

# POKER, CHESS, AND THE AD&D™ SYSTEM

THE OFFICIAL WORD ON WHAT'S OFFICIAL

by E. Gary Gygax

A few individuals consistently voice misconceptions about the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® and the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS™ games with respect to the whole of the genre of fantasy role playing in general and TSR in particular. This matter would be of small import indeed, were it not that some of these few are also connected with commercial ventures in the Adventure Gaming industry in general and fantasy in particular. Because of this basic misconception and lack of knowledge, it is sometimes difficult to communicate effectively. In order to cast light on the situation, please follow along as I draw a couple of analogies. Although the parallels aren't exact, they do demonstrate quite amply the points to be made.

In the wide range of card games there is poker. It is a separate and distinct game from all others played with cards. There is a single recognized authority on poker — Hoyle. Now the Hoyle rules relate two distinct types of poker played. One sort is pretty well free and includes lots of house rules and hands such as the *skip-straight*, *straight round the corner*, *blaze*, and so on. The other form of the game is that which is played according to the rules set forth by Hoyle. If one were to liken the D&D® game system to the former sort of poker, and the AD&D™ game system to the latter, one wouldn't miss the mark by much as far as general concept is concerned.

Now consider chess. The game name actually is a generic for many national and variant boardgames involving pieces and pawns which probably evolved from the Indian game, Chaturanga. Be that as it may, consider the chess enthusiast who discovers the fact that there are, indeed, hundreds of different versions of the game in addition to that which the Western world calls chess. Imagine this delighted fellow then busily taking what he considers to be the best features of Shogi (Japanese chess), Timor's Chess (a variant game), and a few of his own ideas. These he uses to create a new game — chess, of course. Envision the reception he would receive

when presenting this new game at a chess tournament sponsored by the US Chess Federation! (But all six of the guys who played it with me loved it!)

If one thinks of the D&D game structure as a book which covers most of the forms of chess, including variants, and tells prospective players how to put together a board and select which pieces and pawns will be used in the creation, the parallel is not far from the mark. This is especially true if one then likens AD&D gaming to Western chess. In the former, the interested party constructs the design by steps, beginning with a small board and simple pieces and adding space and more complex movement as skill and desire dictate. The latter case dictates the size and power of all pieces and pawns immediately, but the enthusiast must then concentrate on the skill required to play the game well.

One letter from a reader of DRAGON™ Magazine commenting on the barbarian sub-class (issue #63) was critical because the approach differed from the other established classes. Using the analogy to chess, I suggest that the objection is similar to criticism of the move of the knight because it can leap over other men while none of the other pieces or pawns can do so. That is an aside. Allow me to return to the major point which must predicate what follows.

Using the relationship of games, think about this: Would any intelligent person purchase a copy of the MONOPOLY® game, add in some parts of THE MAD MAGAZINE® game, imagine it to be somehow "better" than either one alone, and then announce to everyone far and wide that the end product was not only superior, but it was still a MONOPOLY game? As ludicrous as that sounds, that is pretty much what happens when even well-meaning players of TSR games try to mix and match different systems. Now consider the result when some overzealous MONOPOLY game fan blends in what he considers "improvements" from the LIFE game and the CAREERS game, claiming that the result is a MONOPOLY game — an improved version, of course — and playable by all other MONOPOLY game enthusiasts everywhere. (After all,

he and his group of half a dozen friends really like the "design"!) Sounds silly, but that happens frequently to TSR's AD&D game.

Notice that TSR *owns* the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game system. Well, they own the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, too — just as Parker Brothers owns MONOPOLY and THE MAD MAGAZINE game. TSR holds the copyrights to the D&D and AD&D games. They own the Trade Marks. Use of either must be by TSR or with its permission. Neither game is public domain. No other firm can make any commercial use whatsoever of either game without permission from TSR. Furthermore, house rules are as different from place to place as can be imagined, so that of the several million D&D game players, the only recognized basis for intra-group play are the rules furnished by TSR. It is far more tight a basis when AD&D gaming is considered. Of the two or so million players of that game system, only about 5% even get DRAGON Magazine and read the *official* rules additions. Just as TSR sells far more D&D games than are sold of all other competing fantasy role-playing products combined, DRAGON Magazine has a circulation which is over twice that of all of its competitors. To claim that any other FRP game system has the acceptance of D&D gaming is absolutely contravened by hard facts. When AD&D gaming is included in the totals, there is no contest — it is a laugher. Similarly, DRAGON Magazine dominates the field, but even with its relatively large circulation, it reaches less than 25% of the total D&D/AD&D game audience. Now we have some perspective.

