

AMUSING ANECDOTES

HUMOROUS TALES BY FELLOW GAMERS

ERIC AND THE GAZEBO

"Let us cast our minds back to the early days of fantasy roleplaying... In the early '70s, Ed Whitechurch ran "his game," and one of the participants was Eric Sorenson, a veritable giant of a man.

This story is essentially true: I knew both Ed and Eric, and neither denies it (although Eric, for reasons that will become apparent, never repeats it).

The gist of it is that Eric... well, you need to know a bit more about Eric. Eric comes quite close to being a computer. When he games, he methodically considers each possibility before choosing his preferred option. If given time, he will invariably pick the optimum solution. It has been known to take weeks. He is otherwise in all respects a superior gamer, and I've spent many happy hours competing with and against him, as long as he is given enough time.

Eric was playing a neutral paladin ("Why should only lawful good religions get to have holy warriors?" was the rationale) in Ed's game. He even had a holy sword, which fought well and did all those things holy swords are supposed to do, including *detect good or evil* (by random die roll).

He was on some lord's land when the following exchange occurred:

- ED:** 'You see a well-groomed garden. In the middle, on a small hill, you see a gazebo.'
- ERIC:** 'A gazebo? What color is it?'
- ED:** *(Pause)* 'It's white, Eric.'
- ERIC:** 'How far away is it?'
- ED:** 'About 50 yards.'
- ERIC:** 'How big is it?'
- ED:** *(Pause)* 'It's about 30 feet across, 15 feet high, with a pointed top.'
- ERIC:** 'I use my sword to detect whether it's good.'
- ED:** 'It's not good, Eric. It's a gazebo!'
- ERIC:** *(Pause)* 'I call out to it.'
- ED:** 'It won't answer. It's a gazebo!'
- ERIC:** *(Pause)* 'I sheathe my sword and draw my bow and arrows. Does it respond in any way?'
- ED:** 'No, Eric. It's a gazebo!'
- ERIC:** 'I shoot it with my bow. *(rolls to hit)* What happened?'
- ED:** 'There is now a gazebo with an arrow sticking out of it.'
- ERIC:** *(Pause)* 'Wasn't it wounded?'
- ED:** 'Of course not, Eric! It's a gazebo!'
- ERIC:** *(Whimper)* 'But that was a *+3 arrow!*'
- ED:** 'It's a gazebo, Eric, a gazebo! If you really want to try to destroy it, you could try to chop it with an axe, I suppose, or you could try to burn it, but I don't know why anybody would even try. It's a @#%\$&!# gazebo!'
- ERIC:** *(Long pause - he has no axe or fire spells)* 'I run away.'
- ED:** *(Thoroughly frustrated)* 'It's too late. You've awakened the gazebo, and it catches you and eats you.'
- ERIC:** *(Reaching for his dice)* 'Maybe I'll roll up a fire-using mage so I can avenge my paladin...'

At this point, the increasingly amused fellow party members restored a modicum of order by explaining what a gazebo is. This is solely an afterthought, of course, but Eric is doubly lucky that the gazebo was not situated on a grassy knoll."

CLASSIC PARTY GENESIS

- PLAYER 1:** "I go into the tavern, do I see anyone there?"
- DM:** "There are several people eating and drinking. One of them is a large man in chainmail with an axe."
- PLAYER 1:** "I go up to the guy with the axe and say hello."
- PLAYER 2:** "Hello."
- PLAYER 1:** "You look dangerous and heavily armed; let's go rob tombs and camp together for the rest of our lives."
- PLAYER 2:** "Okay."

ROLEPLAYING DEFINITIONS

Adventure

An evening of drunken debauchery with maybe a game involved.

Campaign

A series of fights over several months.

Critical Fumble

A bad thing.

Critical Hit

A good thing.

d4

The sharp pointy dice that hurt your feet when you step on them.

d6

The box-shaped dice that you will need a lot of as they are often used to roll damage. Some games take a sort of retro approach and use nothing else. Most players have a couple of bags full of these.

d8

The first of the rarely used curiosity dice.

d10

You will need half a ton of them due to the ever-increasing number of percentile systems and the rocket-speed conglomeration of White Wolf games.

d12

The second of the rarely used curiosity dice.

d20

This dice first found fame with AD&D. Its near-spherical shape allows you to hurl it 'round your house with great speed. Probably the most popular die at the moment due to the wildly acclaimed d20 System.

d100

Normally 2d10, but sometimes a huge munchkin-die. The d100 is used to enable percentile systems a false sense of scientific credibility.

Dungeon Master

The enemy.

Edition

A way to invalidate previous rulebooks and make you spend hundreds of dollars on new ones. Editions usually claim to be "compatible" with earlier games, but only to make you buy those books too.

Experience

Ways to increase your munchkinism.

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Freeform

A more street-credible way of saying live-action.

Genre

What determines whether you are slaughtering aliens or orcs.

Hit Points

A number you want to be as high as possible.

Level

The scale of munchkindom you have achieved.

Live-Action Roleplaying

What tabletop gamers say they don't do; i.e. dressing up in costumes and hitting each other with foamies.

Magic Points

The number of times you can shout FWACKOOM and deafen your DM.

Munchkin

Power-gamer, twink, combat-wombat, metagamer, min-maxer, gun-bunny...

NPC

Cannon fodder.

PC

Your character, dummy.

Player

You and your friends.

RPG

Rocket-Propelled Grenade.

Rules Lawyer

A player that constantly, consistently, and damagingly interrupts play with what is best termed "whining." They are also easily identified by their lack of bringing up rules that do not favor them, and constantly look for interesting ways to interpret wording—common sense and game integrity be damned.

Skills

One-half of your munchkin potential.

Statistics

The other half.

Supplement

A book that adds on to the basic rules and background of the original game, complicating everyone's lives.

Table Top

Not live-action or play by mail or play by e-mail—roleplaying in armchairs, with dice getting lost under the sofa, and soda getting spilled all over game books (only sad cases sit around a proper table).

THE CATHOLIC CLERIC

"One of my gaming clients tried to introduce a friend to DUNGEONS & DRAGONS the other night. The new guy didn't have his own dice, so I offered to let him use some of mine. He seemed a little reluctant after noticing that the "one" pip was represented by a skull and crossbones, but he took a deep breath and rolled on.

He was lucky enough—or so I thought—to roll two natural 18's in a row for his first character. Most of us were making a big fuss about it, but he just sort of quietly stared at the 666 lined up on the table.

Before I realize what's happening, he's shouting a prayer at me and splashing holy water on the table (I guess he's Catholic?). Then he crossed his chest a few times and left in a run.

My question to you: I think this guy would do an excellent job of playing a cleric character. How do I get him back to the gaming table?"

THE TOP 100 THINGS I'D DO IF I BECAME AN EVIL OVERLORD

1. My Legions of Terror will have helmets with clear Plexiglas visors, not face-concealing ones.

2. My ventilation ducts will be too small to crawl through.

3. My noble half-brother whose throne I usurped will be killed, not kept anonymously imprisoned in a forgotten cell of my dungeon.

4. Shooting is *not* too good for my enemies.

5. The artifact that is the source of my power will not be kept on the Mountain of Despair beyond the River of Fire guarded by the Dragons of Eternity. It will be in my safe-deposit box. The same applies to the object, which is my one weakness.

6. I will not gloat over my enemies' predicament before killing them.

7. When I've captured my adversary and he says, "Look, before you kill me, will you at least tell me what this is all about?" I'll say "No." and shoot him. No, on second thought I'll shoot him then say "No."

8. After I kidnap the beautiful princess, we will be married immediately in a quiet civil ceremony, not a lavish spectacle in three weeks time during which the final phase of my plan will be carried out.

9. I will not include a self-destruct mechanism unless absolutely necessary. If it is necessary, it will not be a large red button labeled "Danger: Do Not Push". The big red button marked "Do Not Push" will instead trigger a spray of bullets on anyone stupid enough to disregard it. Similarly, the ON/OFF switch will not clearly be labeled as such.

10. I will not interrogate my enemies in the inner sanctum—a small hotel well outside my borders will work just as well.

11. I will be secure in my superiority. Therefore, I will feel no need to prove it by leaving clues in the form of riddles or leaving my weaker enemies alive to show they pose no threat.

12. One of my advisors will be an average five-year-old child. Any flaws in my plan that he is able to spot will be corrected before implementation.

13. All slain enemies will be cremated, or at least have several rounds of ammunition emptied into them, not left for dead at the bottom of the cliff. The announcement of their deaths, as well as any accompanying celebration, will be deferred until after the aforementioned disposal.

14. The hero is not entitled to a last kiss, a last cigarette, or any other form of last request.

15. I will never employ any device with a digital countdown. If I find that such a device is absolutely unavoidable, I will set it to activate when the counter reaches 117 and the hero is just putting his plan into operation.

16. I will never utter the sentence "But before I kill you, there's just one thing I want to know."

17. When I employ people as advisors, I will occasionally listen to their advice.

18. I will not have a son. Although his laughably under-planned attempt to usurp power would easily fail, it would provide a fatal distraction at a crucial point in time.

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19. I will not have a daughter. She would be as beautiful as she was evil, but one look at the hero's rugged countenance and she'd betray her own father.

20. Despite its proven stress-relieving effect, I will not indulge in maniacal laughter. When so occupied, it's too easy to miss unexpected developments that a more attentive individual could adjust to accordingly.

21. I will hire a talented fashion designer to create original uniforms for my Legions of Terror, as opposed to some cheap knock-offs that make them look like Nazi stormtroopers, Roman foot soldiers, or savage Mongol hordes. All were eventually defeated and I want my troops to have a more positive mind-set.

22. No matter how tempted I am with the prospect of unlimited power, I will not consume any energy field bigger than my head.

