

***Dungeon
Master***[®]
FOR
DUMMIES[®]

by Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker

Foreword by Jeff Grubb



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Wiley Publishing, Inc.

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About the Authors

Bill Slavicsek began playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS roleplaying game with his friends during his formative teenage years in New York City. This was in 1977, the same year that *Star Wars* and *Sword of Shannara* debuted. This trilogy of epic fantasy combined with comic books and horror novels were to forever influence Bill's outlook on life and entertainment. In 1986, Bill's hobby became his career when he joined the staff of West End Games. There, as an editor and game designer, Bill worked on a number of board games and roleplaying games, including *Ghostbusters*, *Paranoia*, *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, and *Torg: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars*. Later, Bill went on to use his vast knowledge of the *Star Wars* films and associated extensions to write two editions of *A Guide to the Star Wars Universe* for Lucasfilm, Ltd., and published by Del Rey Books.

In 1993, Bill joined the staff of TSR, Inc., then publishers of the DUNGEON & DRAGONS game lines, as a game designer and editor. His design credits for the company include the *ALTERNITY Science Fiction Game* (which he co-designed with Richard Baker), the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, the *d20 Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, the *Star Wars Miniatures Game*, *Urban Arcana*, *Council of Wyrms*, and the *EBERRON Campaign Setting*.

Since 1997, Bill has been the Director of Roleplaying Games Research and Development for Wizards of the Coast, Inc., the company that now publishes all DUNGEONS & DRAGONS novels and game products. He oversaw the creation of the d20 Roleplaying Game System and the newest edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. Bill leads a talented staff of game designers, developers, and editors who produce award-winning game products for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and other d20 System game lines, including roleplaying game supplements and accessories, adventures and campaign books, and pre-painted plastic miniatures. He lives with his wife Michele, two cats, and more comics, toys, and books than he knows what to do with — and that's okay by him.

Richard Baker is an award-winning game designer and a best-selling author. He's worked on the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game lines since 1991. Rich traces his D&D experience back to 1979, when he began playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game as a 7th-grader. He spent a significant amount of his high school and college years playing D&D at every opportunity, and after serving as a surface warfare officer in the United States Navy, Rich decided to take a shot at working on the game he grew up playing — and so he joined the staff of TSR, Inc., and became a game designer.

Rich's list of D&D design credits numbers over 50 game products, including the Origins Award-winning *BIRTHRIGHT Campaign Setting*, the *ALTERNITY Science Fiction Roleplaying Game* (which he co-designed with Bill Slavicsek), and the newest edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. He has also served as creative director for the *ALTERNITY* and *FORGOTTEN REALMS* game lines. As an author,

Rich has published eight fantasy and science fiction novels, including *City of Ravens*, *Forsaken House*, and the New York Times bestseller *Condemnation*.

Rich is currently employed as a senior game designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and works every day on new products for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. He married his college sweetheart, Kim, in 1991; they have two daughters, Alex and Hannah. When he isn't writing (a rare occurrence), Rich likes to hike in the Cascades, play wargames, and root for the Philadelphia Phillies — who just don't seem to be getting any better, darn it.

Dedication

Bill Slavicsek: To DMs everywhere, past, current, and future. The world needs you, now more than ever. Dream it up, play it, and have fun!

Richard Baker: To Kim, Alex, and Hannah for putting up with a lot of work in evenings and on weekends for many months now. “Understanding” is an understatement.

Authors' Acknowledgments

Many exceptional people have contributed to the D&D game. We'd like to say a word of thanks to the game designers and editors who helped us to get started in this business, including Jim Ward, Kim Mohan, Zeb Cook, Jeff Grubb, Steve Winter, Bruce Nesmith, Tim Brown, Troy Denning, Roger Moore, Ed Greenwood, Harold Johnson, Andrea Hayday, Jon Pickens, Skip Williams, Bill Connors, and especially Dave Sutherland. Dave passed away a few months before this book published, but millions of D&D fans know and love his monster illustrations and dungeon maps from the earliest days of the game, most of all the 1st Edition *Monster Manual*. We both worked with Dave on many D&D projects in our early days at TSR. We're going to miss him.

We owe a special thank you to the folks at Wizards of the Coast who worked so hard to breathe fresh life into the D&D game, including Peter Adkison, Ryan Dancey, Skaff Elias, Lisa Stevens, and many others.