If one plays the D&D game system, it is possible that material from outside that offered by TSR to be included in the game. Such a game becomes "house rules" poker, so to speak. One then either announces the special rules, or drops them, when players from outside the core group participate in the game. Hoyle has even begun to standardize house rules, and this is similar to what TSR will be doing in the next few years as a special team of designers and editors work on the D&D game system — both to

finish it and to make a few needed revisions.

The AD&D game system does not allow the injection of extraneous material. That is clearly stated in the rule books. It is thus a simple matter: Either one plays the AD&D game, or one plays something else, just as one either plays poker according to Hoyle, or one plays (Western) chess by tournament rules, or one does not. Since the game is the sole property of TSR and its designer, what is official and what is not has meaning if one plays the game. Serious players will only accept official material, for they *play* the game rather than playing at it, as do those who enjoy "house rules" poker, or who push pawns around the chess board. No power on earth can dictate that gamers not add spurious rules and material to either the D&D or AD&D game systems, but likewise no claim to playing either game can then be made. Such games are not D&D or AD&D games — they are something else, classifiable only under the generic "FRPG" catch-all. To be succinct, whether you play either game or not is your business, but in order to state that you play either, it is obviously necessary to play them with the official rules, as written. Thus, when you get information in these pages which bears the "official" stamp, that means it can immediately be used in game play.

Certainly, even those groups who adhere strictly to the rules may develop certain rule extensions or cases which differ from what is written. These individuals are notable, for in a tournament they are heard inquiring about how certain rules or situations will be handled. They play D&D or AD&D games and fully understand what that means. I do hope that all Good Readers are now as well grounded in the facts of the matter.

Either you play TSR's D&D and AD&D games, or you play variants of them, or you use a hodge-podge system, or else you play one of the systems which have grown up after TSR's. Unless you play the AD&D game system, you probably won't have much purpose in reading what is official and what isn't. In any event, bear in mind that the mainstream play both game systems as they appear. Next time someone touts some magazine or game as being useful for inclusion in your campaign, consider the foregoing. Adding non-official material puts your game outside the D&D or AD&D game system. It becomes something else at best.

Far too often, extraneous material tinkered onto the existing D&D or AD&D campaign will quickly bring it down to a lower level at best, ruin it at worst. Fads and "new, state-of-the-art" games come and go, but the D&D and AD&D games keep on growing and improving. The choice is yours.

### The barbarian

This brings us nicely round to whether or not the barbarian sub-class of fighters unbalances the AD&D game — or is too weak and useless for consideration. Opinions were about evenly divided between those two positions. Is the barbarian a true class? Perhaps the character could better be described as an individual from a certain type of society or cultural group. Certainly, one could not call the barbarian group a race. In any case, the designation "profession" isn't bad, for barbarians work at being what they are and derive their livelihood from the pursuit of such activity. Of course, barbarians must come from a particular society, but then it is only logical to assume that magic-users come from that strata of developed society which enjoys money, education, and position. How else could such a class of characters be trained so long and expensively? Whatever justifies the barbarian, or the magic-user, is not actually germane. Does the sub-class work? *That* is the question. TSR has sufficient faith in the creator of the system to say "yes" by allowing me to produce official material on a *carte blanche* basis. Be that as it may, there were too many questions about the sub-class to simply pass over them all by offering a "take it or leave it" position.

It is obvious to anyone who has the opportunity to read the letters regarding the barbarian that the objections to the class are both contradictory and reactionary. As I mentioned before, of those comments which questioned the barbarian, it was nearly a standoff between those protesting it as too strong and those asserting it was too weak. A few wondered why a decision to be a barbarian character had to be made prior to rolling dice for attribute scores. The answer is simple: The game is based on role-playing principles, and it is easier to do so with a course determined in the first place. Method I of *Generation of Ability Scores* encourages the player to arrange scores so as to be able to choose a character profession from predisposition rather than dice-determined statistics. It is but a step removed from there to deciding on play as a barbarian sub-class fighter and rolling dice accordingly. Frank Mentzer suggests that the 4d6 system could be employed, with minimum score requirements of 16 strength and constitution, 15 dexterity, and a maximum wisdom of 15. That will work, but it seems to beg the question. Playing as a barbarian is offered to players as a determined choice, not as one of several possibilities — or a mere afterthought. This is a part of the whole concept. Thus, the level title for a barbarian never varies. Such a character, properly role-played, is bred, raised, grows, and dies a barbarian. Barbarians do not need training to go up levels, because they gain no so-

phistication. They get tougher and more wily. This also should be clear to those who wonder about the amount of experience points required to gain a level — it is hard-earned, "school of hard knocks" learning which enables them to get better, not any form of schooled training, exercise, and like instruction.

