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Player's Handbook (Dungeons & Dragons)



Synopsis

Everything a player needs to create heroic characters for the world's greatest roleplaying game. The Player's Handbook is the essential reference for every Dungeons & Dragons® roleplayer. It contains rules for character creation and advancement, backgrounds and skills, exploration and combat, equipment, spells, and much more. Use this book to create exciting characters from among the most iconic D&D® races and classes. Dungeons & Dragons immerses you in a world of adventure. Explore ancient ruins and deadly dungeons. Battle monsters while searching for legendary treasures. Gain experience and power as you trek across uncharted lands with your companions. The world needs heroes. Will you answer the call?

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Customer Reviews

I am going to try to not duplicate the information provided in most of the other 5 star reviews because I agree with the vast majority of them. I am an oldster, have played every edition of D&D there has been, most of them being released when I was of legal drinking age, and IMO this is the best edition ever. I have not been this excited about a version of D&D since 2nd edition was released. It appears to me to have taken all the best, from a game design point of view, and most popular aspects of earlier editions and put them in one book. Another way to think of it is that this edition is the most true to the game principles set forth in the earlier editions, especially AD&D 1st and 2nd editions, while at the same time carrying the more modern and popular principles from 3.5

and even the much maligned 4.0. I have to admit that I completely steered clear of the earlier play test versions, and was more than a little skeptical of the approach taken in getting feedback from so many play testers. I was worried that we would end up with a "too many cooks spoil the stew" situation; a game that was a convoluted mish-mash of everyone's "favorite rules" creating an incoherent and largely unplayable mess. I am pleasantly surprised to say that I was 100% wrong about the effectiveness of the play test process and the finished product. Contrary to the opinions in some of the lower star reviews, what I am holding in my hands and have read cover to cover is a very "tight," comprehensive, elegant, and fun set of rules. Who is likely to like these rules? I think both the veteran player who cut his or her teeth on any version before 3.0, and a brand new player will like them. The mechanics most definitely have a "return to the basics that made the game great in the 70's and 80's" feel, while at the same time keeping a more elegant version of the more modern mechanics, like feats, attacks of opportunity, etc., that people generally love from 3.0 and later editions. For the most part, all of these things have been streamlined and made more elegant in application, but they are there. I will end with my favorite thing about this book. A little background first to provide some context for my opinion. And let me say that this is just my opinion and some will disagree with me. For me, D&D started to trend downward in my enjoyment of the game at 2nd edition, and then it really did so at 3.0 and 3.5. For me, although I did not have the strong dislike for 4.0 that many people did, it just was not D&D to me anymore, I think primarily because I had cut my teeth so much on 1st edition and the Basic and Expert sets in particular. D&D 5th edition has produced a steep positive trend for me for I think one general reason. When playing even 2nd edition, but very much so for 3.0, 3.5, and even 4.0, I found myself interacting with my character in the game more as a playing piece than a character in a story. Concerns about where to put skill points, and if a particular collection and order of choice for Feats began to dominate my thoughts and game choices. It was almost as if my character, and my decisions about playing the character, began to be dominated more by my interface with the rules in the book, rather than with my ideas about my character and my interaction with the game world. As my character advanced in level, I found that my focus on the book and what was written therein became more pronounced, not less as it did with earlier editions. As I reflected while playing these later editions, I found that I was not really playing a character, but instead was playing a set of rules. So far, the gift that 5th edition has given to me is a change in focus. My character has again become a protagonist in an adventure story, rather than a playing piece. I worry now more about the choices and decisions I make while interacting with the game world, and those choices making the character fun to play, rather than fretting over whether or not I have chosen the right Feats or if my modifier for a particular skill is as

