

# Chapter 1

## Preparing for Adventure

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Exploring the origins and objectives of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
- ▶ Looking at the components of the game
- ▶ Explaining the role of the Dungeon Master
- ▶ Examining the things you need to play
- ▶ Understanding the different expressions of the game
- ▶ Joining a 1st-level game

**E**veryone played make-believe during childhood. Whether you played cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, superheroes, or firefighters, you opened up your imagination and pretended to be something other than yourself. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is a game of the imagination, a roleplaying game where players take on the roles of amazing heroes in a medieval fantasy setting. It's just like make-believe, only more sophisticated, grown up, and fun. D&D gives form and structure to your imagination, creating a leisure activity that's more interactive and open-ended than any movie, novel, or computer game.

The backdrop for D&D is a mythological world of fairy tales, epic adventures, and monsters, where heroes gain power and magic to win against all kinds of challenges and villains. This backdrop owes much to fantasy novels, including *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien, but also to a sort of collective consciousness consisting of material from comic books, TV shows, movies, and other fantasy-related influences. Over the course of more than 30 years, D&D has, in turn, influenced such media and helped set the stage for the computer game industry. This chapter provides an overview of the game and explores some of the topics that we discuss in greater detail throughout the book.

## What Is D&D?

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Roleplaying Game is full of fantastic locations, strange creatures, magic items, treasure, and lots of monsters. Imagine an ancient place and time. Imagine a world much like our own, long ago, where armored warriors use swords and bows, castles sit atop wooded hills, and thatched cottages clump together here and there across the countryside.

### The origin of D&D

It started with wargames, a popular pastime in which participants re-create famous battles on a tabletop using metal figures. In the mid-1960s, Gary Gygax formed a small group of wargamers who met regularly and set out to publish new wargames. This led to the development of the *Chainmail* miniatures rules, and by 1971, Gygax added supplemental rules that expanded the game to include fantastic creatures such as elves, dwarves, and monsters.

In 1972, Dave Arneson came to Gygax with a new take on the traditional wargame. Gone were the massive armies. Each player had a single character like the “hero” characters in *Chainmail*. A storyteller ran the game, unfolding a narrative in which the players were free to choose their own courses of action for their characters. This was a cooperative experience, not a competitive wargame, in which the players joined forces to defeat villains and gain rewards.

This combination of miniatures gaming and player imagination created a totally new experience. Gygax and Arneson collaborated on a set of rules, but they weren’t able to find a publisher. So in 1974, Gygax formed a company (that eventually was called TSR, Inc.) and published DUNGEONS & DRAGONS himself.

In 1977, the rules were totally rewritten, and the original *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Basic Set* was released. Sales rose rapidly, and the game

became a phenomenon. A year later, a new version of the game, *Advanced DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* (AD&D), was introduced, published in a series of high-quality hardcover books.

The 1980s continued to see remarkable growth for the game, and new initiatives started during this decade. D&D novels were introduced, a cartoon series debuted on Saturday morning TV, and new fantasy worlds (called *campaign settings*) for D&D such as *DRAGONLANCE* and *FORGOTTEN REALMS* appeared. In 1989, the second edition of AD&D hit the shelves, and the 1990s saw the birth of even more campaign settings, including *RAVENLOFT*, *DARK SUN*, and *PLANESCAPE*.

In 1997, TSR changed hands. Wizards of the Coast, makers of the phenomenal trading card game *MAGIC: THE GATHERING*, purchased the company and moved most of the creative staff to its offices in Washington State. In 2000, the 3rd edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game was released.

In 2008, D&D 4th Edition hit the shelves. The newest edition concentrates on making a great game even better, ratcheting up the fun and speed of play, as well as adding online components via the D&D Insider Web site ([www.dndinsider.com](http://www.dndinsider.com)). Today the game is more popular than ever. Some 5 million people play D&D every month, using their imaginations and having fun with their friends.

