

# CHAPTER 9: DUNGEON MASTER'S WORKSHOP

**A**S THE DUNGEON MASTER, YOU AREN'T LIMITED by the rules in the *Player's Handbook*, the guidelines in this book, or the selection of monsters in the *Monster Manual*. You can let your imagination run wild. This chapter contains optional rules that you can use to customize your campaign, as well as guidelines on creating your own material, such as monsters and magic items.

The options in this chapter relate to many different parts of the game. Some of them are variants of rules, and others are entirely new rules. Each option represents a different genre, style of play, or both. Consider trying no more than one or two of the options at a time so that you can clearly assess their effects on your campaign before adding other options.

Before you add a new rule to your campaign, ask yourself two questions:

- Will the rule improve the game?
- Will my players like it?

If you're confident that the answer to both questions is yes, then you have nothing to lose by giving it a try. Urge your players to provide feedback. If the rule or game element isn't functioning as intended or isn't adding much to your game, you can refine it or ditch it. No matter what a rule's source, a rule serves you, not the other way around.

Beware of adding anything to your game that allows a character to concentrate on more than one effect at a time, use more than one reaction or bonus action per round, or attune to more than three magic items at a time. Rules and game elements that override the rules for concentration, reactions, bonus actions, and magic item attunement can seriously unbalance or overcomplicate your game.

## ABILITY OPTIONS

The optional rules in this section pertain to using ability scores.

### PROFICIENCY DICE

This optional rule replaces a character's proficiency bonus with a proficiency die, adding more randomness to the game and making proficiency a less reliable indicator of mastery. Instead of adding a proficiency bonus to an ability check, an attack roll, or saving throw, the character's player rolls a die. The Proficiency Die table shows which die or dice to roll, as determined by the character's level.

Whenever a feature, such as the rogue's Expertise, lets a character double his or her proficiency bonus, the player rolls the character's proficiency die twice instead of once.

This option is intended for player characters and nonplayer characters who have levels, as opposed to monsters who don't.

### PROFICIENCY DIE

Level	Proficiency Bonus	Proficiency Die
1st–4th	+2	1d4
5th–8th	+3	1d6
9th–12th	+4	1d8
13th–16th	+5	1d10
17th–20th	+6	1d12

### SKILL VARIANTS

A skill dictates the circumstances under which a character can add his or her proficiency bonus to an ability check. Skills define those circumstances by referring to different aspects of the six ability scores. For example, Acrobatics and Stealth are two different aspects of Dexterity, and a character can specialize in either or both.

You can dispense with skills and use one of the following variants. Choose whichever one best suits your campaign.

#### ABILITY CHECK PROFICIENCY

With this variant rule, characters don't have skill proficiencies. Instead, each character has proficiency in two abilities: one tied to the character's class and one tied to the character's background. The Ability Proficiencies by Class table suggests a proficiency for each class, and you choose which ability is tied to a given background. Starting at 1st level, a character adds his or her proficiency bonus to any ability check tied to one or the other of these two abilities.

#### ABILITY CHECK PROFICIENCIES BY CLASS

Class	Ability Check
Barbarian	Strength, Dexterity, or Wisdom
Bard	Any one
Cleric	Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma
Druid	Intelligence or Wisdom
Fighter	Strength, Dexterity, or Wisdom
Monk	Strength, Dexterity, or Intelligence
Paladin	Strength, Wisdom, or Charisma
Ranger	Strength, Dexterity, or Wisdom
Rogue	Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma
Sorcerer	Intelligence or Charisma
Warlock	Intelligence or Charisma
Wizard	Intelligence or Wisdom

The Expertise feature works differently than normal under this rule. At 1st level, instead of choosing two skill proficiencies, a character with the Expertise class feature chooses one of the abilities in which he or she has proficiency. Selecting an ability counts as two of the character's Expertise choices. If the character would gain an additional skill proficiency, that character instead selects another ability check in which to gain proficiency.



This option removes skills from the game and doesn't allow for much distinction among characters. For example, a character can't choose to emphasize persuasion or intimidation; he or she is equally adept at both.

