

D&D IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE DM

by Gary Gygax

Successful play of *D & D* is a blend of desire, skill and luck. Desire is often initiated by actually participating in a game. It is absolutely a reflection of the referee's ability to maintain an interesting and challenging game. Skill is a blend of knowledge of the rules and game background as applied to the particular game circumstances favored by the referee. Memory or recall is often a skill function. Luck is the least important of the three, but it is a factor in successful play nonetheless. Using the above criteria it would seem that players who have attained a score or more of levels in their respective campaigns are successful indeed. This is generally quite untrue. Usually such meteoric rise simply reflects an incompetent Dungeonmaster.

While adventurers in a *D & D* campaign must grade their play to their referee, it is also incumbent upon the Dungeonmaster to suit his campaign to the participants. This interaction is absolutely necessary if the campaign is to continue to be of interest to all parties. It is often a temptation to the referee to turn his dungeons into a veritable gift shoppe of magical goodies, ripe for plucking by his players. Similarly, by a bit of fudging, outdoor expeditions become trips to the welfare department for heaps of loot. Monsters exist for the slaying of the adventurers — whether of the sort who "guard" treasure, or of the wandering variety. Experience points are heaped upon the underserving heads of players, levels accumulate like dead leaves in autumn, and if players with standings in the 20's, 30's and 40's of levels do not become bored, they typically become filled with an entirely false sense of accomplishment, they are puffed up with hubris. As they have not really earned their standings, and their actual ability has no reflection on their campaign level, they are easily deflated (killed) in a game which demands competence in proportionate measure to players' levels.

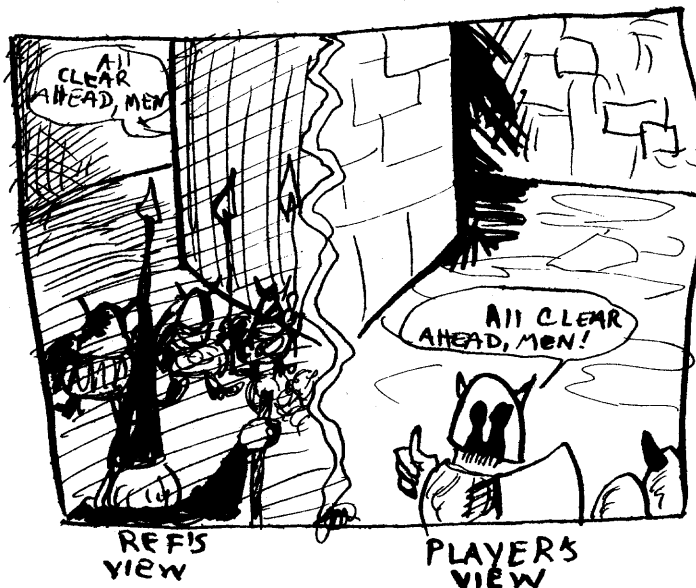
It is, therefore, time that referees reconsider their judging. First, is magic actually quite scarce in your dungeons? It should be! Likewise, treasures should be proportionate both to the levels of the dungeon and the monsters guarding them. Second, absolute disinterest *must* be exercised by the Dungeonmaster, and if a favorite player stupidly puts himself into a situation where he is about to be killed, let the dice tell the story and KILL him. This is not to say that you should never temper chance with a bit of "Divine Intervention," but helping players should be a rare act on the referee's part, and the action should only be taken when fate seems to have unjustly condemned an otherwise good player, and then not in every circumstance should the referee intervene. Third, create personas for the inhabitants of your dungeon — if they are intelligent they would act cleverly to preserve themselves and slay intruding expeditions out to do them in and steal their treasures. The same is true for wandering monsters. Fourth, there should be some high-level, very tricky and clever chaps in the nearest inhabitation to the dungeon, folks who skin adventures out of their wealth just as prospectors were generally fleeced for their gold in the Old West. When the campaign turkeys flock to town trying to buy magical weapons, potions, scrolls, various other items of magical nature, get a chum turned back to flesh, have a corpse resurrected, or whatever, make them pay through their proverbial noses. For example, what would a player charge for like items or services? Find out, add a good bit, and that is the cost you as referee will make your personas charge. This will certainly be entertaining to you, and laying little traps in addition will keep the players on their collective toes. After all,



