

SLY FLOURISH'S

THE
LAZY
DUNGEON MASTER



by Michael E. Shea

APPENDIX A: LAZY DUNGEON MASTER TOOLKIT

Below you will find a series of lists to help you build your lazy D&D game. Use them either directly or as examples to build your own lists. Print them out and keep them tucked in your DM kit to help you improvise when the time is right. Add your own lists as you need.

20 Adventure Seeds

1. Dwarven explorers uncover a mad wizard's vault.
2. Undead attack an old monastery protecting an evil artifact.
3. An isolated village seeks heroes to defend it from monstrous attackers.
4. Hobgoblin slavers allied with a demon-blooded dragon terrorize local farmsteads.
5. A powerful noble family seeks vengeance for a slain criminal son.
6. Orc raiders enslaved dwarves to dig into an ancient dark elf ruin.
7. A fledgling apprentice releases a demon who begins building a fiendish army.
8. A corrupt warlord harries a poor village with a hired band of rogues.
9. A supernatural plague from a forgotten elven ruin turns local villagers into ghouls.
10. A floating keep from an alternate world crashes into a nearby wild forest.
11. A thieves guild threatens to release a hallucinogen into a city's water supply.
12. Forbidden knowledge revealed in an old book brings powerful justicars who plan to wipe out everyone in the town.
13. The corpse of an old god infested with devils appears embedded within a nearby mountain.
14. The death of a hill giant lord's son brings down the lord's goblinoid army onto a nearby walled city.
15. A king finds a hidden door within his keep that leads to a vast multi-leveled labyrinth.
16. A kobald witch-doctor discovers a powerful artifact that sways inhuman armies to his service.
17. A band of mercenaries starts a war between two feuding cities.
18. An evil priest becomes filled with terrible power and unleashes charismatic cultists across the land.
19. A fallen hero's father frames local adventurers, while allying with wilderness tribes to increase terror.
20. Recent foresting expansions upset a nearby swamp full of lizard-men and their black dragon god-king.

20 Movie-Inspired Quests

1. Hunt down a powerful beast never seen in this area before (*Jaws*)
2. Find an ancient buried artifact before an evil army does (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*)
3. Find a lost treasure to negotiate a hostage rescue (*Romancing the Stone*)
4. Hunt down constructs that believe they are human (*Blade Runner*)
5. Protect a young girl who holds the fate of a kingdom in her mind (*Firefly*)
6. Seek revenge upon the cult that wiped out a whole village (*Conan the Barbarian*)
7. Drop behind enemy lines to destroy a bridge (*Bridge over the River Kwai*)
8. Hunt down a rogue general now seen as a god by an army of goblinoids (*Apocalypse Now*)
9. Seek revenge on rogue bandits who accosted a bar wench (*Unforgiven*)
10. Find the last surviving brother of five in the middle of a war (*Saving Private Ryan*)
11. Take revenge on the orc tribe that murdered a young girl's father (*True Grit*)
12. Protect a village from a band of monstrous brigands (*Seven Samurai / Magnificent Seven*)
13. Save a village from two warring bandit tribes (*Yojimbo*)
14. Find a lost treasure before two other parties find it (*The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*)
15. Imprison or slay a powerful demon trapped within a keep (*The Keep*)
16. Destroy an ancient artifact containing the soul of a demon prince (*The Prince of Darkness*)
17. Hunt down and destroy a shapeshifting monster released from an ancient buried vessel (*The Thing*)
18. Kill the gang of assassins who left you for dead (*Kill Bill*)
19. Kidnap or rescue an unborn heir (*The Way of the Gun*)
20. Steal an artifact from the most powerful bank in the city (*Heat*)



