

# 50 Years of D&D® Gaming

By Gary Gygax

## A 25-Year Retrospective

### plus 25 Years of Fearless Predictions



Gary still runs AD&D at the Gen Con® Game Fair. One of this year's lucky adventuring parties included Martin Wright, Paul Stormberg, Paul Brackett, Willy Roop, Corie Chasan, Paul Coveney, Carlos Vigil, Mark Barrazuol, B. Matt Conklin, Jason Calhoun, Tom Evans, Scott Wood, and Chris McDuffie.

It isn't difficult for me now to recall events over a quarter-century of time, and I have been asked to do so in connection with another exercise, scrying! So let us begin way back in 1974 when the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game was first introduced.

Many of you might not have been born way back then. Many a young player asks how the game was conceived, for they have never heard of the CHAINMAIL™ medieval military miniatures rules and its Fantasy Supplement. That was the main basis for what

followed. The relative popularity of the fantasy miniatures made us sure of things. Even before the D&D® game was published, we knew that it would be popular. Just how popular was not really understood, but I'll get to that in due course.

When Don Kaye and I founded Tactical Studies Rules in October of 1973, we had to be content with releasing a booklet of military miniatures rules, *Cavaliers*

& *Roundheads*, Rules for the English Civil War, as the initial offering from our fledgling enterprise. As fine a set of rules as those were, both Don and I were anxious to publish the D&D game. However, that would require more money than was available to us, so we produced what we could, kept every penny received in sales, and waited impatiently to launch the main product.

I had written the first draft of the

## Gygax predicts...

Now we move into more uncertain territory, passing the current time, even the predictable events of 2000, to peer into the future. Surely most readers will understand how I manage to do this. With inky pool ready in the electrum basin, magical energy in a nimbus above, the scrying begins! Follow along as we move ahead, year by year, to see what will occur.

*Here then are my 25 Fearless Predictions!:*

### 2000

The 3rd Edition is released in August, and there is shock and confusion among the disparate sets of fans. However, as it is played, the new work captures the hearts and minds of the vast majority, and their enthusiasm brings in many others. A few hundred vocal detractors of the publisher, the game, and all connected with it are permanently hospitalized for acute depression. Nobody misses them. (TSR also confidentially suggests that a publishable version of my original Castle

Greyhawk and 40+ dungeon levels might be of interest.)

### 2001

Emphasis on the GREYHAWK® setting expands the number of persons utilizing it as the base for their games and actually attracts new players to the D&D game because of the compelling nature of the setting, its development, and online features.

(I now begin working on the Castle Greyhawk manuscript.)

### 2002

With the spring unveiling of a chain of 2,002 retail stores nationwide, WotC not only shocks the whole industry but gets a big boost on the Big Board, its share price doubling in the next week of trading. Sales of the D&D Game "Beginners Boxed Set" set new records for RPG success to add laurels to that crown in the Christmas Season.

### 2003

Via its new chain of shops, TSR unveils its live-



D&D game in the winter of 1972. It was a manuscript of but fifty pages, sent out to a score or so of wargaming associates all over the country. Some were in high school, the majority in college. Letters and phone calls that poured in following that distribution confirmed our assumption that the game was destined to be a hit. In the spring of 1973, the manuscript was revised and expanded to fill 150 pages, and about fifty copies of this work were mailed out to eager "referees" from coast to coast. They wanted more, and the volume of mail and telephone calls I received at home each day grew ever greater. Calls at midnight or later were common, and it was a case of "publish or perish" from want of sleep!

