



Illustration by C. Lukacs

### WHAT IS A BATTLEFIELD ADVENTURE?

**W**ith any campaign in the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game, game sessions work best when the adventures match the character and player types present in the party. Just as a party of druids and barbarians is less appropriate for a game of urban espionage, so too would a group of sorcerers and wizards be ill suited for a campaign that continually places them in front of charging cavalry.

War campaigns can be as varied as traditional D&D campaigns: Adventures can run the gamut from secret infiltrations of enemy camps to epic battles on the front line. Some players enjoy the opportunity to have their character lead a unit into battle, whereas others prefer to play with small groups of PCs in a more traditional adventuring party. As the DM, you should make an effort to know those tendencies and desires of your group, and tailor the campaign to suit.

With the “battlefield as dungeon” approach used in planning a war campaign, the DM needs new tools to keep track of events on the battlefield and help players realize how their characters can interact with this new environment.

Playing D&D within the war genre is essentially about moving the action from the dungeons, castles, and ruins of traditional D&D to the great battle scenes of fantasy novels and movies, where tens of thousands of men and monsters clash. Summarized as simply as possible, this is the book that brings the dungeon out onto the battlefield. The two environments have a lot in common—most notably the presence of lethal foes who want to do in the characters—but major differences persist. Whether you’re a player or the DM, you’ll adjust your game to account for the difference in scale, pacing, movement, and motivation.

The battles discussed in *Heroes of Battle* are no mere skirmishes. Thousands of soldiers on a side is the norm, and the characters probably see only part of the larger battle unfold before them. But the outcome of even the greatest battle often hinges on a smaller engagement. Can the player characters hold the bridge long enough for a relief column to arrive? Can they disrupt the enemy’s supplies behind the lines, then escape across no-man’s-land before the entire enemy army hunts them down? While the player characters are only a small part of an army, the role they play in a battle can be pivotal and heroic.

To use military jargon, battlefields are a “target-rich environment” for PCs. The monsters aren’t hiding behind locked doors and in mazelike corridors—they’re marching right toward you with malice in their eyes. In traditional D&D, characters can generally rest when they need to. But the battle rages on even if the beleaguered characters are low on spells, hit points, and other resources. Conversely, in a battlefield adventure you’re unlikely to run out of opponents. Brave and ambitious characters can almost always find a worthy enemy to fight on the battlefield.

The architecture of a site-based adventure slows the pacing of a D&D game, and it also constrains the PCs’ movement. If there’s a door to the north and another to the south, the characters will almost always take one of those two choices. But on a battlefield, characters can go where they like, although the enemy might have something to say about it (not to mention the PCs’ superior officers). DMs must be prepared for PCs who decide on a whim to seize a network of trenches to the east. But, by the same token, PCs must be prepared for threats that can come from any direction—everything from goblin sappers tunneling beneath their feet to a barrage of flaming catapult stones from the sky.

There are as many reasons to go to war as there are wars themselves. Some PCs will fight for king and country. Others will fight to protect their comrades. Some are fulfilling a lucrative military contract. On one hand, battlefield adventures can start from very prosaic motivations. The PCs attack the gnoll watchtower because the general ordered them to, not because the gnolls are guarding treasure or have kidnapped the mayor’s daughter. But on the other hand, sustaining a character’s motivation to stay in the army throughout a war means delving deeper into the DM’s bag of tricks than in a traditional D&D game. Treasure, experience, and plenty of action are still motivators, to be sure, but the PCs will also be bucking for promotions, earning decorations for heroism, and eventually shaping the outcomes of the larger war.

## THINK BIG/PLAY SMALL

Roleplaying in a war setting sounds like a lot of fun. Who doesn’t enjoy watching great war movies such as *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Guns of Navarone*, and *The Dirty Dozen*? But turning the battlefield into a dungeon for your players takes more work than you might think.

By their very nature, wars are large affairs. Not even counting support personnel behind the lines who supply food and munitions, or medical personnel who care for the wounded after a conflict, a single battle can involve hundreds if not thousands or even tens of thousands of soldiers.

That’s not roleplaying. That’s wargaming.

And wars, by their nature, are political. They are fought over ideologies and resources; over religious beliefs and revenge; and, all too often, for economic expansion. But

even if the masses are sold lock, stock, and smoking barrel on the reasons, wars are still political battles fought by common folk for reasons too often known only to the leaders of those countries.

That’s not roleplaying either. It might make for a great game of *Diplomacy* or *Risk*, or a great Tom Clancy novel, but unless your players love political intrigue, it doesn’t make for a great game of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS.

