



Making monsters meaningful

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Too often DMs complain that monsters are too weak, spells and magic too strong, or players too clever. What is actually stated in most such cases is that the DM is a Dungeon *Milquetoast* rather than Master. Players plan and cooperate, so naturally they tend to utilize all their strengths and abilities collectively, thus, defeating monsters and DM alike. The classic, unthinking reaction of DMs so abused is to create the "Monty Haul" campaign—"I really wanted my players to walk all over everything, even me!"—or the "Killer Campaign" game—"It's them or me, and none of those bastards will survive to tell the tale!"

The game is supposed to be overseen by a disinterested judge, referee, and moderator. The DM creates the milieu, sets the stage, and then observes and relates information. The important part usually overlooked is the active (but still impartial) role of the DM as the force behind each and every creature encountered not otherwise represented by a player. Every NPC and monster encountered is a lifeless shell until filled by the DM's vital activity. Too often the vitality given is cursory, stiff, unthinking, and lackluster. The NPCs and monsters are then easy marks or else so powerful as to be impervious to PC attacks and instant death-dealers in return. This is unfair to players, of course, for both cheat them of the exciting suspense of the game. It also cheats the DM out of the most enjoyable aspect of play-active role assumption. If each DM knew his or her monster and NPCs, then the game would begin to resemble what it is meant to be.

Intelligence is the key factor in determining what course a monster (whether singular or plural) will follow. Mindless creatures act mindlessly. If they are hungry, they attack until food is obtained and

hunger is satisfied. Pain receptors are probably so inefficient as to be immaterial. Attack until death is a likely course. Similarly, stupid creatures will be likely to attack with total confidence. Let us consider certain animals, pack and otherwise, as *cunning*. Wolves, wolverines, giant weasels, etc. will not always fight until dead. It is up to the DM to use his or her intelligence to determine how such monsters will react in any given situation.

The other key to monster behavior is alignment. Chaotic creatures do not follow orders well, but lawful ones do. Chaotic creatures tend towards self far more than lawful ones do. This is *not* to imply that chaotic humanoids such as gnolls, for instance, will not operate as a unit. Training and/or self-preservation encourage such cooperation. It is to imply that a frost giant might well hurl a boulder into a melee involving his ogre servants and attacking humans.

Monsters able to use attack forms of superior nature will tend to do so if they have sufficient intelligence, and if opportunity permits. Missile weapons are a good example. Not only will javelins, spears, etc. be thrown, but bolts and arrows loosed. Even oil will be hurled by monsters aware of the effects of fire. All this can then be applied to more powerful monsters. Potions, scrolls, rings, wands, and so on will certainly be employed by monsters possessing them—assuming ability, of course. Trained, intelligent, coordinated attack and defense modes are stressed in many works, even in modules. Still, DMs blithely ignore this. Their monsters stand for the slaughter and the message goes for naught.

When you establish wilderness encounter areas or dungeon complexes, place monsters with an eye towards their alignment and organization. Thus, all goblins in an area will probably be allied and cooperative. Gnolls need not be organized and groups will probably be competitive, if not antagonistic. The goblins and gnolls might be mutually hostile-unless they see a serious threat from attacking adventurers. In both groups there will be leaders and some defense plans.

Consider a room with two doors. If the defenders can use the second door to send parts of their force to strike the attacking party in the rear, they will certainly do so if they are of even "low" intelligence. Nets, pits, rocks to hurl, and other devices are all logical parts of a planned defense possible to all humanoid and similar monsters. In short, as DM you should plan for the monsters according to their mentality and then play them according to plan.

Of course, players will still overcome monsters, but not "on the cheap" anymore. Players who are rash will actually be defeated fairly often. This should put more challenge in the campaign and make the whole more fun and interesting. The DM is the one who will benefit the most, both from the enjoyment of playing so many roles intently and from the overall rise in the level of his or her campaign.

Another useful and reasonable option for DMs is the combining of monsters with guard beasts or monsters or with other intelligent monsters. Such cooperative groups are 'dealt with in the *Monster Manual* and shown in most modules. Despite this, they are too seldom used. When played, the DM usually gives little thought to the actual strengths of such associations. Lowly kobolds with even one giant weasel are far more powerful than without such a beast. Whether the weasel is kept as a guard at the entrance to their lair or as an unexpected force to be released upon attackers, it is a multi-dice monster, so attackers can strike but once each against it. Meanwhile the kobolds can organize, fire missiles, etc.

