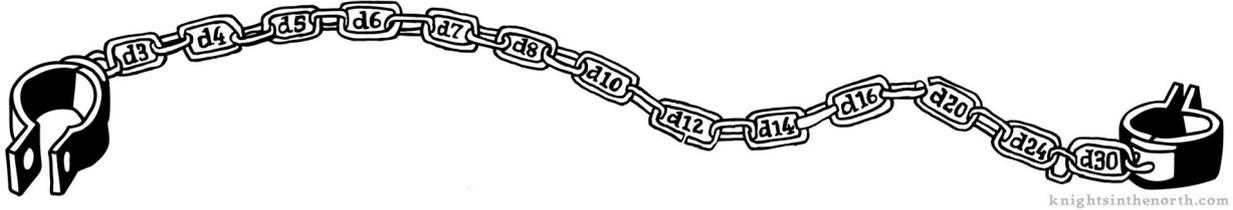


This document contains some insight on getting into Dungeon Crawl Classics (mileage may vary, of course).



Judge AMP's DCC 101

Description: Dungeon Crawl Classics is a great system. What I especially like about it is that it's fairly open for modification and tweaking, since I'm the kind of gamemaster who usually ends up scrapping a system to its barest bones and rebuilding it from ground up. I didn't have to do it with DCC, as the base structure of the game allowed me to do what I wanted with very little modification.

I've ran DCC for about four years now, and written a ton of stuff for it (most of it available here on KitN for you to read). So this time, instead of producing something new for the old hands to pop into their campaigns, I figured that I'd look at what makes DCC different from other systems, and what you might want to pay attention to when getting stuck in.

Most of what I've included here are not so much house rules as just ways to approach the game and interpretations of rules in the book. I would encourage new Judges and players alike to check out the annotated house rules article (available [here](#)) and the rules check sheet (over [here](#)) as companions for this piece.

Rulings, not rules: This is the most important thing about the whole spirit of DCC. I dare say that it's the most important thing about roleplaying games as a whole, at least for me. Don't like how something works? Change it! Can't find the rule on the spot? Come up with a good enough ruling for the moment and move on. Always keep in mind that the rules are supposed to support the action, not slow it down. I'm aware that I run DCC very differently from other Judges, and it's entirely alright! It is of course useful to document your house rules somehow, so that your players are aware of them as well (have a look at the house rules article I've linked above for examples).

Funnels are fun! I've always thought that the emergent storytelling incumbent in how the funnel adventure works is a major advantage of DCC, especially when introducing new people to the roleplaying hobby. There's no need to dive deep into world lore and no call for writing up extensive character backstory - just roll up a bunch of gongfarmers and go! You'll get to know the ones who survive by how they survive, and by the end everyone remaining will have a (tragic) backstory to share over a pint.

Sometimes getting experienced players to embrace this randomness may be challenging however. My approach in these situations is to describe the funnel as a splatter B-movie: the deaths are part of the comedy, and the general logic of the world is a little askew to begin with. Instead of running a chatty session-0, you get to run a deathtrap of a dungeon where some of you might even survive!

As for survivability, generally my funnels have everyone coming out with at least one surviving character. I think I've had one or two full TPKs, but otherwise I generally either focus fire on players with more than one gongfarmer remaining or just inject extra zeroes into the dungeon to round up diminishing rosters. My usual goal is to kill roughly a half of the zeroes walking into any funnel, and have everyone come out with at least one character to level up for further play. Later on, leveled DCC characters are actually pretty resilient, and in my experience after level 3 or so it'll be unlikely for a character to perish due to hit point loss.

Swinging on the dice chain: I collect dice to begin with, so the dice chain is a super cool thing for me (DCC rulebook pg. 17). I also use it pretty extensively, as I've basically replaced all ad hoc bonuses and penalties with dice chain effects. Basically, if the thing a character is trying to do is exceptionally hard or easy due to whatever prevalent condition, slap a dice modifier on the roll. This lets me react quickly to the ridiculous stuff players come up with, especially in the funnel ("*You want to do WHAT with the sack of night soil?*") and makes for a very tangible reward for good strategy or storytelling. My advice here is to lean into the dice chain as much as possible, especially on skill checks (see below).

