

The Dungeon Reality Show: Dungeonball Edition

An Adventure Concept for the 4th Edition of the Dungeons & Dragons Game

By

Philippe-Antoine (ChattyDM) Ménard

Released under the [Creative Commons Share-Alike](#) License

(i.e. Go ahead and share it and/or hack it, but remember to say that it comes from me)

Please visit my blogs at chattydm.net and www.chattystudios.com for more crazy good stuff.

Play testers: Yan Décarie, François Jauvin, Michel Jauvin, Eric Maziade, Marianne Harmignies, Marianne David, Josée-Anik Clermont, Marie-Josée Lalonde, Steve Martin, Martin Richard

I wish to thank the following people who've helped, directly or indirectly with this project: Dave Chalker, Yan Décarie, Graham Poole, Pierre-Marc Giroux, Eric Maziade, Joseph Goodman, Harley Stroh and Wolfgang Baur. Thanks for believing in me guys.

I wish to extend special thanks to chattydm.net reader Brad Gardner. Brad gave excellent suggestions that made the Dungeon Ball game more enjoyable like giving the Chronomancers such fun powers and the 'avoid a penalty by plugging our gear' idea!

Introduction

Shortly after coming back from Gen Con 2008, a friend of mine, who hadn't played D&D in more than 15 years, asked me to show him what D&D 4e was like. I invited a few friends from my D&D campaign to join the fun.

I had decided to run the Kobold Keep adventure found at the end of the Dungeon Master Guide. I found it to be a great introductory adventure. However, as I was getting ready to play, it dawned on me that I could spice the adventure up.

So, borrowing from Goodman Games' X-crawl concept, I made the whole adventure into a reality show where hapless adventurers were forced, through an infernal contract, to participate in some sort of televised Dungeon Crawl. Stealing from all the reality TV shows I had seen, I improvised all kinds of bits to make the adventure feel like it was a TV Show. Sponsored gear, magical cameras, monsters played by low-rate actors, everything was born with this first session.

Thus, the Dungeon Reality Show was born!

The concept succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. We had so much fun that day that we only managed to play one scene of the whole thing.

A few months later, as the Players Handbook 2 was published, we wanted to do a short one-shot game to test the new classes. That's when I decided to revisit the Dungeon Reality Show.

Drawing heavily from Games Workshop's Blood Bowl game, I created a new adventure focused on adventurers getting caught in some sort of hyper violent sporting event.

The feedback I got from players and readers of my blog was phenomenal, so much so that I started a Series of posts about the Dungeon Reality Show concept and wrote a whole adventure based on the 'Dungeon Ball' one shot game I played.

This document brings together all of these posts, edited for the PDF format and sprinkled with some additional design comments.

I hope you enjoy them.

Chapter 1 – The Implied Setting

Somewhere, in the countless worlds of the Astral Sea, resides a millennial Lich whose near limitless resources and intense dislike for boredom lead him to discover an alternate world where entertainment rules supreme and is broadcast over a wide range of non-magical energy frequencies.

The citizen of this world capture, decode and enjoy these energy signals on various technological instruments, preferably sitting down in some plushy furniture and gorging themselves of various types of greasy foods and alcoholic beverages.

One type of entertainment caught the Lich's attention in particular. It was a category of competitive events, often serialized, called "Reality Shows" in the local equivalent of the Common tongue.

Thinking it over, the Lich decided that he could adapt the concept to his low-technology/high-magic corner of the Multiverse. The Astral Sea was awash with bored, powerful and, more importantly, mind-bogglingly rich entities that would likely take to this new form of entertainment like fire does to dried kindling.

Harnessing its considerable resources, the lich went and built a new plane in the Astral Sea. He named it, quite simply enough, the Plane of Games. This plane is filled with countless arenas, theatres, dungeons and anything that the twisted minds of the multiverse could conceive with enough magic and the abundant cheap labour offered by the diabolic allies of the lich, now called 'The Producer'.

When the (very few) detractors of The Producer challenged it by asking who would be crazy or desperate enough to participate in such games, it dismissed them non-nonchalantly, responding that the material world was awash with the best possible source of "willing" participants...

Adventurers!

The Infernal Contract

The easiest way to get a near limitless supply of participants for what was to become the insanely popular Dungeon Reality Show (DSR to the initiate) was to open a chain of taverns aimed at down-on-their-luck adventurers of the material world.