A single monster or group of like, weak monsters is/are far more vulnerable than a combined force. In terms of medieval warfare, a balanced force needs missile, foot, and mounted (mobile) arms which act in concert in order to be effective on the field of battle. The exact role of each arm might vary from situation to situation, but the principle is the same. Terrain might negate the usefulness of one arm—or else mitigate the lack of it. Goblins can field a balanced force of missile troops, worgs and worg-mounted individuals, and regular infantry to form the solid core around which to rally and reform. They might actually be allied with nearby kobolds (thus fielding more troops as unexpected reinforcement, either way) or have a small group of bugbears living with them (as protectors in

return for free lodgings and food). (See *Dungeon Masters Guide*, pages 104-106.)

Another combination of monsters is possible where the weaker is aware of and intelligent enough to use the stronger without the latter's knowledge or consent. For instance, an otyugh dwells in a nearby garbage chamber. The monsters—orcs, let us suppose—lead attackers to this place, setting up their main defense on the far side. In order to get to the orcs, the attackers must contend with an aroused otyugh, for if the quick passage of the orcs failed to make it angry, the entry of the attackers surely will.

Whether dealing with humans, humanoids, or other monsters, many will have active and aggressive offenses and defenses planned and will carry them out. Powerful NPC-type monsters will have associates and guards. Groups will act cooperatively. Other monsters and terrain will be used to advantage, for the monsters know their own area. All this makes the whole game more meaningful for players and DMs alike. It is time to *master your campaign* and stop selling monsters—and yourself—short. You'll not only have more fun, but you'll surely gain the respect of your players too! Smart monsters are certainly one of the main ingredients of a successful campaign.

Two "new" spells

In the "G Series" AD&D Modules I mentioned two spells — *Crystalbrittle* and *Energy Drain*. Both of these new spells had been slated for inclusion in *AD&D Players Handbook*; but, because of random spell selection desirability, spell lists were kept in multiples which corresponded to the dice, i.e. 30's, 24's, 16's, 12's, 10's, 8's, and 6's. Magic-users' 9th-level spells numbered 14. Rather than do more to make 16, and then do four more 7th-level spells, and two more 8th-level spells, I opted to cut the pair. They were then mentioned in *The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl* (p.8) as part of the Jarl's treasure. While their general effects were detailed, complete information was omitted. Here it is!

Ninth Level Spells:

Crystalbrittle (Alteration)

Level: 9
Range: Touch
Duration: Permanent
Area of Effect: 2 cubic feet/level

Components: V, S
Casting Time: 9 segments
Saving Throw: Special

Explanation/Description: The dweomer of this spell causes metal, whether as soft as gold or as hard as adamantite, to turn to a crystalline substance as brittle and fragile as crystal. Thus a sword, shield of metal, metal armor, or even an iron golem can be changed to a delicate, glass-like material easily shattered by any forceful blow. Furthermore, this change is unalterable short of a wish spell; i.e., dispel magic will not reverse the spell. The caster must physically touch the target item—equal to a hit in combat if the item is worn, wielded, or a monster. Any single metal item can be affected by the spell. Thus, a suit of armor can be changed to crystal, but the shield would not be affected, or vice versa. All items gain a saving throw equal to their magical bonus value or protection. A +1/+3 sword would get a 10% (average of the two plusses) chance to save, +5 magic armor a 25% chance to be unaffected, an iron golem a 15% chance to save (for it is hit only by magic weapons of +3 or better quality). *Artifacts* and *relics* of metal have a 95% chance to be unaffected by the spell. Affected items not immediately protected will be shattered and permanently destroyed if struck by a normal blow from a metal tool or any weighty weapon, including a staff.

