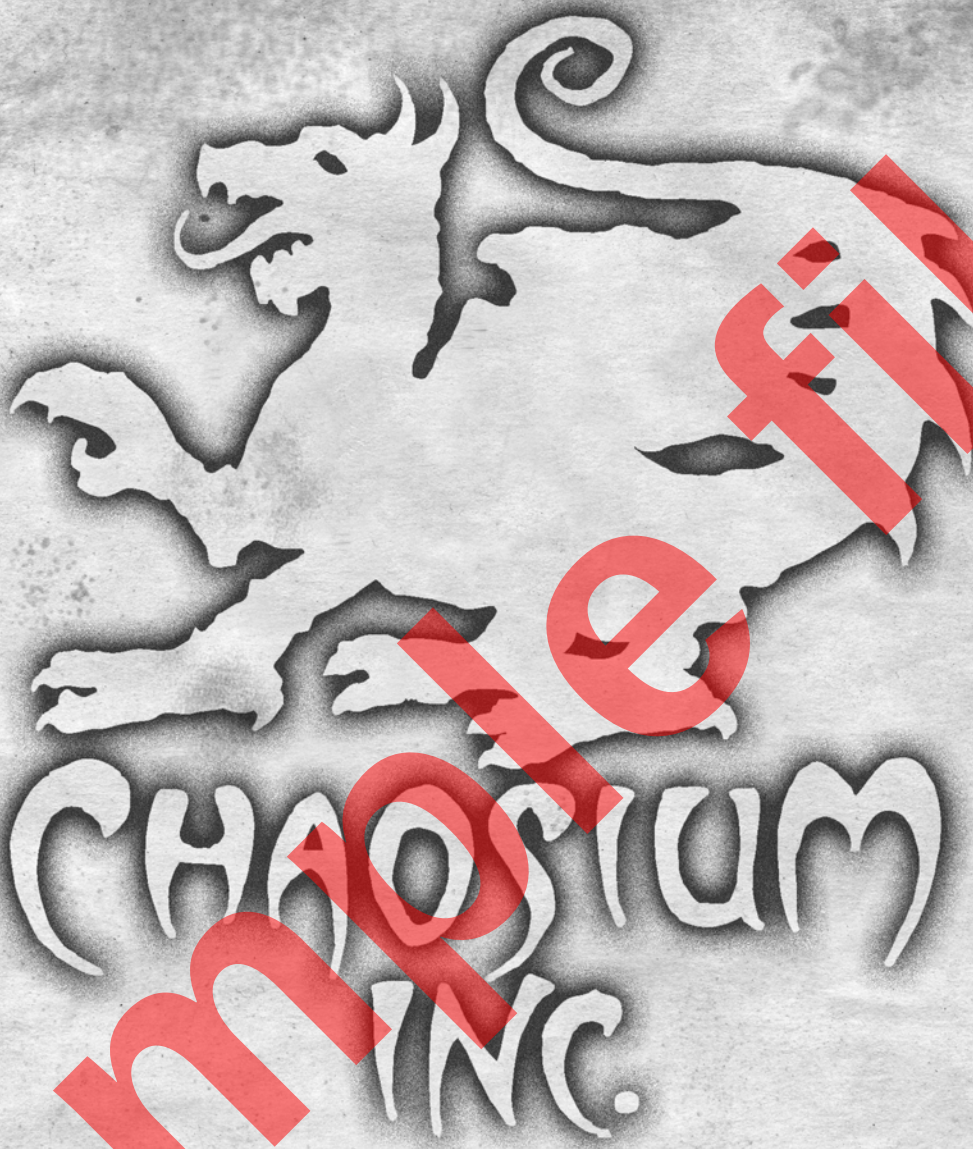

We hope you enjoy
this Chaosium publication,
and thank you for purchasing this
PDF from www.chaosium.com.

BASIC ROLEPLAYING

The Chaosium Roleplaying System

Basic Gamemaster

Authors: Greg Stafford, Charlie Krank, Raymond Turney

Editors: Lynn Willis, Yurek Chodak, Sherman Kahn, Sandy Petersen

Artist: Chris Marrinan

Production: Charlie Krank, Yurek Chodak

Layout intern: Dennis J. Baum

BASIC ROLEPLAYING is a Chaosium Game
Published by Chaosium Inc.

CHAOSIUM INC.
22568 Mission Blvd. #423
Hayward CA 94541

www.chaosium.com

Contents

Gamemastering

Your skill at gamemastering will grow with experience. Present simple storylines at first. More complex plots will develop as your campaign matures. Your players will soon suggest their own scenarios.

This book is intended for gamemasters. Nothing in it must be kept secret from players, though it would be better if players do not read the "Money Tree" scenario before playing it.

Five main sections make up this book. The first one concerns the duties of the gamemaster: devising and presenting roleplaying adventures. Much of it is general in tone, though even old hands will find valuable the discussion of treasures as related to classes of creatures.

The next section consists of scenario-construction aids for the gamemaster: encounter tables (both for the mundane plane and for the otherworld), notes on languages, treasures, and danger classes.

The third chapter treats in more detail the social organization postulated in the *Basic Roleplaying* rules, particularly as they affect adventurer occupations, income, magic, experience, skills, and training. Throughout this section every effort has been made to present social models general enough to be pertinent and self-consistent when used in any fantasy world. Of immediate use are the price lists.

The fourth chapter discusses ships and the sea—supplementary rules to add a special air to your *Basic Roleplaying* games.

The final chapter contains a ready-to-play scenario: The Money Tree. It is intended to be used with average beginning adventurers played by average beginning players. It is also an excellent introduction to the art of gamemastering.

The Gamemaster

In *Basic Roleplaying*, you as gamemaster prepare an adventure for the players, and then present it to them in an interesting and even-handed fashion. During the session you also interpret and apply game rules to resolve particular actions and situations within the adventure.

The last of these tasks is the simplest to explain: a gamemaster tells the players when to roll the dice, and answers questions concerning the results. *Basic Roleplaying* itself is the best reference. If you don't remember a rule, ask your players. If they seem to agree on a point, they are probably right. Your players are your second-best source of information. But if a point isn't covered by the rules, and if the players strongly disagree, you will have to decide: be guided by what is reasonable and fair, and by what will cause you fewer difficulties later.

Other aspects of gamemastering require more discussion.

Gamemaster Style

The competitive GM emphasizes the game in *Basic Roleplaying*. Rules and game relationships are very important. Game mechanics and results are applied as strictly and as impartially as possible in order to emphasize the personal skill of the players in maneuvering their adventurers through challenge after challenge.

The dramatic gamemaster emphasizes the storytelling and roleplaying elements inherent in *Basic Roleplaying*. He willingly subverts strict application of the rules to better serve the dramatic objectives of his scenario.