Similarly, barbarians have lots of weapons to be proficient in — those typically used by a barbarian culture, you will note, and not necessarily those which are most likely to give the character an edge in combat. Barbarians do not have the opportunity of weapon specialization as regular fighters now do (see issue #66 of DRAGON Magazine). Because of their power and innate abilities, they need no magic weapons to hit magic-laden monsters such as gargoyles, demons, or golems. No one ever asked, but barbarians cannot ever be anything else. One cannot start as some other profession and become a barbarian at a later stage. Likewise, once a character is a barbarian, he or she can never opt to change to some other profession and have dual classes.

How about lack of magic? Is AD&D play half magic? Does the whole campaign require that magic permeate each and every character's existence? Yes. . . and no. The game itself subsumes a magical multiverse. Action generally takes place in some setting filled with manifold dweomers. All character classes use it to some extent, even the barbarian. How is it that the sub-class has the powers it does? They are magical, but in a non-standard way, of course. Let us say that their very non-magical nature gives them a sort of paramagical aura. Thus they have superior characteristics and powerful capacities to detect magic, avoid ambush and surprise, and so on.

The barbarian's armor class bonus for high dexterity, +2 per point above 14, means that a barbarian's dexterity bonus in combat can be as high as 8. Combined with chain mail and shield (AC 4), the adjusted rating is AC -4. Anyone who claims that is insufficient, especially considering the mass of hit points a barbarian will have, just doesn't know the first thing about AD&D game play. Those who believe it to be excessive, particularly at low levels of play, have more of a point. However, when relative hit points are considered, as well as the fact that the armor class is relative to the situation — and many instances will disallow dexterity bonus — that argument also loses most, if not all, of its force. Is a 1st-level magic-user with a sleep spell too strong? After all, that character can absolutely demolish a 4th-level character, a pair of wererats, possibly, or all sorts of other monsters more powerful than himself. It is touch and go. . . even assuming you are lucky enough to start play with so powerful a spell as *sleep*. Is a maximum

of 20 hit points too much for a 1st level character? Someone said that about a barbarian. A ranger with 18 constitution has a hit point spread of a minimum of 10, medial 17, maximum 24. Is anyone upset about that? All that is really being questioned is change, because this subclass is different from others. Well, Gentle Players, that is what you've been asking for, and that is what I am here to do. Believe it or not, I actually know my game system and what or what will not work within its parameters! That is why the barbarian is cut off at 8 hit dice, by the way. The points to be had from 8d12, with the constitution bonus awarded, are surely enough of a basis for a STRONG character. Now let's go back to magic and saving throws.

Reasoned study of the barbarian subclass proves that they need no magic armor or weapons. However, along with benefit of armor or protective devices, it is certain that the barbarians need some boost in saving throws. This is doubly true when the fact that they shun spells is considered. Thus, they have a stronger basic resistance to poison and magical forces. *Note one very important change:* In order to remain consistent with existing variances to saving throws, barbarians save versus *polymorph* at +3 (rat her than +2, as shown in the original article). Thanks to Frank Mentzer for noting this anomaly. In any event, the barbarian sees magic of two sorts — wizard magic and god magic. The former is cast by magic-users and their ilk — puling creatures all. The latter sort of dweomer must be tolerated, for who can argue with deities? A *brooch of shielding* (hopefully a rare find in any campaign) is so much dross to a hard-nosed barbarian. He'll take the niggling damage from the magic-user (that's what his high hit points are for) and then hew the cowardly craven to pieces. Those magics which allow saving throws are so much the better, for the barbarian does have a better chance to save against them. Those that happen, happen. With everything that the sub-class has, what real need is there for magic items? Scarce and rare finds in any well-run campaign, such wretched stuff is not for true humans (barbarians) in any event.