high as I want it to be. The way that races, and even classes, are discussed, the used of a character's background and the ideals, personality characteristics, etc. that are randomly determined from the background choice, and the lack of mathematical modifiers except for the familiar ability modifier, and the soon to be ubiquitous global proficiency modifier, instead using the elegant advantage/disadvantage mechanic all have worked to focus my attention back on my character as protagonist. For that I want to thank the play testers and writers of 5th edition. For me this has been the most nostalgic aspect of the rules, not so much the mechanics per se. Do I like all of the rules? Absolutely not. Frankly, I think that is impossible to attain and do not expect that from any set of rpg rules. To me that's not fair to expect that of the writers. And frankly, I am not even looking for that in a set of rules anymore. As I start down the path of the twilight of my gaming career given my age, I want a set of rules that provides enough structure that a DM can make consistent rulings on the fly that fit in with the general mechanics used in the game, and that foster my appreciation as a player of the development of my character in a game world where playing the game is smooth and produces memories of an interesting character who is the protagonist in an interesting story line. Most importantly, I want a set of rules that stays out of the way of that process, and helps me to focus on the game aspects that will produce those kinds of memories. For me, D&D 5th edition, although not perfect, will accomplish this just fine.

So, the fifth edition of the venerable Dungeons and Dragons game is officially out, with the Player's Handbook ready to be picked up, combed through and played by the world. Is it good? I think it's good. I think it's a great implementation of all of the game's best and most beloved ideas. I think it might be my favorite edition yet. To give a little background (and you can feel free to skip this paragraph if you want to get to the meat of the review), I started with 3rd edition, which came out all the way back in 2000, when I was in middle school. I played it through high school and college, and enjoyed it well enough, but eventually the weight of its mechanics began to grate on me. By the end I gave up on 3rd edition, finding it bloated and horrendously inelegant. When 4th edition was released in '08, I was excited. I bought all the books at once and devoured them. I wasn't sold on the powers mechanics and the intense focus on combat, but my buddies and I tried it out. We gave up after a couple months and I sold the books. It was okay, but not my cup of tea. In the end, I, like a lot of folks, gained interest in the older editions of the games, the ones that predated my own D&D experiences, the ones that sounded to me like ancient, esoteric and arcane books of mystery, whose rambling prose and absurdly convoluted mechanics became somehow enticing. We played a little bit of the older editions, mostly the old Basic edition of the game, and had a lot of fun, though it

was more due to the ability to ignore the rules entirely than to any intended strength of the system. Still, after a few games we gave up on tabletop roleplaying games all together. I tried to get into more of the indie side of the RPG genre, taking a particular interest in Burning Wheel, which I still adore as a system, though it seems too unwieldy and I was and remain hesitant to actually try and play it. But now, after a few years of my own indifference, D&D is back. The Starter Set for fifth edition came out last month, and I bought it right away. For some reason, after years of total uninterest in Dungeons and Dragons, where any mention of the game would make me turn up my nose at such inelegant, fiddly silliness, I found myself, all at once, filled with overwhelming excitement about the coming edition. The promise of a game, both old and new, divorced from the flaws of the past, made with some fresh ideas and streamlining, aiming to take the best of each old edition and instill them into a unified whole that is at once simple, quick and varied? It filled my little heart with unexpected delight. I bought the Starter Set on the day it was released in select stores, and I was not let down. See my review of the Starter Set for details on that. Fifth edition is, so far, and this is not hyperbole, exactly what I want the game of Dungeons and Dragons to be. The Player's Handbook is an excellent book and a perfect example of this edition's quality so far. It is concise and complete, including all of the classic archetypes and races of the past, adding some new ones and nowhere stating, "Wait for this later release before you can play your favorite class or race." The high level of quality starts with the art design and cover, which are probably my favorite for any edition of Dungeons and Dragons. The full-cover art is great: a dynamic work, depicting movement and, for once, presenting a properly dressed adventurer woman, who, against all odds, fearlessly takes on a massive fire giant, and whose form, though significantly dwarfed by the giant's, seems just as threatening and powerful and dare I say bad-ass. It is an evocative piece, and really sets the tone for the rest of the book. This is a game about adventure, a game about facing the odds and somehow getting through to the other side, victorious--or dead, possibly, since abruptly losing is always a risk when one plays a dice game. The pages are slick and clean, with a good amount of art, a lot of it full-page, which I quite enjoyed. The quality varies, and while some of the illustrations of halflings look odd to say the least, my overall impression was good. The art was evocative and reminiscent of illustrations of old, presenting a world that actively looked medieval as opposed to anime or steampunk or some amalgamation of traditions and time periods that managed to look disjointed and awkward at best. But when I say that there is no anime, do not despair! That does not mean that everyone depicted is a pale-faced european. Quite the opposite in fact. I commend the Wizards team for not only depicting a good number of people of color in the book, but also having some of those people--and others--dressed in garb that is obviously non-western and doing so

