

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

*ADDITIONAL*

**Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargames  
Campaigns Playable with Paper and Pencil  
And Miniature Figures**



*SUPPLEMENT X*

## PHILOTOMY'S MUSINGS

**BY**

**JASON CONE**



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PHILOTOMY'S  
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS  
Musings

A collection of interpretations, house rulings, expansions, and  
general pontification on the nature of the Original Dungeons &  
Dragons rules by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson

By Jason Cone

Writing: Jason Cone

Editing/Layout: Jason Vey

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Philotomy's OD&D Musings can be found at: <http://www.philotomy.com/>

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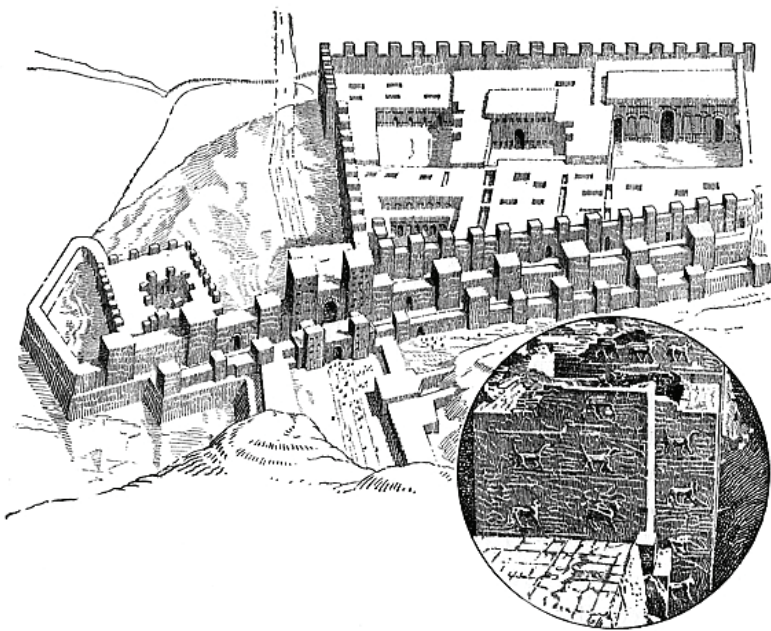
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## OVERVIEW

### What This Book Is About

This booklet is about OD&D, as it is played when I run the game. When I talk about "OD&D," I'm referring to Original Dungeons & Dragons (published in 1974), which included three booklets: Men & Magic, Monsters & Treasure, and The Underworld & Wilderness Adventures. There were multiple rules supplements released for OD&D, including Greyhawk, Blackmoor, Eldritch Wizardy, and Gods, Demi-gods, & Heroes. There is also Swords & Spells, a set of miniature rules based on D&D and Chainmail. Lastly, I consider the Holmes Basic Set as a close relation of the OD&D family. My personal OD&D game consists of rules from the three brown books, plus house-rules (i.e. I'm not using many rules from the supplements). It also owes a great deal to Meepo's Holmes Companion, which got me started down the OD&D path. I hope the thoughts on this page will be helpful to someone that is thinking about running an OD&D game. There's also a link to my B4 Lost City campaign log on the web, at:

[http://www.philotomy.com/lost\\_city.html](http://www.philotomy.com/lost_city.html)



## **What This Is Not About**

Many people use the term "OD&D" in a much broader sense than I do, including what I would call "Classic D&D" in the definition. This page is NOT about the 1981 B/X sets (Moldvay/ Cook/Marsh), the BECMI sets (starting with 1983's Basic Set by Frank Mentzer), or the Rules Cyclopedia. It is also not about AD&D<sup>1</sup> or 3rd edition/d20-based D&D. I have played all of those versions and enjoyed them to one degree or another, but I find the most enjoyment with the OD&D rules.

If you find this site useful, please consider a donation to help me cover the hosting costs. Any assistance is appreciated!

## **ABILITY SCORES & BONUSES**

One of OD&D's most distinctive qualities is its rules for handling ability bonuses, and its philosophy of bonuses, in general. Compared to later versions of the game, OD&D bonuses are uncommon. This means that a +1 bonus in OD&D is a bigger deal than a +1 bonus in B/X, BECM, AD&D, or 3E D&D; you need a truly significant advantage before receiving a +1 bonus (e.g. a magic sword). Consider that Str does not affect attack or damage rolls. Dex does not affect Armor Class. Dex does affect attack rolls with ranged attacks, but the largest bonuses you can receive from high Dex is +1. Et cetera.

One effect of this approach is a de-emphasis on the mechanical importance of ability scores. A Fighting Man with a Str of 17 and a Fighting Man with a Str of 10 will be equally effective with their swords; the only mechanical difference is that the high-strength Fighting Man will advance through the levels faster (it just comes easier to him). In game-terms, there isn't a significant difference in getting slashed by a sword-wielding man with 17 Str and a sword-wielding man with 10 Str. Some gamers sneer that this is completely unrealistic, and the stronger man would have a big advantage. But again, you need to look at it from the same scope and scale as the game. Consider that an OD&D ogre does 1d6+2 points of damage, due to its size and strength, and OD&D ogres are bigger and stronger than any man. Even small bonuses like +1 and +2 are big deals, in OD&D.

The de-emphasis on the mechanical importance of ability scores does not mean that ability scores are useless, or that it is necessarily superfluous to have a 3-18 range when it really comes down to "low, average, or high." On the contrary, ability scores remain an integral part of describing and defining the PC. However, the OD&D approach

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<sup>1</sup> N.B.: When played using most of the rules from the supplements, OD&D is similar to 1st edition AD&D, but as I mentioned, I don't use much from the supplements.

demands creativity and judgment from the players and the referee, apart from defined rules. For example, consider this quotation about the effects of Charisma: "...the charisma score is usable to decide such things as whether or not a witch capturing a player will turn him into a swine or keep him enchanted as a lover." (Men & Magic p. 11) In other words, your ability scores are still meant to be taken into account, but exactly how they apply is left up to the players and the referee.

Another effect of this approach is that bonuses from other sources increase in their relative value. A magical axe +1 is a big deal. Any item which decreases an enemy's chance to hit you (e.g. magic armor) is a big deal, even if it is only a +1 item. Even the +1 benefit from a regular (non-magic) shield is significant. In general, increases of all sorts (including increases in PC level) have greater significance in OD&D, relative to later editions of the game. It also affects things like the significance of better armor. It's certainly possible for a 1st level Fighting Man to start the game with chain mail, or even plate mail. That's a significant advantage over most of the foes he'll face; there aren't a lot of modifiers to negate the difference.