Magic performed by clerics, particularly clerics who serve the deities of the barbarian and his or her tribe, is another matter. That sort of thing must be abided. Who in a barbarian tribe would stoop to using even the dweomer of deities? Why, that's simple: Men and women too old to fight, weaklings, and those odd individuals "touched" by some super-being. In a life-and-death situation, any self-respecting barbarian would allow a proper servant of a known deity to do whatever the deity directs through that servant. If it goes against the barbarian grain, then the offending cleric can be thereafter

shunned — whether out of embarrassment, dislike, or fear is entirely open to question. If absolutely necessary, such spells can be tolerated for short periods of time, but by choice any barbarian must seek more direct solutions with arms. Obviously, faced with a situation which required the barbarian to perform a given plan, and that action was impossible without magic — possibly even wizard magic — the intelligent barbarian would be forced to stoop to such low means to reach the end. Shunning doesn't mean the same as *never* associating with: Look the word up. Again, it doesn't assert that barbarians will slay all magic-users just because they reek of noisome magic, nor does it state that clerics casting spells above 2nd or 3rd level will be done to death by the outraged barbarian. Low-level spells are merely the power of a shaman/cleric given by some deity — not even god magic. Higher-level spells of a clerical nature are disliked by barbarians, and they will not voluntarily be around those who make a practice of employing magic. Circumstances, as usual, alter cases. Remember the spirit of the rules, instead of trying to find the letter by reading between the lines.

Who can be right all of the time? Not I! I admit with a slightly red face that I left out yet another important point regarding the class. Hit points are recovered at twice the normal rate, and barbarians can even get them back at the normal rate while active. Thus, rest allows regaining of lost hit points at +2 points per day, and while moving and/or adventuring points are regained at +1 per day. This is part and parcel of *first aid* ability. The binding and care of damage is required for barbarians to regain lost hit points, helpful to characters and creatures in serious state of damage. Curing natural illnesses (diseases or magical illnesses) is done the same as determining the success of poison antidotes.

Whether or not a barbarian has henchmen is a matter for the player, and the barbarian's charisma and actions, to decide. Will the barbarian build or capture a stronghold of some type? Considering the characteristics of the sub-class, role-playing a barbarian properly would indicate that the character wouldn't do well in such civilized surroundings — at least for an extended period of time. Will a barbarian attract followers? That is again a matter for the individual. It is worth pointing out that a barbarian with a reasonably high charisma and a high experience level is a very influential type when dealing with other barbarians. Anyone with a relative charisma of 20 or more is certainly going to attract followers if they so desire — and work at it a bit!

In all truth, the sub-class is not too powerful. It is, in fact, under-powered unless some very good rolls are gained

in the areas of strength, dexterity, and constitution. To have real prospects for long-range play, the character must have 18, 16, and 17 respectively. That, Gentle Readers, is why they are given 9d6,7d6, and 8d6 for those categories. A low-level barbarian has a better than average chance of survival without such high rolls, but at higher level, he or she is not going to do well unless strength, dexterity, and constitution combine to give high hit points, low armor class, and superior punishment potential.

#### The deva

So how about the official new creature, the deva? (It is pronounced with a long "e" — *deevah*, with the accent on the first syllable.) Some oddly oriented chap accused me of plagiarism because the religion and myth of India mentions devas. (Good gracious! I do hope that when this fellow checks out the Monster Manual he will forgive me. . . . And what will he think of Tolkien, I wonder, who took virtually everything he wrote about from a background of Norse mythology and English folklore? And R. E. Howard! Why, almost all of his names are taken directly from actual history! Mercy! Such high-handed theft!) Those Enlightened Readers familiar with theosophy will immediately be able to recognize from whence I got inspiration for the three races of devas, and their more powerful associates the planetars and solars. Because the races of devas are native to the Upper Outer Planes, their frequency is given for such areas. As is stated, they travel about in service to the deities of these planes and do not generally ramble about on persona! pleasure jaunts. If fans of demons and devils find them too strong, I can hardly wait until they get a look at what planetars and solars are able to do! (*Editor's note: This essay was composed before the issue of DRAGON Magazine containing the planetar and solar had been released.*) Although there are fewer of these servants of Good, they are far and away stronger than the minions of Evil. A strong character can handle the typical demon or devil. With aid from a deva or two, any party of Good alignment can hope to survive the dire machinations of morally and ethically aligned foes with the forces of Darkness to call upon. While they should be seldom met, the potential is always there.

