

HOW TO BUILD A DUNGEON CRAWL

For Heroic and Paragon Tiers • Rob Bodine

I've recently converted a few of classic Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (1st Edition) adventures to 4th Edition (in whole or in part): *C1: The Hidden Shrine of Tomoachan* (long before I heard that Stephen Radney-MacFarland was doing it for the Wizards of the Coast officially), *C2: The Ghost Tower of Inverness*, *G1: The Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*, *L1: The Secret of Bone Hill* (though with a complete change of back story), and *Q1: Queen of the Demonweb Pits*. When I converted my first project, Inverness, my intent was to make a Living Forgotten Realms ("LFR") MyRealms adventure out of it. Thus, it was truly just a conversion: an ordinary 1st Edition adventure modified for a different ruleset. It worked out to be four LFR adventures. I received some great feedback on my conversion, but I quickly realized that the suggested changes, while restoring encounter balance, would take the adventure further away from the feel of the original adventure. This doesn't mean that the adventure wouldn't be fun and wouldn't trigger nostalgia; it just means that it wouldn't do so to as great a degree. Accordingly, I decided to trash the entire rewrite, because I'm onto something bigger and better: the 4th Edition dungeon crawl.

So, What's a Dungeon Crawl?

Different people might describe dungeon crawls differently, so I went to the all-knowing Wikipedia to get the true definition.

A dungeon crawl is a type of scenario in fantasy role-playing games in which heroes navigate a labyrinthine environment, battling various monsters, and looting any treasure they may find. Because of its simplicity, a dungeon crawl can be easier for a gamemaster to run than more complex adventures, and the "hack and slash" style of play is appreciated by players who focus on action and combat. The term can be used in a pejorative sense, since dungeon crawls often lack meaningful plot or logical consistency.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeon_crawl, last accessed July 20, 2011).

That's almost it, although it's missing a couple of components. Dungeon crawls represent a "rapid-fire" approach to combat where encounters are relatively quick, and encounters are as likely to have traps as they are to have "monsters." Although the last sentence in

that definition is technically correct, dungeon crawls don't have to be short on story or role-playing. Every system is what you make of it, and the 1st Edition dungeon crawls demonstrate that by being rich in story and role-playing opportunities.

In the end, building a dungeon crawl represents a change to encounter design from the standard system as presented in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* ("DMG") and other official Wizards of the Coast ("WotC") resources. Even when using WotC's guidelines, encounter design is an art form. When using the dungeon crawl system, that makes it even harder to pin down. Use these guidelines as a starting point for heroic and paragon tiers. Epic tier involves additional considerations that will be covered in a subsequent article.

DIME-STORE PSYCHOLOGY

In First Edition, a player often ran two or three characters in each adventure, so the player thought of himself as more of a boss sending his employee-adventurers into the dungeon. This meant that the player had a sense of accomplishment if so much as one of the three characters survived, and the player mourned his dying characters with a sense of pride that they contributed to the mission's success. In today's gaming culture, players invest themselves more narrowly, immersing themselves into a single character with which they personally identify, and that means they tend to feel like they've failed personally when that character dies, and they miss the character's personality in which they're so deeply invested. This is a psychological aspect to all adventures a designer must consider.

The dungeon crawl system seeks to encourage adventurers to be adventurous despite the danger to a player's only character. While a seemingly empty room could be hiding a trap, it could also hide treasure. If the room appears empty, and PCs choose to ignore it, this could result in some lost items, coin, jewelry, etc. Place some of the magic items in empty rooms. Place some in trapped rooms. Be aware, though, that this must be balanced against the story-based sense of urgency suggested below.

On the other hand, you should award experience points where the PCs avoid conflict altogether if the same result would occur either way. In the first few encounters in which there is an

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important item to find or story element to satisfy, give PCs an alternate avenue of bluff, diplomacy, or stealth (with or without making skill rolls). If the combat is never triggered due to taking such alternative measures, award the same XP. A dungeon crawl can still encourage alternative means of encounter resolution even for players preferring combat, because those players will have plenty of opportunities in any given session. In short, encourage exploration and curiosity but also clever play.

GREAT THEORY, BUT . . .

The true test of whether an adventure is a dungeon crawl is how it feels. If it turns out that you like the feel of a dungeon crawl, certainly continue to apply the dungeon crawl system (or some variation thereof). Even for those that don't like dungeon crawls, there still will be useful information in this article. For example, if you have a time constraint, and the session is roleplay-heavy, you can certainly take form this system to create individual encounters that can be squeezed into the little time available for combat. Moreover, if you track XP meticulously and want to give the party a chance to earn a tiny bit of XP that would level them up by the end of this session, use this system to create an appropriate encounter. There are other useful items in here for your new campaign including Thematic Encounter Templates, Ally Consumables, and above all else a different way to run and apply traps for combat encounters.

CHANGES TO THE RULES

Depending on perspective, there are actually very few rules changes. They might seem to be rules changes, but they aren't. For example, the rules expect you to deviate from the basic calculations for NPC ability scores, attack bonuses, etc., so is it really a rules change for me to give every NPC a +10 bonus to their regularly-calculated initiative? Maybe, but it can instead be seen as an unusually large adjustment that's still within the 4e ruleset.

Another example is the persistence of daily power riders. Page 226 of the Rules Compendium states that and end of encounter effect ends at the end of the current encounter or after 5 minutes, whichever comes first." If the PCs don't take a short rest and stay in initiative, then the rules could be

interpreted to allow rider effects to persist through to the next encounter. Allowing this seems like a rule change, but only because of a small amount of ambiguity. Moreover, just about every party takes a short rest after every combat, making the point moot. (Actually, as you'll see, there is a definite change to this rule for characters of levels 1-4.)

Yet another example applies to Perception DCs for traps and illusions. You almost always want the trap to be sprung, but if you apply Hard DCs to Perception checks, optimized characters will always spot them far too often, negating the threat – and fun – of the encounter. Accordingly, apply a story element that increases the appropriate DCs. For example, when the party reaches the adventure destination, tell them that epic-level rituals have been cast on the site, confusing their arcane, religious, or primal means of detection. This justifies that many things will be masked more than usual, and that's reflected mechanically by [Hard DC + 5] Perception/Insight checks necessary to avoid any encounter altogether. This isn't really a rule change, as the rules tell you to adjust the DCs as you see fit and suggest traps (e.g., the Glyph of Suffering) that have a [Hard DC]+5 to spot. Just keep in mind that it's important not to take away a PC's opportunity for heroism, so make sure the DC isn't literally impossible.

An actual rule change is that you'll have to reduce the XP awards as calculated under the standard rules. Because of the PCs' vastly superior numbers, a level 14 elite soldier isn't as much of a challenge to a party of 10th level characters as it is when accompanied by his other level 14 elite soldiers, minions, etc. The single NPC (or reduced number of NPCs) loses some of its tactical options, especially where leaders are concerned. As a result, the threat won't justify the normal XP award. You'll take away some of that XP to account for the lowered individual threat the PCs face.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ENCOUNTERS

The dungeon crawl system, at its heart, is primarily a matter of encounter selection and design. The encounters are quicker and less lethal, spreading out the same amount of danger over more encounters ... sort of. In fact, the sum of the danger is actually greater. If, for example, you spread the LFR-standard four

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encounters over eight or more encounters, my rules will result in the XP total being a bit higher, which is part of the reason for the XP reduction mentioned above. Here are some other issues that the Dungeon Crawl must resolve.