Also consider how OD&D's philosophy affects rolling for ability scores. The original concept behind ability scores was a 3-18 range with "bell curve probability"; this is easily generated using 3d6. Later versions of the game started making bonuses higher and more common, introducing "bonus inflation." Bonuses became much more important in the game mechanics, and so the importance of ability scores increased. However, the nature of the 3-18 bell curve means very high ability scores are much less likely than average ability scores. Characters that would be perfectly acceptable and viable under the original rules were hopeless characters under the "inflated" systems, so later editions introduced new methods of generating ability scores to address this. Consider this quotation from the AD&D Players Handbook: "It is usually essential to the character's survival to be exceptional (with a rating of 15 or above) in no fewer than two ability characteristics." That may be true under AD&D's system of bonuses and penalties, but it is not true under the original OD&D system. Rolling a character using 3d6 is a perfectly suitable approach in OD&D.

## **ABSTRACT COMBAT**

OD&D combat is highly abstract, which is one of the reasons it moves quickly, even when many combatants are involved. I use a 10-12 second combat round in my game.<sup>2</sup> A lot can happen in that time. The

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<sup>2</sup> OD&D defaults to using 1 minute combat rounds

combat rules assume that combatants are taking their best shots while fighting, and in standard situations, it does not provide for specific hit locations. Your PC's one attack roll does not represent a single swing or thrust, but rather an entire series of feints, swings, and maneuvers. A missed attack roll does not mean that you simply took a swing and missed, but rather that you failed to score any telling blows. You might have missed entirely as your enemy dodged around, or you might have hammered at him as his shield protected him from everything you dished out; this "flavor text" is up largely up to the referee, but in game-terms it works out the same: no damage inflicted. A successful attack roll means that one or more of your attempts succeeded in reducing the enemy's fighting capability. This could be because you physically hurt him, or it could mean you're tiring him out, or it could mean that you're pressing his luck and skill to the breaking point, or it could mean that you've dealt a blow to his confidence. Again, this is largely up to the referee and how he describes loss of hit points in combat.



Because of the abstract nature of combat, I am generally against more than one melee attack roll per round (although this may not apply to missile fire; q.v. Initiative & the Combat Sequence); after all, the roll doesn't represent a single swing, merely the chance to inflict damage, regardless of the number of swings. Instead of additional rolls, it is almost always better to represent an improved chance to inflict damage by applying a bonus to the attack roll, or a modifier to damage. In my OD&D game, PCs receive a single melee attack roll per round (the only exception being high level fighters facing enemies with less than one hit die, who may attack a number of such foes equal to their level; however, even then, the fighter gets a single melee roll for each opponent he's allowed to attack). Monsters sometimes get multiple attacks (although not as commonly as in later editions), but monsters and PCs do not necessarily need to follow the same rules. (If this seems unfair, consider that you can give more experience points for monsters with large numbers of attacks (e.g. see the Holmes XP rules); the discrepancy between PCs and monsters is accounted for by classifying the ability to make multiple attack rolls as a monster special ability.)



## **ARMOR CLASS**

In OD&D, Armor Class is much more of a fixed value than in other editions. As it applies to PCs (and to most humanoid monsters), it is more like "armor type." The main reason this is true is because there are not many modifiers to AC. Dex doesn't modify it. Magic armor and shields don't modify it (they modify the opponent's attack roll). Rings of protection don't modify it (they work like magic armor). Et cetera. Additionally, there is no "overlap" in the armor classes. That is, plate armor is AC3, and there is no other combination that makes up AC3 (e.g. no splint mail + shield). The fact that OD&D AC is so closely related to armor type makes using the weapon vs. AC rules from Supplement I easier to use, if one is so inclined.

## **BURNING OIL**

Using flaming oil to cover a retreat or attack an enemy is a time-honored technique in D&D. The typical approach is to prepare flasks of oil as firebombs, lighting the rags and hurling the flasks at the enemy. Another common technique is to simply hurl the flask and coat the enemy or area with oil, and then follow this up with a hurled torch or other source of ignition. Oil is also simply poured on the ground in a strategic location and subsequently lit, either as a trap or as a deterrent to pursuit.

Flaming oil is a potent weapon in most editions of D&D. In fact, it offers low-level PCs one of their best damage-dealing tactics. Oil is cheap, readily available, and very effective. It's so effective that some referees frown on its use, ruling that common lamp oil is not adequate fuel for a firebomb. Sometimes, these referees will allow "greek fire" variants that are designed and intended for combat use. Obviously, "greek fire" variants cost more than a vial of common lamp oil.

I like the use of oil as a weapon. I think it adds all sorts of opportunities for interesting tactics and terrible screw-ups. Consequently, I don't worry about the quality or effectiveness of "common lamp oil" (especially real-world medieval lamp oil) as a factor in the use of flaming oil. In a campaign world full of fantastic flora and fauna, I think it's possible that the common lamp oil might be derived from a source that produces potent fuel. I think that if the circumstances of its use are considered, the employment of flaming oil as a weapon does not disrupt or unbalance the game. Here's how I handle burning oil in my game:

- A flask of oil will create a pool of oil 5-6 feet in diameter that will burn for approximately 1 turn.

- A thrown flask has a 90% chance of shattering (roll 1d10, with a roll of 1 indicating a failure to shatter)
- Anyone within 5 ft. of the impact point must save vs. Death Ray or be splashed. An ignited splash does 1-3 points of damage.
- A direct hit with ignited oil does 1d6 damage for 2 rounds. (This assumes the victim and/or his friends are actively trying to wipe off the oil and douse the flames.)
- A missed throw will miss by 1-10 feet. The direction of the miss will be determined by rolling 1d8.

