

How Is It Better?

This is the only question that matters. Of course, when it comes to D&D there are so many different varieties it is hard to say anything which won't be contradicted by one version or another so I am just going to haphazardly blanket them all.

Here are the highlights...

Better Checks

Simplicity is a key part of the game, not just for the players but also the DM. The character sheet is uncluttered. Skills come from your class. When an ability check is asked for, the DM is only obliged to ask for an ability. It is left up to the players to know what their class can do and bring it into play.

Risk Rolling

In Dragonhead you do not just roll a 1d20 and succeed or fail. Instead, the game plays off of ability scores. You roll to see how well your character performs a task. You also have the option to make your character Try Hard (or Harder or even Try Your Hardest) to get it right. This adds more dice to your roll and makes a thunderous clatter when it hits the table. Risk Rolling really carries the feeling of what is happening in the adventure while it is happening.

All of this conspires to give players more control over their characters. If you tried your hardest to make something happen and it happens? That's you who did it moreso than your character.

Strength & Success

All too often in D&D you roll the d20 - a 14 turns up - and a new player will ask, "what's a 14? What does that mean?" D&D has never had a good answer for this. It doesn't even have a name for that number. It's just what you rolled. It means you passed or failed and that's it.

In Dragonhead what you roll is the *strength of your action*, it is a measure of performance (and yes, the ability Strength has been changed to Muscle to keep the two from being confused). A score tells us your characters potential. A strength tells us how you just did.

Success is your strength measured with a 5 point gradation. After the first ten points, every 5 points is another success. If you did a good job rolling the dice the game rewards you for it! Your attacks will do more damage and your spells will be more potent.

Simple Answers to Complex Things

The Adventure section is chock full of simple streamlined ways to handle difficult situations. Grappling is a breeze. It's your strength verses the other guy's strength. How much damage does a fall do? The height of the fall split in half. Damage type is determined by what you fall on.

Maybe that is not as simplistic as "roll 1d6 per 10' fallen" but it is more realistic and less of a hassle when a rope bridge gives way and sends dozens of characters and creatures plunging into the valley below.

Better Combat

Initiative - who goes first - has been a thorn in the side of gaming from the very start. Dragonhead has two forms of combat: Basic Combat which is for small fights and Battles for large skirmishes.

With basic combat, which is how most fights start, people declare what their characters are doing, dice are rolled and whoever produces the greatest strength goes first. *That's it.* There is no initiative roll in basic combat. No need to break out a deck of playing cards or hang character's names from the top of the DM's screen with paper clips. Smooth and fluid, combat just happens.

In a battle, each side presents a leader who makes a charisma check and the side whose leader produces the greatest charisma strength takes command of the battlefield. That side goes first and the fight goes side by side until it's over.

Player Facing Rolls.

Most die rolls are made by the players. The DM can roll for monsters and is even encouraged to when knee deep in a big boss battle, but the game also runs fine without it. The DM can easily play countless sessions without ever rolling a die and nobody would notice the difference. This helps immensely when dealing with battles involving large numbers of creatures.

Better Hit Points

Damage is recorded as wear and tear. Wear is exhaustion while tear is actual damage. Sharp weapons cause more tear damage than blunt ones, thus solving the age old problem of how a dagger and a club can do the same amount of damage despite a dagger being far more dangerous than a club.

When it comes to monster hit points the numbers have been kept low to remain backwards compatible with older modules. Character hit points are stat-based. Instead of gaining yet another roll of the hit dice with each level, you increase an ability score and your abilities determine your hit points. The end result is that characters start at 1st level with far more hit points than usual but they do not gain them so dramatically as they climb through the levels.

Why Do This? Because traditionally new players often begin at first level on a level 1-3 adventure not knowing these these are some of the toughest adventures to run because of the fragility of their characters. Meanwhile adventures of levels 9-12 are some of the most tedious adventures to run thanks to the mountains of hit points involved.

Stat-based hit points inverts this and will hopefully bring the game back to where low-level adventures are easy ones for beginning players and high-level adventures are exciting ones for accomplished gamers who want a challenge instead of a yawn.

Better Classes

In Dragonhead there are three kinds of classes: Existences, Callings and Transformations. You can go with just one of them or multi-class and tack a few onto your character. This combines Race As Class with Race/Class and all without the tangled mess which tends to surround multi-classing. If you want to play a Dwarf you can do that and take it to as high a level as you want, but you can also play a Dwarf/Cleric or a Dwarf/Rogue or even a Dwarf/Cleric/Rogue.

Customizable Classes. The game contains a way for DMs to create new classes from scratch. And it's not rocket science! A point value called Vitae is given to different class attributes, add it together and the total tells you what XP-based level advancement scheme to use. The more a class provides a character (like the classic B/X Elf) the harder it becomes to advance.

Better Magic

Spell splots? Vancian Magic? Not in Dragonhead. If you know a spell you can cast it over and over as much as you like. But casting magic is no simple or safe affair. Abuse your powers and it will eventually catch up to you.

Spell levels now make sense. Magic-Users can try to cast any spell they acquire, but the greater the spell level the harder it will be for them to cast.

The spells themselves are pieces of equipment. You don't simply get spells as you level up. You need to acquire what you cast, whether that be paying for them, finding the pages in a treasure trove or stealing them outright. Likewise, spell books are important. Lose your spell book and it won't be long before you forget how to cast your spells.

Numerous Examples

Sometimes the best way to learn is to sit at the table and listen in. These books are peppered with examples written in dialog so not only do you get to see the rules in action but you get to hear how people talk about them while in play. RPG's are conversational and we've done a lot to cut down on the amount of jargon and number talk that tends to come up in other games, hopefully creating something that sounds like a conversation.

A Well of Goblins. The game even comes with its own introductory adventure. An instructional module designed for new DM's to run low-level characters through over the course of a single night.

And Innumerable Small Details

Yes, a ton of other small yet notable improvements, such as...

- A simple coin-based economy
- Easy to understand movement.
- Non-bean counting encumbrance.
- Two ACs for when your guard is up and when you've been caught by surprise.
- Damage reducing armor.
- A greater importance given to languages.

- Characters that can be created in minutes.
- Levels that increase XP at a better rate.
- Treasure for XP
- Magic Items that break if mistreated.
- When you die the next character you roll up should be only one level less than the one you just lost.
- Optional Miniature rules that are actually *optional*.
- Guides for creating Adventures, Classes and Monsters.
- Crash tables galore!
- And so much more.

And It's Not Done Yet!

Once a game has been laid out into nice looking books and artists hired to give it nice looking looks - that is the frosting on a cake - the cake itself had better be baked because there is no changing it without launching into a new version.

Right now Dragonhead is only three quarters-baked. It is getting closer to completion, yet it is still in a state where changes can be made. Read it over and if you find something that irks you - tell me about it - don't wait until after a formal book has been released.

This is why the prototype is being released online. Come to me with advice after it has been finished and it's too late. I won't want to hear it.

Now is the time to act.

Give it a look.

Tell me what you think.

www.chameleondream.com/dragonhead