23. I will keep a special cache of low-tech weapons and train my troops in their use. That way, even if the heroes manage to neutralize my power generator and/or render the standard-issue energy weapons useless, my troops will not be overrun by a handful of savages armed with spears and rocks.

24. I will maintain a realistic assessment of my strengths and weaknesses. Even though this takes some of the fun out of the job, at least I will never utter the line "No, this cannot be! I am *invincible!*" (After that, death is usually instantaneous.)

25. No matter how well it would perform, I will never construct any sort of machinery that is completely indestructible except for one small and virtually inaccessible vulnerable spot.

26. No matter how attractive certain members of the rebellion are, there is probably someone just as attractive who is not desperate to kill me. Therefore, I will think twice before ordering a prisoner sent to my bedchamber.

27. I will never build only one of anything important. All important systems will have redundant control panels and power supplies. For the same reason I will always carry at least two fully loaded weapons at all times.

28. My pet monster will be kept in a secure cage from which it cannot escape and into which I could not accidentally stumble.

29. I will dress in bright and cheery colors, and so throw my enemies into confusion.

30. All bumbling conjurers, clumsy squires, no-talent bards, and cowardly thieves in the land will be preemptively put to death. My foes will surely give up and abandon their quest if they have no source of comic relief.

31. All naive, busy tavern wenches in my realm will be replaced with surly, world-weary waitresses who will provide no unexpected reinforcement and/or romantic subplot for the hero or his sidekick.

32. I will not fly into a rage and kill a messenger who brings me bad news just to illustrate how evil I really am. Good messengers are hard to come by.

33. I won't require high-ranking female members of my organization to wear a stainless-steel bustier. Morale is better with a more casual dress code. Similarly, outfits made entirely from black leather will be reserved for formal occasions.

34. I will not turn into a snake. It never helps.

35. I will not grow a goatee. In the old days, they made you look diabolic. Now they just make you look like a disaffected member of Generation X.

36. I will not imprison members of the same party in the same cellblock, let alone the same cell. If they are important prisoners, I will keep the only key to the cell door on my person instead of handing out copies to every bottom-rung guard in the prison.

37. If my trusted lieutenant tells me my Legions of Terror are losing a battle, I will believe him. After all, he's my trusted lieutenant.

38. If an enemy I have just killed has a younger sibling or offspring anywhere, I will find them and have them killed immediately,

instead of waiting for them to grow up harboring feelings of vengeance towards me in my old age.

39. If I absolutely must ride into battle, I will certainly not ride at the forefront of my Legions of Terror, nor will I seek out my opposite number among his army.

40. I will be neither chivalrous nor sporting. If I have an unstoppable superweapon, I will use it as early and as often as possible instead of keeping it in reserve.

41. Once my power is secure, I will destroy all those pesky time-travel devices.

42. When I capture the hero, I will make sure I also get his dog, monkey, ferret, or whatever sickeningly cute little animal capable of untying ropes and filching keys happens to follow him around.

43. I will maintain a healthy amount of skepticism when I capture the beautiful rebel and she claims she is attracted to my power and good looks and will gladly betray her companions if I just let her in on my plans.

44. I will only employ bounty hunters who work for money. Those who work for the pleasure of the hunt tend to do dumb things like even the odds to give the other guy a sporting chance.

45. I will make sure I have a clear understanding of who is responsible for what in my organization. For example, if my general screws up I will not draw my weapon, point it at him, say, "And here is the price for failure," then suddenly turn and kill some random underling.

46. If an advisor says to me "My liege, he is but one man. What can one man possibly do?" I will reply "This." and kill the advisor.

47. If I learn that a callow youth has begun a quest to destroy me, I will slay him while he is still a callow youth instead of waiting for him to mature.

48. I will treat any beast that I control through magic or technology with respect and kindness. Thus if the control is ever broken, it will not immediately come after me for revenge.

49. If I learn the whereabouts of the one artifact that can destroy me, I will not send all my troops out to seize it. Instead, I will send them out to seize something else and quietly put a Want Ad in the local paper.

50. My main computers will have their own special operating system that will be completely incompatible with today's conventional operating systems.

51. If one of my dungeon guards begins expressing concern over the conditions in the beautiful princess' cell, I will immediately transfer him to a less people-oriented position.

52. I will hire a team of board-certified architects and surveyors to examine my castle and inform me of any secret passages and abandoned tunnels that I might not know about.

53. If the beautiful princess that I capture says, "I'll never marry you, never! Do you hear me? *Never!*" I will say "Oh well" and kill her.

54. I will not strike a bargain with a demonic being then attempt to double-cross it simply because I feel like being contrary.

55. The deformed mutants and oddball psychotics will have their place in my Legions of Terror. However before I send them out on important covert missions that require tact and subtlety, I will first see if there is anyone else equally qualified who would attract less attention.

56. My Legions of Terror will be trained in basic marksmanship. Any who cannot learn to hit a man-sized target at 10 meters will be used for target practice.

57. Before employing any captured artifacts or machinery, I will carefully read the owner's manual.

58. If it becomes necessary to escape, I will never stop to pose dramatically and toss off a one-liner.

59. I will never build a sentient computer smarter than I am.

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60. My five-year-old child advisor will also be asked to decipher any code I am thinking of using. If he breaks the code in under 30 seconds, it will not be used. Note: this also applies to passwords.

61. If my advisors ask, "Why are you risking everything on such a mad scheme?" I will not proceed until I have a response that satisfies them.

62. I will design my fortress hallways with no alcoves or protruding structural supports that intruders could use for cover in a firefight.

63. Bulk trash will be disposed of in incinerators, not compactors. And they will be kept hot, with none of that nonsense about flames going through accessible tunnels at predictable intervals.

64. I will see a competent psychiatrist and get cured of all extremely unusual phobias and bizarre compulsive habits that could prove to be a disadvantage.

65. If I must have computer systems with publicly available terminals, the maps they display of my complex will have a room clearly marked as the Main Control Room. That room will be the Execution Chamber. The actual main control room will be marked as Sewage Overflow Containment.

66. My security keypad will actually be a fingerprint scanner. Anyone who watches someone press a sequence of buttons or dusts the pad for fingerprints then subsequently tries to enter by repeating that sequence will trigger the alarm system.

67. No matter how many shorts we have in the system, my guards will be instructed to treat every surveillance camera malfunction as a full-scale emergency.

68. I will spare someone who saved my life sometime in the past. This is only reasonable as it encourages others to do so. However, the offer is good one time only. If they want me to spare them again, they'd better save my life again.

69. All midwives will be banned from the realm. All babies will be delivered at state-approved hospitals. Orphans will be placed in foster-homes, not abandoned in the woods to be raised by creatures of the wild.

70. When my guards split up to search for intruders, they will always travel in groups of at least two. They will be trained so that if one of them disappears mysteriously while on patrol, the other will immediately initiate an alert and call for backup, instead of quizzically peering around a corner.

71. If I decide to test a lieutenant's loyalty and see if he should be made a trusted lieutenant, I will have a crack squad of marksmen standing by in case the answer is no.

72. If all the heroes are standing together around a strange device and begin to taunt me, I will pull out a conventional weapon instead of using my unstoppable superweapon on them.

73. I will not agree to let the heroes go free if they win a rigged contest, even though my advisors assure me it is impossible for them to win.

74. When I create a multimedia presentation of my plan designed so that my five-year-old advisor can easily understand the details, I will not label the disk "Project Overlord" and leave it lying on top of my desk.

75. I will instruct my Legions of Terror to attack the hero en masse, instead of standing around waiting while members break off and attack one or two at a time.

76. If the hero runs up to my roof, I will not run up after him and struggle with him in an attempt to push him over the edge. I will also not engage him at the edge of a cliff (in the middle of a rope-bridge over a river of molten lava is not even worth considering).

77. If I have a fit of temporary insanity and decide to give the hero the chance to reject a job as my trusted lieutenant, I will retain enough sanity to wait until my current trusted lieutenant is out of earshot before making the offer.

78. I will not tell my Legions of Terror "And he must be taken alive!" The command will be "And try to take him alive if it is reasonably practical."

79. If my doomsday device happens to come with a reverse switch, as soon as it has been employed it will be melted down and made into limited-edition commemorative coins.

80. If my weakest troops fail to eliminate a hero, I will send out my best troops instead of wasting time with progressively stronger ones as he gets closer and closer to my fortress.

81. If I am fighting with the hero atop a moving platform, have disarmed him, and am about to finish him off and he glances behind me and drops flat, I too will drop flat instead of quizzically turning around to find out what he saw.

82. I will not shoot at any of my enemies if they are standing in front of the crucial support beam to a heavy, dangerous, unbalanced structure.

83. If I'm eating dinner with the hero, put poison in his goblet, then have to leave the table for any reason, I will order new drinks for both of us instead of trying to decide whether or not to switch with him.

84. I will not have captives of one sex guarded by members of the opposite sex.

85. I will not use any plan in which the final step is horribly complicated, i.e. "Align the 12 Stones of Power on the sacred altar then activate the medallion at the moment of total eclipse." Instead, it will be more along the lines of "Push the button."

86. I will make sure that my doomsday device is up to code and properly grounded.

87. My vats of hazardous chemicals will be covered when not in use. In addition, I will not construct walkways above them.

88. If a group of henchmen fail miserably at a task, I will not berate them for incompetence then send the same group out to try the task again.

89. After I capture the hero's superweapon, I will not immediately disband my legions and relax my guard because I believe whoever holds the weapon is unstoppable. After all, the hero held the weapon and I took it from him.

90. I will not design my Main Control Room so that every workstation is facing away from the door.

91. I will not ignore the messenger that stumbles in exhausted and obviously agitated until my personal grooming or current entertainment is finished. It might actually be important.