The effective gamemaster balances style against objective. Overemphasis on competitive gaming reduces fantasy roleplaying to a version of chess. Overemphasis of storytelling may rob the players of satisfying struggles and victories. Suit your tastes, but try to accommodate your players' tastes as well.

Presenting an Adventure

As the gamemaster, you must present an adventure to the players, or there can be no game. In doing this you'll introduce and dramatize the situation, play the roles of the adversaries, allies, and disinterested bystanders, develop an unfolding story, and finally resolve it in a final episode. Before each session of play begins, you must prepare yourself and the players for the adventure, and after each session you'll attend to bookkeeping and out-of-session player activities.

Published scenarios provide copious text and details, but your own scenarios need only your memory, some notes on the important subjects, and your imagination. Though both can be satisfying to a gamemaster, you'll be prouder of your own. This book contains a complete scenario. Whether you play it or not, you should read it through, keeping in mind the ideas in this chapter.

Conditions for Play

Your player group probably numbers between one and ten gamers; three to six is optimal. While One-on-one gaming permits a good deal of individual player action, it limits roleplaying—too many players in the group decreases the opportunity for each individual to contribute. Orchestrating groups of a dozen or more players can be a horrendous experience for even the most experienced gamemaster.

To help players plan for later sessions, establish a regular time and place for the game. Strive to make it a pleasant ritual; dedicated players can adapt to wretched conditions, but it is better to have a table around which all the players can sit, and upon which visual material can be comfortably studied.

In designing scenarios, presume that players occasionally must miss game sessions. Never pressure a player to attend—be flexible. Once you compromise the optional

nature of the game, the sessions become an obligation, not a pleasant pastime.

Adventurers from Other Worlds

You may have to choose whether or not to admit adventurers from other gamemasters' worlds into your campaign. How you decide depends upon how you view your game world. There are three nominal viewpoints.

Closed World: adventurers can take part in only the world for which they were designed. This is the best and easiest way to maintain a coherent and self consistent universe. It may not be the answer which makes your players happy.

Multiverse: adventurers can enter a number of related universes controlled by different gamemasters; here the gamemasters have made similar basic assumptions about their games, and cooperatively permit communication and travel between their respective game universes. When doing this, you may find it progressively more difficult to rationalize implausible occurrences and contradictory ideas.

Open World: adventurers from every other universe are welcome. This approach is very difficult to balance and to consistently maintain. Players usually try to shift adventurers to more favorable universes; your players who do not have such adventurers and therefore cannot take advantage of such dispensations may feel envious and grumble a bit.

Regardless of approach, as a gamemaster you always have the right to inventory entering adventurer's powers and possessions, and always have as well the right to demand suitable alterations or deletions as conditions for admission. Never admit an adventurer who has more power (in terms of skills or possessions) than you are willing to handle in your campaign.

Preparing for a New Campaign or Player Group

At the first game session set aside time to create characters. Guide the players in designing characters appropriate to your setting and background who will fit comfortably into the sort of adventures you want to conduct. Walk new players step-by-step through adventurer creation so they won't become frustrated and unreceptive to the coming adventure. Keep copies of the player-characters for your own reference.

One adventurer to a player is an elegant ratio, but sometimes a larger party may be necessary to handle a certain scenario. Permit each player an extra adventurer or two, or add some non-player-characters who will be controlled by you, but who can provide skilled support for the adventurers. In case of serious adventurer casualties, the presence of extra or peripheral characters allows players otherwise out of the game to actively participate throughout the session.

As the primary source of information about your game universe, you play its creatures, characters, and environment, and apply the *Basic Roleplaying* rules to the flow of play. To do this smoothly, you'll need to assemble player materials beforehand, study and be familiar with notes describing the scenario, and organize those notes so that you can quickly find the information you want. You'll need to be able to recall or locate specific *Basic Roleplaying* rules to swiftly resolve conflicts, and be well-prepared and flexible enough to adjust for an unanticipated flaw in scenario design, or an unexpected player response. This sounds like a lot, and it is—but you'll be among friends: with a little experience you'll be running a smooth, brisk session.

Organization

Know your scenario. Study and review your material before you run the adventure. Don't hesitate to rehearse. Remember, you are at once the director, set crew, and actors in a large-scale dramatic presentation. Fumbling through notes consumes time, destroys pacing, and implies that you are clumsy and unprepared (even though you may have spent hours preparing).

Prepare maps, diagrams, floor plans, character statistics, background information, and documents in advance. Clearly label your material so that you can find it quickly.

Make sure you have materials for mapping, for taking notes, and for displaying the positions of adventurers, non-player-characters, creatures, and physical settings. Use visual aids: they are more explicit and more effectively draw players into the scene. Use miniature figures and battleboards to display tactical situations. Most players like to identify with miniature figures representing their adventurers.

Reading background material out loud to the players is usually a bad idea, particularly at the beginning. Start with action! Prepare background material ahead of time, photocopy it, and hand it to your players before the session starts. They can read and refer to it as they wish, without disturbing the flow of the game.

Presentation

When introducing the adventure, try to create a comfortable atmosphere, one in which each player trusts the gamemaster and the other players to act fairly and considerately. "Play hard, play fair, nobody hurt" is a good motto. Discourage intra-party treachery and backstabbing. Define the party goals so that they apply to all of the adventurers; emphasize cooperation.

You may seat players around the table in the order which you want them to declare their intentions during play. One way is to start with the player whose adventurer has the highest DEX, since that adventurer reacts the fastest. Another approach is to first seat the player with the least intelligent adventurer, so that his statement of intent is made first, giving the player little time to think (and thereby simulating his adventurer's limited wit). The player with the least intelligent adventurer presumably would not have the advantage of knowing other player's intentions. Use either system, or your own: get the players in the habit of stating intent in an orderly fashion.

During the session you may need to give your players hints when their adventurers are bogged down or if they are in serious trouble. Hint generously with beginners; confine yourself to fewer and more subtle hints with experienced players.

Permit players to state procedures that their adventurers will use in recognizable situations. ("Whenever we get in a fight, I'll cover the group's rear.") This encourages the players to think ahead, and eliminates repetition.

Be generous and detailed in response to questions about the setting. When asked to amplify a description, do so as long as you have anything to say, then state that nothing more can be perceived. Remember that a player is entitled to understand your fantasy world from his adventurer's point of view—the adventurer's sight, hearing, taste, sense of smell, and so on—as the gamemaster you are the only channel through which your world can be explored.

Avoid speaking game lingo; use dramatic narrative. Compare the following interchanges.

Gamespeak

Player: I rolled a 32—got'em.

Gamemaster: The troll tries to parry. Miss on an 86.

Player: I got him in the 02 for 7 points.

Gamemaster: The troll's armor absorbs 4 points of damage, and that takes him down to 1 point in that location.

