



# ADVENTURERS LEAGUE

RUNNING ENGAGING ENCOUNTERS

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# OUTLINE

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- Part 1: Running Dynamic Encounters
- Part 2: DM Empowerment
- Part 3: Q&A



## RUNNING DYNAMIC ENCOUNTERS

*Keep it fresh, and they'll keep coming back*

# ANATOMY OF AN ENCOUNTER

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- An encounter is any scene in which the players are challenged and there is an element of dynamic action.
- Not limited to combat, though combat is the most common type of encounter.
- An encounter can be resolved by strategically utilizing resources, and through any of the three core pillars of play – Combat, Exploration or RP.

## IN D&D

- Parties typically face multiple encounters over the course of an adventuring day.
- In AL, there are usually fewer encounters than stipulated for a given adventuring day as modules are written to be completed in 2-to-4 hours of play.
- Encounters in AL tend to also be scaled for the average party (typically 5 players) who are NOT optimized.

# ADJUSTING THE ADVENTURE

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- Typically, AL modules are scaled for 5 players at the recommended Level and there is a sliding scale for you to dial up or dial back encounters.
- Some modules (usually CCCs) have better scaling options and creative encounter designs.
- The scaling recommendations in modules are usually **NOT sufficient**.
- Plan around the party and their strengths instead.



*NOT EVERYTHING IS ABOUT  
THE OVERWHELMING HORDES.*

# WHAT IS CR?

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- **Challenge Rating (CR)** is a typical gauge of how powerful a monster is.
- A lone monster of a given CR is supposed to prove a fair challenge against an average sized party of the same level.
- This rating is skewed as it does not always account for player competence, tactics and action economy.
- Balancing encounters using CR only truly matter in lower tiers of play, where characters are squishier.



*IT'S ONLY CR 2, THEY SAID.*

# UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENT

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- Again, most AL modules include some mention of the environment in each encounter.
- Pay attention especially to things like weather effects, vision, and hazards.
- If there are no clear guidelines in the encounter, do what is logically necessary to streamline and heighten the dramatic experience of the fight.



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*IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT.  
THOSE SAD HUMANS HAD NO DARKVISION.*

# RTFS (READ THE F\*CKING SPELL/STAT BLOCK/STORY ETC)

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- Magic is a core component in D&D. At higher tiers of play (and even at lower tiers), magic is a game changer.
- Read up on common spells and familiarize yourself with the items that characters have.
- Understand the mechanics, monsters and NPCs involved in the scene, and the general story beats so you can present the scene (especially the climactic ones) well.



*GIANT SPACE SOTONG HAS LEGENDARY RESISTANCE.  
THE SPELL WASN'T VERY EFFECTIVE.*

# PLAY MONSTERS ACCORDING TO THEIR INTELLIGENCE

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- Use the Intelligence score of a monster to gauge their relative effectiveness and tactics.
- Cleverer monsters should be more capable of utilizing elaborate tactics, spells, even RP and subterfuge to foil the characters.
- Intelligent monsters are also more likely to have allies, call for help, or withdraw to a more strategic position if things go poorly.



*ACTUALLY SMARTER THAN  
THE AVERAGE OPTIMIZED AI CHARACTER.*

# NARRATE, NARRATE, NARRATE

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- The players are the stars, and the action revolves around them. Describe what happens around them in a dramatic way.
- Avoid mechanical language if possible to heighten immersion. Remember that the characters are people living in the fantasy world!
- Use the narrative to drop important clues and hints about the encounter without giving too much away.



*DON'T JUST TELL. SHOW.*

# NARRATE, NARRATE, NARRATE

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- Try to telegraph things for the players and keep descriptions consistent across different adventures.
- Create your own unique brand of storytelling during encounter scenes that players will find memorable.



*YES. ROCKS FALL. EVERYBODY DIES.*

# To TotM OR NOT TO TotM?

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- Theater of the Mind (TotM) is an excellent way of expediting encounters where the players have an overwhelming advantage.
- Considering using the grid map and running combat only for key scenes with clear narrative value and high stakes.
- Combat typically takes a fair amount of time (especially with more players) and can lead to diminished attention and interest if there are multiple fights back to back.



*NOT EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE GRIDDED OUT.*



# DM EMPOWERMENT

*Unlimited Power? :o*

# WHAT IS DM EMPOWERMENT?

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- In Adventurers League, DMs can make thematically appropriate modifications and changes (typically combat) as written to better challenge the players.
- You can adjust the encounter by adding or removing thematically appropriate monsters.
- You cannot implement rules that don't exist or make up new rules.



*A WILD DRAGON HAS APPEARED! :O*

# PICKING THEMATICALLY APPROPRIATE MONSTERS

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- Consider the environment and the scene before introducing additional monsters.
- One or two monsters of comparable CR are viable, as are more monsters of reasonably lower CR.
- Use monsters that challenge the players, but also give them the opportunity to play up their strengths and shine.
- The encounter must be FAIR.



*PUSH PLAYERS TO PLAY CREATIVELY AND USE  
ABILITIES THEY DON'T NORMALLY THINK ABOUT USING.*

# USING SPELLCASTERS

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- Typically, spellcasting enemies form the backbone of encounters in higher tiers. It is difficult to challenge high levelled parties without at least some spellcasting enemies.
- You can use thematically appropriate spellcasters of the appropriate CR, and even change the spells they use if they are from classes that prepare spells.



*MAGIC IS THE BIGGEST GAME CHANGER AT HIGHER TIERS.*

# GLYPHS AND PREBUFFS

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- If it makes sense from a narrative perspective, there is no reason why enemies (who are of equally high level and equally experienced) shouldn't be well prepared if they know the characters are coming.
- Glyphs and Prebuffs are great but remember to also have enemies expend their resources if you choose to use such things.
- **Keep the encounter FAIR.**



*MAKING PREPARATIONS IS THE HALLMARK  
OF A GOOD VILLAIN.*

# THE MARTIAL DILEMMA

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- Since AL is scaled for an average party, some adventures may be skewed and unplayable with modifications by parties with no access to spells.
- Take the party composition into consideration when preparing the adventure and adjust encounters as needed.



*WHAT IF YOU RUN INTO AN ALL BARBARIAN PARTY?*

Q&A