# 3 Player Characters

The creature burst through the wall teeth-first, sending the monk flying backward almost to the stairs. Beady eyes fixed on the dwarf.

"Try to get behind it," Harsk said calmly. "Aim for the soft spot under the fin."

"How?" Amiri called back.

"Just wait for the charge," the dwarf replied. Not shifting position, he began passing his axe from hand to hand. The monster pawed the floor, leaving furrows in the stone.

"This is not the shark I was led to expect," Sajan observed.

"How so?" Harsk asked. He sounded genuinely puzzled. "What did you think I meant?"

The monster charged.

# Starting Characters

While the Game Master takes on numerous responsibilities vital to the smooth running and group enjoyment of a roleplaying game, his efforts focus on only half of a game's aspects. The other half—the creation of characters, the narrative drive of the campaign, and a thousand other major decisions—rest to a large extent on the shoulders of the players.

If the game were a movie and the GM its director, then the players would be both starring actors and audience. All the fearsome monsters, nasty traps, elaborate dungeons, and sinister plots in the world are wasted without a dynamic band of players to confront them and aid in developing an exciting story. By sharing a measure of responsibility with the GM for a game's story and the group's greater enjoyment, players go beyond the role of mere bystanders, and become both the stars and the co-authors of their heroic epic.

This chapter details the part of a Pathfinder game the Game Master does not directly control, discussing the elements of an adventuring party, players' rights and responsibilities, ways to involve newcomers and reengage veterans, and suggestions for how to work with gamers of all types toward the creation of more exciting stories and more enjoyable games.

## THE FACE OF THE ENEMY

The Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, at its simplest level, begins with an easy animosity: one player controls the "bad guys" while the others control the "good guys." Add to this the fact that GMs control behind-the-scenes elements, actively concoct schemes to challenge the players, and hold the final say on rules arbitration, and there's ample opportunity for competition, frustration, and hurt feelings. In the best roleplaying groups, both the GM and players figure out ways to avoid these problems.

All participants—especially new players—should be made aware that the GM-player relationship is not a competitive one, and that the players have roles just

as important as the GM. While the GM serves in part as judge, his or her rulings should strive toward fairness, the continued flow of the game, and group enjoyment. At the same time, players share the responsibility for the group's entertainment—including the GM's—and should remain aware that time disproportionately spent on their characters, rules concerns, or out-of-game digressions potentially detracts from other players' opportunities to participate.

Should a player have a concern about the game, a GM's rules arbitration, or any other game-related quandary, he should be encouraged to bring such matters up at a time when it doesn't detract from the group's fun, perhaps immediately following the current game session. In the best campaigns, players should feel like they have a stake in the ongoing story, and a good Game Master keeps in touch with what game elements the players enjoy most, tailoring the campaign to take advantage of their preferences. In the end, though the GM always has the final say, it's important for everyone involved to remember that it's only a game, and a bit of flexibility here and there results in a more enjoyable experience for everyone in the end.

## BEFORE THE GAME

Prior to sitting down to create characters, the players and GM should have a discussion about what sort of game they want to play. Although most campaigns using the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game fall within the sword and sorcery genre, other options abound, and the GM should make sure the players are aware of what sort of game they're headed into. If that means a world where wizardry is outlawed, or all druids have been driven underground by the depredations of an industrial revolution, they should know this before the game begins. Getting a sense of the types of characters each player would enjoy running helps the GM tailor the game from its outset—for more information on this aspect, see Chapter 6.

### Group Composition

The traditional fantasy adventuring party includes four characters: a fighter, a cleric, a rogue, and a wizard. Such a party allows for

a balance of abilities, complimentary class features, and distinct roles wherein each character shines. Though the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game offers a much wider selection of classes, the respective roles these archetypal classes represent—combat, healing and divine casting, stealth and skill mastery, and arcane casting—are still a good checklist for making sure the party can handle a wide range of challenges.

This group structure is not the only possibility, however, and player preference often leaves one or more of these roles unfilled. With a little foresight from the GM, a nontraditional group can flourish. While it might take some effort to adjust to the group's strengths and account for any weaknesses, unusual parties can result in unique and memorable campaigns. How much strategy players put into rounding out party composition is often best left to them, so long as no one is pressured into playing a character he isn't interested in solely for "the good of the party."

Occasionally, a GM might restrict available character types. In these campaigns, such as the example mentioned above where wizardry is outlawed, it's important to decide whether or not you're interested in allowing exceptions. A sorcerer on the run from government officials who think he's a wizard makes for a great PC, but ultimately players must abide by the tropes of your world.

## Character Creation

When it finally comes time to create characters, players face several big decisions, and it's the GM's job to help guide them. When designing their characters, players and GMs should consider not just what characters people want to play, but also how those characters might mesh with a larger adventure group in a thematic rather than mechanical sense. Some of the most common inter-party conflicts, both in character and out, stem from issues of disparate alignments, inflexible viewpoints or goals, class prejudices, or racial enmities. While no player can be expected to create a character that meshes perfectly with all the others in his party—and indeed, a bit of tension between characters makes roleplaying more interesting— every player should seek out ways and reasons for a group to work together, rather than focus on bickering that detracts from the adventure.

During the pre-campaign discussion, the GM should make sure that all players are on the same page regarding character creation basics such as how to generate statistics and what, if any, special character options might be used. This is the time for GMs to discuss what material beyond the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook* new characters might employ. Unless an option clearly conflicts with the tone of the game, or the GM feels the power level is unbalanced, it's often a good idea to honor player requests, but ultimately the GM makes the call

## CHARACTER BACKGROUNDS

Every player is different when it comes to creating character backgrounds. Some like to write whole novels, while others just want a name and a weapon. Both approaches are completely valid, but come with their own particular pitfalls. The player who writes out an overly complex history might be possessive and irritated when the GM tries to work that twists and revelations that manipulate that history. At the same time, the character with no background runs the risk of being bored or feeling disconnected from the campaign.

In general, a good character background serves two functions: getting the player excited about roleplaying, and giving you as the GM something to latch onto at the beginning of the story. As a result, regardless of how much extra work they want to do, encourage each of your players to give you a physical description (to inform NPC reactions), a basic reason for adventuring, and at least one hook involving an old vendetta, personal ethos, relative, or other core detail you can weave into the campaign.

as to what rules can be used, and this information needs to be available to all players up front to avoid disappointment. When in doubt, you can always allow a power on a provisional basis, with the understanding that you'll help the player rebuild his character if you later reject the rule.
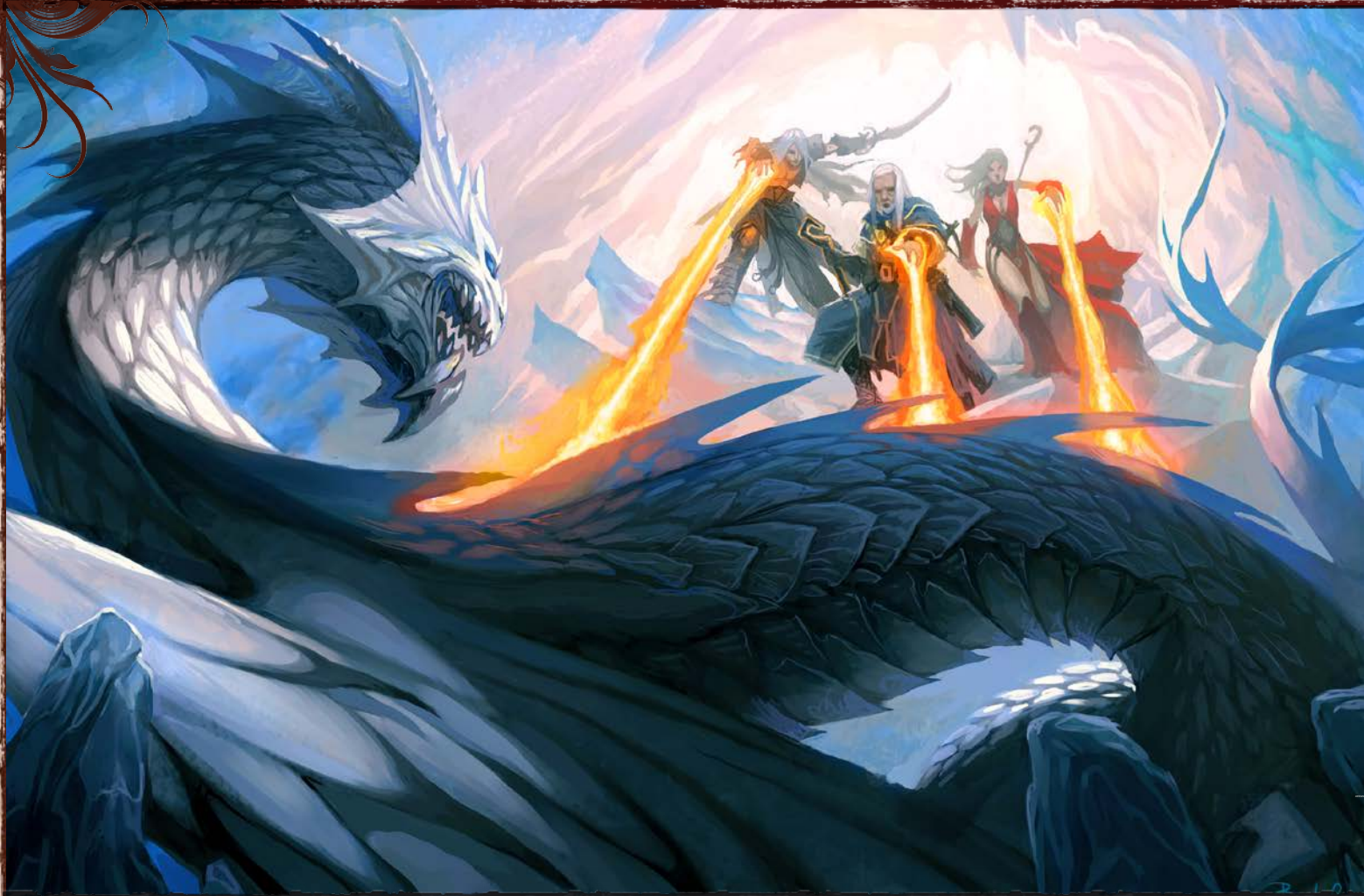
## DURING THE GAME

It's been stated before, but it bears repeating: as long as everyone's enjoying themselves, the game is working. Some groups want nothing but combat after combat, while others crave in-depth roleplaying or elaborate plots. Each player around the game table brings his own unique skills and preferences, and it is the job of the Game Master to play to each player's interests while balancing the needs of the whole group—including himself as world-builder and chief storyteller—to make sure everyone is having fun.