## D&D: It's good for you

A few times over the long history of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, some people have tried to knock it as something silly or even harmful. Nothing could be further from the truth. D&D promotes teamwork and socialization. It teaches math and reading skills. It encourages creativity and imaginative problem solving. It's

uplifting, inspirational, and thought provoking. And it's fun, too! You sit in the same room with other people, socialize, and create amazingly deep fantasy worlds in which good battles evil on a regular basis — and good usually wins out in the end. What could be better than that?

Imagine that in this ancient time magic really works, and that humans aren't the only intelligent species roaming the land.

D&D lets you explore this imaginary world. With the game, some willing friends, and your imagination, you strike out on epic quests set in this long-ago place that never existed but is as familiar as your own recollections. The D&D game lets you participate in the ultimate interactive story. In this story, you and the other players determine what happens next. How does the adventure end? That's the best part — the ending isn't determined until you and your character get there!

For a number of reasons, D&D is different from other games you may have played:

- ✔ **The play keeps on going.** Like an ongoing television series, your game continues from play session to play session.
- ✔ **Your character grows as the game goes on.** You play a character that grows and develops with every adventure in which he or she participates.
- ✔ **The only limit is your imagination.** The game offers endless possibilities and a multitude of choices because your character can do whatever you can imagine.
- ✔ **Everyone wins.** Because the game is really a series of stories told collectively by the players and the Dungeon Master, D&D is a game where everyone wins. If your character survives and wins the day (or dies spectacularly and memorably) and everyone has a good time, then the adventure ends in a win for the group.

## *Objectives of the D&D Game*

D&D is a cooperative game, not a competitive one. In other words, you don't compete against the other players and you don't win by beating them. Instead, there are a lot of different ways to "win" the game. The common denominator in every victory condition is *fun*. If you and the other players have fun, everyone wins a game of D&D.

### *Storytelling*

One way to "win" a D&D game is to help the group tell a fun and exciting story. Whether you successfully complete your adventure or fail miserably, if everyone has a good time and you contribute to creating a story that everyone is going to remember, the group wins.

Unlike other games, each D&D adventure that you play is just one tale in the continuing saga of your player character and the other characters in your group. Of course, you can play a single game session and have a great time, but the real excitement and power of the D&D game comes from the continuing story as your character improves and develops from one adventure to the next. A continuing storyline means that events have consequences. If you find a magic weapon or a potion in one adventure, for example, you can use it in the next. And that evil necromancer that got away? Watch out! He is likely return in a future adventure to cause more trouble, just like villains in novels, TV series, and movies.

### *Adventure goals*

Every adventure contains its own set of victory conditions. Sometimes it's as simple as surviving the dungeon and escaping, or defeating the boss villain at the heart of the fortress of evil. Other times, you might have a specific goal to accomplish (take the evil ring and toss it in the volcano) or a specific monster to beat (stop the werewolf before it rampages through the town again). If you achieve the objective of the adventure, the group wins.

### *Character victories*

When you begin playing D&D, your character starts out at 1st level — the lowest experience level. Your character wins each time he or she defeats

monsters and gains experience points and treasure. With each new level your character gains, he or she increases in power and reputation. Each increase in wealth, power, and equipment is a win for your character.

## Looking at the Components of the Game

You need three distinct components to play a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game:

- ✓ **Players:** You need players, usually two to six of them, to take on the roles of adventurers in the fantasy world. The adventurers controlled by the players are also called *heroes* or *player characters* (PCs, for short).
- ✓ **A Dungeon Master:** The *Dungeon Master* (DM) controls all the *nonplayer characters* (NPCs) — the monsters, villains, and other incidental characters that inhabit the fantasy world. The DM sets the pace of the story and referees the action as the adventure unfolds.
- ✓ **An adventure:** An adventure is the activity that the player characters participate in. An adventure usually consists of a basic plot and a number of encounters. As the players (through their characters) interact with the plot and resolve the encounters, they help the DM tell a story. The cool thing is that every action the player characters perform affects the twists and turns of the plot, so that the outcome of the adventure winds up surprising everyone.

The following sections give more details about all the various parts of the D&D experience.

### Players and characters

The action revolves around the characters in a D&D game just as it does around the protagonists of a novel or the heroes of a movie. Each player creates a character (or selects a ready-to-play character, such as the ones presented in Chapters 3 through 6), a heroic adventurer who is part of a team that regularly delves into dungeons and battles monsters. These characters include mighty fighters, brave clerics, cunning rogues, and powerful wizards. You get to play the game while your character takes all the risks.