Dramatic Narrative

Player: Cormac chops desperately—and connects!

Gamemaster: He tries to parry with his spear and, uhh, misses completely.

Player: Good solid hit here, 7 points. Caught him flatfooted, chopped him in the right leg.

Gamemaster: Sure did! The sword slashes through the leather, blood gushes out, and he is staggering around on that leg. But he looks more mad than hurt.

Colorful, interesting language helps everyone participate more fully in the fantasy. Use it whenever you can, and encourage your players to do the same. Indulge yourself; make dramatic flourishes; step through the game rules onto the stage of your drama, and put on a good show.

As a gamemaster, you have the peculiar problem of keeping your gamemaster information secret from your roleplaying self while you're maneuvering your non-player-characters. It can be tempting to act on knowledge that your non-player-characters could not have. Resist the temptation: you'll feel like a cheat, and your players may agree.

Players must believe that they control the fate of their adventurers, or they will lose interest in the scenario. If you do too much of the talking and acting, your players will begin to doubt that they are significant to the game. A player must feel that his character has freedom to choose his actions; he must not feel like a puppet who must do whatever the gamemaster tells him to do. On the other hand, the gamemaster must channel the adventurer along the plotline or all his hard work preparing a scenario has gone for nothing. You may subtly use rewards or threats, or candidly admit that you aren't ready for the choice they want to exercise. Inevitably, to preserve the illusion of free will, you must occasionally follow the adventurers as they wander away from the scenario. Submit to the impulse to improvise when a dramatic opportunity presents itself. The more experienced you become, the more comfortable you will be in diverging from the original scenario notes. Flexibility and improvisation permits you to exploit your immediate responses and those of your players—often the most pleasure in gaming comes from these creative and whimsical moments. Make a virtue of necessity: relax, and enjoy the opportunity to improvise. Your best work may be done when your imagination is most responsive to the players and the setting.

Keep the game moving. Maintain rapid flow to the play. Shift time scales to compress unimportant action. Fumbling with papers and puzzling over forgotten details stifles the drama in your adventure. Keep all the players involved. Games crawl for players who have no adventurers in active play.

Give your players tasks to keep them busy while you organize or refer to your materials, or while you speak privately with a particular player. If you've been playing for a while, call a break.

Use the pressure of time to build tension. Be consistent. Don't run a leisurely adventure, then suddenly demand an instant response when the adventurers are confronted with danger.

Balance the value of continuous rhythm of play against decreased pleasure as players become desensitized and fatigued. Sessions typically last three to six hours. It is better to cut a session short while interest is high than to keep playing after some players have lost the energy to enjoy it. If interest is still running high after a few hours, take a complete break for 15 minutes—run around, throw the Frisbee, hike to the market for munchies—then return to the adventure with your second wind.

After the game session, find out what players liked and didn't like so you can improve your performance and scenario design next session. Ask the players to summarize what occurred, so that everyone is in agreement. Ask them to state a general plan of action for future adventures, and use this information in planning for the next session. Arrange the time for the next meeting and solicit questions that the players would like answered at the beginning of the next game session.

Principles of Gamemastering

Know the *Basic Roleplaying* rules and game mechanics, and teach them to your players.

Be fair and consistent in rulings and judgments. Experience must be a reliable guide, or player knowledge and skill can be only frustrating and unfruitful. Write down important precedents.

Expect to interpolate and extrapolate the *Basic Roleplaying* rules: inevitably, some situations will not have been explicitly covered by the game designers. As complete as these rules are, they do not pretend to cover everything.

Don't waste time looking up obscure points—use common sense and rule quickly.

Provisional judgments are acceptable. Judge quickly, but always reserve the right to change the ruling when you have sufficient leisure to consider the ramifications.

Don't give your players everything they want. Limiting power and tactics is implicit in roleplaying; limits make the game challenging.

Don't hesitate to backtrack on a rules judgment if it crucially affects an adventurer. Players will accept and forget minor errors of judgment, and major ones which are made right.

Help new players design their characters. This is their initial contact with the rules, and it is important that they not be frustrated nor confused.

Keep separate your non-player-character tactics from your gamemaster role. As adversary, be as cunning, as ferocious, or as stupid as called for by the role. As gamemaster, favor neither adventurers nor their opponents in applying the rules.

If you must intervene to protect the drama of the adventure, do your best to conceal it from the players. Arbitrary action diminishes the challenge of the game.

Bookkeeping Between Adventures

Supervise the bookkeeping on your player's sheets. Make sure everyone remembers to roll for improvements in skills. Record any significant adventurer change (gain or loss of possessions, alteration of statistics, powers, or knowledge) while still fresh in the player's mind. Encourage players to keep an informal history about their adventures—time will quickly blur important details and events.

Update your notes for any non-player-character or setting data that may have changed during the adventure. Assess the impact of the session's play on the scenario or campaign and adapt accordingly. The consequences of a single session may require extensive revision of the adventure and campaign. (You mean that we killed the high priest? Oh dear...)

If your campaign has hooked your players, they will discuss it and plan for it between sessions. This may involve a number of game activities between games. Help them work on the background and development of their player characters—biography; training and research in skills, martial arts, and magic; information-gathering; earning a living between adventures—whatever enhances the illusion of the adventurer as a living being.

Planning a Campaign

If a group of players intends to play together for more than a few sessions, the scenarios should fit together into a coherent campaign—most players enjoy campaigns because in them they better perceive the continuing growth of their adventurers.

A campaign can be defined as a series of linked scenarios, but for a while we will discuss the campaign as though it had little relation to scenarios.

You may need to analyze your nascent campaign in order to present to the players the best possible adventures and encounters. Fortunately such analysis has proceeded for thousands of years in another guise—the elements of fiction.

Narrative fiction nominally has five elements: plot or incident, character, setting, theme, and style, elements always present in traditional literature. Since fantasy roleplaying stems directly from traditional epics like Beowulf and the Song of Roland, and from modern treatments such as the Conan stories and the Lord of the Rings, these elements are always strongly present in fantasy roleplaying as well.

The elements of fiction therefore can be used as guidelines for creating campaigns. These elements are also useful in devising scenarios, but single scenarios have a somewhat different focus; each emphasizes different amounts of the five elements.

The Setting

In a campaign, setting is the most important element, for only in a campaign can you have enough time to evoke and detail a world both broad and deep. Sojourning into another world strongly attracts many people; the atmosphere of your sessions should evoke the sense of wonder for which readers and gamers yearn.

Four sources provide most campaign settings: campaign packs, fiction and film, works of history, and your fertile imagination.

Published campaign packs provide by far the easiest and quickest way to run or to learn to create campaigns. Intended as fantasy roleplaying aids, they already have been tested for effectiveness. It may be a good idea to rely on published material at first; such work saves time and can give you a practical guide for organizing and developing your later campaign.

