



CONTRITION OF A FULL-TIME WIZARD

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It's time for this the Player-in-Chief to make a confession. Sometimes, I'm not the *best*-behaved D&D player. I know what you're thinking. I've read the message boards, I've even gotten your emails, and I certainly get my fair share of headshakes and *tsk tsk*s from around the office.

You could at least try to act surprised.

Yes, we have put New DM through the ringer, and no, he isn't getting paid extra for it, in case you want to start a fund. I like New DM. I do. He's not just a great Dungeon Master, but he's a good friend and he's taught us all a lot. He's been patient, but even Miss Uppity Gripeypants (yep, I've heard that one too—thanks, Mom!) can tell that's starting to wane. He laughs less and hits more. Is it really just lucky die rolling or are the D&D gods exacting his revenge? He recently told me that the group was on the verge of getting a talking-to. Okay, I guess that's really how I know he's fed up.

"With one exception," New DM said, "there is way too much complaining going on. You guys are taking this whole 'you're making rules up' gig too far. It's grating on my last nerve."

It's weird to think of New DM with a last nerve. He seems to have an endless supply of them.

"But isn't that what you guys do in R&D?" I asked. "Make up rules?"

"Not the ones you're complaining about," he said. "Too many monsters to fight! Wah! Really?"

"To be fair," I cautiously interjected, "there are sometimes a lot of monsters in one room. Maybe a tad overkill?"

"And you want to level faster, yet you played two sessions before realizing you were already 5th level."

"It was a very subtle transition between 4th and 5th level," I said.

New DM wasn't buying it. "You're like petulant children that barge into a room, break a bunch of things, and then cry because you got dirty."

Funny, I saw two kids do the same thing with a jar of organic spaghetti sauce at Trader Joe's the night before.

"We don't cry because we're dirty," I began. "We cry because we're getting pantsed by your multiple minions."

Oh, who am I fooling? He's right.

He's not our parole officer or congressman or math teacher or anyone else who deserves our ire and squabbling. He's just a guy who spends an awful lot of time every week preparing for a game he can play with us. New DM has a real job at Wizards. A job that keeps him busy. A job that could probably benefit from those 2 hours in a conference room that we suck out of him. I wasn't surprised he was getting fed up.

"I'm sorry, New DM," I said and I meant it. "I do complain too much."

"It's not just you," he said.

That surprised me. Sure, I sometimes complain about the rules (I'm still not over the whole, *I know three daily spells so I don't get why I can't use three daily spells* thing) but I always felt that was my function in the group. Some are fighters. Some are healers. Some are nit-pickers.

Allow me to remind you that this all goes down at work. Lucky, I know, to call this part of your job. You can't work in marketing without knowing what it is you're marketing, right? We can honestly say we eat, breath, and live D&D because for most of us, it doesn't end when we leave the office. Some are heading home to work on their campaigns; some are heading off to one of their four weekly games. Sometimes I'm convinced it's an absolute dream job. But sometimes I wonder if we're not on the verge of suffering The Great Hotdog Debacle of 1983.

Flashback... It's 1983. My dad hired my best friend Melina and I to man a hotdog stand he rented for a giant tent sale his business was having. We got paid \$2 an hour plus all the hotdogs we could eat. Not one to miss out on a perk, I ate about three hot dogs *an hour*. We were there for six hours. You do the math.

Needless to say, I didn't feel so good that night. Or for the next three days. And I didn't eat another hot dog again until The Great Spring Break Debacle of 1994, when my friends and I spent all of our cash on Fat Tuesday's margaritas and conch fritters by day three of our seven day vacation. (It was either eat a hot dog or the crazy beach guy's pet parrot, Hemingway.) Three days after that, I stopped eating meat all together.

We'd all have to make some serious changes to our behavior or New DM would treat us like a pack of day-old beef franks on a sun-roasted picnic bench.

But what to get the DM who has everything except a well-mannered, well-behaved group?

"Hey New DM," I asked, interrupting his real job. "Hypothetically speaking, if a gaming group wanted to do right by their DM, what kinds of things should they do?"

"Hypothetically speaking?" New DM asked, pulling out a notebook. "Let's take a look."

"You have a list?"

"A hypothetical list."

Scanning the list, I was relieved to see no names were called out. Still it's easy to recognize what you are guilty of. Some of this might not even be specific to our group, which made me wonder how many other groups are suffering their own growing pains.

In case your group is one of them, New DM may have some advice for you, too.

