

The Ranger Revisited

by Simon J. Bull

Test Play Beta (February 2016)

Preamble

Epitomized by Tolkien's Rangers of the North, Rangers of Ithilien, and especially Aragorn—last Chieftain of the Dúnedain—the ranger has captivated role-players from the outset.

The ranger first appeared in the antecedent Fantasy Supplement of Chainmail's 3rd Edition (Feb, 1975) where he is noted as a superior hero-type. It is perhaps no coincidence that Joe Fischer (a player in Gygax's group) detailed this figure as a D&D player-type around the same time—to appear in The Strategic Review #1.2 (Apr, 1975). The ranger has since become a staple RPG archetype, the subject of dozens of interpretations and 'zine articles, and a pillar of the D&D legendaria.

The following article recasts the classic player-type in game terms circa 1974; still extant today where the earlier prints are examined in isolation of later material, else conveniently summarised in Delving Deeper V5.

The Ranger

Rangers are a sub-class of fighters who specialize in tracking and wilderness operations. They generally conform to the description of the fighting class except that:

1. They do not contest the joust,
2. At 4th level they do not adjust morale checks of normal-types in combat,
3. At 8th level they do not cause normal-types to take a morale check by their threatening presence,
4. At 9th level they may establish a protectorate rather than a stronghold.

Additional Restrictions

The ranger has a trilateral prime requisite equal to the lower of his strength, wisdom, or constitution scores.¹ His prime requisite is not adjusted by above average secondary or tertiary abilities.²

A ranger works alone or in small groups. The maximum number of player-types he can operate with is two plus the greater of: one per point of wisdom he possesses above 10, or one per level he possesses above Tracker (1st level).³ Prior to Gerent⁴ status (9th+ level) a ranger may never employ hirelings, mercenaries, or other retainers⁵ and may only ever possess that which he can carry with him; any excess treasure must be donated to a (non-player) worthy cause.⁶

Table 1: Statistics Regarding Rangers

	Rangers	XP	Hit Dice	Fighting Capability	Spells by Spell Level
1st	Tracker	0	2 − 2	Man+1	Nil
2nd	Strider	2,250	2 + 2	2 Men	Nil
3rd	Rover	4,500	3 + 1	3 Men/Hero−1	Nil
4th	Warder	9,000	4	4 Men/Hero	Nil
5th	Picket	18,000	5	5 Men/Hero	Nil
6th	Venturer	33,000	6	6 Men/Hero	Nil
7th	Vanguard	68,000	7	Superhero−1	Nil
8th	Ranger	120,000	8	Superhero	Nil
9th	Gerent	240,000	8 + 2	Superhero	Nil
10th	Gerent, 10th Level	480,000	9	Superhero	Nil
11th	Gerent, 11th Level	720,000	9 + 2	Superhero	Nil
12th	Gerent, 12th Level	960,000*	10**	Superhero	Nil

* A Ranger requires 240,000 XP per level beyond the 12th.

** A Ranger adds 1 HD per two levels beyond the 12th.

Additional Benefits

An unencumbered ranger can move swiftly through the wilderness—ignoring the first encountered movement penalty due to difficult terrain each day—and requires only one day of rest per fortnight. Except in poor visibility, any die that would indicate a ranger is lost instead indicates he is delayed by one hex.⁷

In the wilderness a ranger can track a small party for a few days after their passing. Underground, or in adverse conditions, he may require a throw of 3–6, 5–6, or 6 on a six-sided die at the referee’s discretion.⁸ Furthermore, rangers can be almost invisible in their grey-green cloaks⁹ and are themselves always difficult to track.¹⁰ Outdoors they surprise enemies with a throw of 3–6 on a six-sided die¹¹ and, in melee combat versus giant-types,¹² they deal an additional 1–6 hit points damage¹³ in any round in which they score at least one hit.

