

OBSERVATIONS FROM A VETERAN GAMER

by Sonny Scott

I have been involved with playing the **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®** Game since 1977, and over the years I have developed some views I feel will be of interest to the other members of the **RPGA™** Network.

To me, there is only one firm rule in running or playing an **ADVANCED DUNGEON & DRAGONS®** game — it must be *fun*; for the DM as well as for the players. If the game isn't fun, then not only will it be a short game, but over a period of time you will find fewer and fewer people taking the time to come over and play.

The Basics

First of all, you need an experienced, informed DM. If the DM doesn't know the material and the game rules, the action will rapidly bog down while the DM looks up rules or reads the material. A good DM tries to "KISS" (Keep It Simple, Stupid). Don't try to add extra rules, special magic, or new and different tables. Try to avoid using monsters you are not familiar with. Unusual things can be fun, but too many of them can slow down the flow of play.

You may be tempted at first to add super-powerful NPCs or opponents, but resist the inclination. Far from giving you more control over the situation, you will find that the more power you add to your game, the more out of control it will

become. Like any world, the stronger your opponents and friends become, the stronger you will have to be in order to survive. In the end, someone will become so powerful that no one else can be tolerated to exist in the same world.

Participation

Make sure everyone gets a chance to be in on the action. To keep everyone interested, keep the parties small and friendly. I have run games with anywhere from one player to twenty, and I feel that groups of four to eight make for the best quality gaming. Groups of less than four force the players to be very creative, or play two characters. When a player is forced to divide his attention between two characters, he does not have time to enjoy what is happening in the game. Conversely, groups of more than eight leave the players with too much time on their hands between moves.

Players hate to wait. This can be a problem in problem in smaller groups if the DM allows single members of the group to wander around without the others. It has been my experience that the players have more fun if they can all stay involved. No one likes to wait and do nothing while the DM resolves issues for another player. At times it is important to let the players pursue solo activities, but try to keep the solo play outside the regular gaming sessions as much as possible, and let the games involve *all* the players.

There is some argument that if players break off, things will happen to them that the rest of the group will not know about. If you think the non-participating players will not find out what happened to the player who went off by himself, I've got some land I want to talk to you about.

For the DM

In closing, I want to touch on DM enjoyment. When you involve numerous tables and charts, you do not have enough time to interact with players. Make sure you give your NPCs different qualities and lifestyles so you can encourage interaction with the players. At first you may feel funny trying to sound like a girl or an old man, but try anyway. Not only will the game become more enjoyable for everyone, but you may learn it's fun to be some else.

When you set up your game, try looking around your everyday life for people to base your NPCs on. Watch and listen to older people and merchants. Watch your friends in school and try to learn what makes people do what they do. Then apply it to your game. NPCs are more fun if they behave like real people.

If you use a few of the suggestions I've made today, I think you will find that you and your friends will get much more enjoyment out of your games. I know it is not always possible to implement every new idea, but try out any you think will be useful to you.

Good luck and good gaming!