### BACKGROUND PROFICIENCY

With this variant rule, characters don't have skill or tool proficiencies. Anything that would grant the character a skill or tool proficiency provides no benefit. Instead, a character can add his or her proficiency bonus to any ability check to which the character's prior training and experience (reflected in the character's background) reasonably applies. The DM is the ultimate judge of whether the character's background applies.

For example, the player of a character with the noble background could reasonably argue that the proficiency bonus should apply to a Charisma check the character makes to secure an audience with the king. The player should be encouraged to explain in specific terms how the character's background applies. Not simply "I'm a noble," but "I spent three years before starting my adventuring career serving as my family's ambassador to the court, and this sort of thing is second nature to me now."

This simple system relies heavily on players developing their characters' histories. Don't let it result in endless debates about whether a character's proficiency bonus applies in a given situation. Unless a player's attempt to explain the relevance of the character's background makes everyone else at the table roll their eyes at its absurdity, go ahead and reward the player for making the effort.

If a character has the Expertise feature, instead of choosing skills and tools to gain the benefit of that feature, the player defines aspects of his or her background to which the benefit applies. Continuing the noble example, the player might decide to apply Expertise to "situations where courtly manners and etiquette are paramount" and "figuring out the secret plots that court members hatch against one another."

### PERSONALITY TRAIT PROFICIENCY

With this variant rule, characters don't have skill proficiencies. Instead, a character can add his or her proficiency bonus to any ability check directly related to the character's positive personality traits. For example, a character with a positive personality trait of "I never have a plan, but I'm great at making things up as I go along" might apply the bonus when engaging in some off-the-cuff deception to get out of a tight spot. A player should come up with at least four positive personality traits when creating a character.

When a character's negative personality trait directly impacts an ability check, the character has disadvantage on the check. For example, a hermit whose negative trait is "I often get lost in my own thoughts and contemplation, oblivious to my surroundings" might have disadvantage on an ability check made to notice creatures sneaking up.

If a character has the Expertise feature, the player can apply its benefit to personality traits related to ability

checks, instead of to skills or tools. If a character would gain a new skill or tool proficiency, the character instead gains a new positive personality trait.

This system relies heavily on players developing their characters' personalities. Make sure that different characters' traits—positive and negative—come into play with about the same frequency. Don't let a player get away with a positive trait that always seems to apply and a negative trait that never does.

At your discretion, you can also tie a character's ideals, bonds, and flaws to this system.

## HERO POINTS

Hero points work well in epic fantasy and mythic campaigns in which the characters are meant to be more like superheroes than the average adventurer is.

With this option, a character starts with 5 hero points at 1st level. Each time the character gains a level, he or she loses any unspent hero points and gains a new total equal to 5 + half the character's level.

A player can spend a hero point whenever he or she makes an attack roll, an ability check, or a saving throw. The player can spend the hero point after the roll is made but before any of its results are applied. Spending the hero point allows the player to roll a d6 and add it to the d20, possibly turning a failure into a success. A player can spend only 1 hero point per roll.

In addition, whenever a character fails a death saving throw, the player can spend one hero point to turn the failure into a success.

## NEW ABILITY SCORES: HONOR AND SANITY

If you're running a campaign shaped by a strict code of honor or the constant risk of insanity, consider adding one or both these new ability scores: Honor and Sanity. These abilities function like the standard six abilities, with exceptions specified in each ability below.

Here's how to incorporate these optional abilities at character creation:

- If your players use the standard array of ability scores, add one 11 to the array for each optional ability you add.
- If your players use the optional point-buy system, add 3 points to the number of points for each optional ability you add.
- If your players roll their ability scores, have them roll for the added ability scores.

If you ever need to make a check or saving throw for Honor or Sanity for a monster that lacks the score, you can use Charisma for Honor and Wisdom for Sanity.

