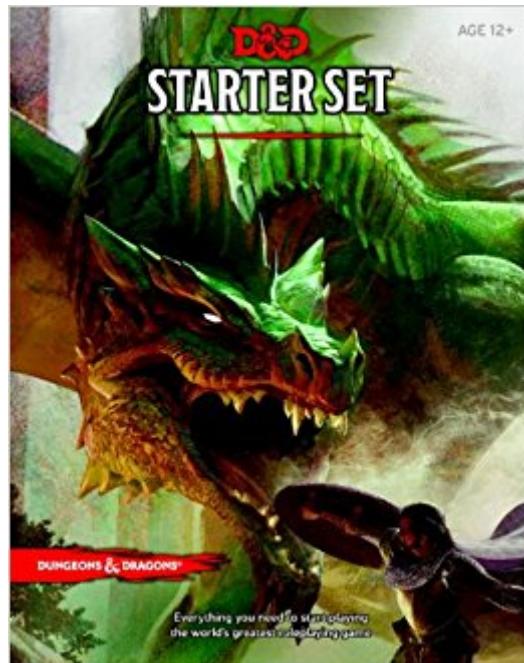


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# Dungeons & Dragons Starter Set



## Synopsis

Explore subterranean labyrinths! Plunder hoards of treasure! Battle legendary monsters! The Dungeons & Dragons Starter Set is your gateway to action-packed stories of the imagination. This box contains the essential rules of the game plus everything you need to play heroic characters on perilous adventures in worlds of fantasy. Ideal for a group of 4 – 6, the Dungeons & Dragons Starter Set includes a 64-page adventure book with everything the Dungeon Master needs to get started, a 32-page rulebook for playing characters level 1 – 5, 5 pregenerated characters, each with a character sheet and supporting reference material, and 6 dice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

First things first - for those of you rating this based on comparisons to starter sets for other RPGs, please consider this: if you have enough knowledge of/experience with other RPG starter sets to make this comparison, you are not the target audience for this starter set! Please download the free D&D Basic PDF and consider purchasing the 5e core books (Player's Handbook, Monster Manual, Dungeon Master's Guide) when they are released over the coming months. As someone who has been playing D&D and other tabletop games for over 20 years, I am clearly not part of the target audience for this product -- although I did purchase a copy it to get the included adventure, and for the dice which I have given to my three-year-old to add to her collection so that she'll be well-equipped once she's old enough to start gaming. My rating is based solely on how well WOTC achieved their goal for this starter: to make an affordable, accessible entry product for people who

are new to D&D (and, if new to D&D, most likely new to pen-and-paper RPGs in general). Note that this also means that my rating does not necessarily reflect my opinion of the 5e rules themselves -- again, I am looking only at the contents of this starter set and its ability to deliver what it proposes to do. On the first count, I doubt few would argue that the retail price falls outside the "affordable" range, and I would even go as far as to say that it becomes downright cheap if you purchase it at 's price. Furthermore, rather than providing a short intro adventure and then thrusting fledgling DMs out into the wide world of designing their own adventures before they've had a chance to experience their first TPK (total-party-kill), the included adventure has enough content to take characters up to 5th level - several sessions' worth of gaming at least, even gaining experience at a breakneck pace and gaining a level per game session. I have not read the adventure thoroughly enough yet to fairly evaluate it, but even if it is of only middling quality, it would by itself be worth the price of admission for veteran DMs (who could also extrapolate upon the contents of the adventure and flesh them out into a larger campaign that takes players beyond 5th level). As far as being accessible (by which I mean the ease by which a new player can understand the game and start playing by reading the included materials), let me first say that playing RPGs is a hobby that is best learned from and passed on by people who are already engaged in the hobby. However, for those not fortunate enough to learn the game from friends or family, the contents of this starter set will do a yeoman's job of helping new players learn the game. The essential rules of gameplay for both players and DMs are included, and players can move on to the D&D Basic game (available as a free PDF) or the full version of the game as the three core rulebooks become available. While D&D Basic and the full game have more content (rules for advancing beyond 5th level, more classes, spells and monsters, along with optional rules for DMs to incorporate into their campaigns), the contents of the starter set will provide many hours of gaming on their own. Admittedly, the contents aren't flashy, but besides helping keep the price of this thing way down, the simplicity is part of the point: you've got your rules, your characters, your adventure, and your dice -- boom! Now just get your friends together and you're ready to play (ok, better get some pencils first too). Miniatures, poster maps, dungeon tiles, etc., are all great and can really enhance the game when used appropriately. Note the key word here "appropriately" -- that is, miniatures and the rest can and do enhance the game when used properly (like the right blend and amount of spices on your favorite dish), but the true focus of a tabletop RPG should be the story and the game. Including optional accessories in the starter (yes, minis and a battle map are optional in this edition) would obfuscate the point that D&D does not require any of these things in order to be fun. By including only the bare essentials in this starter, Wizards is subtly but clearly communicating to players that D&D is a game