92. If I ever talk to the hero on the phone, I will not taunt him. Instead, I will say this: "Your dogged perseverance has given me new insight on the futility of my evil ways. If you leaves me alone for a few months of quiet contemplation I will likely return to the path of righteousness." Heroes are incredibly gullible in this regard.

93. If I decide to hold a double execution of the hero and an underling who failed or betrayed me, I will see to it that the hero is scheduled to go first.

94. When arresting prisoners, my guards will not allow them to stop and grab a useless trinket of purely sentimental value.

95. My dungeon will have its own qualified medical staff complete with bodyguards. That way if a prisoner becomes sick and his cellmate tells the guard it's an emergency, the guard will fetch a trauma team instead of opening up the cell for a look.

96. My door mechanisms will be designed so that blasting the control panel on the outside seals the door and blasting the control panel on the inside opens the door, not vice versa.

97. My dungeon cells will not be furnished with objects that contain reflective surfaces or anything that can be unraveled.

98. If an attractive young couple enters my realm, I will carefully monitor their activities. If I find they are happy and affectionate, I will ignore them. However, if circumstance has forced them together against their will and they spend all their time bickering and criticizing

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ing each other except during the intermittent occasions when they are saving each others' lives at which point there are hints of sexual tension, I will immediately order their execution.

99. Any data file of crucial importance will be padded to 1.45 MB in size.

100. Finally, to keep my subjects permanently locked in a mindless trance, I will provide each of them with free unlimited Internet access.

THE HEAD OF VECNA

"An important safety tip! Many years ago, (back when we all were still playing the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS) I ran a game where I pitted two groups against each other. Several members of Group One came up with the idea of luring Group Two into a trap.

You remember the *Hand of Vecna* and the *Eye of Vecna*? They were artifacts in the old D&D world where if you cut off your hand (or your eye) and replaced it with the *Hand of Vecna* (or the *Eye*) you'd get new awesome powers.

Well, Group One thought up the *Head of Vecna*. Group One spread rumors all over the countryside (even paying bards to spread the word about this artifact rumored to exist nearby). They even went so far as to get a real head and place it under some weak traps to help with the illusion.

Unfortunately, they forgot to let *all* the members of their group in on the secret plan (I suspect it was because they didn't want the druid to be caught and tell the enemy about this trap of theirs, or maybe because they didn't want him messing with things).

The druid in Group One heard about this new artifact and went off in search of it himself (I believe to help prove himself to the party members...)

Well, after much trial and tribulation, he found it; deactivated (or set off) all the traps, and took his "prize" off into the woods for examination. He discovered that it did not radiate magic (a well-known trait of artifacts) and smiled gleefully.

I wasn't really worried since he was alone and I knew that there was no way he could cut his own head off! Alas, I was mistaken. The druid promptly summoned some carnivorous apes and instructed them to use his own scimitar and cut his head off (and of course quickly replacing it with the *Head of Vecna*).

Some time later, Group One decided to find the druid and to check on the trap. They found the headless body (and the two heads) and realized that they had erred in their plan (besides laughing at the person who had played the druid). The *Head of Vecna* still had *both* eyes! They corrected this mistake and reset their traps and the *Head* for its real intended victims.

Group Two, by this time, had heard of the powerful artifact and decided that it bore investigating since, if true, they could use it to destroy Group One. After much trial and tribulation, they found the resting place of the *Head of Vecna*! They were particularly impressed with the cunning traps surrounding the site (one almost missed his save against the weakest poison known to man). They recovered the *Head* and made off to a safe area.

Group Two actually came to blows (several rounds of fighting) against each other arguing over *who would get their head cut off*? Several greedy characters had to be hurt and restrained before it was decided who would be the recipient of the great powers bestowed by the *Head*. The wizard was selected and one of them promptly cut his head off.

As a character was lifting the *Head of Vecna* to place it on its new body, another argument broke out and they spent several minutes shouting and yelling. Then, finally, they put the *Head* onto the character.

Well, of course, the *Head* simply fell off the lifeless body. All members of Group Two began yelling and screaming at each other (and at me) and then, on their own, decided that they had let too much time pass between cutting off the head off a hopeful recipient and putting the *Head of Vecna* onto the body.

So they did it again (killing another PC).

In closing, it should be said that I never even cracked a smile as all this was going on. After the second PC was slaughtered, I had to give in (my side was hurting).

And Group Two blamed *me* for all of that.

So let that be a warning to you: don't let your head get cut off unless you really know what you're doing."

MICROSOFT LEVELS UP WINDOWS

"It seems that Microsoft has bowed to the pressure of millions of munchkins worldwide and plans to release the latest versions of their flagship products as Windows XP and Office XP. The XP name is short for "eXPerience," symbolizing the rich and munchkin-like treasure Windows and Office can offer for low or nonexistent risk. Already labeled the "Blind Kobold" release, preorders for the two products have already crashed several servers in the US. Sources at excite.com confirm that a full set of elven chain and *boots of springing and striding* will ship with each product sold.

Industry analysts predict that Microsoft (NASDAQ "MSFT") is gearing up to cash in on the hype of the Diablo 2 expansion pack, and Neverwinter Nights. It is rumored that playing these games using Windows XP will increase the speed of leveling up.

"7-!!5 !5 50 1337," remarked 4M4zoN666, an avid game player. "I LoV3 XP!!!" Similar sentiments have been expressed by the gamer community at large. The release of the XP product line renewed speculation that Microsoft would attempt to buy out Wizards of the Coast, creators of the popular roleplaying game, DUNGEONS & DRAGONS.

"We believe that Microsoft and Wizards can form a successful party," stated a Microsoft press release. "But until Steve Jobs stops drinking all the Mountain Dew, we're not starting the campaign."

In unrelated news, Microsoft plans to change its logo to a disembodied hand and eye in 2nd quarter 2001.

BILL GATES GRANTS SELF 18 DEXTERITY, 20 CHARISMA

REDMOND, WA—Microsoft head Bill Gates, already considered by many to be among the most powerful men in the world, further increased his powers Monday, augmenting several of his key statistics to near-immortal levels.

Among the most striking increases were a +2 raise in Dexterity to 18, and an overwhelming Charisma increase to an above-human score of 20, placing Gates in the realm of deities and demigods.

"I am pleased to announce that I have boosted my already impressive statistics," Gates said in a statement to shareholders Monday. "As we develop the technological framework that will dominate the 21st century, these augmentations—and others to follow—will be powerful wards against competition from the likes of Netscape, Oracle and Melkor who is named Morgoth.

"Microsoft is the software-industry leader today, and tomorrow it will also dominate the realm of information access, as well as the content being accessed," Gates said. "The continued growth of our Corbis Media archive, the successful development and launch of MSNBC, and my mastery of the *shield* spells of the Elven King Lagolin are only the beginning for Microsoft."

Gates, who raised his Intelligence to 20 in 1990, is fast becoming the most powerful CEO in American media. Experts place him above Fox's Rupert Murdoch and Disney's Michael Eisner, both of whom hold over 1.2 million hit points. Gates is also rumored to be in pos-

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session of a *bag of holding* containing one terabyte of information, as well as over 100 billion gold and silver pieces.

Analysts see Monday's statistical boost as extremely beneficial to Gates in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

"This is a very shrewd move on Gates' part," *PC Magazine* columnist John C. Dvorak said. "His vastly increased Charisma—the prime stat of a chaotic evil executive—will help him tremendously in his ongoing struggle to convince skeptical Microsoft stockholders that his ventures into television and his massive content-buying spree will pay off in the long run. The extra Charisma will also assist him greatly in dealing with wary CEOs of companies he wishes to invest in and cast spells over, like Comcast.

"It hardly seems fair, but he will now be capable of near-invisibility in behind-the-scenes business dealings," Dvorak added, referring to the stealth argument that comes with a Dexterity gain. "And at the same time, he'll wear *Mordenkainen's spectacles of true sight*, which provide +6 insight gains into long-term Windows marketing strategies."

While few question the wisdom behind Gates' stat increases, there remains a possibility that the Federal Trade Commission, which in 1996 ruled his licensing agreement with computer manufacturers to be in violation of anti-trust laws, will challenge the move. Even if the FTC rules against Gates, however, industry analysts believe that he should easily recover, thanks to his above-average 15 Constitution. Gates' rivals expressed frustration over his ability to achieve invulnerability in a supposedly competitive market. "Combining this augmentation with last month's purchase of the *polo shirt of Thalkettoth*, which grants a +5 saving throw against anti-trust litigation, Gates should now be seen as operating outside the law," Apple CEO Dr. Gilbert Amelio said Tuesday. "One more sorcerous potion of *gain market share*, and we might as well declare bankruptcy."

"Anyone can be a Santa Claus DM and give out unearned stats," Oracle president Larry Ellison said. "I'm surprised he didn't just go ahead and give himself a 20 in everything."

With overpowering statistics in all six ability categories, with the exception of Strength, Gates is widely considered to be primed for the Kingship.

"Certainly his campaign could be crushed if he made a mistake," ABC computer correspondent Geena Smith said. "But let's be realistic. He's got 40 million experience points dating back to when he dropped out of Harvard. His party has done nothing but kill and acquire for 22 years. He knows when to cast versus when to hack-and-slash. He will be the emperor lich of 21st century media."

