One-Shot Wonders

OVER **100** SESSION IDEAS FOR FANTASY RPGs

CHAPTER 9

RUNNING YOUR GAME

Looking to take your GM skills to the next level? The resources in this chapter help you build the one-shot session plans in this book into an epic campaign. You'll find tips for running games, adding extra challenges and new ways to reward your party. There are also simple guides to character creation and combat, which are perfect for sharing with new players.

MAKING A CHARACTER

Players, it's time to create a unique character to embody at the tabletop! Your choices will influence your character's in-game abilities, then a character sheet is used to store all that information. The process can be confusing at first, so here's a breakdown.

What can I choose?

The building blocks of your character are species (or race), class and background. These all give you different capabilities that you use in the game.

There are multiple options available for species, class and background, so select the combination that suits your vision for your character.

Species — Gives you genetic aptitudes such as your speed or darkvision. You can also choose cultural traits, such as a language, based on the traditions of your species or your upbringing.

Class — Your character's specialism. This decides the talents you possess such as spellcasting ability, weapon competence, and hit die value.

Background — Describes what your character was doing before their quest began. This choice influences the equipment your character may be proficient with, as well as their skills.

Level — Character levels range from 1 to 20. Gaining adventuring experience helps your character level up and increase their abilities. Your character's starting level is chosen in agreement with the GM.

What numbers do I need?

There are many numbers on a character sheet, here's a list of the ones you'll likely use the most.

Ability Scores — Your character's core abilities are Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma.

To generate ability scores, roll four six-sided dice and add together the three highest results. Do this six times, then assign your six totals to your core abilities. Consider giving your highest score to the ability type that your class uses the most. Finally, apply any bonuses to these scores that may have been granted by your choice of species.

Modifiers — Each ability score has an associated modifier. Modifiers increase or decrease the results of dice rolls when using an ability. To calculate a modifier, minus 10 from the ability score, then divide by 2 (rounding down). For example, an ability score of 17 has a +3 modifier ($17 - 10 = 7$, $7 \div 2 = 3.5$, rounded down to 3).

Skills — There are eighteen key skills. To calculate how good your character is at those skills, add the associated ability modifier to any bonuses you receive for proficiency in that skill.

Starting equipment

You'll start the game with a list of useful adventuring gear, armour and weapons. This can be taken directly from the suggestions for your class or purchased from the items available in the Equipment chapter of the Basic Rules, with a budget of 4d4 x 10gp.

Your Armour Class (AC) determines how likely it is a creature's attack will hit you. This is generally your Dexterity modifier + 10, but can be boosted by armour.

You will need to be proficient with any weapons chosen.

Hit Points

Your hit points (HP) reflect the amount of damage you can take. At Level 1, your HP are equal to your Constitution modifier + the highest number on your class hit die. When levelling up, you gain HP equal to your Constitution modifier + a roll of your hit die.

Personality

To decide your character's personality, you can select pre-written Ideals, Bonds, Flaws and Traits from within your background. Or, you can get creative and write some of your own, to link with your vision of the character's backstory.

Playing a Session

As a GM, you describe the world your players exist in and what they encounter. However, you aren't in charge of exactly what happens. Instead, the players propose the interactions their characters make, and it's up to the dice to decide if they are successful or not.

When do players roll?

As a player, you're likely to roll the dice in one of three situations:

1. **Ability Check** — When you try to do something (e.g. "Can I climb the side of this building?").

2. **Attack Roll** — When you try to hit something (e.g. "I shoot an arrow at one of the Hydra's heads!").

3. **Saving Throw** — When you avoid something bad happening to you (e.g. shake off a toxin's effect).

Players don't need to roll for everything they want their character to do. If they want to open a shop door, it is safe to assume they can manage it! Players roll if the intended outcome is uncertain, or if there would be a real consequence to failure.

When do GMs roll?

A GM rolls ability checks, attack rolls and saving throws on behalf of any enemy or ally characters, in the same way a player rolls for their character.

Generally, the GM will tell the players the result of any dice roll they make for an enemy or ally. You may want to roll behind your GM screen to conceal your results, or in front of the players to show you are being honest!

Occasionally, a GM will need to roll without letting the players know the result, such as when an enemy makes a Stealth ability check to creep up on the party. If the enemy successfully beats the characters' Passive Perception scores, don't tell the players until the enemy makes themselves known!

How do rolls of the dice work?

You roll a twenty-sided die to get a result, then make any modifications based on the abilities or proficiencies listed on your character sheet or monster stat block.