In my humble attempt at contrition, I present to you *New DM's Player Manifesto Wish List*. (As paraphrased by me. Which might account for why it sounds more like a doggie obedience class syllabus.)

DO YOUR BUSINESS

Yeah, we leveled! Three weeks ago. So why haven't any of us taken the time to update our character sheets between games? It's like knowing you're getting a coveted gift for Christmas, only to wake up on the big day to declare you'd rather wait until New Year's to open it. We've all been guilty of this. Maybe *real* work got in the way. Or maybe we think we've got too many feats already. Regardless, it's not fair to your group.

The same deal goes with magic items. We'll drag around an undisclosed level 9 magic item for weeks before handing it over to someone. And forget about shopping. Even I don't take time out to stock up on supplies. We'll be starving in the forest six feet outside of town before anyone realizes we haven't eaten in weeks. New DM has called us out more than a few times for claiming to dump a *healing potion* down the throat of a near-dead party member.

"Where did you get a *healing potion*?" he'd ask.

"We looted it off the guards we killed in the tower."

"Anwar used that on Maya three encounters ago."

"Oh."

How does he know this stuff? He's not even a mother.

LISTEN!

So apparently dungeon masters don't talk just to hear themselves. At least New DM doesn't. When he prattles on about things like who we're looking for, where we are, and who we're up against, it might be important.

Adam used to write these things down, but when he left the group we were forced to rely on our

memories or Scott, which is worse because he gets sidetracked in the middle of a sentence and starts writing down all the recipes he can add whiskey to.

“Just once,” New DM pleaded, “I’d love for you guys to remember where you are and what you’re fighting for.”

“Sounds like you want us to channel our inner 80’s John Hughes movie character.”

“I want you to channel your inner grownups and quit acting like a bunch of teenagers stuck in detention.”

Same thing, right? But hey, who am I to argue?

“But then you wouldn’t get to do your ‘previously on DUNGEONS & DRAGONS’ spiel,” I say instead.

“Get to?”

Interesting...

DROP IT!

I once dated a guy who was a research tech at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. He’d often leave work grumpy and stressed which usually prompted a response from me somewhere along the lines of, “Buck up, camper! It’s not like you’re curing cancer!” We didn’t last long and not just because he couldn’t appreciate my highbrow sense of humor.

Here at Wizards, we make games. Games are supposed to be fun, right? Therefore, one might assume Wizards is a fun place to work as proven by the fact you can play games on the clock. Your assumption is correct, but it can also backfire on you. Do you know how hard it is to leave work when you’re still at work? Maybe you just ended a frustrating conference call seconds before your game. Or maybe your coworker blew a deadline that’s going to prevent you from get-

ting a big project done on time. And maybe that same coworker is sitting across the table from you in need of some healing.

Not everyone respects our game time, and meetings are often scheduled over the top of our game time. And often, a co-worker won’t bother with a meeting and just barge into the conference room waving a sell sheet that needs editing or a press release that needs approving. You can’t exactly say, “Hey back off! I’m playing a game here!” Especially when it’s your boss waving the press release.

Regardless of what goes on during your day, you need to check that work baggage outside the conference room door and stay in the game, which brings me to the next point.

STAY!

Do people in your game read the newspaper, call their mothers, or take off to run a few errands between turns? Probably not. At least, I hope not. Paying attention shouldn’t be limited to remembering what happened the last time you played. It’s also about remembering what you’re doing in the moment. Don’t bring your laptop, spreadsheet, or Power Point presentation into the game. Cell phones should only be allowed if you’re expecting an important call. Even if it’s not your turn, you should still be paying attention to what’s happening at the table. Imagine this is real life, and you and your buddies are in the middle of a bar fight. Are you going to throw a punch and then jump into a game of darts until someone taps you on the shoulder and tells you the bad guys are waiting in the parking lot if you maybe want to hit them over the head with a pool cue?

RESPECT THE PACK

Hey, buddy. You come here often? No? Why’s that? Oh, right! Because you’re new! You haven’t been here at all!

Like the members of a real adventuring party, you can’t forget who has your back. Whether you’ve made it official or not, you have entered into a social contract. That means you show up. *On time*. You arm your character with the best knowledge, weapons, skills, and spells they can afford. You watch out for one another. You share your snacks. (Or at least make a half-hearted offering.)

It’s a big deal when you’re trying to fill an opening in a game group. It’s not just about who’s willing to play a healer (which we never seem to have enough of) or who is free Tuesdays from 3:30 to 5:30. The group needs to mesh. They have to trust each other. Your social feng shui depends on it.