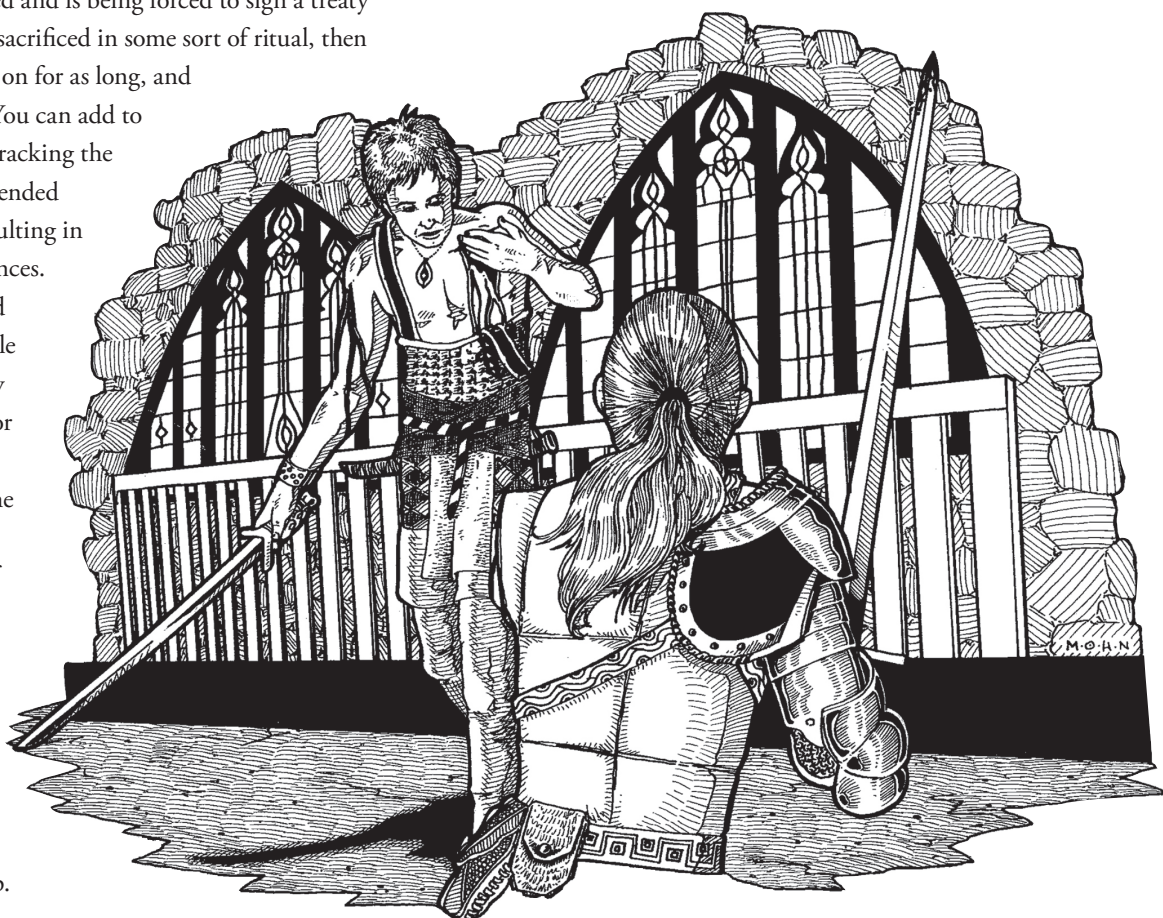
Pacing v. Threat Level

The idea of a dungeon crawl is that once the PCs enter, they can't leave, or don't want to leave, immediately, but in the standard encounter design system, that won't work. PCs are built to handle 3-5 encounters before having to take an extended rest, and between each combat encounter, they almost always have to take a short rest. This slows the perceived pace of the game (i.e., in-character pace), so the encounters need to be easier, but this creates another problem. With easy encounters, the PCs will never feel threatened. You must maintain a sense of urgency despite giving them easy encounters.

This would appear to create a tension, but if so, it's easily resolved. The urgency comes from the story. For example, if a noble has been captured and is being forced to sign a treaty under duress, or will be sacrificed in some sort of ritual, then the PCs will try to press on for as long, and as quickly, as they can. You can add to this urgency by openly tracking the number of short and extended rests the party takes, resulting in direct in-story consequences. These can be goal related (e.g., the kidnapped noble is driven mad after 1 day and killed after 2 days) or environmental (e.g., the dungeon starts to become unstable, resulting in an increasing number of collapses per encounter). For the latter, your choice of Thematic Encounter Templates (see below) can serve that purpose through, for example, a "cave-in" trap.

The TETs can also represent resource-draining encounters that provide neither XP nor treasure rewards. The less short rests taken, the less of these "random" encounters the party will face.

As for the encounters, even easy encounters can be deadly. To the extent that is reasonable, encounters should try to "focus fire" on one or two members of the party, creating a significant and direct threatening feel for those one or two characters. This will also be of great concern to the other members of the party because they won't want to lose a party member. If you don't focus fire, the danger is spread too thin because none of these encounters, by themselves, should ever result in a TPK (i.e., total party kill). So, the way in which you manage your NPCs will maintain a sense of danger. You can also use Thematic Encounter Templates (see below) in both regards. They can provide a story element that adds to the urgency (e.g., representing roving patrols, "wandering monsters"), or they can make each encounter individually dangerous despite not being party-dangerous.



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Respecting Class Features

As will become apparent, changes to action points can diminish the value of a Warlord, and reducing the number of combatants can either nullify a defender's mark or overpower it (depending on creature design), or take away from a character's powers that affect an area. You have to be sensitive to these facts. This system has been tested with several classes but not all. Using the suggestions for those two character types as a guide, make necessary adjustments for any other classes that seem to have their class features nullified.

Trap Design

Whereas everything else in this article is intended to provide a reasonable alternative to the standard encounter design system, the dungeon crawl approach to traps within encounters is expressly intended to improve upon it. This is the one area where the math doesn't add up, and every DM should consider this system, whether they're designing a dungeon crawl or not.

On pages 176-177 of the 4th Edition Player's Handbook, there's a picture of a drow rogue trying to disable a trap via a control panel, while his party-mates deal with the threats. In the background, a caster is blasting something, which you should imagine is a creature adding to the party's problems. In 20 years when people fondly remember 4th Edition, this picture should be one of the iconic pictures of this edition, but it won't be, and that's a crime. Fourth Edition made an effort to make encounters more interesting by using creatures and traps together ("mixed encounters"), with a skill challenge framework making it easy to implement.

Unfortunately, the 4th Edition culture seems to minimize traps. Elite and solo traps are rarely seen, and traps within a mixed encounter are treated more like terrain than creatures. Combat never plays out as depicted in that Player's Handbook picture. Players always see the creatures as the actual encounter to be addressed first, and then worry about the trap. To make matters worse, DMs often end combat as soon as the last creature is killed, conceding that "now that combat is over, you find a way to disable the trap and move on." Never mind that one of the characters is bleeding out with two failed death saves while the poison darts are still shooting at the other characters

that might heal her. Moreover, in the rare instance where the trap is addressed, the PCs do so by attacking it because PC damage-dealing capability scales faster than trap hit points.

This is not to say that hostile terrain is a bad idea – it will be covered in depth in a subsequent article – but not having true traps just isn't acceptable for dungeon crawls, where they are important for historical reasons, logical reasons, and tactical reasons. Historical refers to the fact that for a good number of 1st Edition adventures you might be converting to a dungeon crawl, trap-only and mixed encounters will occur often.

Logical refers to the fact that a 2,000-year-old tomb isn't likely to have its original complement of guards. You'll be able to logically explain the presence of the undead that haunt the place, some umber hulks that burrow in, and dangerous fungus that doesn't need sunlight. To a large extent, however, traps are the most likely way a dungeon designer would protect his treasure hoard or temple. If you rely on the creatures too much, either the players will get bored that they fight a ghost in every encounter, or the players will begin to sense the inappropriateness of the creatures you're using. (Though, it certainly is funny when you enter an encounter and ask yourself, "Why are these monsters just sitting here waiting for me?", but that can carry you only so far.)

