

THE GM

There are many different fantasy genres, each with their own style or advice for GMing. Dungeon World is designed for one of those styles in particular — a world of elves, orcs, dragons and magic where dark dangers mix with lighthearted adventure. The rules in this chapter will help you run a game in that style.

The characters have rules to follow when they roll dice and take actions. The GM has rules to follow, too. You'll be refereeing, adjudicating, and describing the world as you go — Dungeon World provides a framework to guide you in doing so. This chapter isn't about advice or optional tips and tricks. It's a chapter with procedures and rules for whoever takes on the role of GM.

GMING DUNGEON WORLD: A FRAMEWORK

Running a game of Dungeon World is built on these: the GM's **agenda**, **principles**, and **moves**. The agenda is what you set out to do when you sit down at the table. The principles are the guides that keep you focused on that agenda. The GM's moves are the concrete, moment-to-moment things you do to move the game forward. You'll make moves when players miss their rolls, when the rules call for it, and whenever the players look to you to see what happens. Your moves keep the fiction consistent and the game's action moving forward.

The GM's agenda, principles, and moves are rules just like damage or stats or HP. You should take the same care in altering them or ignoring them that you would with any other rule.

HOW TO GM

When you sit down at the table as a GM you do these things:

- ♦ Describe the situation
- ♦ Follow the rules
- ♦ Make moves
- ♦ Exploit your prep

The players have it easy — they just say what their characters say, think, and do. You have it a bit harder. You have to say everything else.

First and foremost, you **describe the immediate situation around the players at all times**. This is how you start a session, how you get things rolling after a snack break, get back on track after a great joke: tell them what the situation is in concrete terms. Use detail and senses to draw them in — the situation isn't just an orc charging you, it's an orc painted in blood swinging a hammer and yelling bloody murder. The situation around them is rarely "everything's great, nothing to worry about." When you describe the situation, always end with "What do you do?"

From the get-go make sure to **follow the rules**. This means your GM rules, sure, but also keep an eye on the players' moves. It's everyone's responsibility to watch for when a move has been triggered, including you. Part of following the rules is **making moves** — your moves are different than player moves and we'll describe them in detail below. In all of these things, **exploit your prep**. At times you'll know something the players don't yet know, and you can use that knowledge to help you make moves.

AGENDA

Your agenda makes up the things you aim to do at all times while GMing a game of Dungeon World:

- ♦ Portray a fantastic world
- ♦ Fill the characters' lives with adventure
- ♦ Play to find out what happens

Everything you say and do at the table (and away from the table, too) exists to accomplish these three goals and no others. You're not trying to beat the players or test their ability to solve complex traps. You're not here to give the players a chance to explore your finely crafted setting. You're not trying to kill the players (though monsters might be). You're most certainly not here to tell everyone a planned-out story.

Your first agenda is to **portray a fantastic world**. Dungeon World is all about guts, guile, and bravery against darkness and doom. Show the players the wonders of the world they're in and encourage them to react to it.

Filling the characters' lives with adventure means working with the players to create a world that's engaging and dynamic. Dungeon World adventures **never** presume player actions — a Dungeon World adventure portrays a setting in motion, and as the players come into conflict with that setting, action is inevitable.

This is how you **play to find out what happens**. You're sharing in the fun of finding out how the characters react to and change the world you're portraying. So really, don't plan too hard. The rules of the game will fight you.

PRINCIPLES

- ♦ Draw maps, leave blanks
- ♦ Address the characters, not the players
- ♦ Embrace the fantastic
- ♦ Make a move that follows
- ♦ Never speak the name of your move
- ♦ Give every monster life
- ♦ Name every person
- ♦ Ask questions and use the answers
- ♦ Be a fan of the characters
- ♦ Think dangerous
- ♦ Begin and end with the fiction
- ♦ Think offscreen, too

Your principles are your guides. Often, when it's time to make a move, you'll already have an idea of what makes sense. Consider it in light of your principles and go with it, if it fits.

Draw maps, leave blanks. Dungeon World exists mostly in the imaginations of the people playing it; maps help everyone stay on the same page. Don't try to make a map complete — leave room for the unknown.

Address the characters, not the players. Say “Dunwick, what are you doing about the wight?” not “Tony, is Dunwick doing something about that wight?” This keeps the game focused on the fiction, since moves are always based on the actions of characters, not the players portraying them.

Embrace the fantastic. Magic, strange vistas, gods, demons, and abominations — embrace the fantastic on every scale, in your prep and in play.

Make a move that follows. When you make a move, you’re taking an element of the fiction and bringing it to bear against the characters. Your move should always follow from the fiction.

Never speak the name of your move. Your moves are prompts to you, not things you say directly. You never show the players you’re picking a move from a list — show it to them as a straightforward outcome of their actions, since it is.

Give every monster life. Give each monster details that bring it to life: smells, sights, sounds. Give each one enough to make it real, but don’t cry when it gets beat up or overthrown — that’s what player characters do.

Name every person. Anyone the players speak with has a name. The rest can flow from there.

Ask questions and use the answers. Part of playing to find out what happens is explicitly not knowing everything, and being curious. If you don’t know something, ask the players and use what they say. The easiest question is “What do you do?”

Be a fan of the characters. Think of the players’ characters as protagonists in a story you might see on TV. Cheer for their victories and lament their defeats.

Think dangerous. Everything in the world is a target. You’re thinking like an evil overlord: no single life is worth anything and there is nothing sacrosanct. The world changes; without the characters’ intervention, it changes for the worse.

Begin and end with the fiction. Everything anyone does in Dungeon World comes from and leads to fictional events.

Think offscreen too. Just because you’re a fan of the characters doesn’t mean everything happens right in front of them. Sometimes your best move is in the next room, or another part of the dungeon, or back in town.