20 Adventure Locations

1. A network of natural caves beneath an ancient hollowed-out tree
2. A long-forgotten cellar beneath an inn
3. A forgotten dungeon beneath a castle
4. A ruined temple to a dark forgotten god
5. A field of ruin in the corpse of a massive dragon
6. A mad wizard's trapped dungeon
7. A twisted maze in a haunted wood
8. The ruins of a keep fallen in battle
9. Festering sewers beneath the town
10. A fortress carved from a stone mountain
11. A haunted catacombs in a mound carved like a giant skull
12. A forgotten crypt of a mad king
13. A temple of an evil cult hidden in the chambers of a church
14. A network of passages in a huge mansion
15. Dark passages of swirling nightmare beyond a portal of black-mirrored glass
16. The remains of a city buried under volcanic rock
17. A hidden vault beneath a seaside lighthouse
18. Hidden passages lost beneath an old library
19. A wizard's tower on a floating earthmote
20. Natural caves behind a huge waterfall

20 Fantasy Names

1. Axbury Whitemane
2. Brianne Ironfist
3. Janis Willowswift
4. Oroth Windstone
5. Peters Whitecloak
6. Randis Rockwell
7. Tristan Graystone
8. Ovena Blackstone
9. Anerhost Bluecloak
10. Palman Freestar
11. Krisset Alwind
12. Florena Graymoon
13. Duberos Rothchild
14. Chorn Evenstar
15. Envil Moonbane
16. Janna Leafblade
17. Kogas Ironcutter
18. Liona Seawinter
19. Patsi Dawnbubble
20. Travell Wintersbane

20 NPC Character Frameworks

1. Belloq, from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*
2. Han Solo, from *Star Wars*
3. Yu Shu Lien, from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*
4. Dolores Claiborne, from *Dolores Claiborne*
5. Tom Hagen, from *The Godfather*
6. Sherif Ali, from *Lawrence of Arabia*
7. Dick Hallorann, from *The Shining*
8. Sgt. Dignam, from *The Departed*
9. Sgt. Apone, from *Aliens*
10. Little Bill Daggett, from *Unforgiven*
11. Jean Lundegaard, from *Fargo*
12. Chuckie Sullivan, from *Good Will Hunting*
13. Robert "Bobby Elvis" Munson, from *Sons of Anarchy*
14. Chief Tyrol, from *Battlestar Galactica*
15. Calamity Jane, from *Deadwood*
16. Mike Ehrmantraut, from *Breaking Bad*
17. Rupert Giles, from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
18. Titus Pullo, from *Rome*
19. Lorne, from *Angel*
20. Sir Francis Walsingham, from *Elizabeth*

20 Encounter Terrain Effects

1. An unholy circle of power that steals life energy
2. A skull glyph painted in blood that fills creatures with battle rage
3. A summoning circle that spawns minions
4. A mystical obelisk that radiates arcane power
5. A flaming cauldron that spurts fireballs
6. A gargoyle statue that spits poison darts
7. A statue of a warrior with a swinging axe trap
8. A dragon statue that breathes fire
9. Murder holes from which enemies fire arrows
10. Invisible exploding runes on the floor
11. A skull on a pike that whispers dark words
12. A crystal that fires a beam of burning light
13. A pit trap filled with poison sticks
14. An area of anti-gravity
15. A mirror of entrapment
16. Portraits of screaming maidens that drive living creatures mad
17. Delicate urns of poison gas
18. Serpent statues that spit acid
19. Steel rods that fire lightning
20. A pillar of black tentacles that grabs and pulls people closer



20 PC Relationships

1. Survivors of former adventuring party
2. Adopted siblings
3. Master and apprentice
4. Boss and hired hand
5. Former prisoners
6. Bounty hunters
7. Former militia
8. Former soldiers in a losing war
9. Former members of a thieves guild
10. Lord and serf
11. Ward and protector
12. Former grifters
13. Mercenaries
14. Former enemies that now work together
15. Business partners
16. Former students of beloved teacher
17. Former slaves
18. Former privateers
19. Dueling partners
20. Failed protectors of a lost artifact