Lastly, tactical refers to the fact that Dungeons & Dragons culture seems to have lost the need to make the classic choice of who goes first in marching order. In 1st Edition, the question was, "Do we put the highly perceptive but squishy thief in front, hoping he finds the trap before it kills him, or do we accept that the trap will be sprung and just put the big tough guy in front knowing he can survive the first hit?" If traps are to be an important part of these encounters, then the squishy rogue or mission-critical cleric should go first, either to avoid the trap or to be prepared to address it as quickly as possible.

The lesson here is to know how to build traps and not to marginalize them. You should apply the mechanical changes to every encounter you write, whether for dungeon crawls or the standard system. This will make the trap a significant part of a mixed encounter, and probably a lot more fun.

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THE GUIDELINES

Enough fluff; here's some crunch.

Initiative Bonus

The Problem: *In the dungeon crawl system, NPCs lose a significant number of tactical options and are, as a whole, less of a threat.*

The Solution: *Make sure the NPCs get at least one “bite at the apple” by giving them an overwhelming chance of winning initiative.*

Give your NPCs a +10 to initiative above that produced using the standard calculation for initiative. Because your NPCs are going to be defeated easily, their ability to produce any tension depends on them getting off their best powers, or at least getting a chance to hit. Although it's still possible that the PCs will win initiative, it will be rare and thus heroic. There's nothing wrong with that . . . unless it occurs too often. Then it's boring and, more importantly to this article, imbalanced.

Thematic Encounter Templates

The Problem: *The standard system for adjusting encounters for a varying number of PCs is mathematically inapplicable to the dungeon crawl system, but in any case is too coarse and boring.*

The Solution: *Have a template available that more gradually increases the threat of an encounter, acting as a reinforcement for a unexpectedly weak encounter. This increases the diversity of the encounter without greatly increasing its complexity, and maintains the feel of the adventure as a whole.*

Building encounters is as much an art as science, especially for dungeon crawls, but assuming you're not publishing the adventure, play-testing isn't usually an option. If you've created an underpowered encounter, or if optimized PCs have combinations of powers that completely remove the danger from the entire game, you need to have a couple of quick options available to add to the encounter's threat level. As a fringe benefit, these serve to replicate the feel of “wandering monsters,” or just to stir the pot a bit (i.e., satisfy a story element). These are **Thematic Encounter Templates** (“TET”), so named because



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1) they're tied to the theme of the adventure as a whole, and 2) you use them in a way analogous to how you'd use a creature template to a standard creature (e.g., the lich).

TETs allow an easy adjustment for a varying number of PCs that your group might have from week to week. For example, any group might vary from three to six or more PCs for any given session depending on the circumstances. Because dungeon crawl encounters are underpowered, reasonably well-balanced, and closely mirror the classic encounters of the original adventures, throwing in another identical creature might not be a realistic or desirable option. TETs make that easier to accomplish and should be considered when designing encounters using either the standard system or dungeon crawl system.

Mechanics

A TET can be an NPC minion ("creature TET"), a terrain hazard ("hazard TET"), or a trap ("trap TET"). If an adventure takes the PCs from level X to level X+2, it's preferable to make the TET level X+1, so the same TETs can be used for the entire adventure even as the PCs gain levels. Having just one TET per adventure works fine, but it runs the risk of getting old very fast. Build at least two TETs, one a trap or hazard TET, and the other a creature TET. If the adventure will take place in different environments, however, it's preferable to different TETs for each environment. For a creature TET, you may add a number of minions you feel is appropriate to balance the encounter. This is a much more discrete approach than using a standard creature, allowing for much finer tuning to your encounter difficulty.

Theme

To add to their appropriateness, TETs should also fit thematically with the creatures the PCs are likely to face. For example, a fire trap is appropriately found in an adventure site guarded by fire-resistant devils. That additional level of synergy will allow your players to more easily immerse themselves into their characters' circumstances.

Some Examples

In the original *Hidden Shrine*, the lower levels were filled with poison gas in order to give the PCs a sense of urgency, not to mention an additional challenge. In an article on the official WotC rewrite, author Stephen Radney-MacFarland has the damage occur every 5 minutes by way of losing a healing surge, which is not a bad approach, though without playtesting, it might be difficult to assure that such hazards don't result in an insurmountable amount of damage.

Instead, you could use a hazard TET allowing finer control over the level of threat being created, and still giving the players the feel of the original adventure. The following stat block is modeled after the "dew-colored pale yellow blossoms" in Encounter 38: The Barred Pit. They can be found on the walls of every room but occasionally produce close blasts of poison, representing a hazard TET. The stat block below was for a party starting at 10th level and assumes they'll progress to 12th level by the time they're finished. Accordingly, following the practice of creating TETs of level [X+1], the hazard is level 11.

Poison Fungus Trap	Level 11 Lurker XP 500
<i>As you walk by a patch of fungus stuck to the wall, it explodes in a cloud of toxic spores.</i>	
Trap: The fungus releases toxic spores.	
Perception	
◆DC 10: The character notices the fungus.	
Additional Skill: Dungeoneering, Nature	
◆DC 16: The character identifies the fungus.	
Trigger	
The spores release poison when a creature moves adjacent.	
Attack	
Opportunity Action	Close blast 2
Target: Each creature in blast.	
Attack: +14 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 poison damage.	
Countermeasures	
◆An adjacent character can disable the fungus with a DC 16 Nature check (standard action).	
◆A character may pass by the fungus without triggering its attack with a DC 21 Dungeoneering check (standard action).	

For a creature TET, you could use the group of feral Fey Primates from Encounter 39: Chamber of the Second Sun. The stat block below reskins and modifies the Su Ambushers from *Monster Manual 3*.

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C1: Fey Primate		Level 11 Minion Soldier	
Medium fey beast		XP 150	
HP 1; missed attack never damages a minion		Initiative +23	
AC 27; Fortitude 21; Reflex 25; Will 23		Perception +14	
Speed 7 (forest walk), climb 1		Darkvision	
Standard Actions			
⊕ Claw • At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC			
Hit: 10 damage.			
↓ Seize Prey • At-Will			
Effect: The Fey Primate moves its speed and makes the following attack at any point during the move.			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. Fortitude			
Hit: 10 damage. If the Fey Primate continues the move after the attack, it pulls the target with it and does not provoke opportunity attacks from the target.			
↷ Fling Poo • At-Will			
Attack: Ranged 6/12; +18 vs. AC			
Hit: 4 damage, and the target's square becomes difficult terrain until the end of the encounter.			
Triggered Actions			
↓ Tribal Fury • Encounter			
Trigger: An ally within 3 squares is first bloodied.			
Effect (Free): The Fey Primate uses claw.			
↓ Grasping Claws			
Trigger: The Fey Primate drops to 0 hit points.			
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The Fey Primate uses claw.			
Skills Acrobatics +16, Athletics +13, Stealth +16			
Str 16 (+8)	Dex 22 (+11)	Wis 19 (+9)	
Con 17 (+8)	Int 2 (+1)	Cha 14 (+7)	
Alignment unaligned Languages —			

If you're converting a First Edition adventure using the dungeon crawl system, you can design your TETs to cover areas that were lacking in the original adventure. As great as it was, *Steading* didn't have a good number of traps (though the trap protecting the treasure hordes was fantastic). By adding the following TET, you can add a thematically appropriate means to address that deficiency. This is a TET suitable for an adventure taking characters from levels 13-15.