Considerations in the use of flaming oil:

- Storage (bulk and weight) of multiple flasks
- Relative fragility of flasks in dungeoneering situations (e.g. falls, et cetera)
- Time required to retrieve stored flasks
- Time required to prepare a flask (unstopper, insert a rag, et cetera)
- Source of ignition
- Smell/smoke/wandering monsters
- Enemies who learn and adapt to the PCs tactics

## **CALLED SHOTS**

I think the concept of the called shot is a poor fit for D&D because of



the abstract nature of the combat system. Unless there is a special reason for targeting a specific area, D&D combat assumes that combatants will take the best shots they can get. For example, consider the situation of a PC fighter facing off against an orc warrior wearing chainmail and a helm. The player might say "I swing at his head with my sword." Since this

combat is a completely normal situation, it follows the standard assumptions of the rules, and the PC should not receive any special modifiers to his attack roll, or to damage if his attack succeeds. Rather, I would treat his statement as flavor. I might respond, "Okay, make a

standard attack roll..." If the attack succeeds, but only does a single point of damage, I might say "You step forward, raining blows down around the orc's head and shoulders; he manages to fend off most of your strikes, but one glances off his helm, drawing a thin trickle of blood from his temple. He grunts and snarls at you." If the attack hits and does six points of damage, I might say "You step forward, raining blows down around the orc's head and shoulders; he parries wildly, grimacing as you nearly knock his weapon from his hand, then a vicious backswing connects solidly, ringing his cloven helm like a gong. Gore splatters across your sword-arm, and his falling body almost pulls the hilt from your grasp, but you hold on and jerk the weapon free." If the attack missed, I might say "You step forward, raining blows down around the orc's head and shoulders; he parries easily, guiding your attacks to the side while sneering at you with yellowed tusks..."

Nevertheless, there may be special situations that fall outside of standard combat assumptions. For example, an arrow shot to pin clothing to the wall, an attack intended to shatter the potion bottle in an enemy's hand, et cetera. There is also precedent in D&D for striking a specific spot on certain creatures (e.g. a beholder's eye); typically, the monster description assigns a separate AC for this location, as appropriate. I think this approach is superior to an approach that applies a standard modifier for called shots (e.g. -4). Rather than a "one-size-fits-all" modifier for such actions, each called shot should be handled separately, with the referee determining difficulty and assigning a target AC or die roll modifier that he believes appropriate.

## **CLASS & RACE**

In original OD&D, there are three classes: Fighting Man, Magic User, and Cleric. In addition to humans, PCs can also be Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits (Halflings). Humans may be any class. PC Elves are a combination of Fighting Man and Magic User. PC Dwarves are Fighting Men. PC Hobbits are also Fighting Men. I like the three-class scheme, and in particular I think that having no Thief class has a positive effect on the game, eliminating the special skills and making all the PCs active participants in searching, stealthy-movement, et cetera. As time goes by, I'm less and less fond of the demi-human races, though. I don't restrict players from choosing a non-human race, but I tend to prefer human PCs in my games (and thus approve of the level limitations placed on non-human PCs).

A few brief notes on specific classes and races in my OD&D games:

**CLERICS:** In my game, all priests are not members of the Cleric class. Instead, Clerics are rare and devoted holy men that can perform

miracles (i.e. Cleric spells) and are usually militants of one sort or another. Clerics are rarely found in common shrines and temples; they tend to be action-oriented, smiting evil foes and performing holy missions. Successful and famous Clerics often form their own temples and orders, so they can also be found in the upper ranks of the church hierarchies. (Note that only humans may be Clerics. This doesn't mean that demi-humans don't have priests or holy men, but only that these demi-human priests are not members of the Cleric class.)

ELVES: The OD&D rules on the Elf leave a great deal of room for interpretation, and individual referees handle elves in different ways. In my game, Elves start as both Fighting Man and Magic User (i.e. Veteran and Medium). For starting hit points, the Elf rolls 1d6+1 (i.e. Veteran hit dice) and 1d6 (Medium hit dice), taking the higher of the two rolls. He tracks experience for each class separately. At the beginning of each adventure session (loosely defined as the from the start of an adventure until XP is awarded in a safe place), the Elf's player declares whether he is adventuring as a Fighter or as a Magic User. During that session, the Elf's earned XP goes to the declared class, and he fights and saves as the declared class. Regardless of declared class, the Elf can use any weapon, and may cast spells if he is not wearing armor, or if he is wearing magical armor. The Elf maintains a single hit point total. When the Elf advances a level, he rolls the total hit dice for his new level (e.g. if he advanced to Hero, he rolls 4d6), and takes the greater of his roll or his current hit point total). Elves are, of course, limited to 4th level Fighting Man (Hero) and 8th level Magic User (Warlock). The Elf abilities from Chainmail are translated as +1 to hit against kobolds, goblins, and hobgoblins, and orcs (the greater bonuses in Chainmail are interpreted as coming from magical weapons and from mass-combat tactics against certain foes). Elves possess infravision and can see in the dark (however, this special vision may not work in supernatural or mythic underworld settings). Note that while Chainmail mentions elvish invisibility, this is not translated as an individual ability, but as the use of magical elven cloaks or invisibility spells.

DWARVES: Dwarven PCs are Fighting Men, limited to 6th level (Myrmidon). In addition to the abilities listed in Men & Magic, dwarves only take 1/2 damage from ogres, trolls, and giants (this is an adaptation of the Chainmail bonus). Dwarves possess infravision and can see in the dark (however, this special vision may not work in supernatural or mythic underworld settings).

HOBBITS: Hobbit PCs are Fighting Men, limited to 4th level (Hero). Their "deadly accuracy with missiles" is translated from Chainmail as a



+1 to hit with slings. They are extremely good at hiding in brush or woods (adjudicated by the referee based on the circumstances).

## **CREATING AN "OLD-SCHOOL" DUNGEON**

You're all excited about the idea of running a traditional, old-school dungeon. You sit down with some graph paper and pencils. You spend some time drawing a nice map of the first level, and start keying. Hours go by. Your wife asks when you're coming to bed. Suddenly the weight and enormity of the task descends on you, stopping you in your tracks. How can you finish? How can you get the whole thing done? How do you keep things fresh and interesting for the players going through it? How do you even begin to go about designing this thing?

I don't have a one-true-way, guaranteed method to offer, but I do have some advice that might help. Most of this is nothing I've dreamed up on my own, but rather bits of wisdom I've gathered from various sources.

Gary Gygax's words in the original D&D rule books are a primary source, but I also gleaned much from online sources, including the ideas of T. Foster (Trent Foster), Evreaux, Melan (Gabor Lux), Wheggi, Stormgiant, grodog, and many others. This is also a very broad look at the subject, not delving down into the details of the task.