## Fair Gameplay

In a game featuring as many rules and options as the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, the concept of "fairness" has a number of different interpretations. For players, though, fairness largely relates to their interaction with the Pathfinder rules and the group at large.

In terms of the rules of the game, the same aphorisms that held true in grade school remain true during gameplay: No one likes a cheater. In most games with experienced players, the GM doesn't need to check over every player's character sheet or double-check the math on every bonus. A game operating on dozens of different subsystems requires honesty and goodwill, as the fun of the game lies in the

simulation, not the calculations behind it. Misreporting dice rolls, ignoring a vulnerability, or bending the rules in any of a thousand other ways puts the game's integrity in jeopardy, and is ultimately pointless— a character's story is made interesting by the failures as much as by the successes. The danger lies in losing the other players' trust, forcing the game to slow down when the GM inevitably does note discrepancies, and even potentially being asked to leave a game. Yet even though players may give lip service to these ideas, or the fact that there's no such thing as "winning" a roleplaying game, sometimes players succumb to temptation, and it's the GM's duty to deal with such players quietly, gracefully—and firmly.

Beyond simply obeying the rules, however, fairness can also mean sharing the spotlight equally, and ensuring that all players are getting the chance to perform. While not every player is going to be on the edge of his seat every minute, it's a GM's job to watch and see if anyone is hogging the spotlight or being left out. Compromise and sacrifice are needed to keep the game going smoothly, and you should avoid letting players monopolize your attention

with their characters' individual needs or interests. Similarly, sometimes characters are knocked out of combat or killed. Although it's no fun to sit out for a portion of a session, players should remain positive and understand that sometimes the dice roll against them—and that you as GM will get them back into the action as soon as possible.

## Player Knowledge

Separating the information a player knows from the facts a character possesses regularly proves one of the most difficult challenges players face. "Metagaming," or making decisions based on player knowledge as opposed to character knowledge, quickly erodes the group's belief in the world the GM creates. It often frustrates both the GM and other players when an interesting adventure cracks because a given PC acts on information the character has no way of possessing, and such issues should be dealt with quickly and calmly when they come up.

To determine if a character's action is appropriate, have the player justify his decision using only information the character knows. For example, if no one in-game

has mentioned anything about vampires, but the player knows the GM loves vampires or was looking at vampire miniatures earlier, it's metagaming to have his character stock up on wooden stakes and holy water. If, however, the character remembers the strange marks on the victims' necks and the fact that all the attacks occurred at night (and perhaps makes a skill check to recall any information he has about monsters fitting those criteria), buying wooden stakes is a perfectly justifiable action.

Metagaming isn't always intentional. If a player isn't certain where the line between player knowledge and character knowledge falls, have him explain in-character why he's making a decision. If he resorts to using game terms or vague statements (or sophisticated concepts that clash with the voice of his Intelligence 7 barbarian), the information likely comes from player knowledge.

This certainly doesn't mean that characters have to be as dumb as posts, never making decisions unless they are blatantly obvious, but rather that players should strive to process information in the same way their characters would. This is the essence of roleplaying. For example, suppose a wizard character says, "The orc used sneak attack on us—therefore, he's got to be a rogue, so I won't cast *fireball*. I'll cast *charm person* instead; he probably has a weak Will save." This is clearly player knowledge: the player described his reasoning using game terms and rules knowledge. Contrast this with the player instead saying: "The orc is wearing light armor and doing an awful lot of damage with just a short sword. This reminds me of the wererat murderer we fought in Korvosa. That wererat avoided my *fireballs* like they weren't even there, so I'm going to try *charm person*." Here the player performs exactly the same action, using the same information, but justifies it with character knowledge instead of directly metagaming. Of course, this isn't an excuse for players to fast-talk their way into metagaming, and if a character has too many justified epiphanies, you may still want to have a talk with the player.

One particularly sticky area of metagaming has nothing to do with game mechanics, but rather real-world knowledge and intelligence. Sometimes the player who's a genius at solving puzzles and riddles wants to play a dumb brute of a swordsman. This is great—so long as his character isn't still solving all the puzzles. In this situation (or the reverse, where the player who's terrible at puzzles has an Intelligence score of 22), let all the players work together to solve the puzzle, but use skill checks and Intelligence checks to offer hints or determine who actually comes up with the solution. Similarly, don't fall into the trap of letting a player's knowledge base inform the character's beyond what's reasonable. Just because your player knows how to make gunpowder out of bat guano doesn't mean his uneducated halfling cleric does.

## Plot Development

In real life, players might be justifiably suspicious if a stranger approached them at a bar and offered them money to perform a dangerous task. In a game, however, players who scrutinize plot hooks too closely can cause a GM a lot of stress. These players sometimes make the case that blindly accepting a plot hook (or rushing into battle, or delving into the dungeon) when their character wouldn't likely do so goes against the whole idea of roleplaying. If the player knows the GM wants him to follow the hook and the player accepts, isn't that metagaming?

In a way, yes. While a good GM is often capable of presenting incentives and circumstances that allow PCs to float seamlessly and justifiably from encounter to encounter, sometimes the GM needs a little help. In these situations, it's important for the players to remember that the rule against metagaming is subordinate to the rule about having fun, and if you as the GM need them to work with you, it's their responsibility to do so.

Thankfully, no matter what the situation, there's never a time when a creative GM can't help his players find a believable way to undertake a given action. Though it can be frustrating to deal with a player who stubbornly proclaims, "My character would never do that!", take a moment to look at the character's backstory and see if there's a potential rationalization, or a previously "unrevealed" aspect of the situation that can get the character invested once more. A paladin might normally reject a sinister dark elf's offer, but perhaps in this case she pretends to accept in order to find out what the dark elf is up to. Conversely, maybe the drow forgot to mention that there's several innocent lives at stake, making accepting her offer the only righteous option.

This doesn't mean that players should always bend over backward to accommodate the GM—if none of the players take to the adventure hook for some unforeseen reason, you've failed to adequately read your party, and it's up to you to repackage the adventure in a more appealing way. Alternatively, if a player genuinely can't think of a good reason for a character to work toward an adventure's ends, saying so might spark a lively in-character discussion and lead other characters to convince him.

Obstinacy, however, is one of the quickest ways for a player to kill a campaign. A player who refuses to play his character any way but his own, fails to accommodate other players' wishes and interests, or insists on heading off on his own is forgetting the cooperative nature of the game. In this case, it's the GM's responsibility to intervene and speak privately to the player. If working together to add additional plot elements, or coaching the player in more team-based play, doesn't succeed in bringing him back in line with the rest of the group, then it might be best for him to create a new character or resign from the gaming group altogether— perhaps taking his headstrong character on a solo adventure.

# AFTER THE GAME

Between sessions, players still have plenty of opportunities to contribute to a game's success. Engaging in good record keeping, maintaining up-to-date characters, participating in game-related projects, and giving feedback all help games run smoothly, take work off your shoulders, and keep a campaign fun even between sessions.

## Keeping Current

As soon as a session ends, all players should consult their notes to ensure that all experience points, treasure, and important information has been accurately recorded. Some groups appoint one player to track treasure, another to list NPC names and descriptions, and yet another to note plot and adventure hooks. These duties might rotate, but every player should understand her responsibilities to the group, lest valuable details or resources be lost. Often players keep their own notes, sometimes in character, and these narratives form contrasting viewpoints that can make for fun campaign journals. Additional documentation, such as map sketches, tallies of slain enemies, folders of item cards, and lists of shared adventuring gear, helps keep the players focused and adds to the fun.

Players should also ensure that their character sheets stay up to date, adding and removing equipment, accounting for long-term effects, and updating character level adjustments as soon as possible. Decide ahead of time if you have any specific preferences regarding leveling, such as not allowing the players to level in the middle of the session, or insisting that they roll their hit points in front of a witness. Players should always arrive for a session with an up-to-date character sheet so valuable game time isn't consumed by last-minute preparation.

## Feedback

Gaming groups thrive on feedback. Enthusiastic players spur the GM to continue creating exciting adventures and make the daunting task of running a game worthwhile,

while the GM complimenting a player on his roleplaying, strategy, or teamwork can help educate and make the party more cohesive. A GM or player who compliments others also inspires others to share positive feedback and are most likely to be taken seriously when offering criticism.

Constructive criticism is just as important as positive reinforcement, but it should be handled more carefully. When possible, raise any individual issues with players in private. Phrasing such criticism as a request for assistance often makes the process easier. For example, if a player is getting caustic toward a teammate over the latter's limited rules knowledge, you might ask that he help educate the neophyte player. Similarly, if one player's character is constantly disrupting the game by heading off in different directions, you could ask that player to help you keep the group on track—many players understand the difficulties of GMing, and may play differently if they see themselves as sharing that responsibility.

## Creativity Between Sessions

Just because the session ends, that doesn't mean the game can't follow a player home. Many players make their most meaningful contributions to a game between sessions. Literary-minded or artistic players often keep some manner of in-character campaign journal or sketchbook, depicting the party's exploits from their characters' point of view. This might take the form of notes, an actual pen-and-ink diary, or posts to an online journal or forum, and can be anything from letters to another character, reports to a related organization, a scholarly work, or a bardic epic. Making such records accessible to the other players (or even the wider gaming community) allows others to share in the group's adventures.

Although campaign journals serve as the most common creative activity between sessions, no GM should underestimate the imagination of her players. Artistic players might create sketches of their characters, portraits of their enemies, or illustrations of their exploits, while more craft-focused players might help the GM make maps or props of important items, or might fashion costumes or adornments based on their characters. If you have a player looking for such a project, consider bringing them in on one of the creative aspects you don't have time for, whether it's painting miniatures, making maps, or creating a playlist for the game's soundtrack.