about using your imagination and the shared interaction that takes place between the players, the DM, and the game world. Thanks, Wizards, for creating a product that will help bring the wonder and joy of RPGs to a new generation of players! (And please feel free to contact me for the details of where to mail the check ;-)) Finally, a bit of friendly advice for the new players out there: think carefully about your chosen course of action if you ever hear the DM ask, "Are you sure?"

**Content (5/5)** The Starter Set's got a rulebook, the adventure Lost Mine of Phandelver, some character sheets (a few pregenerated characters AKA pregens and one blank sheet), and a set of dice (1 each of d4, d6, d8, d12 and d20 and 2 of the d10s, one of which has the double-digits marking it as a percentile die). I could maybe argue about this set missing character creation, but no. It's perfect for the name Starter Set. Let's take a deeper look.

**Starter Set Rulebook** The Starter Set Rulebook is a 32-page instruction manual for playing Dungeons & Dragons. There aren't any character creation rules in this rulebook; basic level advancement tips specific to the pregenerated characters are listed on the individual character sheets. Since pages 23-31 cover the spells available to Wizards and Clerics and page 32 is a summary of the Conditions, this book is a very slim, very concise rules reference for understanding the mechanics of D&D.

**1. How to Play** The first chapter quickly explains what the D&D roleplaying experience is all about, featuring an example of play nicely mixed in with the descriptive text, then goes on to explain the dice used to play the game, how character abilities work, and the ability, skill, and saving throw checks that players will be making during play. I won't get into what D&D is "you should know if you're here, or you'll figure it out very quickly once you pick up the Starter Set or the Player's Handbook, or if you watch Critical Role, or well, let's just leave it at that if you're reading this review ??

How it plays, though, is something worth talking about, whether you are entirely new to D&D or just the 5th Edition of the game. Let's break it down as simply as possible:

- \*Your character has six Ability Scores – Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma – rated 3-18 (with some potential exceptions), and a table tells you what the modifier is for each score (i.e. a score of 12-13 is a +1 modifier, 14-15 is a +2 modifier, etc.).
- \*Your character has a Race – elf, dwarf, human, or halfling – that provides those potential exceptions I just mentioned, increasing certain Ability Scores favored by that specific race, and thus also the modifier.
- \*Your character has a Class that tells you what sorts of skills and abilities they are especially good at. Their Level tells you how experienced they are in that class, and thus gives you an additional modifier that pertains to those class skills and abilities called the Proficiency Bonus.
- \*Whenever you

