



Blackjack's Guide To Bitter Gamemastering #5

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Dealing With Dragons (or "Put Down The RPG Launcher, Damnit!")

I believe I've sent my PCs on a grand total of maybe two runs which have involved coming into contact with an actual dragon, usually in the form of runners getting stuck out in the wilderness and wandering a bit too close to a cave containing one of the highly territorial beasts. And during the grand total of two runs involving such creatures the runners have responded to the dragon's presence by launching an attack on it or its dwelling with a degree ferocity that would better suited for an assault on a small European commonwealth or corporate headquarters. On both occasions the dragon was simply taking a nap.

Now what gets me is I had no intention of having the dragon attempt to rack up the runners in any way, shape, or form and had simply inserted it into the sequence of events for the sake of inserting it into the sequence of events. And then the runners pick its signature up on thermo and proceed to direct large, self propelled ordinance in its direction for god knows what reason. I'm guessing it's because they were afraid it might try to waste them but, from what I know of dragons, if you don't mess with them they don't mess with you as well. Dragons are as intelligent (if not more so) as the runners themselves and knows full well the benefits of not going around wasting stuff for the sake of wasting stuff. If I was in the PCs position I would be THRILLED to come across a dragon and although I'd have my grenade launcher at the ready I'd want to see if I could talk to it, ask some advice, see if it would pee in a cup so I could sell it to a magician, etc.

Perhaps my subject is not that of dragons specifically, but the idea that sometimes things need to be thought out more than they usually are and that, at times, there is the need to lighten up on the defensive posture PCs usually hold and simply see what's going on before they start to make things explode. Some runners are so on edge that their reaction to anything; scary people, large creatures, sunspots, etc., involves the use of large caliber weapons. Sometimes its more interesting to put the safety on for a few seconds and see what's up. The dragons will thank you.

Ha Ha, Real Freakin Funny

There are some people in this world who are gifted with the ability to come up with a snappy and humorous response for virtually every possible statement a human can make and although this is great at parties involving beverages with a high alcohol content it can make a role-playing session a living hell for the gamemaster. I am good friends with such an individual who, somehow, sneaked into my apartment late one night, opened up my skull, examined the portion of my brain which responds to humor, and wrote up a list of remarks which have such a profound effect on this brain portion that he would routinely have me laughing until I contracted, in pain, into the fetal position. It was quite a distraction.

Fortunately I was good enough friends with this individual that I could tell him that if he didn't stop I would kill his character and then set his car (my friend's, not his character's) on fire, possibly with him in it. He agreed to cool it and aside from the occasional snide remark things returned to as close to a state of normality as one can expect for this particular group. Unfortunately, it's not always this easy. There always seems to be the token player who can make a joke out of anything or, along the same lines, a smart ass comment or complaint. Usually the complaints and comments take the form of low volume mumbling regarding the way I handle the rules such as, "Target of six, sheesh, should've been five because I wasn't running." Again, it delays the game because I have to commit time to seething over the fact that this prick should know by now that I could come up with a valid excuse for giving him a target

of 45 and his comments are designed for the simple purpose of pissing me off.

There are two ways I handle such situations. Method number one involves me shouting at the individual a few times, as a warning, and then simply getting up and leaving and going somewhere to shoot pool for maybe an hour or so while the rest of the players scream and holler at the individual for ruining the game. By the time I return either this person has left or has been beaten into submission by his fellow players. Method number two involves a nasty little technique by which the gamemaster simply makes all of these annoying little comments audible in the fantasy world. An example:

PLAYER (In Game): I want forty thousand for the run instead of the thirty we set earlier.

GM: Roll negotiations, target of six.

PLAYER (In Reality, mumbling): Yeah, six. Should've been a five.

NPC: Did you call me a Six? That gang killed my brother! Die samurai scum!!!!

And then of course the player will say: "But I didn't say that!", to which I usually reply: "I don't care." or "Yes you did." and a large argument erupts and eventually, after this occurs five or six times, the player gets the point. Either that or I go shoot some pool.