Think about those great war movies. They’re not about huge battles fought over geopolitical ideologies. They’re stories about small groups of well-trained people going on dangerous missions. They might have been ordered to go, but each person in the group usually has his or her reasons for taking the mission, whether it’s for greed or glory, advancement or adventure.

Now, that’s roleplaying at its finest.

The war becomes backdrop to a full-fledged adventure with great feats of heroism, tangible goals that group members can fully grasp, and one-on-one battles with life itself (and the success of the mission) hanging in the balance.

The war is there, ever-present in the lives of the characters. It impacts where they go and what they have to do when they get there. But the roleplaying experience becomes more about the mission—the adventure—than about the war. The war becomes the world or setting. The missions become the dungeon.

The trick to turning the battlefield into a dungeon is to think big but play small. The war can be ever-present in the daily lives of the PCs. They can see the impact it has in reports from the front lines, the sacrifices of the common people as supplies run short, and even the deaths of relatives or friends. But you as DM have to be the generals of both armies as well as the armies themselves. Never let a battle between the PCs and their army against an opposing army become nothing more than a two-day-long melee between hundreds or thousands of NPCs as your PCs watch helplessly waiting for their turn to come back around. Instead, their general tells the characters that he needs them to “take that hill at all costs,” thus turning a huge battle between thousands into a small battle between two manageable forces—the PCs against the dozen or two dozen foes who block their way to achieving their mission. The battle can rage on all around the PCs, but all you—and they—have to worry about is that one hill, that single goal.

Here’s another example of how to think big but play small. In a real war, the supply line is a primary concern for the generals. Whether soldiers are making incursions into enemy territory or are strewn out over a large area defending against multiple attacks, they need food and water. Plus, a large army needs other supplies, such as arrows, spell components, fresh horses, and fresh soldiers.

Feeding an army on the move is a logistical and bureaucratic nightmare—and incredibly boring. Most PCs won’t want to spend game time poring over supply requisitions. But that doesn’t mean you can’t make this important part of war part of your campaign.

The PCs might not care where the food is coming from or how it gets out to them in the field, but if you cut that supply line it becomes important pretty quickly when the food starts to run out. Now you have an adventure. The PCs can be sent out to stop raids on the supply line or to escort a caravan of food from HQ to a distant outpost. You can even turn it around and have the PCs try to cut the supply line of an invading force, thus leaving the enemy at a disadvantage.

Logistical problems can also give nonfighters something to do in your game. For example, characters with logistical or scrounging skills (such as *Survival*) or access to the spell *Leomund's billet* (see page 127) could have a chance to shine in an adventure about food shortages and cut supply lines.

The castle siege is another scenario in which you can take a large battle and turn it into a small adventure (or even a series of small adventures). While the battle rages all around them, the PCs could be tasked with guarding the gate, thus allowing you to focus on one small section of the battle. Later in this same scenario, perhaps after the gate falls and the army retreats into the main keep, you could send the PCs out a secret entrance on a mission to bring back reinforcements from an allied kingdom. The PCs will have to sneak, or fight, their way through enemy lines. They might even be pursued across the countryside as they race to find help in time.

Again, you have turned a large battle between massive armies into a small battle (or series of battles) between the PCs and manageable groups of enemies. Best of all, both of these scenarios allows the PCs to be the heroes. Their effort in these small skirmishes is the crucial factor between success and failure in the larger battle.

More scenario ideas are discussed in Chapter 2: Battlefield Adventures and Chapter 3: Battlefield Encounters.

## PLAYER CHARACTER ROLES

In an epic conflict involving tens of thousands of soldiers, do the actions of a small group of heroes really matter? In the case of a group of PCs, and in the context of a war campaign, the answer should almost always be yes. The key to the answer is at what level the heroes have an effect.

An entire battle might not hinge on the actions of a few low-level PCs, but the survival of a unit of troops might. At 1st or 2nd level, the PCs might reorganize a separated unit and lead it to safety. They might bring down an ogre that is tearing through the front ranks. Exploits like these stand out from a typical soldier's actions, and should be recognized or rewarded by immediate commanders and the like. The actions are noticeable, but the outcome of the battle usually does not hinge on the fate of a single ogre.

Mid-level PCs have a greater chance of impacting an overall battle's success. Strike teams of characters might

disable an enemy's artillery, or lead a surge through a mass of enemies to rescue an isolated force, or ambush a key officer, providing their own army with a distinct advantage in the conflict. Mid-level PCs are also more likely to be in command positions, and to have a chance to successfully rally troops that have routed. The battle could be won or lost despite the PCs' actions, yet their accomplishments can be significant enough to be recognized by the commanders on both sides of the conflict.

