



Rise of the Dungeon Master: Gary Gygax and the Creation of D&D

David Kushner , Koren Shadmi (Illustrations)

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Rise of the Dungeon Master tells, in graphic form, the story of Gary Gygax, co-creator of Dungeons & Dragons, one of the most influential games ever made. Like the game itself, the narrative casts the reader into the adventure from a first person point of view, taking on the roles of the different characters in the story.

Gygax was the son of immigrants who grew up in Lake Geneva, WI, in the 1950s. An imaginative misfit, he escaped into a virtual world based on science fiction novels, military history and strategic games like chess. In the mid-1970s, he co-created the wildly popular Dungeons & Dragons game, determining the rules and inventing the signature 20-sided dice. Starting out in the basement of his home, he was soon struggling to keep up with the demand. Gygax was a purist, in the sense that he was adamant that players use their imaginations and that the rules of the game remain flexible. A creative mind with no real knowledge of business, he made some strategic errors and had a falling out with the game's co-creator, his close friend and partner, David Arneson.

By the late 1970s the game had become so popular among kids that parents started to worry -- so much so that a mom's group was formed to alert parents to the dangers of role play and fantasy. The backlash only fueled the fires of the young fans who continued to play the game, escaping into imaginary worlds. Before long, D&D conventions were set up around the country and the game inspired everything from movies to the first video games. With D&D, Gygax created the kind of role playing fantasy that would fuel the multibillion dollar video game industry, and become a foundation of contemporary geek culture.

Rise of the Dungeon Master: Gary Gygax and the Creation of D&D Details

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From Reader Review Rise of the Dungeon Master: Gary Gygax and the Creation of D&D for online ebook

Anna Morgan says

There will be a review forthcoming on my YouTube channel. Really enjoyed this one.

Brooke Bianchi-Pennington says

This was brief and interesting, and I enjoyed how the style and use of POV was meant to reflect the game. However, I think in being brief there wasn't a lot of character development, and this honestly made everyone come off as stereotypically 70s sexist. I understand that that was probably the reality, but I wish that it had been addressed or problematized a bit.

Sam says

This is one of the few books in 2nd person that I feel can actually pull it off. It made me feel like I was jumping into one of the D&D campaign guides in preparation for the next session I would run with my group. I enjoyed reading about the creation of not just D&D but also GenCon, since I'll be going to GenCon in a couple months. I suppose the only sad part I had with this book is when it spoke of the success of D&D now it mentioned shows like Stranger Things or the rise of fantasy shows like Game of Thrones, but failed to even reference Critical Role or any of the other wonderful live-streamed D&D shows that can be found online. Still, I liked this graphic novel formatted story, and it was a nice quick read.

Tyler Kroon says

A comprehensive biography of Gary Gygax (a co-creator of Dungeons and Dragons), and the history of D&D itself, in the form of a graphic novel. I especially liked that they showed how the game influenced other instances of pop culture, including tv shows, video games, and computer programming, to name a few.

William Fricke says

COUCH FACTOR (1-5): ??????????

Remember Dungeons and Dragons, the game for geeky kids that holed up in their basement for hours on end role-playing their way through an epic quest run by a guy called the Dungeon Master.

I do, in fact, I was one of those kids. Reluctant at first, then really into it, then reluctant again, then a closet fantasy fan. Why so many reversals? Well, because D&D was dorky and the girls that went to D&D games were not the girls that interested me as a boy. So, I grew big and strong. I played sports. I worked to buy a nice car. And I kinda forgot about the game.

When I started, it was because I played with my older brother. He became interested at 10 or 11 years of age and needed another player. I followed his lead. After exhausting the teammates that lived near us in the country -- there were none -- we looked elsewhere. So, our dad would drop us off at the local hobby shop 20 minutes away. Using the buddy system, my brother and I would play a game all Saturday with a group of considerably older gentlemen.

We would get to know the guys in the shop, the other players, and the store owners pretty well. The Red Dragon, as it was called, was set off a well-traversed road in the middle of nowhere in the thumb of Michigan (Yes, hold up your right hand, palm facing you and point at the thumb. We lived there.)

Now, as parents, my brother and I can't believe we were dropped off at this place as 11 and 12-year-olds. We had nowhere to go if trouble came about. No phones. No internet. We could have been tied up in the back and used as practice dummies for the medieval weapons trade or shipped off as slave labor. But we weren't. We were looked after by these older men, who just wanted to play a game and live in a fantasy world for an afternoon. It was nothing but good-hearted fun.

