



THE OUTGOING GOBLIN'S GUIDE TO GAMING ETIQUETTE

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HI! I'M THE OFFICIAL
ADVISOR FOR THIS HELPFUL ARTICLE.
REMEMBER: JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE
PLAYING A CHAOTIC EVIL ROGUE
DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD
BE RUDE.

READ ON AND FOLLOW MY
ADVICE, EVEN WHEN EVERY
OUNCE OF COMMON SENSE
TELLS YOU THAT YOU SHOULDN'T.
YOU'LL BE GLAD YOU DID!



Etiquette is the art and science of living together happily. It is the set of rules that maintains the peacefulness of civilization. It is the salve that soothes society when it becomes chafed.

Have you ever been in the middle of a long, happy session of D&D, when suddenly you said the wrong thing, and your whole party suddenly ganged up on you and killed you? Wow! Me, too.

Fortunately, I've learned from all the times this has happened to me. This guide is a way of giving something back to the community from which I have taken so much. Follow the advice within, and you will shine as a beacon of politeness to all your fellow patrons of the geekly arts.

Dos and Don'ts of the Proper Roleplayer

It is a terrifying thing to be an adventurer—you're massively outnumbered by monsters, surrounded by huge forces you can't understand, and trying to keep your dice from mingling overmuch with the dice of the player next to you. Face it: You're toast. But if you follow these rules, you might be able to hold off your inevitable, grisly death for a short period of time.

DON'T stand up, point at the DM, and shout "You're not the boss of me!"

DO regale your friends with tales of roleplaying adventure. What's the point of having Frodalf make 3rd level if you can't tell your pals about it in intense, soul-crushing detail?

DON'T ask the magic user how much mana is left in his pool.

DO give your characters classic fantasy names to help get people in the proper mood. "Bilbo" and "Mel Gibson" are excellent choices.

DON'T blow cigarette smoke in the DM's face after casting a *fireball*, no matter how much it helps him to "feel the fantasy."

DO adopt a special voice to use when your character speaks. Your fellow players will feel much more immersed in the fantasy after thirty minutes in a room with "Squeaky, The Gnome With a High-Pitched Voice."

DON'T try to get an automatic rifle for your character. The DM will be forced to give the orcs rocket launchers in the name of game balance.

Good manners are, of course, not for the player alone. Believe it or not, sometimes the Dungeon Master should

play nice too. Not too much, of course, or the players will take advantage—shifty vermin that they are. Never trust them for a moment.

DO provide a civilized gaming environment. When a DM pulls out his ermine-trimmed dice bag, lays out his hand-crocheted gaming doilies, and has the module brought out on a silver tray by his man-servant Orlando, his players know that they have entered civilization at last.

DON'T forget to encourage serious thought. Try making your players answer a riddle before they can leave the dungeon. Nothing builds a player's self-esteem like coming up with the answer after 3 hours of saying things like, "Is it the sun? No? Then how about a snail?"

DO encourage roleplaying by enforcing an "If you say it, your character says it!" rule. It's common sense. After all, in the middle of a dungeon, do you really want your elf to say, "Hey, Jason, get me a coke?" or, "Arrgh. My chest. Aaaghh! Where are my nitroglycerine pills?" Certainly not.

DON'T break with tradition. The bad guy always puts a death trap on his dresser. Monsters always live underground, even though it would be really moldy and cold. And intelligent magic swords always have really obnoxious personalities.

DO make fantasy speech mandatory. Common use of phrases like "Prithee, my liege" and "Huzzah!" create an environment that makes the players feel blissfully adrift in time and space.

(Example: "Prithee my liege, but if mine *+1 dagger* doesn't end up back in my pack on the nonce, I will have to kick some serious elven butt. Huzzah!")

DON'T give the ogres canisters of the bubonic plague until a character in the party can cast *remove disease*. Fair is fair.

Follow the Standard Rules of Etiquette

When we spend a happy evening gaming, we create a fantastic new world in our caffeine-addled minds. However, our corporeal bodies, sadly, remain in this world, growing older and rounder. This means that, since we remain in this world, we have to live by the rules of

WELL, THIS MIGHT NOT BE SO BAD. IN MY GAMES, THE OGRES TEND TO COME EQUIPPED WITH ENERGY PISTOLS AND CANISTERS OF THE BUBONIC PLAGUE. BUT THEN, MY CAMPAIGNS TEND TO BE MORE LIVELY AND FAST-PACED THAN MOST.



etiquette everyone else lives by every day.