without being exploitative or resorting to stereotypes. When we open the book we can see that Dungeons and Dragons is a game of vaguely feudal societies, but whose inspirations span the entirety of the globe, removing us from the strict adherence to Europeanism that dominated past editions. I love it. I love seeing a strong samurai woman one page and a very dark-skinned whirling dervish on another. My recurring argument for what D&D should be revolves around the game ideally being limitless, and the active inclusion of non-western cultures and peoples without lumping them into types such as "oriental" or "vaguely mesoAmerican but we are not going to call them that" really goes along with that. So the art is good. How about the layout? Love it too. As with previous editions, the first few chapters are about character creation, detailing fantasy races--elves and dwarves and so forth--before discussing classes, backgrounds (which are new) and further customization options like optional feats and multiclassing. From there we get chapters about mechanics, exploration and finally combat, which I might note comes last after exploration and social encounters. The last two chapters are about magic, as per the norm. The order is logical and a good start for beginners, though the classes reference rules that are not detailed until much later chapters, which could be very confusing to newcomers. Each race, aside from humans, half-elves and half-orcs, have at least one subrace to choose from, with the Elves having High Elves, Wood Elves and Drow, for example, providing each character with choices within choices right off the bat. This is a recurring theme in fifth edition, where the classes and races are each somewhat stricter than in 3rd or 4th edition, but with each providing a good deal of variety both between other races and within. Classes too each have at least two subclasses, with the class list including the Barbarian, whose mechanics of course focus around her berserker rage; the bard, who can cast spells but also gets a pool of "bardic inspiration dice" that he can spend to benefit their allies and roll to add extra bonuses to attacks, checks and saves; the Cleric, who is fairly standard, but has a lot of variety granted by what "domain" corresponds to her respective god, potentially giving abilities ranging from being excellent in combat, excellent at sneaking around(!), excellent at healing (the classic) and so forth; the druid, who can focus either in her ability to cast spells or the classic druid art of lycanthropy; the fighter, who can be a standard, simple to play warrior who is good at having hit points and hitting things, in addition to both a very 4th edition-like, Warlord-esque commander type guy, who uses a pool of special dice to trigger abilities and command his allies, and an eldritch knight, who casts spells while he slashes and smashes and stabs; the monk, who isn't really my thing but other people might like him a lot--he can either punch or cast spells; the paladin, who now swears an oath, either to a god, to nature or to herself, and draws her powers from that, manifesting as a paladin of vengeance, who loves to kill, or even a paladin of the woodland fae, confusing

