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Version 1.0a

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What the heck is a

At the 2000 GEN CON Game Fair, a new term entered the vernacular of the RPG hobby. Since then, a revolution has been quietly underway that is changing the way people design and publish roleplaying game products. For more than a year, a lot of people have been talking about, buying, playing, designing and publishing "d20 System" games.

The idea behind the d20 System is pretty straightforward. As a part of designing the new version of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, Wizards of the Coast spent thousands of hours interviewing players, playtesting rules, and carefully examining the core assumptions and systems of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. After going through that process, the design team felt that they had established a long and detailed list of strong rules and simple philosophies about what made a roleplaying game fun to play and easy to learn. That material was not a complete game in and of itself, but rather it was the foundation for many possible games, exploring many possible worlds and genres. In time, that material was given the formal title "d20 System," and Wizards of the Coast decided to make it the basis for all of its roleplaying game efforts. We created a special logo for the d20 System and put it on all of our new roleplaying products, starting with the new core books for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS.

At its most basic, the d20 System means:

- Characters are defined by six basic attributes; Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Dexterity, Constitution, and Charisma, with scores ranging from 1 to infinity.
- Rolling higher is always better than rolling lower.
- To see if a character's action is successful, roll a d20, add some modifiers, and compare to a target number.

d20 system?

by Ryan Dancey

If the result is equal to or higher than the target number, the action was a success.

Many of the d20 System games that Wizards of the Coast will be publishing will have some other similarities:

- Three kinds of saving throws (Fortitude, Reflex, and Willpower).
- Skills (things you get better at over time) & Feats (things your character has that make her special, but that don't improve with practice).
- Hit points and Armor Class.

A d20 System game might have classes and levels, or it might have some other system for tracking character advancement. It might use DUNGEONS &

DRAGONS standard hit points, or it might have Wound Points and Vitality Points, as in the *STAR WARS*

Roleplaying Game, or it might have a whole new system. It might have D&D-style "fire and forget" magic spells, or it might have a whole new system like that showcased in the upcoming *Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game*.

Armor Class might be the same system seen in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, or it might be a system that models how much damage armor can "soak" from a hit. D20 System games will be designed for science fiction, techno-thrillers, superheroes, many flavors of fantasy, and as many other combinations of worlds and genres as the designers can imagine. As long as most of the basic rules are similar to the other d20 System games, it will be relatively easy for a player who's already familiar with one d20 System game to quickly learn another.

A game publisher using one basic set of rules for all of its games is not a new idea. The concept first gained widespread application in the late 1980s, and several companies, such as White Wolf (the *Storyteller System*), Steve Jackson (*GURPS*), Palladium (*Palladium RPG*), and AEG (*AEG House System*) have shown that there can be tremendous advantages to focusing on a core set of rules. Another big advantage is that players who learn to love one game in such a family have an easier time learning the other games from that publisher—meaning that each new game has a ready-made potential audience of players and game masters.

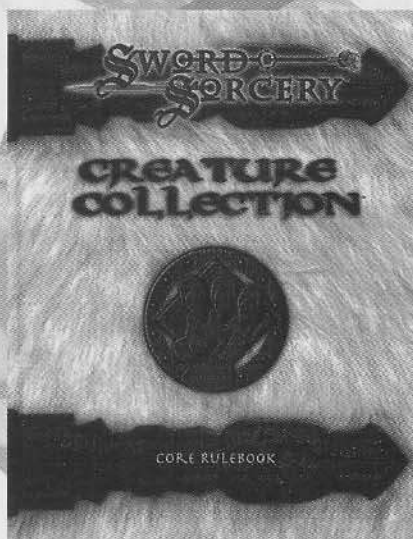
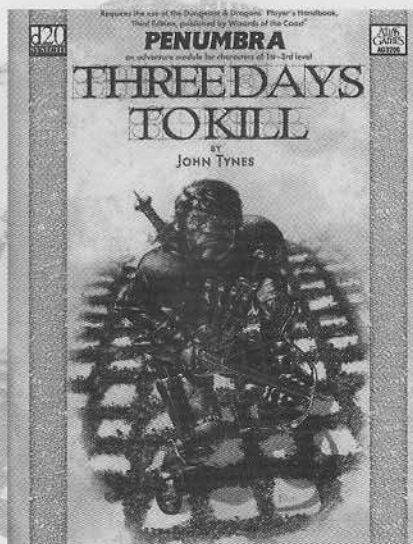
The Player Network