It's not just artists and writers who can help the GM between sessions, either. If you have a trusted player who's particularly adept with the rules (or maybe even GMs himself), feel free to use him as a resource, perhaps vetting rules supplements proposed by other players and advising you on tricky balance issues, or educating other players in particularly confusing aspects of the game.

# New Players

Even a group that's been playing together for years occasionally finds itself in need of new players. Teaching newcomers, rather than finding established players, brings several challenges but also has the potential for great rewards. This can be particularly challenging when an individual has never played a tabletop roleplaying game before and therefore has no point of reference for such an experience. Whether you find yourself looking for new members, trying to introduce a friend to roleplaying games, or teaching someone who has just become interested, consider the following topics.

**Meeting New Players**: New players come most readily from your group's extended circle of friends, where potential newcomers' interest and compatibility with the rest of the group is already known or can be reasonably estimated. Beyond existing circles of friends, game stores, gaming conventions, and organized play programs (like Paizo's Pathfinder Society) make great places to meet new players. Many gaming related websites, college campuses, libraries, and coffee houses also host forums where local gamers might network. While all of these options can help bring together fantastic groups, you should always remain aware of the potential dangers of meeting strangers. Always arrange to meet in a public space (such as a local game store, mall, or coffee shop), let loved ones know where you are going, share your contact's information, and never go alone.

**Introducing Players**: If your group is interested in introducing someone to roleplaying for the first time, the best way to start is by inviting that person to a session. What the new player does at this first session is up to her. If she's most comfortable watching and asking questions, she should do so. If she prefers to learn by doing, playing existing side-characters like allied NPCs, familiars, or animal companions allows her to jump in on the side of the PCs; alternatively, the GM might hand over control of a monster to teach her the basics. And of course, there's no better way for her to start than jumping in with a new character, created with the GM's help. If this first session goes well and the new player seems interested in learning more, perhaps it's time to formally invite her to join the group.

**Teaching New Players**: Learning a roleplaying game's rules is the greatest challenge facing any new gamer, especially when contending with an entire group spouting lingo like a second language. Experienced gamers can do a lot to make the learning process easier. First and foremost, make the new player feel welcome. As GM, you already have a lot on your plate in a given session, and it's often helpful to ask a willing, experienced player to act as a "buddy" for the new player, explaining game terms and suggesting

actions. Encouragement is especially important during this learning period, and it's crucial that you ask the new player for input in party decisions, as it's easy for newcomers to be overwhelmed by a party already used to working together. Keep in mind that it's not important for the new player to know every rule or option from the start. New players should be made aware of the basics, which can later be added to once they're more comfortable with the game. Other players should also avoid jumping in, as having suggestions offered from multiple directions can prove confusing and frustrating. Providing the player with a cheat sheet of common terms and rules also helps her learn the game. And as helpful as it is for a new player to receive advice and support, it's important to step back periodically and give her a chance to demonstrate what she's learned. With each passing session, she'll need less help, and in time she'll be playing like a veteran.

A Basic Rules Cheat Sheet is included in the back of this book. Feel free to photocopy it and give it to your new players to assist them in learning the rules and terminology of the game.

**Beginner's Game**: If you're trying to find a number of new players, or if you know multiple people interested in roleplaying but don't want to interrupt the momentum of an ongoing campaign by bringing inexperienced players up to speed, you might consider running a game just for beginners. Such a game allows all the new players to start at the same point and with about the same base of knowledge. New players don't have to worry about learning both the Pathfinder RPG rules and the details of a long-running campaign at once, as optimally the game starts a new story. They also don't have to feel inexperienced or like a drag on the more adept members of the group—with a beginner's game, new players can take their time with the rules, ask questions, and learn from questions asked by others.

GMs who choose to run a game for beginners should decide whether they want to make it open to the public or restricted to a select group of friends. While inviting a few interested potential players is usually the easiest course, many game stores and conventions welcome GMs willing to teach new roleplayers. As with any new game or topic, the GM should be patient with beginners, receptive to their questions, and interested in making sure everyone understands what's going on. Not every rule and option needs to be presented from the start; ensuring that everyone is comfortable with the basics before gradually introducing new elements helps to avoid overwhelming anyone. Remember that, first and foremost, the Pathfinder RPG is a game and is most fun when played, so demonstrations, simple combats, and keeping an open forum for questions can not only make for a fun adventure, but can also quickly expand a GM's pool of potential players.

# The Life of a Party

Once a group has its players, the elements of the game are decided upon, and characters are made, it's time for adventure! The importance of the players doesn't end when the GM's story begins. The ways players cooperate, characters play off of each other, and an adventuring party functions together can determine not just the success or failure of an adventure, but also the fortune of a gaming group as a whole. This section focuses on elements of the game GMs—and their players—should consider to improve the quality of their parties, make running the game easier, and generally spend more game time roleplaying and less time squabbling. Keeping in mind some of the issues and sticking points most commonly faced during roleplaying games can help you steer your party away from problems, frustrations, and wasted time.

## GATHERING A GROUP

There's an important step between creating characters and having that first adventure: forming an adventuring party. Unless your players have discussed connections between their characters in advance, you might find yourself with a disparate group of individuals seemingly unlikely to work toward the same goal. This can prove an extremely daunting task, and may require some quick and clever improvisation, though experienced players are likely to try and make the job easier for you by responding receptively to potential common interests. The less hand-waving a GM has to do, however, the stronger a story feels. To help a group deal with the often-awkward first encounter, the following options aid in transforming a group of strangers into a cohesive adventuring party.

### Shared Past

One of the easiest ways to deal with the first time characters meet is to make it their hundredth time. Working with players to create characters who know each other from the start alleviates much of the hassle of trying to entwine them with one another. Characters may be childhood friends, students of the same master, or relatives who have shared countless experiences before the adventure even begins. Working with the group to create a uniting factor makes explaining why the characters are in the same place at the same time straightforward. Knowing one another doesn't have to mean the characters are friends. Passing acquaintances, respectful peers, or even longstanding rivals might be shoved together by circumstance.

If it seems too implausible for every character in a group to know every other member, or a shared background element seems illogical or can't be decided upon, having even two or three related characters goes a long way toward bringing the entire group together. Two or more groups of PCs coming together, or a larger group meeting an outsider, decreases the number of factors the GM needs to wrangle to bring the party together.

The shared past method can also work well beyond first level—just because a PC never mentioned an old acquaintance, for example, doesn't mean she doesn't exist, and more than one replacement character has come searching for her recently deceased sibling, only to pick up her sister's quest where the late adventurer left off. Shared pasts also provide an excellent means of introducing villains with a connection to the PCs, making the adventure a personal vendetta from the very first encounter.

### Shared Goal

Perhaps one character shows up at the entrance to a recently uncovered dungeon looking for her missing niece, and soon after a robed figure also approaches the entrance tracking down a kobold who stole his master's book of arcane research. Both need to clear out the same dungeon, so they might as well work together. It's the PCs' objective, not their history, that brings them together in this case. While such happenstance can easily stretch credulity if numerous adventurers show up at a site all at the same time, chancing upon a character or another group with a similar destination or goal can be made to feel natural if it's done thoughtfully. Unlike the shared past method, the characters must learn to trust one another over time, providing ample opportunities for roleplaying as characters feel each other out and create friendships and rivalries.

### In Media Res

Few things energize a new gaming group more than sitting down for their first adventure and immediately being told, "Roll initiative!" Novels rarely begin at the most boring part of the story, and neither should adventures. Starting the party in the midst of an ambush on their caravan, fighting a fire at their inn, imprisoned in a dungeon, or hearing screams from down the hall begins the adventure immediately. The characters might already be aware of each other, but it's their reactions to the event facing them that initially draws them together, giving the GM a starting point from which to weave a lasting connection.

As stirring as this method can be, it risks taking a measure of character control out of the players' hands, as it assumes prior actions, and can be especially frustrating if a player doesn't believe her character would be involved in the situation presented. Thus, it's often helpful for the GM to include the players in a measure of the setup, perhaps asking each member to come up with a reason for why his character might be in a specific place or be interested in

some event. They don't need to know how the GM plans to start things off, but they'll already know why they're around when the excitement begins.

### Flash Forward

By far the easiest way to get characters together is to skip past the introductions and straight to the adventure. Having the players decide upon how the characters met, develop a few connections or rivalries, and determining what shared goals they already have allows a group to forgo the introductory period. While this glosses over many nuances of character motivation and potentially memorable first meetings, it also means that the GM can start an adventure at the first encounter of the adventure and start the story moving forward from there. This method tends to work best for one-night adventures, where specifics of characterization and motivation prove secondary to the excitement of the game, but can also be useful for groups where players are keen on weaving an elaborate group backstory.

## PARTY COMPOSITION

As long as every player is participating and having fun, there's no right or wrong number of players in a gaming group. Yet times arise when the number of characters and the choices they make have a significant effect on an adventure, and can potentially compromise the enjoyment of all involved.

### Splitting the Party

"Don't split the party" is practically an RPG mantra. But sometimes players do it anyway, or a split is forced upon them by a sudden avalanche, a *teleport* spell gone awry, or the chance to sneak into the palace in a halfling-sized crate.

When you find yourself running multiple groups, it's worth remembering why you're at the front of the table: to give your friends a challenging, fun time, not to relentlessly enforce realism. You don't want to utterly break everyone's suspension of disbelief, but it's not the end of the world if you engineer events for the party to be reunited sooner rather than later. Is it really so bad if the avalanche gets dug away quickly or the palace loading dock has a bunch of different-sized crates?

In these situations, the GM often needs to adjust the flow of the session to compensate and keep things both logical and fun. When faced with such a situation, you have several different tactics at your disposal.

**Split Screen**: Some GMs have little problem keeping track of the events of two small groups at once. If you're comfortable with it, you can try to continue to run events as normal, dealing with each group while the other one is considering its next move so that neither side feels neglected. For instance, this might work well in a combat that spans two different rooms (or two simultaneous combats), and keeping both groups operating as part of the same initiative order during these periods can help ensure that no one is left out for an unfair period of time. In general, though, this is by far the most difficult way to handle a split party.