One thing to keep in mind is that you don't have to create the whole the right off the bat, before you start playing. In fact, attempting that is probably setting yourself up to fail. You can sketch out a "Skull-mountain"-style elevation or side-view of the dungeon, including some deeper levels, but you needn't draw and key the entire thing. Instead, start off with the first three levels, and start running it. You can certainly have a framework or general idea of what you'll be placing in the deeper areas, but you don't need to finish (or even map) those areas, yet. You'll develop the deeper levels (as well as continuing to develop and modify the upper levels) as the game continues.

This is a very cool, and very "old school" approach. Your dungeon will evolve in a very organic manner. During play, the players are going to ask questions and take actions that make you think and give you ideas that never occurred to you. Actual play is going to shape the direction and design of your dungeon, often in unexpected fashion. You and the players will be in a sort of creativity feedback loop, and your dungeon will be all the better for it.

When creating your first three (or so) levels, there are a few general concepts that you should keep in mind. First, remember to offer the players plenty of choices. Even at the entrance to the place, don't give them one path to follow, give them four or five choices to make, right off the bat. For that matter, there needn't be only a single entrance. Have several ways in, with a few of the entrances going directly to deeper areas. Maybe new entrances open up or are discovered as play continues. Another important way to give players choices is to offer them many opportunities to move up and down through the levels. You want the players to decide when they want to go deeper. This isn't a video game where you play through the level to the end with the boss monster, then find the stairs. If they're a group of 1st level PCs, but they want to try their luck and skill on the 4th level of the dungeon, that's their decision.

Also, remember that stairs needn't go up or down a single level, and that's it. Give the players ways to go down multiple levels. Some paths up or down may skip one or more levels. You may be leery of including a stair, shaft, or elevator that spans multiple levels, fearing that your players will go down into undeveloped areas of the dungeon. That's true; they might. However, it's more likely that they will be fearful of going too deep, and even if they do descend to a level you haven't developed, they'll be very jumpy and very likely to stick close to their line of retreat. You can wing a hall or a room, or even an encounter from the appropriate wandering monster table. Usually a group dipping down below their comfort-zone will retreat after a quick look around and

a maybe a scare (even hearing a threatening sound can be enough to send them scurrying back to safer ground). Once you know that the PCs are dipping down into those areas, you'll also have the motivation to work on and develop them. There's no goad like regular play to break dungeon-writers' block.

When drawing your maps, include multiple paths and choices, but also keep in mind that you want your players to be able to embark in meaningful exploration. You want them to be able to use their minds and their skill to make real discoveries. Include some dead ends, and leave some space on the map where you might later add stairs, shafts, and secret areas, as your dungeon continues to develop through play. Other desirable features include things like long, twisty passages, where they can't see the end. These will play on their fear (i.e. the unknown), and offer opportunities for interesting pursuit and evasion. A similar desirable feature are "pinch points" on the map. These are locations where access to a larger area or section is controlled by one or two points. Knowledge of and control of these pinch points can be an important factor if the PCs are being pursued and need a place to mount a defense.

Related to pinch points is the concept of a sublevel. A dungeon sublevel is an area that is isolated from the main level, usually by some sort of secret pinch point. In many old school dungeons, sublevels are a kind of reward in and of themselves. They tend to be smaller than full levels, and are often themed, although neither of these is a rule that cannot be broken. Sublevels often contain fantastic elements and large treasures, but they can also be more dangerous than normal. One of the great things about sublevels is that they can easily be added to an existing dungeon layout. This is a good way to incorporate third-party modules into your dungeon, as well.

A large consideration when drawing your maps is how to lay them out. One common choice is graph paper with 6 squares per inch, but that varies by taste, and by the size of the level. I've also seen dungeon maps (especially cavern maps) drawn on hex-paper (e.g. Isle of the Ape uses this approach). However, there is something to be said for eschewing graph paper, entirely, and drawing your maps on plain white paper. This frees you from the constraints of the grid, and you might be surprised to find that your mapping takes on an entirely fresh character, with levels stretching out or sprawling in a much more organic and natural manner. Varying your approach from level to level is another good technique for keeping things fresh. One level might be very maze and grid-like, with relatively thin walls and not much rock, stone or earth between areas. Another might use large chambers,

widely spaced, with curving tunnels through thick areas of stone. Trying different approaches to the act of mapping will naturally result in different styles of map, in many cases.

How big to make your levels is another question that will come up almost immediately. There is no one correct answer, but the considerations I've already listed will have an impact. Another important consideration is the "density" of your dungeon, defined by the distribution of monsters. The traditional approach is to create a dungeon with about a third of encounter areas (e.g. rooms) containing monsters. That may seem to be a very "empty" dungeon. However, that empty space serves multiple purposes. It acts as a buffer between dangerous areas. It presents a measure of uncertainty to the players, and they need to balance their desire to search everything and everywhere with the danger of wandering monsters. It offers the benefit of repeat play, since they are unlikely to be able to explore everything on a level before continuing to the next. It offers room to run, allowing for meaningful evasion and pursuit, where the PCs can use the space and multiple paths along with techniques like hold portal and dropping food or treasure in order to extricate themselves from situations beyond their capabilities. It also offers the referee the ability to naturally restock, change, and add features (a secret stair to the newly completed sixth level could be penciled into the dusty and unvisited area of the first level, for example).

The question which naturally follows the distribution of monsters is the distribution of treasure. The traditional guideline is that half of the encounter areas with monsters will have treasure. Additionally, one-sixth of the "empty" encounter areas will have treasure, although such unguarded treasure will, no doubt, be craftily hidden and perhaps long-forgotten or guarded by ancient traps or magic. Treasure guarded by monsters may or may not be hidden or trapped. If it includes magic items, those will often be carried or used by the creatures, of course.

A very important consideration, and one that impacts the size of the levels, is just how much treasure should be placed. In the vast majority of old-school D&D games, treasure is the main goal (i.e. the PCs are seeking fortune and glory), and will provide the bulk of the XP. A typical old school campaign might have 80% of the XP coming from treasure, and the remaining 20% coming from defeating monsters. So the amount of treasure you stock your dungeon with will impact how many experience points the PCs earn. You need to provide enough XP to allow them to progress.



For the first level, especially, keep in mind that it's likely that the PCs will "lose" XP through attrition. That is, PCs will loot treasure (and thus XP) from the dungeon, but then die in a later encounter. They'll also overlook some treasure, simply not finding it. They may acquire XP from unexpected sources or side-adventures outside the dungeon, as well, and they may also acquire XP from dipping down into the lower levels, so judging the "correct" amount of treasure (i.e. XP) to place is more of a loose art than a science.