The number rolled is compared to an opposing, pre-set number to see if the action was successful:

- Ability Checks are modified by the skill you are testing and rolled against a GM-set Difficulty Class (DC). A good rule for setting DCs is: Easy = 10, Moderate = 15, and Hard = 20.

- Attack Rolls are modified by Strength for melee and Dexterity for ranged. The opposing creature's Armour Class (AC) determines whether the attack hits or not.

- Saving Throw difficulties are set by the rules of a spell or special ability, or applied by the GM in the same way as a regular DC.

Here's an example of how dice rolls work in play:

> Leena wants to help a worried merchant by lifting their overturned cart and placing it back on its wheels.

> The GM asks Leena to make a Strength ability check, to see if she has what it takes to move the vehicle.

> The GM determines the task is of Moderate difficulty, so has set a DC of 15 for the challenge.

> Leena rolls a twenty-sided die and gets a 13. She adds her Strength modifier of +2 to get a final result of 15.

> Meeting or beating the DC means the action succeeds! The GM describes how Leena successfully lifts the cart.

Advantage and Disadvantage

Sometimes, a player can roll with either advantage or disadvantage. This could be based on their abilities, the current situation or their relationship with the person they are speaking to. If another player's character is helping with an action, this can also give advantage.

To roll with advantage — roll two twenty-sided dice and take the higher roll.

To roll with disadvantage — roll two twenty-sided dice and take the lower roll.

Generally, twenty-sided dice are used for everything apart from attack or spell damage calculations, where other dice are needed.

Running Combat

Conflict is an integral part of all storytelling, and that is especially true of RPG storytelling. When your party run into an opposing force, combat often follows. Once you know the mechanics of running combat, bring it to life with epic narration.

Initiative Order

As soon as a fight breaks out, the GM asks the players to make their Initiative rolls, and rolls Initiative for the monsters in the encounter. Players roll a twenty-sided die and add their Dexterity modifier to the number rolled. The list of everyone's Initiative results from highest to lowest (including the monsters) determines a turn order for the ongoing combat. When each combatant has taken a turn, a new round of combat begins, following the same order from the top, until the combat encounter comes to an end.

Players' Turns

Action — A character can typically take one action per turn. Often, this is used to Attack with a weapon or Cast a Spell (if they are a magic user).

There are also a variety of tactical actions a character may take instead of an outright attack. These include, but are not limited to: Dash / Disengage / Dodge / Help / Hide / Ready / Search / Use an Object. Other class abilities may require an action to use.

Bonus Action — A character may also have access to abilities or spells that are considered bonus actions, which allow them to take another supplementary action on their turn.

Movement — A character can also move on their turn; the distance is determined by their speed. On a battle map, each square is normally considered 5 ft wide, so a character with 30 ft speed can run up to six squares.

Reaction — Every character and monster has one reaction that they can spend during each round of combat, this resets when a new round begins.

Some spells and abilities use a reaction, but the most common use for a reaction is an opportunity attack. When a creature leaves another creature's melee range, the stationary creature can use their reaction to make a free attack roll against the moving creature.

Monsters' Turns

The GM controls the enemies and allies, following their stats and rules. Some creatures have abilities that need to recharge after use; roll a six-sided dice at the start of the creature's turn, if the number falls within the range listed, then the ability is recharged.

Taking Damage

When an attack hits a player or enemy, it inflicts damage. The attacker rolls the damage dice in their weapon or spell profile to determine the damage done, adding their modifiers. This number is deducted from the target's Hit Points (HP).

☠ Death Saving Throws ☠

If a monster reaches 0 HP, they are killed and removed from the battlefield. If a player's character reaches 0 HP, they are unconscious and must use their following turns to make death saving throws. To do this, the player must roll a twenty-sided dice every turn until they reach three successes or three failures, or until they are healed by an ally. Three successes mean the character stabilises, but remains unconscious; three failures mean the character sadly dies and the player must create a new character, who can be introduced in a following session.

Rolling a 1 counts as two failures; rolling 2-9 counts as one failure; rolling between 10-19 counts as one success; rolling a 20 gives the character 1 HP, waking them up.

Common Complications

During combat, you may encounter some unusual circumstances that change how the rules of attacks, movement or damage calculations are applied. Familiarising yourself with these terms and the associated rules can help you run combat more smoothly.