We've had the pleasure of playing in many D&D games over the years, so it seems especially appropriate to thank the folks who have been our own Dungeon Masters over the years. Rich would like to thank Bud Stiles, Greg Wingo, Thomas Reid, John Rateliff, Ed Stark, Warren Wyman, and Dave Noonan. Bill wants to say hi to his Thursday Night Game Group, past and present, which has included such players as Michele Carter, Jeff Grubb, John Rateliff, Chris Perkins, Ed Stark, Thomas Reid, Larry Weiner, Stephen Schend, Dale Donovan, Cindy Rick, David Wise, Lester Smith, and others who played an adventure or two or stuck around for entire campaigns. Thanks!

Bill Slavicsek: The current edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game owes its existence to a lot of talented people. The work that Rich and I have done on this *For Dummies* book would not have been possible if not for the original effort of a formidable team of creatives and business people. Peter Adkison, for purchasing TSR, Inc., merging its products and staff with Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and providing the vision for what the new edition of the game would be. My creative team on the massive re-design project, which included Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, Kim Mohan, Julia Martin, John Rateliff, Ed Stark, Dawn Murin, Todd Lockwood, and Sam Wood. The business team, past and present, who help bring D&D products to market, which includes Ryan Dancey, Keith Strohm, Cindy Rice, Mary Kirchoff, Anthony Valterra, Chris Toepker, Liz Schuh, Mary Elizabeth Allen, Charles Ryan, Kevin Wilson, Linae Foster, and Scott Rouse.

I have to acknowledge the efforts of my current staff. This amazing collection of designers, developers, and editors work everyday to push the envelope and expand the horizons of our products, and as much as I lead them, they influence the way I think about and approach game design and D&D. Every part of this *For Dummies* book owes at least a little to the ideas and work of Richard Baker, Michele Carter, Andy Collins, Bruce Cordell, Jesse Decker, Michael Donais, Rob Heinsoo, Gwendolyn F.M. Kestrel, Stacy Longstreet, Mike Mearls, Kim Mohan, David Noonan, Christopher Perkins, John Rateliff, Stephen Schubert, Matthew Sernett, Ed Stark, Chris Thomasson, Rob Watkins, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, and James Wyatt.

Finally, thanks to everyone at Wiley Publishing who worked with us on this, including Melody Layne, Jean Rogers, and Virginia Sanders, and to everyone at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., who help us make great games on a regular basis.

Richard Baker: Many people of exceptional creativity have worked on the D&D game over the years. Without the work of game designers, editors, and artists such as Gary Gygax, Dave Arneson, Jim Ward, Kim Mohan, Zeb Cook, Jeff Grubb, Steve Winter, Bruce Nesmith, Tim Brown, Troy Denning, Roger Moore, Ed Greenwood, Mike Carr, Harold Johnson, Andrea Hayday, Jon Pickens, Lawrence Schick, Skip Williams, Dave Sutherland, Jeff Easley, Larry Elmore, and countless others, D&D would not have grown into the beloved hobby of millions of fans across the world. Countless other authors, artists, developers, and editors have contributed over the years; we're sorry that we can't thank them all.

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Contents at a Glance

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xix</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Part I: Running a Great Game</i>	<i>7</i>
Chapter 1: The Role of the Dungeon Master	9
Chapter 2: Preparing for Play.....	21
Chapter 3: Running the Game	33
Chapter 4: Narrating the Adventure	45
Chapter 5: Dealing with Players	61
Chapter 6: Teaching the Game.....	77
Chapter 7: Sample Dungeon: The Rat Lord's Lair	85
<i>Part II: Advanced Dungeon Mastering</i>	<i>105</i>
Chapter 8: Running an Ongoing Game.....	107
Chapter 9: Knowing the Players	125
Chapter 10: Choosing Your Game Style.....	139
Chapter 11: Creating Excitement at the Game Table	151
Chapter 12: Growing Your Game	167
Chapter 13: Using Every Available Resource.....	179
<i>Part III: Creating Adventures</i>	<i>191</i>
Chapter 14: Tools of the Trade	193
Chapter 15: The Dungeon Adventure	205
Chapter 16: The Wilderness Adventure.....	213
Chapter 17: The Event-Based Adventure	219
Chapter 18: The Randomly Generated Adventure	225
Chapter 19: The High-Level Adventure.....	249
Chapter 20: Sample Dungeon: The Necromancer's Apprentice	261
<i>Part IV: Building a Campaign</i>	<i>289</i>
Chapter 21: Building a Continuous Story	291
Chapter 22: Creating Memorable Villains.....	301
Chapter 23: Bringing the World to Life	307

