

Home &gt; Games &gt; D&amp;D &gt; Articles

Home

D&amp;D Archive




Save My Game

08/19/2005



## Adjudicating Charm Spells, Part 2

By Jason Nelson-Brown

-  Printer Friendly
-  Email A Friend
-  Discuss This Article
-  Download This Article

This column provides advice for DMs whose campaigns are in trouble. Do your players constantly bicker or complain about issues both inside and outside of the main campaign action? Do your best ideas fall flat? Have you set up a situation that you now wish you hadn't? Worry no more, because Jason Nelson-Brown has the answers to save your game!

### Charmed Attacks

In this installment of *Save My Game*, we look at what happens when PCs are forced to attack one another via charm and dominate spells. Adjudicating the effects of such spells fairly can be a challenge, especially when the characters involved are not especially friendly. What's a DM to do?

#### Problem: Charms and Party Members

**What would happen if an NPC cast *charm person* on a PC and then told her to attack a party member against whom she had a known grudge? What happens if a *dominated* character is ordered to attack an ally, and that ally is then *charmed* and instructed to defend himself? -- Carol**

Adjudicating charm and dominate spells that involve intraparty conflict can be quite a DMing challenge. And when a grudge already exists between certain party members, can an order to escalate that grudge into physical combat really be considered against the PC's will? Let's look at some of the specific cases noted in the questions above.

#### Solution 1: Knowing is Half the Battle

Mental control becomes much more useful when you know something about the person you're controlling. If you have some idea how useful a particular character might be, you have a better idea of whether to bother to use a *charm person* on him at all. You know which questions to ask and which suggestions should sound the most reasonable to him. You also know what subjects to avoid and which languages to use. If you don't have prior knowledge of your subject, a *tongues* spell is almost a must for *charm monster*, though *dominate person* does not require a common language.

In much the same way as an assassin must observe her prey before striking with a death attack, you gain an invaluable advantage by doing a bit of reconnaissance before casting your *charm person* spell. If you plan to use any form of mental control, *augury* or *divination* might provide clues about the best targets to control and how best to approach them. Skills such as Gather Information and Knowledge (local) can help you understand the local customs and traditions, as well as regional variations and proper forms of address and greeting, so that you can set up your interaction in the most favorable way. A simple spell such as *detect thoughts* can be a valuable tool for gaining specific information about your proposed subject, and a stronger information-gathering ability -- such as the psionic power *mind probe* -- is worth even more, since it can reveal an inter-character grudge that you might be able to exploit!

#### Solution 2: Make Your Own Luck

Suppose you can't find a useful grudge or conflict to exploit, or maybe you don't have time to look. You might be able to achieve a similar result by taking matters into your own hands! Use *modify memory* to implant a false memory of a grudge, or of some offensive incident that would likely spark one. Alternatively, you could use an illusion spell or the psionic power *false sensory input* to show your subject a hateful incident and plant the seeds of conflict. Once you have a grudge established, the suggestion to attack an ally seems a bit more reasonable to your target.

But what happens if both the attacker and the defender are mind-controlled? Even if attacking your friend does not seem like a reasonable suggestion, defending yourself against that friend's maniacal attacks certainly is. Using lethal force in such a situation may or may not seem reasonable, depending on the nature and effectiveness of your friend's attacks and how easily you can get him raised from the dead. But if your new best friend -- the one who has charmed you -- tells you that the friend who is attacking you is actually a *polymorphed* demon or doppelganger, that explanation might seem pretty believable. The

believability of the story would be even further enhanced if your controller can show you some sort of evidence -- real or illusory -- or if the charmer has a good Bluff modifier.

### Solution 3: Who's in Charge Here?

What happens when you charm someone who's already under someone else's *charm person* effect? Whose orders will the subject take?

For starters, refer to Multiple Mental Control Effects on page 172 of the *Player's Handbook*. "If a creature is under the mental control of two or more creatures, it tends to obey each to the best of its ability, and to the extent of the control each effect allows." So according to the rules, both charms are in effect simultaneously -- and if the two sets of instructions don't conflict, the subject will obey both.

More likely, though, you're talking about a tug-of-war between a bad-guy charmer and a fellow PC who is trying to counter the effect with a *charm person* spell of her own. So how do you as DM resolve the double charm? According to the *Player's Handbook*, "If the controlled creature receives conflicting orders simultaneously, the competing controllers must make opposed Charisma checks to determine which one the creature obeys." You could also give the ally a circumstance bonus on that Charisma check, since she has much greater knowledge of the subject and his motivations. Even though the subject considers both charmers to be his friends, a well-known friend can probably make a more compelling case for why he should do as she asks than someone who doesn't know him as well, especially if the PC charmer uses her knowledge of the subject and his personality (see Solution 1). Dueling with *charm person* spells in this manner is a risky proposition, but if you're out of *dispel magic* spells, it might just be a workable solution for you.

### Solution 4: Let the Players Play

Mind control is a tricky proposition at best, and the fact that players tend to be sensitive about losing control of their characters makes the situation even more difficult. PCs are already complicated to run, and controlled PCs can be even more so. So save yourself some time and headaches and let the player play his *charmed* PC. Inform him that his character is controlled and instruct him to play accordingly, warning him that you as DM reserve the right to veto an action or take over the PC if he doesn't play the mind control honestly. Who knows? The player might enjoy playing a controlled PC and do so with relish and imagination, freeing you to run the rest of the game.

### Summary

When mind control spells precipitate intraparty combat, adjudicating them becomes still more complicated. Knowledge of the subject, whether obtained through long association or via divination effects, enhances the probability that suggestions will seem reasonable. When two casters try to charm the same person, he will try to obey both to the best of his ability. But when the orders conflict, the two charmers must make opposed Charisma checks to determine whose orders the subject will obey. As DM, you can apply a circumstance bonus to the Charisma check of a fellow PC to reflect her more fundamental knowledge of the subject's nature. Finally, allowing the player of a controlled PC to continue playing his character can keep him involved and interested, and free you to run the game.

### About the Author

Jason Nelson-Brown lives in Seattle with his wife Kelle, daughters Meshia and Indigo, son Allen, and dog Bear. He is an active and committed born-again Christian who began playing **D&D** in 1981 and currently runs one weekly campaign while playing intermittently in two others.

#### Recent Save My Game

- Time Management 08/03/2007
- Weakened Demon Lords 07/27/2007
- Player Thrills, DM Disappointments 07/20/2007
- Shut Up Already! 07/13/2007
- Six is Company, Twelve's a Crowd 07/06/2007

(MORE)

#### Recent Articles

- This Month's *Dragon Magazine* 04/26/2007
- Chapter 2: Conflict 09/24/2007
- Eastern Classes 09/18/2007
- Crusaders, Swordsages, Warblades 09/11/2007
- *Fortress of the Yuan-Ti* 09/04/2007

(MORE)

[About Us](#) • [Jobs](#) • [New to the Game?](#) • [Inside Wizards](#) • [Find a Store](#) • [Press](#) • [Help](#) • [Sitemap](#)



©1995-2010 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)