Given a turn (a day in the wilderness), a Warder (4th level) and above can locate rare plants of healing virtue with a throw of 3–6 on a six-sided die (depending on scarcity a throw of 5–6 or 6 may be required, at the referee’s discretion). Applied to a stricken man-type, a Warder (4th level) and above can *Remove Disease*, a Venturer (6th level) and above can *Slow Poison*, and a Vanguard (7th level) and above can *Neutralize Poison*.¹⁴

Rangers (8th level) and above can employ crystal balls.¹⁵

A Gerent (9th+ level) may establish a protectorate;¹⁶ a tract of wilderness 6 hexes in radius or equivalent. His seat will be a secluded fort, hideaway, or bastion that costs double a regular stronghold to build. Despite this he has not—and nor does he covet—the widespread reputation of a Warlord so the

population of his protectorate remains sparse; 2–8 villages of 100–400 population. Each resident can pay 1 gp in taxes each year.

A Gerent's stronghold will attract a body of 14–24 elite woodsmen, longbowmen, or wood elves¹⁷ who will serve without payment and are absolutely loyal to the protectorate.

Further Observations

The DD-Ranger description presented above is verbose compared to the core DD classes. Even so, it is briefer than the SR-Ranger and omits five additional tables for determination of special followers besides.

The DD-Ranger's most notable divergence from the SR-Ranger is his lack of any real spell casting abilities. It seems appropriate that a fighter-type should not lightly combine the cleric's and magic-user's advantages! The DD-Ranger's clerical function is manifested as more modest non-magical healing abilities, in conjunction with the regular V5 fighter's ability to ignore a number of hits. The DD-Ranger's magical function is manifested only his continued ability to operate a crystal ball.

The advantage of 2 HD at 1st level is an enduring feature of the class which DD respects, albeit with a more modest 2 – 2 HD. Each of the Tracker's two hit dice can yield: 1, 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 hp; all told he has 2–10 hp. With high constitution he has 4–12 hp or, with low constitution he has 2–8 hp. Comparatively, the fighter starting DD-fighter has 3–8 hp.

Although the Ranger starts out with more HD than the fighter, he ultimately attains fewer dice. Even ignoring his steeper XP requirement, by 8th level the ranger is behind the fighter and will never catch up. Most significantly: the ranger does not achieve the fighter's top Fighting Capability at 12th level, and nor does he until 14th level (at a bewildering 1,440,00 XP).

Because of his XP requirement the Ranger's HD, FC, and saving throw progression falls roughly halfway between the fighter's and cleric's on an XP-by-XP basis.

Notes

¹Despite requiring three above average scores (1 in 78 fair characters qualifying) the SR-Ranger cannot earn an XP bonus for high abilities. Compared to a fighter earning +10% XP, he requires approximately 25% more experience. The DD-Ranger requires only one-tenth more XP than a regular fighter but has reduced likelihood of earning an XP bonus. This interpretation eliminates ability score requirements that *preclude* class selection; instead relying on XP adjustments to encourage appropriate class selection. This mechanism also appears in the original game. The odds of a DD-Ranger earning +10% XP (three

ability scores of 15+) are remote; about 1 in 1,130 fair characters. The odds of earning +5% XP (three ability scores of 13+) are about 1 in 57 fair characters. The odds of carrying no XP penalty (three ability scores of 9+) are about 2 in 5 fair characters.

²Unlike the DD-Ranger, the DD V5 core classes do benefit for secondary and tertiary abilities.

³The SR-Ranger states «Only two of the class may operate together». This is largely a meta-game restriction that prevents multiple *players* from running the class within a group—possibly because four or five rangers together might have been too powerful? The above interpretation turns the concept into an in-game restriction: that rangers are *loners* who prefer to operate in small groups.

⁴DD introduces new level titles for Rangers in which *Gerent* is the top rank. “Gerent” is an archaic term for one who rules or manages land.

⁵The SR-Ranger states «They may not hire any men-at-arms or other servants or aides of any kind whatsoever». The inability to retain hirelings and other helpers is one of the ranger’s principle restrictions, and this is reflected in the DD-Ranger. It sits nicely alongside the notion that rangers are loners.

⁶The SR-Ranger states «They may own only that which they can carry with them, and excess treasure or goods must be donated to a worthy cause».

⁷Swift and tireless movement through the wilderness is a feature of Tolkien’s Aragorn and, by implication, Rangers in general. This feature should be useful in the wilderness exploration game.