Character Bilbo of The Gatepeople
 Alignment chaotic evil Race half-elf
 Class CEO Level 33
 Player's Name Bill Gates Homeland Terrain Seattle
 Sex M Age 41 Ht. 6'5" Kit entrepreneur/visionary
 Wt. 165 Hair Brn. Eyes Yellow Secondary Skills Negotiation, Hacking, Demon Summoning
 Appearance strikingly handsome, high cheekbones, great hair

13	STR	Henchmen must carry gold pieces
18	DEX	Lawsuit dodging (+4)
15	CON	Anti-Trust Suit recovery (+5)
20	INT	Accepted to Harvard
18	WIS	Can see The Road Ahead
20	CHR	Stockholder Persuasion

HIT POINTS	Languages	Magic Items
1.5 million HP	English	Bettmann Archives
	Pascal	MSNBC
	C++ ActiveX, COBOL	Bag of holdings
		Spectacles of True Sight

Superstitions: Never talk to competition, Microsoft Explorer



WEAPON COMBAT				Range	Weight	Size	Type	Speed
Weapon	#AT	Attack Adj/Dmg Adj	THACO					
Secret Search Engine			+6	6D6	earth			
Polo Shirt of Thalkettoth			+1	3D12	closet → work	medium/ralph		
Long Bow			+3	2D6	long range	light		
Focus/Drive of the Gods			+1	5D17	limitless		intense	
Hostile Takeover/LBO			+5	8D19	NY-LA			

Above: Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, one of the most powerful businessmen on the Prime Material Plane, recently granted himself powers normally available only to deities and demigod.

SKIP THE ROGUE

"Like most gaming stories, this one loses quite a bit in the telling. I was DMing a group on a dungeon expedition and they found a "backdoor" into the place, actually a sinkhole.

All roleplayers know you never split up the party, but they all do it anyway. So, the party sends its rogue down the sinkhole, whereupon two kobold sentries promptly ventilate the poor rogue with the crossbows, leaving him bleeding and dying at the bottom of the sinkhole.

The rest of the party rapidly climbs down into the sinkhole as fast as they can, with the kobolds pumping crossbow bolts into them as quickly as they could. Thanks to the party's wildly different movement rates, they string out along the climb and arrive by ones and twos at the bottom. When the first characters get there, they are worried more about the kobolds than their dying friend, so they sort of use him as a step stool to reach the chamber floor and go charging after the kobolds.

The poor rogue served as a welcome mat for the entire party.

Eventually, the kobolds ran off and the party stopped to put the rogue back together. The rogue was unconscious through the whole affair, so the character didn't know what had happened, but the player did. The player kept asking snide questions such as "Gee, how did I get these footprints on my chest?" and "That's odd, did you know you could get bruised ribs from a crossbow?"

All this made the other players squirm quite a bit."

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REAL MEN DON'T PLAY GURPS

Back in the good old days—the “Golden Era” of roleplaying—it was easy to separate the men from the boys (sometimes called “Real Men” and “Quiche Eaters” in literature). During this period, the Real Men were the ones who played DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, and the Quiche Eaters were the ones who didn't.

A Real Man said things like “save vs. death or die” and “THACo” (they actually pronounced the zero in THACo, you understand), and the rest of the world said things like “DUNGEONS & DRAGONS— isn't that Satanic?” and “dragons don't exist.” Real Men brush off such trivial issues, and have never had problems killing things that don't exist.

But, as usual, times change. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is no longer the only force in roleplaying. We are faced today with a world in which vampires can be player characters instead of monsters, and rules exist for creating microwave ovens and toasters that are more detailed than those for creating humans.

There is a clear need to point out the differences between the typical pasty-faced Goth poseur or aspiring gearhead and a Real Man. If this difference is made clear, it will give these people something to aspire to—a role model, a father figure. It will also help explain why, despite 25 years of progress in roleplaying games, the Real Man continues to be the force that he is today.

Games

The easiest way to tell a Real Man from the rest of the roleplaying crowd is by the game he plays. Real Men play DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. Quiche Eaters play GURPS and Storyteller. Mark Rein.Hagen, the designer of Storyteller, was once asked, “How do you pronounce the dot in your name?” He replied “It's unpronounceable and symbolizes how meaningless are the labels that we attach to ourselves.” One can tell immediately from this comment that Mark Rein.Hagen is a Quiche Eater. Real Men don't need the abstract concepts introduced by Quiche-Eating games—like characterization, immersiveness, or realism—to get their jobs done. They are perfectly happy with a sword, a spellbook, and a beer.

- Real Men use swords to kill monsters.
- Real Men use swords to tame the wilderness.
- Real Men use swords to negotiate peace treaties.
- Real Men use swords to romance the opposite sex.

If you can't do it with a sword, do it with a *fireball*. If you can't do it with a *fireball*, it isn't worth doing.

Real Gaming

Roleplaying pundits have gotten into the “gambist/simulationist/dramatist” classification rut over the past several years. They claim that roleplaying has many purposes and games should be designed to emphasize the particular purpose that the designer has in mind. They don't all agree on exactly which purposes should be emphasized, of course, which hasn't stopped megabytes of tedious discussion on one forum or another. These people have obviously never played a Real Game. My first adventure in a Real Game involved tracking down a demon with six arms, a snake-like tail, a bad attitude, and killing it before it destroyed the entire kingdom. Any Real Man will tell you that all the Dramatist Existentialist Angst and Simulationist Verisimilitude in the world won't help you solve a problem like that—it takes violence. Some quick observations on Real Men and violence:

- Real Men aren't afraid to kill orcs.
- Real Men aren't afraid to kill giants.
- Real Men aren't afraid to kill dragons.

- Real Men aren't afraid to kill kittens—they might grow up to be an evil wizard's familiar.
- Real Men don't have to justify killing things—the need is obvious.

Games emphasizing free-form storytelling and non-violent interaction have gotten a lot of press lately. “The story is the thing,” according to these games. The people who write these games believe that they offer an alternative to how roleplaying games have historically been played, namely as a series of encounters involving killing things. Real Men know better than that; they know that the story is merely a convenient device used to set the stage for the important parts of the game, namely killing things.

Dice

What kind of dice are used by a Real Man? Six-sided dice? Naturally—everyone and his dog uses six-sided dice; it is the iconic die. But a Real Man isn't satisfied until his dice collection includes every platonic solid and regular polyhedron (and possibly irregular ones as well).

A Real Man's dice collection includes multiple examples of four-, six-, eight-, ten-, twelve- and 20-sided dice. Some particularly dedicated Real Men also have two-, three-, 30- and 100-sided dice. The fact that it is physically impossible to have a polyhedron with only two faces (sides) is but a minor inconvenience to a Real Man.

Real Men are also discerning consumers who demand value for money from their roleplaying purchases. Dice are expensive and justifying their existence is a key requirement from any game that a Real Man plays. A ruleset that doesn't use ten different polyhedra simply isn't worth considering for a Real Man.

Rulesets

What kind of system does a Real Man use to resolve tasks in the game? In theory, a Real Man could use any task resolution system he liked. Back in the days when adventures consisted solely of 10-foot-square rooms occupied by 50-foot-long dragons, this was of course moot. The only task resolution systems that mattered were the attack roll (see “Real Gaming” above) and the saving throw. Your typical Real Man knew the class attack matrices in the 1st Edition D&D *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* by heart, and exactly where the break-points were for optimal dual classing. (Back then, classes were *real* classes. Every cleric was the same as every other cleric, every fighter was the same as every other fighter, and so on. This made it very easy to create new characters after your original ones got killed. These days, you can spend more time creating new characters than actually gaming.)

Let it not be said that the Real Man is averse to progress, however. Many of the innovations that have appeared in the last 25 years have been incorporated into rulesets that Real Men use today. For example, DUNGEONS & DRAGONS originally had no task resolution system for non-combat situations, so not surprisingly, people tended to gloss over them. Today, there are lots of ways of handling such situations, so Real Men now have the luxury of glossing over them for their own sake. Some people have claimed that the latest edition of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS places more emphasis on nonviolent solutions to problems, but after careful study I have come to the conclusion that they were mistaken.

The Real Man might compromise his principles and use a ruleset that is not DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, if there are enough opportunities to cause violence. There are several Real Men playing GURPS, for instance, and they talk about Real Men's issues like wound ballistics and the physics of laminate amour and long rod penetrators. Those Real Men who play Storyteller also find no lack of opportunities to kill things. Indeed, Storyteller, despite its Quiche-Eating sensibili-

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ties, is perhaps even more suited to epic violence than DUNGEONS & DRAGONS; some 2,000-year-old elder kindred make 50th level wizard-paladins look like kids in the park.

- Real Men play hardened, violent adventures in GURPS.
- Real Men play hardened, violent adventures in Vampire.
- Real Men play hardened, violent adventures in Call of Cthulhu.
- Real Men play hardened, violent adventures in Elfquest.

As we can see, the determined Real Man can instigate violence in any ruleset.

The Future

What of the future? It is a matter of some concern to Real Men that the latest generation of roleplayers are not being brought up with the same outlook on life as their elders. Many of them have never seen a 10-foot-wide corridor, let alone heard the tale of Eric and the dread gazebo. Hardly anyone in gaming clubs these days has had the experience of mapping out a dungeon on grid paper. Gamers these days are soft—protected from the realities of roleplaying by diceless systems, computer games, and “player-friendly” modules. Worst of all, some of these alleged “roleplayers” manage to become game developers without ever having had a character die on them! Are we destined to become a community of Goth poseurs and aspiring gearheads?

From my experience, I can only report that the future is bright for Real Men everywhere. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS doesn't show any signs of dying out, despite all the efforts of Storyteller and GURPS fans the world over. Even more subtle tricks, like adding nonweapon proficiencies, skills, and powers to D&D have failed. Oh sure, TSR came out with the Players' Option books, which were almost certainly D&D's darkest hour. However, all of them simply just gave us more and better ways to instigate violence—to kill monsters as God meant it to be. Furthermore, on the computer gaming front, games like Diablo and Counterstrike are giving rise to a whole new generation of Real Men. They may use a strange lingo containing words like woot and 3131, but the truth is that Real Men speak the same language everywhere—even if the words are different.