<i>Part V: The Part of Tens</i>	317
Chapter 24: Ten Best Classic Adventures	319
Chapter 25: Ten Best <i>Dungeon Magazine</i> Adventures	323
Chapter 26: Ten Best 3rd Edition Adventures	327
Chapter 27: Ten Challenging Traps	331
Chapter 28: Ten Ready-to-Use Encounters	339
Chapter 29: Ten Things to Avoid When DMing.....	363
Chapter 30: Ten Things to Do All the Time When DMing.....	367
<i>Index</i>	371

Table of Contents

Foreword.....*xix*

Introduction..... **1**

About This Book.....1
Why You Need This Book.....2
How to Use This Book.....2
D&D Terminology.....3
How This Book Is Organized.....5
 Part I: Running a Great Game.....5
 Part II: Advanced Dungeon Mastering.....5
 Part III: Creating Adventures.....5
 Part IV: Building a Campaign.....5
 Part V: The Part of Tens.....6
Icons Used in This Book.....6
Where to Go from Here.....6

Part I: Running a Great Game **7**

Chapter 1: The Role of the Dungeon Master **9**

What Is a DM?10
So You Want to Be the Dungeon Master?10
What Do You Need for Playing?11
The Expressions of Dungeon Mastering.....12
 DM as rules moderator12
 DM as narrator.....13
 DM as a cast of thousands14
 DM as player16
 DM as social director18
 DM as creator.....19
The Goal of Dungeon Mastering.....20

Chapter 2: Preparing for Play **21**

Gathering a Game Group.....21
 Finding players22
 Inviting players to the game24
Using a Published Adventure25
 Wizards of the Coast products26
 Dungeon Magazine26



- RPGA27
- Other d20 publishers27
- Creating Your Own Adventures27
- Making Preparations before the Game28
- Establishing the Ground Rules: Gaming Etiquette28
 - Being ready to run the game29
 - Hosting chores29
 - Setting a time limit30
 - Bringing or chipping in for refreshments30
 - Eliminating outside distractions31
 - Making sure everyone understands the in-game rules of conduct31

Chapter 3: Running the Game 33

- Taking Charge as Dungeon Master and Running the Game33
 - DM laws34
 - DM basics34
 - Narrating.....35
 - Running NPCs and monsters35
 - Winging it36
- Playing through the Game Session36
 - Setting ground rules36
 - Settling in as everyone arrives36
 - Gathering around the game table.....37
 - Creating and updating characters.....38
 - Opening with the prologue.....39
 - Recapping the previous session.....41
 - Taking on encounters and challenges42
 - Ending a game session.....43
 - Closing with an epilogue44

Chapter 4: Narrating the Adventure 45

- Understanding D&D as a Storytelling Experience45
 - The group story concept.....46
 - An ongoing epic46
 - The DM's role47
- Telling Interesting and Exciting Stories.....47
 - Making a story a D&D story48
 - Choosing an adventure premise.....49
- Mastering the Adventure Narration.....50
 - Directing the adventure50
 - Adding special effects.....51
 - Playing the nonplayer characters53
- Bringing the Adventure to Life55
 - Creating fantastic locations56
 - Describing intense battles.....56
 - Giving the players exciting challenges59
 - Setting up evocative roleplaying encounters59

Chapter 5: Dealing with Players	61
D&D: A Social Experience.....	61
Looking at the Game Group.....	62
Comparing DMs and Players	62
Being the DM.....	63
Interacting with players.....	63
What do you want out of the game?	65
Increasing the fun quotient	67
Setting Ground Rules and Expectations.....	67
Staying serious or hungering for humor?.....	68
Naming characters	68
Managing multiple characters	68
Handling no-shows.....	69
Adding new players.....	70
Dealing with dice	70
Bringing books.....	71
Debating rules.....	72
Managing off-topic discussions	72
Considering computers	72
Setting the table with miniatures and a battle grid.....	73
Making Mistakes and Deciding What to Do with Them	73
Sharing DM Duties.....	75
One campaign, multiple DMs.....	75
Multiple campaigns, multiple DMs.....	75
Chapter 6: Teaching the Game	77
Dungeon Master as Teacher.....	78
Teaching the basic rules.....	78
Showing how to create a character	79
Relaxing and having fun playing the game.....	79
Making Use of Helpful Aids	80
D&D Basic Game.....	80
Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies	80
Fantastic Locations	80
Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures.....	80
Teaching Key Elements to New Players	81
Explaining the premise of D&D.....	81
Describing the world of D&D	82
Showing how to use the core mechanic.....	82
Explaining what a character can do.....	83
Explaining the most important parts of the character sheet	83
Chapter 7: Sample Dungeon: The Rat Lord's Lair	85
Dungeon Master Preparation.....	85
Knowing the players	85
Knowing your adventure.....	86

