DM sets the pace of the story and presents the various challenges and encounters that the other players must overcome.
- ◆ **Monster Controller:** The DM controls the monsters that the adventurers confront, choosing the monsters' actions and rolling dice for them.
- ◆ **Referee:** The DM decides how to apply the game rules and guides the story. If the rules don't cover a situation, the DM determines what to do. At times, the DM might alter or even ignore the result of a die roll if doing so benefits the story.

Many players find that being the Dungeon Master is the best part of the game. The Dungeon Master role isn't necessarily a permanent post; each player in the group can take turns being the DM from adventure to adventure.

## COOPERATION, NOT OPPOSITION

Even though as the DM you control the monsters in an adventure, you aren't the other players' adversary and don't want them to fail. Your job is to provide a framework for the whole group to enjoy an exciting adventure. That means challenging the adventurers with interesting encounters and tests, keeping the game moving, and applying the rules of the game fairly. Your goal is to make success taste its sweetest by presenting challenges that are just hard enough that the other players have to work to overcome them, but not so hard that victory or escape is impossible.

## The Adventure

Adventurers need adventures. A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure consists of a series of linked events. As the players decide which way to go next and how their characters deal with the resulting encounters and challenges, they turn the adventure into an exciting story about their characters. All DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventures feature action, combat, mystery, magic, challenges, conversation, and lots of monsters.

Adventures come in three forms.

- ◆ **Ready-to-Play:** The DM can buy or obtain professionally written, ready-to-play adventures from a number of sources, including a local game store and [www.dndinsider.com](http://www.dndinsider.com).
- ◆ **Adventure Hooks and Components:** Most DUNGEONS & DRAGONS products offer pieces of adventures—story ideas, maps, interesting monsters—that the DM can assemble into an adventure.
- ◆ **Homemade:** Many DMs choose to create their own adventures, building challenging encounters and stocking them with monsters and treasures from products such as the *Monster Vault* and the *Dungeon Master's Kit*.

An adventure can be a simple “dungeon crawl,” a series of rooms filled with monsters and traps that has little story to explain why the adventurers are facing those challenges. It can be as complex as a murder mystery or a tale of political intrigue, or it can be but one chapter in an epic tale related to the fate of the world. An adventure can last for a single game session or stretch out over many sessions of play. For instance, exploring a haunted castle (which takes a few hours or days in the game world) might involve half a dozen game sessions over the course of a couple of months of real time.

When the same group of adventurers plays with the same Dungeon Master through multiple adventures, the result is a campaign. The story of the heroes doesn't end with a single adventure but continues on for as long as desired, just as in an ongoing comic book, television, or novel series.

## Game Books and Accessories

The action of the game takes place mostly in the imagination, but a few products are necessary to play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. The following DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Essentials™ products provide a great place to start.

### Essential Products for Players and Dungeon Masters

- ◆ **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set***. This boxed set contains everything a group of players needs to start playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. It contains rules, dice, maps, tokens, and an adventure that takes characters from 1st to 2nd level.
- ◆ **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Rules Compendium***™. This comprehensive book contains the essential rules of the game collected in one place, taking a campaign from 1st to 30th level.
- ◆ **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Roleplaying Game Dice Set***. The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, as well as other games using the D&D® game system, require a special set of dice (see the “Game Dice” sidebar). Pick up extra dice so that every player has a set.

### Essential Products for Players

The Essentials player books feature the fundamental elements of the game from a player's point of view.

- ◆ ***Heroes of the Fallen Lands***™. This volume contains rules for several classes: cleric, fighter, rogue, and wizard. It also describes several races: dwarf, eladrin, elf, halfling, and human.
- ◆ ***Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms***™. This volume contains rules for several classes: druid, paladin, ranger, and warlock. It also describes several races: dragonborn, drow, half-elf, half-orc, and tiefling.

### Essential Products for Dungeon Masters

- ◆ ***Dungeon Master's Kit***™. This product features game rules, advice, adventures, maps, tokens, and a DM screen—all useful tools for a Dungeon Master. Many Dungeon Masters like to use a screen to keep the other players from seeing dice rolls for the monsters and from spotting secrets in the DM's notes.
- ◆ ***Monster Vault***™. This product features a collection of monsters for use in any DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, from 1st level to 30th level, and includes monster tokens and an adventure.
- ◆ ***Dungeon Tiles Master Sets***. Three master sets of Dungeon Tiles (*The Dungeon*, *The City*, and *The Wilderness*) enable you to create encounter areas for any adventure, using DUNGEONS & DRAGONS tokens and miniatures. The tiles let you easily create a battle map for a combat

encounter. Tokens and miniatures are placed on the map to keep track of where adventurers and monsters are positioned as the encounter unfolds.