people with fairy-inspired charms, which are both pretty cool; the ranger, who either slaughters with his own swords or gets a lovely woodland creature to aid him; the rogue, who loves thievery, assassination or arcane tricksteriness, and who of course backstabs non-stop; the sorcerer, who either focuses on her draconic origins or the chaotic influence of wild magic, and who has special sorcery points to spend that allow her to modify spells in much the same way that 3rd edition's metamagic feats worked; the warlock, who is probably my least favorite class, though I like the thematic idea, and who combines 4th edition-esque style powers with classic Vancian casting in a way that I found particularly inelegant; and of course the wizard, who has a huge list of spells to choose from, and who gets to choose one of the classic schools of wizardry--abjuration, conjuration, necromancy et cetera--to modify spells and grant thematic special abilities. In all, the classes are great fun, are varied, contain all of the classics and manage to represent nearly every classic archetype from D&D's past, even including some of the more neglected and obscure ones. In past editions of Dungeons and Dragons, the end of the races and classes chapters would pretty much mark the final steps in creating and customizing your character's abilities, personality and details. 3rd and 4th edition added feats to the mix, but otherwise your character was done at this point. Unlike its predecessors, fifth edition adds a further ingredient to the recipe via character backgrounds. There are number listed in the book, but I'm not going to go into them, since it actively recommends creating your own backgrounds and modifying the existing ones as needed to get the character you want. But suffice to say, there are a good number included. Each background adds at least two more skills to the skills you gain from your class, give you a few more pieces of starting equipment and add a fun narrative ability--for example, anyone with the sailor background has the narrative ability of being able to always secure passage on a ship to wherever they need to go. The backgrounds are fun, and really push the D&D towards so-called story-game territory, adding such open-ended narrative abilities. Your background also gives you examples for four new stats in fifth edition: your character's personality traits, ideals, bonds and flaws. There are no numbers associated with these, and they are merely short statements describing your character and his or her feelings, outlooks and connections to the world. And, for the first time, they have mechanical benefits, where playing to your character's bonds and so forth earn a special, spendable point called Inspiration, which I will detail later on and which can give your character a pretty serious boon usable when the going gets tough. I like it a lot, though after Burning Wheel's much more in-depth versions of what is more or less the same mechanism, it feels a little shallower than I would like. Like the past couple of editions, fifth edition has feats, which are optional this time, takable in place of automatic stat upgrades as your character levels. The feats are fewer but heftier than before, each

adding several abilities or wrinkles to your character's mechanics. For the most part, feats don't seem to get in the way of what your character should be able to do naturally and don't limit other characters who would forgo them. 3rd edition style multiclassing is also included in this chapter. It too is optional, and I will probably not use it--it seems unnecessary with all of the subclasses, and like its only real purpose would be for power gaming. However, if you want to play a cleric/wizard or the like, you'd probably have to multiclass; but where in the past lower maximum levels in each class would make for lousy spell selection, the fifth edition mechanics combine spell casting for each class, letting you have your high power spells but with fewer spells in total from each respective class. The gameplay sections of the book are relatively brief, emphasizing the rather stripped-down, to the point nature of the new edition. Pretty much everything is an ability check--rolling a twenty-sided die and adding a number based on your ability score and comparing the result with a target number. Ability checks are modified by something called proficiency, representing your character's training and experience with whatever skill or attack he or she is using. Everything works this way, from attacks to skills. Proficiency bonus also maxes out at +6, which I appreciated, resulting in the math being simpler and all the numbers being lower. I do wonder how this might affect probability in the game, however, but someone else can probably speak to that--math and the hard sciences aren't really my thing, I was always more into the humanities. There is a lot in these chapters regarding roleplaying, cost of living, what your character's do with their downtime and other more mundane--but in my opinion still fun--activities that occur during an adventurer's life. These individual sections are fairly short, but I felt they cover everything to a reasonable degree, still allowing a lot of room for DM or player ideas. The following chapter details a D&D staple: fighting stuff. Combat is simple and quick, and unlike the past two editions, is assumed to be more of a "theater of the mind" experience, not relying on grids or miniature figurines. This is another thing I like a lot, as I found counting hexes on a grid to be tedious and uninteresting and unnecessary. In a somewhat silly move, however, attack ranges and positioning and speed are still measured in feet, adding needless complication and increased possibility for arguments when it comes to who can reach who and who is in whose spell's area of effect. I would have much preferred a more narrativist combat positioning system that depended on more abstract zones or areas or something, but I suppose this way still allows for players who want to play with miniatures to do so. Actual actions in combat are simple, with a more streamlined version of the past two edition's action economy. You can move and take an action, with your action being anything ranging from moving more, attacking up to your maximum number of attacks per round, casting a spell, readying an action or something else. It also allows for a certain amount of