20 Encounter-Wide Environmental Effects

1. Growing clouds of poisonous gas
2. Whispers of the insane dead cause psychic damage
3. Acid dripping from the ceiling burns creatures
4. Thick fog makes it difficult to see at range
5. Quaking ground threatens to knock people prone
6. Hallucinogenic gas makes people attack allies
7. Hot steam burns creatures more severely each round
8. Lightning bolts damage or incapacitate creatures
9. Portals vomit forth hordes of minions
10. Ghosts of vengeance fill creatures with bloodlust
11. Shifting time increases accuracy but decreases defenses
12. An unholy presence limits healing
13. Arcing electricity hurts those that are close to other creatures
14. Arcane lodestones limit magic use
15. Icy floors make people slide around, Mario-style
16. Freezing mist damages and slows those within
17. Crushing walls close in
18. Clouds of bats interrupt casting
19. A flood of foul water threatens to drown creatures
20. Flammable oil threatens to ignite

20 Combat Outs

1. Constructs disabled
2. Summoned creatures unsummoned
3. Brutes sacrifice health for damage
4. Villains surrender and become quest givers
5. Monsters flee
6. Aberrant monsters explode
7. Truce negotiated
8. Puzzle solved
9. Powerful weapon unleashed
10. Followers sacrifice themselves while leader escapes
11. Cavern collapses
12. Villain teleports explosively
13. NPC rescued
14. Item stolen
15. PCs flee from an overwhelming force
16. Gods intervene
17. Minions betray villain
18. Guards break it up
19. The true villain shows up
20. The true purpose reveals the battle as a ruse

20 Things That Never Should Have Been Found

1. Ancient book from before the time of mortals
2. Sealed copper cylinder containing the last breath of a dead god
3. Crown of the lich queen
4. A jeweled demon skull that always speaks the dark truth
5. The dagger that pierced the heart of a child heir to a fallen empire
6. A ancient tablet describing the death of a current king
7. A steel coffin containing the dust of an entombed vampire
8. An urn containing the ashes of an adulterous queen and her dark priest lover
9. An immortal child
10. Scrolls of a dark spell that cannot be destroyed
11. An ancient well leading to a dark world
12. A twisted horn that awakens the eater of the world
13. A sphere holding the souls of the dead
14. A jeweled box of secrets, lies, and jealousy
15. A priceless gem that brought murder to every previous owner
16. An ethereal prison in the form of an adamantine monolith
17. An ancient primordial burial ground
18. An intricate mechanical box containing an unknown seed
19. A treasure chest containing a still-beating heart
20. The skull of a man dated a million years older than mortals



APPENDIX B: THE DUNGEON MASTER SURVEY

From 22 April 2012 until 17 June 2012, I conducted a survey of dungeon master preparation techniques. The survey included results from 817 dungeon masters across all editions of D&D. I broke the survey up into several multiple-choice questions related to the preparation of D&D games across any edition of Dungeons and Dragons. The survey questions included the following:

How often to you run Dungeons & Dragons games?

How much time do you spend preparing for each game you run?

Which version of Dungeons & Dragons do you primarily run?

How long are your D&D game sessions?

In your game, how long does each combat encounter take?

How much time do you spend preparing the following for each game?

- World building
- Combat encounter design
- Monster design
- NPC development
- Non-combat encounter design
- Battle map preparation
- Props and handouts
- Experience and Treasure

Each of these questions had specific pre-defined time periods. You can download a full copy of the [survey results in Excel](#).

Survey flaws

Surveys like these are almost always inherently flawed. Different game systems sometimes get mixed together in the results. The multiple-choice nature of the survey doesn't allow for a clean bell curve of time spent. These results, however, give us a broad look at where many DMs spend their time in preparation for their game.

