

Dead Heroes Aren't Much Fun

by JD Wiker

I personally don't much like how *Dungeons & Dragons* handles bringing dead player characters back to life. It might be because my campaign is about playing through the entire Adventure Path series. (That goal is severely hampered if a character is even one level lower than the rest of the party.) But it might revolve more around the fact that a dead PC creates a lengthy discussion that brings the rest of the game to a screeching halt.

This lengthy discussion occurs because a dead character creates an unpleasant dilemma for the character's player: "Should I suck up the level loss and hope I catch up? Or is it more cost effective for me just to create a new character?" I've seen this discussion take place over and over, and the default answer seems to be that it's easier to make up a new character than to play with the "impaired" original character. The worst part about it is that *D&D* makes no provision for how to replace a dead character. The *Player's Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* assume that the player will go ahead and play the character who's just returned from the dead—that the player will just go ahead and suck up the level loss. Unfortunately, the rules for coming back from the dead (*Player's Handbook* Chapter 10, Casting Spells, Special Spell Effects, Bringing Back the Dead) make it pretty clear that the loss of experience is a strong disincentive to stick with even a favorite character. "Earning further experience to regain the lost level" is much more disheartening than the original designer seemed to think.

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I got into this discussion with several members of roleplaying game R&D shortly before I left Wizards of the Coast. We didn't really come to a conclusion while I was still there, except that some people thought that the drawback to having a character die was fine the way it was, and others felt that losing a level either was too much of a drawback, or that it created too many questions for a playing group to answer.

Recently, one of my players mentioned to me that the play group is feeling pretty hopeless

about their current chances for survival. As I mentioned before, they are currently adventuring in the *Heart of Nightfang Spire*, by Bruce Cordell—one of the deadliest adventures I've seen since the original *Tomb of Horrors*. The PC mortality rate is pretty high on this one, and since I don't want my players withdrawing from the campaign simply because they're afraid to carry on, I've come up with rewrites of the three divine spells in the "Resurrection Suite": *raise dead*, *resurrection*, and *true resurrection*.

The core of this house rule is the negative level mechanic. Rather than penalize a character with actual level loss, I figure, why not just let him suffer the effects of temporary level loss? This gets the character back into play quickly, gets the player participating in the game again (which is, after all, why he's there in the first place), and avoids the temptation for the player to ditch his old, "weaker" character for a new, better one. I know that some DMs have a house rule about what level a new character can be (whether it's the character of a new player, or the new character of an existing player)—but I've never seen a variation of that rule that I truly liked.

So here. If you find that you like this alternate rule, feel free to use it in your home games. •



Raise Dead

Conjuration (Healing)

Level: Clr 5

Components: V, S, M, DF

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Target: Dead creature touched

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None (see text)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

The cleric restores life to a deceased creature. The cleric can raise creatures who have been dead up to one day per caster level. In addition, the subject's soul must be free and willing to return (see PHB, Chapter 10, Casting Spells, Special Spell Effects, Bringing Back the Dead). If the subject's soul is not willing to return, the spell does not work; therefore, subjects who want to return receive no saving throw. The subject receives one negative level (or suffers 1d4 points of Constitution damage, if she's 1st level) when raised.

Raise dead cures hit point damage up to a total of 1 hit point per Hit Die. Any ability scores damaged to 0 are raised to 1. Normal poisons and normal diseases are cured in the process of raising the subject, but magical diseases and curses are not undone. While the spell closes mortal wounds and repairs lethal damage of most kinds, the body of the creature to be raised must be whole. Otherwise, missing parts are still missing when the creature is brought back to life. None of the dead creature's equipment or possessions are affected in any way by this spell.

A creature who has been turned into an undead creature or killed by a death effect can't be raised by this spell. Constructs, elementals, outsiders, and undead creatures can't be raised. The spell cannot bring back a creature who has died of old age.

Coming back from the dead is an ordeal. The subject of the spell receives one negative level *when* it is raised, just as if it had lost a level to an energy-draining creature. If the subject is 1st level, it suffers 1d4 points of Constitution damage instead. A negative

level can be dispelled by a *restoration* spell; ability damage can be dispelled by *restoration* or *lesser restoration*. A raised character who doesn't receive a *restoration* or *lesser restoration* may attempt a Fortitude save (DC 15) once every 24 hours to completely remove the effects of the negative level or Constitution damage.

A character who died with spells prepared has a 50% chance of losing any given spell upon being raised. A spell-casting creature that doesn't prepare spells (such as a sorcerer) has a 50% chance of losing any given unused spell slot as if had been used to cast a spell.

Material Component: A diamond worth at least 500 gp.

Resurrection

Conjuration (Healing)

Level: Clr 7

Casting Time: 10 minutes

As *raise dead*, except you are able to restore life and complete strength to any deceased creature. The condition of the remains is not a factor. So long as some small portion of the creature's body still exists, it can be resurrected, but the portion receiving the spell must have been part of the creature's body at the time of death. (The remains of a creature hit by a *disintegrate* spell count as a small portion of the body.) The creature can have been dead no longer than 10 years per caster level.

Upon completion of the spell, the creature is immediately restored to full hit points, vigor, and health, with no loss of prepared spells. However the subject receives one negative level (or 1 point of Constitution damage if the subject was 1st level). A negative level can be dispelled by a *restoration* spell; ability damage can be dispelled by *restoration* or *lesser restoration*. A raised character who doesn't receive a *restoration* or *lesser restoration* may attempt a Fortitude save (DC 15) once every 24 hours to completely remove the effects of the negative level or Constitution damage.

You can revive someone killed by a death effect or someone who has been turned into an undead creature and then destroyed. You cannot revive someone who has died of old age.

Material Components: A sprinkle of holy water and a diamond worth at least 500 gp.

True Resurrection

Conjuration (Healing)

Level: Clr 9, Healing 9

Components: V, S, M, DF

Casting Time: 10 minutes

As *raise dead*, except the cleric can resurrect a creature who has been dead up to 10 years per caster level. This spell can even bring back creatures whose bodies have been wholly destroyed, provided you unambiguously identify the deceased in some fashion (reciting the deceased's time and place of birth or death is the most common method).

Upon completion of the spell, the creature is immediately restored to full hit points, vigor, and health, with no negative levels (or Constitution damage) or prepared spells.

You can revive someone killed by a death effect or someone who has been turned into an undead creature and then destroyed.

Even *true resurrection* can't restore to life a creature who has died of old age.

Material Components: A sprinkle of holy water and a diamond worth at least 5,000 gp. •

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