Playing a D&D character is kind of like acting, except everything happens around the gaming table. You don't have to deliver lines or perform stunts. Just find a comfortable seat, explain what your character is doing, and roll some dice to determine the outcome. The scene plays out in your imagination and in the imaginations of the other players.

## *The Dungeon Master*

One player has a special role in a D&D game. This player, the *Dungeon Master* (or DM), controls the pace of the story and referees the action along the way. Every D&D game needs a Dungeon Master — you can't play the game without one.

The cool thing about Dungeon Masters is that they allow the game to be totally interactive and open-ended. Players can have their characters attempt anything they can imagine because there's a real, live person sitting in the DM's chair, coordinating the action and determining how every event adds to the story. The game rules and the dice help, but the DM must use his or her imagination to make the world unfold.

The player who decides to take on the role of the Dungeon Master becomes a member of a select group. Not everyone has the dedication and creativity to be a DM, but those who do have a great outlet in the D&D game. The DM defines the game his or her group is going to play, and a good DM results in a great game of D&D.

Some groups use multiple DMs so that everyone gets to run a player character at some point, and all who want to try their hands at DMing get the opportunity. Other groups go for years with the same player serving as DM for every game session. It all depends on the desires of the group and the personalities involved.

## *The adventure*

The player characters are the stars of your D&D game, just like the heroes in books or movies. They are adventurers, and adventurers need adventures. A D&D adventure features action, combat, mystery, challenges, and lots and lots of monsters. Adventures come in three forms: full-length adventures published specifically for D&D, adventure hooks in published products that DMs can turn into full-length adventures, and adventures that DMs create for themselves.

Adventures can be as simple as a basic dungeon crawl or as complex as a murder mystery. An adventure can last for a single game session or stretch out over a number of sessions of play. One adventure might take place in a haunted castle, another in a crime-ridden village, a third in the catacombs beneath an ancient graveyard. What makes D&D different from your typical board game is that each adventure is just a single tale in the continuing saga of your player characters. Adventures provide the stage upon which your player characters perform heroic deeds and resolve legendary quests. Anything is possible in a D&D game, and it is through adventures that the possibilities come alive.

## Supplies you need

Players and characters, a Dungeon Master, and an adventure — these are the basic components of any DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. However, you need a few supplies to get the most out of the experience. These supplies include the following items, which we explain in more detail shortly:

- ✓ The D&D game itself
- ✓ Special dice
- ✓ Character sheets
- ✓ *D&D Miniatures* and *D&D Dungeon Tiles*
- ✓ Pencils and lots of paper
- ✓ An Internet connection, if you want to use the tools and game aids available at [www.dndinsider.com](http://www.dndinsider.com)



You can find a selection of D&D rulebooks and supplements at most bookstores. But for the miniatures, dice, *D&D Dungeon Tiles*, and other items, your best bet is a hobby game store. You can also find many sources for gaming supplies online, such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.chessex.com](http://www.chessex.com), or [www.gamestation.net](http://www.gamestation.net).

### The D&D game

This *For Dummies* book is a great place to start, but eventually you'll need other products and books to get the most from the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Roleplaying Game. Beginners should pick up the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Roleplaying Game Starter Set*, which includes the basic rules, dice, and many of the other components discussed in this section, all in one convenient box.

If you want to progress beyond the basics, you need the three 4th Edition core books, all published by Wizards of the Coast, that make up the full D&D game:

- ✓ **Player's Handbook:** Presents the rules of the game from the player's point of view and provides details on creating characters, outfitting adventurers, and playing the game.
- ✓ **Dungeon Master's Guide:** Presents the rules of the game from the Dungeon Master's point of view and provides detailed advice on running games, creating adventures, sustaining campaigns, and awarding experience to player characters.
- ✓ **Monster Manual:** Presents hundreds of creatures to use in any D&D game. From low-level to high-level, friendly to hostile, each creature has an illustration, game tactics, and statistics for ease of use.