Next-easiest to comprehend are those settings presented by films and other narrative material. Since film rarely lavishes systematic detail, you'll get inspiration and characters from it, but little else. Fantasy and science fiction stories are often action-packed, excellent sources for settings, characters, and narratives!

Historical materials are omnipresent. Better encyclopedias, such as the Britannica III, contain thousands of topical essays, systematized and cross-referenced. Any librarian can direct you to a plethora of easily-photocopied sources for costumes, places, people, royal houses, and maps; all of it will lend you confidence and credibility. Using historical conditions insures that your setting will be coherent and logical, satisfying to your players and a great aid to you. You'll want to introduce fantasy elements, but they can be easily interpolated from traditional fantasy sources. The juvenile book section of your library, for instance, has superbly-illustrated fantasy sources emphasizing alien places and moods, violence and warfare, and magic, religion, and the supernatural.

If you decide to create your own fantasy world, be prepared to do a lot of work while designing from scratch the physical, social, and political elements of a world. Your world must withstand logical scrutiny, and must be internally consistent—your players will spend months or years poking and prodding it, and wringing out its secrets. Creating a believable world is both incredibly difficult and supremely rewarding.

Most campaigns draw from all the sources. The world of Cormac emphasizes narrative and historical sources, affording gamemasters the opportunity to use materials which are readily available and which are quite familiar.

Warning: make the time you spend designing your world proportionate to the time spent playing in it. It is discouraging to slave over a masterpiece that never comes to life in play.

Detailed settings are the most effective, but a high level of detail requires the gamemaster to have a lot of carefully-prepared material on hand. Find a manageable level of detail that will create the proper atmosphere, yet will not overload your memory and record-keeping.

Character

Campaigns have little room for characterization of gamemaster-controlled characters. Exhaustive characterization is, after all, mostly the job of the players. Occasionally a superb warrior, powerful sorcerer, or great leader becomes important, but this is more likely to occur in individual scenarios.

The great villain usually is the most important non-player-character. Though such a powerful figure rarely appears himself, this fiend steadily dispatches countless henchmen to thwart the adventurers. He and his minions may drop out of sight for a while, especially after a defeat, but they'll continue to lurk about, adding depth and range to otherwise disconnected scenarios. Eventually the players will generate their own scenarios as they hunt down their old foe.

Leaders are more likely to favor the adventurers. They may be private patrons, political kingpins, heads of religions, or shadowy forms with unfathomable motives. They can supply information and special items, and occasionally dispatch some men to strong-arm the adventurers out of trouble.

A stable of minor characters is invaluable, since adventurers always want to talk with someone you didn't anticipate. Keep a file of names, dates, and places for reference.

You should also help guide the development of the adventurers. Help the players visualize their characters. Work out a vivid background history in conjunction with the players, and explain how the adventurer fits into the societies and cultures of the campaign.

Decide how much you will rely upon randomly rolled statistics and how strictly you will follow the *Basic Roleplaying* rules. Negotiate with players to balance their knowledge of the rules with an adventurer they can handle. Some players will try to wrangle a more powerful adventurer out of the negotiations, so make it clear that the rules are an aid in organizing a campaign, not tools by which to chisel out the most powerful adventurer possible.

Plot and Incident

The most important element in a campaign is suspense, which acts structurally something like the refrain of a song, unifying the direction of the piece and reminding singers and listeners alike what it means. Similarly, suspense keeps the players interested in the campaign. Each session should hint at actions in the world beyond which may affect the adventurers, who will seek to penetrate this shroud of mystery. These will be heightened by the uncertainties about the character's fate, and maintain suspense in the campaign.

Lavish most of your work on the opening scenarios. Once you have intrigued the players, later adventures will be richer and easier.

Don't plot out the entire story line before you begin to play. Have several possible developments in mind to be chosen on the basis of the initial sessions results. As you come to better know your players and their adventurers, you can select a storyline likely to interest everyone.

Don't be too novel. Most campaign plots vary familiar story ideas offering dozens of sessions of play: the return of and triumph of the rightful king, the abduction of and rescue of the princess, the quest for the magical artifact, the search for a lost heritage, and so on.

Theme

Theme plays an important part in campaign strategy, and shapes events in individual scenarios. One or two main themes give coherence and significance to the campaign. They should engage most of the adventurers' self-motivations. Present several possible themes to start, and pursue those which interest most players. Some themes which are also skeletal plots include freeing an enslaved people, saving the universe from forces of evil, reestablishing an ancient ideal, and making the world safe for democracy. More pervasive thematics, such as proving that love is real, will require careful plotting and relating of the adventurers to specific incidents—an elaborate and risky procedure in the long run.

Fantasy gaming is escapist, a journey from the mundane to the perfect, where justice triumphs and where heroes never fall. Most players do not want tragedy or ambiguous (realistic) resolution. They may be disappointed and discouraged when you peddle the theme that everybody dies, often inappropriately, and that the rules of existence do not conform to human desires. They want a happy ending.

There should be personal tragedy. Failure and the deaths of adventurers make the eventual triumphs more poignant. But the benign universe is a major theme throughout fantasy literature.

Style

You'll also be choosing a style of presentation. Will events be humorous and light, or grim and dangerous? Will your rewards and triumphs be scarce or generous? Will adventurers grow regularly and lushly, with generous dollops of power, wealth, and success? Will you emphasize combat and

tactics, problem-solving, or dialog and roleplaying? Will the background be subtle and detailed or broadly-brushed? Should adventurer options be many, or limited and carefully directed?

Style is difficult to discuss. Roleplaying is a new narrative mode, with little resemblance to previous literary forms. In a small way, devising and running a roleplaying scenario resembles the writing, directing, and acting all the roles in a film, except that the analogy fails crucially—the artist and the audience of a film do not interact.

Roleplaying resembles jazz. One artist, the gamemaster, interacts spontaneously with several other artists, the players. Creation is shared. Roleplaying is not a spectator sport—everyone adds theme, melody, and harmony.

You can get hints about gamemaster styles from fantasy-gaming magazines, fanzines, games, and books. Seminars and conversations at game conventions can be valuable, as can observing the style of other gamemasters and borrowing what you like.

Your style will develop as you gamemaster. Do not be intimidated. Excellent gamemasters can develop with little conscious thought. As you encounter problems and resolve them, your presentation improves. Your improvement will be faster, though, if you make an effort to review your gamemastering experience, and then emphasize in later sessions what seem to be your strengths, while working to minimize your weaknesses.

Plan your campaign and scenarios by how best you can present your material. The style you evolve will be your own, organic to your abilities and predispositions. Gamemastering can be improved with dedication and hard work.