Magic Poison Crossbow Turret		Level 14 Blaster	
Trap		XP 1,000	
<i>A pair of armored crossbow turrets drops down from the ceiling on the far edge of the room, peppering creatures with quarrels.</i>			
Trap: Two crossbows attack each round on their initiative after they are triggered.			
Perception			
◆ DC 28: The character notices the trigger plates.			
◆ DC 28: The character notices the hidden turret emplacements.			
◆ DC 18: The character notices the hidden control panel.			
Initiative: +16			
Trigger			
The trap activates and rolls initiative when a character enters one of the four trigger squares in the room.			
Attack			
Standard Action		Ranged 10	
Targets: Each crossbow attacks one intruder. It magically distinguishes intruders from natives of the dungeon.			
Attack: +19 vs. AC			
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).			
Countermeasures			
◆ A character making a successful Athletics check (DC 6, DC 11 without a running start) can jump over a single trigger plate square.			
◆ An adjacent character can disable a trigger plate with a DC 18 Thievery check.			
◆ A character can attack a turret (AC 25, other defenses 23; hp 125; resist 10 all). Destroying a turret stops its attacks.			
◆ A character can engage in a skill challenge to deactivate the control panel. DC 18 Thievery (3 successes before 2 failures). Success disables the trap. Failure causes the control panel to explode (close blast 3, 4d8 + 6 damage to all creatures in blast) and the trap remains active.			

Steading had two different environments: the above-ground structure built by the Hill Giants, and an underground dungeon level. You should create two separate creature TETs for each of these levels based on the inhabitants of the environment. For encounters in the steading level, you could use a level 14 ogre minion, representing the ogre servants wandering through the steading. For the dungeon level, the natural cave areas expressly say they have stalagmites, and of course stalactites should be assumed as well. The following stat block is for a Piercer. These not only provide a thematic creature TET, but also add some old-school flavor. Before running this particular creature, though, you really need to understand the stat block. It can be confusing to see how it plays out until it finally coalesces in your mind.

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G1: Evolved Piercer	Level 14 Minion Lurker	
Small aberrant beast	XP 250	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion	Initiative +27	
AC 28; Fortitude 25; Reflex 26; Will 26	Perception +13	
Speed 2, climb 2 (see spider climb)	Blindsight 20	
Resist 10 acid		
Traits		
Spider Climb		
The Evolved Piercer does not provoke opportunity attacks by climbing and may cling indefinitely to any surface.		
Standard Actions		
☹ Dropping Strike • At-Will		
<i>Attack:</i> Range special (one creature directly below where the Evolved Piercer is perched); +19 vs. AC; The Evolved Piercer drops from its perch on the ceiling onto a character below.		
<i>Hit:</i> 9 damage and the target is grabbed (until escape).		
<i>Miss:</i> The evolved piercer teleports up to 20 squares to a new perch on the ceiling.		
↓ Digest (acid) • At-Will		
<i>Effect:</i> Melee 0 (one grabbed creature); No attack roll required. 10 acid damage.		
☹ Drip, Drip, Drip (acid) • At-Will		
<i>Attack:</i> Range special (one creature directly below where the Evolved Piercer is perched); +17 vs. Reflex		
<i>Hit:</i> 9 acid damage.		
Move Actions		
Teleport (teleportation) • At-Will		
<i>Effect:</i> The Evolved Piercer teleports up to 20 squares to the ceiling and latches onto a new perch.		
Triggered Actions		
Get away (teleportation) • At-Will		
<i>Requirements:</i> The evolved piercer may use this power only when grabbing a creature.		
<i>Trigger:</i> The Evolved Piercer is missed by a melee attack from a creature it isn't grabbing.		
<i>Effect (Immediate Reaction):</i> The evolved piercer teleports up to 20 squares to a new perch on the ceiling.		
Skills Stealth +18		
Str 13 (+8)	Dex 23 (+13)	Wis 23 (+13)
Con 16 (+10)	Int 8 (+6)	Cha 8 (+6)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		

Encounter Levels

The Problem: *The standard system usually results in excessively long combats that can become boring slugfests. Once the NPCs have used their special powers, the encounter often devolve into a back-and-forth mathematics exercise with no surprises or variety.*

The Solution: *Decrease the XP budget, making the encounter as a whole easier; but increase the level of the NPC combatants, making each NPC combatant individually more dangerous; then have the NPCs focus fire on one or two PCs.*

This is where the dungeon crawl system significantly separates from the standard system. According to the sidebar on page 56 of the DMG, for a party of level X, an easy encounter can be as low as Level X-2, and a hard encounter can be as high as level X+4. Encounter levels, though, apply only when trying to add up the total XP the PCs should face/earn before taking their next extended rest. This is largely irrelevant in the dungeon crawl system because the encounters will traditionally have fewer combatants, making the encounter level appear far too low. That is, a single level 14 elite soldier is worth 2,000 XP. For 5 10th-level PCs, this translates to an easy level 9 encounter. It will be that easy because of the overwhelming numbers in favor of the PCs, but that NPC is a perfect challenge in a dungeon crawl.

Why less combatants? Two reasons: First, that's the way most 1st Edition adventures were written. If you're trying to convert one of those adventures, it'll be easier, and truer to the original feel, if you're keeping the same (or close to same) number of NPCs in the encounter. Second, and more importantly, each encounter should be faster and easier. As you'll see, you can still have a large number of combatants, but you'll have to use minions, swarms, or lower level creatures to do it.

NPC Levels and Numbers

Note: NPC means monster, trap, or puzzle in this context.

The sidebar on page 56 of the DMG also suggests that an individual NPC should fall between Levels X-4 and X+5. In a dungeon crawl, solo creatures should be easy because you can't reduce the number of solo creatures in an encounter to reduce the resource drain. This means a solo creature should be Level-3, Level-2, or Level-1 (this excludes level-4 because it's far too easy). Elite, standard, and minion creatures should always be hard, falling between Level+3 and Level +5, assuming one or two standard creatures, which can be substituted with minions or elites according to the normal rules (i.e., a standard NPC can be replaced by four minions of the same level, and an elite NPC can be replaced by two standard creatures or eight minions of the same level). Also note that since encounter speed is a major consideration, soldiers are considered "higher level" than non-soldiers. See entries 2 and 3 in Table 1 below to see how this is addressed.

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Table 1. Creature Selection

Entry	Number of Creatures	Type	Level*	Notes
1	1	Solo	X-3, X-2, or X-1	Used as sparingly as you would in the standard encounter design system. These encounters should be considered special. Also, these creatures should almost always be controllers or soldiers, with controllers seeming to be the most fun of those two. Finally, these combats will still take a relatively long time to complete, even if the solo is replaced with equivalent lesser characters (see below), so their overuse can ruin the pacing.
2	1	Elite soldier	X+4 or X+5	Used sparingly, especially if there are more than one defender in the group. If this creature can nullify marks, the defender feels cheated. If it can't, the encounter will be boring.
3	2	Non-soldier elites or standard soldiers	X+3, X+4, or X+5	
4	3	Non-soldier standards	X+3, X+4, or X+5	
5	4-∞	n/a	n/a	Use either minions, swarms, or mob (i.e., swarm of humanoids) of an appropriate size; or use standard creatures of a lower level. (See below)

* X = Party level

If you have to adjust for variable players (and thus PCs) at the table, it's easier to use a TET to do so, as your adjustments will almost always be to make the encounter harder. Note well that the encounters work well with only three players, so you will never need to decrease the threat of an encounter. The following chart shows how you should build each encounter. This should cover both encounters you're converting from an earlier-edition adventure and original works.