As the PCs approach high levels, their deeds of valor (or secrecy) directly affect the outcome of a battle. They become the leaders of the armies, or at the very least are engaged in planning an upcoming confrontation. The PCs seek out the leaders of the opposing force to fight them directly, or provide great magic that turns the tide of battle. When the PCs are victorious, so is their army.

The actions of the PCs matter, but not always to the ultimate outcome of the battle. At low levels, what they do matters greatly to the soldiers whose lives they save, and the significance of their actions increases as they gain levels; high-level PCs are capable of helping to shape the battle itself. Regardless of the scale of the PCs' actions, the players should always be aware of the PCs' influence on the outcome.

## PCS AND VULNERABILITY

PCs tend to think themselves invulnerable when faced with overwhelming numbers of low-level fodder. A 10th-level fighter with the *Great Cleave* feat might think that he is a match for any unit that consists of mere 1st-level kobold warriors. For the most part, however, an army should have better uses for a 10th-level fighter than to put him out on the front lines. If one side of a conflict has a 10th-level fighter, the other side likely has a trio of ogre barbarians that could likewise tear through a company of low-level warriors. A better tactical decision is to have the fighter defend against those ogres.

Even if the fighter insisted on taking out a battalion of enemies on his own, or with a group of heroes, the mass of enemies could still overwhelm him. Troops can use the aid another action to increase the chance of one soldier getting a hit, and there's always a chance that the fighter could get pinned or otherwise overcome.

There is a place for heroic melees against a horde of opponents. But if an entire army is easily decimated by the PCs, then that adventure is likely too weak a challenge.

## PACING

In any game session, it is important to maintain the flow of the game and not bog down in dice rolling or rules minutiae. As a DM, there are some preparations you can make to ensure that a war campaign continues to move along at an acceptable pace.

When preparing for your game sessions, set up a battle plan, a timeline of events that will occur during the battle. Identify events such as when certain troops

begin moving, or in what round artillery will be fired; then, once the battle begins, you will already know what happens around the PCs. Make a timetable for the overall battle, including maneuvers for both sides involved, that shows how the battle will play out. Make a list of the events that will happen around the PCs: These are the encounters the PCs need to deal with directly. Make notes on how the PCs' success or failure will affect the larger battle, if at all.

For ranged attacks such as artillery or fireballs that might affect the party, you could roll damage dice ahead of time, noting it on the battle plan. Be judicious in your use of this tactic, so you don't attack the PC who has few hit points just because you know a low (or high) damage roll is coming up.

In some cases, you might want to determine beforehand the result of a conflict between two units. In such instances, you might decide how many rounds it takes for one unit to become victorious and how strong that unit remains once that small conflict is resolved. A unit might achieve victory by destroying the enemy unit, but it could also win by causing the foes to rout.

You can determine the victor by running the combat normally, or you might simply make an educated estimate, based on the strengths of the units involved. In a large battle with many units, you can use this method to determine how long the battle will last and who might ultimately be victorious, in the absence of any interaction by the PCs.

You can think of the battlefield as a dungeon that is in constant motion. Once you have determined what the battlefield will look like from hour to hour or round to round, then you have the ability to add the PCs into the mix at any location or point in time.

## DESCRIBING THE ACTION

Try to illustrate the progress of the overall battle to the PCs. In a pitched



*Regdar and Mialec take a break from the rigors of the battlefield*

combat, take a moment at the beginning of a round to describe how other nearby units are faring, and mention when new threats present themselves. Less often, perhaps once every ten rounds of combat, give the PCs an idea of the larger scale by indicating whether their army seems to be winning (or losing), or at least if the battle is going to plan.

In some cases, you might have NPCs fighting other NPCs. If you want to have the dice decide the fate of these NPCs, perform the rolling beforehand so as not to slow down the game. If the PCs interfere with that scuffle, then resolve combat normally. If the PCs do not become directly involved, or if the levels or Hit Dice of the NPCs vary significantly from the average level of the party members, then describe the fight but keep the focus on the PCs.

Make sure to describe morale effects to the PCs. If the allies they are fighting beside become shaken, it should be obvious to the PCs that they could attempt to rally their comrades. Likewise, if they know that they have struck fear into the hearts of their enemies, they can be encouraged and know that at least a small victory might be near.

As always, pay attention to your players. If they are nodding off or losing interest, try to get those characters involved.

## TACTICAL DOWNTIME

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* suggests that a typical party should be able to overcome four encounters before

needing to rest, heal, and regain spells. But in the middle of a pitched battle there's usually no good place to set up camp and pull out the spellbooks.