Where are my skill proficiencies?: In the DCC rulebook, the rules covering skill checks and proficiencies take all of two pages (DCC rulebook pg. 66), and I think it's glorious. I mean, it's not really rocket science - coming up with DCs for stuff is easy enough, and the whole system leans heavily on character occupations, so character background actually has a mechanical significance beyond the starting equipment for the funnel.

The system also allows a Judge to lean heavily on the dice chain (see above). I generally do this so that every occupation has a few things they are obviously good at and get a more or less automatic +d2 to any roll within that scope (rolling a d30, basically): a hunter is good at hunting, a healer is good at healing, a sailor is good at sailing, and so on. Similarly, every occupation has a wide array of stuff they know how to do (rolling a d20 on the check): a hunter can skin creatures, a healer can recognize herbs and such, and a sailor can navigate using stars. This still leaves everyone with a whole bunch of stuff they are quire bad at, suffering penalties to their rolls (ranging from -1d to -4d): hunters suck at negotiating with nobles, healers are probably quite bad at feats of agility or strength, and sailors are basically useless at finding water in a desert.

Finally, the skill system leaves space for a bit of emergent storytelling as well. I'll certainly allow a player to attempt to justify why their character might be proficient at a certain action, or even deserving of an increased die. Usually this results in amusing little vignettes in the midst of adventuring, as someone tries to justify why their gongfarmer is actually quite capable of tracking an owlbear based on its scent, or something equally ludicrous.

Checks vs. rolls: Skill checks, and by extension saving throws and attack rolls are all well and good, and let characters shine with what they're good at. But I've found that raw attribute rolls are a useful tool for some situations (rolling a d20 and aiming for equal or below an attribute value). I use attribute rolls for situations where it'd be difficult to define a DC due to whatever reason, usually because a situation requires a quick gut reaction from a character. For example, Intelligence rolls are handy when a character is trying to remember something on the spot, and I might require a Stamina roll when trying to force march through a jungle. Generally, if something requires a test but there's no obvious DC to be assigned, consider using an attribute roll.

Rolling under Luck when *Recovering a body* (DCC rulebook pg. 93) is obviously one of the major situations where this mechanic is useful.

The various uses for Luck: Luck is a super versatile tool, and certainly what sets DCC apart from other related games. It allows for important player agency in what is otherwise a very swingy system, and is a great tool for rewarding players for their actions. Both Luck checks and Luck rolls are great catch-all tools for stuff that'd otherwise be difficult to define (although I don't agree with the rulebook on using Luck as a stat for listening checks; that's obviously a perception roll and falls under Intelligence). Basically, if you can't figure out what stat to use, just roll on Luck and be done with it.

The guidelines for using Luck in the rulebook (DCC rulebook pg. 360) are something I've never really adhered to too slavishly. I've not come across a situation where I'd feel justified to specifically penalize characters with a negative Luck modifier on top of whatever they've done to themselves already (since the character with the lowest Luck is already likely to be hit by traps or monsters), and making someone lose points of Luck for insulting a demon or a deity seems a bit petty, when considering all of the other possible repercussions (indeed, I might be liable to award Luck for such an audacious act instead). I run with the rule of thumb that you can't be awarded Luck for something you spent Luck on, and that good roleplaying and character moments are generally what replenishes your spent points (I've even been known to award Luck for dumb jokes that make the table laugh).

Mighty Deeds: Mighty Deeds are cool! And they can be used to accomplish most anything. The only real rule of thumb I have with this mechanic is that a Deed roll of 3 allows for a save for the target, a roll of 4 gives the player the effect they're looking for, and anything higher than that does something extra. Also, I've found that (new) players often forget to define their deeds before rolling. I've solved this problem by having everyone write down their signature deed on their character sheet: should they forget to say what they do, they try for that. I recommend Judges familiarize themselves with the relevant section in the rulebook (DCC rulebook pg. 88) and check out the *Steel and Fury* -supplement for further inspiration (available here on DTRPG; this is actually the only outside supplement I use at my table so I heartily recommend grabbing it).