### HONOR SCORE

If your campaign involves cultures where a rigid code of honor is part of daily life, consider using the Honor score as a means of measuring a character's devotion to that code. This ability fits well in a setting inspired by Asian cultures, such as Kara-Tur in the *Forgotten Realms*. The Honor ability is also useful in any campaign that revolves around orders of knights.



Honor measures not only a character's devotion to a code but also the character's understanding of it. The Honor score can also reflect how others perceive a character's honor. A character with a high Honor usually has a reputation that others know about, especially those who have high Honor scores themselves.

Unlike other abilities, Honor can't be raised with normal ability score increases. Instead, you can award increases to Honor—or impose reductions—based on a character's actions. At the end of an adventure, if you think a character's actions in the adventure reflected well or poorly on his or her understanding of the code, you can increase or decrease the character's Honor by 1. As with other ability scores, a character's Honor can't exceed 20 or fall below 1.

**Honor Checks.** Honor checks can be used in social situations, much as Charisma would, when a character's understanding of a code of conduct is the most defining factor in the way a social interaction will play out.

You might also call for an Honor check when a character is in one of the following situations:

- Being unsure how to act with honor
- Surrendering while trying to save face
- Trying to determine another character's Honor score
- Trying to use the proper etiquette in a delicate social situation
- Using his or her honorable or dishonorable reputation to influence someone else

**Honor Saving Throws.** An Honor saving throw comes into play when you want to determine whether a character might inadvertently do something dishonorable. You might call for an Honor saving throw in the following situations:

- Avoiding an accidental breach of honor or etiquette
- Resisting the urge to respond to goading or insults from an enemy
- Recognizing when an enemy attempts to trick a character into a breach of honor

## SANITY SCORE

Consider using the Sanity score if your campaign revolves around entities of an utterly alien and unspeakable nature, such as Great Cthulhu, whose powers and minions can shatter a character's mind.

A character with a high Sanity is level-headed even in the face of insane circumstances, while a character with low Sanity is unsteady, breaking easily when confronted by eldritch horrors that are beyond normal reason.

**Sanity Checks.** You might ask characters to make a Sanity check in place of an Intelligence check to recall lore about the alien creatures of madness featured in your campaign, to decipher the writings of raving lunatics, or to learn spells from tomes of forbidden lore. You might also call for a Sanity check when a character tries one of the following activities:

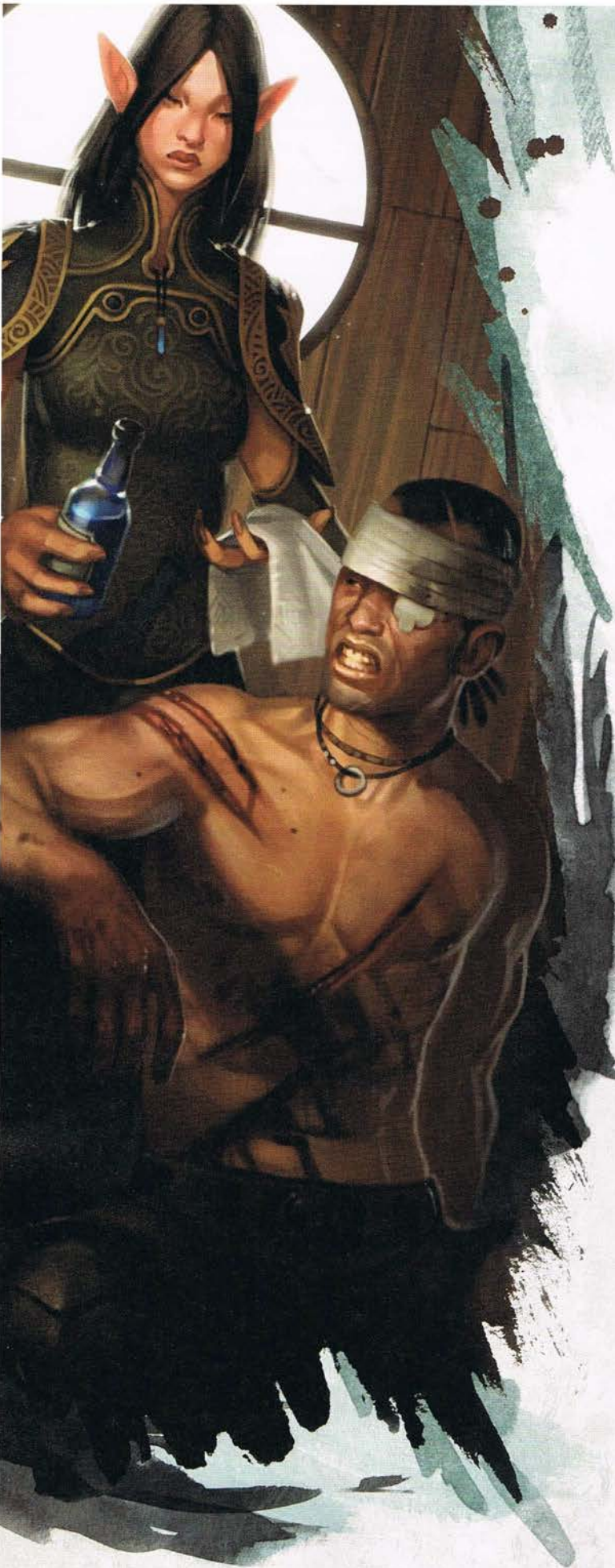
- Deciphering a piece of text written in a language so alien that it threatens to break a character's mind
- Overcoming the lingering effects of madness
- Comprehending a piece of alien magic foreign to all normal understanding of magic

