



## CHAPTER TWO: ADJUDICATING PLAY

What a campaign rewards, it gets more of. This tenet is true in both the simple meaning (games that pass out experience points only for combat encourage PCs to kill things, while games that pass out experience points for roleplaying are likely to have more sessions with nary a sword swung) and in a more esoteric sense (house rules that make building castles and creating kingdoms easy are more likely to have characters doing so). If you want your d20 campaign to have a different feel, you may need to alter, add, or eliminate standard rules to encourage the tone you want. These changes are often referred to as house rules.

House rules are new rules created by GMs for use in their own campaigns. A GM may introduce house rules to fix something about the core rules that bothers her, to cover an oversight in the core rules, or to change the flavor of the game by altering its underlying assumptions. The best house rules are those that match a group's style of play and support the kind of adventures the GM plans on running.

House rules are very common with many groups and have a bad reputation with others. No game can cover every possible event and style of play, but bad house rules make the game less fun. Rule changes need to be carefully considered and playtested for balance. A new house rule may have unexpected consequences, changing a game in a way neither you nor your players like.

Used well, however, house rules allow a gaming group to change a campaign to match its style of play more closely. In a game that deals mostly with diplomacy and negotiation, you may want to simplify combat rules so fights take up less time. Of course, if your group loves getting into fights but doesn't like complex rules, you may also want to cut down on the combat rules you use.

Designing your own rules is an important part of being a GM. Even if you want to avoid changing the flavor of a game by altering its core assumptions, you'll eventually be asked to handle a situation the rules don't cover. Roleplaying games are, by their very nature, dependent on the GM to be ready to handle every possible contingency. No published set of rules can possibly do this, so eventually every GM must strike out on her own. The new rule may be a one-time decision about what to do if a goblin is convinced to drink oil and swallow a tindertwig, or it may be a sweeping change to allow socially inept players to have smooth, suave characters.

Off-the-cuff decisions regarding unusual situations can be rough, as they're unlikely to come up again. More permanent changes to the rules must be carefully examined to see if they have side effects you didn't expect and don't want. The best way to do this is extensive playtesting, but this often isn't a practical answer for casual gamers. Playtesting takes time, and most gamers

would rather spend that time actually playing their game than testing new rules for it. Failing a playtest, a rule needs to be looked at very closely. Try to imagine every possible use of the new rule, as well as consider who the rule benefits most.

For example, a GM might decide she wants small, fast weapons such as throwing knives to be more common in his campaigns. If she makes a house rule that allows characters to make twice as many attacks with light ranged weapons, assuming that their ease of use allows faster attacks, such weapons will certainly be most common. They'll appeal most, however, to characters with big Strength bonuses, since such characters can add that bonus to every ranged attack. A character with a +6 Strength bonus is better off making two knife attacks, even if they only deal 1–4 points of damage, than one spear attack. This means the stronger a character gets, the more likely he is to use a light throwing weapon, which is counter-intuitive. Barbarian hordes with bandoleers of shuriken seem wrong and likely aren't what the GM intended.

Further, a house rule must be well known to the players. Even if a GM designed a perfectly functional house rule, players will be understandably upset if they aren't aware of it before it comes into a play. Not only should you be sure to mention the rule, you should probably give everyone a handout with all new rules carefully explained. Players need access to all the rules to plan their character advancement and react reasonably to the events of the campaign. Since house rules aren't available in any rulebook, it's your job to disseminate them to players.

The other reason this is key is that players may not like a new rule. While it's important you're happy with how your game goes, the players need to be happy as well. A new proposed house rule is often well received by players, but it's a good idea for you to ask their input and make sure they're comfortable with new rules. Sometimes a player's style of play doesn't match yours, and working out such issues before they come up in game play is best.

All the following rules are designed to be easily added to a game, either to provide rules for situations that come up regularly or to change the feel of a campaign by altering the core d20 rule set. They're broken into three broad categories: combat rules (those dealing with fighting on a personal- or mass-combat scale); general (those dealing with simulating the world in one way or another); and magic (those providing additions and alterations to the normal rules of magic). Each section presents a new rule, discusses what kinds of campaigns it's best for, and explores possible variants and repercussions of the rule.

Additional new rules can be found throughout the *Advanced Gamemaster's Guide*, especially in **Chapter Seven: Treasure and Magic Items**. The rules found in other chapters are not so much changes in the core rules as additions to the normal set of options. They are less likely to have unexpected consequences and less likely to require changes in related rules. Even so, all these additions at least touch on how their inclusion will probably change the feel of a campaign.

