You're all here because you're interested in running your own game of Dungeons and Dragons. Prepare yourself for the most exhausting, frustrating, confusing...and spectacularly awesome experience you'll ever have. There's nothing quite like being a Dungeon Master and I think you'll find once you sit down at your first table, you'll learn a lot about the game, but even more about yourself and friends. I know from my own personal experiences, I would be a far less confident and comfortable person than I am today if I had not started DMing.

I'll start off by sharing a bit about myself as a DM. I have been playing Dungeons and Dragons for around 8 years and have been DMing campaigns for the past 3 to 4 years. Most of what I have played and run has been 5th edition and it has definitely been my favourite. I run mostly the published campaigns that Wizards releases (that way I can sell and promote them in the store) but I do run a home brew Christmas themed campaign around the holidays. I currently have a group of 6 players with ages ranging from 13 to early forties and experience levels starting at absolute newbies to 20+ years of gaming. We meet weekly and have 3 hour gaming sessions. I am now running them through the Tomb of Annihilation campaign released in the fall of last year, which is set in the jungle peninsula of Chult where the players have to find the source of a mysterious Death Curse causing the resurrected to wither and the dead unable to be risen. It's a challenging campaign, to say the least, but my players are handling it with minimal weeping.

So now you all know who I am, let's get to who YOU are as a DM. You are everything and nothing at the same time. You are every single piece of the game. Time, space and fate combined.....or a little less profoundly put, you are the narrator. You will be telling the story of the adventure your players embark on and along the way you will be playing the part of every villager, quest giver and enemy they meet. You will also be playing more subtle roles like the change in the weather and general environment around the party. You'll be playing the role of the tingle that runs down their spine when they're delving into a deep crypt and the swell of triumph after they rescue a city from a tyrannical ruler. During this adventure it's your job to not only describe their physical surroundings in detail but also to set the appropriate mood in each situation, as well as of course all the technical stuff we'll get to later on in the summer. You'll be telling the players what they can and can't do in the game all the while gently guiding them along the right path toward the end goal.

You sit behind what's called a Dungeon Master Screen. Behind this screen is the source of all the magic in D&D.......books and dice! What you do behind your screen is kept secret from your players so as to uphold the mystery of the story. Kind of like knowing the end of movie before you've seen the whole thing, it's kind of a bummer. You're going to spend the session back here flipping through pages, rolling dice and writing notes as you navigate through combat, role playing and the more mundane tasks like shopping and traveling. There will not be a moment your sitting and twiddling your thumbs. The DM is always busy.

So let's talk about what you need to have before starting your group. First off, let's address the obvious: a DM screen. The main purpose of a screen is to block your players from seeing what you're rolling and writing, but its secondary purpose is to act as a reference board of all kinds of information you'll use frequently throughout the game. The art side, which faces your players, also helps to set the mood and spark the imaginations of the group. You have several different options available to you when it comes to screens. Wizards produces campaign specific screens which we sell here. These screens have some generic information used in any D&D game, like conditions such as restrained and paralyzed, and then some information that is specific to the campaign whose art it's sporting. For example, I have an Princes of the Apocalypse DM screen here that shows the generic information and then these specific pieces like maps of the areas the adventure takes place in and the main antagonists. Depending on

which screen you get, these pieces of information will vary. You absolutely don't have to have a DM screen that matches your campaign. Say you bought this Elemental Evil one while you were running that campaign, then you finish that setting and want to move onto Curse of Strahd. You can definitely still use your Elemental Evil screen, you just won't use those specific pieces of information. Another option available to you is to do what I have done and make your own. This one is made from 6"x12" canvas boards from the dollar store, strapped together with hockey tape. I then commissioned my mom to paint some of my favourite scenes from Skyrim across the player side. Making your own screen is more work, but you can tailor the information inside to exactly what you know you use on a regular basis. You can also insert clear pockets so you can put in your own campaign specific information and take them out when you're finished. Inside mine I have posted the five factions, lodging and meal prices, rates of travel, experience points by level, most commonly purchased goods prices, hire-able services and all the saves and skills available to players. I also have listed all the Deities for human and non-human races. In my pockets, I have campaign specific information like the scents a strange character they met produces and the order in which the players keep their night watches. My screen typically has several sticky notes with reminders and notes for myself to keep in mind either throughout the game or to follow up with in between games. Another screen option I have seen DMs use is stacking several binders around themselves. This obviously is not nearly as structurally sound less scenic for your players. But, you do have several pockets available to you, and it's a quick alternative until you get a real screen or if you forgot your screen at home.