**Jump Cuts**: It's natural to go back and forth between two groups, and that back-and-forth provides its own dramatic momentum, like a movie that cuts back and forth between two different scenes.

Decide in the moment when you want those "cuts" to occur, choosing them based on your sense of pacing. Don't feel like you need to switch between team A and team B every round; that will leave everyone disjointed and bring play to a crawl. Nor should you fully resolve an encounter with team A, because then team B might as well go to the kitchen and have a pizza. Time those "cuts" between the groups for the big moments—the scouts see something fascinating, the rear guard brings down the ogre, and other natural turning points.

**Deputize Your Players**: If one group is doing a lot while the other group is waiting around, put the players in the less-active group to work for you. They can control a monster or an NPC guard. It's not the end of the world if a player sees a stat block, and many players relish the vicarious thrill of attacking their friends.

**Extra Scene**: If the separation is sure to go on for an extended period, the group might arrange an extra session focusing on only the relevant characters. While a session that includes only some of the characters can sometimes help a campaign (for example, when multiple players know they're going to be absent, or a subgroup wants to go off on a side quest), it can also leave certain players feeling left out of the action. In such cases, a more creative solution might be required. You might have the players whose characters are not being focused on create temporary characters, newly introduced to their companions, or else take control of important NPCs; this approach allows them to accompany their companions for the duration of their side adventure while still maintaining continuity with their existing characters. This method means no players get left out of an adventure, and the entire group remains in tune with all of the story's events.

**One Man Show**: In cases where a lone character decides to run off on his own, the GM should do what she can to keep the game fun for the player, but by the same token shouldn't feel that she needs to split game time evenly between the majority of the group and the party of one. If a player chooses to take his character away from the central narrative, receiving less of the GM's attention might just be part of the price. Alternatively, a separate solo session or email narrative might be exactly what the player needs to satisfy his character goals without sacrificing any fun for the rest of the group.

**Go With the Flow**: When the two parties reunite, let it happen. Don't worry that 10 minutes passed for one group and only 5 minutes passed for the other. It's probably not worth it to award experience points differently—few people really care that they get 150 more XP than someone else, and making such distinctions is more likely to foment discord than prevent it.

## Adjusting for Limitations

Before a game even begins, players have the opportunity to work with the GM to create the characters that they want to play and that best serve the game. Occasionally, though, a group's particular mix of character classes leaves it with limiting weaknesses in need of reconciliation. Below are several options to help you address such issues.

**Character Adjustment**: Sometimes the players can handle the potential problem for you by cannily readjusting magical items, rethinking the group's tactics, or taking levels in specific classes that help address the party's needs. While such options have the benefit of allowing the party itself to control every aspect of how its weaknesses are accounted for, buying new equipment is expensive and the leveling process takes time, meaning numerous sessions might pass before a player's newly adopted techniques or character options actually begin to help.

**Cohorts**: The Leadership feat gives a character the option to attract subordinates drawn to his personality and legend. Just because that character might be a wizard doesn't mean he has to attract spellcasting associates; attracting other cohorts gives him a perfect opportunity to balance his own limitations with a whole other set of abilities. In this situation, work with your players to create NPCs that are both valuable to the group and interesting and plausible within the ongoing story.

How cohorts and followers are run in a game warrants discussion before a character simply takes this feat, however. Are cohorts independent entities—meaning NPCs controlled by you as the GM—or simply appendages of the character who hires them? Most GMs prefer to let the player control the tactical and mechanical aspects of the cohort, while maintaining control of the NPC's personality, loyalties, and mannerisms. This can make for fun and rewarding interplay between the player and the GM, but it's important to remember that one player running an entire mini-party of his own risks detracting from other players' chances for participation, and the more cohorts and hirelings a GM must control, the more likely their presence will slow down and complicate the campaign. Before allowing a player to take the Leadership feat you should discuss such concerns with the player and make sure you're both on the same page regarding how the feat functions, and how to keep a bevy of followers from becoming a burden.

**Hirelings**: In many fantasy settings, it's wholly plausible that a group of adventurers might hire porters, guides, mercenaries, or even other adventurers to fulfill any number of needs. Page 159 of the *Core Rulebook* presents costs for a number of typical services, and you can use these prices to suggest salaries for other professionals, whether they be sages or swordsmen.

## Secondary Characters

While most gaming groups adhere to the basic convention of one player per character, there's no rule to prevent players from running multiple characters if you're comfortable with it. As mentioned earlier, the Leadership feat offers perhaps the most obvious option for this, potentially drawing a small army into a single character's employ. Yet there's nothing to say that a player can't play two totally independent PCs at once. This option is particularly useful for small groups that would otherwise have significant holes in their abilities and skill sets. In extreme cases, a game with only one player might see the player running an entire party.

## HANDLING TREASURE

Over the course of any adventure, there are treasures to find and rewards to win. While the shape of these rewards can vary wildly (see Chapter 5), the way PCs handle such rewards can create a host of issues, the most common being how to divide treasure fairly. Groups should work out how their party divides treasure early on to avoid tensions mid-adventure, and GMs should watch for signs of growing resentment and offer advice as needed, keeping in mind the following factors.

**By Need**: While it's easy enough to give every PC an equal share of the coins found or gained by selling art, jewelry, and easily liquidated items, desirable magic items and other unique treasures pose their own problems. If the group finds an item that would be beneficial to a certain character, most groups will allow that character to use it, for the good of all. If two characters want the same item, they can resolve who gets it by determining who would receive the greater benefit. Should this prove unclear or even, the players can determine who gets it by whatever method pleases them—high die roll, sharing the item, or even paying the other person for the privilege of using it—as long as the game keeps moving along. This is a simple system for the players, but relies on you providing equally useful items for every member of the party, which may stretch credulity.

**By Value**: In a more complex method of handling treasure, the characters collect their loot and wait to divide it until they're safely out of harm's way. Then the gp value of all the items is totaled, and every character

takes a turn choosing an item. The value of that item is then subtracted from the character's share of the overall treasure. This system ensures that characters who don't find items they want among the treasure have money to buy other items, while characters who do want treasure items have proportionately less money.

**NPC Shares**: Seldom discussed, NPCs have their own motives. Does a cohort get a share of the treasure? A hireling or follower? An NPC who's tagging along? An animal companion? Before splitting up treasure, the entire group—and any avaricious NPCs—should be on the same page about where the loot goes in the end (and such issues can conveniently resolve the problem of the character with too many hirelings or cohorts).

## DEATH OF A HERO

Inevitably, whether in a dramatic sacrifice or merely through bad luck with the dice, player characters die. How the group reacts to the death—and what the now-characterless player does about the situation—can say a lot about your game. In most cases, the focus of all parties involved changes to making sure the recently deceased character can get back into the action as soon as possible. But should the circumstances of the character's death render him beyond the party's reach, it might be time to create a new character.

### When to Resurrect

Just because a companion has fallen and the party can afford to restore him doesn't mean the player necessarily wants his character to come back. Death gives many players the perfect opportunity to abandon an old character for something new, or remedy a weakness in the party. The player of the deceased should always have a voice in determining whether or not his character is brought back to life, as no one benefits from bringing back a character who doesn't want it.

By the same token, players with dead characters should understand that their companions are not obligated to restore them, especially if doing so would require hocking every item and using every gold piece the party possesses. The game should not be made less enjoyable—and the party crippled—just to reverse the unfortunate fate of a single character.

### Back from the Grave

Sometimes a group's favorite character dies and for one reason or another can't be resurrected. While there's nothing preventing a player from tacking a "II" to the end of his character's name and recreating him stat for stat, encourage your players to exercise a bit more creativity in making replacement characters.

A player looking for ways to get reinvolved in a game after his character's death might look to individuals in his deceased character's backstory, NPCs traveling with the group, or other story-based opportunities to add a new PC to the game. Ideally the player creates a new character distinctive from his last, but even if not, most character backstories provide reasons for such similarities. At the same time, a new character with his own unique reasons to pursue the party's goals can mesh easily with an existing party and might have reason to know much of the plot of an ongoing campaign.

