

# GUIDE TO BETTER DMING

by

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## INTRODUCTION

This book was designed by many different people each with different opinions. Thus you may find some very opposing views on how to do things. Nothing is to say anyone way is right or wrong. This book is designed just to make new and seasoned DMs aware of the options. You can select the way you want to run your campaign on your own.

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## 01 GENERAL

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### 01.1 STARTING

Do **\*NOT\*** let players import characters from other campaigns. It totally destroys "game continuity." Unless you are an experienced DM. (See 04.1.1 JOINING AN EXISTING CAMPAIGN)

Start Small. Don't use 25th level fighters and giant dragons and whopping big treasure troves rotten with magical items. Pit low level characters against low level bad guys and monsters. Be sure you know what you're dealing with before you present it to the players.

Start DMing a small group of sympathetic players. You don't need some AD&D know-it-all second-guessing your every decision. Too many players (more than 3 or 4 to start) can be uncontrollable. If your players are all new too, agree on some group interaction ground rules before the first game. Three basic rules are: everyone gets a chance to play/speak; people keep their hands and eyes off other players' character sheets; look behind the DM screen and die.

Run low-level modules, or steal ideas from them. They're generally fairly complete and can give you direction, even if you don't slavishly follow them (which isn't bad

for a beginner to do). Go ahead and use published modules now, and you can modify them for further play later. DON'T try to learn all these complicated rules while at the same time constructing your own complete, complex world. That can come later.

Get the rules down, and prepare for games before you play. Stand up for yourself if players don't agree with your actions and you know you're right; but be open-minded enough to see when a player's argument makes sense. Changing your mind on a call or outcome doesn't mean you're abdicating power. This is a COMMON error among new DMs we've worked with. Remember, the DM is in charge, but s/he's not infallible.

If I had to name the most important characteristic of a good DM, I wouldn't hesitate. "Organization" and "imagination" are important. So are "consistency" and "fairness." But above and beyond these, is the ability to \*THINK FAST\* in an unexpected situation. Your players, if they're decent roleplayers at all, will confront you with all sorts of things you hadn't expected. ("We rape the elf.") You have to figure out how to adjudicate the results of these events, without hesitating, and stand by your decision in the face of the inevitable "Dungeon Lawyers." (One of the most useful words for a DM: "FIAT!" Which is a Latin word meaning "Make it so," effectively. Say it and brook no argument.)

## 01.2 RULES AND LAWS

DMs word is Law. You basically design the world, control the gods which in turn control the world, religion, magic. You also control all the kings which control thier sections of the world and make laws. So basically any laws or rules you want are yours for the having. One thing you should remember is once you make a rule or a law you should keep it constant (See 01.3 KEEP IT CONSISTANT)

## 01.3 KEEP IT CONSISTENT

One thing you should try to do is keep things consistent on the whole. This does not say that things cannot change. Certain area of your world things might operate differently, but there should be some reason for this. Maybe a hidden magical power source is effecting magic or a lack of magic in an area. Or some powerful wizard has effected an area for his/her liking. Or on certain rules in a kingdom, the King/Queen may decide to change the rules/laws halfway through the campaign, but again there should be some reason for the change. The PCs don't need to know the exact reason, but they should if they want to, follow it up to find out the reason.

## 02 WORLD DESIGN

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Design at least three times as much "world" as you think you'll need. One thing I've found repeatedly (in 18 years of DMing) is that characters rarely do what you expect, and \*never\* what you want.

Try to make encounters that are place independent. That is, they can be moved about without too much work. This way when the PCs are travelling down the path and then turn off for no reason you can move the cave to where they will no come across it. This way the PCs don't think there be forced into anything. The just happened to stumble across a secret cave. This can be done to some extent, but not with all things.

## 03 VILLIANS AND NPCs

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Every adventure needs a good villain. To create a good villain you need, at minimum, the following:

- Her goals. Why is she doing whatever she's doing?
- Her power level. This should be commensurate with that of your party -- she should be difficult, but possible, for them to defeat.
- Reasonably complete description. What does she look like? What does she dress? How does she speak? Etc.

If you have a villain you really like -- especially if she's given the party a hard time -- give her an emergency escape, so she can come back to trouble your players again after a few months have gone by.

Make one recurring enemy and have him gain power with the PCs to keep him challenging. This can be anything from a childhood friend that one of the PCs took his/her lover, to a relative, to a child that one of your ancestors wronged in some way or another.

## 04 BALANCE

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### 04.1 NEW PLAYERS

#### 04.1.1 JOINING AN EXISTING CAMPAIGN

It also means that when you let a new player into a campaign, you have to give some serious thought to whether to make him come in as a first level, who is likely to die very rapidly at the hands of the critters the others face, or have him come in as a character from another town who's just moved in with his own experience, etc. (Or perhaps have him take over an existing NPC.)

There is more to a good campaign than balance -- but not much. Player characters have to be kept nominally similar in power so that they can interact and not have one bossing the others around. This doesn't mean everything has to be absolutely \*equal\*, but that one character doesn't accumulate massive treasure and power without some compensating accumulations on the parts of others.

There's more than this to balance. The next obvious point is balance between players and monsters, but that's so obvious it doesn't need much discussion here. (Rather, it needs entire tomes written about it, but that's another argument.)

Then, too, there is balance of the world itself. Is your world ruled mostly by Law or Chaos? (At least in the area your campaign will begin.) Is it high-power, or low-power? How common is magick? Etc.

Another issue of world-balance is the variety of NPCs your players meet. Remember that \*MOST\* of the people in the world will be neither wizards, warriors, thieves, nor priests, but craftsmen, farmers, petty criminals, government officials, merchants. . . You get the idea. Children. Old people. Make your world \*complete\* in its balance.

## 05 ADVENTURES

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Try not to force players in a certain direction. Most players that I have played with, hate when the DM forces them down a certain path. They try even harder to get off that path, once down it. Thus try to allow your players to roam where they want.

In towns you can have them over hear a couple of drunks talking how they just mugged an adventure that came back from some nearby caves. If they want they will go explore the caves.

If the PCs don't go in the direction you want then move the dungeon to where they will stumble across it. Or scare them back into the direction you want by facing them with an overwhelming force. This is a hard one because many times the PCs will actually try and take on the force. PCs often don't the sense to run away from things.