When in the autumn of 1973 someone proposed buying into our partnership, Don Kaye and I agreed. Arrangements were made for illustrations "on the cheap," this desperately, as time was precious. With the money tendered in the company bank account, the process was then moved into high gear. A local packaging company was contacted, and 1,000 small boxes with brown wood-grain wrapping were ordered. Labels for front and spine were to be done by the printer. I rushed the manuscript to the offices of Graphic Printing, then on Broad Street here in Lake Geneva. Assured that when it was "set" (typed

on an IBM typewriter and plates burned therefrom) it would be edited and corrected, we stood impatiently by in eager anticipation of the culmination of this momentous event, the delivery of three booklets, and "pull out sheets" in a quantity of 1,000 each. Indeed, this account indicates just how "green" we were.... But despite the lack of editing; the rather amateurish quality of writing, layout, and illustration; and the clumsiness of the packaging, we were ecstatic with the result when it finally came off the press late in January 1974. This date begins the "official" history of the presence of the game, of course.

We had the whole shebang delivered to Don Kaye's residence where it went into the storeroom—his hastily emptied pantry. Every night for a week we gathered there to assemble sets, box them, paste on labels, and stack them on the pantry—I mean *store-room*—shelves. A handful of direct orders were filled just before the end of the month, so January 1974 is indeed the official date of the first sale of the D&D game.

Next we filled the "big orders" placed by hobby shops and distributors. There were a few of the former, perhaps as many as five or six, who were taking half-dozens. Three distrib-

## The Name of the Game

Allow me to digress for a moment to explain why we were so enthused about the fantasy project. It was more than knowing that fantasy miniatures gaming had appeal, of course. When in 1972 we began playing the new game, virtually everyone who actually took part in an adventure was excited, nay, enthralled, with it. It needed a name, so I made a list of two columns. I passed it around to friends and family. Choose one name from either column, or select one from each, I instructed. When my youngest daughter, Cindy, then but about age six, chose what most of the others had said they liked best, the matter was sealed. The name was to be "Dungeons & Dragons." This alliterative title seemed perfect to me, of course. Not only had I founded a "Castle & Crusade Society" as part of a large wargaming organization, but I thought the name also aptly described key elements in the game, and it had been my own first choice. So when I began to draft the rules, it bore that now-world-famous title.

action version of the D&D game. Many rural townfolk are scandalized at seeing young people in bat-winged cloaks of varying hues doing a "buck and wing," not understanding that it merely indicates the player is changing from dragon to human form.

### 2004

Ryan Dancey commands the creation of "D&D Deep Dish Pizza." As hot when you eat it as if a Dragon had just breathed on it! Being the staple food of gamers, it is an overnight sensation. Over 90% of game shops install rolling pizza ovens, and the general populace eat it up.

### 2005

*Scepter of Seven Souls* starring Bruce Willis, a D&D film based on the GREYHAWK setting and "elsewhere" is released in the summer, with a sneak preview offered at GEN CON Game Fair. The movie is a box office smash, and thus some money actually has to be paid by the filmmaker to Wizards of the Coast.

### 2006

A major clothing manufacturer launches its new "Gamewear" line featuring the the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS logo. All parties are pleased as sales of XL and larger sizes surpass all expectations.

### 2007

Not to lose out, a major soft drink corporation introduces "Dragon Cola," and its extra caffeine and electrolytes enable one dedicated group to set a world record with a 108-hour D&D game marathon. Unfortunately, fatigue on the part of players is such that at this momentous time all PCs are slain when they and their controlling persons fall asleep, the former upon a bed of yellow mold, the latter on their crumb and bottle-strewn table.

### 2008

The largest gaming convention ever held in Europe is staged in Liechtenstein in July with sponsorship of the new Wizards of the Coast



tutors ordered in really "large" quantities, two dozen each. Thus, by the end of February, we had shipped out about 150 sets of the game. What a smash success!

In a meeting around this time I set forth what seemed to be the prospect for our product. My comments went something like this: "You know, the D&D game is likely to appeal to most wargamers, boardgame buffs, and miniatures players alike, so that means around 10,000 to 15,000 sales. Better still, this game is one that will appeal to most fantasy readers—and not a few science fiction ones as well. I figure that means another 50,000 or more prospective customers when the word gets out. This is going to be hot!"