In most civilized areas, adventurers could now count on finding a welcome smile, a warm meal and a tankard of cool frothing ale at *The Unsung Hero*. All of this, free of charge, provided that broke adventurers spun an entertaining tale of their recent adventures and that they signed a bill attesting the exchange of food for 'entertainment services'.

That bill is in fact a contract with a LOT of tiny, hidden, magically encrypted script. Yet it is still legally binding in most courts of Astral Law. The Contract stipulates that the adventurers can be transported, at any point in their lives, and without prior notice, to the Plane of Games to participate in a series of deadly events that comprise one 'episode' of DSR.

Upon successful completion of the games, any living participants can be discharged of further participation, unless they agree to sign a new contract for a full 'season' of one of the many parallel shows that DSR has spawned such as 'Can you Eat a Whole Troll Before You Explode?' or "A visit to Wight Castle".

It's important to note that the rewards for successfully completing an episode of one of those shows largely make up for the risks one takes in participating in the first place. Plus The Producer offers some very affordable life insurance policies that make participating in shows more lucrative (and survivable) than exploring lost ruins or following some insignificant quest for the local Needy Professional Consultant.

Chapter 2 - The Set

There's no business like...

When you throw your PCs into the Plane of Games, you want to make sure to describe the barely contained chaos that is the 'set' of the show. The PCs are teleported right in the middle of people shouting, sets being built or moved, makeup rooms, etc.

The first interactive elements I have thrown at PC when they are introduced to the Plane of Games is some sort of big-haired, loud, rhinestone-covered humanoid holding a microphone-equivalent device. The Announcer is the link between the PCs and all the hidden people running the whole show.

Announcer: "So good to see you! How does it feel to have been selected for tonight's show?"

PC: "Erm, where are we?"

Announcer: "There you have it folks, playing the "I'm lost and confused" card to destabilize the competition. Our contestants are getting shrewder every season!"

The idea is to weave fantasy elements with what we know of the world of television.

Drop some half-naked elves with black makeup complaining to their "agent" that they aren't allowed to show the true depth of their completely original heroic drow concept. Describe how floating, glowing orbs with numbers on them go around into people's faces for "close ups". Mention Beholders having coffee with Red Dragons, reminiscing about the good old times when you actually could get killed fighting adventurers.

Go wild! It's TV, everything's possible!

The goal of the DM is to get the players to go from expectant stage to the WTF! one and then ease them into the "I think this is going to be fun" stage.

Weapons of Mass Advertising

Announcer: "Okay guys, we're done with the sound bites, so head up to the Sponsor's tents just over there and pick up your free gear"!

A very successful gimmicks to get players into the whole Dungeon Reality Show vibe is to give each PC a piece of magical equipment they can use (usually 1-3 levels higher than they are). Once the items are chosen, the PCs are told that if they plug the manufacturer of said items to the Vision-Orbs, the show's Chronomancers will alter the flow of time to allow an extra action with the item.

In other words, players get one free action point, using the sponsored item, once in the session as long as they mention the item's name and key feature!

This idea should motivate players to try for their best [Sham-Wow guy](#) impressions to get their free action.

Here are a few examples:

- *Feroze's Tuning Songblade - It stays sharp so you won't*
 - *As this blade channels your bardic magic, the blade unleashes a wail that leaves your foes senseless.*
- *Kadri's Reckless Scimitar - We hit where it hurts*
 - *Some fighters favour force over accuracy-this weapon is for them.*
- *String Propelled Flameburst, by Firat - The best danger is the distant danger*
 - *This ranged weapon packs a fiery surprise.*
- *Volkan Wand of Swarming Silverware - World Leader in Sprayable Cutlery*
 - *The invisible forces you wield through this wand strike with deadly power.*
- *Imperial Göker's Lucky Starr - We Trust in our Lucky Starr*
 - *Luck favours the bold-and the wielder of this blade.*
- *Nergis Replay - The blade that strikes back*
 - *You can use this weapon to attack with preternatural speed.*
- *XURXO - The Inescapable, Relentless Pole arm*
 - *This weapon grows increasingly eager to strike those you have trouble hitting.*

Of course, in some games, the PCs will miss with their free action. In such cases, if you feel generous, have the Chronomancers stop everything, send techs on the set to “check the batteries”, show the hapless PC how to properly use the item and lecture them on the importance of looking good for the Vision-Orbs.

Once this is done, have the PC try again. If they manage to fail once more, have a NPC whisper in their microphone “He's hopeless, we'll fix it in post production” and move on to the next PC.