The stuff of magic: Magic is quite swingy in DCC. For arcane casters, mercurial effects (DCC rulebook pg. 111) and spellburn (DCC rulebook pg. 107) make things interesting, and for users of idol magic deity disapproval (DCC rulebook pg. 122) is sometimes an issue. I'll tackle both of these separately, but I do have one insight that applies to both: resolving spells takes a lot of time out of combat, and that time will only increase as characters gain more experience. Beyond the obvious "*have your players plan their turns in advance and pay attention*" there are a few things you can do to mitigate this time sink. First of all, have everyone write down the page numbers for their spells on their character sheet. This is super useful, and everyone can do it. Secondly, if possible, have a spare rulebook available for spellcasters, so they can check out their effects on their own - you don't need to know how many rounds a protective spell lasts, the player can keep track of that and check out the effects on their own. Originally, we did try to have spells printed out for everyone, so that all casters had their own little spellbook along with their character sheets, but this quickly became unfeasible as characters increased in power.

Specifically for arcane casters, I've a couple of notes to share. The roll numbers for mercurial effects should be written down when rolled, so that they can be checked out later (I've yet to see a character sheet that has enough space for noting down the full effect descriptions). As for spellburn, we've actually never used the spellburn action descriptors (DCC rulebook pg. 109 and associated patron descriptions). I just have the player do the math on what they burn, and hand wave the mystical side with "the caster feeds their magic with their life

force". This is both to cut down on time spent on wizard actions, as well as to avoid dwelling on descriptions of gruesome self-mutilation (this is not to say that roleplaying spellburn is frowned upon, it's just not a major focus for us). Oh, and as for spell duels, I just rewrote the rules entirely (see article over [here](#)).

As for idol magic, the is considerably less to say. One thing I will point out is that the disapproval table in the rulebook (DCC rulebook pg. 122) sort of assumes a cleric of a benevolent, lawful deity. This was one of the first things that I set out to improve when I started to write my own stuff for the game, as the table sent our cleric of Nimlurun on a quest to heal the infirm, which seemed quite contrary to the deity's general demeanour. I encourage Judges to come up with their own deity-specific disapproval tables (or indeed to use the plethora of resources on KitN, available [here](#)). Additionally, the only limitation that I have for lay on hands is that deities entirely refuse to heal servants of opposing deities - this means that I don't have to think about the mechanic overmuch, and things keep moving rather handily.

It's (not) all about alignment: In my personal opinion, alignment is a bit of an outdated concept. Consequently, I don't take it particularly seriously most of the time. If a character acts against their alignment, they may shift away from it, which generally isn't an issue unless they're very involved with a god or patron. And of course, the DCC alignment system is quite easy for this: there's no good or evil stamped on a character, rather just a general estimate on how orderly or chaotic they are. This suits my world of grey morals quite well, but is obviously very much a personal preference.

Scaling adventures: We've always ran games so that there are six active characters, and we run a session if at least three players can make it to the table. This means that sometimes people play multiple characters at once, and we've had a fine time doing it. Usually the first extra character goes on whoever runs the cleric, so they get to do something beyond healing in combat. Due to this however I tend to give monsters in published adventures a little extra beef: at minimum, maximum hit points based on their HD; sometimes more than that. Scaling encounters in DCC is more of an art than a science, and I encourage Judges to experiment audaciously.

Life between dungeons: In my opinion, a lot of the interesting stuff actually happens outside dungeon walls. I usually just tell my players beforehand when they have a chance to spend some downtime (as in "*This week's session will be downtime in town, figure out what you want to do.*"). And chaining adventure modules together usually requires some travelling. We've published pretty extensive resources on these topics before, so go read them! (Downtime action rules [here](#), carousing tables [here](#), and a couple of random encounter tables for between adventures [here](#) and [here](#).)

EXP and "encounters": The rules for awarding experience points are pretty good (DCC rulebook pg. 359), with the small change that EVERYTHING counts as an encounter at my table. Do a good bit of in character haggling? Encounter. Come up with a cool ritual to appease your patron or deity? Encounter. Gather enough information to glean the location of the next dungeon? Encounter. That way even downtime sessions feel like progress, although actual deadly stuff always grants more EXP. I also add a +1 per death (going down to 0 or below) in any encounter, so that the really brutal showdowns can really rack up the experience for whoever survives. And of course everyone taking part in an encounter gets the same amount of EXP (as in, characters sorting out a 4 EXP encounter all get 4 EXP, the points are not divided among participants as some systems do).

I also give out bonus points for keeping the party journal and maintaining the party loot, and end every session with everyone awarding a point of EXP for something they thought was cool during the session. I've found that this increases party cohesion between players, and is generally pretty good for morale - people very rarely award points to themselves, for example.