Forcing characters to cope with the loss of a party member, however, isn't the only option to dealing with in-game deaths. If a character proves absolutely vital to a game, is the hinge that keeps a player invested, or was slain through an unfair technicality, the GM might consider finding a way to return the character to life. While openly ignoring the rules can feel weak and arbitrary, the GM might concoct a special deific favor or even an adventure-worthy plot to restore the deceased character. Doing so can strengthen a party, rewarding members for their reliance on and willingness to sacrifice for one another, and even give the group new reasons to adventure, but this tactic should be used sparingly lest a group lose its fear of death altogether.
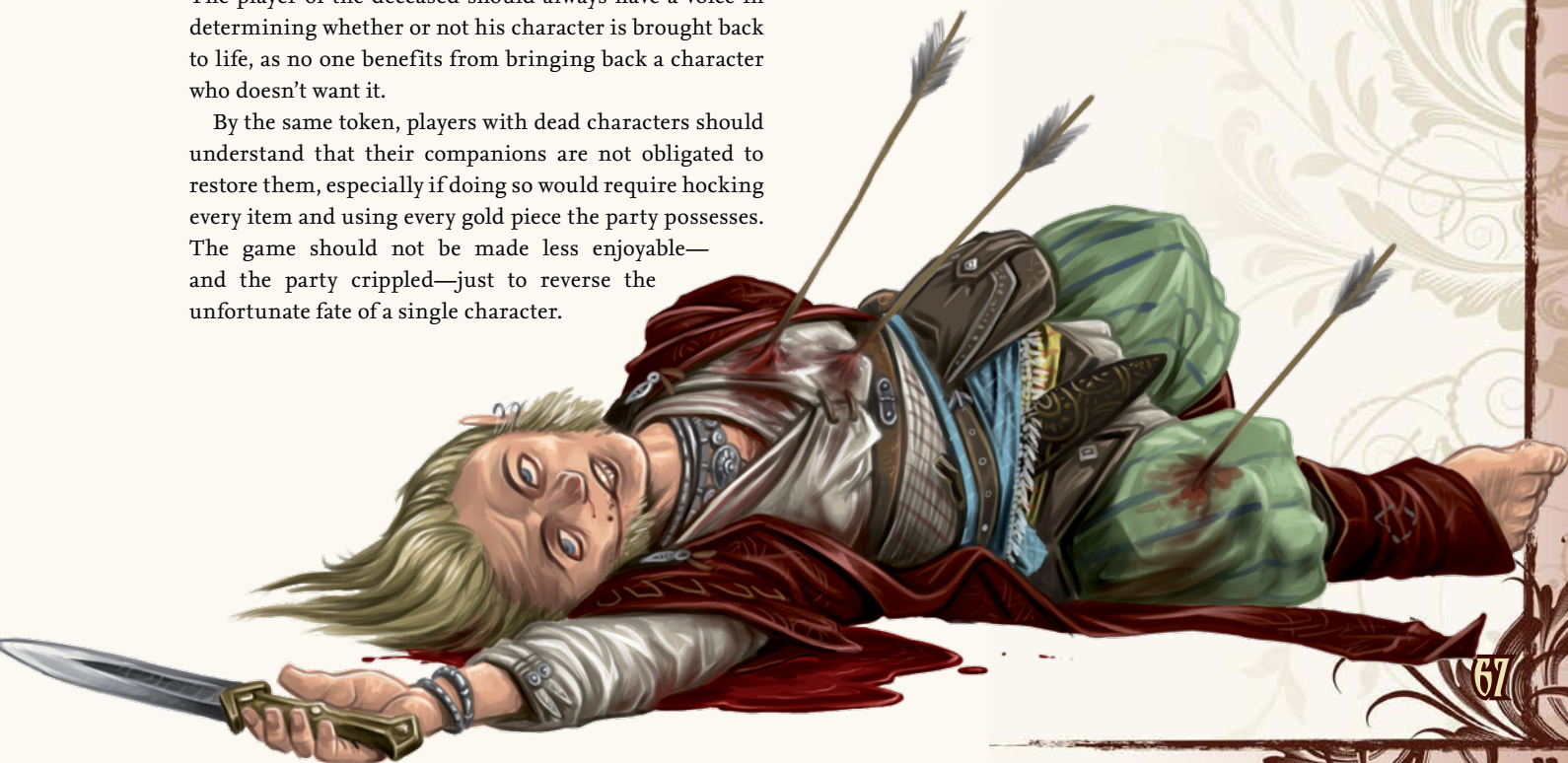
## ALIGNMENT

Alignment is easily one of the most debated topics in roleplaying, and straddles the line between descriptive element and rules element. How it is treated varies wildly; for some GMs it's merely a two-letter description, while for others it's a web of permissions and restrictions. Sorting out how this system works is important; it determines how players portray their characters, and how you as GM adjudicate certain aspects of the game.

Alignment exists primarily to define and summarize the moral and ethical tendencies of characters in a game, for both PCs and NPCs, and finds its roots in the fantasy literature that inspires most roleplaying games. Many characters in such stories easily fall into the camps of good or evil, but others straddle the line and seem good in one instance and evil in the next. Additionally, the relationship and outlook of these characters toward matters of law, justice, freedom, and anarchy further divides them. Just as one character might ignore society's rules in order to do what he knows is right, another might work great evil by manipulating laws to his own ends. Alignment is summarized on page 166 of the *Core Rulebook*, but the interpretations are endless, and ultimately lie with you as the GM at a mechanical standpoint, and with your players in how they define their characters' morality. Some gamers favor strict alignments and black-and-white judgments, while others prefer a gritty, "realistic" game in which morality is relative, and well-intentioned "good" characters are capable of terrible atrocities.

Many of the debates spawned by alignment arise as the system moves beyond mere description to taking on a role that affects the game's rules. While no real-world humans can say they're entirely good or law-abiding, there exist creatures in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game that are fundamentally good, evil, lawful, or chaotic, and some magic depends on judging a character by its alignment. Because game effects are associated with an ultimately subjective system, you should make sure your players understand your interpretation of alignment ahead of time. The following are a few ways you might handle alignment in your game or use it to help players develop their characters.

### Predestination

The simplest way to view alignment is as nine literal personalities. If a character is lawful good, he always obeys the law and always does the "right" thing, while a chaotic evil character always shirks the law and acts maliciously. This is a system of absolutes, where free will and context mean little, everything is pre-ordained, and every creature has a path. Players who view alignment as predestination might wear alignments like straitjackets, but at the same time, they always know how to roleplay their character's reaction to situations. This proves both helpful and comforting to many players new to or ill at ease with roleplaying. This approach

also renders alignment-based rules easy to arbitrate, turning every matter of determining alignment into a simple yes-no question. Problems with this method tend to arise when a game ventures into sketchier moral and ethical situations. A player might become uncomfortable when his lawful good character feels forced to obey the laws of an evil society, or might have trouble in a campaign that requires him to work with those whose alignments differ from his own.

### Free Will

Many players tend to focus more on creating characters with consistent, specific personalities rather than alignments. These players envision their heroes' backgrounds, personality traits, attitudes, and goals, and only then choose an alignment that best reflects these facets. A character's alignment then becomes a way of categorizing his personality, rather than defining him and channeling his actions. As long as the player understands the impact of his choice on gameplay, this approach works smoothly. For example, a player who chooses the chaotic neutral alignment needs to understand that certain elements within the game world will judge him based on this decision (as with any other alignment). Some temples might deny him healing because the biggest threat in the region is chaotic monsters, viewing her alignment as grounds for suspicion. This method is also problematic when it becomes too general. Accepting alignment as a broad category can render it almost meaningless and make it difficult for you as the GM to judge whether a character is acting outside of her alignment and arbitrate any game effects associated with doing so.

### Defining Deeds

Another way to see alignment is as a series of concentric rings. In the center ring are all the behaviors that are obviously acceptable according to a character's alignment. Around that is a middle circle that covers the gray areas—actions that might be allowed under certain circumstances or are unclear. On the outside is the forbidden area of extreme actions that obviously violate the alignment. Taking prisoners offers examples of all three circles. Accepting an opponent's honorable surrender is clearly good. Torturing that prisoner for information might be in the forbidden area for a given good character. But what about threatening torture, if the PC doesn't intend to carry out the threat? That falls into the middle circle. Taking this route means players must remember their characters' alignment and act accordingly. At the same time, while this route goes far toward suggesting how characters might act in specific situations, debates might arise when group members don't see eye-to-eye about which acts are permissible. Additionally, some characters might have varying access to the gray areas of their alignment, and GMs should discuss where this line exists for characters who face repercussions for deviating from their moral code.

## Changing Alignment

While alignment is often a static trait, options and effects exist that might cause it to change, and players might seek to change their PCs' alignments for a variety of reasons.

**Voluntarily**: Aside from merely having misunderstood what a specific alignment means, PCs might seek to change their alignment in light of game events or to qualify for some alignment-related goal. How this change takes shape should be determined by the player and GM. Often, some quest, trauma, rehabilitation, or other life-changing event triggers the alignment change. Players should be sure of their decision, as changing alignment should be the result of an extraordinary effort, not a whim, and a PC with a shifting personality risks losing definition as a character and might begin to seem like he's trying to exploit the rules.

**Involuntarily**: All manner of events might lead a character to have an involuntary alignment shift. Some are truly involuntary, as some force overrides or corrupts the PC's personality. The GM should work with the player in such cases, perhaps making an unnaturally compromised PC a confederate in an ongoing story. Stepping out of the norm and playing her own character in a contradictory fashion can be fun for a player and delightfully unnerving for the rest of a group.

Characters also risk having their alignment changed if they continually act in accordance with an alignment other than the one they chose. For many characters, this matters little, but in the case of characters bound to a specific alignment for rules-related purposes, an alignment change might mean having to reimagine their entire character. Instead of springing this on a player, make it clear when an action risks violating an alignment-related requirement. Sometimes this will be seen as the voice of the character's conscience, and allow the player to refrain from the action or suitably justify it to themselves (and you) to bring it into accordance with their values.

## EVIL CHARACTERS

Many GMs refuse to allow players to create characters with evil alignments, as is their prerogative if they feel such a character might disrupt the game or hinder the story. Occasionally, though, your players might have intriguing ideas for antiheroic characters, or you might have a great idea that requires evil characters to play out.

Evil characters present more than just an excuse to engage in offensive behavior or play homicidal maniacs; rather, they allow players to mimic some of the classic cads and antiheroes of legends and fantasy literature. Just like good characters, evil characters have goals and desires and understand the consequences of their actions. Those who do whatever they want without consideration for the rest of the party

risk undesirable repercussions. Adventurers who routinely steal from their companions or betray their compatriots are likely to find themselves abandoned or slain. But evil characters who are more than just psychopaths can prove to be valuable members of a group should their goals parallel those of a party. Talk with your players and discuss what makes their characters evil, their goals, and how allying with other adventurers might aid those goals. At the same time, players of good characters should think about why they might travel with such ne'er-do-wells (perhaps out of desperation, responsibility, or the hope of rehabilitation).

# Player Interactions

One of the great things about roleplaying games is that they tend to bring together a wide variety of players, each with his or her own unique passions, play style, and traits. This witch's brew of personalities can create some truly memorable game experiences, with each player adding her own flavor to the game. Like a world-class chef, it's the GM's job to manage these game elements—stirring one pot while another simmers—to create a game experience that leaves all players breathless in anticipation of the next session.

It's important for GMs to accept that all of these different personalities make a campaign better. While some types of players are more difficult to handle than others, each has his own role to play on the grand stage that is the campaign, and working with each can help you improve as a GM.

This section details 14 different and archetypal player personalities, along with the challenges and preferences they might exhibit. While this list does not cover every type of player, it gives enough of an overview for GMs to recognize these stereotypes as they manifest during the game and have a good idea how to interact with them. Don't be surprised if the same player exhibits multiple traits; gamer psychology is just as complex as any other, and people are frequently a dash of this and a pinch of that. Though it's important not to pigeonhole your players, many people will tend to have certain specific habits that cast them more into a particular category than another. This section is intended to help you interact with potentially frustrating player types in a manner that is fun and productive for you and them.