Between combats, the PCs should have an opportunity to heal themselves magically, or otherwise reload and prepare for the next encounter. An encounter that would generally be appropriate for the party's level becomes much more deadly if the party is nearly out of hit points or has an unconscious party member as a result of the previous fight. The time between combats need not be hours in length, just a minute or two to allow the party to catch its collective breath.

When planning the encounters, keep in mind that after four encounters in a given day, the spellcasters are likely out of spells, the barbarian cannot rage again, and the paladin has used all his smite attempts. Continuing on might be a challenge for the party, but it might not be much fun for the players.

Four encounters might not seem like much, but in the context of a larger battle this amount of activity can be significant. A set of four encounters might consist of, for example, taking control of a hill, defending it for some time, rescuing a commander in distress, and then performing a fighting withdrawal. With some tense and quiet intervals between those events, those four encounters could easily take a half-day of game time.

If you want to have more than four encounters, try making the Encounter Level of each encounter one or two levels lower than the party level. The encounters might seem a bit easy at first, but the addition of a few more encounters in a day tests the endurance of the party without making the encounters so overpowering that the party must rely on luck to succeed.

## CAMPAIGN PLANNING

You will have to face a lot of issues when you begin a war campaign. This section will take a look some of these issues and provide hints and insights into how to combat the most prevalent problems you are likely to encounter as your PCs go to war.

First, anyone who has ever played with a large group (say, eight or more PCs) knows that even a short melee can seem interminably long as players wait for their turns. Multiply that by a hundred or a thousand, and you can see one problem with gaming in a war scenario.

Second, in a war you have armies, and in armies you have ranks. What happens when the weakest player in the group suddenly outranks the rest of the PCs? Power struggles are a common part of roleplaying, but military ranks—which can be an enjoyable part of the war campaign—can also become a major headache.

Another factor to consider is treasure. When your PCs are in a dungeon, it's easy to drop a treasure chest in a room for them to find. But unless the NPCs on a battlefield are traveling in siege engines, they won't be carrying treasure for the PCs to find. So, how do you reward players for heroic deeds? More important, how do you make sure the

characters obtain equipment of sufficient value as they gain levels and fight tougher battles?

A dungeon is often close to a town or a city where the PCs can go to rest or buy supplies. Even in remote dungeons, the PCs can often find a room that has been cleared of enemies where they feel safe enough to bed down for the night. But in a war, the characters will often find themselves behind enemy lines with no possibility of getting a good night's rest, let alone meeting a friendly shopkeeper. So, strategic downtime becomes something you have to plan into a scenario to give the PCs a chance to rest and resupply.

Lastly, you will have to pay closer attention to the needs of the nonfighters in your group. Wars are all about heroic deeds and titanic battles. But after a night of constant melees, the rogues, druids, bards, and even rangers in your group might feel unfulfilled. To help those players get the most out of their characters, you need to give some thought to adventures off the battlefield.

## DEALING WITH RANK AND ORDERS

In Chapter 4 you will find rules for adding military ranks to your war campaign, and for awarding medals and honors to worthy characters. While ranks and recognition are a cool way to reward good roleplaying, they do present a potential problem for the DM and the group.

Everyone has seen group dynamics ruined by an overbearing player who tries to take control of the group and gives orders that nobody wants to follow. And, if you've played D&D long enough, you've seen what happens when you have too many "generals" in the group. Everyone wants to give orders, but nobody wants to follow them.

Either situation can lead to bickering players, long discussions about who should open a door, sloppy melees that get characters killed, and, ultimately, hurt feelings within the group. Now add stratified ranks to an already fragile dynamic. It's hard enough to ignore the "paladin who would be king" when that character only has the power of his convictions. What happens when he outranks the other characters in the group?

The dynamic of each gaming group is going to be different, but most groups seem to work best when a pseudodemocratic leadership is present. One player will often dominate the decision-making, but if he or she regularly asks for advice and help, no other player in the group feels left out. Handing out ranks can destroy that dynamic, especially if the natural leader of the group is not the recipient of the promotion.

If there is a natural leader among the players, it might make sense to give that player's character the highest rank. The rest of the players are already used to following that player's lead when it comes to making decisions, so if the de facto leader is also the highest-ranking character in the group, there shouldn't be too much strife.

There are a couple of problems with this approach, however. First, not every group works well with a single leader giving all the commands, especially if the rest of

the players don't get a voice in the decisions. Most players dislike being led by the nose through an adventure by the DM but really detest being led by a dictatorial player, no matter how good that player's ideas might be. So you should probably avoid turning your de facto leader into the ranking leader unless that player leads by consensus instead of fiat.