## - COMBAT RULES -

Combat is a major element of most d20 campaigns. The base combat rules are designed to encourage heroic action, to keep play detailed enough players have interesting choices in a fight but abstract enough not to bog down in details, and to allow players to face failure without characters being killed. Hit points, one of the most integrated elements of the rules, allow players to enjoy the give-and-take of combat without characters being quickly crippled (or constantly missed until a single blow drops them), while a few combat maneuvers and a slew of feats tweak the tactical concerns of a fight.

Since combat is so integral to most campaigns, it's one of the first things GMs seek to change when running certain types of campaigns. The following rules are designed to support a certain style of play as explained in the descriptions. Use any or all of these rules independently to create the style of combat your campaign theme demands.

### BUSHWHACKING RULES

One common problem GMs have when trying to run games with urban settings, espionage, or assassination as

major themes is the difficulty in dropping a foe in a single blow when attacking from stealth. Obviously, characters with sneak attack get their bonus dice when attacking a flat-footed foe and assassins have their death attack, but some campaign styles require everyone to have a chance to drop a foe in one shot from ambush. Vast pools of hit points work well for general combat in such settings, but they make assassination attempts problematic at best. To overcome this drawback, try introducing the bushwhack rule.

The bushwhack rule applies only when a target is flat-footed and unaware of an attack against him. This second part is very important. A thief jumping out of the shadows to stab a guard in the chest isn't bushwhacking him — the guard sees the blade coming even if he doesn't have time to react to it. If the thief was stabbing the guard in the back or attacking him under cover of total darkness or while invisible, the situation would qualify as a bushwhack. Since the d20 rules assume no facing, a character must either declare he's attacking a target from behind (and reasonably be able to do so) or win an opposed skill contest of the worst of his Move Silently and Hide against the best of his victim's Listen or Spot.

If the target is both flat-footed and unaware, he must make a Fortitude save if successfully damaged (DC 10 + damage dealt) or die. If the damage is non-lethal, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + damage dealt) or be knocked unconscious for 2d6 minutes. Creatures immune to critical hits or sneak attacks are immune to bushwhacks.

Games with a bushwhack rule can be surprisingly deadly. Characters have a fair chance to deal with foes far more powerful than themselves if they can bushwhack them. For the same reason, the PCs may find their characters killed or captured by lesser threats if ambushed. This possibility opens numerous potential plots (including PCs sneaking around to ambush a foe they cannot beat in a fair fight or having to escape from minor foes who managed to capture them from surprise). Yet it also means that any character, no matter how tough or well protected, can be killed in a single blow under the right circumstances. Tension can increase as a result (especially if PCs find themselves somewhere with low visibility or a high level of cover); however, it also increases caution, which can slow down a campaign and remove a level of heroic action. The rule is best used in campaigns with a gritty, life-is-cheap feel rather than over-the-top high adventure, like Green Ronin's Black Company Campaign Setting, for instance.

## CLASS DODGE BONUS

The idea behind the class dodge bonus is that as characters get better at combat and hitting things



(represented by the increase in base attack bonus), they also get better at avoiding damage. Each class gains a dodge bonus based on level. Just like other class-based numbers, a multiclass character adds his bonus from each class to gain his total dodge bonus. This system works well for GMs who want campaigns in which heavy armor is less common and in which people have greater survivability in plain clothes.

To prevent this system from being too unbalancing, a slight change is made to how dodge bonuses, Dexterity bonuses to AC, and armor interact. A character's total dodge bonus is his dodge bonuses from all sources (dodge bonuses stack, unlike most bonus types), plus his Dexterity modifier. A suit of armor's maximum Dexterity bonus is changed to its maximum dodge bonus. Thus, a character with a 14 Dexterity and a +3 dodge bonus is considered to have a total dodge bonus of +5 (+2 Dex, +3 dodge). If wearing hide armor, however, he is limited by its maximum dodge bonus of +4, giving him an AC of 18 (+4 armor, +4 dodge).

Numerous things change when you add class dodge bonuses. First and most obviously, characters become harder to hit in combat. Combats take longer, and combat-based characters become slightly more powerful compared to non-combatants. This effect works well for GMs who feel spellcasters are slightly overpowered normally, but other GMs may want to consider giving them a slight power boost.

Second, armor becomes less critical to character success. Lightly armored fighting concepts, such as swashbucklers and savages, become more survivable. Fights that occur when characters are unarmored (such as nighttime attacks and fights in prisons or gladiatorial arenas) are less deadly, as characters aren't as penalized by a lack of armor. Since fewer characters will wear heavy armor, physical skill checks (those made with skills that suffer an armor check penalty) will be more easily made. Characters will generally be more mobile, with higher land speeds and better ability to make Balance, Climb, Jump, and Tumble checks.