⁸Tracking is a core function of the ranger. The SR-Ranger annotates this ability as a series of percentage chances (which AD&D expands considerably). DD instead simplifies it to automatic success in normal, outdoor conditions, allowing for a throw of a six-sided die to determine success in more unrealistic circumstances. Note that U&WA p20 designates party sizes of 1–3, 4–9, 10–24, and 25+ man (on foot or mounted) for the purposes of wilderness pursuit. 4–9 man-types might therefore be considered a «small party» for the purpose of tracking. Larger parties should be easier to track, smaller parties more difficult. Tracking indoors, or in poor weather, should also be more difficult.

⁹Near-invisibility outdoors is an addition. This rule is borrowed directly from Elves and seems highly appropriate for Rangers, particularly in light of their increased odds of surprising others.

¹⁰This is an addition. As expert trackers it seems fitting that rangers should elude tracking themselves. Whether this is because they travel in smaller groups, or is an extension to being nearly invisible outdoors, or is an entirely new feature is left to the referee.

¹¹The SR-Ranger states «Because of their ability to track Rangers also are difficult to surprise» but delivers this clumsily. D&D’s opposed surprise check works well when figures adjust only *their own odds* of surprising others. It doesn’t work as well when figures adjust their odds of surprising others *and*

of being surprised themselves. The latter creates the awkward possibility that figure A (who surprises others on a 3–6) encounters figure B (who can only be surprised on a 6). Hence, DD sets only a figure’s *odds of surprising others*. The neat side-effect of this is that doing so indirectly affects the odds of *being surprised* in precisely the desired manner. Because the DD-Ranger is twice as likely to surprise others in the wilderness, he is—indirectly—only half as likely to be surprised himself.

¹²DD V5’s «giant-types» are not identical to OD&D’s «giant class». The former comprises only larger than man-sized humanoids such as orges, minotaurs, trolls, and giants and excludes all normal-types.

¹³This is an alteration. The SR-Ranger states: «For each level they have gained they add +1 to their damage die» which seems innocuous enough at low levels, but becomes ridiculous at higher levels. DD’s 1–6 damage may seem over-powered at first glance yields an average of 3.5 hp damage and is only applicable versus large creatures with multiple HD. Moreover, this rule is borrowed directly from V5 Elves who—as specified in Chainmail—count each normal hit versus ogres as two hits.

¹⁴The SR-Ranger states «Ranger-Knights are able to employ magic items which heal or cure disease, including scrolls» and allows use of clerical spells at upper levels. DD allows a more restricted set of healing capabilities that are non-magical in nature, function only in the wilderness, and only with a significant commitment of time (a wilderness turn representing one game day).

¹⁵The SR-Ranger states «Ranger-Lords are able to employ all devices which deal with Clairvoyance, Clairaudience, ESP, Telepathy, Telekenesis, and Teleportation, including scrolls» and allows use of magic-user spells at upper levels. The DD-Ranger retains only the use crystal balls. Ignoring scrolls (AD&D would later exclude these), the *crystal ball* is the item appearing in M&T that matches the SR-Ranger’s criteria and is not already usable by regular fighters. Moreover, Aragorn employed the Palantír, so there is strong precedent for the DD-Ranger to retain this feature. Magic spells, however, are left for Wizards.

¹⁶The protectorate is an alteration of the SR-Ranger’s stronghold which the author feels is more appropriate to the class. The 6-hex radius yields greater than triple the land area of a fighter’s stronghold, meaning the ranger must “range” widely to cover his protectorate. It’s income, however, remains the same as a fighter’s stronghold. His fort or bastion costs double in order that it remains modest—in keeping with the ranger’s low profile.

¹⁷The SR-Ranger Lord can attract a melange of Special and Extraordinary followers, requiring *five* explanatory tables. DD acknowledges that the Extraordinary followers are highly improbable, and that from 9th level the Ranger is able to attract levelled retainers in the regular fashion. Therefore, the DD-Ranger’s followers are simplified to a more reliable group of elite woodsmen not unlike Faramir’s Rangers of Ithilien. Their improved loyalty is borrowed from the top-level Cleric’s followers. Note that 14–24 can be generated with 2d6+12.