improvisation, where a player may use his or her action to try and jump on the giant's back and stab him in the eye, for example. It's simple and easy to keep track of and I like it. The final few chapters round out magic, which returns to the old Vancian style of pre-4th edition. I am very happy with it. I'm overjoyed, in fact, that so many spells have returned and that magic feels magical again. The basic mechanic is a little difficult to describe, but is fairly elegant once you get used to it. Spell casters have spell slots that they can use to cast spells. A first level wizard, for example, has two spell slots. The wizard also has spells prepared from a list, with that same first level character probably being able to prepare around four spells. This hypothetical wizard would choose four spells from her character's spellbook and prepare them, and then, during the adventure, she can use a spell slot to cast the spell. She can use all of her spell slots to cast the same spell or she can use each slot to cast a different spell, giving her a fair amount of flexibility. Spell slots are leveled, but you can use them to cast any spell of the slot's level or lower. So, for example, a level 20 wizard could use a 9th level spell slot to cast Magic Missile, a first level spell, and since he used a high level spell slot, Magic Missile would scale and do significantly more damage than if he had used a first level spell slot or a 10th level one. There are a good number of spells included, and all of the old favorites seem represented. Also, since due to subclasses every class has the potential to cast spells, the spell list can be relevant and useful to most everyone. The book ends with a few appendices, detailing deities from various D&D worlds, common monsters and animals the players will interact with and summon and even a list of recommended reading, containing the old classics like Tolkien but updated with fantasy novels published as recently as in the last year. The appendices aren't entirely necessary, but are a fun bonus and definitely add to the sense of the Player's Handbook actually being a complete reference. So, after all of that, and after reading it cover to cover--a first for me in regards to a Dungeons and Dragons book--I am going to say, and this is only my opinion mind you, that the fifth edition Player's Handbook is probably the best one ever to bear the name of Dungeons and Dragons. It is concise, it feels complete, it is packed to the brim with ideas and details and suggestions, the art is great and the game manages to feel both old and new, in the best way possible. The mechanics are simple yet classes offer a wide variety of options, all while still sticking to the old sense of well-defined archetypes. You can mechanically customize your character to every detail, or you can forgo all of that and not worry about the mechanics and optimization, and both options are viable. They even added some story game elements--how weird is that!--and your character's personality and feelings, for the first time ever in D&D, have mechanical benefits. It's great. I am very happy with fifth edition so far, and I am, for the first time in a long time, actually excited to see where the brand goes.

I bought this book last September 2014. A bunch of the pages have come free from the binding. I have 2nd edition D&D books that I bought new in the 1990s that have held up to the test of time. I take care of my books so this is frankly unacceptable. Will be contacting Wizards of the Coast to express my extreme displeasure with the quality of this product. It is a real shame since the book has 5 star content, but is made at 1 star quality. UPDATE 9/30/15: I thought that I would share my experience with obtaining a replacement book from the manufacturer after my initial review. I contacted Wizards via phone and email to report a defective product. The info to do so may be found here: [...] After explaining my situation to the customer service rep, they promptly scheduled a pick up via FedEx of my defective book and when it was received, I was sent email notification that a replacement was in route. Fast forward to today, 9/30 and my replacement book has arrived and is in perfect condition. Time will only tell if this one holds up, but for now, I am optimistic. So for those out there that have had issues with the pages coming free of the binding, there is hope! Contact Wizards and explain the situation to them, they have been more than fair in my case. Just a word of advice, be persistent and patient and your replacement book will come.

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