Items providing an additional armor bonus without a higher maximum dodge bonus become more valuable as well. A ranger might be more interested in bracers of armor +6 than a wizard, and light armor with magic enhancements to AC become more useful than mundane armor with the same total AC bonus. A paladin with a high Dexterity is better off wearing a +3 breastplate than masterwork full plate.

The chart below gives the dodge progression for every standard PC and NPC class, as well as classes found in Green Ronin's *Advanced Player's Manual* and the **Master Class** series.. If using a class not listed here, give it the progression of the class with the closest concept or role. For example, most classes dependent on their divine spellcasting abilities will have fair dodge progression, while warriors with heavy armor will have good and

**TABLE 2-1:**  
**CLASS DODGE BONUSES**

Level/HD	Dodge Bonus by Progression			
	Amazing	Good	Fair	Poor
1st	+0	+0	+0	+0
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+0
3rd	+1	+1	+0	+0
4th	+2	+1	+1	+0
5th	+2	+1	+1	+1
6th	+2	+2	+1	+1
7th	+3	+2	+2	+1
8th	+3	+2	+2	+1
9th	+4	+3	+2	+2
10th	+4	+3	+2	+2
11th	+4	+3	+3	+2
12th	+5	+4	+3	+2
13th	+5	+4	+3	+3
14th	+6	+4	+4	+3
15th	+6	+5	+4	+3
16th	+6	+5	+4	+3
17th	+7	+5	+4	+4
18th	+7	+6	+5	+4
19th	+8	+6	+5	+4
20th	+8	+6	+5	+4

warriors proficient with only light or medium armor will have amazing dodge progression.

Remember a good dodge progression is as much about having the time to practice combat as it is about being nimble. Of course, every character wants to have as big a dodge bonus as possible, but fighters simply have more time to learn to avoid weapon blows than clerics. Rogues, though less effective in a fair fight, are equally likely to learn avoidance from the school of hard knocks. Barbarians and rangers not only fight on the front lines, they often do so without the benefit of heavy armor. Wizards also lack heavy armor, but do have defensive spells that both protect them and take up time needed to study and meditate.

Altering which progression a class gets is another way of changing the dynamics of a campaign. The assigned progressions are designed to change the roles each class plays as little as possible — fighters are still front-line combatants and bards are less likely to get into close combat than rogues. If you want to run a game with fewer front-line fighters or with a preponderance of arcane spellcasters, give better progressions to those classes you want to see more of. You could also design a new core class or a prestige class that grants a class dodge

bonus even if other classes don't. This should always be a good progression at best, as good and amazing progressions are too unbalancing in a game with only a few classes gaining them.

Progression	Class
Amazing	Barbarian, duelist, elocater, ranger
Good	Aristocrat, assassin, blackguard, cavalier, fighter, holy/unholy warrior, monk, noble, paladin, psionic fist, rogue, scout, shadowdancer, slayer, war mind, warrior
Fair	Arcane archer, avatar, bard, dragon disciple, druid, dwarven defender, cleric, eldritch knight, evangelist, expert, hierophant, horizon walker, psychic, psychic warrior, pyrokineticist, shaman, slayer, soulknife, warpriest
Poor	Adept, arcane trickster, archmage, cerebremancer, commoner, eldritch weaver, loremaster, metamind, mystic theurge, psion, psion uncarnate, sorcerer, spellmaster, thanemage, thaumaturgist, thrallherd, wilder, witch, wizard

The same dodge bonuses should be given to NPCs as well. Those with class levels figure their dodge bonus just like PCs. Characters with multiple HD gain a dodge bonus based on their type, as noted below. Creature types that frequently wear armor (humanoids, giants, monstrous humanoids, and outsiders) have the same restrictions as PCs — limiting their maximum dodge bonus by armor type. Other creature types (aberrations, animals, constructs, dragons, elementals, fey, magical beasts, oozes, plants, undead, and vermin) are often balanced with natural armor. These types may not gain a dodge bonus greater than their Dexterity modifier before bonuses and/or penalties. Thus, a dire wolf, with a +2 Dexterity bonus, cannot gain more than a +2 dodge bonus from its Hit Dice, no matter how many Hit Dice it has.

Creature Type	Dodge Progression
Dragons, magical beasts, outsiders	Amazing
Aberrations, constructs, elementals, giants, monstrous humanoids	Good
Animals, humanoids, oozes, plants, vermin	Fair
Fey, undead	Poor