need to roll a ÆœcheckÆ• Æœrolling a die to see if you use a skill or ability successfully or notÆ• you roll 1d20 and add the Ability and Proficiency modifiers to the roll to get a result.\*The Dungeon Master has a difficulty class (DC) set Æœvery easy is 5, easy is 10, medium is 15, hard is 20, very hard 25, and nearly impossible 30Æ• and if the result beats that number, you succeed. (The DC is often set by existing conditions in the rules or for a monster, so the DM is rarely just pulling this number out of his or her butt.)Pretty simple.Best of all, D&D sums up beneficial or detrimental circumstances Æœdarkness, getting sand kicked into your eyes, special combat maneuvers that set you up to surprise or double-team an opponent with the help of an ally, ambushing opponents from a hiding spotÆ• through advantage (rolling a second d20 and taking the better result) or disadvantage (rolling a second d20 and taking the worse result). You canÆt have both advantage and disadvantage (they negate each other), and getting multiple sources of either doesnÆt ÆœstackÆ• in some way: you either have advantage, disadvantage, or you roll straight-up, thatÆs it.The various Skills are technically available to everyone, but your class (and maybe your race) and your Background (which is sort of like a former occupation, already filled in for the pregenerated characters) tells you which ones you are better at. You also have Saving Throws, which are just ability checks that represent reflexive defenses against certain types of attacks, traps, spells, or environmental factors like poison gas, falling off the edge of a cliff, or the like.All of that may sound complicated, but really youÆre just getting a list of things you are cool at, and the Proficiency Bonus you add to any rolls is the same for every character at every level (+2 up through level 4, +3 at level 5, and so on up to level 20, which doesnÆt appear in this Starter Set anyway). The only true variable here is your Ability modifiers and whether or not you are actually Proficient in a given skill or saving throw.For reference, the skills (and the Ability Score modifier youÆd add to rolls using them) are:  
\*Athletics (based on Strength)  
\*Acrobatics, Sleight of Hand, and Stealth (all based on Dexterity)  
\*Arcana, History, Investigation, Nature, and Religion (Intelligence)  
\*Animal Handling, Insight, Medicine, Perception, and Survival (Wisdom)  
\*Deception, Intimidation, Performance, and Persuasion (Charisma)  
Constitution doesnÆt get any skills, probably in some small part due to the fact that it forms the basis of some other traits, like a characterÆs Hit Points, or HP (how much damage they can take before being knocked out and potentially dying), and comes up as a saving throw quite often against things like poison, many spells, and a special check by spellcasters called a Concentration check that allows them to keep a spell effect in play even if they are getting beat on.For those of you that have upgraded to the full PlayerÆs Handbook, youÆll find that this chapter is an abbreviated version of the Introduction, followed by the

Using Ability Scores chapter. The example of play is ever-so-slightly different in wording from the PHB, showing that it may have been an early edit, but otherwise this is almost a word-for-word reproduction.2. CombatThe chapter on combat covers one of the most common occurrences in the Dungeons & Dragons game: a battle of wits and skill against opponents, often monstrous in nature, where you employ weapons — swords, axes, bows — and spells against them, and they try to get around your armor and shield (if any) or magical defenses to damage you. The rules are clearly spelled out, showing how the combat round works, how order (Initiative) is established so you know who goes when, and all the permutations attacks and damage available to all, as well as covering various special abilities and how they interact with all of this. In a quick 5 pages, you have everything you need to understand and run combat that can be both tactical and narrative. Combat really boils down to ability checks like above, but instead of using skills you utilize the Proficiency Bonus you receive from being skilled with certain weapons or spells you employ. A character or monster's Armor Class (AC) is the difficulty class for the rolls to determine if you hit them (or in some cases, like lots of spells, the opponent rolls a saving throw to avoid the spell's effects). AC is often determined by armor, whether or not you have a shield equipped, and your Dexterity modifier, though spells, magic items, and the natural hide of some monsters can all modify it. It should be noted that characters and monsters/Nonplayer Characters (NPCs) die a little differently. When a monster or NPC hits zero (0) hit points, they are dead, unless a DM (rarely) wants to make the call that a particularly dramatically important one follows the rules for Player Characters (PCs). For the PCs, they die at zero hit points only if there is damage leftover that equals or exceeds their hit point maximum. Otherwise, they go unconscious, and if the opponent was trying to kill them, they begin making a special saving throw called a Death Saving Throw on their following turn (unless they are healed of course!). This saving throw doesn't get the usual Ability Score or Proficiency modifiers: it's a straight d20 roll vs. a DC of 10, and you tally successes and failures each round until you get either 3 successes (you stabilize and are just out cold until healed) or 3 failures (grab a new character sheet, because your PC is dead!). The only thing missing is taking the tactical nature of combat to the next level by adding a battle map or using a grid and miniatures to establish positioning, but the nature of the rules themselves — everything is measured in feet, most grids conform to 1? squares = 5 feet — sets players and DMs up to easily integrate those things without any loss of fidelity in the rules. If you have the PHB, you'll find this chapter is a word-for-word reproduction of the combat chapter. The only things the PHB adds are additional sidebars that elaborate on the using grids, describing actions and damage, more depth regarding interacting with objects during combat, and improvising actions.