Recognize that labels can be a negative, and that you shouldn't casually assign one of these personality types to a player, nor even mention your mental designations unless you're sure the player will take it with grace and not see it as dismissal or name-calling. You may find that some players freely embrace their type ("I strictly adhere to the rules; I guess that makes me a rules lawyer"), while others have a different conception of their behavior, or believe they are much too psychologically complex to ever fall into a particular category ("I am not a diva! I'm just keeping the game interesting!"). Use your best judgment when discussing these archetypes with your group.

The GM's role is to ensure fun for all, not to force everyone to march in lockstep toward the next page of the adventure. The quote by the Greek playwright Aristophanes that begins this section alludes to the challenges that await you as you lead your group toward its next great adventure. Just as the crab eventually finds its way back to sea, so too will players embark on fun-filled evenings of epic quests and daring-do. The GM should allow them to zigzag their way from one encounter to the next by playing the way

> *The wisest of the wise will never make a crab walk straight.*
> —Aristophanes

they like to play, even if their course seems surprising or inefficient compared to the one you expected.

Player motivations can be a tricky thing to manage. In order to keep things running smoothly, you may need to embrace some of your "problem player's" desires, which can mean extra work coming up with new rules systems for economics or extra sessions to make the needy player feel like he has a chance to shine. Whenever possible, work with your players and embrace their quirks as what they likely are—enthusiasm for the game you both enjoy. Your experience will be the better for it.

**Dangerous Combos**: As you assess the composition of your gaming group, take special note of potentially explosive combinations. The GM serves as referee between players, especially when their motivations place them in diametrically opposed roles, so if you see trouble brewing, try discussing with your players how they would like to handle the situation ahead of time, before people have gotten heated. (Some of these potentially problematic combinations are mentioned on the following pages.) Also, if you have particular pet peeves or anticipate issues before a game begins, you may want to talk with your group ahead of time, so they can be mindful of their own tendencies and take care to sidestep potential issues.

**Know Your Group**: There's a difference between being a Game Master and mastering the role of the GM. The more experienced you are and the better you know your players, the less apt you are to need the advice on the following pages. Remember that this advice doesn't take the individual quirks and preferences of actual players or groups into account, so you should always feel free to make any adjustments and changes that are best for the game. It's your campaign and world, and you're the one to judge what works and what doesn't. And of course it's possible that you might even fall into one of these categories yourself, in which case dealing with a particular archetype might not seem like a problem.

**Respect**: Although the GM controls many aspects of the game, one thing she can't control—and shouldn't attempt to—is the players. Tailoring the game to better suit the players shouldn't feel subversive or manipulative. Ideally, everyone at the game table is there to have a good time and a GM should make clear her attempts to minimize conflicts and improve the game for everyone. Players should also take responsibility—the more they respect and understand each other, the less the GM needs these suggestions.

# ANTAGONIST

*No prudent antagonist thinks light of his adversaries.*
—John Wolfgang von Goethe

Inter-party strife presents one of the most dangerous kinds of tension, and the antagonist is often at the heart of it. This player has elected to create a character at odds with one or more members of the party. It might be that the antagonist has decided he's an atheist in conflict with the party cleric. Perhaps he's the lone evil character in a group of good-aligned characters. He might be the dwarf who is untrusting of the party's elf members, or a rogue who enjoys stealing from teammates. Whatever the reason, he's setting himself up as the lightning rod. While rivalry and good-natured butting of heads can bring an entertaining element to a campaign, outright animosity should be addressed. Three steps can often help diffuse such situations:

**1. Determine the Source**: Most inter-character conflicts are intentional and have been specifically defined by the players. Such clashes aren't always negative elements, especially when they don't interfere with the game and keep a measure of levity. A source of antagonism can add to a campaign; the challenge lies in managing the intensity of the conflict and the likely outcome. Some potential sources of antagonistic conflict include alignment (good and evil; law and chaos), prejudice (against magic or certain races), moral values (caste system, role of women), political beliefs (national or guild-level strife), religion (opposing religion or non-believer), inter-party lies or theft, and xenophobia.

**2. Determine the Level of Antagonism**: What does the antagonist do when confronted by the source of the conflict? Can the players (both the antagonist and the other group members) still work together when the source of tension arises? If the answer is no, then the player should reduce the level of antagonism, even if it means modifying his character concept. A group whose members can't trust each other or are unwilling to come to one another's aid is an adventuring company that's headed toward early retirement.

**3. Identify Possible Resolutions**: One player should never be allowed to create a situation that's only fun for him. One of the most dangerous sources of antagonism is a character of an opposing alignment or organization whose primary goal is the destruction of another party member. No one really wins in that situation, and it's likely that the distrust carries over to the next time everyone rolls up characters. In this situation, lay out the problem clearly for the antagonist, and be polite but firm in offering to help the player modify his character or create a new one capable of working within the group.

# CONTINUITY EXPERT

*Things alter for the worse spontaneously, if they not be altered for the better designedly.*
—Francis Bacon

The continuity expert keeps up-to-date with the latest published novels and game supplements. She can cite historical facts buried in small type hundreds of pages into a supplement, and note each diversion from established canon. The moment the new supplement hits the shelves at the local hobby shop, she has devoured its contents and wants to use it in the upcoming game session.

Unless you are yourself a continuity expert, this can be frustrating. You may want to head off any problems at the pass and simply announce that your version of the setting is your own, and not beholden to any other continuity. If you're trying to play closer to canon, however, it's important that your group know what liberties, if any, your campaign plans to take with the source material. Perhaps your game makes significant changes to a setting or moves forward from a snapshot in a setting's history, meaning that certain existing or future supplements might not seamlessly apply to the campaign's version of a world. That doesn't mean you need to ignore all supplements you aren't already familiar with, merely that players should understand that you'll need time to review such information—and that whether or not you incorporate it is solely your decision.

During the course of the game, the continuity expert might note deviations from canon or even continuity established during the course of a campaign. Whether this proves helpful, distracting, or completely irrelevant hinges largely on when such comments are presented. Few things can derail a GM's narrative faster than being constantly contradicted about matters of story. In these cases, it often helps to table the discussion and let the expert know that you'll discuss it after the game, or over e-mail. Above all, never forget that you control your game world, not the continuity expert or a game publisher, and what you say goes.

Like a rules lawyer, a continuity expert can be a great help to a GM. Most prove eager to research elements of a campaign setting and enthusiastically help prepare for upcoming sessions. Canny GMs might find ways to have such a player research multiple useful topics without giving away the intended course of upcoming adventures. During a session, a continuity expert's knowledge can prove exceedingly useful if it has an in-character outlet—encouraging such a player to adopt a knowledgeable class, purchase tomes of relevant lore, or be the group researcher gives her opportunities to exploit and display her knowledge in character and without interrupting the game.

# Diva

*My life is a lovely story, happy and full of incident.*
—Hans Christian Andersen

The diva is the center of attention, the focus of all roleplaying interactions that occur in the campaign world. Every conversation, introduction, and event is another opportunity for her to shine, while the rest of the group struggles to get a word in edgewise. No matter is too small or insignificant for her; she's ready for the spotlight! Unfortunately, the rest of the players are bored to tears.

While having a player totally immersed in and excited about the game is every GM's goal, it should never happen at the cost of other players' enjoyment. The diva can truly shine during her turn and those encounters specifically aimed at engaging her character—but when it's someone else's turn, she needs to learn to hang back and give other players chances to take the stage as well.

In combat, initiative does a good job of keeping the focus moving, but if a character monopolizes NPC interactions, a good counter during heavy roleplaying sessions is to break each conversation up into minute-long spots. You as the GM can then move around the table much like you would during a combat encounter to allow everyone a chance to interact. If the diva interrupts, remind her that this is all occurring at the same time, and that she's busy talking to that other NPC right now. If there's a single NPC and the diva is doing all the talking for the group, have him fixate on someone else or ask for an introduction to her friends.

In the end, if subtlety doesn't work, you might need to be blunt with the diva in order to get the message across that everyone needs a chance to play. A diva can be a strong party leader, but shouldn't be allowed to dominate group decisions. If the other players seem to be merely following along, ask them directly for their characters' thoughts.

**The Diva-Loner:** This is a particularly dangerous combination, as the diva wants to take the spotlight while doing something on her own. She might charm a young prince into a moonlit walk along the canals, or decide that she wants to go fight crime after the rest of the party goes to sleep. Whatever the rationale, the solution is the same as for the loner player type: it splits the party and creates a new story that needs to take place off-scene.

Off-scene encounters can be discussed before or after a gaming session, over email during the week, or whenever other players aren't waiting. As long as the diva isn't doing something crazy or suicidal, there's no reason to punish her, but neither should you have these solo escapades reveal key plot points or allow yourself to be distracted from the rest of the party.

# Entrepreneur

*A person is born with a liking for profit.*
—Xun Zi

The economic heart of most pseudo-medieval campaigns is their businesses, each creating revenue for the local lord and providing specialty shops, guilds, taverns, and other structures needed by adventurers and the common folk. Players generally fall into one of two molds as entrepreneurs, each of which has an impact on local businesses. The first is the player who seeks to sell everything acquired from the bodies of fallen enemies. The second is the businessman who sees an opportunity and wants to stake his claim.

For both types of entrepreneurs, the GM should follow simple rules to ensure that everyone at the gaming table is having fun. Don't let yourself get locked into rolling on charts for long periods while other players wait, or let the minutiae of the items collected slow down the game. Instead, presume the characters choose the most valuable items—and only the most valuable items—and quickly move the adventure along. While your players might be eager to loot all of the soldiers' short swords, collecting their old boots for sale later is a waste of adventuring time. If a character is big on appraising things, have him roll at the end of each session to ensure that he takes the most valuable possessions with him. Don't slow down the game determining the value of the gilt on a doorframe or the darts in a disabled trap.