On Scene NPC lines

Another element that I introduced to the concept, especially in the first one I played where Kobolds were trying to stop PCs from passing through their room, was to voice the opponents as third-rate actors with inflated egos. When a PC impales a monster with an awesome critical hit (replayed 3 times to the viewers), I have the monster scream “call my agent” or go into some sort of [Shatneresque](#) death scene.

Peppering every few rounds of each scene with quips and complaints that remind everyone that the whole thing is a low-quality show helps maintain the silly ambiance that this type of game thrives on.

Chapter 3- Sample Adventure

The Dungeon Reality Show: Dungeon Ball Edition

This adventure is for a party of 5-6 level 2 player characters .

The adventure divided in 5 scenes:

1. PCs get whisked to the set, given weapons and told their task.
2. The PCs must play a Dungeon Ball game against a team of Kobolds
3. Half-Time Show: The PCs must entertain the crowd, various undead may be sent to get them off the stage
4. Sudden Death Overtime: During the second half of the game, the dreaded Zomboni makes an appearance and all hell breaks loose.
5. Going Home

Adjusting for higher level PCs: While initially designed for low level PCs, you can adjust the adventure to pretty much any Heroic Tiered level by changing 3 elements:

- Choose an opposing team from a humanoid race whose level range within 1-3 levels of the PCs.
- Give the ball the defence scores of a minion of the party's level
- Change the Zomboni's level to the new party level's +3-5 (or create a new Elite/Solo monster based on the same concept)

Scene 1: We're not in Greyhawk anymore

Goals:

- Throw players headfirst in the DRS experience
- Equip players with new Sponsored Magic Items
- Inform players of the adventure's objective.

Using elements described in the previous two chapters, set a scene that brings the PCs onto the middle of playing field of some sort of American football stadium. Describe how they find themselves in the middle of a large grassy field (or whatever environment you chose) surrounded by a horde of screaming creatures of all breeds and races standing on the stone steps of this huge amphitheatre.

A short, fat and loud halfling/goblin/Beholder comes to the PCs with some sort of rod with a foamy/knobby end. He tries to interview the PCs as if they were veterans of this sort of event. Pile on camera references and inane announcer chatter.

The key messages to deliver through all the announcer's chatter:

- PCs are told that they are the lucky contestant of this week's edition of something called The Dungeon Reality Show.
- They are expected to play (and survive) a game of Dungeon Ball against the local champions: the Whiteclaws Rime Riders.

If questioned about the rules of the game, have the NPC promise that everything will be explained before the game starts.

If any PC actually manages to come out of shock long enough to mount any kind of objections, the host will happily say that participation to this event is entirely voluntary and that participants are free to

Scene 2 - Play Da Game!

Goals

- PCs must play and survive a game of Dungeon Ball
- Explore creative ways to use 4e combat rules
- Try to pull a few fast ones on the Ref!

Draw the Dungeon Ball field: 26X15 divided in the middle, with the goal zone being 1X15. You can also use the game board of a very famous Fantasy Football game. Feel free to use any other types of battle maps that would be fun to use for such a game.

All players get a bonus power:

Keep the Sponsors Happy

Minor Action, Encounter

Effect: The Referee automatically fails to spot the PCs next attack with a Product Placement weapon or implement.

Special: In order to use this power, the PC must plug the product being used as part of the minor action.

The opposing team is composed of:

- 2 Kobold Hurlers (Replace Stealth with Athletics+5)
- 3 Kobolds Dragonshields (Replace Stealth with Athletics +8)

You can modify the composition of the team to reflect the party's level and your personal preferences.

The Ball is a Kruthik Hatchling affected with a permanent slow effect. Take note that it deals 2 points of damage whenever a player finishes its turn adjacent to it (or when it's being carried).

Place a referee on the board (non-combatant, 1 hp, move 6, initiative+5, Perception +5) near the middle line. During play it stays out of the way but remains on the board.

Flip a coin, the losing team starts as defence and sets up on the board first. All players of a team must be placed on the same side of the board, behind the middle line. Once the defensive team is deployed, the offence sets up.

Roll initiative for all individual players (including monsters), the ball and the referee.

The goal of the game is to score the most points within one hour of real time playing or scoring 3 more goals than the opposite team. A point is scored when a player crosses the goal line with the ball in hands or catches the ball when standing behind the goal line.

The game is played like a combat encounter with a few variants. Here are the various game-related action that players can do during their turns.

Picking up the ball = Minor Action, Dexterity or Strength attack vs Reflex of the ball (15).

Running with the ball: Move Action. No rolls necessary, ignore the "drag a grabbed creature" rule.