The second problem with turning a single player into the group's leader is that the other players might view this decision as favoritism. This situation could lead to the very dissent you were trying to avoid. The players might even stop listening to the de facto leader out of resentment, thus ruining your plan of encouraging that player's leadership of the group.

So, what do you do? You want to use ranks and medals to reward your characters, but you want to avoid dissent in the group. One possible solution is to take your cue from old war movies again.

Rank is most important when a leader needs to give orders to a large group of soldiers who all must do roughly the same job. But in movies such as *The Guns of Navarone* or *The Dirty Dozen*, each member of the group is a specialist, brought along to do a particular job. Sure, someone is ostensibly in charge, but when it comes down to a question relating to his or her specialty, the specialist is the one calling the shots.

If you set up your PCs as a team of specialists, rank becomes much less important within the workings of the group. While rank and medals can still be important to the character who receives them, it won't necessarily make that character the leader of the group, because every character has an equally important job to do within the context of the mission. You, in the guise of a higher-ranking NPC, can even spell out each character's role in the mission before sending them out.

Having well-defined roles gives the players a sense of their place in the mission and provides them with some protection when another player tries to "pull rank." They can point to the orders and their part in the mission. This concept also emphasizes the importance of the group as a team who must work together to reach a common goal, instead of a military unit that must follow the orders of the ranking officer.

You can give other players a chance to shine when using the "team of specialists" concept by either rotating or splitting leadership within the group.

Rotating leadership is an arrangement in which the leader changes from one mission to the next. If you have a team of specialists, the leader for any specific mission is determined by which character has the right abilities to best complete the mission. For example, if the mission is mostly about battle, the fighter should lead. If the mission is mostly about stealth, the rogue should lead.

Split leadership occurs when one character is in charge of one part of the mission while another character is in charge of a different part. For example, the highest-ranking character ("lieutenant") might be in charge of the overall mission, while the one with the most combat

expertise ("sergeant") deploys the troops when the party gets into a battle. Or the PC ranger might be in charge of getting the group to the mission location, and the PC rogue might be in charge of executing the mission once the group arrives.

Split or rotating leadership roles can be spelled out in the group's orders at the beginning of the mission and can lead to some interesting roleplaying opportunities. Characters will have to work out the dynamics of joint leadership, perhaps at one point following someone who isn't used to leading others. But because the players know it's not a permanent situation, they should be more willing to give the new leader(s) a chance to succeed.

Ultimately, you have to figure out what works best for your group, based on the dynamics and the various personalities of the players. As you incorporate ranks and medals into your game, remember two things:

First, this is a game that should be fun for all players. It is your job to make sure the players are enjoying themselves.

Second, players are happiest when they have some sense of free will in the game. They don't want to be herded into or through an adventure by you or another character. So if you use orders within your campaign, make sure the characters have some say in how those orders are carried out.

## TREASURE IN A WAR CAMPAIGN

You need to address several issues when dealing with treasure in a war campaign. First, how do you reward characters with items as they progress through the campaign? Second, how will you provide characters with an outlet for selling or trading old and unused treasure? Third, how will characters be able to re-equip expendable items when they are depleted? Finally, how do you make sure your characters are equipped properly as they gain levels and fight tougher battles?

The main problem with treasure in a war campaign is that battles are fought in fields, or forests, or even in towns—out in the open—and treasure is normally not secreted out in the open. Of course, the PCs can pick over the bodies of the fallen after a battle. But wars are often fought by large forces using cheap weapons, so there might not be much of value for the characters to find after a battle.

However, searching bodies can be one of the best ways for low-level characters to add to their wealth. Selling used armor can be quite profitable for characters just starting out in their careers. And even if the PCs are comfortable picking over the fallen for a few coins and some gear, there might not be any place to sell these items in the middle of a war, especially if the PCs are behind the lines.

The most noble of the PCs might even have moral objections to such profiteering. However, dealing with the so-called black market is one viable option for giving your characters a way to sell old and confiscated gear. The dangers of dealing in scavenged war materials can make



*A well-stocked army offers its soldiers plenty of choices for gear*

*Illus. by F. Robinson*

for a great adventure or some fun roleplaying situations as the characters have to contend with shady characters and the threat of getting caught by their commanders.

As the characters progress, they will need more than just scavenged armor, though. One option for improving their prospects of gaining treasure is to send them on missions that give them a chance to fight more powerful creatures that have decent gear and treasure. You could even send the PCs into a dungeon or an enemy stronghold to look for a powerful artifact or supplies to use against the enemies. While there, they could easily find a hidden stash of treasure, items, or magical gear.

These types of missions should be the exception more than the rule in a war campaign. If you keep sending your PCs into dungeons, you'll lose the feel of being in the middle of a war. There's a way to use the war milieu to help provide the more objective rewards that players so often crave. Most treasure issues can be addressed with two simple mechanisms: recognition and requisition.