Energy Drain (Evocation)

Level: 9
Range: Touch
Duration: Permanent
Area of Effect: 1 creature

Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 3 segments
Saving Throw: None

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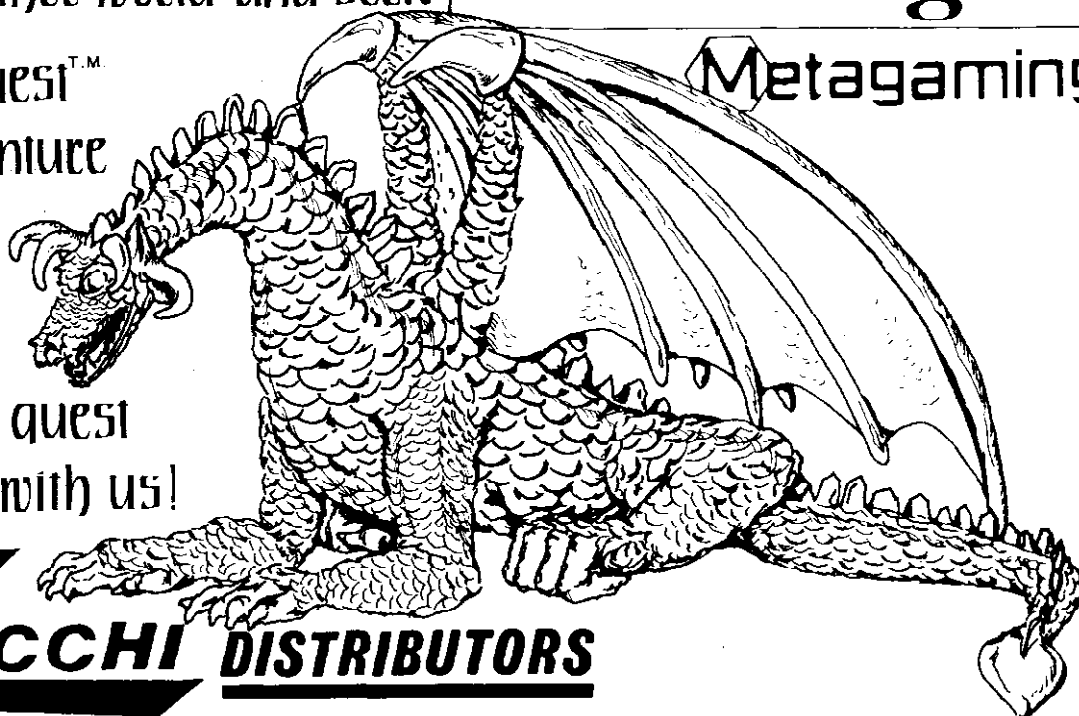
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other game referees. Not only would it show them how to truly stimulate players with non-aggressive, logical deduction, but also I consider it "revenge" for the players. Let the referee get frustrated for a change.

It's interesting to note that there is very little bloodshed of any kind in the Adams ADVENTURE series. It's brain instead of brawn that counts here. Indeed, there are many funny occurrences in these games, but very little killing or violence.

It is my firm belief that ADVENTURE games are made *NOT* to be won. The fun of the game comes from the actual "adventure" of ADVENTURE. I had the distinct feeling of "OK, what do I do now?" after I finally "won" the SAMPLER.

The Nitty Gritty

All the games in Scott Adams' ADVENTURE series, except the SAMPLER, are \$14.95, on cassette. The SAMPLER is \$5.95. Versions are available for 16K (Level II) TRS-80, 16K Sorcerer, 32K Apple II, 24K PET, and 48K CP/M computer systems. Disks with two games are available for \$24.95. For more information, write: Adventure International, Box 3435, Longwood, Fla. 32750.

I can't recommend ANY version of Scott Adams' ADVENTURE series highly enough. Beg, borrow, or steal a chance to play ADVENTURE!!!!

Sorcerer's Scroll

(From page 17)

By casting this spell the magic-user opens a channel between the plane he or she is on and the Negative Material Plane, the caster becoming the conductor between the two planes. As soon as he or she touches (equal to a hit if melee is involved) any living creature, the victim loses two energy levels (cf. spectre in *Monster Manual*). A monster loses two hit dice permanently, both for hit points and attack ability. A character loses levels, hit dice and points, and abilities permanently (until regained through adventuring, if applicable). The material component of this spell is essence of spectre or vampire dust. Preparation requires three segments, the material component is cast forth, and upon touching the victim the magic-user speaks the triggering word ("entropy", "nihil est", or whatever), and the dweomer takes effect instantly. There is always a 1 in 20 chance that the caster will also be affected by the *energy* drain and lose 1 energy level also when the victim is drained of two. Humans or humanoids brought to zero energy levels by this spell become juju zombies.