The Rat Lord's Lair.....	87
Adventure premise.....	88
Starting the adventure.....	89
Encounter Area 1: The Basement Room.....	90
Encounter Area 2: Unfriendly Gang.....	98
Encounter Area 3: Lair of the Rat Lord.....	101
Making the Adventure Tougher.....	104

Part II: Advanced Dungeon Mastering 105

Chapter 8: Running an Ongoing Game 107

Choosing the Right Format.....	108
The standalone session.....	108
The dungeon-of-the-week adventure.....	109
The one-shot campaign.....	110
The continuing campaign.....	111
Keeping Records.....	112
The no-records game.....	113
The DM binder.....	113
Building a Basic Campaign.....	114
Linking adventures together.....	114
Pacing character advancement.....	117
Creating the home base.....	118
A Sample Base: Griffonford.....	120
The story of Griffonford.....	120
Notable NPCs.....	122
Adventures near Griffonford.....	124

Chapter 9: Knowing the Players 125

Figuring Out Player Styles.....	125
Roleplayers.....	126
Power gamers.....	126
Introducing the Player Types.....	127
Hack'n'slasher.....	128
Wargamer.....	129
Thinker.....	129
Impulsive adventurer.....	130
Explorer.....	130
Character actor.....	131
Watcher.....	131
Analyzing the Players.....	132
Balancing Play Styles.....	133
Getting Along with Difficult Players.....	133
Handling a problem character.....	133
Dealing with a rules lawyer.....	135
Speeding up a slow player.....	136
Involving the apathetic player.....	137

Chapter 10: Choosing Your Game Style139

- DM Styles: Running the Game You Run Best139
 - Action movie director140
 - Storyteller141
 - Worldbuilder141
 - Puzzlemaker142
 - Connector142
- Establishing Your Own Style143
- Setting the Tone143
 - Arbiter or narrator?144
 - On-task or player-paced?144
 - By the book or fast and loose?146
- Building Your DM Toolbox146
 - Letting the dice decide146
 - Ruling by common sense147
 - Winging it148
 - DM cheating149

Chapter 11: Creating Excitement at the Game Table151

- Maximizing Imagination151
 - Narrating for all five senses152
 - Mixing the mundane and fantastic152
 - Suspending disbelief154
 - Setting the mood155
 - Showing, not telling156
- Pacing the Game163
 - Cliffhangers164
 - The cut-away scene164
 - Varying your delivery165
 - Getting to the fun fast165

Chapter 12: Growing Your Game167

- Setting Your Game in a World167
- Adding New Rules Elements168
 - Making new options available169
 - Examining new rules elements170
- Creating House Rules174
- Getting Players Involved in the Game175
 - Crafting good backgrounds175
 - Using character goals176
 - Using 21st century technology to enhance your game178

Chapter 13: Using Every Available Resource179

- Buying Published Game Material179
- Understanding what’s out there180
- Figuring out what you need183

Finding Story Inspiration	185
The real world.....	185
Fantasy fiction	185
Movies and TV	187
The collision of ideas	188
Talking with Other Gamers	188
Joining a game club.....	189
Corresponding on the Web	189

***Part III: Creating Adventures* 191**

Chapter 14: Tools of the Trade 193

Breaking Down the Parts of a D&D Adventure	193
The premise	195
Encounters	197
The end.....	198
Creating Dungeon Maps	200
Populating a Dungeon.....	200
Challenge Ratings	201
Encounter Level.....	201
Rewards	202
Experience points.....	203
Treasure.....	203

Chapter 15: The Dungeon Adventure 205

Designing Your First Dungeon	205
Plotting the dungeon's story.....	206
Drawing the map	206
Marking the encounter areas.....	207
Making a key	208
Adding Depth to Dungeon Crawls.....	211

Chapter 16: The Wilderness Adventure 213

Designing a Wilderness Adventure	213
What is the wilderness?.....	214
How to use the wilderness	217
Wilderness Adventure Outline	217

Chapter 17: The Event-Based Adventure 219

Designing Event-Based Adventures	219
The flowchart.....	220
The timeline	221
Using Flowcharts and Timelines in Dungeons	223