The Rise of the Dungeon Master tells the story of Gary Gygax, the founder of D&D. He too just wanted to play and explore as a kid. As an adult, he recreated the epic battles of history with his friends and role-played them as a game. This led to his creation of several games until finally, with collaborations with others, he created the game we know today as Dungeons and Dragons.

The creation of the game influenced all role-playing games since including every epic fantasy game for Nintendo, X-Box, Playstation, and computer games. So, is Rise of the Dungeon Master a good read? As a graphic novel, the book can be read in an hour of page turning fun. Something to enjoy to pass the time, if you enjoy learning about D&D.

A part of D&D's history is the public pushback against its role-playing qualities - opponents claiming its spell-casting promoted witchcraft and Satan worship. The most notable case is the story of Dallas Egbert, a prodigy student at Michigan State University, who went missing in the early 1980s. Dallas left clues to his whereabouts like the Dungeon Master in the D&D games he so loved to play. William Dear, the detective, helped solve the case by following Egbert's clues from his dorm room to the tunnels under Michigan State University and finally down south where Egbert had run after failing to commit suicide in the tunnels.

I read Dungeon Master: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III while I was at Michigan State and wanted to find a way into the tunnels under the school to see what Dallas had seen but the university had locked them down tight by the time I had arrived on campus in the late 90s. If D&D played a role in my youth and in my college years, it surely has played a role in my adult life as well. As an English teacher, I love to read and write. It all started with reading the Forgotten Realms series of books by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis. While I have graduated to more "serious works of literature," I still love a good fantasy story -- Game of Thrones anyone?

Maybe in my twilight years, I will carry on my relationship with D&D by creating my own world, filling it with characters from the role of a 20-sided die, and setting them off on adventures to level up and gather valuable treasure.

Eric Piotrowski says

This is an excellent look at the life of Gary Gygax and the classic game system he created with Dave Arneson. The art is clean and engaging, and the storytelling is lively without being rushed. We get plenty of

depth but no wallowing in nostalgia for the sake of wallowing.

The one drawback (which costs a star in this review) is the use of second-person. It's interesting and effective in places, to match the experience of having a story related during a session of Dungeons & Dragons. But it comes and goes, and becomes messy in places. The first-person quotes from Gygax et al are jarring when mixed into the second-person structure, and the two different fonts aren't distinctive enough to ease the swapping.

I will make a specific mention of the gender dynamics in this book. The author and artist do a great job representing women players and GenCon attendees, without making an unrealistic pastiche of wishful thinking. A nice balance is struck.

A must-read for any D&D fan, and a fascinating story for everybody else. Highly recommended.

Katie says

Interesting enough for me to read in a sitting. I learned some stuff.

Edit: I did like the info on how Gygax dropped out of school, liked exploring tunnels under the local empty sanatorium, and came to the conclusion that the universe must've been intelligently created near the end of his life. I didn't like the bits where founders would fight, take credit, all the usual shenanigans of once-friends now business-enemies. Boo. I thought the little interlude about the public perception of D&D and shaping forces was really fascinating. Also one of the few (if not only??) book I've read written in second person point of view. SO THAT WAS FUN.

Sharon says

Hmmm. A truncated version of the D&D creation story, told (successfully) in the second person. It's short, so it glosses over many of the controversies and problems Gygax, Arneson and TSR had over the years. Other reviewers claim historical inaccuracies; some of the timeline doesn't work exactly right, 'tis true. A nicely illustrated introduction to the life of Gygax and D&D, but don't expect much depth or detail.

Kelcey says

An interesting look at the history and creation of D&D. I liked the graphic novel format and the way the story was told. At times, the art was a little off-putting overall told the story well. At times, the story got a little bogged down with details of political bs and whatnot, but overall, it was interesting to see the ups and downs and everything that happened to arrive where we are today. I love playing Pathfinder and seeing how it all developed and the overarching effects the game had were quite interesting. It was a little bit sexist, which I will assume is supposed to reflect the times, but I still didn't particularly appreciate it (as an avid female gamer myself).

Shane says

I read this in one sitting while at the dentist. :) When I bought it I had no idea it was a graphic novel, and even though I read a lot of graphic novels, I was disappointed because this is the kind of information I would like to learn about in book form. When it started it seemed like it was going to be a really bad fictional story that included Gary Gygax as the main character. Instead it turned into the true story of Gary Gygax (and others).