People who play roleplaying games form an interconnected network. You might play with your cousin, who attends college in another state. At col-

lege, she plays with a friend who has a brother in the Navy. When they're both home together, they play together with a group from their hometown. When he's at sea, he plays with a group on his submarine. That means that there's a connection between you and those sailors playing DUNGEONS & DRAGONS on the other side of the world. All of you, and everyone in your various gaming groups, and everyone they play with, and everyone in their various groups, etc. are all one big network. You all share a common knowledge of the rules, and for the most part, you all play the game in a similar way. Sure, some groups may be more interested in exploring the details of their character's lives, and others might be worried about what lurks behind the next corner in a dungeon, but you and all the other DUNGEONS & DRAGONS players have more in common than you might expect.

When a new player gets exposed to the roleplaying game hobby and wants to start playing regularly, that person joins the global community as well. Games that have lots of players tend to remain popular over long periods of time because it is easy to find other people to play with who already know the rules. Games with smaller communities can be challenging because players often have to recruit and teach new players the rules before they can begin to enjoy playing the game together. As the first, and the largest game, DUNGEONS & DRAGONS has the unique benefit of being the game that more people know how to play *in common* than any other roleplaying game in the world. New players are thus more likely to play D&D than any other game, and when they look for a regular group of players, they are more likely to find a group interested in D&D than any other game. That's the reason that DUNGEONS & DRAGONS remains, year after year, the best-selling roleplaying game in the world. In general, it is the game that delivers the most value, because it is the game that has the most players.

By using the basic rules of the new edition of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS in the company's other roleplaying games, Wizards of the Coast is trying to make those new games as valuable to players as DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. So a player who wants to play *STAR WARS*, for example, should be able to quickly



Two of the first d20 System products.

teach her friends to play the game if they all know how to play DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, because the two games have so many things in common. They use the same basic rules to determine if a character's actions are successful. They have a shared vocabulary. Depending on the game, it may be very similar to DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, or it might be substantially different. The goal of the d20 System is to make the transition relatively easy.

The Next Step

That's the point that many other game publishers reached in the evolution of their own basic rules. Wizards of the Coast has taken this idea one very radical step forward. We've created a system that will allow anyone to publish rules and extensions, or even whole

new games, based on the d20 System. That system allows both commercial and noncommercial publications, requires no approvals, and makes no demands for royalties or payments of any kind.

The reason Wizards of the Coast is taking this unprecedented action is that it believes that by providing access to the network of players who use its rules, it will create a market for lots of interesting game products that will enhance the value of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, and other roleplaying games that Wizards of the Coast publishes. Rather than by just a small team of dedicated staff who work exclusively for Wizards of the Coast, now, products for the d20 System can be created by thousands of independent designers, and even competitive publishers! The result will be an explosion of exciting new products that all work to strengthen the whole player community. And the stronger that community is, the more core rulebooks Wizards of the Coast sells. The more core books sell, the more new players there are, and the larger the market becomes for all the other products on the market. This process creates a "virtuous circle," where everyone benefits from the constant and continuous growth.

Let's take a look at how this market was created.