The DM needs all three books, but players can get by with just a copy of the *Player's Handbook*.

### Dice

You roll dice to determine the outcome of actions in the game. If you want your character to try something — such as attack the ogre, disarm the trap, or search for clues — you use the dice whenever the result isn't a sure thing. The D&D game uses dice of different shapes. Each player should have his or her own set of dice with which to play the game. Players get possessive and protective of their dice, and having your own set means you can customize it. (Dice come in all kinds of styles and colors.) Game play also proceeds more smoothly when you don't have to pass the dice around for sharing among players.

A set of dice for the D&D game includes at least the following (see Figure 1-1):

- ✓ One four-sided die (referred to as a d4)
- ✓ One six-sided die (d6)
- ✓ One eight-sided die (d8)
- ✓ One ten-sided die (d10)
- ✓ One twelve-sided die (d12)
- ✓ One twenty-sided die (d20)

**Figure 1-1:**  
The basic  
dice for  
D&D.



The d20 determines character success at any given action, and the other dice determine what happens if an action succeeds.

### Character sheets

Your D&D character is defined by a series of key statistics, as well as by the background story you create for the character. These statistics and other key information are contained on a character sheet. As your character participates in adventures, these statistics change.





This book contains a series of basic character sheets that provide ready-to-play characters. You can find these in Chapters 3 through 6.

Wizards of the Coast provides blank character sheets in the form of PDF files that you can download and print (at [www.dndinsider.com](http://www.dndinsider.com)).

### ***D&D Miniatures and D&D Dungeon Tiles***

Although most of the action of D&D occurs in the imaginations of the participants, it's often very helpful to display certain information where everyone can see it. Combat situations, for example, work better when the players and DM know where all the participants are (characters and monsters) in relation to one another. D&D uses a grid of one-inch squares to represent where the action takes place. To represent the characters and monsters, the players and DM place miniatures or other markers on the grid.

Look for official *D&D Dungeon Tiles*, high-quality cardstock tiles that you can configure to create any dungeon you can imagine. These make a great play surface for the game. When these are combined with official *D&D Miniatures*, which present heroic characters and monsters right out of the *Monster Manual* in detailed, prepainted plastic, every adventure you have comes to life.



You can find other play surfaces in the *D&D Roleplaying Game Starter Set*, in D&D adventures, and online at [www.dndinsider.com](http://www.dndinsider.com).

### ***Pencils, paper, and graph paper***

You need a means for keeping notes and recording important information during game play, so have a lot of pencils, scrap paper, and graph paper available. Use the scrap paper for notes about the adventure. (Write down the names of NPCs and places, any treasure your character acquires, and any other details that you might forget or think may be important later.)

One player might take the role of note keeper, or each player may want to take his or her own notes. Use the graph paper to sketch a map of the area the PCs are exploring — players want to map the dungeon as they explore it, and the DM uses graph paper to design the whole dungeon before the adventurers enter it.

## ***One Game Rule to Rule Them All***

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is built around a core mechanic. This core mechanic is used to resolve all actions in the game, keeping play fast and intuitive.

## Expressions of D&D

The primary expression of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS takes the form of the D&D roleplaying game (RPG). This is where the whole thing started, and the RPG is still going strong after more than 30 years. This expression is presented in the three 4th Edition core rulebooks (*Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*) and a plethora of supplements and accessories that expand the world of D&D. This *For Dummies* book focuses on the RPG experience and tries to make it clearer and easier to get into. But other expressions of D&D exist. Here are a few that you might want to check out:

- ✓ **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures:** Official D&D preprinted plastic miniatures are available for use with the RPG. From hero characters to monsters such as bugbears, mind flayers, beholders, and more, a wide selection of the most popular and iconic D&D creatures can be found in randomly assorted booster packs. These miniature figures can also be used for a more competitive experience, a head-to-head skirmish game where players create warbands of D&D characters and creatures to throw against each other. If this concept (which goes back to D&D's roots) interests you, look for the *D&D Miniatures Starter Set* and *Booster Packs*.
- ✓ **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS novels:** Wizards of the Coast publishes fantasy novels set in the worlds of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. Some of the most popular series include novels

set in the FORGOTTEN REALMS and EBERRON settings and in the young adult PRACTICAL GUIDE series for younger readers.