As the note for the fifth entry reminds us, you can replace NPCs using the standard conversion method. Here are some examples of how to deal with differing numbers of larger than three (3) NPCs:

1. Four creatures could be represented as four non-soldier standard creatures of level X+3, corresponding to the third entry on Table 1 (one elite = two standards; not allowing the level to get too high due to the number of creatures);

2. Four creatures could be represented as a single Large/Huge elite soldier swarm/mob of level X+4 or X+5, corresponding to the second entry on Table 1 (one elite = two standards);

3. Five creatures could be represented as five standard creatures of level X-3, X-2, or X-1, corresponding to first entry on Table 1 (one solo = five creatures);

4. Six creatures could be represented as five non-soldier standard creatures of level X-3, corresponding roughly to first entry on Table 1 (one solo = five creatures, but using the lowest appropriate creature level due to the extra creature);

5. Forty creatures (a common encounter in 1st Edition) could be represented as two Huge non-soldier elite mobs (20 creatures each) of level X+3, X+4, or X+5, corresponding to the third entry on Table 1;

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6. Ten bugbears could be represented as a single Large or Huge non-soldier Elite mob (9 bugbears) and their Elite non-soldier (controller?) leader, both of which should be level X+3, X+4, or X+5, corresponding to the third entry on Table 1;

7. One-hundred Medium creatures could be represented by four Gargantuan non-soldier, standard mobs (25 creatures each) of level X+3, corresponding to the third entry on Table 1 (one elite = two standards; see also example #1 in this list). You better have a big room for this one.

Not Always: The Art of Encounter Design

The Problem: *Sometimes, perfect math doesn't result in a perfect encounter.*

The Solution: *Know your PCs and adjust these rules as needed.*

This is a great table that generally suits your needs, but because encounter design is at least as much an art form as science, it doesn't always play out that way. For example, the reason swarms came to be included is that 1st Edition encounters sometimes included dozens of enemies . . . literally. In *Steading*, there were a series of five rooms containing 47 bugbears. The 42 grunts could be converted to minions appropriately, but the 4 lieutenants had to be standard creatures, and the captain probably should be an elite. For story purposes, it made sense to keep this number of bugbears because they were a force intended to deal with an orc uprising. While two groups of 24 bugbears were sleeping, and there was some capacity to logically separate the bugbears into separate combats, that logic would eventually break down. It was clearly appropriate to use mobs and reduce the level of the single creatures below the party level.

Another example is from *Hidden Shrine*. In that adventure, the second creature combat encounter the PCs faced was the Nahual. For a dungeon crawl, a Skirmisher facing a level 10 party should fall between levels 13 and 15, but that didn't work too well. Without giving too much away, one of the characters couldn't contribute to the encounter. There's a good reason WotC decided to get rid of that kind of effect, but as this was one of the iconic encounters of that adventure, you might choose to keep it as is. To make sure that the one unfortunate player

isn't terribly bored, the encounter must be very quick, even by dungeon crawl thinking. The following stat block provides the Nahual, suitable for a party of level 10, but violating the rules set out above in Table 1. This creates a very quick encounter, but one with enough tension to justify its design.

C1: The Nahual		Level 10 Skirmisher
Medium natural animate (construct)		XP 500
HP 109; Bloodied 55		Initiative +11
AC 24; Fortitude 24; Reflex 22; Will 21		Perception +12
Speed 7		Darkvision
Immune disease, polymorph, poison		
Traits		
Deftness		
The Nahual has a +4 bonus to defenses against opportunity attacks.		
Standard Actions		
⬇ Claws • At-Will		
Attack: +15 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).		
⬅ Stunning Gaze (gaze, psychic) • Recharge ⏳ ⏳ ⏳ ⏳		
Attack: Close blast 2 (one creature); +13 vs. Will		
Hit: The target is dazed (save ends), is pushed two squares, and drops all items in his hands.		
Move Actions		
Deft Shift • At-Will		
Effect: The Nahual shifts 4 squares as a move action. The Nahual can move through enemy squares as part of this shift but must end its movement in an unoccupied square.		
Minor Actions		
⬅ Mistaken Identity • At-Will		
Attack: Close Burst 10 (all creatures in burst); +13 vs. Will		
Hit: The target believes that the statue is the creature it's mimicing.		
Skills Stealth +14		
Str 18 (+9)	Dex 18 (+9)	Wis 15 (+7)
Con 21 (+10)	Int 12 (+6)	Cha 12 (+6)
Alignment chaotic evil		Languages Common
Equipment scepter		

Lastly, be careful to avoid overusing swarms/mobs can leave the melee and ranged attackers at a disadvantage (vs. those relying on close and area burst attacks). When converting an old adventure that has too many encounters of twenty or more enemies, generally convert them to individual combatants. Save the swarms only for those encounters considered iconic.

Not Always, Part II: Heroic Tier NPC Hit Points

The Problem: *Many combats outlive their usefulness. Once all of the NPCs have exhausted their interesting powers, and the PCs have exhausted their encounter powers, the combat becomes a monotonous back-and-forth of dice rolling.*

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The Solution: *In heroic tier, when Table 1 dictates you use a Solider or Brute NPC of a higher level than the party, reduce its hit points.*

Encounters can involve tremendously dynamic creatures, traps, and hazards, and take place in tremendously dynamic environments. For such a case, a two-hour combat can actually be fun, and there's nothing wrong with it. Of course, such a long combat will still create a problematic resource drain in a dungeon crawl, so they still can't be overused for practical reasons, but in any case they represent the exception, not the rule. Most combats that last an hour or more quickly devolve into a boring back-and-forth of uninteresting at-will and basic attacks between the adversaries. The NPCs have exposed all of their secrets, the PCs are down to at-will powers and possibly daily powers that would seem to be wasted this late in the encounter, and as a result, the combat is nothing but a math exercise at this point. Decisions are too easy. Combat dynamics are no longer present. Talent is supplanted completely by dice roll. In short, the fun is lost.

The DM could "call" combat, choosing to charge you a healing surge or not depending on how well you were doing, but that meta gaming seems cheap and saps the fun from the game just as much as forcing the party to end the combat naturally would. Ideally, combats end naturally (i.e., an entire side is reduced to 0 hit points) at exactly the point where the combat would otherwise become boring. That's an ideal, of course. There's no way to accurately predict that, but the dungeon crawl naturally comes closer because the combats are always faster. Still, in heroic tier, brutes will sometimes extend combat too long because they have too many hit points and, in general, run out of interesting powers much too quickly (if they have any at all). Likewise, soldiers will also extend combat too long because they're so difficult to hit. Even with their suite of interesting powers, soldiers can create frustration among the players who are constantly missing their target.

For these reasons, whenever Table 1 dictates that you use an NPC of a level greater than the party, if that NPC is either a brute or a soldier, consider reducing their hit points to as little as half of what they'd normally have. This is not always necessary depending on the environmental circumstances that add to the difficulty level, but it is often necessary to speed

combat along. You may find yourself making these adjustments as you're actually running the encounter, so make sure you have a note available that tells you the bloodied value for the NPC depending on whether the NPC has 100%, 75%, or 50%. If you reach the bloodied value for the creature assuming it has 50% normal hit points, and you feel like the combat is dragging too long, announce that the creature is bloodied. At that point, increase the damage done by the NPC to compensate for the lower hit point pool. Taking inspiration from Sly Flourish's "[Three Monster Powers to Speed up Combat](#)" (last visited August 28, 2011), give the NPC a bonus to its damage of one-half the NPC's level if only 75% of its hit points are available, or a bonus to its damage of the NPC's level if only 50% of its hit points are available.

Example

In *Ghost Tower of Inverness*, Encounter 10 (the Tunnel Room), the 6th-level PCs encounter an Umber Hulk, a 10th-level soldier that normally has 214 hit points, does $2d6 + 7$ damage with a Claw attack, and can produce 10 ongoing damage to a grabbed opponent. The stat block and hit point chart are reprinted below. The hit point chart has three different hit point pools on it so that a DM can make a change to the creature during combat.

If the combat is beginning to drag by the time the Umber Hulk is reduced by 53 hit points (at 161 hit points), the DM can immediately declare that the Umber Hulk is bloodied, and proceed using that hit point pool (on the far right). To compensate for the reduced health, the Umber Hulk now does $2d6 + 17$ damage with a claw attack and ongoing 20 damage to a grabbed opponent. If instead the combat doesn't begin to drag until the Umber Hulk is at 134 hit points, the DM can at that point declare that the Umber Hulk is bloodied, and proceed using that hit point pool (in the center). To compensate for the reduced health, the Umber Hulk now does $2d6 + 12$ damage with a claw attack and ongoing 15 damage to a grabbed opponent. This may seem like a lot of damage, but note that the Umber Hulk is the only creature the PCs are facing, and it doesn't have solo powers. Moreover, its chance to hit isn't increased for any of its powers.