Next, determine how much the player can reasonably recover from the dungeon. Calculating the weight and mass of items can be tedious, but saying that everything in a dungeon is bolted down is unrealistic. The game already has rules for encumbrance, but an easier house rule might be that the character can carry one vaguely defined item (the pieces of a disabled trap, the limbs of a destroyed golem, the brasswork off a vampire's coffin) per point of Strength, with accommodations for any magic items like *bags of holding*. This speeds the game along and helps prevent stopping every time the GM describes a shiny bit of room dressing. And don't forget that the character's weapons and armor count toward the total—if the entrepreneur wants that third tapestry, he's going to have to leave his sword behind.

The value of mundane loot is closely tied to the magic level of your campaign, the size of the city the players deliver the goods to, the need for those goods, and the quality and quantity of the goods. Delivering 20 suits of chainmail to a sleepy village likely floods the market and earns a pittance, while that same armor in a town scrambling to arm itself would earn significantly more. As a general rule, try assuming a 10–20% payout where there is a moderate need for the items and then adjust from there.

# FLAKE

*They whose guilt within their bosom lies,*
*imagine every eye beholds their blame.*
—*Shakespeare*

The flake player is one that proves his type over a period of time. He might initially show up on time, fired up and ready to take on the world, but by the fourth game session he's apologizing for not showing up the week before. Suddenly he's showing up every third session, probably late, and looking to pick up where he left off.

Now the GM has a potential conflict. While the flake has been gone, the other players have advanced their characters a few levels and he's behind them with an unresolved subplot. What should you do?

First off, talk privately to the player to determine the reasons he hasn't been showing up. Sometimes life demands that we shift our attention elsewhere, and other players are generally understanding of those situations. Maybe there are interparty conflicts or a particular storyline that's been making the game less appealing. It's all about communication; no player should make other players wait 30 minutes to see if he's going to show up this week. Respecting other people's time goes a long way toward cultivating goodwill.

Since any player can potentially turn into a flake, it's useful to avoid creating adventures that revolve around every player being present. It's fine to assume that a particular character participates in the adventure (run by you, if need be), but hinging everyone's fun on any one character makes it easy to be disappointed.

It's good to have explicit rules for how you want to handle missing players. You might assign a penalty on earned experience if a player misses a game session, while letting him stay fairly close to the rest of the group in terms of advancement even when circumstances conspire to keep him away. This generally balances itself out over time, and everyone ends up fairly close in experience (making it much easier for you to plan encounters).

To be respectful of others, try using e-mail or other electronic means to have players RSVP to the gaming session. This lets everyone know who is showing up. And if something happens at the last minute, players can contact everyone to let the group know.

If a player missing out on sessions truly cripples a group, consider using NPCs to fill the same role. The rest of the party can temporarily adopt or hire these NPCs to make up for missing skills, and the NPC's wages are a small price to pay for a well-timed *fireball* or backstab—especially if they come out of the missing character's share of treasure.

# GLASS JAW

*The weakness of the enemy makes our strength.*
—*Cherokee Proverb*

Some characters have a weakness that constantly reveals itself or is easily exploited in virtually every encounter. Examples include characters with ultra-low ability scores, those unable to defend themselves in combat, characters cursed with the lowest possible number of hit points, and the like.

Many sorts of glass jaws appear during character creation, giving the GM the opportunity to drill down into the player's real motivations before play begins. While it can be fun to occasionally include glass jaw characters as an opportunity to add additional roleplaying elements to the campaign, serious design flaws can handicap the rest of the party's enjoyment, and are best caught early. This is not to say that every character must be optimized to the fullest extent of the rules, but characters with crippling deficiencies—like a wizard unable to cast 2nd-level spells, or a bard with no Perform skill—should be addressed. Find out why that particular player has created the character with such a glaring weakness. For example, if the wizard player wants to play a sickly character for added drama, you could always adjust his Constitution score back into the normal range and instead let him roleplay through a less crippling affliction like a disease or curse.

It's possible that the player isn't looking for a roleplaying opportunity. Depending on the creation method and the player's level of experience, he might just have rolled poorly or not know the rules well enough to make his character viable. If that's the case, working with the player to build the character and re-rolling or using a point-buy system for ability score generation is likely to resolve the situation.

If none of the above suggestions fix the problem, it's best to talk to the player privately and determine what he intends to do with this character. Explain your concerns about what you perceive as the character's glass jaw and the impact it might have on the rest of the group. Together, you and the player should explore creative solutions to help improve everyone's time around the gaming table, modifying the character concept as necessary.

**Power Gamers and Glass Jaws**: As players finish character generation, level up, or make other choices related to their character's statistics, encourage your players who are skilled at using the rules to offer suggestions to those less adept. While the final choices in such collaborations lie with the player running the character, having someone else point out potential problems or advantages can make the game's sometimes daunting rules and options more manageable.

**PATHFINDER**
ROLEPLAYING GAME

# LONER

*He who would do great things should not attempt them all alone.*
—Native American Proverb

The loner can be one of the most disruptive forces around the gaming table. She has little regard for group cohesion, and seizes every opportunity to go off alone, heedless of the effect on other players. This might be when the rest of the characters are expecting to rest and recover their spells, during combat in order to explore some dark side tunnel, or any time her interests diverge from the party's.

There are really two issues here. First, what goals does the player have for her character that she doesn't feel can be met as part of the group experience? It may be that she feels bound by the character concept she's created, and needs help figuring out how to make it work within the party structure. Second, is the character's role in the group dynamic essential for the heroes to overcome their obstacles? If she's leaving when other players need her, this presents a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

As the GM, you may want to work with the loner between sessions to help achieve her character's goals. Avoid the temptation to split your attention during the game—giving one player fully half of your game time simply because she wandered off is no fair to the rest of the players. Handle any side adventures that happen away from the group off camera, not when it wastes the whole group's time. And if the loner gets tired of sitting out simply because her character wandered away from the group, perhaps she won't be as likely to wander off again.

You might also use the loner's meanderings to introduce new plot elements. In taking her leave, does the loner stumble into a group of wandering monsters that attack the party? Set off a trap? These effects don't have to be immediate—if your player wants to sneak out of the tavern in the middle of the night, you might quickly gloss over her escapade, but use the opportunity to explain how the orcs were able to locate the group's campsite. The idea isn't to punish a player for her loner tendencies, but rather to create the greatest amount of fun for the greatest number of players.

Of course, you're not the only one likely to be irritated by a loner's gallivanting, and regular abandonment of the group eventually causes intra-party strife. Other characters—and players—might become upset and seek to confront the loner's character. This can be a great opportunity for roleplaying, but it risks alienating the loner. Make sure that the loner knows that while running her character in such a manner isn't "wrong," going off alone can have a negative impact on the other players' enjoyment, and that you want to make sure everyone—including her—is getting their needs met.

# LUMP

*As long as you're enthralled by a lifeless form, you're not free.*
—Bodhidharma

The lump just takes up space at the gaming table, rolling dice when instructed or performing actions when other players ask him to do something. There's no passion here; the lump is more of an automaton awaiting its next orders. Many times, the lump is a player new to the game or an experienced player outside of his comfort zone.

One of the GM's primary goals is to ensure that everyone is having fun during the game. For most people, lumpish behavior is the definition of boredom, and it's your job to reach out and bring the lump into the campaign for real.

For new players, lack of familiarity with the rules is a frequent source of confusion. Not knowing exactly what to do, they shut down and wait for more experienced players to instruct them. They might be confused about their class role or the ebb and flow of the encounters, worried about wasting their abilities at the wrong time, or simply intimidated by louder and more experienced players. Aside from considering the advice found on page 65 and reminding new players that they can do anything, let your experienced players know that they need to encourage the new player to spread his wings. If he doesn't know the rules or the campaign setting, let him borrow a book to read up between sessions. Remember that people tend to best learn the rules by playing, though—focus on letting neophytes do things on their own, and at their own speed.

**In-Game Advice**: If you want to take a more direct approach, the easiest way to get a lump roleplaying is to engage him directly via NPCs or situations that don't allow him to defer to other players. Mouthy NPC assistants and sentient items (especially those that can speak) can also work wonders at getting a lump out of his shell, as giving a PC an in-game source of advice (even faulty advice) can prompt roleplaying opportunities and manipulate the player into thinking about his acts and making his own decisions. Humor also helps many awkward players feel more at ease. Setting a lump up with an even less experienced NPC sidekick can help him feel more confident and capable.

**Lump vs. Diva**: In many ways, the diva loves the lump player—he allows the diva to take all the limelight for herself while the lump does what he always does. But as the lump slowly emerges from his shell, suddenly there's less time in the sun for the diva. Jumping back and forth between these two player types can be a challenge; focus on fanning the flames of the lump until he becomes comfortable enough with the game that the diva won't be able to shove him back into his shell.

# ONE-TRICK PONY

*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.*
—*Aristotle*

A player who falls into the one-trick pony type has a preference for playing a particular character or filling a specific role. She might always be the paladin, standing on the front lines and charging evil every time she sees it. Or maybe she's the wizard specialized in evocation who blasts enemies to bits. She has a play style she likes, and she tends to stick with it.

The one-trick pony tends to keep a certain role locked down, preventing other players from experiencing the game from that perspective. Her insistence also has the effect of forcing other players to approach the campaign in a certain way. For example, players can never sneak in to attack the boss by surprise if the paladin always charges forward into every combat.

Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with indulging a one-trick pony as long as everyone is having fun and you're able to take your campaign to its final destination. But at the same time, you aren't required to maintain the status quo just because that's the way it's always been. When the time comes to shake things up, embrace the change and communicate it to everyone.

One way to address this situation is by announcing the main campaign story before players roll up characters, and requiring everyone to come up with characters that fit into it. If you're running a thieves' guild campaign that requires stealth and trickery, it's fine to disallow certain classes or require select skills.

A second type of one-trick pony is the player who uses a specific tactic against enemies again and again during the campaign. This player has found an effective combo or strategy and uses it whenever possible, to the exclusion of all others. Again, while not technically wrong, this play style can quickly get old, and there are a few ways to address it. Before you do so, however, stop and make sure there's actually a problem. Is the player's strategy boring the other party members? Or are you merely frustrated by its effectiveness? Don't punish players for being good at what they do—instead, try exploring counter strategies, and enlist other players and GMs outside of the game if you need tactical help. If you have recurring villains, it only makes sense that they'd quickly learn to defend against their enemies' greatest weapons, or turn the party's pet tactic around and begin using it against them. There's no strategy for which a defense cannot be devised, and if the one-trick pony complains that the enemy seems unduly prepared, let him know that's the danger of predictability.