Chapter 18: The Randomly Generated Adventure	225
Using the Random-Generation Tables	225
Keeping Track of a Random Dungeon	226
Starting Your Random Dungeon	227
Base Encounter Level	227
First room configuration.....	228
Generating the Dungeon Map	229
Rolling a Random Encounter	238
Generating Random Treasure.....	243
Finishing a Random Dungeon.....	248
Chapter 19: The High-Level Adventure	249
Understanding Why the Game Changes.....	250
Mobility magic	250
The widening attack gap	251
Save-or-die spells.....	252
Divination magic.....	253
Specialization.....	254
Refining the Challenges	254
Flight	256
Invisibility.....	256
Invulnerability.....	257
Making the Experience Match the Level	259
Raising the stakes.....	259
Wowing the players with the setting.....	259
Providing benchmark encounters.....	260
Chapter 20: Sample Dungeon: The Necromancer's Apprentice ...	261
Dungeon Master Preparation.....	261
The Necromancer's Apprentice	262
Adventure premise.....	262
Starting the adventure	263
Arim's pasture.....	265
The Thirsting Wood	267
House of Roburn.....	269
The dungeon below.....	276
Concluding the adventure.....	287
Making the Adventure Tougher	288
Part IV: Building a Campaign	289
Chapter 21: Building a Continuous Story	291
Building a Campaign	292
Creating a world	292
Using context	292

Building on past events	294
Finding inspiration	295
Choosing themes for adventures and campaigns	296
The Dungeon-of-the-Week Campaign Model	299
Building on What the Players Give You.....	300
Chapter 22: Creating Memorable Villains	301
What Is a Villain?	301
Every Hero Needs a Good Villain	302
Good villains take work	302
Give villains every chance to succeed	303
Villain Archetypes	304
Master villains.....	304
Minor villains	306
Chapter 23: Bringing the World to Life	307
The World in a Nutshell: The DM's Notebook	307
Building a World from the Inside Out: Start Small and Add Details	308
Putting the World Together	309
Climate and geography.....	311
Sites of interest	312
 Part V: The Part of Tens	 317
Chapter 24: Ten Best Classic Adventures	319
S1–Tomb of Horrors	319
G1–Stading of the Hill Giant Chief	320
D1–Descent into the Depths of the Earth.....	320
S2–White Plume Mountain	320
A1–Slave Pits of the Undercity	320
C1–The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan	321
Q1–Queen of the Demonweb Pits.....	321
I3–Pharaoh	321
I6–Ravenloft	321
T1–4–The Temple of Elemental Evil.....	322
Chapter 25: Ten Best <i>Dungeon Magazine</i> Adventures	323
The Age Of Worms Adventure Path	323
The Shackled City Adventure Path	324
The Styes.....	324
Mad God's Key.....	324
Maure Castle	325
Tammeraut's Fate.....	325
The Lich-Queen's Beloved	325

Tears for Twilight Hollow.....	325
Rana Mor.....	326
The Harrowing.....	326
Chapter 26: Ten Best 3rd Edition Adventures	327
The Sunless Citadel.....	327
Shadows of the Last War.....	327
Forge of Fury.....	327
Whispers of the Vampire's Blade.....	328
Sons of Gruumsh.....	328
Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil.....	328
The Speaker in Dreams.....	330
Red Hand of Doom.....	330
City of the Spider Queen.....	330
Lord of the Iron Fortress.....	330
Chapter 27: Ten Challenging Traps	331
Scything Blade Trap.....	332
Symbol.....	332
Burning Hands Trap.....	333
Portcullis Trap.....	333
Teleport Trap.....	334
Poison Gas Trap.....	335
Dart Trap.....	336
Glyph of Warding.....	336
Water Trap.....	337
Pit Trap.....	338
Chapter 28: Ten Ready-to-Use Encounters	339
Umber Hulk Ambush (EL 9).....	339
Walking the Plank (EL 3).....	340
Corridor of Webs (EL 2).....	343
Mummy Crypt (EL 7).....	345
Rain of Arrows, Rain of Fire (EL 6).....	347
Dragon's Den (EL 4).....	349
Minotaur Maze (EL 7).....	352
Grimlock Hunters (EL 3).....	353
Elemental Fundamentals (EL 9).....	355
Shrine of Evil (EL 10).....	359
Chapter 29: Ten Things to Avoid When DMing	363
Don't Get Attached to Your Villains.....	363
Don't Try to Kill the PCs.....	363
Don't Let the Players Become Too Frustrated.....	364
Don't Compete With Other Entertainment.....	364

Don't Overcomplicate the Encounter	365
Don't Play Favorites	365
Don't Give the Players Everything	365
... But Don't Be Stingy, Either	365
Don't Sit There Like a Lump	366
Don't Center the Game on One Player.....	366

Chapter 30: Ten Things to Do All the Time When DMing 367

Be Prepared	367
Provide Various Challenges	367
Start Each Session with Action.....	368
Look for Opportunities.....	368
Exude Drama in Your Descriptions.....	368
Use Visual Aids	368
Be Responsive	369
Be Consistent.....	369
Be Impartial.....	370
Have Fun.....	370

<i>Index</i>	371
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Foreword

Welcome to the next level.

Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker put together the original *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* book with an eye toward making D&D, an intriguing and complex system, more accessible and friendly to both first-time players and long-term fans. Now they're back, ready to take on an even greater challenge.

The art of Dungeon Mastery.

Being a DM is a quantum leap up from merely playing the game. You aren't keeping track of a single character but rather coordinating a full-fledged world. You're not worrying just about what is behind the next door but about how the epic adventure will ultimately resolve. You have to be ready for anything that a group of creative, inventive, and downright devious players will throw at you over the course of a game session. You are host, team leader, narrator, head bad guy, playwright, supporting cast, ringleader, and ringmaster, all at the same time.

It is a very tall order, and Bill and Rich put it all together in one package for you.

I can personally vouch for Bill's DM credentials. For the past few years, a group of us creative types, present and former members of Wizards of the Coast, have gathered at his house every Thursday night for our weekly game. Bill has used us as a test-bed for new projects he has worked on, including the *Star Wars* RPG, *d20 Modern*, and most recently the newest D&D campaign setting, *EBERRON*. Yes, we get to play the first drafts (and take the initial lumps) of the new systems. It's a tough job, and Bill makes it a heckuva lot of fun.

Rich is no slouch in the DM department either, as an author and game designer with world-building credentials from way back, including most recently managing Wizard of the Coast's sprawling, chaotic, eternal campaign, the *FORGOTTEN REALMS*. Oh, and in one of his first projects, for a D&D-in-space campaign called *SPELLJAMMER*, he put battleship guns on an asteroid and took it out for a spin. So he thinks outside the box as well as any devious player.

Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies gives you a box of tools. *Dungeon Master For Dummies* shows you what you can build with those tools. *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* gives you a rainbow of paints. *Dungeon Master For Dummies* shows you what you can portray with those paints. *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* opens the door to a new world. *Dungeon Master For Dummies* goes through that door, and shows you how to create your own worlds and delight and entertain your players. It is the next level of play.

Enjoy.

Jeff Grubb

Co-founder of the DRAGONLANCE campaign setting and co-creator of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting, Jeff is the author of over a dozen novels, two dozen short stories, and more game products than is either polite or proper to mention. His most recent characters in Bill's Thursday Night Games have been Gomez the gnome artificer, Moondog Greenberg the kabalistic biker, and Whappamanga the Wookiee.

Introduction

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS roleplaying game has been exciting and expanding the imaginations of players around the world for more than 30 years. The key components to a good (or better yet, *great*) game of D&D include enthusiastic players, a fun adventure, and a good (or better yet, *great*) Dungeon Master. The Dungeon Master (also known as the DM) applies imagination, game rules, and creative flair to make every game session fun and memorable for the entire game group. Indeed, DMs firmly believe that the role they take on in the D&D game provides the most rewarding, creative, and fun experience available.

It's good to be the DM!

We've carefully crafted this book to make the role of Dungeon Master more accessible to D&D players. Not everyone has the temperament and mindset — or the desire — to be the DM for a gaming group. But if the idea of creating scenarios or even entire worlds of adventure for your friends appeals to you, you owe it to yourself to explore the role of the DM.

And, if you're already DMing for your gaming group, the hints and tips layered throughout this book will help you become a better DM . . . perhaps even a *great* DM. Goodness knows that the D&D game — and the world, really — needs more great DMs.

About This Book

We wrote this book because the nice folks at Wiley Publishing, Inc., liked our previous one (*Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*) and they asked us to write another. But we also wrote it because we have a passion for the D&D game, and we want to share that love with as many people as possible. We wrote in our previous *For Dummies* book that the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game speaks to and feeds the human condition. As a game of the imagination, D&D builds on the myths and fantasies that shape our culture. In an age when so many activities involve isolated people, D&D is a social experience. Nothing else — no computer game, no board game, no movie — comes close to delivering the interactive and unlimited adventure of the D&D experience.

It's the Dungeon Master who makes much of that creative, social, and interactive experience possible. Simply put, you can't play the D&D roleplaying game without a Dungeon Master. The DM is essential, and a good DM is worth his or her weight in gold pieces!