Versions of D&D ran

Of the 817 respondents, 51 of them (6%) mostly ran Original D&D, 1st Edition AD&D, or 2nd edition AD&D. Of the remaining 766 respondents, 420 (51%) primarily ran 4th edition; 278 (34%) primarily ran Pathfinder; and 68 (8%) primarily ran 3rd or 3.5 Edition D&D.

How often did participants run their games?

Of the 817 total participants, 10% run games less than monthly; 14% run monthly; 18% run twice a month; 35% run weekly; and 23% run more than weekly. While looking at overall preparation time, I filtered the results down to those who ran games weekly or more than weekly; 470 of the total 817. This helped normalize the time spent between sessions.

Total preparation time

Of the 470 participants who ran games weekly or more, 11% spent less than one hour preparing for each game; 39% spent 1-3 hours; 29% spent 3-6 hours; 15% spent 6-10 hours; and 7% spent more than 10 hours preparing for their games.

Detailed Tabulated Results						
	none	< 30 min	30 min-1 hr	1-2 hrs	> 2 hrs	
The following chart includes results from 470 respondents who play all versions of D&D weekly or more often broken out by specific activity:						
Combat Encounter Design	19%	42%	24%	11%	4%	
Non-Combat Encounter Design	16%	50%	20%	12%	2%	
Battle Map Preparation	37%	41%	14%	5%	3%	
Monster Design	27%	35%	19%	14%	5%	
NPC Development	14%	52%	20%	12%	2%	
World Building	17%	26%	12%	14%	31%	
Experience and Loot	40%	47%	9%	4%	0%	
Props and Handouts	31%	46%	13%	7%	1%	



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the gamers who helped me test these ideas at the game table: Paul Cooley, Casey Creech, James Grummel, Lisa Jo Grummell, Derek Lahousse, Jessica Lahousse, Mike Schiller, Michelle Shea, and Bryan Wire.

I want to thank the ten dungeon masters who answered my dungeon master questionnaire: Teos Abadia, Dave Chalker, Jeff Greiner, James Grummell, Tracy Hurley, Matt James, Michael Mallen, Davena Oaks, Steve Townshend, and Randall Walker. Their input helped expand and verify many of the ideas in this book.

Thank you to Jimi Bonogofsky, Marilyn Kupetz, and Erik Nowak for their artwork, editing, and design. They helped this book look less like an essay from a twelve year old and more like a professional product.

Jeff Greiner and Michael Mallen reviewed the drafts of this book, helping to refine the concepts into something palatable to advanced dungeon masters. I greatly appreciate their help.

I want to thank Jeremy Crawford, Mike Mearls, Chris Perkins, and Rodney Thompson at Wizards of the Coast for stepping out into the public to discuss how they run their own games.

Most of all, I thank my wife, Michelle Shea. This book wouldn't have been possible without her help and who suffered through countless dog-walks discussing and refining the way of the Lazy Dungeon Master.

Thank you all.

REFERENCES

Arcadian, John, Patrick Benson, Walt Ciechanowski, Don Mappin, Scott Martin, Matthew Neagley, Martin Ralya, Kurt "Telas" Schneider, Troy Taylor, and Phil Vecchione. *Masks: 1,000 Memorable NPCs for Any Roleplaying Game*. July 2011.

<http://www.enginepublishing.com/masks-1000-memorable-npcs-for-any-roleplaying-game>

Chalker, Dave. "The Combat 'Out.'" 28 February 2012.

<http://critical-hits.com/2011/02/28/the-combat-out>

Chalker, Dave. "Critical Hits." Accessed 2 September 2012.

<http://critical-hits.com>

Cooper, Thadeous, Samuel Dillon, Tracy Hurley, Randall Walker. "4 Geeks 4e." Accessed 2 September 2012.