- ✓ **Dragon Magazine and Dungeon Magazine:** Wizards of the Coast publishes two online magazines dedicated to the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. *Dragon Magazine* provides a player's perspective on the hobby, offering loads of new options to add to your game. Consider it to be an ongoing supplement full of new feats, powers, and magic items, as well as new player character races and classes, and tons of roleplaying and tactical advice to make any player better at the game. The companion periodical, *Dungeon Magazine*, is the definitive resource for D&D Dungeon Masters. It features DM advice, dungeon lairs, and ready-to-play adventures that can be dropped into any D&D campaign. Together, these magazines are required reading for serious D&D players and DMs everywhere. You can discover more about these magazines and find subscription information on the Web at [www.dndinsider.com](http://www.dndinsider.com).
- ✓ **Computer and console games:** You might be more familiar with DUNGEONS & DRAGONS through the computer and video games that have been released over the years. The computer game industry grew out of the paper RPGs created by D&D, and today Atari continues to publish licensed games set in the worlds of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS.

**The core game mechanic:** Whenever your character attempts an action that has a chance of failure associated with it, roll a twenty-sided die (d20). The higher the roll, the better the character's chances of succeeding in that action.

Character actions boil down to three basic types:

- ✓ **Attack rolls:** A roll to determine whether your character succeeds at attacking a monster or other opponent. Using a longsword against a monster, for example, requires an attack roll.
- ✓ **Skill checks:** A roll to determine whether your character uses a skill successfully. Using the Athletics skill to climb a wall, for example, requires a skill check.
- ✓ **Ability checks:** A roll to determine whether your character succeeds at attempting to do something to which no specific skill really applies. Attempting to bash open a dungeon door, for example, requires a Strength ability check.

To determine whether any of these actions are successful, follow these steps:

1. **Roll a d20.**
2. **Add any relevant modifiers.**
3. **Compare the result to a target number.**

If the result equals or exceeds the target number, the action succeeds. A result less than the target number indicates that the action fails.



*Modifiers* are determined by your character's level, ability scores, and other factors. You record modifiers on your character sheet for easy reference when you're playing. *Target numbers*, also called the Difficulty Class (DC) for a particular task or action, come from a variety of places. Some are set by the action itself and are defined in the rules, and other times the target numbers are determined by the Dungeon Master. For more details on modifiers and target numbers, see Chapter 7.

## Joining a D&D Game

The best way to learn how to play DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is to jump right in. If you know other players who have a regular game, this book provides you with everything you need to join an existing game. The ready-to-play characters in Chapters 3 through 6 are 1st-level characters, completely built and outfitted for their first adventure. If you want to join a higher-level game, Chapter 9 presents one of these characters at greater levels of experience — specifically, at 4th level and at 8th level — giving you a little more latitude in where to start.

## The best place to start

Other than this nifty *For Dummies* book, where's the best place to start learning the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game? Well, we wrote this book to be a great starting point as well as a perfect companion to the full D&D game. Don't be afraid to just start out using the material in this book.

At some point, however, you need to get one of the D&D games. If you're brand new to the concept of roleplaying games, we urge you to buy the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Roleplaying Game Starter Set*. This jam-packed box includes dice, versatile dungeon tiles, character and monster tokens, and ready-to-play characters. This *For Dummies* book makes a great companion for learning to play with the *Starter Set*.

If you have some knowledge and experience with D&D or games like it, you might be ready to leap right into the 4th Edition core rulebooks. This trinity of knowledge comes in the form of the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. These volumes are available at fine hobby game stores and bookstores, and with this *For Dummies* book at your side, you should have no trouble navigating your way through them. If you go this route, you'll need to buy a set of dice, too, because the books don't come with them.

If you don't have an existing game group to join, you'll have to start your own. Chapter 9 discusses organizing your own game group.

Whether you join an existing group or start your own, we urge you to get moving. Every day you wait means one less day of getting in on the fun and excitement of D&D.