

THE WISDOM OF GYGAX

Rather than just include these bits of gaming philosophy from the 1st Edition ADnD books in small doses, I've decided to record them here by themselves for the general edification. While all of us realized Gary Gygax was the voice of D&D, who among us, back in 1979, realized that Gary was also such a curmudgeon? Re-reading the DMG I picture him as Vince Lombardi, George Patton, Ben Kenobi, Gandalf, and Ambrose Bierce all rolled into one. I think he deserves his legendary status, not only for creating the game, but for the eloquence used in describing and defending the concepts behind the core system. One has to thank him not only for the game but for exposing us to many of the authors who were his inspiration (Robert E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft, and many others) and also for elevating our vocabularies! It was a challenge to keep up. I remember reading the DMG with a dictionary close by at all times. Versions may change, but these maxims remained burned in my gaming memory. As long as I DM, this is the way I'll do it.

The game is the thing, and certain rules can be distorted or disregarded altogether in favor of play.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 9

Know the game systems, and you will know how and when to take upon yourself the ultimate power. To become the final arbiter, rather than the interpreter of the rules, can be a difficult and demanding task, and it cannot be undertaken lightly, for your players expect to play *this* game, not one made up on the spot. By the same token, they are playing the game the way *you*, their DM, imagines and creates it. Remembering that the game is greater than its parts, and knowing all of the parts, you will have overcome the greatest part of the challenge of being a referee. Being a true DM requires cleverness and imagination which no set of rule books can bestow.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 9

Read and become familiar with the contents of this work and the one written for players, learn your monsters, and spice things up with some pantheons of super-powerful beings. Then put your judging and refereeing ability into the creation of your own personal milieu, and you have donned the mantle of Dungeon Master. Welcome to the exalted ranks of the overworked and harassed, whose cleverness and imagination are all too often unappreciated by cloddish characters whose only thought in life is to loot, pillage, slay, and who fail to appreciate the hours of preparation which went into the creation of what they aim to destroy as cheaply and quickly as possible.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 9

As a DM you must live by the immortal words of the sage who said: "Never give a sucker an even break." Also, don't be a sucker for your players, for you'd better be sure they follow sage advice too. As the DM, you have to prove in every game that you are still the best. This book is dedicated to helping assure that you are.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 9

MOVING SILENTLY: Do NOT inform the thief that his or dice score indicated a lack of success at his attempted stealth, if that is the case. He or she *thinks* the movement is silent, and the monster or other victim will inform the character of his or her misapprehension soon enough.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 19

HIDE IN SHADOWS: As is plainly sated in the Player's Handbook, this is NEVER possible under direct (or even indirect) observation. If the thief insists on trying, allow the attempt and throw dice, but don't bother to read them, as the fool is as obvious as a coal pile in a ballroom. Likewise, if a hidden thief attempts movement while under observation, the proverbial jig is up for him or her.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 19

The game features humankind for a reason. It is the most logical basis in an illogical game. From a design aspect it provides the sound of groundwork. From a standpoint of creating the campaign milieu it provides the most readily usable assumptions. From a participation approach it is the only method, for all players are, after all is said and done, human, and it allows them the role with which most are most desirous and capable of identifying with. From all views then it is enough fantasy to assume a swords & sorcery cosmos, with impossible professions and make-believe magic. To adventure amongst the weird is fantasy enough without becoming that too! Consider also that every Dungeon Master worthy of that title is continually at work expanding his or her campaign milieu. The game is not merely a meaningless dungeon and an urban base around which is plopped the dreaded wilderness. Each of you must design a *world*, piece by piece, as if a jigsaw puzzle were being hand crafted, and each new section must fit perfectly the pattern of the other pieces. Faced with such a task all of us need all of the aid and assistance we can get. Without such help the sheer magnitude of the task would force most of us to throw up our hands in despair.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 21