Even D&D itself is not as bad on Real Men as it once was. The latest release of D&D has the potential of a roleplaying game worthy of any Real Man—unlimited hit dice, all classes gaining multiple attacks per round, and plenty of strange and arbitrary special abilities. If you ignore the fact that it contains skills like Diplomacy, Craft, and Profession, 3rd Edition contains much that can be appreciated by the Real Man. After all, there's no multiclassing limits, three-quarters of the core classes use spells, and the added bonus of the prestige class is thrown in—like having the best parts of kits and dual classing in one place. To add to the fun, bonuses can have different types, so not only do you have to remember which numbers to add up, you have to remember which ones to throw away too.

No, the future isn't all that bad. Why, in the past year, even the classic Real Man's roleplaying game—1st Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS—has been revived and republished under the Hackmaster brand. From all evidence, the spirit of Real Men lives on in this excellent ruleset. As long as there are ill-defined campaign worlds, quirky challenges, and bizarre dungeons, there will be Real Men willing to Kill the Monsters and Take their Treasure.

Long live DUNGEONS & DRAGONS!

SPELLCASTING 101:

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

With the Harry Potter movie raking in bales of box office cash as I write this and the popularity of both the Harry Potter books and the recent edition of D&D (which is driving some Satanic panic victims

into fits of apoplexy) I thought I might do a little demonstration for everyone.

More than a few times I've heard certain people claim that both Harry Potter and D&D books contain real spells that you can cast. Recently, in fact, I found a site called Demonbuster that has this to say about the Harry Potter series:

“Some of the Christians who defend Harry Potter books claim that one could never learn enough to truly practice magic or sorcery by reading them. That sort of statement could only be made by someone who was comparatively ignorant of sorcery.”

Demonbuster also tells us that we should never burn candles or wear cologne, perfume, or any clothing with a paisley print, so they must know what they're talking about. Bold statements like those are never made by crackpots, after all.

So, I'm going to settle this for everyone. I am going to take my Harry Potter books and my Third Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Player's Handbook* and attempt to cast the arcane spells contained within, all in the name of science, and at great risk to my body and soul.

You heard right. These claims of authentic, functional magical abilities will be put to the test before your very eyes. Do these spells really work? Will your kids be able to cast them after a casual read? Will I survive unscathed? The spells that you see the characters casting in the Harry Potter series consist primarily of a few pseudo-Latin words spoken loudly while waving your magic wand or pointing it at your target. This should be a piece of cake—if there's one thing I can do, it's speak pseudo-Latin while waving a stick around!

Preparation: Constructing the Wand

First, we'll need a wand. According to the books, wands are usually made of a magical wood, with some sort of powerful item inside—like a unicorn hair or phoenix feather. I'm not sure where to find a phoenix or unicorn—in fact, I suspect that neither of them really exists. But I could be wrong. After all, according to Demonbuster, any kid who reads these books will be able to start throwing spells around like there's no tomorrow. So a wand can't be that hard to make.

The Harry Potter books tell us nothing about how to construct a wand, so I will have to improvise. We have a border collie (no horn), a parakeet with a very bad temper, and a yard full of transplanted Christmas trees (and there's *got* to be some kind of magic in those). So for the purposes of our experiments, I will be using an evergreen twig with some dog hairs and a parakeet feather taped to it.

This part wasn't easy. The parakeet got a few good bites in, and the dog won't go anywhere near me now, but that's okay. Any wizard worth his salt can cast spells with a bandaged hand and the dog would only get in the way anyway. Now we have one official Harry Potter wand, capable of performing all kinds of nasty magical effects. Let's pick up one of the books and look for a spell to cast.

Phase One: Casting Spells from the Harry Potter Books

Spell Name: Lumos

Source: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 335

Harry makes his wand shine like a flashlight:

“Lumos!” he whispered. The wandlight showed him the trunk of a thick tree...

That should come in handy the next time the power goes out.

Test Method: This should be simple; say the word and wave the wand. What could be easier?

Results: My results went something like this:

“Lumos.” (wave, wave)

“Lumos!” (wave, wave, wave)

“LUMOS, DAGNABIT!” (wavewavewavewavewave)

Nothing. That's odd. I did everything the book told me to. Maybe I need more dog hair. Or an easier spell. Let's try the first book instead.

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I probably shouldn't have tried something from the third volume since Harry was a third year at Hogwarts in that one.

Spell Name: Body-Bind

Source: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 273
(Hermione) raised her wand.

"Petrificus Totalus!" she cried, pointing it at Neville.

Neville's arms snapped to his sides. His legs sprang together. His whole body rigid, he swayed where he stood and then fell flat on his face, stiff as a board."

Test Method: This one seems a lot more powerful than the old instant-flashlight trick. Still, Hermione is a first year when she casts this, so it should be no problem whatsoever. I can see where this spell would be very handy when the kids are getting rowdy at the supermarket. Rather than risk one of them getting hurt on the hard tile floor and possibly run over by a shopping cart, I think I'll cast this one on Paula in the living room, where the carpet will gently cushion her fall. We'll have a good laugh over it afterwards, once I figure out how to undo the spell (hopefully, they cover that in *Goblet of Fire* somewhere...)

Results: Failure. Paula didn't bind. In fact, she snatched my magic wand away and told me to take the trash out.

I really don't get it. I did everything that the characters in the book did, as closely as I could—I waved my wand, said the magic words, and nothing happened at all.

Oh, crap.

This must mean I'm a muggle. How embarrassing.

Phase Two: Casting Spells From a D&D Book

Ah, good old DUNGEONS & DRAGONS... where *anyone* can be a magic-user—muggle or not—as long as they meet the Intelligence requirement!

The spells contained in the *Player's Handbook* consist of a block of statistical information—the time it takes to cast the spell, the duration of the spell's effect, and what components are required to cast it. The components can be verbal, somatic, and/or material, in any combination—but it is rarely supplied to the reader what the exact "magic words" of the verbal component are, how you should gesticulate to perform the somatic component, or in what way the material components are used.

Some would suggest that this means that these spells aren't really meant to be cast by real people and that they're just make-believe. But we know better, because we're not "comparatively ignorant of sorcery" like most people, right?

Okay, this should be easy. Let's pick something simple, a nice First Level spell...

Spell Name: *Hold Portal*

Components Required: V

Spell Effect: Turning to p. 214 of the *Player's Handbook*, we find that *hold portal* will hold closed a door of up to 20 square feet per level. Since I've been playing D&D for 20 years now, I've got to be at least 20th level, right? So I should be able to hold a door that is 400 square feet in size. Man, oh man... the pranks I could pull with that kind of power...

Also, the spell description says that "the magic holds the portal fast, just as if it were securely closed and normally locked." That should easily keep my two daughters from running out of the playroom every two minutes to bother me as I write this.

Test Method: The book tells me that the only thing we need to cast this spell is a verbal component... but it doesn't tell me what that magic word is. Still, a 20th level mage like myself should know all of this by now. I'll just shout a few lock-related magical power words at the playroom door.

Results: Failure. The results went something like this:

"Lock!"

"Deadbolt!"

"Bar!"

THUMP! "Daddy, can we have something to drink?"

Rats. Let's try again:

"PADLOCK!"

"SCHLAGE!"

THUMP! "Daddy! Noah's pulling my hair! Tell her to stop!"

Okay, I know what's wrong. Aylish must know the counterspell!

Spell Name: *Feather Fall*

Components Required: V

Spell Effect: *Feather fall's* purpose is to decrease the speed of a falling object—very useful if you find yourself a sudden victim of gravity.

Test Subject: Self

Test Method: To test this, I will climb onto the roof of our garage, leap off, and shout the verbal component—which I suspect in this case may be "Mary Poppins." If the spell works, I should float to the ground like the suggested feather.

Results: Attempt failed. Children traumatized; oldest daughter resorted to poking daddy with a stick to determine signs of life. Driveway is very hard. Ow.

Spell Name: *Spider Climb*

Components Required: V, S, M

Spell Effect: *Spider Climb* allows the caster to climb walls and ceilings like... well... a spider.

Test Subject: Self

Test Method: I will attempt to climb back onto the roof of the garage, and possibly give *feather fall* another go once I'm up there. As usual, no verbal component is supplied, so we will be using the word "McFarlane" (and if you don't know why, then you're not enough of a geek). The material components are the hardest to swallow—literally. In order to successfully cast this spell, I must eat a live spider and a drop of bitumen (asphalt). Ack. Oh well, it's all in the name of science...

Results: Driveway is still hard. Ow, ow. And for the record, live spiders taste horrible... but after the last two experiments, I've begun to acquire a taste for asphalt.

Spell Name: *Burning Hands*

Components Required: V, S

Test Subject: A stuffed dragon that is in no way connected with the Disney Corporation.

Spell Effect: The effect of a *burning hands* spell is a sheet of flame that shoots forth from the fingertips in a fan-like spray.

Test Method: The spell description tells us that the somatic component is performed by holding the hands outward, palms down, fingers spread, with both thumbs touching. No word is given on the verbal component, but in the Big Dragon Battle Scene of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS movie, Profion seems to shout "fire" as a verbal component. This seems a little too obvious, so I will be using the phrase "Disco Inferno" instead.

Results: Nothing. Good thing, too... my kids love that dragon.

Spell Name: *Change Self*

Components Required: V, S

Test Subject: Self (as if this wasn't obvious)

Test Method: The *change self* spell allows the caster to alter his appearance in any way he chooses. Using this spell, I will be altering my appearance to resemble rakishly handsome film and television star Bruce Cambell. For the verbal and somatic components of the

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spell, I'll sing a verse of "Karma Chameleon" while voguing. But you probably didn't want that mental picture.

Results: Nothing. Rats.

Spell Name: *Animate Rope*

Components Required: V, S

Spell Effect: This spell causes any piece of rope to move about under the wizard's control. Once cast, the rope can be used to entangle, bind, or trip an opponent, creature, or annoying neighbor's kid that keeps throwing dirt clods into your yard while you're trying to concentrate on spell casting.

