

Monster Death and Dying

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Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), 5th edition (5E), has a system for determining the fate of characters reaching 0 hit points (hp.). They don't immediately die, but make a series of "death saving throws." When a character at 0 hp. takes a turn, a DC10 d20 roll is made. A 20 raises the character to 1 hp.; he's no longer dying, and can begin to function again. (As a house rule, I have the character go up one level of exhaustion.) On a save other than on 20, the character remains alive with a recorded successful saves. On a failure other than 1, the character has accumulated a "fail." On a d20=1, that counts as two failures. If the character rolls three failures, he's dead. Three successes without a 20 means stable. So, there could be as many as 5 die rolls (over 5 turns) before the character's fate is determined. Someone doing healing or anything else that gives the character hp. stops the process, as does successful "stabilization" action by another character.

This system of determining what happens to characters who go to 0 hp. applies explicitly to player characters (the "you" in the *Player Handbook* text), and perhaps Non-Player Characters (NPC's) and perhaps other creatures associated with the party (presumably at the DM's discretion), though the *Player's Handbook* uses language "the creature" when referring to this process. The *Player's Handbook* does say that most DM's do not use this process for "monsters," they die when they reach 0 hp, with mighty villains or special NPC's the exception.

Well, in cases where large numbers of humanoid creatures and the like are defeated in combat, say a company of hobgoblins, I have been using a similar process so that, unless the party makes a point of killing the incapacitated survivors, some of these may survive to fight another day. (Since at best they would be at 1 hp., they'd generally be intent on getting away. Among more organized or disciplined humanoids like hobgoblins, they might even help to stabilize dying colleagues if the party has not stayed present to loot the bodies and kill the survivors. (Among some types of monsters, any survivors might well kill and eat any unconscious survivors.) At first this was done by making death saving throws as described in the *Player's Handbook*, but something simpler and easier to do was needed. That's what this paper describes.

So, what are the odds that, left undisturbed, a downed creature survives and is conscious, survives but is unconscious, or dies? Those odds can (and were) calculated: 18%, 41%, and 40% respectively to two digits precision – the missing 1% is roundoff error. (The precisely calculated odds are .181375, .41375, and .404875 respectively.) The most accurate way to conveniently roll this would be d% = 1-18 character to +1; d%=19-59 character stable; d%=60-99 character dead. Roll again on d%=00 (with dead on another 00). A less precise way to do this would be d20=17-20 at +1; 9-16 stable; 1-8 dead. For a troop of lots of humanoid monsters that will slightly favor the monsters, but this way of dealing with monster survival is entirely an abstraction with no good basis for saying it's "accurate" or not anyway.

The diagram on the next page shows the method used to calculate the odds.

