

# Dragonsfoot - First Edition AD&D;

By Tony Reeves.

The following is an article I wrote for new Dm's based largely on my own observations as both a player, and DM over the last 20 years. As a Dungeon Master, I live and die by the enjoyment my players receive from my games. As a player, a single rule, or rule change can mean the difference between a good game and a great one. I run what is considered an "open style game" which means that I get a lot of input from the players. This works exceptionally well for me and has for as long as I been a Dungeon Master. Feel free to use any of my ideas herein to help you. Any by all means, if you have found any other easy or effective ways of doing things then please send me an email. I'm always on the look out for new or better ways of doing things! Meanwhile, enjoy!

**Be Realistic.** Have you ever had to make a quick rule on a situation you've never encountered before? Well, Here's help! I've always been a stickler for detail. So much so in fact, that I always feel that there has to be a bit of realism incorporated in my scenarios, and campaigns. To start with, I always make it a point to arrive 30-45 minutes early, no matter where I play. Part of this is because I hate to be late to anything, but there are some added benefits you can turn to your advantage just by being there early. I always set out my equipment first, brush up on any finer points of the game that I need to remember for the session (I have a terrible time remembering names!) then about the time I'm ready, all of my players arrive. I specifically set this time aside so that the players can discuss rules, ask questions, or to clarify any specifics the players need. Since I have both long time, and new players, this is a great time to discuss rules that the players disagree with, or would like see changed, or simply

have questions about. This is one of the most important things to do with your players, because it allows you to develop trust. It also provides me with a bit of extra time to look up rules if I need to, in case a question comes across that I don't know the answer to before the actual game starts. We usually spend about a half hour doing this.

**Respect and be respected.** In order to be a referee, I've found that the best ones are ones that I respected. Respect when it comes to a DM has to be earned. The key way to earn it is to follow a few simple steps. Always use the same rules for everyone. This also includes the monsters! Nobody likes a Dungeon Master who changes the rules all the time! Conversely, no one enjoys a "rules lawyer" or someone who is always by the book for every circumstance, either. Always be fair, honest, and open to the players criticism. Allow the players to voice their opinions and when they do it's very important that you listen. That doesn't mean to argue with them. First of all you'll never get anything solved. Second, you'll have lost that particular players respect, and maybe even lost a player or friend. All of my players are also my friends. This makes it even easier to be open with them as well as take their criticism, even though it does hurt sometimes.

**Admit your mistakes even when you are wrong.** This is one my players love the most, especially the one's who haven't played that long. My players believe that I rarely make a mistake, but when I confess to one, even if they didn't catch on at the time, they feel as though I've shared something with them. It doesn't show them you're stupid. It shows that you're human, that you care about the game for their sakes, and are making an honest to attempt to make sure the game is fair to all! Another reason to allow the players to point out mistakes is that you don't forget them later! When a player tells you that you've made a mistake, thank them for reminding you, after all everyone who's played very much realizes how hectic it is to keep control of all the players for the duration of the game. This also makes it easier on the players when they make a mistake, especially if they're new. They're not as likely to take it so

personally if they do happen to be a silly mistake. It serves to make a friendlier game, because no one picks on anyone else, because they do something goofy. That's one thing I never allow and neither should you. It only creates hard feelings between the players and that's not what your there for!

**Keep Combat simple, understandable and orderly.** As player and DM, I've noticed that combat is what gives most DM's headaches. It seems to be when the most peculiar actions occur, when most arguments start, and when things are the least controlled and most disruptive. First you need to establish order. I do this in several ways as you'll see shortly. The way I do things is specifically designed to keep things in my control, keep it easy while still keeping the flow of the game fast, and also makes sure everyone has their turn. To begin, when a combat sequence starts I call out for an initiative roll either by the party (one person rolls for the party, which generally is the case) or by individual, whichever way the situation dictates. As soon as I call out for the initiative roll, the players inform me of what actions they're taking if I don't already know. Always make sure you know what everybody is doing. If I have questions or suspect someone did not get a turn, then starting with the player to my immediate left I begin to ask questions of everyone, going clockwise around the table until everyone tells me their actions, whether they're moving, fighting, casting spells, and if so what specific spell(s) are being cast, and the casting time and last but not least if there are multiple spells. As I go round the table and the info comes in, I make a note and establish which segments the spells go off in the round, based on who wins initiative. This is a very effective method to control multiple spell users, as it keeps it all straight for you! In addition, if a mage decides to cast more than one spell, he or she can, so long as I know the details. I just have to write the info down so I remember what segment the spell falls in. Whoever wins the initiative of course, goes first, but the following is always true whether I go first or if I let the players. I let all the players roll for their attacks, and damage at the same time, except for spells, spell like effects, psionics, etc, unless the spell