War heroes gain recognition in many forms: fame, promotions, and even monetary rewards. Of course, decorations are the most obvious way to recognize heroic deeds. Take a look through the decorations described on page 90. You can use these decorations to reward your characters, or create ones of your own to fit your campaign.

Promotions can also help PCs in a couple of ways. Promotions can mean higher pay or access to better equipment. Eventually, promotions can lead to PCs occupying seats

at the war planning table. They'll see the larger picture of the war effort firsthand, and that'll undoubtedly give them the information to assign themselves interesting missions (read: adventures).

If the characters have done something truly heroic, or completed a particularly tough mission that had a major impact on the course of the war, you can even go so far as to reward them with items from the castle treasury. These could be monetary rewards, better equipment, or even magic items.

Requisition lies at the other end of the spectrum. Instead of characters being rewarded for deeds performed, they are given the supplies they need ahead of time for an upcoming mission. Perhaps, as they gain levels (and ranks within the military), the PCs can even requisition items for themselves.

In addition to the standard items of warfare that the military provides to all soldiers, the PCs might also get a salary. This salary and the requisitioned supplies can be an easy way to hand out treasure awards on a regular basis, helping to ensure that the characters have the right amount and level of equipment for their level. If your PCs begin to fall behind the averages shown in Table 5-1: Character Wealth by Level, page 135 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, they might not be able to handle encounters aimed at a group of their level.

As with the other issues covered in this section, you will have to find the way that works best for rewarding

characters in your campaign. You might even be able to drop a treasure chest down into the middle of a battlefield. Just make sure it makes sense for that treasure to be there—for example, deciding that it's part of the opposing army's payroll or an intercepted shipment of replacement equipment.

## STRATEGIC DOWNTIME

All characters need daily sleep or meditation to recuperate from the rigors of battle, but some PCs will need a bit of extra time away from the monsters, mysteries, and mayhem of the adventure setting to take care of personal matters. Strategic downtime is the time PCs spend away from encounter situations. It often occurs between gaming sessions.

Downtime can be as simple as a few nights at an inn or a temple to regain lost hit points or heal ability damage. Or it could mean a month in a laboratory researching a new spell or crafting a magic item. This time can give nonfighters a chance to have a small adventure of their own, or it could just be used for relaxing or carousing. What downtime is used for depends on the personality and the needs of each character.

Whatever the reason, most characters need some occasional downtime, and this fact presents a challenge in a war campaign. If the PCs are constantly on the battlefield or away on a long mission, in hostile territory far from their base, they might not be able to find a hospitable spot (let alone a bed) for months at a time. This can make it hard to heal completely between sessions and almost impossible for PCs to find the resources they need for research or crafting items.

Plus, if the PCs are part of a military force, they are not entirely in control of their own time. They go when and where they are told, and they cannot just decide to rest or perform research for a week. The war isn't going to take a break just because the PCs need a little R&R. When the characters do get a break from action, you need to either find a way for the war to slacken (a brief armistice, perhaps) or keep track of changing conditions during the downtime.

If the characters are fighting close to home, they might be given a furlough by their commanding officer, providing some much-needed time off. The upside of this method is that the PCs will have access to resources at the base (or perhaps a nearby town) for research, crafts, side adventures, or more frivolous recuperative activities. The downside is that you need to take into account the course of the war while the PCs are out of commission.

Furloughs do not work, however, when the PCs are nowhere near their base of operations or are deep in hostile territory. If the PCs just need a safe haven for some rest and recuperation, you can use one of these tried-and-true plot devices: the burned-out keep, the empty cave, or the partisan farmer.

Here's how these concepts work. The PCs are tired and sore. They have been marching or riding all day and have fought one too many fights. The arcane spellcasters

are out of spells, the divine spellcasters have no healing left, and the barbarian is all raged out. Suddenly, off in the distance, one of the characters spots the scorched remains of a keep. Perhaps it was destroyed during the war. Perhaps it's a crumbling ruin from some other war fought long ago. The PCs search the area but find no evidence of recent enemy travel. It seems safe, so they bed down for the night.

The empty cave and the partisan farmer work the same way, except that the PCs spot the outline of the cave entrance or they see some smoke rising from a chimney in the distance. The cave is currently free of large predators, and the farmer has no allegiance to the enemy that the PCs are fighting. They have found a safe haven they can use for a night or a week. Perhaps this haven can even be used as a base of operations while the characters complete their mission.