Even if you've run a hundred games, this book provides the advice you need to expand your gaming techniques. Experienced Dungeon Masters will find hints, tips, and advice designed to elevate your game to new levels: From improving your game sessions to creating adventures and crafting campaigns, we cover it all. If you've never run a game as the DM, this book is a great place to start. We explain the ins and outs of Dungeon Mastering and offer plenty of advice on how to become the best DM you can be.

Why You Need This Book

New Dungeon Masters need this book because it's written by D&D experts to serve as a comprehensive guide for DMing. Before this book, great Dungeon Masters had to be born with an innate knack for the role. Sure, books like the D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* provide some level of advice, but none of them have been written as training manuals, and none of them have been written in a straightforward, direct manner (the *For Dummies* style).

With this book, you'll discover facts about running the D&D game that many seasoned DMs have never realized. Do you know how to build balanced encounters to best challenge your party? Do you know the tricks to keeping a game session moving? Do you know how to wing it when your players try something really unexpected? How do you make a ruling when they try something that goes beyond the boundaries of the game? Thanks to our years of experience and our unprecedented access to the Wizards of the Coast's Research and Development department, we've filled this book with insider knowledge and examples that can't help but make you the best DM you can be.

Seasoned Dungeon Masters can always be made better, and we try to share our knowledge and experience in every chapter of this book. The D&D game is as unlimited as the imaginations of its players, and something fresh and new is always waiting to be discovered. We shine a light in all the myriad corners of the game to help you find details you never knew were there, or at least remind you of something you haven't used in a while. We want to make you a better DM because better DMs make for better games.

How to Use This Book

You can use this book in many ways. You can read it cover to cover, in chapter order, and follow along with our loose narrative that explains the concepts of Dungeon Mastering from the basics to the most advanced applications of the role. Alternatively, you can glance at the Table of Contents and jump around to the chapters that most interest you. That works fine, too.

If you're new to the idea of being the Dungeon Master, we suggest starting with Part I. It helps explain the DM's role more fully and provides the foundation for the chapters and parts that follow. If you've run a few game sessions, explore the information in Part I to see whether you're fully utilizing the tricks and tools available to you. Then move on to Part II to take your DM style to the next level. If you're an old pro, jump to whatever section of the book strikes your interest. Even in chapters that seem below your level of experience, we bet you'll find something new and fresh to try at the gaming table. And we're sure that everyone will find something exciting and fun in the Part of Tens.

This book assumes you have at least some experience with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. If this isn't the case, we suggest you start with this book's companion volume, *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*. You might also want to buy the *D&D Basic Game* from Wizards of the Coast.

We wrote this book assuming that, as a somewhat experienced D&D player or DM, you have the core D&D game books — *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. We refer to these volumes often throughout these pages. This book isn't a replacement for any of your D&D game books; it's a companion piece designed to make the information in those volumes clearer and easier to understand, while adding new information specifically designed to make you a better Dungeon Master.



This book's Cheat Sheet contains cardstock cutouts that feature tools to help your D&D game run more smoothly and efficiently. The Character Cards can be used to keep track of player characters in the game. The Monster Cards, likewise, can be used to record monster statistics. Together, they make a great resource for setting the initiative order and tracking any changes by simply re-ordering the cards as combats unfold.

D&D Terminology

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, like other intensive activities, has a lot of jargon that can sometimes make comprehension a bit tricky. We wrote this book using as much plain language as possible, but you're still going to need to know some of the terms that long-time players take for granted.

Here's a quick recap of a few common terms that we use over and over:

- ✓ **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS:** The original roleplaying game of medieval fantasy and adventure. In the game, players take on the role of imaginary characters defined by a series of statistics, cool powers, and magical abilities. The game is played around a table or other comfortable location where players can spread out books and papers and roll dice. D&D (the short form of the name) is a game of the imagination, part group storytelling

game and part wargame. There are no winners or losers in this game; the point is to build an exciting fantasy story through the actions of the characters and the challenges set forth by the Dungeon Master.