<http://4geeks4e.com>

Crawford, Jeremy, Mearls, Mike, Perkins, Chris and Thompson, Rodney. "Ask The Dungeon Master: Video Recording at PAX 2012." 1 September 2012.

http://www.twitch.tv/wotc_dnd/b/330634658

DNDWizards Youtube Channel, 'Acquisitions' query. Accessed 17 September 2012.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/DNDWizards/videos?query=acquisitions>

"Dwarven Forge." Accessed 2 September 2012.

<http://www.dwarvenforge.com>

"Gnome Stew." Accessed 2 September 2012.

<http://www.gnomestew.com>

Gordon, Greg, Laws, Robin and Mearls, Mike.

Dungeon Master's Guide 2 (4th Edition). September 2009.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/asin/078695244X/slyflourish-20>

Greenwood, Ed. "Ham Acting Across a Table."

14 September 2012.

<http://www.wizards.com/dnd/Article.aspx?x=dnd/fttr/20120914>



Greiner, Jeff, Tracy Hurley, Robin D. Laws.
“Story Advice with Robin Laws from GenCon (Tome 201).”
23 September 2012.
<http://thetome.podbean.com/2012/09/23/story-advice-with-robin-laws-from-gencon-tome-201>

Greiner, Jeff. “Temporary Hit Points.”
Last accessed 8 September 2012.
<http://temporaryhitpoints.com>

Greiner, Jeff. “The Tome Show.”
Last accessed 8 September 2012.
<http://thetome.podbean.com>

Gygax, Gary. *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Dungeon Master's Guide*. Revised Edition 1995.
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/asin/0935696024/slyflourish-20>

Gygax, Gary. “Appendix N: Inspirational and Educational Reading.” Accessed 2 September 2012.
http://www.digital-eel.com/blog/ADnD_reading_list.htm

Hurley, Tracy. “Sarah Darkmagic.”
<http://sarahdarkmagic.com>

Laws, Robin D. *Robin's Laws of Good Game Mastering*. Steve Jackson Games. 2002.
<http://www.sjgames.com/robinlaws>

Mallen, Michael. “The Agony of Defeat.” 4 May 2012.
<http://theiddm.wordpress.com/2012/05/04/the-agony-of-defeat>

Mallen, Michael. “Combat Encounter Analysis: Penny Arcade/PvP Podcast Series Enters ‘The Dungeon.’” 2 June 2012.
<http://theiddm.wordpress.com/2011/06/02/combat-encounter-analysis-penny-arcadepvp-podcast-series-enters-the-dungeon>

Mallen, Michael. “How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Improv.” 3 January 2012.
<http://theiddm.wordpress.com/2012/01/03/how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-the-improv>

Mallen, Michael. “I Am The Entertainer, And I Know Just Where I Stand.” 15 December 2011.
<http://theiddm.wordpress.com/2011/12/15/i-am-the-entertainer-and-i-know-just-where-i-stand>

Mallen, Michael. “The Id DM.”
<http://theiddm.wordpress.com>

Mallen, Michael. “Ride the Rails Like a Rockstar.” 16 March 2011.
<http://theiddm.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/ride-the-rails-like-a-rockstar-2>

Morningstar, Jason. “Fiasco.” December 2009.
<http://www.bullypulpitgames.com/games/fiasco>

Oaks, Davena. “The She DM.” Accessed on 2 September 2012.
<http://theshedm.com>

Perkins, Chris. “What’s My Motivation.” 19 July 2012.
<http://www.wizards.com/dnd/Article.aspx?x=dnd/4dmxp/20120719>

Perkins, Chris. “Schley Stack.” 17 May 2012.
<http://www.wizards.com/DnD/Article.aspx?x=dnd/4dmxp/20120517>

Perkins, Chris. “A Lesson in Mediocrity.” 15 March 2012.
<http://wizards.com/dnd/Article.aspx?x=dnd/4dmxp/20120315>

Perkins, Chris. “I Got Your Back.” 30 August 2012.
<http://www.wizards.com/dnd/Article.aspx?x=dnd/4dmxp/20120830>