In addition to providing shelter and safety, these spots can easily lead to side adventures. The ruined keep could have a hidden secret (or even a small dungeon adventure) buried under the rubble. The cave might be the home of a large monster that was out hunting when the PCs arrived. The farmer might be involved in something nefarious or have a mystery to solve that necessitates recruiting the characters' help.

However, these safe havens don't necessarily provide the characters with the kind of resources they need for the more involved activities that they might want to pursue during longer downtimes. In this case, you might need to introduce the members of the resistance (who need not speak with a fake French accent).

The resistance is, of course, a group of local residents who oppose the enemy by performing acts of sabotage. They will often have a secret base of operations (perhaps the cave, ruined keep, or farmhouse mentioned above) and can provide the PCs with much-needed supplies, a place to rest, intelligence about the enemy, resources for research and item creation, and even side adventures that require stealth instead of brute force (for those characters who enjoy that kind of adventure).

It's easy enough to introduce the resistance into a scenario. Their agents can find the PCs and lead them to the secret base. The characters could be given a contact name and a password in their mission instructions. The two parties could even meet while both are trying to complete the same mission, which can give your PCs a chance to use their Diplomacy skills.

In addition to providing the perfect safe haven for short or long rest periods, the resistance can be a great source for intrigue. That group could have a contact inside an enemy stronghold or a member with vital information who has been captured and must be rescued, which can lead to exciting undercover operations. The resistance could even have been infiltrated by a mole whom the PCs must ferret out before they are all captured. The possibilities for side adventures off the battlefield are nearly endless with the introduction of a resistance group to your war campaign.

What happens to the rest of the war while the PCs are busy on side quests or taking a long furlough? Unlike a dungeon, where the monsters are somewhat contained and conditions aren't as likely to change when the PCs rest for a day or a week, the course of a war can and should change constantly as forces advance or retreat, major battles are won or lost, and conditions shift on the battlefield.

You can handle this problem in a number of ways. First, you can keep track of the ebb and flow of the war during downtime and then bring the PCs up to speed on any changes when they return. If you want to, you can use the downtime to make changes to the campaign, which can affect future scenarios.

For example, if the PCs are behind enemy lines working with the resistance, they might be cut off from information about what's happening on the home front. They could return from their mission only to find the enemy has taken their master's castle and thrown the ruler in the dungeon. Now the PCs must rescue the king and begin a rebellion to overthrow the new regime.

If you're not ready for such a major change in your campaign, you can simply chart the course of major battles (either through die rolls, deduction based on military factors such as force size and position, or simply deciding for yourself) and then make subtle changes based on those outcomes.

Not every DM will want the headache of keeping track of changing conditions, though, and some players don't deal well with changes that are out of their control. There are a few ways for you to halt the action without the tactic seeming artificial.

For example, there can be a lull in the fighting, which gives the PCs an opportunity for a rest while the two forces regroup. The enemy could suffer a devastating loss, forcing their military to retreat until they can get reinforcements. Or the war can grind to a standstill, with both forces so entrenched that neither side can make any significant advances. There could even be a timely truce called while the leaders discuss terms for ending the hostilities. Winter weather or the rainy season can set in, making it impossible to continue fighting until better weather returns.

Any of these ideas can give PCs ample downtime without the need for you to chart the continuing course of the war during the break. And these are natural interruptions that a real war might have, so it won't seem odd that nothing happens while the PCs are resting or researching.

Another way to give PCs some downtime without interfering with the flow of the campaign is for each player to run multiple characters. This system allows players to swap characters anytime one of their characters needs a rest or wants to do some out-of-game activities. However, this can be a major scheduling and record-keeping headache for both you and the players.

For one thing, you have to decide how unplayed characters advance. You can either force players to split

experience points between all their characters, award full experience points to all characters, or award experience only to those characters that actually participated during the game session that just ended.

There are pros and cons to each system. Awarding partial experience to all characters slows down everyone's advancement. Awarding full experience lets characters advance faster, but players have to update two or more characters much more often. Awarding experience normally (only to the characters who participated) will allow for normal advancement of the played characters but will ultimately result in a group with PCs of many different levels, making it hard to create encounters that work for all characters present at a session.

The other problem comes when the group is sent off on long missions well away from its base of operations. When this happens, players are pretty much stuck with the characters that make the initial trip unless you can find some plausible way for characters to switch in the middle of an adventure.

However, running multiple characters can be a lot of fun for both the DM and the players. It gives players the chance to try out different kinds of characters from the ones they normally play, gives the group more specialists to draw upon for specific missions, provides some ready NPCs for you when you need a hostage the characters care about or a messenger that they will trust, and allows characters to take downtime whenever they need it without impacting the flow of the game or the war.