The next vital piece to being a DM is all of your published books. The main three you'll need is the Player's Handbook, the Dungeon Master's Guide and the Monster Manual. No matter what campaign you're running, you'll **NEED** these three books. Although you're not playing a specific character out of the PHB, it holds all the information on your players' classes' abilities and spells, all of the gear they can purchase and use and lots of other information you'll reference. The Dungeon Master's Guide goes without saying. This book teaches you almost everything you need to know as a DM and my most favourite part? It has loads and loads of magic items and their descriptions you can give to your players. The Monster Manual is more than likely going to be the book your reference most often. This holds the statistics of every goblin, giant, cultist and dragon you'll encounter. It shows their health, armour class and abilities and actions, just like the character sheet shows for your players. Wizards has published a couple supplementary books that hold even more monster stats which are Volo's Guide to Monster's, Xanathar's Guide to Everything and Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes, but this the Monster Manual the main book you'll need. There is also the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide which has a lot of additional stories, maps and flavour on the Sword Coast. If you're running a campaign set in this area, it's a neat one to have, but again, not completely necessary. If you're running a published campaign, you'll obviously need that book every session as well.

This goes without saying, but you need a lot of dice if you're DMing. You will controlling many creatures during combat with a variety of attacks using different dice. At the very least, you will need a 7 piece set, but I find over time those dice tend to multiply.....

There is a lot of paperwork that goes into being a DM. You're going to have notes, maps, pictures and stats you'll be constantly referencing. I've found the best way to keep it safe and organized is in a big, beefy binder, preferably one that zips up. With your binder you're definitely going to want either lined paper or a note book for all your notes. I prefer to use a notebook as it keeps the pages intact for longer; the paper definitely suffers a lot of abuse with the amount of flipping you'll be doing. Some people are lucky enough to be able to read a sentence and retain it....I am not one of those people. I have to physically write something down to remember it, which is why I have a whole notebook dedicated to notes from the campaign book. It's a lot like taking notes from a textbook in school. In the back of my

notebook, I also document each session by attendance, XP awarded, gold awarded, inspiration points, downtime and renown awarded and a quick synopsis of what happened during the session. This way I can track my player's attendance vs experience points and make sure they're all on track. I can also skim over my synopsis before the next session so I remember everything that happened, especially if we don't meet for a week or two. Having graph paper is handy when plotting maps of dungeons or towns so I always like to keep some handy. I keep my notes about the campaign's story confined to my notebook and use note pads and sticky notes for everything that happens during the session like initiative during combat, damage dealt to enemies and as I've mentioned before, notes to yourself of things to follow up with after the session.

I also like to make sure I have a folder dedicated to each campaign to hold all of the loose paperwork you'll have. Especially if you're running a home brew, you'll have a lot of maps, charts, pictures and references you'll need to keep close. Even the published campaign books have a lot of printable content you'll want to keep safe. In the folder I also carry blank character sheets and adventure log sheets for my players.

Obviously with all that writing you'll need lots of writing utensils. I make sure to have a pencil case loaded with pencils, pens, markers, an eraser and a pair of scissors. Again, just like school. You'll also want a calculator to divide XP, but most phones have those anyway.

I absolutely love these little page markers, you'll notice there are tons of them in all of my books. Each week while doing my prep work, I go through and stick one of these on each page I'm going to have to reference in the next session. This really cuts down on the time you'll take to find information during the game and also cuts down on the flipping wear on your books. If you get the transparent ones, you can use them to highlight really important pieces of information in your campaign book or notes. These are definitely worth getting.