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C2: UMBER HULK	Level 10 Elite Soldier
Large natural magical beast	XP 1,000
HP 107; Bloodied 54	Initiative +19
AC 28; Fortitude 31; Reflex 26; Will 25	Perception +11
Speed 5, burrow 2 (tunneling)	Darkvision, Tremorsense 5
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
Standard Actions	
⊕ Claw • At-Will	
<i>Attack:</i> Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC	
<i>Hit:</i> 2d6 + 12 damage.	
⊕ Grabbing Double Attack • At-Will	
<i>Effect:</i> The umber hulk makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit the same target, the target is grabbed (until escape). A grabbed target takes ongoing 15 damage from the umber hulk's mandibles until it escapes. The umber hulk cannot make any other attacks while grabbing a creature.	
Minor Actions	
↖ Confusing Gaze (gaze, psychic) • At-Will 1/round	
<i>Attack:</i> Close blast 5 (enemies in blast); +14 vs. Will	
<i>Hit:</i> The target slides 5 squares and is dazed (save ends).	
Skills Athletics +17, Dungeoneering +11, Stealth +12	
Str 25 (+12)	Dex 15 (+7) Wis 13 (+6)
Con 19 (+9)	Int 4 (+2) Cha 10 (+5)
Alignment unaligned Languages —	

Umbur Hulk					
Mini:					
214 (107)		160 (80) +5		107 (53) +10	

Action Points

The Problem: *By spreading the threat over more encounters, action points become to powerful.*

The Solution: *Redefine the definition of a milestone.*

Because, in theory, the dungeon crawl system divides four encounters into ten, and as many as twelve are placed between extended rests, action points shouldn't be earned until the players have completed four (or more) encounters.

If you choose to award them every four encounters (strongly suggested for parties of levels 1-4), then that gives the party something of an advantage assuming you've spread the threat across ten or more encounters instead of eight. Between levels 5 and 10, award action points every five encounters. Above level 10, when paragon paths grant action point benefits, redefine the idea of the "milestone" to mean ... well ... a *milestone*. When the PCs do something important, learn something important, or reach an important point in the adventure, award them an action point. This is a good way to adjust for how well or how poorly the party is doing, but it also has a better feel to it than the standard milestone format. In no event should you award action points more than once every five encounters, though they can be awarded more frequently based on the particular order in which the PCs address encounters.

This comes with an important caveat. The warlord provides some of its best benefits when party members spend actions points. To make sure warlords aren't left out in the cold, provide a second means to kick off those effects. For example, over the course of encounters that lead to a milestone, permit a PC to take the benefit of warlord action point effects any one time they use a daily power. To be clear, each PC can do this once extra during the course of those encounters, not every time they use a daily power. Also, keep in mind that this is done for the sake of the warlord, not the other PC, so you don't need special rules allowing PCs to take advantage of paragon path features or anything else triggered by an action point.

"End of the Encounter" Riders

The Problem: *By spreading the threat over more encounters, daily power riders will be available against a smaller percentage of the threat.*

The Solution: *Allow daily power riders to persist across encounters.*

For non-Essentials characters, their power is shifted towards daily powers, making them a precious asset, even well into the paragon tier, but especially at the lowest levels. Considering that the methods employed here spread the threats across more encounters, it seems appropriate that the "end of the encounter" riders on daily powers should too. If not, daily powers will be much less useful, which negatively impacts the power curve, causing you to have to make even more adjustments in building

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your dungeon crawl. Moreover, daily *utility* powers will almost never be chosen over encounter utility powers, reducing player choice. For that reason, adopt a different rule.

To remind you of the relevant rules, *non-Essentials* characters have 1 daily attack power from levels 1 to 4, 2 daily attack powers from levels 5-8, 3 daily attack powers from levels 9-19, and 4 daily attack powers from levels 20-30. Obviously, there is much more variety tactically-speaking at higher levels. Also note that if a daily power rider says “until the end of the encounter,” it lasts until the end of the encounter or until five minutes have elapsed, whichever comes first.

For parties of levels 1-4, a rider should persist until the next encounter in which it would be useful, but in no event for more than three encounters total (including the encounter in which it was initially used), *even if the party takes a single short rest during that time span* (i.e., a short rest between encounters 1 and 2, or a short rest between encounters 2 and 3, but not both). For example, if you use a daily power in Encounter 1 that adds a dazing effect to your attacks, but in Encounter 2 that has no value because the encounter is a trap or puzzle, then you may continue to maintain it (using a minor action if that’s normally required to do so) into Encounter 3. However, if it’s not useful in Encounter 3 either, you lose the rider effect. You will not be able to sustain the effect into Encounter 4 unless you can reasonably argue that Encounter 4 was within 5 minutes of Encounter 1.

For parties of levels 5-20, remind the players that daily power riders will persist for up to five minutes if no short rest is taken. If they want to keep the rider, they will have to proceed immediately to the next couple of encounters. For all parties, if quickly moving forward results in lost treasure or a dangerous combat with depleted encounter powers, that’s their problem.

Note: Some daily powers are less popular because, though they do great things, they’re dependent on a particular tactical situation. Because you face an additional six or more encounters between extended rests, that means you’re much more likely to face that perfect set of facts that makes your daily power shine. That’s the one aspect to this discussion that actually cuts in favor of the players. Still, without a rule change or change in player approach, the value is likewise diminished by the fact that going



“NOVA” will get you out of 1/10 the total danger rather than 1/4. The utility of a daily power is still diminished if it can be used in only one encounter.

Traps

The Problem: *Traps are too easy to find, but impossible to disarm in the span of a combat encounter.*

The Solution: *Make traps extremely difficult to spot using high DCs, but make them reasonable to address through a simpler skill challenge complexity.*

Trap design using the standard system is frustrating for two reasons. First, most optimizers find ways to bypass every single trap unless the DM doesn’t give them a mathematical chance to find it, which runs contrary to 4th Edition’s design philosophy. Second, as implemented in every adventure I’ve personally read, it makes no sense to try to disarm the traps that *are* sprung. Although it’s certainly been attempted, I haven’t seen it since

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the initial release of LFR at GenCon, which was before everyone knew just how fruitless an effort it was to do so.

The reason it's a fruitless effort is that combats never last more than five rounds, and usually last only two or three. With typically only one party member trained in Thievery, that character won't even be halfway towards disabling the trap by the time combat is over, and at that point he's dead. Either the NPCs will have won the fight and will now pummel the hapless thief, or the PCs will have won the fight and will pummel the hapless thief. . . for wasting his time on the trap when they could have used his sneak attack damage. To add to this disincentive, some traps are disabled by way of, for example, a control panel that explodes upon failure, most of the time hitting more than one party member, *and* destroying the control panel. Due to the reduced number of failures, it's possible that this could happen before the end of combat. Besides the impracticality of both results of a failure (mechanically speaking), the fact that the control panel no longer operates is especially perplexing. It doesn't make *logical* sense either. Now even the creators of the trap won't be able to disarm it. Why would they do that? Though imbalanced, it's at least logically understandable that there is an attack on failure, but

destroying the means to turn off the trap is as much against the interests of the NPCs as it is the PCs.

Let's fix all of these.