## ADVENTURING OFF THE BATTLEFIELD

While constant battling is a great source of experience points, it can wear down the PCs and become almost monotonous. In addition, not every character is a fighter. Many players enjoy roleplaying as much as, if not more than, combat. They prefer skills, feats, and spells that help them unravel mysteries or deal with NPCs in ways that don't involve a sword. It is up to you to make sure that every PC gets a chance to shine within the game, and to provide obstacles that give characters a chance to use noncombat abilities.

The rest of this section contains ideas to help you create adventures away from the battlefield for the PCs. Simply flesh these out or use them to jump start your creative juices and come up with your own. Either way, don't forget to provide characters with opportunities to use their noncombat skills.

### Noncombat Scenario Ideas

Here are scenarios for war-based campaigns that don't necessarily center on combat.

**Intelligence Gathering:** A new enemy is massing troops, or perhaps the current enemy has been recruiting allies and that force is on the move. The general needs up-to-date intelligence about troop movements, the strength of the new foe, and the terms of the alliance that can be

used against the enemy. The PCs must make their way through the war zone out to the borderlands to gather the needed data and then return without being detected. Stealth and skill in gathering information are imperative for this mission to succeed.

**Reinforcements:** The keep is surrounded and cut off from help. A neighboring kingdom might come to the rescue if only a message can get through in time. The PCs must sneak out of the keep and through the troops encamped outside the walls and travel to the king's castle. Once they arrive, they must get an audience with the king and convince him to send reinforcements. This mission will require both stealth and diplomacy.

**Prisoners of War:** The PCs have been captured (perhaps during one of the other side missions). They have been stripped of their gear and tossed in the dungeon, or whisked off to a POW camp. They must find a way out of their cells, locate their gear, and escape. But they're not free yet, for they are still deep in enemy territory, sticking out like elves in a dwarf community. They'll need disguises, perhaps even forged identification papers, and a lot of luck to find their way home again.

**Escaped Prisoner:** An enemy spy held in the dungeon has escaped and is making her way back to the enemy base with important information about defenses, castle weaknesses, and troop strength. She must be stopped at all costs. The PCs are sent out to track down the escaped prisoner and make sure she hasn't passed on her secrets to anyone along the way. A ranger for tracking or a mage with scrying ability is an absolute necessity for this mission.

**Secret Weapon:** There have been rumors that the enemy has a secret weapon. Perhaps it's a new type of siege engine. Perhaps it's some unearthed artifact of a bygone age. The PCs must infiltrate the enemy's military, find out where they are keeping the secret weapon, and then either destroy it or steal it. This mission will require ingenuity, disguise, and perhaps magical knowledge to complete.

**Saboteur:** A saboteur has infiltrated the PCs' military base. Weapon caches have been destroyed, alchemical

ingredients and spell components gone missing, guards found dead at their posts. Rumors are running rampant, and everyone in the keep is edgy with paranoia. The PCs must root out the saboteur quickly before morale breaks down completely and soldiers begin deserting by the dozens. They must look at all the evidence and try to determine who the saboteur could be. Then they must prove it to the general and the men, perhaps by catching him or her in the act. This mission will require cunning, adeptness at gathering information, and deductive reasoning.

**Disinformation Campaign:** The generals are planning a major counterattack in the coming months, but the enemy has spies everywhere; it's almost impossible to take them by surprise. The PCs must find a way to get false plans into enemy hands to throw their spy network off track. The false plans are ready, but it's up to the PCs to devise and implement a plan for delivering them to an enemy spy in a way that will avoid suspicion. This mission might require someone with forgery skill as well as PCs who are good at planning.

**Codebreaker:** The military has intercepted several messages in the past few months through the resistance working within enemy borders. Unfortunately, they are in code and cannot be read. The PCs are asked to take a look at the messages and try to decode them. If they can't figure out the code, then the PCs will have to find someone who can—even if it means infiltrating an enemy base, finding the code key, and escaping again without alerting the enemy. This mission will require either deductive reasoning or disguise, stealth, forgery, and perhaps some magical help as well.

**Barracks Adventure:** Sometimes the day-to-day life of a soldier is adventure enough. Low-level PCs will find plenty of challenge just surviving basic training

if they're unlucky enough to have sadistic instructors, bullies in their unit, and friends who are running a black market ring from within the barracks. Rivalries between ostensibly friendly units are commonplace, and the PCs might infiltrate a rival compound to pull off an embarrassing prank or sabotage the rival's equipment before a major inspection. The officer corps might be a hotbed of political intrigue, with junior officers fighting



*A ranger saboteur plants some explosives to undermine a bridge*

for a limited number of promotions by means both fair and foul.