Priest of
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Lord of Fine
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"... Know ye, O Zephyr of Divine Victory, that a report of strange nature comes from your city of Penom: to wit, one Priest of Dlamelish did meet with the Governor of Penom and some of the latter's colleagues at a celebration. This priest stated that he was then drugged and awoke in a chamber beneath the palace, where he shortly found a stairway leading down to a vast underground river. Upon that river was a barge containing a mighty and terrible Hlyss! My Lord, this being came to slay your priest but was at length defeated, whereupon your priest discovered several chests of Zu'ur, the deadly narcotic which has begun to plague your Empire. This greenish powder has been found in almost every city of the land, and once inhaled it deadens the senses and destroys the will with infallible surety. If indeed this narcotic is being brought into the Empire from or by the Hlyss, it is a matter of urgency indeed! The priest then set out upon the barge and after some adventures came out upon the seacoast, where he claims to have seen a mighty ship of the Hlyss hidden in a cove. He would surely have perished, had not a company of the city troops come upon him. Shortly thereafter he requested transfer to the district near unto Fasilum, where he now serves the local administrator of District Ferinara [hexes 3422 and 3423: Translator]. Action upon this event is earnestly prayed." [This passage is followed by the glyph for "investigate and act as deemed beneficial": Translator]



Dungeonmasters are entitled to a little fun too! Another point to remember is that you should keep a strict account of time. The wizard who spends six months writing scrolls and enchanting items is OUT of the campaign for six months, he cannot play during these six game months, and if the time system is anywhere reflective of the proper scale that means a period of actual time in the neighborhood of three months. That will pretty well eliminate all that sort of foolishness. Ingredients for scroll writing and potion making should also be stipulated (we will treat this in an upcoming issue of *SR* or in a *D & D* supplement as it should be dealt with at length) so that it is no easy task to prepare scrolls or duplicate potions.

When players no longer have reams of goodies at their fingertips they must use **their** abilities instead, and as you will have made your dungeons and wildernesses far more difficult and demanding, it will require considerable skill, imagination, and intellectual exercise to actually gain from the course of an adventure. Furthermore, when magic is rare it is valuable, and only if it is scarce will there be real interest in seeking it. When it is difficult to survive, a long process to gain levels, when there are many desired items of magical nature to seek for, then a campaign is interesting and challenging. Think about how much fun it is to have something handed to you on a silver platter — nice once in a while but unappreciated when it becomes common occurrence. This analogy applies to experience and treasure in the *D & D* campaign.

It requires no careful study to determine that *D & D* is aimed at progression which is geared to the approach noted above. There are no monsters to challenge the capabilities of 30th level lords, 40th level patriarchs, and so on. Now I know of the games played at CalTech where the rules have been expanded and changed to reflect incredibly high levels, comic book characters and spells, and so on. Okay. Different strokes for different folks, but that is not *D & D*. While *D & D* is pretty flexible, that sort of thing stretches it too far, and the boys out there are playing something entirely different — perhaps their own name "Dungeons & Beavers," tells it best. It is reasonable to calculate that if a fair player takes part in 50 to 75 games in the course of a year he should acquire sufficient experience points to make him about 9th to 11th level, assuming that he manages to survive all that play. The acquisition of successively higher levels will be proportionate to enhanced power and the number of experience points necessary to attain them, so another year of play will by no means mean a doubling of levels but rather the addition of perhaps two or three levels. Using this gauge, it should take four or five years to see 20th level. As *BLACKMOOR* is the only campaign with a life of five years, and *GREYHAWK* with a life of four is the second longest running campaign, the most able adventurers should not yet have attained 20th level except in the two named campaigns. To my certain knowledge no player in either *BLACKMOOR* or *GREYHAWK* has risen above 14th level.

By requiring players to work for experience, to *earn* their treasure, means that the opportunity to retain interest will remain. It will also mean that the rules will fit the existing situation, a dragon, balrog, or whatever will be a fearsome challenge rather than a pushover. It is still up to the Dungeonmaster to make the campaign really interesting to his players by adding imaginative touches, through exertion to develop background and detailed data regarding the campaign, and to make certain that there is always something new and exciting to learn about or acquire. It will, however, be an easier task. So if a 33rd level wizard reflects a poorly managed campaign, a continuing mortality rate of 50% per expedition generally reflects over-reaction and likewise a poorly managed campaign. It is unreasonable to place three blue dragons on the first dungeon level, just as unreasonable as it is to allow a 10th level fighter to rampage through the upper levels of a dungeon rousting kobolds and giant rats to gain easy loot and experience. When you tighten up your refereeing be careful not to go too far the other way.

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