

Uniformity,

conformity

...or neither?

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In the preface to the *Players' Handbook* Gary Gygax points out that he has set himself up as final arbiter of fantasy role-playing in the minds of the majority of *D&D* adventurers by authoring the *Advanced D&D* project.

Since the publication of the *Dungeon Masters Guide* my old *Chainmail* and vintage *Dungeons & Dragons* has been relegated to a dingy cardboard box in the storage shed. Someday, years from now, I will show them with the same pride that comes from bringing out my 1962 version of *Tactics II*, my first war game.

Several months ago I came across a member of the minority that hasn't acknowledged Gay as final arbiter. The campaign he ran was based on the original spirit of *Chainmail* instead of the latest revisions. To say the least, the game was fresh and unorthodox. His foundation was the 3rd edition of *Chainmail* and his vague recollections of the three-volume set of *Dungeons & Dragons*, which he never purchased.

Most players of *D&D* lie somewhere between the extremes of Gygax-as-the-last-word and Chainmail-is-good-enough-for-me. But the contrast between these two poles raises some interesting questions. How much uniformity is required from campaign to campaign? When does uniformity become restrictive conformity? How fast and in what direction is the "uniform" system of *D&D* evolving?

The answer to the first question is deceptively simple. The minimum amount of uniformity required to make campaigns recognizable and playable to all is virtually nil. For me it was just as easy and enjoyable playing antediluvian pseudo-*Chainmail D&D* as playing state-of-the-art *Advanced D&D*. Both were fantasy role-playing games, but they were from widely different universes. As long as the referee knows what's coming down, there is no confusion. The principal danger for a player steeped in the tradition of *D&D* is making assumptions based on *Advanced D&D* rules that may not hold in another game.

The second question is not so easily answered. In fact, it probably has no correct answer. The continuum variability-uniformity-conformity cannot be polarized into good and bad. As pointed out above, vast differences in game systems do not necessarily make campaigns unplayable or less enjoyable.

On the other hand, extreme conformity does not doom a game either. The games of Chess and Go enjoy great popularity despite rigorously structured rules. Successive campaigns run by the same referee have essentially identical foundations and rules, yet they are no less playable or entertaining. Gay Gygax may accept the credit and blame for the uniformity of the *Advanced D&D* project, but ultimately the referees and players must decide what degree of uniformity is best for them.

Despite a certain amount of "sameness" in all *D&D*, the game is constantly changing. In an effort to determine how fast and in what direction *D&D* is evolving, I compiled a comparative list of some important design features from the Fantasy supplement of *Chainmail*, Original *D&D*, and *Advanced D&D*. My conclusions are entirely subjective extrapolation.

The single overwhelming trend apparent from the listing is the

Design Feature	Chainmail Fantasy SUPP.	D&D	AD&D
Character			
Classes	2	3	5(11)*
Alignment			
Variations	3	3	9
Listed Equipment	-	65 items	148 items
Human Hit Dice		6-sided	4-10 sided
Combat System	Hit = Kill	Hit = 1-6 points	Hits variable, typically 1-8 points
Armor Types			9
Armor Classes	8	8	
Melee Weapons	12		4 9
Magic-User Spells	16	70	260**
Cleric Spells	0	26	154***
Monsters	23	69	350+
Treasure Types	3	131+	250+
Healing Wounds	-	1 hit pt./2 days	1 hit pt./day; 5 hit pts./day after 30 days

* Eleven includes Druid, Paladin, Ranger, Illusionist, Assassin, Bard.

** Including Illusionist spells.

*** Including Druid spells.

increase in all values through time. In less than a decade, the complexity of *D&D* has risen enormously. This might be termed simulation inflation, because the increase is due to attempts to simulate reality.

Of course, in *D&D* the attempt is to simulate fantasy. Increasing complexity, and hence, more accurate simulation, is counterbalanced by a loss in playability. Most referees omit some standard material as well as many of the optional items. This is strong evidence that the point of equilibrium between accuracy and playability has been passed by the *Advanced D&D* project. The beauty of it all is that the individual campaign can be designed around the needs of the players, sacrificing some material for one game and reincorporating it in the next.

No doubt there will continue to be a proliferation of new details. Based on the numerical values in the list, one can expect an increase to 10 in the number of character classes, with subclasses doubling, in the next five years. A third dimension may be added to alignment, making 27 total variations. Standardized lists of equipment prices will exceed 300 items.

Human hit dice will continue to rise, and the combat system will become increasingly complex with finer distinctions made between armor classes and weapon type. For example, a character will possess chainmail on the torso and left arm with leather on the right arm. He will fight with a single-bladed war axe and long dagger.

Predictably, spells will number in the thousands and up to 12 levels of spells may be involved. The number of monsters should continue to multiply, and any day now we can expect treasure type AA. The number of magic items will be only slightly smaller than the number of monsters.

Since both hit dice and the average amount of damage per hit will have risen, the minimum rate of unassisted healing must increase in proportion.

The bottom line is that *D&D* is changing fast and probably will change faster in the future, and that this change is toward a more complex system. Players and referees will need to be more selective in determining what aspects of the game to emphasize and which to tone down or omit.

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