Passing the ball (i.e. landing it in the targeted square): Std Action, Acrobatics/Dex check vs DC equal to distance thrown squares. On a miss, ball lands in a random (1d8) square adjacent to target, roll again if square is occupied.

Kicking the ball: Std Action, Athletics/Str check vs DC equal to distance thrown squares. On a miss, ball lands in a random (1d8) square adjacent to target, roll again if square is occupied.

Catching the ball = Immediate Reaction: Dex attack vs ball's reflex defence (15), on a miss, ball

tumbles in a random (1d8) adjacent square, roll again if square is occupied.

Intercepting an in-flight ball = Same as catching except: must be in path of ball and have immediate action available.

Dropping the ball: Free Action. When a ball drops, it tumbles in a random (1d8) adjacent square, roll again if square is occupied. A carrier automatically drops the ball whenever it is immobilized, Knocked Prone, Stunned and Dazed.

Opportunity Tackle: Whenever a player could make an attack of opportunity, a tackle attack (Str vs Fort, Hit: Target falls prone) can be made instead.

Running Tackle: Like a Bull Rush, except that tackler has the choice of pushing target 1 square or knocking it prone.

The Ball: On its initiative, the ball will attack its carrier. If free, the ball will move (max 2, it is slowed) toward the centre of the field.

If the ball gets killed, the offending player gets a penalty (see below), and a new ball materializes at the last spot it occupied.

When a goal is scored, the scoring team gets 1 point, becomes the Defensive team and sets up as described above.

Also, the scoring team chooses one of the following scoring bonuses:

- One player spends a Healing Surge
- One player recovers an Encounter Power
- Star Power! One Player gains a +1 bonus to all d20 rolls until another goal is scored or the game ends

While armour, weapons and implements are allowed on the field, using an attack or a power against an opponent (or having a pet, conjuration or summoned creature do it) is not allowed during the game...

...unless you can manage to slip one past the ref!

Whenever a player decides to make use any attack powers (including any basic attacks and attacks by pets, conjurations, etc), the Referee spots the attack and calls for a penalty (see below) unless the attack roll is higher than the Referee's Passive perception (15). This applies to **all** rolls of an area attack, those are hard to hide).

The use of 'aid another' is a good way to help a teammate land a good one on an opponent without getting spotted.

The Referee can also be distracted with a Bluff check or any creative use of other skills (DC 15). When distracted, the Ref will ignore fouls until the end of the distractor's next turn.

The use of Sponsored Items can avoid this, see above.

If a penalty is called on a player, that player gets targeted by the Chronomancer's '**You're in Timeout**' Power (Immediate Reaction, when a penalty is called on a creature ; +6 vs. Will; Hit: the creature is teleported to the sidelines).

The timed-out player must stay in the sidelines until the end of its next turn. He is allowed to talk to teammates, argue with the ref, spot fouls from the opposing team, etc. However if the player tries to return to the field, he must avoid being spotted by the Chronomancer (Passive Perception 15) or be targeted by the **I Said Sit Down Now!** Power (immediate reaction; the creature leaves the penalty box early; +8 vs. Will; Hit: the creature is teleported back to the sidelines and is dazed (save ends))

Scene 3 - The Half Time Show

Scene goals

- Perform a skill challenge that simulates a stage show
- Introduce combat elements to the challenge if a skill check is missed.
- Allow players to find creative uses for their skills.

Once the time or score limit has been reached, a siren sounds and the following announcement is heard throughout the stadium:

“Attention all personnel and participants, clear the field, I repeat, clear the field. Prepare for conjuration of Stage in 10, 9, 8...”

While slowly counting down out loud, ask what the PCs are doing. Feel free to stretch the moment as much as you think your players can handle. If they ask, tell them that the remaining kobold players are running off the field like their lives depended on it.

It is assumed that players will also get out of the way.

At the end of the 10 seconds, a huge stage (take a 4X8 and a 2X8 dungeon tile to create a 6X8 'stage') materializes 5' over the middle of the field and drops noisily, crushing whatever you decided to leave there. The Stage is 5' high and can be climbed with a DC15 Athletics check. Add a set of stairs to allow PCs to climb on it more easily.

The announcer will come to the PCs and announce that their next task will be to continue to entertain the crowd as the performers of the half-time show. If asked what they have to do, the announcer will shrug, saying “You’re the stars, you decide! As long as you are on this stage in 10 minutes, anything else is in your capable hands”.