March was pretty slow, and we began to worry. Me especially. Had I overestimated the new game? The end of April of 1974 saw us with an inventory of around 700 still there. We had only a tiny ad in a wargame magazine and word of mouth to publicize the D&D game. Both were at work. It was in May when orders began to come in again, and these were mainly from shops and distributors. In September we had what seemed a lot of cash in the bank, so I placed a print order for 2,000 more sets. When they arrived at the end of October, we were out of stock, and there were backorders to fill. Orders were

both more frequent and larger from then on. Confidence rose once again, and Don Kaye spoke as he had before of the coming time when he could resign his current job so as to work full time for Tactical Studies Rules.

Tragedy struck in January 1975. Don died of a heart attack. He was only thirty-six years old. Our partnership had been drawn up without a clause covering such an exigency, and Don's widow was not interested in continuing in the company. In due course, this spelled the end of Tactical Studies Rules and the emergence of TSR Hobbies, Inc. Before the corporation was formed, however, the operation moved from Sage Street to the basement of the house I rented on Center Street in Lake Geneva. Then plans were made for the new enterprise.

Meantime, in February of 1975, Heritage Models, one of our major distributors, offered to print 3,000 copies of the D&D game for us at no charge other than their keeping an "overrun" of 300. These 300 they would retain and sell to pay for the printing. We jumped on that offer, for it gave us capital to print other products. When in April the truck came and I toted all those boxes down to the basement, I wondered if such a vast store of goods would ever be sold. We had switched packaging by then, of

course. Although booklets and reference sheets were still hand-collated, we had boxes with a white, printed wrapping on them, so no more tedious labeling was required. Time to assemble a D&D game was thus reduced by about 40%. That was lucky too, for the darned games were beginning to blow off the shelves. As a matter of fact, they were shipping at a rate of around 1,000 copies a month then. I did about 90% of that by myself. In May I went to work full time for the corporation so I could keep up with the sales of the D&D game and other products we were then carrying. For those wondering, my salary was \$85 a week, not much even way back then, but it was a matter of love, not money, that motivated the effort.

In May, the assets and liabilities of Tactical Studies Rules were purchased by TSR Hobbies, Inc. I was then a shareholder in the new corporation. It was around this time that I sat down, analyzed sales, looked at the trend line, and made some fearless predictions, sans crystal ball. It was pretty clear that we would make a bit over \$200,000 gross income by the end of the fiscal year in spring of 1976. As I was getting a fair amount of feedback from the fans, I had also discovered something that was totally unexpected. At least half of the

European Headquarters established there at the beginning of the year. With thousands of events being offered in all the major languages, so many people show up that the population of the country is more than doubled.

## 2009

With the advent of both audio and video in the average home computer, internet play of various D&D games finally attains such volume as to become the most popular game, leading all others offered on the web!

## 2010

*De Braug Strikes Back*, the sequel to *Scepter of Seven Soul*, hits the cinemas. Box office results are greater than its predecessor, even though Willis now plays the role of Racious de Braug rather than the young hero, Dart the Wanderer.

## 2011

At the end of the first decade of the new millennium, WotC exceeds the \$500 million mark in revenues. After a considerable hiatus, the

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Game is once again assailed by TV evangelists in hopes that some of its success will rub off on them.

## 2012

Construction of the new film studio, "Pastoral Dweomercreaft & Artistry," is well underway. New producer-director Peter Adkison is the toast of Tinseltown, even though the new facility is in Seattle.

## 2013

When *Return of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*, starring Bruce Willis, Jr. is released everyone holds their breath. This is the premier of PD&A Productions, and it is an even bigger box-office smash than were the other films based on the D&D game. Discontent from the Hollywood region is kept hush-hush, because producers there admit they couldn't find a way to tap into the cash stream. Century City bans Dragon Cola and Dungeoness Crab from restaurant menus.



consumers didn't fit my previous profile. That is, they were not wargamers, didn't read fantasy, and hadn't really been interested in gaming as a hobby before their introduction to the D&D game! In point of fact, I was getting many requests for lists of recommended fantasy books from new Dungeon Masters (no longer mere "referees") who were anxious to gain source material for their adventures and campaigns. Astonishing!