Pressfield, Steven. *The War of Art*. 11 November 2011.
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/asin/B007A4SDCG/slyflourish-20>

Shea, Michael. “D&D Dungeon Master Cheat Sheet.” Accessed 13 October 2012.
http://slyflourish.com/master_dm_sheet.pdf

Shea, Michael. “Dungeon Master Survey Results.” 14 May 2012.
http://s3.amazonaws.com/slyflourish_content/dm_survey_results.xls

Shea, Michael. *Dungeon Master Tips*. July 2012.
<http://slyflourish.com/book>

Shea, Michael. “Easier Initiative Cards.” 9 July 2012.
http://slyflourish.com/easier_initiative_cards.html



Shea, Michael. "Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium Random Loot Tables." 24 October 2011.
http://slyflourish.com/random_loot_tables.html

Shea, Michael. "Poster Map Visual Index." 3 October 2011.
http://slyflourish.com/map_index.html

Shea, Michael. *Running Epic Tier D&D Games*.
February 2011.
<http://slyflourish.com/epic>

Shea, Michael. "Steve Townshend on Dungeons and Dragons Improvisation." 21 May 2012.
http://slyflourish.com/dnd_improv.html

Shea, Michael and Chris Sims. "Critical Hits Podcast #30: Chris Sims and Mike Shea on Encounter Design." 7 July 2011.
<http://critical-hits.com/2011/07/07/critical-hits-podcast-30-chris-sims-and-mike-shea-on-encounter-design>

Shea, Michael and Townshend, Steve. "Steve Townshend on Adventure Design Podcast." 19 March 2012.
<http://critical-hits.com/2012/03/19/steve-townshend-on-adventure-design-podcast>

Rehm, Scott. "The Angry DM". Accessed 2 September 2012.
<http://angrydm.com>

"This Is My Game." Accessed 2 September 2012.
<http://www.myrpggame.com>

Thompson, Rodney, Sernett, Matthew, and Bonner, Logan. *Monster Vault*. November 2010.
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/asin/0786956313/slyflourish-20>

Vecchione, Phil. "I Don't Like Published Adventures." 11 May 2012.
<http://www.gnomestew.com/hot-buttons/i-dont-like-published-adventures>

Vecchione, Phil. *Never Unprepared: The Complete Game Master's Guide to Session Prep*. June 2012.
<http://www.enginepublishing.com/never-unprepared-the-complete-game-masters-guide-to-session-prep>

Wheaton, Wil. "Fiasco Set-up." 19 July 2012.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuJizhyf-y4>

"Yet Another Fantasy Name Generator."
Accessed 2 September 2012.
<http://dicelog.com/yafnagen>

A WORD ABOUT PIRACY

This book is the work of an author and a small group of editors, artists, and designers. There's no giant faceless corporation or an army of lawyers between your money and the creator. I built, designed, and distributed the book to make it as easy as possible for you to use it however you want. There's no digital rights management on the book. You can copy it to any of your devices, print it out, and use it however you want for your own personal use.

I also tried to keep the price down and set it to the value of the work. If you did somehow get a copy of this book without paying for it, I ask that you please visit <http://slyflourish.com/lazydm> and pay for it. Your money will help fund the research, time, and materials for future works like this. To steal a quote from Walt Disney: I don't write books to make money, I make money to write more books.

So I ask for your help and support. If you're reading this book and haven't paid for it, please do.

Thank you,

Mike Shea



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael E. Shea is a writer, gamer, and technologist and creator of [Sly Flourish](#), a website dedicated to building the better Dungeons and Dragons dungeon master. Mike is the author of [Sly Flourish's Dungeon Master Tips](#) and [Sly Flourish's Running Epic Tier D&D Games](#) and is a [freelance author for Wizards of the Coast](#). Mike has been playing Dungeons and Dragons since 1987.

Mike Shea lives with his wife, Michelle, and their dire-warg Jebu in Virginia.