Scenario Design

Scenarios are the discrete building blocks of campaigns. They may be resolved in an evening, or last for a couple of sessions. A scenario by definition is one or more closely-connected encounters between the adventurers and the non-player-characters, creatures, traps, natural environment, and so on that you play.

Scenarios can be isolated as well, unconnected to a campaign. Isolated scenarios are ideal for times when the players may not be able to meet again.

A scenario need not be elaborate or highly original. A simple twist to a conventional situation is easy and effective: staging a melee is hardly unique, but setting your melee on a cliff face at the end of a rope, or on a flying carpet thousands of feet in the air is intriguing and interesting.

Storyline

The adventurers will have to overcome one or more situations and/or solve one or more problems as the session evolves. The sort of encounters they have indirectly make up the theme of the scenario. Sometimes your scenarios may simply be naturalistic encounters; at other times the incidents may coordinate in secondary meanings as well. Sometimes the theme simply is the storyline—the reason why the adventurers agree to be endangered and discomforted in the first place. There are lots of rationales; they may or may not have anything to do with the theme of the campaign.

Into The Unknown: a search for loot and adventure.

The Quest: a search for a specific object or person, usually at the request or order of a superior or patron.

Solving The Mystery: unusual events require investigation, and any menace must be dealt with.

Revenge: the adventurers have the opportunity to seek justice or revenge against foes who have victimized them or others.

The Challenge: honor requires that an adventurer achieve a task or be branded an unworthy coward.

Vile Intrigue: a plot threatening friends or lords of the adventurers must be unraveled, and the villains must be brought to justice.

The Escort: the adventurers must journey with and protect a lord, employer, or valuable item.

The Puzzle: a riddle or puzzle will, if solved, gain someone something desired.

The Rescue: victim must be discovered and freed unharmed from the captors.

The Crusade or The Police Action: criminals must be captured or eliminated before they cause further harm.

The War or The Assault: the adventurers have a military objective.

The Feud: the adventurers take sides in a conflict between traditional enemies.

Monster Peril: a peaceful village must be protected from the ravages of a lion, dragon, or bandit gang.

The Research Expedition: a party is dispatched to study and map an unfamiliar region.

Banditry: if honorable, the adventurers live like Robin Hood and steal from the rich to give to the poor.

Bounty Hunt: a price is on a criminal's head, the adventurers want the reward.

The Hunt: the adventurers seek to capture or to kill a beast for sport or for its economic value.

Messenger: the adventurers must overcome obstacles to deliver an important message.

Smugglers: the adventurers transport something at great risk for substantial profit.

Meet The Aliens: the adventurers encounter an alien creature or culture, and may need to defend themselves or may want to establish friendly relations.

Relating The Elements

Once you have chosen a theme or storyline, relate to it the other elements of the narrative—plot, character, and setting. (Your style remains recognizably yours; once evolved and working, don't mess with it.)

Scenario Plot: what hooks the attention of the players? What hooks the adventurers into the story? How is the scenario introduced to them? How should they resolve its challenge? What problems will confront them? What other ways might they solve it?

Scenario Non-Player-Characters: who and what will be met? What do they look like and sound like? Who among them need personalities outlined? What abilities do they have to threaten or help the adventurers? Will they appear in several scenarios?

Scenario Setting: what are the physical and cultural backgrounds? Where does the action take place? What does the region look like? Smell like? How long will the adventurers be there?

The key to roleplaying's popularity is its ability to carry us into an imaginary world in a peculiarly personal way. Well-thought-out streets and rooms leave the players with the feeling of looking through their adventurers' eyes.

Know the scene well. Use familiar real-world settings as models. Photographs of ancient castles and taverns, scenes from favorite fiction, or fantastic scenery by surrealist painters will help you with less-familiar fantasy elements. The more incisive and interesting your detail, the more convincing is your setting.

If useful, prepare a map or plan for each incident, and provide player copies. The copies you have should be annotated with the specifics of the location and encounters to be faced there. Illustrations, no matter how crude or how schematic, help players to see the scene. Published photos and illustrations suggest terrain, architecture, costumes, and battle regalia.

Cultural settings should be consistent to their own laws of science and society. You may want to use known societies as analogs, but leave yourself room to be flexible and to maintain wonder.

Plotting The Scenario

You need strong plots. Repeating similar encounters ruins player interest. Your plots should engage and entice the imagination. The action should move directly and tersely from the hook—the situation or statement which attracts the initial interest—to the ultimate showdown. Along the way, the adventurers face a series of incidental or incremental challenges.

Your scenario outline should list the initial action, the challenges or incidents, and the climax. The storyline already has determined the climax. Lavish attention on the first incident; it must attract the players and amplify or echo the motivations of their adventurers.

The Hook

Open with action. Don't detail background until players ask for it. One way to keep up suspense is to parcel out to the players a little less information than they want; then make them struggle for the rest of the information they need. You may add the pressure of a time limit within which they must act or all is lost.

The adventurers may be motivated by appeals to their greed, pride, honor, lust for power, or guilt. But if you can find a goal that relentlessly draws your players to the climax, then your scenario will succeed, even if the adventurers fail.

Complications

Having established motivation, create one or more incidents to overcome or suffer through. Give them variety; make some friendly and some not. Violent conflict is a roleplaying staple, since it threatens the lives of the adventurers, and is inherently dramatic. But adventurers should not habitually fight everything they encounter, nor should they expect every combat to annihilate the opposition. Sometimes the opposing force should have clearly superior weapons, abilities, and numbers, forcing the characters to parley, flee, or surrender when attacked. Steady violence will dull the appetite, offends those who seek more subtle adventure, and makes for lopsided adventurers. A good gamemaster also will rely on other types of challenges to provide action and conflict.

Traps can give another kind of challenge. Interpreted broadly, traps include ambushes and impeding obstacles as well as deadfalls, pits, and automated contraptions. Remember that traps may solve problems for the adventurers as well.

Riddles and other puzzles are fine complications: word games, devious logical traps, and obscure prophecies can be very entertaining.

Man-against-nature incidents occur in many adventures. Typically, wild creatures are encountered, but the natural elements are a wonderful way to make trouble for adventurers. You might have them search for water in a desert, guide a raft down a raging rapid, try to survive a blizzard, find their way through a jungle, climb a dangerous peak, and so on.

Non-player-characters are another familiar source of conflict and adventure, though many such encounters should be more than excuses for swordplay. Design incidents which force the adventurers to negotiate or to act on the basis of incomplete information, perhaps tense situations or with the handicap of a greedy informant. Create a non-player-character who is the only source for particular information, but who cannot be frightened into revealing what he knows. They'll have to talk him into it, through argument, reason, and persuasion.