The Half-time show is a free-form Skill Challenge where the PCs must think of ways to impress a crowd of several thousands. While setting up, ask your players for any props they would like to have onstage (or near it) to help them. Be generous and help them if they have a hard time thinking of something.

Examples:

- Paper Lanterns that explode in a shower of sparks when hit
- A goblin zeppelin filled with explosive gas
- Human Sized xylophone
- Drums made of Goblin Heads
- Dwarf Tossing kits

You get the picture...

Once they are ready, start the Challenge.

Scene 4 - The Zomboni strikes!

Scene Goals:

- Provide another occasion to play some more Dungeon Ball
- Introduce the Final challenge of the Session: The Zomboni!

Depending on how much fun you and the players have had playing dungeon ball, you can opt to play the second half of the game. If/when everyone has had enough, have the PCs and kobold set up as usual and then make the following announcement thunder.

“Oh no, we’re running out of time! The game is over and the cleanup crew will show up momentarily. Will our heroes survive the ZOMBONI?”

All remaining kobolds are instantly killed by bolts of lightning coming from the sky (Those darn produceamancers and rise as Rotting Zombies who attack immediately. the omboni also materializes on one end of the field and attacks everything!

Roll initiative!

Bonegrinder Zomboni		Level 5 Elite Brute
Large Natural Animate		XP 400
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +3; tremorsense 5	
HP 156; Bloodied 78		
AC 17; Fortitude 18, Reflex 18, Will 16 (Can be targeted by Turn Undead powers)		
Saving Throws + 2		
Immune: Gaze		
Speed 4		
Action Points 1		
☠ Skull Cannon (Standard; at-will) Necrotic		
Ranged 10/20; +8 vs AC; 1d10+4 damage plus 5 ongoing necrotic damage (save ends)		
⬇ Bonegrind Engulf (Standard; at-will)		
The Bonegrinder Zamboni attacks one or two Medium or smaller targets; +6 vs Reflex (automatically hits an immobilized creature); Hit: 3d8+4 damage, the target is grabbed and pulled into the Zamboni’s space; the target is dazed and takes ongoing 5 damage until it escapes the grab. A creature that escapes the grab shifts to a square of its choosing adjacent to the Zomboni. The Zomboni can move normally while creatures are engulfed within it.		
↔ Ghoulish Blast (Standard; encounter) Necrotic		
Close Blast 5; +6 vs. Reflex; 2d6+4 Necrotic Damage and the target is immobilized (Save Ends) Recharges when an engulfed creature dies.		
↔ Raise Cleaning Crew (Standard; encounter)		
Burst 4. Place 4 Zombie Rotters and 4 Decrepit Skeleton in empty squares within the burst.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages None	
Skills n/a		
Str 14 (+4)	Dex 18 (+6)	Wis 12 (+3)
Con 18 (+6)	Int 10 (+2)	Cha 8 (+1)
Equipment None		

Tactics: The Zomboni will fire it’s skull canon while advancing toward the largest group of creature. Once close, it will fire its ghoulish blast and the try to ‘eat’ as many creatures as possible. It will summon it’s “cleaning crew” to recharge its blast.

If PCs try to leave the field, they meet an invisible force barrier that prevents escape (including by teleportation). The barrier disappears when the Zomboni (or the PCs) is(are) destroyed.

Scene 5 – There's No Place like Home

Survivors of the last scene, if there are any, are cheered by the whole stadium.

The announcer comes and presents the PCs with a large trophy made of precious metal and gemstones (it's worth the value of a magic item 4 levels over the party's level).

They are also offered two choices:

- They can chose to put an end to their contractual obligations to the Dungeon Reality Show and return home
- They can decide to become regulars of the show and sign for a full season (that usually means leaving the PC's current campaign).

After that, the PCs are told that they can keep their sponsored items and are returned to their home plane (if that's what they wanted).

Roll Credits

Designer Notes

At first, the adventure started with the half-time show. The PCs were thrust into the skill challenge with no preparation. The show occurred while a game of ball was going on between skeletons and zombies. While some aspects of it were hilarious, players weren't sure how to act and mostly focused on fighting the undead minions.

Also, I had made a game rule that should the ball be killed, the Zomboni scene would start automatically (skipping the 'playing the game' scene). Since this happened in both playtests, I decided to rework the whole adventure into it's present format.

Playing dungeon ball is a lot of fun. It demonstrates that the 4e rule set can accommodate various fast-paced mini-games outside of straight up combat. I will surely investigate other types of game that we can play with these rules.

Phil (ChattyDM) Ménard