One minute rounds are devised to offer the maximum of choice with a minimum of complication. This allows the DM and the players the best of both worlds. The system assumes much activity during the course of each round. Envision, if you will, a fencing, boxing, or karate match. During the course of one minute of such competition, there are numerous attacks which are unsuccessful, feints, maneuvering, and so forth. During a one-minute melee round many attacks are made, but some are mere feints, while some are blocked or parried. One, or possibly several, have the chance to actually score damage. For such chances, the dice are rolled, and if the "to-hit" number is equaled or exceeded, the attack was successful, but otherwise it too was avoided, blocked, parried or whatever. Damage scored to characters or certain monsters is actually not substantially physical-- a mere nick or scratch until the last handful of hit points are considered-- is a matter of wearing away the endurance, the luck, the magical protections. With respect to most monsters such damage is, in fact, more physically substantial, although as with adjustments in armor class rating for speed and agility, there are also similar additions in hit points. So while a round of combat is not a continuous series of attacks, it is neither just a single blow and counter-blow affair. The opponents spar and move, seeking an opportunity to engage when an opening in the enemy's guard presents itself.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 61

As has been often pointed out, AD&D is a game wherein participants create personae and operate them in the milieu created and designed, in whole or in part, by the Dungeon Master and shared by all, including the DM, in imagination and enthusiasm. The central theme of this game is the interaction of these personae, whether those of the players or those of the DM, with the milieu, including that part represented by the characters and creatures personified by the DM. This interaction results in adventures and deeds of daring. The heroic fantasy which results is a blend of the dramatic and the comic, the foolish and the brave, stirring excitement and grinding boredom. It is a game in which the continuing epic is the most meaningful portion. It becomes an entity in which at least some of the characters seem to be able to survive for an indefinite time, and characters who have shorter spans of existence are linked one to the other by blood or purpose. These personae put up with the frustrations, the setbacks, and the tragedies because they aim for and can reasonably expect to achieve adventure, challenge, wealth, glory and more. If player characters are not of the same stamp as Conan, they also appreciate that they are in effect writing their own adventures and creating their own legends, not merely reliving those of someone else's creation.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 80

[Because] the player character is all-important, he or she must always-- or nearly always-- have a chance, no matter how small, a chance of somehow escaping what otherwise would be inevitable destruction. Many will not be able to do so, but the escapes of those who do are what the fabric of the game is created upon. These adventures become the twice-told tales and legends of the campaign. The fame (or

infamy) of certain characters gives luster to the campaign and enjoyment to player and DM alike as the parts grow and are entwined to become a fantastic history of a never-was world where all of us would wish to live if we could.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 80

Someone once sharply criticized the concept of the saving throw as ridiculous. Could a man chained to a rock, they asked, save himself from the blast of a red dragon's breath? Why not?, I replied. If you accept fire-breathing dragons, why doubt the chance to reduce the damage sustained from such a creature's attack? Imagine that the figure, at the last moment, of course, manages to drop beneath the licking flames, or finds a crevice in which to shield his or her body, and succeeds in finding a way to be free of the fetters. Why not? The mechanics of combat or the details of the injury caused by some horrible weapon are not key to heroic fantasy and adventure games. It is the character, how he or she becomes involved in the combat, how he or she somehow escapes--or fails to escape-- the mortal threat which is important to enjoyment and longevity of the game.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 80

It is quite unreasonable to assume that as a character gains levels of ability in his or her class that a corresponding gain in actual ability to sustain physical damage takes place. It is preposterous to state such an assumption, for if we are to assume that a man is killed by a sword thrust which does 4 hit points of damage, we must similarly assume that a hero could, on the average, withstand five such thrusts before being slain! Why, then, the increase in hit points? Because these reflect both the actual physical ability of the character to withstand damage-- as indicated by constitution bonuses-- and a commensurate increase in such areas as skill in combat and similar life-or-death situations, the "sixth sense" which warns the individual of some otherwise unforeseen events, sheer luck, and the fantastic provisions of magical protections and/or divine protection. Therefore, constitution affects both actual ability to withstand physical punishment hit points (physique) and the immeasurable areas which involve the sixth sense and luck (fitness).

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 82

While it is more "realistic" for clerics to study holy writings, pray, chant, practice self-discipline, etc. to gain experience, it would not make a playable game roll along. Similarly, fighters should be exercising, riding, smiting pelts, tilting at the lists, and engaging in weapons practice of various sorts to gain expertise (experience); magic-users should be deciphering old scrolls, searching ancient tomes, experimenting alchemically, and so forth; while thieves should spend their off-hours honing their skills,

"casing" various buildings, watching potential victims, and carefully planning their next "job." All very realistic but conducive to non-game boredom!

