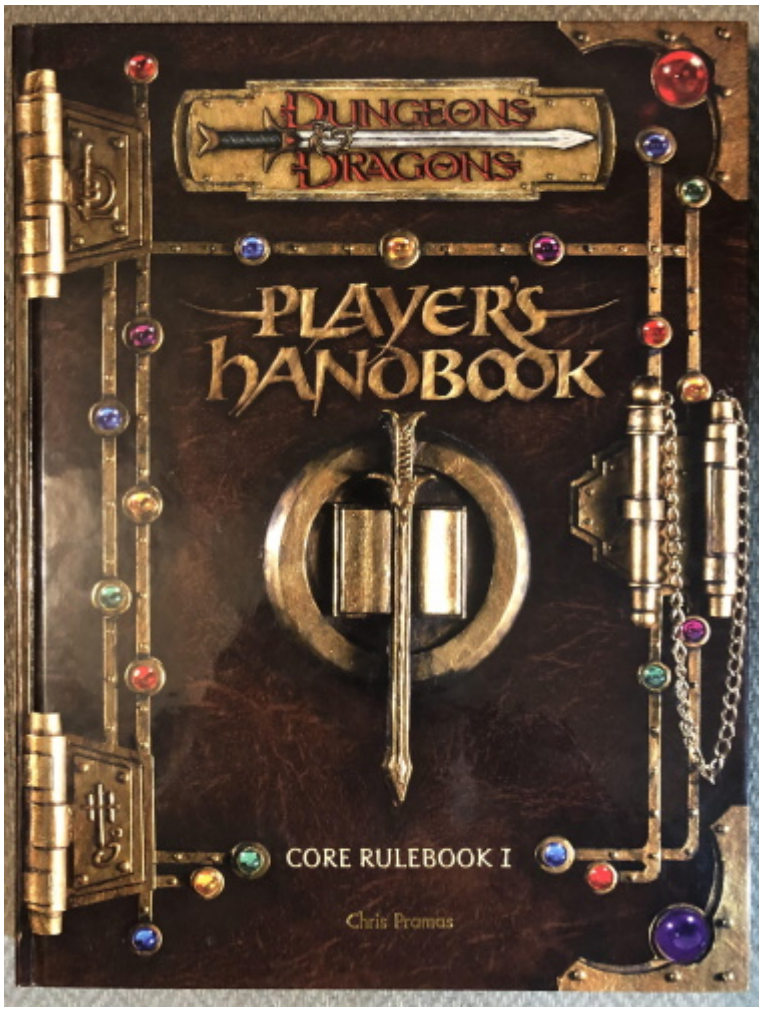
Twitter Thread by Chris Pramas

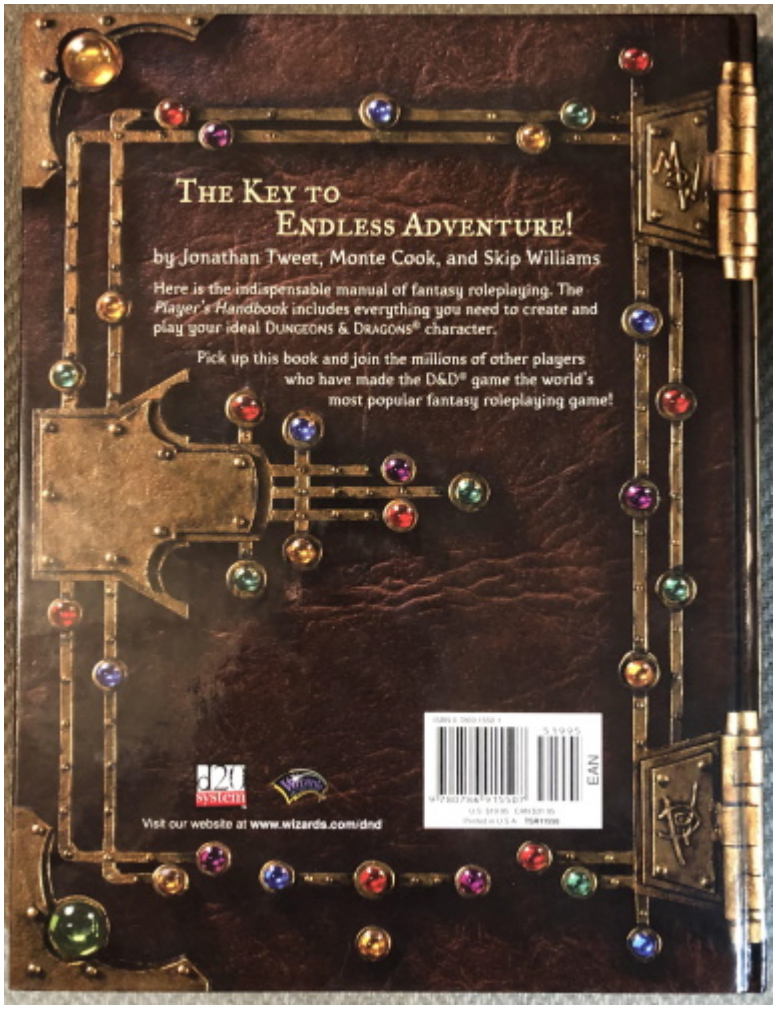


Chris Pramas
@Pramas

I have decided to take a dive into the d20 System era, so today's game is its starting point, Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition (2000) from Wizards of the Coast. I worked at WotC from 1998 to 2002 so I was there for the development, launch, and follow-up to 3E. #CuratedQuarantine



I did no design work on the core game, but I was in roleplaying R&D, so I was involved in the internal playtesting, meetings, and discussions. Everyone involved in 3E got a Player's Handbook with their name embossed on the front cover. The pictures show mine. #CuratedQuarantine



Now AD&D Second Edition had been published in 1989 and WotC bought the ailing TSR in 1997, so it made sense to do a new edition. The goal was to retain the core of D&D but to rationalize the rules to make them more consistent & ideally easier to learn and play. #CuratedQuarantine

In previous editions, sometimes you wanted to roll high and sometimes you wanted to roll low. Sometimes you rolled a d20 and sometimes percentile dice. A lower armor class was better than a higher one, with the result that +3 armor actually reduced your AC. #CuratedQuarantine

This is the sort of stuff that 3E addressed successfully. There was a core mechanic for everything. Roll a d20, add modifiers, and try to hit a target number (hence the d20 System). #CuratedQuarantine

Armor Class would now go up instead of down. Thief skills were no longer percentile but d20 rolls like anything else. This was all to the good. #CuratedQuarantine

The thing to understand about WotC in this period though is it was a group of competing factions and within the company there was a lot of disagreement about the direction of 3E. #CuratedQuarantine

I remember Harold Johnson (an old TSR hand and the designer of Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan) holding up a playtest packet in a R&D meeting and thundering, “This document is an act of hubris!” #CuratedQuarantine