Your mother was right. "Please" and "thank you" are magic words, just as capable of opening doors as any magic spell. There are lots of other magic words, too, like "critical hit," "I'm bleeding to death," and "Huzzah!" These are phrases that make every gaming session run a little smoother.

When your host has you over for a gaming session, be a gracious guest. Compliment his collection of *STAR TREK* novels. Don't spill Mountain Dew on the *Highlander* video tapes. Don't point out how lame he was for buying a Dreamcast when the Playstation II has been out for months and it doubles as a DVD player. Instead, compliment his taste in furniture and wall decoration, and, if he has crusty dishes stacked in the sink, just think of them as his effort to create a dungeon-like atmosphere.

A polite guest always brings tasty snacks to be consumed during the gaming session. In general, gamers insist on food that is low-calorie, nutritious, and

pleasingly high in roughage. Bottled mineral water and rice cakes are a must, and no gamer can resist a nice bowl of carrot sticks.

When rolling dice, shake them briefly and release them with a smooth, gentle motion. Avoid an unpleasant rattling sound, which might disturb your DM and result in frequent critical hits landed on your character. Remember: Your dice are there to generate random numbers. They are not meant to serve as projectiles, earplugs, or candy.

When your favorite character is killed, do not simply wad up the character sheet and throw it on the ground. Proper etiquette demands that you must first tear it into quarters, using firm, horizontal hand motions, and place the remains into an envelope made of fine linen paper. Finally, either burn the envelope or put it through a shredder and use the remains as hamster bedding—or eat it.

Also, when your favorite character is killed, a half an hour of shouted obscenities is strictly optional.





SEE HOW SIMPLE PROPER ETIQUETTE IS? A FEW HOURS OF PLAY USING THESE RULES AND EVERY PLAYER AT YOUR TABLE WILL HAVE A WIDE GRIN ON HIS FACE! OR MAYBE IT WILL BE A RICTUS OF TERROR. I NEVER CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE.

Finally, after a good session of gaming, one should always send a proper thank you note to the DM, hand-written on some sort of lovely stationary:

Dear Mr. Dungeon Master,

Thank you very much for having us over for that lovely adventure last Saturday. Also, thank you very much for the lovely +1 longsword. It was exactly what my character needed, and the experience points I received for getting it really hit the spot. Ha ha.

Also, I'd like to apologize for that little misunderstanding that we had. I was mistaken. You are, in fact, the boss of me. I'm sorry for any upset my loud and unexpected outburst caused you.

- Warmest Regards,
Jeff Vogel

Building an Interesting Party

When creating your character, remember that the central element of every great drama is conflict. Help out your DM by making things interesting! Does your friend plan to play a shifty, untrustworthy thief? Then you must play a paladin. Is Erik playing a laser-gun-toting alien hunter? Then be an alien in human disguise, and lay your eggs in his torso as soon as possible. Is the DM's girlfriend in the game? Then do something to tick her off, by all means!

There is no better time for exciting roleplaying and intrigue than when splitting up the loot. Look at it this way: Think about how important it is to get paid at your job. Think of the loot as your character's salary. Imagine working hard at, say, McDonalds, cleaning the grease traps and mopping the floors and waiting for the end of the month when you will finally get that *girdle of hill giant*

strength you've been busting your butt for. But then, when the time comes, the shift manager tries to stick you with a lousy +1 guisarme instead, and you're not even proficient in the guisarme!

Remember that part of etiquette is making sure people are polite to you. So in this case, be sure to demonstrate exactly where the shift manager can put his lousy guisarme.

Pay Attention

There is nothing more irritating to a hard-working DM than inattentive players. If you peer out from over your screen and see Frederick knitting, Mariann sticking a cartridge into her Gameboy, and Jules slowly and lovingly caressing his Magic cards, you know that this evening of roleplaying is pretty much blown.

It is, of course, impolite to be inattentive during your DM's game. But it is also impolite for the DM to lash out in return, inflicting arbitrary critical hits and making rolls on a previously unused Spontaneous Wand Explosion Table.

I DISAGREE. LASHING OUT IS 90 PERCENT OF THE FUN OF BEING A DM. BEING ABLE TO HIDE BEHIND A COOL SCREEN IS THE OTHER 10 PERCENT.

Instead, the Dungeon Master should have foreseen potential problems and created a distraction-free gaming zone. The play room should be stripped of unpleasant distractions, like televisions and stereos. Instead, the room should be filled with items that create an atmosphere helpful to fantasy and imagination,

like bowls of organ meat, open flames, and live snakes.