The perspective change was often confusing. They tried to use the "you're in a room, it's 20 x 20" style of a DM speaking, but then they were quoting people, and putting the reader in the place of the characters (I think).

It was kind of like reading a bullet-pointed list of facts and quotes with pictures attached. Luckily I was interested in the facts and I didn't know some of them, so I enjoyed it. I still think this kind of thing would be better in a full book format with a lot more information/details.

Lissa says

This accessible graphic novel format presents an overview of the creation of D&D and the people involved in the creation. The text doesn't romanticize the business elements or personal conflicts of game design but tactfully tells the story of the changes to the development and evolution of the game over time. The controversy about the game is also documented. The inclusion of players and fans in various ways was also interesting. For added flavor, the story is styled to feel like a Dungeon Master is telling it to you in-game. This is intended for a grown up audience and although I read the whole thing aloud to my D&D loving 7 year old and only skipped a few words/phrases, the topics (disappointment, disagreement, disillusionment, career and family and health issues) are quite mature for young readers.

This book is highly recommended as an introduction to the people who created D&D, although the biographical and realistic focus on the co-creators may leave you wanting to read something more fun about the game's influence on players and culture afterwards!

Shannon Appelcline says

Despite the name, this is not a biography of Gary Gygax. Instead, it's look at the history of the D&D game, that gives some strong attention to Dave Arneson as well.

The artwork is attractive and often clearly references D&D art. The writing is also evocative, in its second-person, "You are playing" style.

Unfortunately, the history leaves a lot to be desired. To start with, the author just doesn't seem to have a great handle on what he's writing about. For example, when he talks about other games eating into D&D's market share (which didn't really happen), he lists a fairly random assortment of publishers: Hero Games, Steve Jackson Games, and White Wolf Games. Or when he talks about D&D modules, he fairly randomly depicts "The Village of Hommllet", which was the ninth, for no particular reason.

More frustratingly, the book is riddled with problems. Most of it is inappropriate chronology where the author gets things out of order. I'm not sure if he has his facts wrong, if he doesn't understand the industry, or if he's just being really sloppy in his super-abridged writing. But the book is full of things that will give you the wrong impression: no, Gygax didn't fall out with Arneson just before he got ousted from his own company (it was much earlier); no the Monster Manual didn't come after the Players Handbook (they

appeared in the reverse order).

So, this book is an amusing bit of candy, but pretty untrustworthy as a piece of non-fiction. I expected a lot more from an award-winning journalist and professor.

Annise says

This book was cute. I appreciated the story; the draw for people to learn what D&D is exactly; the details from the creators' lives. The story at times was a bit repetitive and written in an unusual first person style that I was not super fond of, but overall it's a short read worth reading.

Rod Brown says

I was surprised at how engaging I found this biography, especially since I have never played Dungeons & Dragons in my life. But I can see the game's influence in other games I have enjoyed, especially the old Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord game I played on my first Macintosh back in college and Minecraft today.

The book is laid out like the storyboards of a well-done documentary with talking heads giving insight into the dramatic re-enactments. I was initially put off on the use of a dungeon master narration to describe the setting of new scenes, but it really fit the material and won me over.

That said, the story boils down to a fairly common dispute between creators of who created what when and how much those contributions added to the final product. Rather than having any big dramatic moments, this minor conflict peters out into basically a shrug of the shoulders. Regardless, it drew me along far more effectively than a story about nerds sitting in a basement playing games should.

Ανδρ?ας Μιχαηλ?δης says

This one is a solid 3.5, but I gave away that half-star because of sentimental reasons (I have been an RPG gamer for more than 20 years and this deals with the history of one of my favorite hobbies); also, the production is simply amazing, with matte paper which makes the greys pop out and is a treat to feel with one's fingers.

HOWEVER... there are narrative faults, most of which are conscious choices and not mistakes: the constant shift in POV, putting you in Gygax's or Arneson's shoes, then back in your own, then in the shoes of an unnamed 70s teenager, and lack of names to accompany a few characters who are apparently... what, too obvious?

Otherwise, I think it does a pretty good job illustrating the story and subsequent influence of D&D in the limited space available (well, maybe except for the final chapter which tried to pull a Syamalan ending and ended up being rather weird), with the clean and yet evocative artwork this kind of work needed.

The chapter concerning the disappearance and subsequent suicide (by gun) of gamer Dallas Egbert III, which led to the '80s D&D witch hunt is especially interesting.