## Other Useful Ingredients for Play

**A Place to Play:** The bare minimum of space needed to play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is room for everyone in the group to sit. Most likely, everyone will also want a table to sit around. A table holds the battle grid and tokens or miniatures, gives players a place to roll dice and write on character sheets, and holds piles of books and papers. People can pull chairs around a dining table or sit in chairs or sofas by a coffee table. It's possible to run a game without a table for the battle grid, but combat runs more easily if everyone can see where everything is positioned.

**Paper and Pencils:** Everyone should have a pencil and paper. During every round of combat, players need to keep track of hit points, bonuses and penalties, the use of powers, the consequences of various conditions, and other information. Someone in the group typically takes notes about what has happened in the adventure, and players need to make note of experience points and treasure their characters acquire. Alternatively, players can do a lot of this note-taking digitally, using a computer or a smart phone.

## GAME DICE

The game uses polyhedral dice with different numbers of sides, as shown here. You can find dice like these in game stores and in many bookstores.

In these rules, the different dice are referred to by the letter "d" followed by the number of sides: d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20. For instance, a d6 is a six-sided die (the typical cube that many games use).

When you need to roll dice, the rules tell you how many dice to roll, what size they are, and what modifiers to add. For example, "3d8 + 5" means you roll three eight-sided dice and add 5 to the total.

The same "d" notation appears in the expressions "1d3" and "1d2." To simulate the roll of 1d3, roll a d6 and divide the result by 2. To simulate the roll of 1d2, roll any die and assign a result of 1 or 2 to the roll depending on whether it was odd or even.



# HOW TO PLAY

Basically, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game consists of a group of heroes taking on an adventure presented by the Dungeon Master. Each adventure is made up of encounters—various challenges that the characters face.

In a board game, you have a piece, or pieces, to move around. Your “piece” in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is your adventurer if you’re a player and an adventure’s monsters and other characters if you’re the DM. Often the action of an adventure takes place in your imagination only, but if you use tokens or miniatures, you literally move pieces around on the table.



## Basics of Play

Here’s a summary of the basic rules of the game.

Every creature has powers, skills, and special features tied to one of six ability scores. The abilities are Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. Each creature also has **hit points**, which are reduced when the creature takes damage, most often as the result of a **damage roll**.

A creature does things in the game by performing **actions**. Actions are resolved by making different kinds of **checks**. A check is rolling a twenty-sided die (a **d20**), adding modifiers based on the type of action, and announcing the result.

*Example:* An adventurer might make a melee basic attack, using the character’s Strength modifier and a modifier based on the weapon used to make the attack (totaling 5). The player rolls a d20 and adds 5, getting a 12 on the die and announcing a result of 17 ( $12 + 5 = 17$ ).

The three basic checks that are used all the time are **attack rolls**, **skill checks**, and **ability checks**. Players usually make checks against a target number, but sometimes a check is compared to another character’s check. This is an **opposed check**.

A **modifier** is any number that adds to or subtracts from a die roll. A character's ability scores, for example, provide modifiers that apply to many actions in the game. A **bonus** is a positive modifier (such as a +2 bonus). A **penalty** is a negative modifier (for example, a -1 penalty).

In any task, a creature's modifiers represent training, competence, and natural talent. The d20 roll, on the other hand, reflects luck and the unpredictable nature of action and adventure.

The Dungeon Master compares a check result against a target number, the **Difficulty Class (DC)** of the task being attempted or the **defense** against which an attack is being made. Most target numbers are set for the DM, such as a monster's defense numbers or the DC for climbing a dungeon wall. Other times, the DM estimates the difficulty of a task that isn't specifically covered by the rules. To do this, the DM makes use of advice and tables provided in adventures, the *Dungeon Master's Kit*, or this book.

Chapter 1 goes into more detail about the basic rules of the game.

## Encounters

Encounters are the action scenes in an adventure, various kinds of challenges that the adventurers must face and overcome. Encounters come in two types.

- ♦ **Combat encounters** are battles against nefarious foes. In a combat encounter, adventurers and monsters take turns attacking until one side or the other is defeated.
- ♦ **Noncombat encounters** include deadly traps, difficult puzzles, and other obstacles to overcome. Sometimes the adventurers prevail in noncombat encounters by applying their skills or with clever use of magic, and sometimes the players have to puzzle them out with nothing but their wits. Noncombat encounters also include social interactions, such as attempts to persuade, bargain with, or obtain information from a character played by the DM.

Adventurers have an array of tools at their disposal to help them overcome the challenges in encounters, including attack powers—such as a wizard's *fireball* or a fighter's *power strike*—that deal damage and produce other effects against enemies in combat. Adventurers also have utility powers, skills, and other features that can be useful in both combat and noncombat encounters.

## Exploration

Between encounters, the adventurers explore the world—or whatever limited segment of the world the DM's adventure presents them with. The players make decisions about which way their characters travel and what they try to do next. Exploration is the give-and-take of the players saying what they want their characters to do, and the DM telling the players what happens when their characters do it.

For instance, let's say the adventurers have just climbed down into a dark chasm. The DM tells the players that their characters see three tunnels leading

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