falls in that particular segment, for example a magic missile which has a one segment casting time. Usually the spells will go off at different times than the physical attacks, so I watch the entire melee round carefully and when I announce the spell goes off, the player(s) responsible gives me their to hit roll(if necessary) and any damage applicable. I roll the saving throws for the monsters and tell the mages their effects. Note that a spell caster could potentially cast a spell ten times in one round and it has happened that that many and more spells have been thrown around in one of my high level adventures!

Anyhow In all cases except magic, I start with the person on my immediate left and go through the players one at a time for the physical attacks during the correct segment in the round and they give me their damage and I state the effect if any on their opponent. After they attack, it's my turn and I assign them their damage. I make all of the monster rolls one at a time to keep it a bit more fair. This allows me to adjust the numbers as necessary. More on this later. This continues in an orderly fashion until the entire melee is over. Keep in mind that we use casting times but even if you don't it still makes things easier. It sounds like a lot of work, and in a way it is at first because you're not used to it, but once you do things in this manner, you won't want to do it any other way. I know it sounds a little harsh to make the players take turns like this but most players will understand it you explain why you're doing it. In reality if you point out the fact that not only is it easier for you, and also assures that everyone gets their turn, then the players will agree. One other thing that makes things easy is the use of miniatures. With miniatures, you can have the character move their piece to show where their character is. You can draw out room dimensions, and show the spell effects in great detail. It creates a much better visual picture overall, and this helps you. You may find that you don't use quite the same way of keeping time in the round, initiative etc, the same way that I do and really it doesn't matter. The main point is that you get the data in an orderly manner in a way you can interpret it easily without disrupting the flow of the game. The only other

thing of importance is that you do your melee rounds the same way every time. This will help keep player confusion to a minimum.

**Special situations require special rules.** Sometimes the players just plain don't like a certain rule. If you look in the beginning of the 1st edition books, you'll see that even Gary Gygax said that the rule books are only guidelines and that the main thing is to make sure the players had fun! To keep things short, things like combat, spell effects, abilities, utilization of time, races, class level limitations, damage, healing, etc, are all critical to the players and their enjoyment. There's a lot of ways to circumvent problems. Use what works with your group of players. If a problem comes up during the game and you don't have an answer immediately, ask the players how they feel about the rule! Experienced players, like some of mine are, can sometimes offer their own logical solutions right off the bat, although sometimes the solutions make no sense as well. Use your own judgment in any case, but at least let all the player have a say, and listen to them all. If possible make a ruling as fast as possible so the flow of the game isn't interrupted. There's nothing worse than waiting for ten minutes for a referee to make a decision because he's looking through 3-4 books for some obscure rule that you'll only use 1 time in ten years! The ruling only needs to last for a single session in most instances. You can almost always make an overruling later if absolutely necessary. Generally, if I can't make a ruling on the spot or within 5 minutes, then I will make a snap decision based on the circumstances and all other input, then finally I ask the players if it sounds fair, and make a promise to them to research it further. Sometime before the next session, I do the research. At the beginning of the session I present them with either a definite answer or logical options to vote on. This is at the beginning of the following session before the game really starts. It's important, if you DM this way, that you never back out of a promise to research a rule or settle an argument. Solving problems quickly will help show the players that you take the game and them seriously, and they'll appreciate that. Voting on problems is a good way to stop arguments since it gets all of the players input. Likewise, it stops

arguments because everyone has a chance to affect the rule and voice their opinion.