A battle grid, I feel, is absolutely necessary. Some DMs can run a game without them, but I honestly don't understand how. Each character and enemy has a movement speed and either spells or weapons that have a range to them. That movement and range is represented here on this grid in 5 foot squares. So if a character can move 30 feet in one turn, they can move 6 of these squares. If their spell has a range of 60 feet, they can hit a target 12 squares away. These battle grids illustrate exactly what is happening in combat and helps everyone to plan their turns accordingly. This is a battle grid produced by Wizards but you can also get dungeon tiles which have specific environments on them like, temples, taverns, courtyards and even underground sewers. Before I got my first grid, I bought a piece of bristol board from the dollar store and drew on 1 inch by 1 inch squares with a thick, black marker. This obviously works just fine, but is harder to transport and doesn't look as nice.

If you have a battle grid, you'll need something to represent your players and the enemies in combat. Over the 30 years that D&D and similar pencil and paper RPGs have existed, millions of miniatures have been produced. You can find one for almost any enemy and race and class combination. I have some that I use, but honestly, it can get pretty expensive to have miniatures for everything, especially since players change class and race from campaign to campaign as well as the types of enemies they'll be facing will change. What I use in my campaigns are small, wooden tiles that are colour coded with my players' initials on them (not the characters' names as those change each campaign). These represent my players and then I have ones for enemies, NPCs and bosses. On the flip side is grey and blood spattered, representing the character has dropped to 0 HP and is need of healing. This lets the healers of the party know exactly who is down and where they are.

To go with my miniature tiles, I use clothespins with corresponding colours and names for my players, enemies, NPCs and bosses. I clip these pins across the top of my DM screen in order of initiative during combat. This shows the order in which each player and enemy will take their turns. Not only does it remind you and the players so they're ready when their turn comes around, but they also help your players plan their turns and how they'll interact with their teammates during combat.

With all this stuff you'll be carting around, you need a sturdy, reliable and MASSIVE backpack to contain it all. D&D books, since they're hardcover and heavy, are notorious backpack destroyers. This is what happened to my last backpack I was foolish enough to think could handle all of my D&D supplies...he did his best. So, lesson learned. Stay away from the backpacks that have those plastic-like liners because they will disintegrate in no time. What I have now, I got up at Deals Army Surplus store. Yes, apparently we need the military's help to carry all our D&D books. This one is huge inside but most importantly, it is made of a thick canvas that the sharp edges of the books won't tear up. It's also best to enroll in a few Ironman triathlons to prepare yourself to lift that sucker of a backpack once it's full.

Now you need to make the decision of what adventure you're going to run. This is something you can discuss with your players and get everyone's opinion and preference or something you can just decide on your own. If you're going with a published campaign you have a couple things to consider: the flavour and style of the adventure, the difficulty level and how long you'd like it to run (what level you'd like your players to reach). For levels 1-5 you have the option of the Starter Set which runs the Lost Mines of Phandelver. This is a great adventure to run for your first time DMing as it's fairly short and gives a little taste of each type of challenge an adventuring party will encounter. It comes with 5 pre-made characters for your players to use, but you can also make your own characters if you prefer. You could also choose one of the multi-adventure book likes Tales from the Yawning Portal or Ghosts of Saltmarsh if you wish to only do a few sessions until you get the hang of DMing. You can do your own research on these published campaigns and decided which one you'd like to run. There's a chart below that shows a little snapshot of each of the published adventures to date.

Of course you also have the option of running a home brew. "Home brew" is the term we give to any campaign that isn't a published book by Wizards and is created by the DM, meaning it all comes from your head. Home brews are a lot of work and can be pretty difficult to run if it's your first time DMing, but you are given complete control of the adventure so if you're the type of person who doesn't like to be restrained by rules, a home brew may be more your style. Personally, I would suggest not running a home brew until you have gotten the hang of DMing 5th edition first. When you create a home brew you decide what levels you'd like to run and how long it runs for.

Now you have everything you need to get started......except players! Choosing the right players for a group is really important. You and your players are going to be spending a lot of time together because most campaigns run for months or even years and most sessions for for several hours each time. The group getting along and working well together is key to the survival of the campaign. When you pick players for your group consider the following:

Their experience level – if you're a brand new DM, having brand new players is often easier. A most experienced player will reflexively answer other players' questions for you or tell you how rules work. No one means this with malicious intent, they're just trying to be helpful, but it can definitely disrupt the balance of player and DM. As the DM you and only you have the final say on EVERYTHING so make sure you have players that respect that, regardless of your experience level versus theirs.