You can think of the game as the end result of a series of negotiations more than the implementation of a vision. This was not always to the game's benefit. #CuratedQuarantine

One of the Magic designers, for example, came in one day and said, "I playtested the game with six rogue PCs and the skill system is totally broken." The skill system was then rewritten, despite the fact that a six rogue party is not how D&D is played. #CuratedQuarantine

The decisions made all seemed logical enough in isolation, but the end result was a game that was just more complicated than it needed to be. Anyone who ever tried to design a high-level monster of NPC can tell you that. #CuratedQuarantine

Because of things like synergy bonuses, the ability to add character classes to monsters, and other finicky rules, it was difficult to actually stat up adversaries correctly. #CuratedQuarantine

The full-time paid designers at WotC had a hard time with it, which you can see from the product reviews of this period. There was a whole sub-genre of them that ran through books notating all the math mistakes. #CuratedQuarantine

Roleplaying R&D ultimately came to rely on an extremely detailed Excel sheet that Penny Williams put together over several years, since the promised electronic tools (there was a demo CD with the Player's Handbook) had a host of problems in development. #CuratedQuarantine

The long-term issues of D&D 3E are not necessarily obvious at first blush and it plays well at low to medium levels. And I don't mean to denigrate anyone's efforts. #CuratedQuarantine

Many smart and talented designers, editors, artists etc. worked hard under challenging conditions. The game's launch was a big success for WotC and there was much enthusiasm over the first new edition in 11 years. #CuratedQuarantine

There was also excitement about an announced licensing plan that would allow other companies to publish 3E compatible material. I will get into the launch of the d20 System as a brand and license tomorrow. #CuratedQuarantine