I suggest taking the average XP required to advance for a party of around 5 PCs and using that as a guideline for the amount of treasure you should place. For example, if a first level party needs around 10,000 XP for everyone to advance to second level, you need at least 8,000 XP worth of treasure (i.e. 80% of the 10,000, with the balance coming from monsters). However, taking attrition and missed treasure into consideration, you probably need to at least double that amount. There are several approaches you can take, given this guideline. You can use the treasure tables from the rule books or from various collections of monster and treasure assortments to assist with the process. The exact distribution will vary, of course. If you have a first level of 100 rooms or encounter areas, you might end up with something like this:

20 areas with monsters and treasure

15 areas with monsters (no treasure)

15 areas with treasure (no monster)

50 areas without monsters or treasure



That would mean 35 treasures, varying in value from hoard-to-hoard, and with the more valuable caches well-hidden and possibly defended by tougher monsters or more dangerous traps. These would be the major encounter areas that most PCs will be seeking.

With some idea of the required treasure out of the way, attention must turn to the monsters that will be placed on the level. As with treasure, the rule book tables and additional monster and treasure assortments that are organized by level provide an extremely valuable tool for the referee. I don't suggest

simply rolling everything randomly, but rather using the tables as a springboard for your creativity. Also, examination of the traditional table will show that not all monsters on the first level of the dungeon are "first level" monsters. (Part of skillful old-school play being the ability to evaluate an encounter and know when to run.) The tables indicate a chance for more powerful and dangerous encounters, as well. The referee should choose a handful of monsters he wants to use, or a theme, and then perhaps use random rolls to "fill in" the gaps. When using random rolls, don't be afraid to discard results that don't work. However, one of the benefits of random rolls is their utility as a spur to your creativity. If you get a result that seems odd, don't immediately reject it; instead, give it some thought to see if you can imagine a way that such-and-such combination or situation would make some sense. You might be surprised to that this results in cool ideas and encounters that you might not have considered, otherwise. Lastly, don't feel bound by the monsters on the tables. The tables provide a useful measure for an "appropriate" encounter difficulty for a given level, but you can certainly swap-out monsters of similar difficulty and number. Another useful technique is "re-skinning" well known monsters, giving them a different appearance while using the same stats as the original.

In addition to the difficulty of the monsters, the referee should consider how forgiving to make their exact placement. For example, on the first level, it's likely that any given fight may seriously deplete a party of adventurers. Therefore, encounters on the first level of the dungeon might be fairly widely spaced, with small enclaves of monsters, rather than large lairs of closely-placed and coordinated groups. The larger and more coordinated groups are more properly placed on the lower levels. That's not to say that you can't have a well-coordinated lair on the first level, but if all the encounter areas on the level are well-coordinated and closely placed, it will be extremely difficult for a first level party.

When choosing monsters to populate a level, do not overlook the opportunity to introduce opposed factions, tension, and NPCs that might offer the chance for smart play, dialogue, and "politics" within the dungeon. A common criticism of dungeon-based play is that it lacks the sophistication and opportunities for interesting interaction and role-play that are present in cities and such. This doesn't have to be the case. There's no reason a dungeon, even a mythic underworld that operates according to its own rules, must be a random, non-sensical place of simplistic and one-dimensional play. The dungeon can be filled with just as much intrigue and opportunity for dialogue as the King's court; it's up to the players (and the referee, of course), to take advantages of those opportunities.

When considering the second, and deeper, levels, the referee can follow a similar approach for determining the number of monsters and the total value of the treasure. However, keep in mind that you will have less PC attrition as the characters increase in hit points and power, so you won't need to double the treasure, like you might on the upper levels. The first few levels will probably be fairly large, but deeper levels can often be smaller and less sprawling, although this is not a hard-and-fast rule.

I mentioned wandering monsters, earlier, in passing. In an old-school dungeon, the purpose of wandering monsters is to provide a challenge that helps encourage good play. Wandering monsters present a danger that drains resources (e.g. hit points, spells, magic items) from a party for very little or no reward (i.e. treasure). Since monsters are not worth much XP, compared to treasure, wandering monsters are something to be avoided. Smart players will try to avoid, evade, distract, or otherwise bypass wandering monsters. They don't want to spend their resources on wandering monsters, but rather on areas and encounters that will provide a larger reward. They will try to stay focused and avoid wasting time in the dungeon, since wandering monsters encountered are a function of time.

Wandering monsters are typically rolled from a table, by level. Often, the table will include a chance of a roll on a deeper-level's table, as well. I typically include the following elements in my wandering monster tables:

1. Strange or unexplained noises, smells, or events
2. Encounters with monsters from keyed areas on the level. Killing these monsters reduces the total number of monsters from that area.
3. Encounters with truly wandering monsters that are not from keyed areas. Killing these monsters does not reduce the total from keyed areas.
4. A chance for a roll on a harder table.

I also like to set up my wandering monster tables with a bell-shaped probability curve, so that I can divide them into results that are common, uncommon, rare, and very rare.

This brief treatment of old school dungeon creation barely scratches the surface. I have not mentioned anything about tricks, barely touched on traps, environmental hazards, puzzles, teleporters, light and darkness, air, water, fungus, factions, red herrings, sublevels, and a myriad of similar topics. However, I'm hopeful that this musing might

assist a referee contemplating the task of megadungeon creation, and help him on his way. For more advice and details, I highly recommend checking out the various old-school forums, which hold a great wealth of wisdom and experience on creating and running interesting and fun dungeons.

## **CONSIDERING OD&D?**

So you're thinking about trying OD&D? That's great! If you're experienced with other versions, I have some suggestions that might help you get the most of the system:

### **Approach it fresh**

Read the rules, and don't assume that you know how things work. There are differences that may surprise you.

### **Play it for what it is**

Don't try to make it into 3E (or whatever), approach it as its own game. If you find yourself saying "that's broken," consider that you may be looking at it from a completely different perspective than the original designers. Try to see how the rule could be interpreted in a way that doesn't seem broken. You might be surprised to find that it isn't broken, it's just operating under a different set of assumptions than you're used to. Embrace the design assumptions, and you'll enjoy the game more.