If you’re the new person entering the group you’ve got to respect the dynamics. Why not wait a few sessions before you rush to usurp the alpha? Maybe you have been playing longer than everyone else. Maybe you are the most knowledgeable. But not everyone takes kindly to be told right away where to stand, what spell to cast, what monster to target, or how many calories that bag of steakhouse onion potato chips is packing. Boy, people really hate that.

PROTECT!

This goes along with the above, only according to New DM, the burden often falls on the Dungeon Master. While most of us are playing with people we’d want to protect in real life, it’s sometimes jarring to see real-life tensions flare up in a fantasy

setting. Our game is no exception. Like I said, we *work* together. These things are bound to happen when you spend a quarter of your week within three feet of each other.

I think we've all noticed a grudge match playing out on the playmat. Maybe the paladin chose to double move rather than lay her hands on the near-prone bard. Maybe an hour before the game the paladin and the bard were having a heated discussion over which monsters from *Monster Manual 2* were going to be previewed. Coincidence?

Our characters are innocent bystanders and it's not fair to the other players in your game to exact your fantasy revenge on one another. That's what kickboxing class is for.

PRAISE!

This is my addition to the manifesto, as New DM wouldn't dream of asking this of us. Is it really the job of Dungeon Masters to make sure the players are having fun? The ones around the building say so. Seems like a big job to pin on one person, yet one they take on willingly.

This probably goes without saying, but it's something my group often forgets. The Dungeon Master isn't trying to piss you off. New DM is (mostly) playing by rules. I mean, the guy *knows* the rules. He's been playing D&D for nearly three decades. And yet we find it necessary to question him 80% of the time. Okay, 90%.

Maybe a power struggle is normal between players and DMs, but in our case it's less like a struggle and more like ganging up, holding down, and issuing a massive wedgie. Is it because we're playing approxi-

mately 12 feet from the people who make the rules that gives us this false sense of "phone a friend?"

"Since when can't dragonborns teleport?" we'll ask.

"Since forever," New DM will answer.

"We'd like to get a second opinion, please."

And sometimes we would too. I know...annoying.

Contrary to what we accuse New DM of, he tries to be fair. If he's not sure about a rule, he looks it up. And if he was wrong, he admits it.

While we're all sure to thank him after the game, I'm not sure we tell him often enough that we appreciate the work he puts into our campaign. That we think it's nice he schedules his meetings and presentations and calls to his mother *around* our game. That we're grateful he hasn't ditched our ungrateful butts in favor of any number of other groups in search of a DM around the office. Uh oh. Maybe he didn't know they existed. Should I not have mentioned that?

So here's to you, New DM. And DM's everywhere. As Player-in-Chief, I hereby declare the month of July Dungeon Master Appreciation Month. Maybe I will bring him flowers or bake him a cake. Or maybe I should take Tabitha shopping, level her up, and learn how to use that level 9 magic item she just secured. Seems like that's something he'd appreciate even more.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble is also sorry for smashing her fist through her cousin's Minnie Mouse birthday cake, accusing Stacy Kendrick of stealing Papa Smurf and subsequently punching her in the jaw for retribution, and that other Spring Break 1994 debacle.

OSO, FOR THE BALANCED CAMPAIGN

Last month, we presented a . . . well . . . less-than-balanced version of Oso the Circus Bear, setting off a firestorm of controversy on the Wizards of the Coast message boards. The Oso Tabitha uses in her campaign is the powerful (but potentially treacherous) version, but he comes with a cost determined by Shelly's DM. The version below, also designed by 4th Edition lead designer Rob Heinsoo, is more suitable for campaigns in which a DM doesn't want to be troubled with a potentially disruptive, vengeful familiar. If you think your DM would be amenable to the original Oso—and the cost that comes with such a powerful familiar—just be sure to run it by him or her first!

Oso de la Fez, Former Show Bear

Balanced atop his ball, wearing his small, red fez, this bear seems the picture of innocence—until he bellows with fury and lashes at enemies who mock him with his razor-sharp claws.

Speed 4, fly 4 (hover)

Constant Benefits

Grrrrr: You gain a +2 bonus on Intimidate checks.

Active Benefits

His Own Bear: Oso can speak any language you know, and can converse with other creatures. Unlike mere familiars, you can't hear everything Oso hears and says unless Oso lets you, and you would never be able to tell Oso what to say.

Verrrry Dangerous: Oso deals 1d4 damage per tier to anyone who attacks him and misses.