**Be prepared.** In order to be prepared, you have to know what you need. This depends mainly on you and how you DM as well as how much you or your players have invested. In my group, the players sometimes have purchased pre-made modules and given them to me to run. Of course, I allow this and after I run it, the player gets it back. Of course I never highlight or otherwise write in them. If you allow this you can assume that some players will read the module before they give it to you, thinking this will give them an advantage. This isn't a problem for me though, because I always assume this and thus have the nasty tendency to add things and give them a personal twist anyway! In any regard whether you run a pre-made module or create you own, make sure you know it well. The game slows and the players get bored if things begin to drag or move slow. This is especially true in modules set in a city! Make sure you know any new spells or effects, traps and monsters, so you don't have to stop and research in the middle of a scenario. Other things are dice and books. How many and which ones are up to you, and your financial situation. When I first started, I hardly owned anything but a players, monster manual and DM guide! This required a vivid imagination, but those games were some of the best ever! One item I won't do without now, is a DM screen. These are a great way to put a ton of information right at your finger tips and can often be purchased cheaply. I laminated mine and it's held up for several years. It also serves the purpose of hiding your dice rolls from prying eyes, so the players don't really know what I'm rolling. (Yes, they listen to me and watch me very closely! They've learned that if they don't, they might miss something very important or a deadly hint!)

**Fudge the die!** As a player I've seen times when my die rolls were absolutely terrible. It really stinks! I've also seen them be quite good and that's another story. As DM you need to make adjustments to your own rolls as appropriate. If the players win every initiative ten times in a row,

then change your roll from a six to a one! Even the odds a little to make the battles more realistic. If your die rolls all happen to be too good to believe, lower them! This is important with low level characters. I can't tell you how many times I could have killed a character with just one lucky die roll! What fun's that? It's so much more fun if the character is in a long, tough, one on one battle to the death, sweating over your next die roll and their own as well! You don't have to do it every time, just occasionally when things seem to be going the wrong direction or if things need livened up a tad. Try it sometime, and you'll be amazed at what you'll hear. It's a wonderful feeling to hear the player brag how much fun they had and also to hear them brag a little about that big battle with the bugbear and how he though he was a goner!"

**Add a little humor.** AD&D isn't just all magic, or hack and slash. Add what I call the "human factor." Some people might even call it the Murphy Factor. Everyone knows him! "Whatever can go wrong will." "The best laid plans of mice and men.." Use this to your benefit. For instance, A male paladin in one of my adventures years ago located a girdle of femininity. The item was cleverly disguised as a girdle of hill giant strength! The character put it on and POOF! He was a she. ( For full effect, I passed around a note to all the other characters detailing her wonderful figure and her sweet voice!) The other players presented his condition to him/her via role play. It was slightly funny. Needless to say the player thought it was a bummer. That is until, they came to a door that no one could open. He/She was the only one who hadn't tried it. One comment from a certain stubborn dwarf was "Go ahead, but I couldn't open it and ain't no wisp of a girl gonna do it!" I fudged the die a bit then, and then everyone at the table cracked up after she door swung open! The poor dwarf suffered to no end at being outdone by a girl. That girl is now a 15th level paladin! That one scenario totally turned the situation around! The really good thing was I no longer got to hear the moans and groans when something was cursed, etc and it provide a bit of role play. something even

funnier happened later...Remember the dwarf? He married the paladin girl!

**Know how to keep a secret.** Some Dungeon Masters are not capable of this. Nothing can ruin a player's best laid plans (and fun) like a big mouthed DM giving away too much data to one or all of the other players. One thing I recommend is the passing of notes. This works so well, that I've incorporated them into other aspects of our game as well. My group always has either scratch paper or post it notes handy at all times. I use them many times to let a character know they've found a secret door, drank a potion of insanity, heard something and for dozens of other reasons. Merely hand the character a note that says "Congratulations! You have just ingested a potion of paranoia. Please role-play this in the following manner until further notice: You are certain that someone is out to get you! You're deathly afraid that someone or something is following you! Whatever it is, also means to kill you in most gruesome manner! Please also note that your character doesn't realize that there's anything wrong with himself and will argue vehemently with any to suggest otherwise!" Pass a note like this, and watch the fun start! A note like this can create hilarious situations and can provide serious help for games that are starved of role play. If something occurs that is more than I want to write on a piece of paper then many times, I'll lead the person into another room have a private chat with them. A good example is if a character is killed (out of sight of the others!) by a doppelganger. I lead the person into the other room and tell them all about it. This can be fun too! All in all humor can take many forms and the better role players will use this to the hilt, which merely serves as an example to the lesser experienced. Notes also serve to make the players physically learn the secret, and this is where the DM has fun!