Should the players provide their own distractions, the DM can usually convey disapproval with simple, clear communication. A can of spray paint will let Jules know that his Magic cards are not safe at the table, a large magnet will help Mariann understand the inappropriateness of her Gameboy, and Frederick can be dissuaded from knitting with a massive box of ravenous moths.

Etiquette is, in the end, all about communication, and nothing communicates better than actions—unexpected, horrible actions.

The Importance of Timeliness and Understanding

It is a sad fact of our roleplaying lives that most campaigns are killed by indifference.

WELL, ACTUALLY, MOST OF MY CAMPAIGNS ARE KILLED BY A NATURAL 20, AN ORC, AND A ROCKET LALINCHER. BUT, AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, MY CAMPAIGNS ARE A BIT MORE LIVELY AND HIGH-SPIRITED THAN MOST.



People don't show up to sessions. The DM becomes unavailable because of a new job or an unsympathetic spouse. Or maybe all of the rulebooks are burned for warmth. Hard work and concentration are necessary to maintain a good campaign.

If you are the DM, it is important to be flexible when players are absent. If Sue can't make it, let another player play Sue's character. Give that player one of Sue's magic items as a gratuity for the extra work. You can also run Sue's character as an NPC. Playing Sue yourself will give you a chance to humorously satirize some of Sue's more notable personality traits and verbal tics. This will help you work out frustration over the time Sue spilled Mountain Dew on your *Highlander* tapes.

If you are a player, on the other hand, try to meet the DM half-way. Suppose the DM walks in carrying a copy of the module *Scum Orcs of the Hills*. He sets out twenty carefully painted scum orc miniatures and his copy of "Ecology of the Scum Orc." For the sake of realism, he has carefully cultivated a personal scent very similar to that of a scum orc. He lays out a map of the hills surrounding the players' village and asks, "What do you do now?"

This is *not* the point where you say, "We go to the lowlands and hunt kobolds," unless you want the DM to start playtesting that groovy new critical hit chart he just made up.

A Helpful Example

In closing, here is a transcript of a recent gaming sessions with the author and four of his friends. It was a pleasant experience for all concerned, and everyone was so polite that yours truly could barely stand it. Read, and learn.

The group for this session consisted of Sue (chaotic-evil rogue), Frederick (chaotic-evil rogue), Mariann (lawful-good paladin), and Jules (chaotic-evil fighter/rogue).

(Note that this is a near-perfect group for the creation of exciting role-playing. A group like this can have hours of enjoyable treachery and intrigue over the discovery of a single healing potion.)

ANY CAMPAIGN IN WHICH THE DM'S GIRLFRIEND PLAYS IS DESTINED TO BE RICH, EXCITING, AND COMPLICATED. ESPECIALLY AFTER THEY BREAK UP.



DM: Okay, the gnoll is dead. Unfortunately, your attacks damaged its kevlar vest too much for it to be of use.

Sue: We head west.

(The DM bends down behind his screen to see what comes next. As he looks, someone slaps it with the palm of his or her hand, smacking the DM in the nose. He jumps up.)

DM: Who did that?

Frederick: (pointing at Mariann) It was her!

Mariann: You sneak!

Jules: Huzzah!

DM: Okay, Frederick. You get 500 experience for helping.

(Always be polite and reward people who help you.)

Jules: Prithee, my liege!

Mariann: (to Frederick) I'll get you for this.

DM: And Mariann, you lose your paladinhood.

Mariann: Okay, I become a chaotic-evil rogue.

DM: Excellent! Done.

Sue: Where did all of these moths come from?

DM: Just being prepared.

Sue: Like I said, we head west.

Mariann: I sneak attack Jules.

(All right! Now we're getting some interesting conflict! Now none of the players will find out that I forgot to design an adventure.)

Jules: Ow. Dang. I drink my healing potion.

DM: You look in your pouch and realize that it's gone.

Jules: All right, who has my healing potion?

Mariann: I run behind Jules and sneak attack her again.

(And so on. This goes on for about an hour of pure, scheming fun.)

DM: (munching on a carrot stick) Suddenly, you are distracted by an explosion. You look up and see a dozen scum orcs on the crest of a nearby hill. One has a rocket launcher, and the rest are holding small metal canisters of some sort.

Sue: I pull out my wand and shoot a magic missile at them.

DM: Your wand is gone.

Jules: (stands up, points at me, shouts) You're not the boss of me!

Great, huh? Like I said before, there is nothing like a little bit of good manners to create a lively, non-stop, action-packed gaming session. See you in the dungeon! Huzzah!

AND REMEMBER, YOU CAN'T SPELL MANNERS WITHOUT M-E. AND YOU CAN'T SPELL POLITE WITHOUT L-I-E.