Although illustrated as male, the races of devas are similar to humans in that they have male and female sexes. They are bipedal and somewhat resemble humans, but they are in no sense human. In fact, they are nothing like the angels of Judeo-Christian teaching, or Moslem, for that matter, as they are a race, have no direct descent due to creation by a supreme being, and have corporal forms everywhere, save the Prime Material Plane where they have material forms

but immortality. Devas have wings in order to fly — just as giant eagles and rocs do. For much the same reason, quite a number of the monstrous inhabitants of the Lower Outer Planes have wings. After all, AD&D gaming is postulated on medieval fantasy and mythology. Because there are hordes of nasty critters at work to promote Evil (and provide fodder for swordplay), it is necessary to have some reasonable' minions serving the opposing planes in the mythical multiverse of the game. To state that devas are patterned after angels is preposterous. They are patterned after mythological and fabled concepts of what sort of creatures serve the forces of Good. They are written so as to make their alignment absolutely clear. To think otherwise is to fly in the face of reason and against the entire gamut of creatures patterned in the AD&D game system. Much of the inspiration for it all is borrowed from folklore, myth, and legend. To claim that some demon names match those found in the Bible makes as much sense as asserting that devas are from Indian myth or that they are angels. Devils and demons were either taken from common lists of secular writings on the topic, or made up on the spot as the need arose. Some are obviously based on the gods of ancient cultures — Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, etc. Some are of medieval origin. Who borrows from whom becomes quite muddled in the span of history. Frankly, what difference does it make when we are talking about a time separation of centuries?!

There was a typographical error in the stats for one of the devas. This is important! The *astral deva* has a "mace-like" weapon which strikes as if it were a *mace of disruption* wielded by an 8th level cleric, not a 9th level cleric, as shown. My thanks to Chuck Conerity for spotting the glitch!

#### Other topics

As an aside, one letter-writer asked if magic-users were ever going to benefit from intelligence at lower levels, suggesting that they needed spell help in the form of bonuses such as clerics gain. Not so. Magic-users are strong enough as they are. The benefit they gain from intelligence is the capacity to know additional spells and the more immediately important chance of being able to comprehend any given spell when first presented with it. Adding to magic-user strength is certainly a case of gilding gold and painting lilies. It won't be done here! Adding some new, useful spells at all levels is something else again. . . .

This same writer also asks: "Are the characteristics for halflings still going to be generated by the roll of 3d6 in all cases?" As Method I for such generation suggests that 4d6 be used, the question seems rather pointless, shall we say?

The game rules hold as written, except in the case of the barbarian sub-class. However, because it is not a critical rule in the game, and character ability generation rolls are so frequently a matter for lying and cheating (where players really cheat themselves, much as if they cheated at solitaire), methods of generation which develop a reasonable spread and do not exceed the 18 maximum dice total are acceptable "house rules." The credence of a campaign using such variant systems might be suspect, even with so small a matter.

Simply put, variants of this nature too often give undue advantage or penalty with regard to the probability spread as presented in the rules. Thus, how well will a player used to such undue advantage, or suffering from lack of experience in some class or race because of unfair restrictions, do in a tournament where the correct systems are used? It should not take a mathematical wizard to determine that there is a radical difference in the probability curves of the totals of the highest 3 of 4d6 -1 compared to the total of 4d4! Curves which improve the character's chances for high ability scores are more acceptable — cheating always takes place in beginners' campaigns anyway. They do penalize participants, however, as they do not prepare them for the "facts of life" in a real cam-

paign, let alone a tournament situation. Overall, the probability curves given should be respected. They work exactly as they should in relationship to the whole game system.

Another aside pertained to height and weight. The letter-writer held that height should determine weight. Perhaps that chap has never seen a short, fat person or a tall, thin one. Somatyping could be interesting, but why put it into a game already fraught with many tables and charts?

Speaking of tables and charts, I do have one severe problem with my own game system. I got talked into doing the complicated and time-consuming series for grappling, pummeling, and overbearing in a weak moment. I have regretted them ever since. I tend to use a very simple system which we initially developed for such close-quarters combat in about 1974. Being a glutton for punishment, I am now asking all of you Gentle Players to give me your comments on the matter. Am I alone in disliking the rules and systems for weaponless combat as presented? Do you wish something different? Should the whole matter be more precise? Would you enjoy such combat more if it was accomplished with greater alacrity and simpler rules? Here is your chance to influence the course of the matter.



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