### **Restrain yourself**

This is related to "play it for what it is." First, let me state up front that part of what makes OD&D great is its openness and the ease with which it can be house-ruled and tweaked (in fact, some might argue that it demands house-rules). However, in the beginning you should try and keep your house rules to a minimum. Where you do house-rule (and you will), try to keep the changes small (q.v. Ability Scores & Bonuses). Develop understanding of the basics of the game and its "spirit" before making major changes or additions.

## **CRITICAL HITS**

I am not a huge fan of critical hit systems in D&D; I don't think they're a good fit, given the abstract nature of combat and damage. Also, since the referee gets to make many more rolls than the players, critical hit systems tend to favor the monsters/enemies, in the long run. Nevertheless, players enjoy a game-mechanic that rewards lucky and high rolls, so I do use critical hits in my OD&D game. (See the update, below.)

In deciding how to incorporate critical hits, I knew that I didn't want to add any additional rolls to combat. I also didn't want to start down the

"damage/bonus inflation" path that other versions of D&D have followed; I wanted to stay with the basic concept behind damage in OD&D (i.e. 6 points is enough to kill the average man). This led me directly to my house rule: on a natural 20 that hits, the attack does maximum damage. Thus, if you do 1-6 points of damage, and you roll a natural 20 that hits, you do a full 6 points of damage. This represents your "best shot." No additional rolls are required (in fact, you need one less roll than normal), and the results fit the idea of a critical hit while respecting the underlying philosophies of the game. Of course, critical successes imply that critical failures are possible, too, so on a natural 1 that misses, your enemy gets a free attack on you, or a referee-mandated mishap occurs (e.g. you drop your weapon, slip and fall, et cetera).



Another system I considered (but rejected due to the additional rolling, potential for excessive damage, and possible complexity), is "exploding" damage dice. The idea is that critical hits should be based on the damage roll, not the "to hit" roll, because the damage roll is what really determines how well you did. Thus, a maximum result on your damage roll would indicate a critical hit, and you get to

roll an extra damage die. If that one is maximum, too, you get to add another die roll, and so on. However, with a 1d6 damage die, that means roughly one in six damaging attacks will be a critical hit. That may be a bit high. If you were to use exploding dice, you might want to switch both damage dice and the basic hit die to 1d12 instead of 1d6; then only 8% of damaging attacks would be critical hits. Another variant is to halve the exploded die: thus, if you're rolling a 1d12 and get a 12, then you add a 1d6, then a 1d3, and then 1 point. While I think exploding dice are an interesting approach, I prefer the "max damage" approach, overall.

Addendum: After being on the receiving end of critical hits, the players in my OD&D game have voted to dispense with a critical hit system. I'm pleased with this development. My game no longer uses critical hits; it uses standard rolled damage.

## **DAMAGE & HIT POINTS**

In OD&D, hit points are an abstract measure of a PC's well-being and fitness for combat. Hit points include factors like physical well-being,

mental well-being or morale, how tired the PC is, how lucky he is, and even skill. As a PC takes damage, the declining hit points represent his resources being used up in combat. Not only is it physical damage, but it's also his muscles getting tired, sweat getting in his eyes, his breath running short, his resolve weakening, his reactions slowing, and his reserves of skill and luck being used. This means that the referee's description of combat should take these factors into account. Consider a 10th level Fighting Man with 50 hit points and a 1st level Fighting Man with 5 hit points. Each of these Fighting Men enters combat and each receives 6 points of damage from an enemy swordsman. This damage runs the 1st level Fighting Man through, killing him. However, the 10th level Fighting Man is still up, fighting, and not even terribly diminished. He's not really ten times as tough, physically, it's just that his superior luck and skill allowed him to evade or deflect the blow which would've killed a 1st level fighter. Instead of killing him, it just used up some of his resources.

In OD&D, a normal man has 1-6 hit points, and all weapons do 1-6 hit points of damage. In other words, the average man can be slain with a single damage roll from any weapon. This makes perfect sense given D&D's abstract system: a dagger thrust can kill you just as readily as a chop from a greataxe. When describing OD&D combat, I only describe severe or mortal wounds when the last 6 hit points are reached. Prior to that, damage is described as near-misses, parried blows that would've slain a lesser warrior, scratches, bruises, et cetera. This means that players can get a sense of how tough and skilled an enemy is by the effect their damage rolls have. If the PCs have dished out 14 points of damage, and I'm describing how the bad guy just got nicked on his forearm and is starting to sweat, they know that this guy has some serious hit points. On the other hand, if the first four points of damage they inflict opens a gaping, bleeding wound and their foe cries out in anguish, they know this probably isn't an 8th level superhero they're fighting.

(A common criticism of this view is that monsters do not seem to adhere to this concept, with monster hit points usually seeming to be a more direct reflection of physical capability to withstand damage. This never bothered me; I don't think monsters and PCs need to be built on or abide by exactly the same rules and concepts. As in many other areas, the referee should use his judgment on exactly what hit points represent for a given creature or situation.)

In my OD&D game, two-handed weapons roll two dice for damage, taking the larger of the two values as the actual damage inflicted. This gives some benefit to those PCs who choose to use a two-handed

weapon instead of carrying a shield. A similar rule applies to PCs fighting with a weapon in each hand.

Most monsters also do 1-6 points of damage, with exceptions being made for exceptionally large or strong creatures (using the damage values from Monsters & Treasure as a guide).

## **THE DUNGEON AS A MYTHIC UNDERWORLD**

There are many interpretations of "the dungeon" in D&D. OD&D, in particular, lends itself to a certain type of dungeon that is often called a "megadungeon" and that I usually refer to as "the underworld." There is a school of thought on dungeons that says they should have been built with a distinct purpose, should "make sense" as far as the inhabitants and their ecology, and shouldn't necessarily be the centerpiece of the game (after all, the Mines of Moria were just a place to get through). None of that need be true for a megadungeon underworld. There might be a reason the dungeon exists, but there might not; it might simply be. It certainly can, and perhaps should, be the centerpiece of the game. As for ecology, a megadungeon should have a certain amount of verisimilitude and internal consistency, but it is an underworld: a place where the normal laws of reality may not apply, and may be bent, warped, or broken. Not merely an underground site or a lair, not sane, the underworld gnaws on the physical world like some chaotic cancer. It is inimical to men; the dungeon, itself, opposes and obstructs the adventurers brave enough to explore it. For example, consider the OD&D approach to doors and to vision in the underworld:

Generally, doors will not open by turning the handle or by a push. Doors must be forced open by strength...Most doors will automatically close, despite the difficulty in opening them. Doors will automatically open for monsters, unless they are held shut against them by characters. Doors can be wedged open by means of spikes, but there is a one-third chance (die 5-6) that the spike will slip and the door will shut...In the underworld some light source or an infravision spell must be used. Torches, lanterns, and magic swords will illuminate the way, but they also allow monsters to "see" the users so that monsters will never be surprised unless coming through a door. Also, torches can be blown out by a strong gust of wind. Monsters are assumed to have permanent infravision as long as they are not serving some character. (The Underworld & Wilderness Adventures, pg 9)

Special Ability functions are generally as indicated in CHAINMAIL where not contradictory to the information stated hereinafter, and it is generally true that any monster or man can see in total darkness as far

as the dungeons are concerned except player characters. (Monsters & Treasure, pg 5)



Notice that all characters, including those which can see in normal darkness (e.g. elves, dwarves)<sup>3</sup>, require a light source in the underworld, while all denizens of the place possess infravision or the ability to see in total darkness. Even more telling, a monster that enters the service of a character loses this special vision. Similarly, characters must force their way through doors and have difficulty keeping them open; however, these same doors automatically open for monsters. This is a clear example of how the normal rules do not apply to the underworld, and how the underworld, itself, works against the characters exploring it.

Of course, none of this demands that every dungeon need be a mythic underworld; there could be natural caves and delved dungeon sites that are not in the "underworld" category, and follow more natural laws. Nevertheless, the central dungeon of the campaign benefits from the strange other-worldliness that characterizes a mythic underworld.

A mythic underworld should not be confused with the concept of the "underdark." The underdark concept is that of an underground wilderness composed of miles of caves, tunnels, delved sites, and even whole underground cities. This is a cool fantasy concept, but is distinct from the concept of a mythic underworld that obeys its own laws and is weird, otherworldly, and apart from the natural order of things. (There is no reason a referee couldn't join the two concepts of underworld and underdark, though.)

Some common characteristics and philosophies for a mythic underworld or megadungeon (keep these in mind when creating your dungeon):

1. It's big, and has many levels; in fact, it may be endless

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<sup>3</sup> This ability is not specified in the three brown books, but is found in [Chainmail](#).



2. It follows its own ecological and physical rules
3. It is not static; the inhabitants and even the layout may grow or change over time
4. It is not linear; there are many possible paths and interconnections
5. There are many ways to move up and down through the levels
6. Its purpose is mysterious or shrouded in legend
7. It's inimical to those exploring it
8. Deeper or farther levels are more dangerous
9. It's a (the?) central feature of the campaign

If you embrace these concepts, you'll be playing OD&D according to some of the original assumptions of the game. And boy, is it fun.

## **ESSENTIAL & RECOMMENDED MATERIAL**

### **Essentials**

OD&D Rules (the three little/brown books)

Dice

### **Highly Recommended**

Chainmail

Judges Guild Ready Ref Sheets, Volume I

Monster & Treasure Assortment Sets One-Three

Best of Dragon Magazine Volume I

Fight On! Magazine

### **Recommended for Inspiration**

Supplement I: Greyhawk

Supplement II: Blackmoor

Supplement III: Eldritch Wizardy

Supplement IV: Gods, Demigods, & Heroes

Judges Guild First Fantasy Campaign

Judges Guild Dungeonmaster Compendium

Empire of the Petal Throne

Obviously, the only real essential is the OD&D rules. However, Chainmail is valuable for filling in gaps in the combat rules, including things like missile ranges, rates of fire, initiative, et cetera (and some OD&D referees even use Chainmail's man-to-man system instead of the OD&D "alternate" combat system). Early issues of Dragon magazine are also filled with a wealth of information and inspiration, and give you a window into how the game was played and developed. Best of the Dragon, Volume I collects some of the choice articles. If you can find a copy of the Dragon CD-ROM archive, that's even better. The

Judges Guild Ready Ref Sheets, Volume I are a fantastic resource, filled with charts and tables similar to the appendices in the 1E Dungeon Masters Guide. Another incredibly useful resource is the Monster & Treasure Assortments; these are tables of dungeon encounters and dungeon treasures for levels 1 through 9. They offer referees a handy guide for stocking dungeons. And don't forget about Fight On! magazine, which is a currently in print periodical that focuses on OD&D and old-school gaming. I'm very impressed by the first issue; you can really tell it's a labor of love that is being put together by people who are enthusiastic about the game.

Supplements I-IV are, of course, interesting and potentially useful as a source of inspiration and house-rules. If you use them, I suggest picking and choosing, rather than simply adopting everything in them. Much of the material in them were additions and house-rules from various individual campaigns. The Judges Guild First Fantasy Campaign is similar; it's a book which details Dave Arneson's Blackmoor campaign, including dungeon maps and a rough key for the Blackmoor dungeon. Tita's House of Games offers a reprint of the original Empire of the Petal Throne, which is a game with rules derived from OD&D, as a starting point (also, a PDF, and world and Jakálla city maps are available from RPGNow). Empire of the Petal Throne is another excellent example of how individuals adapted OD&D for their own games. (It also includes some interesting rules additions or interpretations that could be applied directly to OD&D (e.g. the 'roll all your hit dice when you advance a level' rule). Lastly, The Dungeoneer was a magazine put out by Judges Guild. They published a Compendium of the first six issues which has some interesting inspirational material (e.g. I love the article on magic which describes how spellcasting works, calls Supplement I "almost canon," and ends by saying that you may have worked out your own system for handling spellcasting, so feel free to ignore the article...), but especially the great adventure, "Night of the Walking Wet."

## **EXPERIENCE & ADVANCEMENT**

The OD&D rules specify two ways characters acquire experience points: defeating monsters and obtaining treasure. Experience awards are adjusted by modifiers from the PC's prime requisite scores and by relative levels (e.g. an 6th level PC facing a 3rd level threat will only gain 1/2 of the normal experience award), although never above a 1:1 ratio (e.g. a 1st level PC facing a 3rd level threat does not gain three times the normal experience). Treasure awards 1 XP for every 1 GP value. Defeated monsters award 100 XP per hit die. Note that this is a big difference from the way later editions award experience for monsters. OD&D Supplement I offered a new system (adopted by later

editions) with much smaller awards, and even called the original award scheme "ridiculous." However, I don't find it ridiculous. The original XP award scheme tends to advance PCs through the low levels more rapidly than the Greyhawk method, but slows down in the higher levels. I like that effect. The original XP award scheme also has the benefit of being drop-dead simple.