In light of sales and the altered player profile I was then putting together, my pencil went to work in performing a rather easy task. Without hesitation, I made the following projections for corporate sales: In 1977 the gross would be around \$500,000; 1978 would see TSR Hobbies making around \$1,000,000; in 1979 we could expect \$2,000,000 in sales revenues, 1980 would be \$4,000,000, and 1981, all the way to \$8,000,000! That would place us definitely at the top of the gaming heap in those days. Beyond five years I couldn't go. Based on what I saw from the current sales of the D&D game and the input from distributors, shops, and individuals, it seemed a certainty to me that corporate growth would double through that period, to 1981. This anticipated our continued publication of new products, mainly but not exclusively for the D&D game.

There isn't much to talk about in regards to the period noted, 1976 to 1981. The revision of the D&D game took place in 1976, and the new Basic Set was released in 1977. Thereafter the Expert Set for the D&D game appeared. Likewise, I wrote and the company published the core books for the new AD&D game system during this period. First came the *Monster Manual* (1977), then the *Player's Handbook* (1978), and finally the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* (1979). For "breaks" in between I wrote the "Giant" and then the "Drow" series of adventure modules. All of these products assured that the projections I had made were on target. Actually, I was 90% accurate until there was a monstrous media flap about the D&D game.

plunging of growth for that fiscal year. We couldn't quite manage to print and ship the games and books quickly enough to meet the new demands. Heber City, Utah, where the game had been banned, was the center of a virtual black hole. Despite our best efforts to get games to the vicinity, not a copy could be found within about 200 miles of the town, so great was the demand.

With such a year as that behind us, things settled down, and the sales figures for fiscal 1982 were a more modest \$24 million and change. When fiscal 1983 was history, and gross income of a bit more than \$32 million recorded, it signaled something important. At this point I saw that the game was likely to level off soon. While urging creation of additional material to support the D&D

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When that unexpected publicity occurred, sales were drastically affected. Instead of grossing around \$8 million as projected, the furor of "negative" publicity drove them through the roof, and TSR Hobbies experienced a quadru-

and AD&D games, it also seemed certain that something more was needed. Early in 1984 I offered a tentative plan to revise the AD&D game so as to expand the consumer base, and in the following months I suggested more

## 2014

The success of gaming enables PD&A to offer "The Gaming Channel" on TV. With a home at last, millions of geeks and nerds tune in to see their role models, including this author, drone on endlessly about little or nothing.

## 2015

Because of Internet play now dominating the RPG scene, the gaming community transcends national boundaries, and English is now called the "Common Tongue." The Peoples D&D Game Center is set up in Beijing.

## 2016

The film *D&D: The Ghostly Menace*, again starring Bruce Willis, Jr., is the hottest film of the year. Now even jocks are sporting "Gamewear," and all young rebels demand Dragon Cola. An exodus for parts unknown of persons holding that the D&D game is "work of the devil" passes unnoticed by even the tabloids.

## 2017

With everything from fantasy worlds, states, cities, and local adventure areas to programs for individual and unique designs of fantasy milieus ranging from world settings to local taverns produced for their loyal fans, D&D game product sales soar higher still. Hollywood gets its revenge, and the third motion picture in Wizards' PD&A-produced series, *Ghostly Menace*, is snubbed at the Oscars.

## 2018

The new Artificial Intelligence program developed by Wizards of the Coast for the TSR line beats the "World Storytelling Game" champion in four straight adventures. Fully two percent of the roleplaying game audience quits playing in protest of this "unnatural and unfair" development.

## 2019

Plans for the much-needed 4th-Edition D&D game bear fruit. Now the game is not only multi-genre



details. Being very much involved in the entertainment end of the business then, having moved from TSR, Inc. to DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Entertainment Corporation in 1983, I was not able to actively produce as much creative effort as I would have liked to in this period.

