

The World Outside the Dungeon

Breathing life into the world outside the dungeon is useful for campaigns that want the players' characters to leave a lasting mark on the setting. This could be building a wizard's tower and constructing levels of magical laboratories to discover magical secrets. Or perhaps constructing a castle and forging a new barony out of the wilderness. Maybe a character is appointed as high priest to defend the faithful. Another might become the supreme boss of a city-state's underworld.

This can be expanded to almost anything that has a lasting impact on the setting of the campaign: building a crossroad's inn, liberating of a city and joining the city council, or returning to one's liege with the secret of dragon powder.

Often these achievements have intermediate steps that can be accomplished at lower levels. For instance, taking charge of a rural temple, and helping the faithful in the surrounding village. Being promoted to captain of one of the king's company to undertake missions as royal agents. Gaining control of an entire neighborhood of a city-state with your gang. Or a Magic-User taking on their first apprentices to help them organize expeditions to explore ruins.



The key to making all of these happen is to breathe life into the world outside of the dungeon, particularly those who live within the setting.



Elements of a Campaign

When starting a campaign, things that are useful to look at are

- Locomes to adventure in.
- Characters to roleplay with.
- The plans the characters have for their future, along with what natural (or supernatural) events may occur.

Locales

The iconic locale is the dungeon, a maze with rooms that are either empty, or have monsters, deadly traps, or glittering treasure. Dungeon mazes can be stacked on each other to form multiple levels with the difficulty of the monsters and the wealth of treasure increasing as the characters venture deeper.

In the world outside of the dungeon, locales are just as varied. There are natural locales like creature lairs and hazardous terrain (deserts, icefields, and jungles). There are locales that are built, like villages and towns, camps and castles. Some locales are old and no longer used, creating a ruin that may be inhabited by monsters with their treasure.

At the beginning of the campaign, a half dozen or so locales should be created. Half of them should be places to adventures in like dungeons, monster-filled forests, or monastery ruins. The other half should be inhabited locales like large villages that the party can use as a home base, castles belonging to the local lords, or druid circles deep within the forest.

Characters

The key element that allows players to make their mark are the characters they encounter. Some are potential allies, other are neutral, and a few will be the player characters' enemies. It is recommended that you come up with a dozen notable characters with roughly three that are potential allies, six that are neutral in some way, and three that are potential enemies. Don't be surprised if the players, through good or bad roleplaying, manage to mix up this list.

Some examples include a village reeve, a castle lord, a master druid, a chief of an Orc tribe, a merchant who is the boss of the local smuggling ring, a priest of an evil god who commands a posse of bandits deep in the forest, a disgruntled old farmer who knows everybody within a day's travel, an ambitious yeoman seeking adventure, or a retired Magic-User selling potions from his cottage at the end of the lane.



You want interconnections between each character, but keep the number low at first. The old farmer and castle lord were once rivals for the love of a maiden when they were young, and have been enemies ever since. The young yeoman yearns for adventure to hone his fighting skill to take vengeance against the Orc chief that killed his family.

Just as the dungeon maze is a natural avenue of exploration, the interconnections between the characters of the campaign provide other paths to explore. At the end of the paths are allies to help, and complications that fuel further adventure.

Plans

The characters of the setting have a life of their own along with hopes and plans for the future. Detailing the plans of three to five of the characters provides complication to fuel adventures in the world outside of the dungeon.

For example, an evil priest has taken up residence in the forest. He was commanded by his god to find a way to seek vengeance on the region. Two generations ago, the dark god's followers were purged and expelled by followers of the goddess of justice. The priest has attracted a group of outlaws and down-on-their-luck peasants to operate as a gang of bandits.

Most of the wealth and supplies the bandits steal is given to the evil priest. He uses his ill-gotten gain to explore the forest for the lost axe of Chernak, the legendary Orc chief who led his tribe into this forest long ago. By finding the axe, the priest hopes to make allies of the present-day Orcs, and use both the axe and the Orcs as his god's instrument of vengeance against the goddess of justice.

Some character plans are relatively modest while others, like the evil priest's plan above, could impact an entire region. Regardless of their scope, the key thing to remember is that these plans represent what possibly could happen, not what will happen. The players' actions will affect what your characters' plans are during and after your sessions.



The World in Motion

After creating the lists of locales, characters, and plans, it is time to run the first session and set the world of the campaign in motion.

The Initial Context

One of the hard things about a campaign using these rules is what the players do at first. It is important to think about the initial context—the situation the players find their characters in when play commences. Sometimes the players are notably self-driven and the group has a specific idea of what they want to do. In these cases, the initial context can be minimal.

In most cases, the players will be unsure of the possibilities, so it is best to have three to five rumors, pieces of lore, or contacts prepared so the players have a choice of where to adventure. It is important that anything vital they would know is written up in a small handout and made available. Keep this handout as minimal as you can while still covering everything you deem important.

The Continuing Saga

Often the initial adventure does not affect the plans of the various characters you made. But as the players acquire experience and wealth, they will start to have a major impact on the region. After each session, you should review each of the plans you made in light of what the players did or did not do as their characters. Then update those plans. Sometimes this means an NPC's plan is now unfeasible. In that case, you have to look at the character's personality and motivations to come up with a new plan of what they want for the future. This process is key to prevent yourself from railroading the players down a predetermined path.

Bag of Stuff

When acting as their characters, the players do the unexpected all the time. Perhaps they decide to visit a shrine you noted but didn't detail. Maybe they decide to abandon the dungeon you created in favor of exploring the forest. When this happens, you are forced to improvise if you don't have anything specific prepared.

The bag of stuff is a collection of locales, characters, and even character plans that you can pull out and use to run a portion of the campaign on the fly.

Locales

It is useful to have six to twelve generic locations prepared (or gathered) to represent common locales found in a campaign. A shop, a crossroads, a forest clearing, a section of swamp, a peasant's hut. These don't need to be elaborate, just enough of memory aid to allow you to quickly use them in a session. Simply alter a few elements to make it unique. Take notes during the session if you think the locale will be revisited, then when you have time, flesh it out into something more unique.

Characters

A major section of these rules are the NPCs, a series of entries describing common character types in a fantasy setting presented the same format as the monsters. They are useful in preparing an adventure or locale, but also useful when you need to pull something out of your bag of stuff.

When you need a type of NPC, you can use a method similar to the locales above: find an NPC in the NPC section, change a few details to make them unique, then use it as part of the session.

Plans

Make a list of a handful of personality types and their broad goals. As you get new ideas, add them to this list. This will give you a list of ideas of how to roleplay a character that you didn't expect the party to interact with. As with the locales and characters, you want just enough detail to serve as a memory aid.