Test Subject: One length of rope.

Test Method: Cast spell, throw rope over the fence, command rope to tie up the kid, then feed him some dirt clods. Wait, the dirt-clod-feeding step isn't really part of the spell. Scratch that.

Results: No moving rope. Where did I leave the receipt for this blasted book?

Spell Name: *Charm Person*

Components Required: V, S

Spell Effect: A *charm person* spell convinces the subject that you are a friend, no matter what your prior relationship may be.

Test Subject: Random passerby.

Test Method: Choosing a random passerby, I will ask a simple question: "Would you like to be my friend?" while holding both arms out for a hug. This will act as the verbal and somatic components of the spell. A positive response should signify that the spell is a success.

Results: My target, a female, appeared to have a counterspell of some sort, with a material component that looked like a small red can. The resulting gas cloud was both painful and blinding. My spell appears to have failed, but hers seems to have been very successful. I wonder what level she is?

Spell Name: *Mount*

Components Required: V, S, M

Spell Effect: The *mount* spell summons a horse, complete with saddle, bit, and bridle, that is friendly and willing to act as your steed for two hours per level of the caster. That should give me free rides for almost two whole days!

Test Subject: Self, I guess...

Test Method: The material component is a bit of horsehair, and for a combination verbal/somatic component, I will be shouting "Hi Ho Silver!" and making pretend horse-riding motions.

Results: Waited two and hours. No horse. Police drove me home.

Spell Name: *Mage Armor*

Components Required: V, S, F

Spell Effect: *Mage armor* protects the subject with a force field that is capable of improving the target's resistance to incoming attacks.

Test Subject: Self

Test Method: An assistant will attempt to hit me with a weapon (a rusty old pipe wrench was chosen for both heft and visual effect). If properly cast, the blow will be deflected by the magical force field. The focus for this spell is a small piece of cured leather—my battered wallet should do the trick—and for the somatic and verbal, I will be clenching my fists and shouting, "Sticks and Stones!"

Results: Failed. Ouch. And I can't find my wallet now.

Spell Name: *Cause Fear*

Components Required: V, S

Spell Effect: *Cause fear* does just that—incites fear in the people and creatures around you.

Test Subject: Self

Test Method: I never really got around to casting this spell because...

Results: ...the simple act of walking around wearing a wizard's cap and carrying a tree branch with dog hair taped to it appears to have the same effect as casting a *cause fear* spell. Therefore, my research into this particular spell is inconclusive, since I never cast it in the first place.

Conclusion

The Harry Potter and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS books paint vivid pictures of wizards and witches throwing spells around in great doses of fantasy fun—but do not supply enough information to show you how to do it yourself any more than reading Zane Grey can show you how to be the fastest gun in the West.

Anyone who disagrees is welcome to jump off of the roof of my garage. I'll leave the ladder out for you.

STAT THAT MOVIE

In this game, we'll take a film and discuss the classes of the major characters, as well as dissecting some of the highlights of the film in d20 terms. We'll wrap it up with pointing out some of the mistakes the films made in interpreting the D&D rules.

Disney's Sleeping Beauty

Characters

Prince Phillip: At first glance, Prince Phillip seems like a paladin, but he's clearly just a mid-to-high level fighter, as his whimsical decision to flout his father's wishes and marry a "peasant girl" illustrate. Obviously Neutral or Chaotic Good. We'll call him a Fighter 10/Rogue 5 (he's quite adept at fighting without armor).

Maleficent: Despite her claim of being the "Queen of All Evil," it seems unlikely that Maleficent is much more than a talented wizard. Her use of *shapechange* seems to be the upper limit of her powers (nothing epic, it would seem), so we'll call her Wizard 17.

Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather (the Good Fairies): Most of their spell use is simple *prestidigitation* and *unseen servant*-type trickery. However, it is apparent that they have some unique spell-like ability that allows them to grant a single *wish* (probably similar to the genie ability (3 wishes per year to a non-genie). Each also has constructed a wand (or possibly a rod) with several charges of *sleep*, *polymorph self* (used to become very small) and other spells. Additionally, they seem able to cast minor transmutation spells at will (altering the color of a dress multiple times, for instance). Oddly, none of them has a familiar.

Flora is seen casting *greater magic weapon* and *true strike*, as well as a host of defensive spells. She is most likely a 12th-level Abjurer.

Fauna is perhaps the least powerful of the three fairies, displaying no major abilities beyond those common to all three. We'll assume Flora made her wand for her and peg her at 6th-level Enchanter.

Merryweather is the most aggressive of the fairies, the only one to cast a truly offensive spell (*flesh to stone*), and she seems to imply that she could cast *polymorph other* (despite the fact that Fauna denies it, it's obvious that any wizard who can cast *flesh to stone*—a sixth level spell—could most likely cast a fourth level spell as well). We'll rank Merryweather as an 11th-level Transmuter.

Princess Aurora: Clearly a gifted bard, though by no means a high-level one. We really don't see Aurora do much but *charm* a few animals and fail a fort save vs. poison spinning wheel pricking. This, combined with her sylvan upbringing, probably makes her a Bard 1/Ranger 1.

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Highlights and Gaffes

The birth/bleeding/curse scene that introduces the film has a number of impressive magical displays, particularly from Maleficent, but also from the three fairies. Maleficent first appears either in *gaseous form* or, more likely, *polymorphed* into a will-o'-the-wisp. She casts *scare*, keeping the guards and spectators from rushing her, then proceeds to cast *geas* on the infant princess, forcing her to eventually do the whole finger-pricking routine.

The fairies are clearly granting some sort of *wish* or *limited wish* to Aurora, so Merryweather's gift should have been able to totally reverse Maleficent's *geas*. Maleficent's spell would only be too strong for the fairies to overcome with *remove curse*.

Prince Phillip's escape from the Forbidden Mountain is full of fantastic skill checks – but also full of rules gaffes!

Flora does almost all the magical work here. She creates a "magic" sword and shield for Phillip (though it's obvious she's exaggerating, as she needs to cast *greater magic weapon* on the sword a short time later). She also casts *jump* on Phillip's horse Sampson as he vaults the closing drawbridge. Merryweather does the old *flesh to stone* number on Maleficent's familiar which, understandably, really pisses off the old witch.

Flora turns arrows into flowers and boulders into bubbles. It is unclear what spells she could use to create these effects, as they are clearly combat-related and not mere *prestidigitation*. *Polymorph any object* seems unrealistic, given the fact that it only affects a single object and is too high a level in any case.

Maleficent turns up the heat, casting *wall of thorns* in front of Phillip. Are we to believe that Maleficent is also a 9th-level druid? Oh, right, and she casts it enlarged, too? Clearly munchkinism.

Finally, for the big finale, Maleficent casts *shapechange*, turning herself into a huge black dragon. While it's size is obviously exaggerated for cinematic effect, it's puzzling that the dragon breathes fire instead of acid. But wait...

Even *shapechange* doesn't give you the supernatural abilities of the form taken! She couldn't use the breath weapon at all!

Clearly, even a wizard of Maleficent's rank probably doesn't have a lot of hit points, so Phillip's real problem is the dragon form's natural AC. Luckily, Flora casts *true strike* at the appropriate moment, and Phillip probably rolls pretty well too, as Maleficent takes a fatal blow.

Phillip wakes up Aurora (with the kiss specified in Merryweather's rather odd counter-*geas*), and they live happily ever after.

The Princess Bride

Characters

Westley/Man in Black/Dread Pirate Roberts: Where to begin? Westley learns quite a bit while away from the farm. He clearly has levels of duelist (from *Sword and Fist*). Additionally, he has very high stats (particularly Strength, Dexterity, and Intelligence). He's a clever speaker, with a high Bluff skill ("...perhaps I'm only lying here because I lack the strength to move..."). He obviously has a lot of skill points, necessitating a high Intelligence and a few levels of rogue. We'll sit Westley at Rogue 3/Fighter 5/Duellist 7/Dread Pirate 3, seating him at an impressive 19th level.

Seating Humperdink: Well, he's quite a tracker, renowned as the greatest huntsman alive, so he'll need to be a pretty high level ranger (though, strangely, he doesn't dual-wield or have any animal companions and we really have nothing to compare him to, ranger-wise). He's clearly a rogue as well, Bluffing and Intimidating all over the place. Still, he's really no match for any of our heroes. Ranger 8/Rogue 4/Aristocrat 2.

Inigo Montoya: Pure duelist. There's really not much to Inigo outside of swordsmanship and a burning need for revenge. Well, he can sail, too, though not that well. Fighter 6/Duellist 7.

Vizzini: Pure rogue. Vizzini has a high Intelligence and a chronically low Wisdom score. He's not particularly good at anything except watching his own plans fall apart. Rogue 4.

Fezzig: Fezzig is probably a runty hill giant. We'll give him Rogue 3, as he is remarkably good at Moving Silently for somebody his size, and manages to intimidate a lot of Warrior 1's outside the castle.

Count Roogan: Well, a bit of a mix here. He's nowhere near as competent as Inigo, obviously, but he's got sneak attack down pat. We'll call him a Fighter 4/Rogue 6/Assassin 1. Luckily, Inigo makes his fort save vs. Roogan's death attack.

Miracle Max: As the only magic wielder in the film, Max is something of an enigma. He is clearly able to cast *raise dead*, so he's at least a 9th-level cleric. In fact, he doesn't do much else, so we'll leave him at that.

Buttercup: She's pretty wimpy, but remarkably resistant to Intimidation attempts. Commoner 1, with a very high Will save. She must have the Iron Will feat, because her Wisdom is clearly not stratospheric, considering she can't penetrate Westley's rather minimalistic disguise early on.

