



Carpe DM

“Seize him!” they cried. I barely made it out of the room alive. Sometimes it’s dangerous to mess with the players, even if it’s only a little trick.

Ed Carmien describes them in much better detail in this issue’s installment of “Dungeon Mastery,” but what DM doesn’t love to sit around talking about the sneaky, unfair, and downright dirty little tricks he’s pulled on his players? Of course, you can’t boast about them to the players, since they seem to lack the gene that makes such anecdotes amusing to those of us who run the games. Even the gentlest reminder of a past trick can transform the best of player-DM friendships into something more akin to the loving relationship between James Kirk and Khan Noonian Singh.

Of course, nothing in the world is so powerful as the urge to tell stories about your players falling for the simplest of tricks and traps. Those DMs who live to tell the tale all have their favorites. I have two.

Now, I hate illusion magic. Sure, it’s fun, and no campaign seems quite right without at least one dastardly illusionist subtly misdirecting the heroes from time to time. But then some clown will argue that if an illusory lightning bolt spell deals damage to him when he fails to disbelieve it, then that illusory bridge sure ought to work for his stupid half-ogre companion who mistook the mayor’s prized pig for the kidnapped prince last week. Then you bring out the *Player’s Handbook* and the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, and you go over it all yet again.

Still, when my PCs had finally tracked down their adversary, that aforementioned illusionist, he cast an illusory fireball down the tunnel at them. “Disbelieve!” cried the paladin. “Everybody disbelieve!” And so they stood there, bracing themselves against the imaginary flames. Some of them even made their saves right away, and they automatically succeeded in disbelieving the second bogus fireball to come roaring down the passage. And so they stood there bravely, grinning into the darkness of the long tunnel as the false firelight dwindled, daring the illusionist to cast another.

Then his buddy the invoker cast a real fireball down the tunnel, and none of the PCs tried to get out of the way.

OK, so that was pretty basic, but I think the best tricks are. (Rolling back out of the window by the gaming table and landing on my feet was a pretty simple trick, too, when the alternative was to drown in a sea of thrown soft drinks.)

My other favorite dirty trick was also elementary. Of course, that’s why they all fell for it.

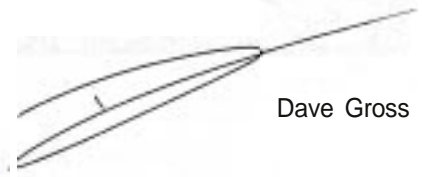
Except for mind flayers (ugh!), beholders had become the most feared monster in the campaign at one point. The players didn’t really think I’d throw one of those at them, since they were still low-to-mid-level. After the *fireball* trick, though, they weren’t taking any chances. They had already planned their tactics for assaulting a beholder should I become particularly ornery one session.

“The paladin and ranger move to opposite sides, while the wizard casts a *phantasmal force* of himself flying above the thing. Meanwhile, the thieves slip underneath using *Hide in Shadows* and *Move Silently* to get a backstab on the big eye’s blind spot.”

Not a bad plan, of course. The PCs had already fallen for the gas spore trick once before, so they waited until the beholder they’d encountered turned around and spoke to them before launching their attack with all the speed and precision of a Navy SEAL assault unit.

Of course, they never stopped to think that a wizard might cast a *magic mouth* spell on the local gas spore. Poof!

I wasn’t so quick to escape that day, but I reckon that walking with a limp for the rest of my days is still a small price to pay for fooling them again. But then, I’m a DM.



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