Simulation Corner

(From page 40)

The attrition character of the combat system leads naturally to a mention of the way the design uses back-printed counters. Essentially, a la 1914 or *Franco-Prussian War*, Goldberg uses reduced-strength counters to give multiple steps to his units. Soviet corps have four or five steps, German divisions have a similar number except that some have more. The *SS Panzer Divisions in Kursk* have eight steps each. The step system requires keeping the lower-step units accessible in order to accommodate losses. To organize this array of replacement counters the designer provides an order of battle chart which graphically presents all the units and shows their proper command relationships. Finally, the design follows up the command relationships by providing that a certain number of units may serve under "alternative subordination" or "independent command."

In contrast, the 1971 SPI *Kursk* contained no command rules whatsoever. It used an odds-ratio CRT. Column shifts in the use of the CRT due to various factors were unheard of. Steps of strength were avoided in 1971. Anti-tank, artillery, and airpower rules were rudimentary or completely missing. There are a variety of marked differences in the play and feel of these two SPI games on the same subject. Clearly, Goldberg's design has gone far beyond the 1971 edition in modelling the situation at Kursk. Even from this brief

synopsis it is apparent that the 1980 *Kursk* is more complete in many respects.

Does this mean that the 1971 *Kursk* was therefore wrong? No, actually the difference in fact reflects the extent of advance in state of the art; in this case the leap forward could be described as a generation improvement. It is a generation and not just a design advance for several reasons: the explicit design attention given to command control and modes of disposition; the emphasis on modelling the longevity of combat endurance; and the interaction between deployment modes and the turn sequence; all show the 1980 *Kursk* substantially improved over its predecessor.

All this is not to say that Jim Dunnigan's 1971 *Kursk* contained no design advances. Indeed, representing mechanized movement with a second "movement phase" was, in its time, also a major design improvement. This game system used by SPI also incorporated early uses of the concept of modifying combat resolution die rolls and brought an advance in the conceptualization and use of results tables which have since moved ahead to the use of column shifts in addition to die-roll modifiers. SPI's 1971 edition was in its way as much of an advance as its 1980 effort.

This brings us back to the original question of state of the art. Surveying these two games, we can see that the 1971 version did make major advances. We can further see that the advances, such as the mechanized movement phase, became standard elements of SPI modern-battle games. By 1980 the elements that were novel in 1971 are accepted as standard — old hat, as it were—and designer Eric Goldberg is able to move out in some interesting new directions with the new *Kursk*. The way that novelties of the previous period become standard design techniques is precisely what is meant by the notion of an "advance" in the state of the art. A related point is that Simulations Publications has shown a degree of institutional learning in the way that it has used novel techniques and then repeated these formulas in related game designs.

The general conclusion is that there is a real state of the art, and that this has become more and more sophisticated as designers have brought more conscious thought to important questions of modelling. Advancing the state of the art is not, however, a costless thing, as a number of recent and excessively complex games demonstrate very effectively. To design widely acceptable games, it is still necessary to strike a balance between what can be modelled in a game and the full array of factors that might be seen to figure in some situation being simulated. The responsibility of the designer is to make these choices and to do so in a way that is intelligible to players. The best games do incorporate innovation, but in a way that builds carefully on the state of the art.

Ringside

(From page 38)

scores. At some time in the future, I will be completing a more comprehensive rating list of fighters (both past and present) which will appear in *Dragon* (assuming you, the readers, want to see such a thing).

Paul Johnstone noted that there seemed to be a need to work in some defensive skills (such as blocking, ducking, etc.). These type of skills are subsumed in the Agility rating of the fighter. What might be interesting to add would be a modifier for punching accuracy, which would reduce (or increase) the agility of the opponent. But I'll leave that up to you, too.

Joseph DiRomillo brought up a point that was not really explained in the rules. On the stiff card sheet which the ring is printed on are two sets of boxes in which are listed the various punches, and several strange symbols. It was intended that the players cut out the various boxes into chits with the names of the punches on them. Thus, punch selection would be done by choosing a chit secretly, and exposing at the same time as your opponent exposes his chit. The other chits, with the X and O symbols, can be used to represent the fighters in the ring.

If you have any further questions or comments on *Ringside*, you can send them to *Dragon*, and they will be forwarded to me.