They are a DM themselves – having another DM playing as a character in your group can definitely be helpful.....but it can also cause issues. Every DM runs their games a little bit differently from the next DM so when a DM sits down as a player, they tend to project how they would run things on your DMing style and may get confused or frustrated when things don't go the way they expect them to. Obviously DMing for a DM isn't a bad thing or something you should avoid, but just be aware of the different challenges that present themselves when DMing for a DM.

What you know about them personally – knowing the person you're going to recruit into your group is a huge advantage. If you've ever played video or board games with someone and notice they are HIGHLY competitive, chances are that attitude will also appear when they play D&D. If someone tends to make a joke out of everything and doesn't take games too seriously, they are likely to be pretty relaxed in D&D. You also wouldn't want to pick a fairly impatient person if you're involving a lot of new players in your group. Or if you're a fairly calm, quiet and collected person, don't choose 6 high energy players that you'll never be heard over. You decide how you would like things to go and pick your players accordingly. Obviously people are complex and it's really not as black and white as I'm making it sound. This is something you have to feel out for yourself.

If you come to us here at Scenic City to assemble your gaming group, we will take this process on ourselves. We have applications each person fills out listing their availability, experience level and age group. We meet every applicant in person and know most of them at least a little bit. When you apply as a DM at the store and are looking for players, you can state any preferences you have, but otherwise we take considerations we think is best for everyone. All group conflict falls on your shoulders as the DM, so make things easier for yourself by picking a cohesive group from the get go.

Once you've picked your players you have the nearly impossible task of working out a gaming schedule. With mostly everyone working nights, weekends, day shifts, split shifts, part time, full time, in school, having kids.....it can get pretty complicated. It's up to you to organize everyone and find a time and location that works best for the group. We are happy to accommodate any D&D group whenever we can, and there is NO CHARGE for setting up a table here.

You're now ready to sit down with your group and starting making up some characters!

Dungeon Master Checklist

- ☐ DM Screen

- ☐ DMG, PHB and Monster Manual (plus any other supplementary materials)

- ☐ Campaign book/materials

- ☐ LOTS of dice

- ☐ Notebook/note paper/sticky notes/page markers

- ☐ Pencils and eraser

- ☐ Battle grid

- ☐ Miniatures/character tokens

- ☐ Blank character/log sheets

- ☐ Big backpack/tote to carry all of this

- ☐ Ridiculous amounts of caffeine and patience and probably some Advil

5th Edition D&D Published Adventures

Campaign Name	Level	Release Date	Theme/Flavour

Lost Mine of Phandelver (Starter Kit)	1 to 5	July 2014	Underground cave and goblins set on the Sword Coast
Hoard of the Dragon Queen	1 to 7	August 2014	Lots and lots of dragons set in West Faerûn
Rise of Tiamat	8 to 15	November 2014	More dragons in West Faerûn
Princes of the Apocalypse	1 to 15	April 2015	Elementals and cultists set in the Dessarin Valley
Out of the Abyss	1 to 14	September 2015	Demons and various subterranean races set in the Underdark
Curse of Strahd	1 to 11	March 2016	Vampires, undead and lycanthropes set in Barovia
Storm King's Thunder	1 to 11	September 2016	Storm, cloud, frost, stone, fire and hill giants set in West Faerûn
Tales From the Yawning Portal	-	March 2017	Several smaller adventures from previous D&D editions
Tomb of Annihilation	1 to 11	September 2017	Undead and dinosaurs set in the jungles of Chult
Waterdeep: Dragonheist	1 to 5	September 2018	Cloak and dagger guild struggles set in the city of Waterdeep.
Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage	5 to 20	November 2018	(Continuation of Dragonheist) mega dungeon of Undermountain and Skullport

Ghosts of Saltmarsh	1 to 12	May 2019	Nautical themed smaller adventures from early D&D and Dungeon Magazine