You generally place traps in an encounter in the same way in which you place creatures in an encounter, whether as part of a planned encounter or a TET, though you can add a single standard trap on top of what is presented in Table 1 above. Doing so makes the encounter much more fun and memorable without slowing down the encounter considerably. Trap levels and secondary roles (standard, elite, or solo) are treated the same. For this reason, you'll probably have a non-negligible number of elite traps, so you should know the rules on how to create them. There have been some changes and additions to the rules, so if you have access to the Dungeon Master's Guide 2 ("DMG2"), use it. You can also reference Mike Shea's **DM Cheat Sheet**.

As with NPC creatures, the initiative modifier for traps should receive a +10 bonus, and the DCs for traps should be adjusted as follows:

Table 2. Trap DCs

Activity	Example	Action Used	DC
Avoiding the trap entirely	Noticing the trigger plate, seeing the trip wire, sensing the arcane energies.	Standard	Hard + 5
Detecting how to disable a trap	Spotting the control panel, knowing where to attack the trap.	Minor (Perception)	Easy (minion, standard) or Moderate (elite, solo)
Disabling the trap	Applying the necessary skill check	Minor *	Hard + 5 (minion, standard) or Hard + 10 (elite, solo)
		Move *	Hard (minion, standard) or Hard + 5 (elite, solo)
		Standard	Moderate (minion, standard) or Hard (elite, solo)

* Require the PC to be adjacent if using a minor or move action, even if the skill check could otherwise be performed from a distance (e.g., Arcana, Religion).

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In addition, simplify the skill challenge necessary to disable the trap. The success/failure ratio should be 3/2 for a standard or minion trap, and 4/3 for an elite or solo trap. If the PCs fail to disable a trap via, for example, a control panel, don't have the control panel explode or any other event that would do further damage to multiple party members. Instead, require the PC to start over from scratch, representing the PC making matters worse. For an idea of how this plays out, recall Han Solo in Return of the Jedi trying to open the blast door but instead closing an additional blast door. "I got it. I got it. . . . I don't got it." He failed his skill challenge, but the only consequence is that he had to start again.

So, what does this do? It assures that the trap is triggered, complicating the encounter and making it more fun; it gives the PCs the option to address the trap through a skill challenge, and in fact are encouraged to do so; and those attempts have a reasonable chance of succeeding towards defeating the trap. If a player wants to be able to contribute to the fight against the NPC creatures by accepting a bit of a risk by using a lesser action to disable the trap, they're free to do so.

Other Rule Changes: XP, Monster knowledge checks, and Healing Surges

XP Reduction

As stated above, dungeon crawl system encounters are not as challenging, so the XP per encounter will be inflated if using the standard system for calculating XP. For groups that increase level when the DM feels they've earned it, this isn't a problem, but for DMs that want to strictly account for XP earnings, the current XP system simply doesn't work for dungeon crawls. If you track XP, then reduce the XP earned for a standard, elite, or minion creature by 20%. Assuming you're taking the standard four encounters (between extended rests) and spreading them out to eight encounters to create a dungeon crawl, this permits you to actually spread them out to ten encounters without giving out any more XP. If your PCs are capable of going more than ten encounters before taking that extended rest, reduce the XP by 25% instead, but only if their success comes from your encounter design. If they're just doing a great job, they deserve the 80% XP.

Monster Knowledge Checks

Additionally, monster knowledge checks should be harder. If a party is facing a single, standard creature with a few minions, or a single elite creature, learning too much about the creatures could also serve to remove all (or too much) of the challenge out of the encounter. As with the +10 initiative boost, if overcoming this rule occurs rarely, it's special and heroic. There's nothing wrong with that, and in fact that should always be a possibility. If it occurs too frequently, though, it's devastating to the adventure's playability. Accordingly, raise the monster knowledge check DC by between three and five, depending on your personal tastes. Your choice could vary from creature to creature, adding five for truly unique creatures that should be harder to identify.

Healing Surges

All of the rule changes (or choices) are designed to increase the level of difficulty. If your design is too hard on the whole, or the PCs are particularly weak or lack synergy, you can adjust the adventure's level of difficulty by giving the PCs more healing surges or a means to regain them.

The dungeon crawl system keeps PCs going, taking as few extended rests as possible. If you'd like to increase the number of encounters between short rests, consider giving the PCs an extra one or two healing surges (e.g., by granting Durable as a bonus feat much the way DMs grant Weapon Expertise as a bonus feat). This will go only so far, because no matter how many healing surges a character has, the party can trigger only so many of them from one short rest to the other. Once the healers are out of healing powers, and everyone's used their second winds, having extra healing surges in the tank won't help in combat. Also, if you find that the PCs are running out of resources too quickly (less than 10 encounters), an extra healing surge or two allows you to use this system as is without making too many modifications. Because you're likely to adjust your encounters after such an occurrence (to make them easier), grant the extra healing surges in the form of a treasure item that, when eaten, restores a healing surge to a character in need rather than give all PCs a flat increase in healing surges.

Of course, all of these healing surge adjustments should be made with the understanding that sometimes things just don't

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work out for the party. If characters die because that's the way the d20 rolls, then let them die. None of these rules should remove the challenge from the game. This is just a matter of finding the correct balance for your PCs.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KEEP

In most cases, there are four things that you shouldn't completely abandon in 4th Edition:

1. Rooms should usually be a bit bigger so that forced movement, immobilization, and other tactical considerations still play a role. The PCs and NPCs are built to make those things matter, so spread out the map a bit *if necessary*. For converting 1st Edition adventures, it usually is necessary because 1st Edition rules were different. Two 5' x 5' squares could fit three characters, which explains why in room 1 of *Demonweb Pits*, the 6 square by 6 square room really could fit 40 trolls and the party (though it would still be quite a tight squeeze). You should consider that when converting old adventures.

2. Combats using non-solo creatures should involve at least as many NPCs as there are defenders in the group, so all defenders can use their marks/auras to shine. This is why you won't see too many Elite soldiers in the game. If you're trying to capture the feel of a specific iconic encounter, and if you feel you're using way too many single creatures, adding a second elite creature to a classic, single-monster encounter doesn't take away too much of that feel. Always remember that dungeon crawls are a truly inexact science, often more art than science. You have some concrete rules, but you also have some vague warnings that are just as useful.

3. Minions are also a fantastic addition to the Dungeons & Dragons ruleset, and considering that one of the controller's functions is to clear out the minions, you shouldn't take away that occasional opportunity. Creature TETs with minions are a great way to introduce them, but use minion-based encounters occasionally to have really dynamic fights representing a heroic accomplishment. Using the encounter creation rules, you can easily do that.

4. Treasure is awarded as normal per the DMG, page 124. That is, while a party of five PCs progresses from level X to level

X+1, they should find magic items of levels X+1, X+2, X+3, and X+4, and a certain amount of coin, jewelry, artwork, etc. per character. A party of six PCs should have an additional item of level X+2 added to that bundle, whereas a party of four PCs should not find the item of level X+2. Still, you might want to put more treasure in the adventure site than this because some rooms won't be searched, meaning the PCs run the danger of being short-changed. Players shouldn't be encouraged to sacrifice the story in the interest of finding a magic item. Just make sure that, no matter their actions, the PCs don't find more treasure than what's appropriate.

SOME FURTHER ADVICE

Maps

Although NPC encounters are easier to create using this system, this still adds a ton of work for the DM, and map drawing cuts into most of your gaming time. **Try to have as many maps made ahead of time as possible, or use dungeon tiles or some other map-making tool.** Otherwise, your fast-paced adventure could slow to a crawl in the real world.

A Couple of New Ideas: Ally-Consumables and Lasting Effects

In *Steading*, there is an orc uprising occurring in the dungeon level. According to the adventure, some of those orcs are more than happy to help the party, a plot device often used by 1st Edition writers. I treated these orcs as party treasure. If the party accepted help from the orcs, they'd be given a stat block of a Level-2 minion swarm with the understanding that, as long as it was logical to do so, the DM would attack the swarm as readily as a PC. Because the swarm is a minion, this would have the same effect as a consumable: a one-time benefit to the party, in this case essentially nullifying a successful hit. To prevent the award from being too powerful, it's level-2 such that its defenses are lower than the party's, and therefore it would nullify some hits that weren't actually a threat to the party, while on the other hand it won't do too much damage, if any, while it's still alive. The party was likely to be level 14 at the point they meet the Orcs. Ally-consumables should not receive the +10 bonus to initiative.