**Sanity Saving Throws.** You might call for a Sanity saving throw when a character runs the risk of succumbing to madness, such as in the following situations:

- Seeing a creature from the Far Realm or other alien realms for the first time
- Making direct contact with the mind of an alien creature
- Being subjected to spells that affect mental stability, such as the insanity option of the *symbol* spell
- Passing through a demiplane built on alien physics
- Resisting an effect conferred by an attack or spell that deals psychic damage







A failed Sanity save might result in short-term, long-term, or indefinite madness, as described in chapter 8, "Running the Game." Any time a character suffers from long-term or indefinite madness, the character's Sanity is reduced by 1. A *greater restoration* spell can restore Sanity lost in this way, and a character can increase his or her Sanity through level advancement.

## ADVENTURING OPTIONS

This section provides options for changing how rests work, as well as for adding unusual things to your campaign, such as modern weapons.

### FEAR AND HORROR

The rules for fear and horror can help you sustain an atmosphere of dread in a dark fantasy campaign.

#### FEAR

When adventurers confront threats they have no hope of overcoming, you can call for them to make a Wisdom saving throw. Set the DC according to the circumstances. A character who fails the save becomes frightened for 1 minute. The character can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of his or her turns, ending the effect on the character on a successful save.

#### HORROR

Horror involves more than simple fright. It entails revulsion and anguish. Often it arises when adventurers see something completely contrary to the common understanding of what can and should occur in the world, or upon the realization of a dreadful truth.

In such a situation, you can call on characters to make a Charisma saving throw to resist the horror. Set the DC based on the magnitude of the horrific circumstances. On a failed save, a character gains a short-term or long-term form of madness that you choose or determine randomly, as detailed in chapter 8, "Running the Game."

### HEALING

These optional rules make it easier or harder for adventurers to recover from injury, either increasing or reducing the amount of time your players can spend adventuring before rest is required.

#### HEALER'S KIT DEPENDENCY

A character can't spend any Hit Dice after finishing a short rest until someone expends one use of a healer's kit to bandage and treat the character's wounds.

#### HEALING SURGES

This optional rule allows characters to heal up in the thick of combat and works well for parties that feature few or no characters with healing magic, or for campaigns in which magical healing is rare.

As an action, a character can use a healing surge and spend up to half his or her Hit Dice. For each Hit Die spent in this way, the player rolls the die and adds the character's Constitution modifier. The character regains hit points equal to the total. The player can decide to spend an additional Hit Die after each roll.