- ✔ **Dungeon Master:** One player is the Dungeon Master (the DM). Although other players control single characters, the DM controls all the monsters and enemies, narrates the action, referees the game, sets up the adventures, and develops the campaign. Every D&D game needs a DM.
- ✔ **Player character:** The character controlled by a player is called a player character (PC). A player character might be a powerful fighter, a sneaky rogue, a crafty sorcerer, or a charismatic cleric, for example.
- ✔ **Nonplayer character:** A character controlled by the Dungeon Master is called a nonplayer character (NPC). An NPC might be a friend, a hireling, a merchant, or a villain, for example, that the player characters interact with in some way.
- ✔ **Adventure:** The player's character is an adventurer in a fantastic world of magic and monsters. Other characters (controlled by other players) join the adventuring party to explore dungeons and battle amazing creatures such as dragons and trolls. Each quest (or mission, or story) is called an adventure. An adventure might last for a single session of play or stretch over the course of several game sessions.
- ✔ **Campaign:** The D&D game doesn't have to end with a single adventure. When the same characters continue from one adventure to another in an ongoing storyline, the overall story is called a campaign.
- ✔ **Dice:** The D&D game uses dice to resolve actions and determine other factors where the outcome isn't certain. The twenty-sided die is the most important, as all major actions in the game are resolved using it. The game also uses a four-sided die, a six-sided die, an eight-sided die, a ten-sided die, and a twelve-sided die. You often see abbreviations used for dice where *d* is followed by the number of sides for that particular die, such as d20, d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12. Sometimes you need to roll multiple dice of a specific shape, such as four six-sided dice, which is abbreviated as 4d6. Sometimes you need to roll multiple dice and add a modifier, such as two four-sided dice plus two, which is abbreviated as 2d4+2.
- ✔ **Player's Handbook:** The first of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume contains the basic rules of play and character creation. No D&D player should be caught without one.
- ✔ **Dungeon Master's Guide:** The second of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume contains the information the Dungeon Master needs to run the game, set up adventures, build campaigns, and award treasure and experience to the player characters.
- ✔ **Monster Manual:** The third of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume is packed with monsters to challenge even the toughest D&D heroes, and contains information that every player and DM needs to know.

How This Book Is Organized

Dungeon Master For Dummies consists of five parts. The chapters within each part cover specific topics in detail. In each chapter, we start with the basics of the topic and build from there. Whenever a point needs further clarification, we reference the appropriate chapter so you can immediately find any additional information you need. Whenever it comes up, we also refer you to the appropriate place in one of the core D&D game books, or even in *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* if we think something in that volume will help.

Part I: Running a Great Game

Dungeon Master, meet your game. Game, meet your Dungeon Master. The chapters in this part assume you're a new to moderately experienced DM and provide all kinds of tips and methods for running and improving your D&D game. This part also includes a sample dungeon you can use to practice what we preach.

Part II: Advanced Dungeon Mastering

The chapters in this part are designed to take your Dungeon Mastering skills to the next level, with advanced discussion topics, techniques, and options. Even experienced DMs can find something new and exciting in this part.

Part III: Creating Adventures

Ultimately, every DM wants to try his or her hand at creating an original adventure. In this part, we provide advice and guidance on how to craft memorable adventures, and we wrap up this part with another sample dungeon that shows the techniques in action.

Part IV: Building a Campaign

This part explores methods for stringing individual adventures together to create an ongoing campaign. Discussing themes, villains, and plots, we get to the heart of what turns a series of adventures into a memorable and exciting campaign.

Part V: The Part of Tens

No *For Dummies* book is complete without this section of top-ten lists. We take this concept to a new level by presenting not only classic lists of the best D&D adventures of all time, but by including encounters, maps, and traps that you can use in your own D&D games.

Icons Used in This Book

To guide you along the way and to point out information you really need to know, this book uses the following icons:



This icon points to tips and tricks that simplify or speed up some aspect of DMing the D&D game.



Remember these important nuggets and you'll be a better DM.



If you see this icon, read and follow the accompanying directions. This information can prevent you from having a bad game session.



Whenever you see this icon, you know we're directing you to more detailed information in one of the D&D core rulebooks — the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, or *Monster Manual*.

Where to Go from Here

We recommend starting with Part I, but feel free to turn to whatever chapters interest you. Just remember to have fun! Approach this book in the spirit of the D&D game, trust us and the wisdom we try to impart, and you'll be well on your way to becoming a DM or to improving the DMing skills you already possess.

Part I

Running a Great Game

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



“He’s a much better Dungeon Master when he’s not taking his Ritalin.”



In this part . . .

This part of *Dungeon Master For Dummies* speaks to all D&D Dungeon Masters. Whether you're thinking about running a game of D&D, have recently joined the ranks of DM, or have a bit of DMing experience under your belt, the chapters in this part provide all kinds of tips and techniques for improving your D&D game. The final chapter in this part provides the first of two sample dungeons you can find in this book. After mastering the techniques in the earlier chapters, the sample dungeon makes a great practice tool to hone your DMing skills. (Plus, it's a fun adventure!)