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 85

Experience points are merely an indicator of the character's progress towards greater proficiency in his or her chosen profession. UPWARD PROGRESS IS NEVER AUTOMATIC. Just because Nell Nimblefingers, Rogue of the Thieves' Guild has managed to acquire 1,251 experience points does NOT mean that she suddenly becomes Nell Nimblefingers the Footpad. The gaining of sufficient experience points is necessary to indicate that a character is *eligible* to gain a level of experience, but the actual award is a matter for you, the DM, to decide.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 86

Unlike most games, AD&D is an ongoing collection of episode adventures, each of which constitutes a session of play. You, as the Dungeon Master, are about to embark on a new career, that of universe maker. You will order the universe and direct the activities in each game, becoming one of the elite group of campaign referees referred to as DMs in the vernacular of AD&D. What lies ahead will require the use of all of your skill, put a strain on your imagination, bring your creativity to the fore, test your patience, and exhaust your free time. Being a DM is not a matter to be taken lightly.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 86

It is no exaggeration to state that the fantasy world builds itself, almost as if the milieu actually takes on a life and reality of its own. This is not to say that an occult power takes over. It is simply that the interaction of judge and players shapes the bare bones of the initial creation into something far larger. It becomes fleshed out, and adventuring breathes life into a make-believe world. Similarly, the geography and history you assign to the world will suddenly begin to shape the character of states and peoples. Details of former events will become obvious from mere outlines of the past course of things. Surprisingly, as the personalities of player characters and non-player characters in the milieu are bound to develop and become almost real, the nations and states and events of a well-conceived AD&D world will take on even more of their own direction and life. What this all boils down to is that once the campaign is set in motion, you will become more of a recorder of events, while the milieu seemingly charts its own course!

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 87

As the DM you are game moderator, judge, jury, and supreme deity.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 102

In many situations it is correct and fun to have the players dice for such things as melee hits or saving throws. However, it is your right to control the dice at any time and roll dice for the players. You might wish to do this to keep them from knowing some specific fact... You do have every right to overrule the dice at any time if there is a particular course of events that you would like to have occur.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 110

There will be times in which the rules do not cover a specific action that a player will attempt. In such situations, instead of being forced to make a decision, take the option to allow the dice to control the situation. This can be done by assigning a reasonable probability to an event and then letting the player dice to see if he or she can make the percentage. You can weigh the dice in any way so as to give the advantage to either the player or non-player character, whichever seems more correct and logical to you while being fair to both sides.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 110

Now and then a player will die through no fault of his own. He or she will have done everything correctly, taken every reasonable precaution, but still the freakish roll of the dice will kill the character. In the long run you should let such things pass as the players will kill more than one opponent with their own freakish rolls at some later time. Yet you do have the right to arbitrate the situation. You can rule that the player, instead of dying, is knocked unconscious, loses a limb, is blinded in one eye or invoke any reasonably severe penalty that still takes into account what the monster has done. It is very demoralizing to the players to lose a cared-for-player character when they have played well. When they have done something stupid or not taken precautions, then let the dice fall where they may! Again, if you have available sample means of raising characters from the dead, even death is not too severe; remember, however, the constitution-based limit to resurrections. Yet one die roll that you should NEVER tamper with is the SYSTEM SHOCK ROLL to be raised from the dead. If a character fails that roll, which he or she should make him or herself, he or she is FOREVER DEAD. There MUST be some final death or immortality will take over and again the game will become boring because the player characters will have 9+ lives each!

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 110

It is the spirit of the game, not the letter of the rules, which is important. Never hold to the letter written, nor allow some barracks room lawyer to force quotations from the

rule books upon you, if it goes against the obvious intent of the game. As you hew the line with respect to conformity to major systems and uniformity of play in general, also be certain the game is mastered by you and not by your players. Within the broad parameters given in the Advanced Dungeons and Dragons volumes, you are creator and final arbiter by ordering things as they should be, the game as a whole first, your campaign next, and your participants thereafter, you will be playing Advanced Dungeons and Dragons as it was meant to be. May you find as much pleasure in doing so as much as the rest of us do.

-- Dungeon Master's Guide, 1st Edition, page 230