Transitions

Transitions occur when one incident concludes and another has not yet started. Logical transitions are familiar activities like traveling, resting, eating, and sleeping. While not dra-

matic, such scenes lend an illusion of the flow of time. Try to use them smoothly, compressing them whenever possible—summarize, then fade to the next incident. If nothing important is to happen, why talk about it?

Transitions are excellent places to take breaks during play, or at which to halt when a scenario takes more than one session to resolve. Breaking in the middle of a melee or an escape is a bad idea. It's hard to reenter the scenario with the same enthusiasm; frequently important details will be forgotten or confused during the break.

The Climax

The climax must resolve the problem presented in the book; the resolution of the climax determines the success or failure of the adventure.

Typically, physical action resolves a scenario—the final battle or confrontation with the antagonists. A subtle or open-ended intellectual or moral climax may leave the players frustrated. A good fight releases all the tensions and neatly wraps up the narrative as well.

Creatures and Characters

After outlining and developing the incidents of your scenario, prepare the descriptions of the non-player-characters. You need not specify every skill, ability, and spell, nor feel obliged to let the dice determine important facets for your non-player-character. Tailor the statistics to fit the scenario. In the Creatures book, you'll find statistical ranges and averages for each *Basic Roleplaying* creature. There are summary forms available, designed to compactly hold such gamemaster information.

Depending on his importance, a non-player-character's appearance and personality, statistics, tactics and strategies may be valuable.

Appearance and personality need only brief notes. You'll want this for most individuals who make even a brief appearance—minor characters, information sources, and rabble.

Basic Roleplaying statistics are necessary if a non-player-character is active in the scenario. Active characters also need appearance and personality notes. Active characters include villains, patrons, and allies.

Fighting foes require notes about favorite tactics, strategies, abbreviated statistics (typically supplied by the squad sheet or the leader and followers sheet), personality and distinguishing features for leaders. Monsters, beasts, and common sword fodder may need nothing more than statistics and a number.

Great villains, such as the Sheriff of Nottingham or Elric's foe, Theleb K'aarna, may require expanded notes indicating how they fit into the campaign, their status and relations in the Empire or Kingdom, areas where their influence is weak or strong, and who are their traditional foes.

Conclusion

Fantasy roleplayers need gamemasters. To be a gamemaster, you'll need a certain knack for storytelling and communicating. You'll also need work, dedication, and a willingness to extend yourself.

There are commensurate rewards. It is immensely flattering to have your fellows be as interested in your fantasy world as they are in the worlds of Tolkien or Howard. You'll be a better and a more subtle leader, with increased self-confidence. Best of all, you'll have the joy of creation and the warm applause of your players. Few hobbies offer more.

Scenario Aids

These aids can be used to add depth to your scenarios. Do not rely exclusively on these tables though, or your games may grow stale. Instead, use these tables only as a foundation for your imagination, and change them as befits your needs.

Languages in Roleplaying

At least for major campaigns, the gamemaster should determine language families, so that he can decide whether or by how much an adventurer from one country can understand a speaker from a neighboring land. The simplest system is to state that all human languages within the campaign area are related, while non-human languages are entirely different.

The gamemaster should also determine the percentage difference in related languages, and use this either to subtract from an adventurer's language ability with a related language, or for resistance rolls as a difficulty factor to be overcome. Suppose, for instance, that Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish have a 20% difficulty factor with each other. All could have a 50% difficulty factor with German, English, or Dutch, and an 85% difficulty factor with French and the other Romance languages.

Trade languages usually develop between human societies with limited contact. Often this is a highly-abridged and refitted version of the language of the dominant employer (pidgin English, for example), but when two or more roughly-equal cultures interact, whole new languages (based on the languages of the participants) emerge. Swahili is one such example.

Outsiders generally pick up such a language easily (it was designed to be easy, after all). Later they may be embarrassed if they assumed that the language they learned was the real language of the area. Any adventurer who comes from outside the region of the campaign generally will have first learned some trade patois.

In much of medieval Europe, the international language and the language of literacy was Latin, a holdover from the long-dead Roman Empire. Probably many would have

learned Greek as well, but Greek happened to be the language of the competing Orthodox bishops of the Eastern Church. Arabic, the other important tongue, was completely outside the Christian scholastic's pale—though many nominally-Christian merchants and traders knew it well.

Encounter Tables

Encounter tables are one way to quickly create random meetings with non-player-characters and creatures. Those of this chapter are included to provide incidents during adventurer movement between specific places in other scenarios. Using the encounter tables alone, without any plot or rationale, makes for a dull game.

Tailor these tables to specific needs, or make up your own. While supplements to *Basic Roleplaying* will include tables designed for specific locations, thereby accounting for the particular nature of individual locations, the charts presented in this chapter necessarily cannot detail appearance, motivation, or other relevant facts. Determine those as appropriate to your scenario.

One good way to use encounter tables is to ignore the suggested random-roll and instead study them for interesting encounters for your scenario, then draw up the specific non-player-characters you need.

There are five encounter tables for the mundane plane: urban, rural, the wilds, wasteland, and magical terrain. There are three for the spirit plane: frontier, outer, and inner.

Mundane Plane Encounters

These encounters occur in the physical world, even though a magical place may be a portion of an encounter. The physical world is otherwise assumed to resemble the one we know. Compare with spirit plane encounters.

Urban Encounters

An urban area consists of a city of any size. But also use this table for encounters along any well-established road. Roll 1D6 for frequency of encounters. A 1 result means one encounter and a roll of 6 means six encounters that day.

Rural Encounters

In rural regions people live in villages and work the land or sea. Rural lands always intervene between urban and the wilds or wastelands. Normally there are 1D3 significant encounters daily.

Urban/Road Encounter Table

r	*o*	*l*	*l*
D100	*result*		
01	Group of traveling nobles, with extensive entourage.		
02	Rowdy rich nobleman, may be seeking trouble.		
03	Servants of noblemen with entourage.		
04-05	Servant of noblemen with modest following.		
06	Priest or priestess traveling with entourage.		
07	Priest or priestess engaged in some activity.		
08	Lone mendicant monk, or paupered priest or priestess.		
09-10	Adept sorcerer with entourage.		
11-14	Soldiers--passing by, on guard, etc.		
15	Soldiers--questioning or searching party.		
16-17	Large merchant caravan passes.		
18-19	Small merchant caravan passes.		
20-25	Peddlers on foot.		
26-27	Wagon of goods driven by crafter.		
28-29	Cart of goods driven by crafter.		
30-35	Crafter bearing goods on back.		
36-40	Farmers in wagons.		
41-55	Farmers in carts.		
56-65	Farmers with livestock.		
66-90	Farmers on foot.		
91-95	Thief or pickpocket.		
96-00	Party is lost--roll encounter from the rural table.		