Difficulties arose at TSR in late 1984 and continued through 1985. At the end of the latter year, I separated from the corporation. Soon, though, TSR forged ahead and began production of the needed 2nd Edition of the AD&D game—although not as I had suggested, I hasten to add. Over the next few years, a new set of core books were published, and the game was given a slightly different look and direction. Along with computer game offerings that were quite successful, this managed to keep things level. That is, the game did not drop off drastically to some lesser plateau but maintained a strong leading place in the RPG market.

In the early 1990s, though, more problems arose for the corporation. Sales were slipping. What would become of the D&D game? Eventually Wizards of the Coast stepped in and acquired TSR, Inc. Many gamers worried, but I was one who cheered. Thanks to Wizards of

the Coast, the game had literally been saved. Indeed, this move revitalized the company. In a relatively short time, new support material saw the game line surging back. When the computer game *Baldur's Gate* became a smash hit, it was apparent to all that the D&D game was not languishing but truly vital and awaiting fresh approaches to bring it back into full flower once again. Wizards of the Coast and TSR had been planning such a move, announced it in 1997.

Immediately upon gaining TSR, CEO Peter Adkison set about planning for a special new edition of the game. It was to be called D&D, dropping the less desirable "Advanced" and restoring all the former mystique and fun associated with the original name.

At the 32nd GEN CON® Game Fair came the "Big Announcement." There would be a 3rd Edition, it would be the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, and while it would be the same in concept and feel, many changes would also be included. All of this was aimed at making the game current in mechanics and better in play.

While a quarter of a century might seem a long time, in retrospect it is but the blink of an eye. The 25 years saw much happen to the D&D game. It was

born, changed as it grew, then changed again. Unlike a person, though, the game is not destined to age, grow old and feeble, then expire. The advent of the 3rd Edition is certain evidence of that. As with the phoenix, but without a fiery death beforehand, the D&D game can be renewed periodically. This is indeed wonderful for its devotees, for it means that the familiar and beloved game will be there, fresh and exciting always, for us now and for generations to come.

When the first copy was sold I was on cloud nine. Now, over 25 years later, as we near the release of the latest version of the D&D game, there is another feeling that pervades me. It is one of profound satisfaction in having been able to contribute to the creation of roleplaying as a game form, to have brought so much enjoyment to so many lives. There's more, though. I am also pretty happy to be around and have the grand opportunity to add to the newest version of the first and still foremost of roleplaying games, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game.

*Gary writes, "Believe it or not, I was over 30 when I wrote the D&D game. Indeed, I was pushing the 40-year mark when three core books of the AD&D game were done. Today I'm, well ... never mind!"*

but has multiple character creation systems that are compatible. (This author is asked to review the material to soon be released. After so doing, he hastily revises his own competing system, hoping no one at Wizards of the Coast will notice.)

## 2020

TSR releases its 1000th Adventure module, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*.

## 2021

Concurrently with WotC breaking the one billion dollar revenue mark, the Gamer Fitness line is launched. Dragon Cola diet version is touted. Female participation in RPGs rises sharply by year's end. This causes grave concerns at Wizards of the Coast as marriages take place and former gamers are forced to devote time to work.

## 2022

The first Doctor of Roleplaying Games graduates from Harvard. Raves on his thesis, *The Essential Need for the Dungeons & Dragons Game in Everyone's Life*, assure him a sinecure with Wiz-

ards of the Coast. The company opens its new operation in Tuva to better serve the growing demand for the D&D game in both Inner and Outer Mongolia.

## 2023

The D&D game is first played on the moon as those sent there to establish mankind's first permanent off-world settlement decide to take a bit of Terra along so as to not be homesick.

## 2024

The Jubilee Year for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Game, and the city of Renton renames itself Dragonza. Tarzana, California makes rude jokes, but these are ignored. Wizards of the Coast unveils the first of its "Holocenters," where gamers can indeed experience the D&D game the way it ought to be!

(Gygax, now age 86, announces to TSR that he has completed the whole of the Greyhawk Castle module but confesses he can't remember where he put the manuscript and maps.)