First, Wizards of the Coast created a license modeled on the Open Source licenses developed in the Free Software community. This agreement is called the Open Gaming License. You can read the text of the license (and a lot of other material about the d20 System at www.wizards.com/d20). The Open Gaming License creates a framework that accomplishes the following:

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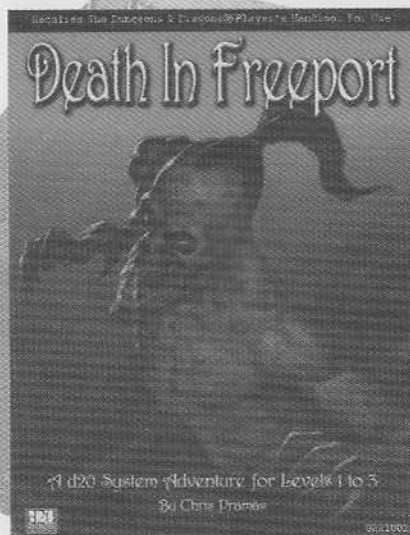
The Open Gaming License itself has no actual content; it is just a framework to define how the copyrights and trademarks involved can be used by each publisher. To actually make the License meaningful, someone has to contribute some Open Game Content.

To that end, Wizards of the Coast developed the *System Reference Document*. You can see the formally released parts of the *System Reference Document* at (www.wizards.com/d20). This material has been released as Open Game Content, using the Open Gaming License. When complete, the *System Reference Document* will include the core rules from the new edition of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, including all the basic rules, plus most of the monsters, magic items, and spells from the core books. Over time, it will be expanded to include material from many sources, and will provide a foundation for many types of games and many kinds of genres. In a very real sense, the *System Reference Document* is the d20 System.

Anyone can take the material from the *System Reference Document*, using the Open Gaming License, and publish adventures, sourcebooks of new spells, monsters or magic items, or even create whole new worlds just like TSR did with DRAGONLANCE and the FORGOTTEN REALMS. You could even use the *System Reference Document* to publish an entirely new roleplaying game!

The Small Print

The Open Gaming License has some strict rules about not using other companies' trademarks without permission. One of the goals of the project is to



The first d20 adventure ever published, *Death in Freeport*, won the prestigious Origins Award earlier this year.

help people make legal products that are compatible with DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. But we want to control the use of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS trademark for our own benefit. Wizards of the Coast wants to promote the whole idea of the d20 System, not just D&D. To facilitate that goal, Wizards has also created the d20 System Trademark License. You can read this license at (www.wizards.com/d20). This license works with the Open Gaming License to give you the right to tell the world that your product is compatible with DUNGEONS & DRAGONS in a very specific way, and the right to use the d20 System logo on your products and your advertising.

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Where We've Been, Where We're Going

Since the 2000 GEN CON Game Fair, we've seen the first examples of products using the Open Gaming License and the d20 System, as many publishers took advantage of the timing of the release of the new edition of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and the advent of Open Gaming. Some of the first commercial products to be released using this system included Atlas Games' *Three Days to Kill*, Green Ronin's *Death in Freeport*, and Sword & Sorcery's *Creature Collection*. As this article is being written, there are more than 200 announced d20 System products either on the market or being designed for release in 2001! They are from publishers with long and prestigious hobby gaming histories, and from companies that have been started just in the past few months to take advantage of this new opportunity.

The future looks very bright for the concept of Open Gaming in general, and the market success of d20 System products from Wizards of the Coast and from many other publishers. A torrent of creativity has been unleashed from many people who have always wanted to try their hand at designing a roleplaying product and from many established companies who have an interest in selling to the large and growing DUNGEONS & DRAGONS community. As time passes, the licenses and the products will change and evolve as the best and brightest designers try their hand at this new format and we all learn from the experience.

If you are interested in getting involved with this project or just want more information, please visit the Open Gaming Foundation web site at www.opengamingfoundation.org, and watch the Wizards of the Coast web site at www.wizards.com/d20 for more exciting d20 System news!

Ryan Dancey is the spiritual godfather of the d20 System movement. Formerly DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Brand Manager, he recently left Wizards of the Coast to found Organized Play, Inc. (www.organizedplay.com).