

WHAT I DID IN MY HOLIDAYS: THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT ROLE-PLAYER

The Ancient Role-Player

In time immemorial (sometime between 1983-85, memories fade when you reach my age) I was visiting a friend of mine. He was holding a blue-covered book (I could see the words Expert Rules on the front) and asked if I wanted to play a game. When he told me that you didn't need a board I was incredulous. How does that work? I asked. He told me, and I was shocked and surprised. It was a story that has been played out a thousand times in a thousand cities.

It wasn't long before we had made our first hybrid game. We were missing some vital components of the system (I'd later call it Basic Dungeons and Dragons), mostly the red book with the words Basic Rules on the cover. It didn't matter. We used combat rules from Way of the Tiger books (kind of like Fighting Fantasy, but with more martial arts). Admittedly it was nothing like trying to run an Advanced Dungeons and Dragons module using only the Expert Rules...who knew that Knock was a spell and not something you did with your fist on a door.

Eventually we got the rest of the books (in my case, Immortal, Master, Companion, Expert, Basic) and actually learned how to play. Of course, once we'd gotten the hang of Basic D'n'D we got our little pubescent hands on Advanced. Before long we were reading confusing rules spread across multiple books, including early editions of the DM and players guides, and the Monster Manual. Before long we were playing like all good teenagers: sex and mindless violence. I probably shouldn't mention the occasional long evening of role-playing, sugar, and gas.

We committed crimes against good sense (and good taste too, but some things don't change), such as no encumbrance ("There's still space in my packs side pocket – put the 30000 gp in there"), playing weird classes offered in White Dwarf magazine way way back, well before it became the Warhammer magazine (the Houri comes to mind...you'll never guess what they did), and general horror characters (Krynn Minotaur barbarians, Cavalier-Paladins from Unearthed Arcana, and of course Kender), and of course aliens in a fantasy setting.

My groups varied in size, the longest lasting one consisting of four of us. That one broke up when I was in Seventh Form after one of the main players went to Uni. Some of my fellow players have been...interesting, while others have been fantastic. I've played in many systems and various editions, written novella like backgrounds, and of course ripped off movies, books, and occasionally other people. I'm not really sure what it is that keeps me coming back, whether it be campaign or one-off, table-top or live. I guess it's just hard to lead a group of barbarians into a massive battle, easily cutting through the normal troops just to reach the army leaders, in the real-world. There aren't enough barbarians left.