

# PLAYING DUNGEONS & DRAGONS IN THE WARGAMING WAY

; A MANIFESTO



So, you've been asked to play DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, the seminal roleplaying game. But there are numberless variants and playstyles out there. What is it even that you do in this game? Here's how to play in the wargaming way.

## CHALLENGE PROPOSED

A small commando team enters a magical underworld.

**Crack the dream-logic:** Observe the environment and apply your knowledge to predict the fairy chess rules of the dungeon reality.

**Map the labyrinth:** Scout carefully and learn where monsters and treasures are. Choose which doors to open, and which risks to take.

**To go on or turn back:** As resources dwindle and information increases, you are called to judge expedition goals against the risk of losses, choosing maneuvers to advance or retreat.

## A HERITAGE OF KRIEGSPIEL

D&D is a roleplaying game that is also a wargame. Its philosophical basis is in conflict simulation gaming of the wargaming tradition. The principles we insist upon here are only novel compared to other types of roleplaying games.

Wargaming originates in the 19th century as a hobby and training tool of military men. Its creative ideals are about learning and sportsmanship; we play to understand conflict dynamics, learn culture and science, and grow in the contest.

Although this may often be ignored today, D&D remains one of the high achievements of wargaming. Its subject matter is virtually unique in the field, focusing on myth and legend, conflict with fantastic unknown unknowns, and teamwork on the skirmish scale.



# THE THREE CORNERSTONES

ARE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WAY

## NEUTRAL REFEREE

The Game Master is a referee; their task is to prepare a challenging scenario and conduct it fairly to whatever outcome. Teaching the rules, and adjudicating the events.

The referee does not have a plan for the outcome of the game. They're not responsible for the outcome, and therefore there is room for players to have agency.

The referee is not an authoritarian master. They are a functionary of the game, not your social superior. You are learning to dance together.

## REAL ACHIEVEMENT

This is a game of skill and daring, played against quantifiable adversity. It's not a theatrical show; you're not playacting inside the Game Master's planned story.

Naturally, this means that losses are real as well. Exhilarating to avoid, depressing to face. But you learn from them because they are real.

Real achievement, real pride, real learning, and real sportsmanship are only possible when the game is real.

## SIMULATION RULES

The game is a conflict simulation, its purpose to shed light on how things work; teach reality, use reality. It is not a boardgame, conveniently self-enclosed and fair.

Players maneuver against the imagined scenario and how it should work. The referee exists to apply and adapt the rules to reflect the scenario.

The ideal of simulating a reality, even a fantastic one, is always an aspiration and a compromise between gameability and insight. The game treads a golden mean to capture *anything* real while remaining fun and fluid. The right mechanical tools for the task depend on the group's developing skills and interests.





## SOME CORE PRINCIPLES FOR PLAYERS

**Ask questions** about the rules; the referee is responsible for filling you in. **Ask questions** about the situation and game world; the GM is responsible for filling you in. **Ask questions** of the other players; you should conspire together to overcome the scenario.

**Do not assume** that there is a “right” or “supposed” thing for you to do. It’s your job to evaluate the scenario, and **retreat is always an option**.

To be sporting, **play the scenario** rather than rules-lawyering or trying to manipulate the GM. To be a great player, **maneuver boldly** and take the consequences!



## BASIC CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

**Quick chargen** is paramount, because characters die. A lot.

**No backstories**, we’ll get to know them in time if they survive.

**Start at 1st level** always, anything else skews perspective.

**Character death** is a necessity, it is what keeps the game honest.

**Use character stables** to even out risk and choose suitable characters for different adventures.

**XP is goal-based**, only granted for success. Treasure, not fighting.

**XP is consistent** and based on achievement only. No pity points, no simony, no attendance or “good roleplaying” awards.

**There is no balance**, players call for retreat if they so judge. Not the ref’s responsibility.

**No cheating**; the referee does not have a vested interest in outcomes. There is never a reason to fudge. Rules are operated in the open and on trust.