Basically, you get some pro tips and some expanded guidelines, but you're only missing rules on mounted and underwater combat with the Starter Set (which are pretty easy to extrapolate from the system anyway).

### 3. Adventuring

The chapter on adventuring in the D&D game covers travel — a risky prospect in a world of fantasy monsters! — healing, experience rewards that boost your character's ability by leveling them up (this covers Levels 1 through 5), and adventuring gear, including arms and armor. These may seem like disparate topics, but they show that the D&D game is not just one about killing monsters with karate kicks and maybe spells: it's about being prepared to cross wild country to find new dungeons to loot, resting and restocking your gear so you can take on the next dragon. This chapter pulls from Adventuring, Equipment, and a little from the Step-by-Step Characters (specifically Beyond 1st Level) chapters of the PHB. The text is pretty much verbatim, but it does skimp on deeper environmental/survival rules, the particulars of detailed overland movement (foraging, forced march, using mounts and vehicles), and that's about it.

### 4. Spellcasting

This chapter covers the rules of casting spells and how the mechanics within spell statblocks work. Unlike some games, there's never really a check to see whether or not you cast the spell — because in D&D you pretty much just say it and it happens. However, the mechanics of each spell — the descriptions of which take up pages 24-31 — are pretty detailed in how a spell works. For example, casting a spell like *bless* is going to effect three of your allies within 30 feet of you, and grants them +1d4 added to their attack rolls to hit an opponent or their saving throws to avoid some detrimental effect cast upon them. This benefit lasts as long as you concentrate on a spell up to 1 minute, so as long as you don't cast a different —concentration— spell, or pass a check whenever you take damage, or avoid getting killed or incapacitated, you can keep the spell's effects going. Meanwhile, a spell like *magic missile* immediately fires darts of energy at up three opponents within 120 feet, dealing 1d4+1 force damage (a special type of damage) with each missile; there's no attack roll to hit the opponent, unlike some other spells, or when using a weapon like a bow or a sword to attack. This section is word-for-word from the Spellcasting chapter in the PHB, though once again the PHB features a few more sidebars (such as one about the Forgotten Realms — Weave explanation for magical power) or additional explanatory pictures (such as for the areas of effect, which get a fun diagram in the PHB). The spells in the Starter Set are pretty much word-for-word from the PHB, too, though admittedly I didn't check every single word to see if they might have been earlier edits.

#### Appendix: Conditions

Referred to in some spells and on the pregenerated character sheets under certain special abilities are things called Conditions, which are like a —rider effect— that you place onto an opponent (or rarely an ally) that invokes

certain mechanical benefits or hindrances for that character so long as they are affected by the condition. For example, a character suffering from the Poisoned condition has disadvantage on all of their attack rolls and ability checks so long as they remain Poisoned. The best part of this Appendix is that it takes up only the very last, back page of the Starter Set Rulebook, meaning that you just flip the book over and you've got a reference for every condition right there. This makes it extremely useful during play. The PHB features an Appendix for the conditions, but it includes several funny illustrations depicting victims of each condition. Spreading it over multiple pages like that, however, reduces some of the utility compared to the presentation here in the Starter Set.