Falling

After falling, a creature can make a Dexterity saving throw. If they don't meet the DC that the GM has set, they take 1d6 damage for every 10 ft they fall, up to a maximum of 20d6. If they succeed on their Dexterity saving throw, they take half damage.

Mounted Combat

Mounting or dismounting a creature uses half the rider's movement speed. The mount's actions and Initiative position depend on whether it is controlled by the rider or acts independently. Riders may fall if a mount is moved against its will, or falls prone.

Conditions

A condition alters a creature's abilities in the game. For example, the Poisoned condition causes disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks. There are many other conditions, including Charmed, Frightened, Grappled, Invisible, Prone and Stunned.

Chases

During a chase, creatures may wish to use the Dash action to gain ground. Within one chase, a creature may only Dash so many times (3 + their Constitution modifier), or risk exhaustion. If a character becomes totally exhausted, their speed is reduced to 0.

Resistances

Some creatures react differently to certain forms of damage. If a creature is resistant to a damage type, that damage is halved. If they are vulnerable to a damage type, that damage is doubled. Immunity means that damage type causes no harm at all.

Taking Cover

If a creature is shielded from its attacker, it is harder to hit. If half of the creature is covered, it has a +2 bonus to its AC and Dexterity saving throws, whereas three-quarters cover grants a +5 bonus. Total cover means a creature can't be targeted directly.

Exhaustion

Strenuous activity, lack of rest, exposure to harsh conditions and some spell effects can give creatures levels of exhaustion. A creature can remove a level of exhaustion by completing a long rest. The first level of exhaustion gives disadvantage on ability checks.

Difficult Terrain

Dense undergrowth and deep snow are examples of terrain that could slow down movement. In combat, each square of difficult terrain costs 10 ft of speed to cross. When travelling across a region in difficult terrain, the journey's travel time is doubled.
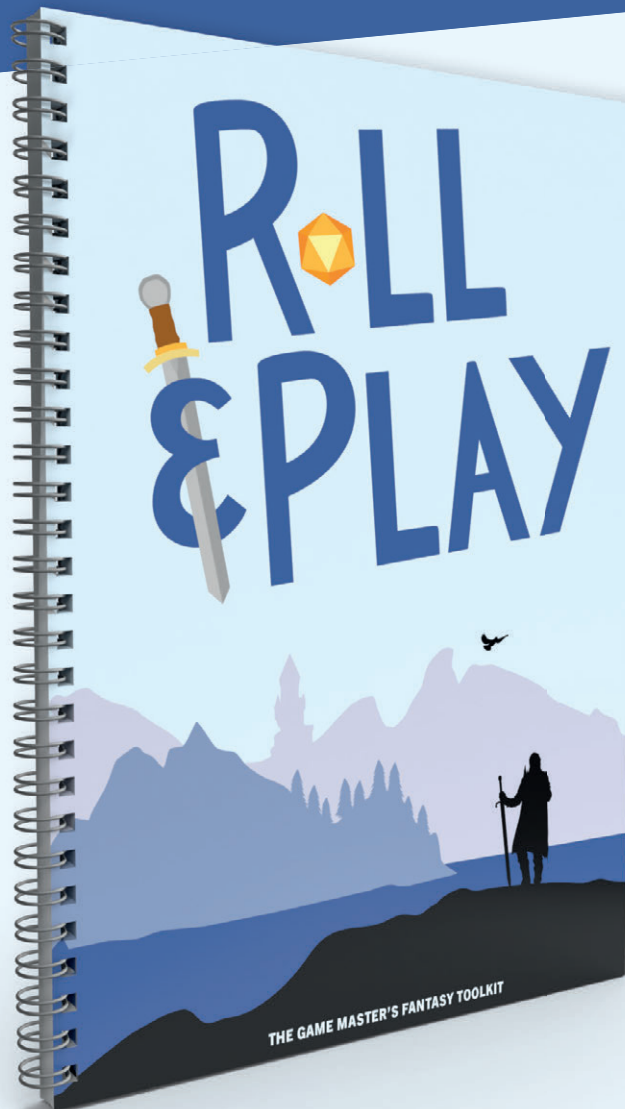
Underwater

If a creature does not have a swim speed, their speed is halved when in water. Weapon attacks are often made at disadvantage, although some weapons, such as spears, function normally. Most creatures can hold their breath for 1 minute, or 10 turns.

Area of Effect

A spell can either target a single being, or an area of the battlefield. If a spell has an area of effect, the spell description will detail the shape of the affected area, whether that is a cone, cube, cylinder, line or sphere, as well as its size and point of origin.