MOVES

Whenever everyone looks to you to see what happens, choose one of these. Each move is something that occurs in the fiction of the game — they aren’t code words or special terms.

- ♦ Use a monster, danger, or location move
- ♦ Reveal an unwelcome truth
- ♦ Show signs of an approaching threat
- ♦ Deal damage
- ♦ Use up their resources
- ♦ Turn their move back on them
- ♦ Separate them
- ♦ Give an opportunity that fits a class’ abilities
- ♦ Show a downside to their class, race, or equipment
- ♦ Offer an opportunity, with or without cost
- ♦ Put someone in a spot
- ♦ Tell them the requirements or consequences and ask

Never speak the name of your move. Make it a real thing that happens to them, and no matter what move you make, always follow up with "What do you do?"

When to Make a Move. You make a move when everyone looks to you to find out what happens, when the players give you a golden opportunity, or when they roll a 6-. Generally when the players are just looking at you to find out what happens you make a soft move, otherwise you make a hard move.

A soft move is one without immediate, irrevocable consequences — something not all that bad (offer an opportunity with cost), or something bad with time to avoid it (show signs of an approaching threat). A soft move ignored becomes a golden opportunity for a hard move. Hard moves have immediate consequences — dealing damage is almost always a hard move. When you have a chance to make a hard move, you can opt for a soft one instead if it better fits the situation.

Choosing a Move. Start by looking at the obvious consequences of the action that triggered it. Let your moves snowball — build on the success or failure of the characters' moves and on your own previous moves. If your first instinct is that this won't hurt them now but it'll come back to bite them later, great — that's think offscreen too. Make a note of it and reveal it when the time is right.

Making Your Move. Keep your principles in mind, in particular never speak the name of your move and address the characters, not the players. Note that "deal damage" is a move, but other moves may include damage as well — when an ogre flings you against a wall you take damage as surely as if he smashed you with his fists. After every move you make, always ask "What do you do?"

Use a monster, danger, or location move. Every monster in an adventure has moves associated with it, as do many locations and the overarching dangers of a front.

Reveal an unwelcome truth. An unwelcome truth is a fact the players wish wasn't true.

Show signs of an approaching threat. "Threat" means anything bad that's on the way; show them something's going to happen unless they act.

Deal damage. Choose one source of damage that's fictionally threatening a character and apply it. Most damage is based on a die roll; you never need to touch the dice.

Use up their resources. Something happens to use up a resource — weapons, armor, healing, ongoing spells. Not always permanently.

Turn Their Move Back On Them. Think about the benefits a move might grant a character and turn them around, or grant the same advantage to someone who has it out for the characters.

Separate Them. From being pushed apart in the heat of battle to being teleported to the far end of the dungeon.

Give an opportunity that fits a class' abilities. Present an opportunity that plays to what one class shines at — even a class not currently in play.

Show a downside to their class, race, or equipment. Just as every class shines, they all have weaknesses too.

Offer an opportunity, with or without cost. Show them something they want: riches, power, glory. Lead with the fiction.

Put someone in a spot. A spot is someplace a character needs to make tough choices. The harder the choice, the tougher the spot.

Tell them the requirements or consequences and ask. Good for when they want something not covered by a move, or they've failed one — they can do it, but they'll pay a price, made clear in the fiction, not just mechanically.

DUNGEON MOVES

Dungeon Moves are a special subset used to make or alter a dungeon on the fly, for hostile areas you haven't planned completely. Map out the area as you make these moves.

- ♦ Change the environment
- ♦ Point to a looming threat
- ♦ Introduce a new faction or type of creature
- ♦ Use a threat from an existing faction or type of creature
- ♦ Make them backtrack
- ♦ Present riches at a price
- ♦ Present a challenge to one of the characters

You can make these moves whenever everyone looks to you to say something, when the players present an opportunity, or when they miss a roll — particularly well-suited for when characters enter a new room or hallway.

Change the environment. Introduce a new environment: carved tunnels become naturally carved, trees turn dead and strange, trails are lost.

Point to a looming threat. Show the signs and clues of something lurking — the dragon's footprints in the mud, the slimy trail of the gelatinous cube.

Introduce a new faction or type of creature. A type is a broad grouping (orcs, goblins, the undead); a faction is a group united by a goal. Introducing means giving clear sensory evidence or substantiated information.

Use a threat from an existing faction or type of creature. Once introduced, use moves of monsters of that type or faction, broadly — orcs with their worgs, a cult with undead servants.

Make them backtrack. Is there anything useful in areas already explored, as yet undiscovered? Show the effect time has had on places left behind — the dungeon evolves in the wake of the characters' actions.

Present riches at a price. Put a desirable item just out of reach, and find a way to make it available if the characters give up what they have.

Present a challenge to one of the characters. Challenge a character by looking at what they're good at, giving someone a chance to shine — or challenge them by looking at what they're bad at or left unresolved.

DEALING WITH COMMON SITUATIONS

Fights. Think about more than just the exchange of damage — monsters might be trying to capture the characters or protect something. No self-respecting monster just stands still for its beating; make sure you're using moves beyond deal damage, even in a fight. Make a map of a complex battle location so everyone knows what's happening.

Traps. Traps may come from your prep or be improvised from your moves. If nothing has established the location is safe, traps are always an option. Players may find traps through clever plans, trap sense, or discerning realities — if an action would discover a trap outside a move, don't hide it from them. Traps aren't allowed to break the rules.

People. NPCs are people: they have goals and the tools to struggle towards those goals. Some whole adventures might take place in a peopled environment rather than an isolated dungeon. People, like dungeons, change over time — the characters' actions cause the world to change, and the people they meet remember. Relationships between characters are bonds; relationships with NPCs are more tenuous, and require action to become real, lasting connections.