The Rural Encounter Table

D100	*result*
01-05	Lost--roll encounter from urban table.
06	Lord of nearest town, with entourage.
07	Priest or priestess of nearest town.
08	Soldiers from nearest town.
09	Townspeople traveling on business.
10	A town.
11	Peddler on the move.
12-14	Traveling farmers.
15-16	Empty dirt trail.
17-26	Plowed fields.
27-29	A village.
30	A lord's country manor.
31-50	Empty fields suitable for grazing.
51-55	Domestic herd animals with herdsman.
56-59	One large wild herbivore.
60	One large carnivore.
61-65	Primitive hunters.
66-70	Country boys intent on mugging the party.
71-75	Highwayman, or a group of bandits.
76-80	Enemy scouting party.
81-00	Lost--roll event from the wilds table.

Encounters in the Wilds (Wilderness)

Human habitation occurs in the wilds, or wilderness, but neither in large numbers nor under comfortable conditions. Peoples native to such areas usually are of nomadic or primitive cultures. Roll twice daily.

Wasteland Encounters

Wastelands include forests, deserts, icelands, mountaintops, swamps, and other regions not normally settled by humans. Here monsters may live. Roll once daily.

Magical Terrain Encounters

In such regions magic lies heaviest, and odd things occur for no reason. Sometimes an ordinary region becomes magical for a while—perhaps after some great ritual, magical battle, or mysterious birth. Roll once daily.

The Spirit Plane

The spirit plane is a featureless place, marked only by the auras of the beings who inhabit it. Ordinary senses are useless here, but every consciousness generates a field of presence around itself with a strength equivalent to one meter per point of POW.

Awareness of such auras is sometimes called "spirit sense." Humans recall only shifting shapes and lights, as do other beings who rely primarily upon sight. A recognizable form or definable shape is rare. Creatures relying on other senses recall the entities by means of those perceptions.

Use the spirit plane encounter tables whenever an adventurer travels the otherworld. The tables show the types of creatures which inhabit the otherworld. Adventurer shamans might search the planes seeking a particular type of spirit or if pursuing some unusual or powerful entity. The gamemaster should make one encounter roll per hour of discorporate travel.

Shamans are trained to navigate the spirit plane. Whenever an encounter is rolled for by the gamemaster, the shaman may alter (raise or lower) the D100 roll by a number of percentiles equal to or less than the POW of the shaman's fetch (not including the shaman's personal POW). He may use these encounter die-roll alterations to find particular types of spirits or to pass between adjacent regions of the spirit plane. Thus, a more powerful shaman will find the required spirit or reach the desired portion of the spirit plane more easily and quickly than an inexperienced shaman. Traveling deeper into the spirit plane requires that the shaman receive a D100 encounter roll result indicating passage to the deeper level (consult the proper spirit plane encounter table). If the shaman is moving outward from the inner region to the frontier, he must achieve an encounter roll result less than 01. A shaman is never obliged to change regions. He may also return to his body instantly at any time, regardless of his position on the spirit plane, unless engaged in spirit combat.

The Wilds Encounter Table

D100	*result*
01	Lost--roll event from rural table.
02	Traveler headed toward a village.
03-04	Tilled fields.
05	Village buildings and residents.
06-10	Primitive or nomadic culture, human family.
11	Primitive or nomadic culture, human clan.
12	Shaman with entourage.
13	Holy man. (Hermit, vision-quester, etc.)
14-15	Primitive or nomadic culture, non-human group.
16-18	Brigands or outlaws.
19-20	Enemy scouting party.
21-30	Empty pastures.
31-35	Pasture with herdsman and domestic animals.
36-45	Fields of wild herbivores.
46-50	Fields with wild carnivore(s).
56-60	Trees and rough terrain.
61-70	Scrub and rough terrain, with wild herbivores.
71-75	Scrub and rough terrain, with carnivore(s).
76-80	One monster which is dangerous to humans.
81-00	Lost--roll on wasteland table.

Wasteland Encounter Table

D100	*result*
01	Village.
02	Hermit or other holy person.
03-05	Human trappers, etc.
06-10	Friendly creature.
11-70	Wild herbivores.
71-80	Wild carnivore.
81-90	Unfriendly monster, dangerous to humans.
91-95	Deadly location (quicksand, poison dust, sheer cliff, avalanche, flooding river, volcano, etc.)
96-00	Lost--roll on magical terrain table.

Magical Terrain Encounter Table

D100	*result*
01	Magical ruler of region.
02	Village of immortals.
03-05	Dance of nature.
06	Neutral demigod.
07-16	Non-human intelligent group or species.
17	Leaders of non-human group or species.
18-20	Servants of local non-human species.
21-45	Large herbivore.
46-50	Large carnivore.
51-65	Magical herbivore.
66-70	Magical carnivore.
71-75	Invading enemies.
76-85	Deadly location (quicksand, carnivorous plants, magical destruction, etc.).
86-99	Monsters.
00	Demonic demigod.

A non-shamanic adventurer forced to discorporate moves about the spirit plane suffering from random encounters: he cannot influence the encounter die rolls using his POW. He cannot return to the mundane plane without help, though he may accidentally travel deeper into the spirit plane through encounter table results.

The Frontier Region

The frontier region is the area which seems closest to the mundane world. Discorporation sends a spirit to this region of the spirit plane. Those spirits most commonly interacting with the living are from this region. The frontier must be traversed in order to reach the outer region.

Outer Spirit Plane

In this outer region dwell more powerful spirits which are often malevolent towards the living, but which are not powerful enough to find a more secure spiritual refuge in the inner region.

The Inner Region

The inner region is the core of the spirit plane. Here eddy the most powerful, the most exotic, and the rarest spirits.

Treasure and Reward

Treasure is an ultimate reward for an adventurer. It is portable, concealable, and can be used to exchange directly for training, research, or equipment, making the adventurer stronger physically or intellectually, and just that much more likely to survive the next brush with death. Treasure is also countable, and its existence at the end of a game gives players and adventurers alike a way of understanding the success of the session or scenario. Men and women who wager their lives expect good reward in return.

As well as cash, rewards can be articles of worth, usable magical items, or information. A few adventurers might say that having eliminated a source of danger to themselves and their people is treasure enough. Most (but not all) feel that a triumph over their foes is adequate recompense. An adventurer rarely declines when pennies accompany the less tangible gifts of thanks and glory.

Adventurers might receive as tangible reward for their deeds either guaranteed wages or performance bounties, or some or all of the loot gathered during the expedition. Accepting payment in loot risks that there will be none, or that it will be lost; on the other hand, guaranteed wages may be dishearteningly less than the loot actually recovered.