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G1: Orc Swarm		Level 12 Minion Brute	
Large natural humanoid (orc, swarm)		XP 175	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion		Initiative +9	
AC 24; Fortitude 25; Reflex 24; Will 23		Perception +6	
Speed 5		Low-Light Vision	
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerability 15 against close and area attacks			
Traits			
Swarm			
The Orc Swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The Orc Swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures that comprise it.			
☉ Swarm Attack • Aura 1			
The angry mob makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that begins its turn within the aura.			
Crushing Press			
An angry mob deals an extra 2d6 damage to prone creatures.			
Standard Actions			
Ⓢ Savage Mob • At-Will			
Attack: Melee 0 (one creature); +15 vs. AC			
Hit: 9 damage, and the target is knocked prone.			
Skills Athletics +14, Intimidate +12			
Str 16 (+9)	Dex 19 (+10)	Wis 10 (+6)	
Con 18 (+10)	Int 7 (+4)	Cha 13 (+7)	
Alignment unaligned		Languages Common, Giant	

Of course, the Ally Consumable need not be a swarm. Elsewhere in *Steading*, the PCs meet an imprisoned elf who, if freed, agrees to serve the PCs for a year and a day. If that doesn't fit into your campaign, you can award an ally consumable in the form of an individual minion.

In another encounter, the PCs found a “Weird Abandoned Temple” that, in the original adventure, could drive a character insane. This is obviously in conflict with 4th Edition design philosophy. The DMG2 has a Maddening Mural trap on page 74, but that was most appropriate for mixed encounters, so use the following stat block.

Wall of Insanity		Level 15 Lurker	
Trap		XP 1,200	
<i>A writhing amorphous form of sickly mauves and violets stretches its formless members towards you.</i>			
Trap: This wall drives those who gaze upon it insane unless they are devoted to its deity (Tharizdun).			
Perception			
◆ No check is required to see the wall.			
Additional Skill: Religion (must be adjacent to the wall)			
◆ DC 27: The character recognizes the nature of the wall but triggers the trap.			
Trigger			
The trap activates when a creature stands in a square adjacent to this wall and gazes upon it for one round, or touches it.			
Attack			
Opportunity Action		Close blast 2 centered on each square.	
Targets: Each creature in blast.			
Attack: +19 vs. Will			
Hit: Until the next milestone is reached or the characters take an extended rest, the creature is temporarily insane. If a PC makes an attack roll, and the attack roll is an odd number (on the die), the attack targets the nearest ally instead. If more than one ally is “nearest,” the target is randomly chosen from those allies using a die roll. If no ally is within range of the attack, the attack fails.			
Countermeasures			
◆ A character can the wall from a distance (AC 5, other defenses 3; hp 250; resist 20 all). Destroying the wall disables it.			
◆ A character can engage in a skill challenge to deactivate the wall. DC 23 Thievery (eyes closed) or DC 18 Religion (3 successes before 2 failures). Success disables the trap. Failure causes the trap to make its opportunity attack against all creatures in a close blast 14 and the trap is disabled.			
◆ Another PC may diagnose the PC's insanity with a DC 23 Heal or DC 18 Religion check only after it manifests itself in combat. Removing the insanity can be accomplished only through the means described or through the use of an appropriate ritual.			

Take special note of what happens on a hit and the last countermeasure. Provide the affected PC with the following as a handout to let them know how they need to behave:

Do not discuss this with the other players other than to say you feel strange. You are driven insane. Until the DM says otherwise, whenever you make an attack roll, if the attack roll is an odd number (on the die), the attack targets the nearest ally instead. If more than one ally is “nearest,” the target is randomly chosen from those allies using a die roll. If no ally is within range of the attack, the attack simply fails. You may choose to attack or not to attack, but you may not give an explanation for either.

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SUMMARY: THE RULES IN REVIEW

1. Initiative: Each NPC should receive a +10 bonus to initiative.

2. Thematic Encounter Templates: Have at least one TET available to easily adjust encounters that are too easy. Ideally have one creature TET and one trap TET per environment.

3. Building Encounters: Encounters should be built according to Table 1.

4. Action Points: For parties of levels 1-4, additional action points should be awarded every 4 encounters. For parties of levels 5-10, additional action points should be awarded every 5 encounters. For parties of levels 11-20, additional action points should be awarded whenever the party does something important, learns something important, or reaches an important point in the dungeon. Allow warlords to grant their action point benefits whenever an action point is spent, and once (per ally) during the encounters leading to a milestone when an ally uses a daily power.

5. “End of Encounter” Riders: For parties of levels 1-4, riders to daily powers can be sustained for the next two encounters, but stay in effect for no more than two encounters in which they were useful. If a minor action is required to sustain the effect, that requirement persists. For parties of levels 5-20, the same rules apply except that maintaining the effects requires that the party not take any short rests between the encounters.

6. Traps: Everything changes, so you’ll have to read this section.

7. XP Awards: If you track XP for your players, award 80% of the normal amount of XP, or even 75% if the PCs are having too easy a time of things due to your encounter design.

8. Monster Knowledge Checks: Increase the DCs for monster knowledge checks by at least 3, but up to 5.

9. Healing Surges (optional): To increase the number of encounters the party can reasonably face before taking an extended rest, or to compensate for exceptionally difficult encounters, allow PCs an increase to the number of healing surges, or include in their treasure an item that, when eaten, restores some lost healing surges.

10. Consequences of Rests: Make sure you have a firm idea as to what happens if the party takes a given number of short and extended rests. Make sure they’re always aware that the clock is ticking, and dawdling will have its consequences.

11. Rooms: Where possible, make sure that the room in which an encounter takes place is sufficiently large enough to allow for tactical combat.

12. The Arts and Sciences Clause: Encounter design remains as much art as it does science. Don’t forget that. (How could you considering how many times I’ve written it?) The goal isn’t to meet the rigid requirements of this system; the goal is to provide a certain feel to the game, and that requires that you feel your way to that end.

INTRODUCTORY TEXT

For your write up, you might want to include the following text in the introduction (modified to suit the level and your own DMing style):

Remind the party:

1. Action points will be awarded every # encounters.
2. Riders to daily powers can be sustained for the next two encounters, but stay in effect for no more than two encounters in which they were useful. If a minor action is required to sustain the effect, that requirement persists. [For levels 1-4 add:] Taking a single short rest during this period will not break the effect.
3. The DCs for monster knowledge checks are increased by #.
4. Do not be discouraged from addressing a trap in a mixed encounter (i.e., one with creatures and traps in it).
5. You may search for treasure, traps, and secret doors, but only if you take a short rest.

Permission is granted to copy and paste this text and all tables from this article into your adventures.

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WHAT'S NEXT?

The next few articles will address how to design dungeon crawl encounters for epic level play, an alternate system for rituals that makes them suitable for dungeon crawls, how terrain effects can be used, and a new character class designed for dungeon crawls.

END NOTE: LEGALESE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Robert E. Bodine, Esq. practices real estate and intellectual property law in Virginia. He is one of the founding members of the Gamers' Syndicate, a Washington, DC-based gaming club, and part owner of **synDCon**, a table-top gaming convention. He authors the article series on **LoRemaster.org**, Protection from Chaos, dealing with intellectual property law matters as they relate to the gaming industry. You can follow him on **Twitter @RobertEBodine** for legal matters, **@GSLLC** for gaming matters, and if you're a sports fan, **@MMADork**.*