Highlights and Gaffes

Aside from some rather loose interpretations of the rules for detecting poisons, bluffing, and tumbling, the film has few rules gaffes. It is difficult to understand exactly why Miracle Max lacks confidence, though we can probably chalk that up to a campaign severely lacking in undead for him to turn (which can really make clerics feel useless).

One notable gaffe is the use of a subdual "coup de grace" by a mere Warrior 1 on Westley. Pure DM fiat, as it violates both the letter and the spirit of the rules. Westley isn't really even helpless in that scene. Unless we're willing to grant that a nameless character seen only once has at least one level of assassin, this is a difficult scene to buy.

A lot of things in this movie smell of DM fiat, as it's hard to believe that a 19th level character like Westley would have any serious difficulty with the obstacles presented to him. He's smarter, faster, and more skillful than anyone he runs into, but he has problems because he gets grappled by one pansy-ass wererat?

Willow

Characters

Willow: A pretty iffy sorcerer, if ever there was one. Willow is clearly a low-to-mid-level halfling rogue with a decent, but not amazing, Use Magic Device skill. His attempts to use a *wand of polymorph other* are comically inept, and he wastes about two dozen charges trying to get Fin Raziel back into human form. His Bluff skill is good enough to fool evil Queen Bavmorda, though she doesn't seem to have a very high Sense Motive anyway. We'll call Willow a Rogue 5/Sorcerer 1 by the end of the film.

Madmardigan: Basically a fighter with few social skills. We see Madmardigan fail a Will save (vs. the spell causing him to fall in love with Sorsha), which is typical of a fighter. However, he also fails a Fortitude save vs. Bavmorda's *polymorph other*, which is indicative of a relatively low level, overall. Madmardigan checks in as a Fighter 8/Rogue 2.

Queen Bavmorda: Well, a transmuter, obviously, as that's just about all the magic she uses in the film. She's clearly made herself at least one *wand of polymorph other*, as she casts the spell an ungodly number of times toward the end of the film. Her trick freezing all the soldiers in Tiras Lee seems to have involved some variant of *flesh to stone*, but that's never made clear. Additionally, it's not at all clear she was even there, indicating she may have vast range for her powers. Conservatively, we'll place her at Transmuter 12.

Sorsha: Displays a decent fighting ability, but not really comparable to Madmardigan. Most likely, she's a Fighter 8 like him, but lacks his rogue levels, which gives him the edge.

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Fin Raziel: It's unclear what Fin was capable of in her heyday, but it's abundantly clear she's no match for Bavmorda, and probably never was. Fin checks in at about Sorcerer 8, with some stat loss (notably Charisma, which is vital to sorcerers).

General Kael: Kael is a pretty tough customer, cutting a swath through the good guys at every opportunity. He gives Madmardigan quite a fight and seems to be tougher than the hero. Kael is likely a Fighter 6/Blackguard 4, though he shows a remarkable dearth of feats. It's quite possible he's just not very bright and therefore doesn't make good use of the feats he possesses.

Highlights and Gaffes

We can only speculate at the manner by which Bavmorda incapacitates the garrison at Tiras Lee, because it happens off-screen. A likely scenario is that she scrys on the fortress, *teleports* there while protected by *improved invisibility* and then uses a *wand of flesh to stone* on each of the guards, who are all Warrior 1's and therefore incapable of handling an invisible opponent. A stretch, but nothing compared to her later antics on the battlements. Bavmorda then *teleports* back to her fortress and lets the ignorant populace believe that she can cast spells on targets she can't even see.

Trolls have no inherent spider climb ability in the *Monster Manual*, though it's possible the creatures infesting the ruins of Tiras Lee are some sort of variant troll or that they have a template applied to them. They don't display much in the way of regeneration either, for that matter.

Willow's attempts to use the *polymorph other wand* on Fin Raziel illustrate the difficulty in using the Use Magic Device skill. He's trying to fake an effective Wizard caster level of 7, meaning he's got to get a total roll of 27 (caster level=result -20). He's probably a Rogue 4 at this point in the film, meaning his maximum number of ranks in the skill is 7. His Charisma bonus is probably not very good, as he's a truculent, argumentative peck with few social skills, so we'll say he has a Cha of 10 (and that's generous). So he's looking for a natural 20 on this roll. It's no wonder he gets so many mishaps.

The scene in which Bavmorda casts *polymorph other* on just about every soldier in the attacking army is just plain silly. Even if she had a nice supply of wands to provide the castings, it's clear that she doesn't take an action for every one of her targets. Bending the rules a little may let her use a *wand of quickened polymorph other*, but it is pure munchkinism to believe that she could still cast so many spells in a single turn (plus it would mean she'd have to be at least a Transmuter 15 to make the wand). The fact that nobody whips out a longbow and nails her with it is also rather ludicrous (though she may have *protection from arrows* up, we don't even see anybody try). It's also pretty unbelievable that not one soldier in the entire army makes his Fort save.

It's nearly inconceivable that Bavmorda's Spellcraft skill is too low to see through Willow's cheesy "disappearing baby" Bluff attempt at the end of the film, but we can probably chalk that one up to a really poor roll on her part vs. a great one on his. Such are the fortunes of the d20 system.

Raiders of the Lost Ark

Characters

Dr. Henry "Indiana" Jones, Jr.: Indy is quite a mix of classes, though obviously rogue is paramount among them. His emphasized rogue skills include Move Silently, Search, Disable Device, Climb and Jump. He's probably a 2nd-level Lasher (from *Sword and Fist*), based on his extensive use of a bullwhip as both weapon and "third hand." That requires two feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Whip) and Weapon Focus (Whip). From knowledge gained in later films regarding his youth, we can guess that he obtained these two feats early on. He also has the Improved Unarmed Attack feat, though he's not a monk by any stretch of the imagination (he's clearly not of a Lawful

ben, for starters). In the final analysis, we'll place Indy at Expert 3/Rogue 8/Lasher 2. Additional feats probably include Toughness and Lightning Reflexes. High stats are likely Dexterity, Wisdom, and Constitution.

Marion Ravenwood: Marion is very resistant to Intimidation and Bluff attempts (even when threatened with torture), indicating a high Wisdom. She obviously has an extremely high Constitution (her alcohol tolerance alone would suggest this is her highest stat). Although attractive, Marion is a poor Bluffer, indicating an average Charisma. Finally, her Hide and Climb skills are very poor, betraying a below-average Dexterity. Marion is probably an Expert 2, emphasizing Appraise and Sense Motive. Feats include Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Frying Pan).

Rene Belloq: Though Indy's nemesis, it's clear that Belloq is a lover, not a fighter. His low Constitution nearly lets Marion escape by getting him drunk. His poor Wisdom is clearly responsible for his choice of allies and his inability to detect the *flamestrike/chain lightning* trap on the Ark (which he probably couldn't have disarmed anyway). His Dexterity is likely pretty weak as well, as he miserably fails his Reflex save against the aforementioned trap. Belloq is a Rogue 5 and has most likely spent all his skill points on Bluff, Diplomacy, Spot (to notice workers digging in the wrong place) and Appraise. He also speaks several languages, but he has probably used his bonus languages to pick up Hovitos, English, and Arabic, in addition to his native French. High stats include Intelligence and Charisma.

"Toht": Toht is not easily Bluffed, but he otherwise shows little in the way of high Wisdom. He more than likely simply has a high Sense Motive skill. His Constitution seems on the low side, as a small burn on the hand (1-3 points of damage, max) makes him cry like a baby. Likewise, he can't seem to take the heat of a Mediterranean summer, obviously suffering subdual damage on the trek to the Ark-opening site. Toht is a Rogue 4 with a lot of points in Intimidation, Sense Motive, and Gather Information.

Sallah: Sallah is a Bluffing master, as evidenced by his ability to convince the Germans time and again that he is a simple digger duped by Indy. Obviously a rogue, Sallah is unhampered by his poor Dexterity, choosing instead to concentrate on the social skills. Diplomacy, Gather Information, Bluff, Perform and Hide are all well represented. Sallah's physique seems to indicate a rather low Constitution (though, judging by the number of children he has, his wife might well beg to differ), but his Strength is probably fairly high, allowing him to reasonably impersonate a professional digger. We'll set him at Rogue 6.

Highlights and Gaffes

Aside from an astounding number of failed Reflex saves among the villains, the film has few out-and-out rules gaffes. It stretches credibility a bit to believe the Germans don't have the foresight to hire a rogue capable of detecting and disarming the trap on the Ark, but, since the Ark is an artifact, it's possible that it is simply not disarm-able.

Indy makes an amazing number of Reflex saves throughout the film, particularly in the opening sequence in South America. Aspiring rogues should watch these scenes carefully. They should also note the potential perils of failing a Disable Device roll (the old "bag of sand switcheroo" almost qualifies as a critical failure).

Belloq must have the Trustworthy feat from *Song and Silence* (and then some), as his Bluff skill is high enough to sneak an entire company of German soldiers into British-controlled Egypt in 1936.

ROLEPLAYER'S ANONYMOUS

"I'm nineteen years old and have been gaming since I was eight (that makes about eleven years of gaming). For over nine of those eleven years, I played with the same group. Sure, the member roster

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changed a little over time (a few were added, lost one of the original four, etc.) but the core remained the same.

But, as we finished High School and entered college, the group was split between different schools. Still, me and two others remained gaming together... but they soon decided they wanted to learn more computer oriented stuff. So they changed schools—to a school out of town no less. This left me alone and I had to find myself a new group. I did, without much trouble actually, manage to find three players for me to dominate (two newbie's and one old player that used to game every once in a while with the old gang). This lasted for a year. One of my new players eventually got homesick and transferred out and a second lost interest and left (for LAN gaming, which he then dumped for Warhammer and now his newest passion is anything *Lord of the Rings* related). The third impregnated his girlfriend and is now too busy playing Mr. Husband (which is great for him as he loves it, but I miss my player).