Guaranteed Income

You might assume that the employer of the adventurers handles all the finances. Then you'll just tell the players when their adventurers get new armor, new horses, or whatever. This method would be best, for instance, when adventurers

Frontier Region Encounter Table

D100	*encounter*	*INT*	*POW or MP*
01-02	chonchon	4D6	3D6+6
03-08	disease spirit	--	3D6+6
09-10	ghoul spirit	3D6	2D6+6
11-25	ghost	2D6+6	4D6
26-27	wraith	2D6+6	3D6+6
28-30	nymph	varies with type	
31-60	spell spirit	per spell	3D6
61-70	intellect spirit	1D6	2D10
71-80	power spirit	--	2D6+3
81-85	discorporate shaman	1D6+12	3D6+6
86-00	to outer plane		

Outer Region Encounter Table

D100	*encounter*	*INT*	*POW*
01-03	chonchon	5D6	5D6+6
04-10	disease spirit	--	5D6+6
11-12	elemental	--	varies
13-15	hellion	4D6	3D6+6
16-25	ghost	3D6+6	6D6
26-28	wraith	3D6+6	5D6+6
29-35	healing spirit	--	4D6
36-45	intellect spirit	1D10	3D10
46-55	magic spirit	3D6	3D6+6
56-60	power spirit	--	3D6+3
61-70	spell spirit	per spell	4D6
71-80	passion spirit	--	3D6+6
81-85	other spirit or demon	varies with type	
86-90	discorporate shaman	1D6+12	3D6+6
91-00	to inner plane		

Inner Region Encounter Table

D100	*encounter*	*INT*	*POW*
01	Bad Man aspect	20	35
02-10	cult/religion spirit	varies with type	
11-25	elemental	--	varies
26-35	ghost	4D6+6	8D6
36-40	hellion	4D6	6D6+6
41-45	healing spirit	--	6D6
46-50	intellect spirit	2D6	4D10
51-60	magic spirit	4D6	5D6+6
61-65	power spirit	--	4D6+3
66-70	spell spirit	per spell	5D6
71-80	passion spirit	--	5D6+6
81-85	discorporate shaman	1D6+12	3D6+6
86-00	gamemaster's choice		

work within a clan, with the clan lord as the employer. Alternately, such an employer might be a local potentate, a temple head, or a gang leader. Experienced adventurers can settle down for awhile and work as bodyguards, watchmen, enforcers, or soldiers.

Alternately, you may assume the same circumstances, but allow the adventurers to handle their own finances. Pay them regular wages; leave it to them to do their own bookkeeping. Occasionally, therefore, they'll run out of money—a great time to tempt them with dangerous propositions.

Adventurer salaries should be a function of the work done and of the arrangements made. An adventurer living with his home clan as a full-time warrior should certainly receive high status. But, all things being equal, a mercenary of equal skill who is hired by the clan for a specific job should be paid about twice the daily rate of his clansman counterpart, since the mercenary is without guarantee of full-time work. (The clansman s daily rate is about 16 pennies per day; a first-class hired swordsman could get 32 pennies per day.)

Adventurers who want cash without fixed responsibility may prefer working for bounties—specified rewards for specific jobs. Suppose a dragon ravages the countryside: the authorities are likely to have posted a reward for its demise. If the adventurers slay the monster, then they can be assured of that reward, and perhaps even collect something extra if the dragon has a treasure hoard (assuming that the adventurers can slay the dragon).

Loot by Speculation

A popular form of adventure is the free-lance expedition, usually destined far from civilization (easy-to-get-at loot presumably has already been grabbed by predecessors). The rewards may be chimerical despite the risk, but generally high risk should mean high reward. The free-lance party remains the quickest road to riches. Normally, such adventurers will have one of four identities—as raiders, bandits, grave-robbers, or monster-hunters.

Raiders: in war, or in situations reflecting interspecies enmity, normal banditry becomes an act of war. Loot so obtained is rightful plunder, and considered to be the property of the looter by his side. Such proceeds mostly will consist of goods, not money. The adventurers may find themselves at the mercy of prize courts, regimental loot divisions, ridiculous shares schemes, taxmen, and other government interference with their rightful gain.

Bandits: Adventurers who rob their own people are bandits. Their presence ensures that a standing army, clan warriors, or mercenary adventurers will exist to try to eliminate them. As gamemaster, bear in mind the contrasting social definitions of raider and bandit, and use them in play. Think out the retaliation likely to pursue malefactors within the settled areas of your campaign. Remind your players to insure their adventurers with the guise of respectability. Brawlers, robbers, and pick-pockets deserve to be pursued by lots of other bounty-hunting adventurers armed with sword and noose.

Grave Robbers: many a hero has won vast treasure by looting the tombs of the great. Remember that tombs exist to honor the dead. Plunderers of such places are desecrating ancestral resting-places of peoples who may still be living, powerful, and vengeful; tomb-robbers are scum and the lowest of scavengers to those who care.

In the worlds of *Basic Roleplaying*, defenses for the great tombs will be much more effective than the vaguely-worded curses and tricky deadfalls of this world. Adventurers daring the living and dead defenders of rich tombs deserve any treasure that can get.

Monster-Hunters: Killing dumb, dangerous beasts has a lot in its favor. No one questions the adventurer's rights to such gains. Morality is rarely a question. Unlike raiding, once the monster is dead, the adventurers usually don't have to fight their way back for days through wild and hostile terrain—and monsters usually do not have kinsmen to wreak vengeance, Grendel's mother excepted.

Unfortunately, monsters will not have much loot. Monsters do not sit in the wilderness hoarding loot. The dragons Fafnir (who guarded the Rhinegold) and Smaug (who sat on the riches of Erebor) seem like exceptions, but remember that they hoarded the wealth gathered by others. Destroying Fafnir and Smaug was a service to civilized beings; their hoards comprised a just reward for the slayers—it's not easy to kill a dragon.

Unintelligent monsters have no use for gold and silver. Treasure found in their lairs is incidental to the skeletons of victims littering the floors. Some usable (blood-stained) armor and weapons might be present, but rarely money or other objects of value: stoorworms and lions, for example, do not bother to haul back loot to their lairs. If they have taken over someone else's home, then they incidentally might control treasure commensurate with the normal possessions of the former inhabitants. Goods still present would range in condition from the merely dusty to the befouled and mutilated. The previous owners may be dead, may no longer have use for their goods, or they may offer a reward for their recovery or for the freeing of their residence.

Intelligent monsters are as likely as anyone to possess treasure. As intelligent beings, they have organized uses for money, goods, and luxuries. Their defenses likely will be in part magical, and will be as systematically designed as the technical level of their culture allows. Intelligent monsters will cooperate at least as much as will intelligent adventurers.

Other Treasures

Strange and outre items might appear in a hoard, including enchanted artifacts, maps and documents, and arcanities such as poisons, healing herbs, pet monsters, etc.

These items should be devised and put into treasures by the gamemaster. The Other Treasures table suggests some guidelines for possible items, your imagination will arrive at many more.