



RUNNING ENGAGING ENCOUNTERS

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OUTLINE

- 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

- 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

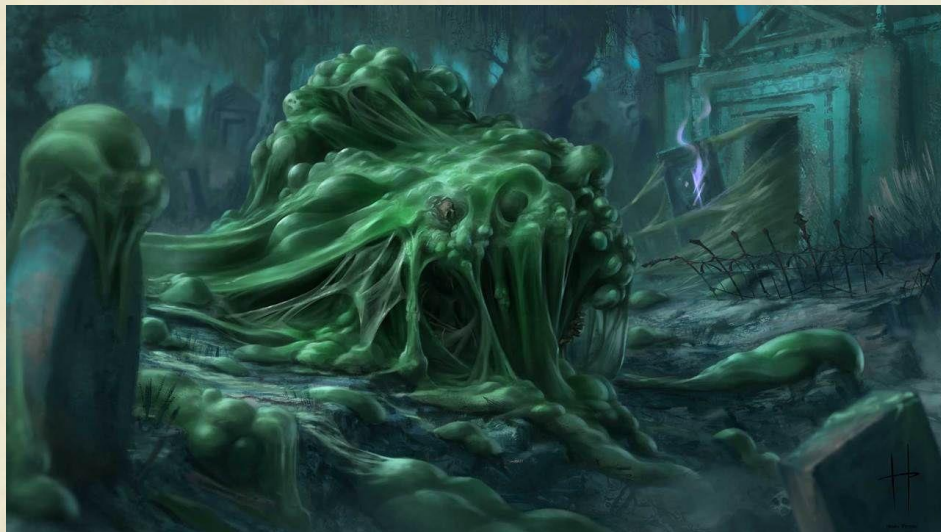
- Typically, AL modules are scaled for 5 players at the recommended Level and there is a sliding scale for you to dial up or dial back encounters.
- Some modules (usually CCCs) have better scaling options and creative encounter designs.
- The scaling recommendations in modules are usually **NOT sufficient**.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



*NOT EVERYTHING IS ABOUT
THE OVERWHELMING HORDES.*

WHAT IS CR?

- **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

- 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.



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

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

- 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

- 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 AL CHARACTER.*

NARRATE, NARRATE, NARRATE

- 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

- 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?

- 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?

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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