I was once again without a group. At first it was tolerable, but soon I lost control over my roleplaying lust. I needed to game! Seriously! I tried to form a new group, but without much luck. Then I tried to get myself into other people's groups, but the problem was that there were no openings for DMs, just players.

GASP! A player?! I haven't done that since I was like, thirteen. I don't function well as a player. I love DMing—it's a passion. As a player, I'm a bossy, metagaming, son-of-a-bitch. I have the character concept attention span of Robin Williams. I hog the spotlight. To make things worse, I'm simply unable to think as a player. Unable to decide what to do next. I'm afraid to *do* anything—you never know what kinda rat-bastardy thing the DM might do to me! Still, practically dying from RPG madness, I threw away my DM soapbox and butted myself into a few player groups.

Group #1: Why Goths Can Be Dangerous

The first group I tried out was a group a friend of mine played in, although I'd never gamed with him before. It was a game of *Vampire*. I've done *Vampire* before—usually as a GM—plenty of times. I liked it: gothic horror centered around the battle against inner demons. I was rather excited about how exactly the game would be different from ours, which was rather grim 'n gritty and soul-search-ery.

I was led into a dark basement in the suburbs, where a large shabby table was covered by candles and all kinds of religious icons. There were three gamers besides me and my friend, two who were girls (never gamed with one before). They were all very much goths (not surprising, since my friend is very much a goth). I did stand out a bit in my brown pants and grey t-shirt, but we hit it off immediately.

DM: 'You find yourself in a shady neighborhood, the dark shadows of Old Prague stretch across the dark streets. The shadowy prostitutes are trying to haggle with dark and mysterious men. It's uh... very... eh...'

ME: 'Dark?'

DM: 'Oh yes. You better believe it.'

PLAYER 1: 'I am full of contempt and self loathing, I'll start cutting myself.'

PLAYER 2: 'I'll do that and also start crying!'

PLAYER 1: 'Oh yeah? I'll run across the street screaming in anguish over my tortured existence.'

PLAYER 2: 'Oh man, that's so over the top! I'll find myself a young child to play with, trying to feel anything that might be known as humanity, only to lose it and kill the child violently.'

PLAYER 1: 'Yeah? I'll try to tie myself up outside as the sun rises, trying to end my unlife, only to chicken out and loath myself for it.'

PLAYER 3: 'You guys are such losers. I'm going to watch every single Disney movie in chronological order.'

PLAYER 1: 'Whoah!'

PLAYER 2: 'I am humbled by your presence.'

PLAYER 3: 'This is of course counting both the animated and live action classics.'

FRIEND: 'Sorry what was that? I was busy trying to imagine that I had just violently raped and killed my own mother to get into character.'

ME: 'I kinda like the Disney movies. Especially the animated ones.'

(embarrassing silence)

ME: 'Right... suddenly I don't feel that good. Kinda depressed. I think I'll be going.'

And that was that. I have had trouble looking my friend in the eyes since.

Group #2: Curse of the Newbies

My second try was with a bunch of younger guys in first year at my school. They had only been gaming for a couple of months. They were very happy about getting me onboard, having someone with a bit more experience than they did. It was a D&D 3e game. I never really got a chance to play.

DM: 'Right, so the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* are in as well as the official Wizards of the Coast splatbooks. I may allow more stuff in later on, but this is it for now.'

ME: 'Ok. Right, so what is your basic campaign idea?'

DM: 'We're using the FORGOTTEN REALMS.'

ME: 'Ok, but what the scope of the campaign? High magic I guess, since it's FORGOTTEN REALMS, right? Will there be a quest-like goal or is it like a free-reign type of game where we move from dungeon to dungeon?'

DM: 'Scope? Eh? What do you mean?'

ME: 'I mean, what are the basic roleplaying concepts behind the game?'

DM: 'What? You mean like classes?'

ME: 'Huh? No I mean, like... eh... the idea... concept... what will we be doing in the game?'

DM: 'Y'know, killing monsters and stuff.'

ME: 'Why? How?'

DM: 'Huh?!'

ME: 'Never mind.'

PLAYER 1: 'My new character is ready!'

DM: 'Great. Let me see.'

ME: 'What's your character like?'

PLAYER 1: 'Elf Rogue 3/Fighter 2/Wizard 1.'

ME: 'What's he like?'

PLAYER 1: 'Uh... Elf Rogue 3/Fighter 2/Wizard 1.'

ME: 'No. Ignore the rules, what's the character's personality, background, and such like?'

PLAYER 1: 'What do you mean?'

ME: 'Oh, never mind.'

DM: 'I was wondering if there was one little thing you could help me out with?'

ME: 'Sure.'

DM: 'These so-called 'Attacks of Opportunities,' how exactly do they work? I've been trying to figure it out and I just can't wrap my head around it.'

ME: 'Oh, I don't know. Never understood them properly, never liked 'em, never used 'em.'

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DM: 'What?! How?! But it's a part of the game! It's in the rules! That's cheatin'!'
ME: 'Yes, but the rules always come second to roleplaying and the enjoyment of the game. They were bogging down play, so we threw them out. Anyway, the 'rules' are really nothing more than guidelines of how the game might work if we so choose, not ultimate laws of the RPG world.'
DM: 'Your point being...?'
PLAYER 1: 'There was a point? I thought he was just quoting the Bible or something.'

So, it didn't really work out. We were at too different stages of RPGing, so I told them that I probably didn't have enough time to game after all. They didn't seem terribly sad to see me go. They thought I was weird.

Group #3: And Last But Not The Least—War Games

Two months after that, I noticed an ad on an Icelandic message board that requested a player for a 3e D&D game. After some e-mailing, I was invited to an apartment less than a ten minute walk from me. Nice! I was the oldest of the bunch, but not by much (they were all one year younger). There were three of them—a DM and two players. They wanted one extra player or as they explained: 'We need a cleric.' So I just rolled up a hit-point-giver and put on my gaming shoes.

DM: 'Ah yes, before we start I must warn you that I have made some minor changes to the rules. Mostly to just streamline combat as well as to add a little bit of realism to the damage and hit point rules.'
ME: 'Oh yeah sure. Grim-n-gritty? Sounds fine. I'm not the type to worked up over rule stuff.'
DM: 'Great! Ok, you are in a tavern. By one of the tables you see two muscular men, a monk and a psychic warrior.'
ME: 'How can I tell?'
DM: 'Uh... they're both bald and one is covered in tattoos.'
PLAYER 1: 'Not bald—shaved!'
ME: 'I walk up to them and greet them. 'Morning fellow adventurers! May I sit down for a cool pint of ale and the swapping of some fearsome war stories?''
PLAYER 1: 'Yo.'
PLAYER 2: 'Sure.'
DM: 'A shady and mysterious fellow sits down besides you and asks you if you're interested in a treasure map that leads the way to untold riches.'
PLAYER 1: 'Yo.'
PLAYER 2: 'Sure.'
ME: 'This proposition sure sounds tempting, but I must ask of you, why do you not use it to fill your own pockets full of gold?'
PLAYER 1: 'Who cares, let's get going.'
PLAYER 2: 'Yeah, don't get stuck in the details.'

ME: 'Uh... ok. Whatever.'
DM: 'After a three day journey you arrive at the entrance to the dungeon.'
ME: 'Just like that?'
PLAYER 1: 'Don't g...'
ME: 'The details, the details—don't get stuck. Right.'
PLAYER 2: 'Thatta boy.'
DM: 'As you approach the entrance, a large black dragon appears and attacks.'
PLAYER 1: 'YEAH—combat! I grab my *ethereal-powered vorpal axe*™!'
PLAYER 2: 'I go into my ninja pose. Oh how he will feel the wrath of my tiger fists!'
ME: 'Whoa! A dragon! Just like that?! Ah... ok, I try to cast... lemme see...'
PLAYER 1: 'I will now manifest *astral construct II*.'
PLAYER 2: 'Oh the irony of a dragon being beaten by the Dragon Discipline of combat.'
ME: '...lemme see... that one? Nah... rather... uh... ah I got it! I am going to...'
DM: 'The dragon launches forward with it's jaws at you.'
ME: 'Me? But... I was gonna...'
DM: 'Too late. He hit you. Hand me a couple of d6s.'
ME: 'Oh, only 2d6 of damage then?'
DM: 'No, I just already had the other six die.'
PLAYER 1: 'Don't forget to add the damage for his ribs breaking and impaling his organs. If he rolls a twenty it'll puncture your heart.'
PLAYER 2: 'I'd think the dragon would have a very acid 'bad' breath y'know, that's like a d4 or two of extra burning damage.'
ME: 'I thought you said not to get stuck in the details?'
PLAYER 1: 'Yeah, but this is combat, man.'
DM: 'Right, your character is dead.'
ME: 'But we just got started.'
PLAYER 2: 'This is realism buddy. Now, I'll then use my Thunder Fist feat to hit the dragon's main artery running through his jaw as he finishes swallowing him.'
DM: 'Right. Roll a d20 and don't forget to add the penalties for being inactive in combat for a couple of days.'
PLAYER 2: 'But I was practicing off screen.'
DM: 'You didn't mention that.'
PLAYER 2: 'Rats.'
PLAYER 1: 'Don't forget the weather modifiers on wind speed and how slippery the ground is.'

...and so on. I spent the next forty minutes watching them tackle one monster after another until both their characters were dead. They seemed very happy with the game. When they asked if I was ready to roll up a new character and start again (it was their fifth attack on that dungeon), I excused myself and went home.

I have not tried again, but instead wait patiently for finding a group to DM. Until then, I satisfy my lusts in the In-Character forums.