# MULTITASK MASTER

*The true art of memory is the art of attention.*
—*Samuel Johnson*

Distractions come into the game room from a variety of sources: phone calls, family, the pizza guy—you name it. Once they start being generated by the gamers themselves, however, you may need to act quickly to keep your game under control and focused. The multitask master is the source of many such distractions around the table, as he e-mails friends from his laptop, sends text messages on his cell phones, and tells this week's joke to those next to him between initiative rounds.

The first thing to do when confronted with multitaskers is to ask yourself why they're doing it. Are your players falling asleep because you're plotting out every possible location that a caltrop could land? Speed things up. Are you spending all your time on a diva's personal subplot, or waiting for a slow player to find the correct damage dice? Move on to the next player. Evenly distributing your attention and keeping the game moving is crucial.

If you don't think you're fostering the distractions, then it's time to talk to the player (or the group at large) and explain your concerns. If you're having to reread encounters or explain to each player what the guy before him did, there's clearly a problem. Part of the problem might stem from unavoidable slowdowns, such as in a group where several players don't know the rules well yet, but there may be something else you can do to keep players' attention during the game. Ask them for ideas.

Unless players are using laptops or cell phones to keep track of their characters, it's fine to ban them from the gaming table. If a player gets a call he must respond to, he should leave the table and take care of it. If he wants to text friends, he should do it away from the table during breaks. Such rules shouldn't feel draconian, but rather emphasize organization and respect for everyone around the table. Some groups even go so far as to specify what is allowed on the table (dice, character sheets, and pencils) instead of targeting what they don't like.

Like most situations, this one is best handled in private at first. If you need to discuss the issue with the group, make sure not to single out a particular player. Instead, focus on the distractions that prevent the game from being fun and come up with a solution the entire group can accept. When possible, it's generally best to start a gaming group with such rules in place than to try and add them later after a problem arises. But distraction is contagious, and the slower the game gets, the more temptation there is for players to multitask.

**PATHFINDER**
ROLEPLAYING GAME

# Power Gamer

*Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.*

—Abraham Lincoln

The power gamer focuses on maximizing her character's strengths while minimizing her weaknesses. She focuses all her character choices to enable her to be highly effective in certain areas, without being correspondingly weak in others. She knows exactly which combinations work best for her character type, thrives under home rules that haven't been thoroughly balanced, and can easily wreak havoc on a GM who is less experienced with rules, seeks to appease all players, or emphasizes roleplaying over statistics.

The power gamer tends to focus on combat, expertly manipulating the rules to create engines of destruction that few of her companions (or enemies) can match. The standard monsters from various rules supplements stand no chance against her unless they're many levels higher than the rest of the group. While the power gamer likely sees her actions as merely playing the game to the best of her ability, her proficiency makes creating challenging encounters for the entire party very difficult; monsters introduced to challenge the power gamer might well kill the other characters.

In such situations, the first thing to do is to take a look at the rules in question. As a GM, you should reserve the right to vet new rules content from any source before it's allowed into your game, and if some of the power gamer's abilities are based on rules you don't approve of or house rules you hadn't thought through entirely, you can change them at the end of an adventure—provided players impacted by the change are allowed to go back and rebuild their characters.

The most important thing when dealing with a power gamer is avoiding an adversarial relationship. Instead, try to learn from her, filing away her tactics for use by future villains. If a player is so effective in combat that it's ruining your game, take her aside and ask for her assistance. Congratulate her honestly on her prowess—she spent a lot of time devising those strategies—then explain the situation. Maybe she can help your other players maximize their characters—a group of all power gamers is easier to deal with than a mixed batch. If that doesn't work, perhaps she or another player can help you devise effective counter strategies, or maybe she'd enjoy the challenge of playing a character a few levels lower than everyone else. In the end, it's possible she may need to retire or redesign the character, but the more transparency you can have about this process, and the less it feels like punishment, the better. And if the character is only slightly too powerful, or the other players prefer to focus on roleplaying, there are always noncombat encounters to help give other players the chance to shine.

# Rules Lawyer

*The strictest law often causes the most serious harm.*

—Cicero

All players like to know that there are universal rules to level the playing field, but the rules lawyer takes it a step farther. He knows every obscure rule, and insists that each one work exactly as written—especially if it's in his favor.

While of course the rules should work the same for villains as they do the heroes, the GM's challenge is ensuring that the game runs smoothly and everyone has fun. Sometimes it's acceptable for the letter of the law to fade a bit, especially if such sacrifices keep an adventure moving smoothly or to make the game more enjoyable. The following techniques can keep the game on track when confronted with a rules lawyer. If you're constantly being contradicted about rules, consider the following steps.

**Establish House Rules**: If your house rules differ from the main rules, make sure everyone knows about it. Also, be sure to let your players know that this isn't a sport, and that you reserve the right to bend or break the rules for the sake of the game from time to time, with the understanding that your intention isn't to be unfair, but rather to make things more fun for the group as a whole.

**When to Question**: As in the case of the continuity expert, let the rules lawyer know when and how it's appropriate to cite the rules. Openly contradicting is counterproductive unless it's a matter of life and death for a character, in which case you should spend a moment to quickly verify key points, but that's it. After the game or between sessions, you can discuss the rules in depth. Alternatively, if you're shaky on a particular rule and it's important to get it right, don't be afraid to ask the rules lawyer for help to keep the game moving. Making an ally of the rules lawyer validates him and likely makes it easier for him to accept when you're forced to overrule him.

**Use Maps and Minis**: Groups that generalize the locations of their individual characters tend to have more problems with rules lawyers. It's difficult for players to understand the tactical layout of an area without actually seeing the area, and can lead to comments like, "I didn't walk up to that chest; I skirted the edge of the wall." An established grid and physical markers prevent a lot of arguments.

Even if you follow these rules, you may still have trouble with rules lawyers. Not everyone views rules the same way. The important thing is to stand behind your rulings, and when certain things break the rules—for good reason—don't feel like you have to reveal world secrets just because the rules lawyer demands answers. GMs work in mysterious ways, and with any luck history will vindicate your choice.

# Tagalong

*You wish to multiply yourself tenfold, a hundredfold? You seek followers? Seek zeros!*
—Friedrich Nietzsche

The tagalong isn't so much a player type as he is a distraction. He might be the significant other of one of the players that shows up each week to spend quality time with his gaming better half. Perhaps he's a player's best friend from high school who is stopping over. Maybe he's even one of the players' children. No matter the relationship, the tagalong is by definition bored by the game and serves as a distraction to the rest of the players. Here's how to prepare for that eventuality.

If the tagalong proves interested in gaming but has never played before, have him observe a game session or take on a minor role, such as the squire, familiar, or assistant of another player, or one of your minor NPCs. If gradually teaching him the game and encouraging this interest works, he may eventually want to create his own character and join the campaign, and chances are good that at least the player who brought him is excited to have him at the table.

If the tagalong has no interest in gaming, even after watching the proceedings for a bit, it's probably best to find some other activity to keep him entertained over the course of the game. If there is a separate room where he can watch TV or read a book, the chances of keeping everyone's attention on the game are much higher. Find out what the tagalong likes to do, and if possible provide him with the resources and equipment he needs to stay entertained. Ultimately, the responsibility for keeping the tagalong happy and distractions to a minimum lies with the player who brought him. Don't be afraid to privately enforce this responsibility.

Children too young to join the game are the most challenging form of tagalongs, as they require both supervision and attention, not to mention a good degree of childproofing for the gaming area. Polite parents should ask the group whether their children are too distracting for gaming, and if it's clear that young children aren't welcome, quietly excuse themselves during the weeks when they can't find a babysitter. But if a group is willing to try—particularly if multiple players have tagalong children—you may be able to play through the distraction caused by children. The important thing is to make sure everyone's on board, as the presence of children can drive some gamers away from the game permanently. Approach this topic respectfully, but be sure to hear from all players before determining the best course of action.

# Thespian

*I love acting. It is so much more real than life.*
—Oscar Wilde

It's hardly surprising that actors would be drawn to roleplaying games. After all, while some roleplayers are interested solely in leveling up and getting cool new abilities, many take it to the next level, establishing dialects, mannerisms, catch phrases, and so on to bring their characters to life. They speak in character all the time, and relish the opportunity to add their drama skills to a social setting.

Make no mistake about it—this is a good thing. As a GM, you're probably already doing many of these things to help set the stage, and having a few thespian player types to play off of can help you make the world that much more vivid.

Yet like the diva, the thespian can easily come to dominate your sessions, especially if your other players are quieter or less interested in the roleplaying side of things. In such cases, the same techniques used to combat the diva apply here, namely switching back and forth between different NPCs and players to ensure that everyone gets equal time. Keep in mind that members of your gaming group likely embrace different depths of roleplaying, and even if they're not hamming it up themselves, some players might take great enjoyment out of watching the thespian roleplay her heart out. As long as everyone's having fun, go with it. (For advice on acting tricks to up your own performance as a GM, see pages 28–33.)

If tangentially related roleplaying encounters begin to dominate a game, however, or certain players seem bored by the clever dialogue, it might be time to rein back on the roleplaying and throw in a few more combat encounters to accommodate everyone's play styles. Because they tend to involve less dice rolling than other types of encounters, social interactions between characters and NPCs can easily happen between games (though it should be noted that email tends to lose a lot of the flair and fun for thespians). Conversely, if some of your players are bored whenever they're not rolling dice, try incorporating more dice rolls into your social interactions. After all, your players put ranks into Bluff, Diplomacy, Sense Motive, and other social skills for a reason, and you shouldn't give away your biggest secrets to the thespian instead of the Diplomacy-heavy bard just because the thespian player likes to do all the talking. As with other metagame questions of personal knowledge versus character knowledge, it's important to remember that a great performance by a player doesn't necessarily indicate the same from his character.