**Lost Mine of Phandelver** The Lost Mine of Phandelver is an exceptional adventure that will take several sessions of play (practically a mini-campaign) to complete, and offers an excellent walk-through of what D&D is all about. There are plenty of opportunities for combat, roleplaying encounters with NPCs and monsters, exploration of wilderness areas (admittedly the weakest link in the adventure), and a heap of advice issued via sidebars for using stealth, bluffing, disguises, and other means of completing quests or defeating opponents without necessarily having to raise your swords or cast combat spells. The adventure follows this simple outline:

- \*Introduction. The party is hired by a dwarf named Gundren to drive a wagon of goods from Neverwinter to Phandalin, where they'll meet him and his bodyguard Sildar and offload the supplies so he can sell them in town.
- \*Part 1: Goblin Arrows. On their way, the party finds Gundren's ride got jacked (i.e. his horse was killed) and they track Sildar down to a goblin hideout (the first of two); the goblins sold Gundren off to someone else.
- \*Part 2: Phandalin. The party heads to the town of Phandalin, and discovers a bunch of bullies have taken the place over. They dispense some Wild West justice and figure out that there are bigger stakes at play.
- \*Part 3: The Spider's Web. The party roams around the wilderness completing sidequests and gathering information on their enemy, soon discovering that Gundren had a map to an abandoned mine at Wave Echo Cave, but his captor, The Black Spider, is planning to take control of it.
- \*Part 4: Wave Echo Cave. The party heads into Wave Echo Cave to save Gundren and stop The Black Spider, but finds the place is a haunted site, hostile to everybody. The GoodWhile fairly linear, this adventure provides a simple framework that actually has a lot going on, and will test the party with encounters of all types. The free-roaming nature of Part 3: The Spider's Web opens up some cool, varied side quests and plenty of opportunity for the players to gain Experience Points (XP) for story-related successes and roleplaying encounters, rather than combat and kill everything in sight• style of play, often known as kick in the door• style. The advice throughout is awesomesauce. The core stuff you need to run the adventure as a Dungeon Master is presented throughout when

and where appropriate, so it's not like you just have a story and are told to tell it to the players; you have all the rules and tools you need to adjudicate gameplay, combat, and roleplaying encounters as they crop up. Some sidebars tell you things like *What the Goblins Know* so if goblins are captured and interrogated you aren't at a loss to figure out how far into the adventure you should have read but didn't before the session. Some other great sidebars and bits of advice:<sup>1</sup> *NPC Party Members*, which explains what to do if and when Sildar (or other NPCs) might join the party for short spurts.<sup>2</sup> Various sidebars or sections detailing how to roleplay various NPCs, especially in Phandalin, which can be almost completely a roleplay area rather than a combat area.<sup>3</sup> Developments for various sections detailing what happens if the players fail, use stealth or disguises, and other methods of handling alternative or off-the-wall tactics. The Bad You know who doesn't get roleplay notes? Gundren, the main guy that hires the party and that is the impetus for the adventure. Same with a green dragon involved in one of the side quests, which is kinda messed up given that this is game of Dungeons & DRAGONS. Although there is a metric ton of roleplay notes throughout, there are some rules from the Dungeon Master's Guide for determining and modifying NPC attitude that are not in the Starter Set, so there's a decent amount of DM fiat in any non-combat encounter. A dick DM is going to play their NPCs as dicks, and there's no mechanics to guide them, just some (admittedly very, very solid) advice. The freeform section of the adventure often sacrifices good exploration-based encounters and rules for *Äœlet*'s just move it along.<sup>4</sup> This leads to a few encounters where the party might get in over the head without much advice for the DM to rein things in, or other areas where exploration involves a string of ability checks with no interesting consequences for failure, retrying, or taking loads of time. Random encounters have existed in D&D for years as a pacing mechanic, and it is all but ignored in this section. These are very minor nitpicks: the adventure is very, very strong overall, and these issues are not going to break it. They are easily ignored or remedied with a bare minimum of work. (We've even talked at length about this in other articles; see the Resources section down below!) **Additional Content** The adventure book closes out with a sampling of critters from the Monster Manual featuring all the creatures and opposing NPCs that crop up in the adventure, and a short list of magic items that the party can come across in their journeys through the various encounter locations. I won't go into great depth here about individual entries, but suffice it to say that this stuff gives you enough to build your own adventures if you want, and is a good sample of the lower-end of the power cur that you'll find in the complete game via the real Monster Manual and Dungeon Master's Guide. (Or the D&D Basic Rules, for that matter.) **Pregenerated Characters** The following pregenerated characters each have a

character sheet in the Starter Set (race/background/class):\*Human Noble Fighter\*Hill dwarf Soldier Cleric\*Lightfoot halfling Criminal Rogue\*High elf Acolyte Wizard\*Human Folk hero FighterYou get to fill in the gender and name, but the backstory, personality traits, and everything else is already filled in for you, complete with explanatory text for all their special abilities, so the lack of character creation info in the Starter Set Rulebook won't hold you back.The back of each sheet includes the backstory in full, a quick explanation of your race, class and background (both how they fit into the world of D&D as well as the Lost Mine of Phandelver adventure), and enough info on leveling up your character to reach Level 5. Sample names are also listed, so you can just pick one and go.Also included is a blank character sheet for photocopying in case you've got players itching to build their own character with the D&D Basic Rules or the full rules from the Player's Handbook.Form (5/5)The D&D Starter Set comes in a cardboard box reminiscent of RPGs of yesteryear and board games of all years? It's sturdy, mine notwithstanding 5 sessions of constant use and then untold sessions being loaded down with the hardcover Player's Handbook and plenty of print outs and looseleaf notes. One corner ripped after I dumped about 10 pounds of books on it by accident, but that's it; not too shabby. If you plan to haul other books with this box, it's great because of the extra room, but if you don't plan to do so, it's just gonna eat up that much more shelf space.Why you're not buying more D&D books to toss in it is beyond me, though.The two books come on thick, glossy paper that's very sturdy; they are stapled in the seams, so they aren't exactly winning awards on the binding, but the sturdiness of the paper suggests this won't really compromise them. In fact, this setup helps the books lay flat so you can ogle the amazing artwork, fantastic Mike Schley map work, and reference rules or adventure material without wrestling with the book. The books are well organized, the table of contents all you need for navigation (except maybe for a few sidebars), and the adventure gives you everything you need to understand up-front, so you're not left wondering what the hell an adventure is, what this one is about, or any other major details, something later adventures (Out of the Abyss, I'm looking at you!) didn't learn from.Character SheetsThe character sheets are thick cardstock, and are also well laid out for easy referencing for the players. I could totally see using them as-is, but they are so nice I'd suggest photocopying them or just downloading the PDF and printing it out. Wizards has released more pregens through Dungeon Masters Guild, and I have a couple in my FREE STUFF! section.The blank character sheet is the generic Adventurer's League version (available here as well), and is on a glossy, thick paper similar to the rulebook and adventure, which makes it absolutely useless for daily use, but it'll last forever, so you can

photocopy the hell outta it for the rest of your natural life if that's what you wanna do. Dice The dice are a solid blue color with white numbers that are large and easy to read. Mine didn't roll particularly well, allowing my players to steamroll through Part 1: Goblin Arrows of Lost Mine of Phandelver, but them's the breaks.

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