My first OD&D campaign used the Greyhawk awards, when it began. However, I've switched all my OD&D games to the original method. PCs tend to advance at a faster rate, but so far that's working out fine; we don't play as often as the Lake Geneva groups back in the 70s, so the faster advancement hasn't been a problem. Also, I treat the 100xp per hit die formula as a guideline which can be varied, not a rule set in stone.

Many gamers sneer at the notion of awarding XP for treasure, preferring goal or story-based awards and similar schemes. I see their point, but I don't find XP awards for treasure objectionable. On the contrary, I see it as a story award. I also see it as a convenient abstraction, much like hit points. Does it make sense that a magic user gains experience by hauling loot out of the ground? Nope. Does it work well in the context of the game? Absolutely. If a given adventure doesn't include much (or any) treasure, then I'll substitute some other form of "story award," instead, but in most cases using treasure works just fine.

Like all the older editions, OD&D uses different XP advancement tables for the various classes. That is, fighting men require 2000 XP to advance to second level, while magic users require 2500 XP, and clerics only need 1500 XP. This is one way that OD&D addresses class balance, rather than using a universal advancement table and attempting to make the power-level of each class equal at every level. Some gamers object to this approach, but I like having a different dynamic for different classes (q.v. my comments about magic users and vancian magic). I object to the idea that a "universal advancement / equal power-level" approach works better (a claim I often hear). In practice, I think that approach is difficult to pull off, especially if the powers are variable (e.g. feats or powers that are chosen by the player); you inevitably end up with this-or-that combination being unbalanced, or this class being too powerful, or this power being "broken," or whatever. Perfect balance is a questing beast that forever eludes those who pursue it. Both approaches have drawbacks, and both approaches can achieve a sort of "ballpark balance." While either approach works, I prefer the unhomogenized flavor the OD&D

approach offers; I think it's okay — even interesting — for the classes to have different power curves.

When advancing a level, I do not require that a PC train, but I do require the PC to return to a safe area before leveling up; you can't advance a level while in the dungeon, for example.

## **GAZE ATTACKS**

OD&D referees vary in their approach to gaze attacks. I prefer to think of these as gaze effects, rather than attacks, since they fall outside the scope of normal attacks. Indeed, no attack roll is needed; all that is required is that victim look into the eyes of the medusa, basilisk, vampire, or other monster with one of these deadly abilities. Instead of an attack roll, the mechanic for handling gaze effects is the saving throw. I look on saving throws as a "last chance" or a "disaster avoidance." That is, your character is in a disastrous situation, but he gets a chance to slip out of circumstances which would spell doom for most men. Consequently, I look on the save vs. gaze effects as "gaze avoidance" rather than "gaze resistance." Meeting the gaze means certain doom; the saving throw determines whether the character met the gaze at all. If he did, he suffers its effects; if not, then he is safe.

A monster with a gaze effect forces characters facing it to roll a saving throw each round, as follows:

- Complete Surprise -2 penalty
- Surprise -1 penalty
- Viewing Monster No modifier
- Attacking Normally +3 bonus
- Avoiding Gaze +6 bonus
- Blindfold/Eyes Closed No save required, but combat penalties apply (e.g. -4 to hit/+4 to be hit)

The referee should adjust these modifiers to suit the exact monster and circumstances under consideration.

## **HELMETS**

OD&D lists helmets among the items your PC can purchase, but no game mechanic benefit is mentioned. This implies that helmets are assumed, and would thus just be part of your overall AC. However, this raises the question, "what about when you don't wear a helmet?" Obviously, an enemy facing an armored man with a bare head will try to hit the bare head, but also wouldn't pass up any opportunities to hit armored parts of the body, as well. On the other hand, the bare-headed warrior would obviously know his head was vulnerable, and would try to

protect it. In keeping with D&D's abstract system of combat, I apply the following house rule to this situation:

Wearing a suit of armor (i.e. doesn't include "shield only") without a helmet grants attackers a +1 bonus to the attack roll. (I followed the OD&D practice where an armor bonus/penalty applies to the enemy's attack roll rather than to the PC's armor class.)<sup>4</sup>

Wearing a helmet while otherwise unarmored grants no mechanical benefit to AC, and no penalty to an attackers "to hit" roll. (To grant such a benefit would be to equate the protective value of a helmet with that of a shield, and I don't think that's the case. In a melee, I'd want a helmet and a shield, but if I had to pick just one, I'd take the shield.) Even though an otherwise unarmored man gains no normal benefit from a helmet, it still might be worthwhile in some situations. For example, if kobolds are dumping baskets of stones down from a cliff top, the referee might rule that a helmet will halve any damage the PC takes. If green slime falls on the PC's head, wearing a helm would offer some benefit. Et cetera.

## **HIT DICE**

In OD&D, six points of damage is enough to kill an average man (q.v. Damage & Hit Points). The original rules use a d6 as the basic hit die for all PCs and monsters, granting modifiers (e.g. +1) or additional hit dice (e.g. 2d6) as levels increased. In my first OD&D campaign, I used the system introduced in the Greyhawk supplement (and the Holmes rules), where each class gets its own hit die type (e.g. d8 for Fighting Men, d6 for Clerics, d4 for Magic Users, etc.), and monsters use 1d8 as their base hit die.

Addendum: My current OD&D campaigns do not use these values, above. Instead, they use the original hit die progression from the Three Little Books, for both PCs and monsters. PCs roll all of their hit dice each time they advance a level; if the new hit point total is less than the old total, the old total will be retained. If they lose a level, they roll all their hit dice for the lower level; if the new total is greater than the old total, the old total is retained. Thus, a Fighting Man who has advanced to 2nd level rolls 2d6, and takes whichever is greater: his current total or his new roll. When he advances to 3rd level, he rolls 3d6 and takes the higher of his current total or his roll, and so on. This is quite different from the way hit points accrue in later editions, but it works well with the unique hit die values of OD&D.

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<sup>4</sup> This practice helps to preserve the concept of AC as armor type, which can be significant if you use the weapon vs. AC adjustments from the Greyhawk Supplement.

## **INITIATIVE & THE COMBAT SEQUENCE**

OD&D does not define rules for initiative (or a combat round sequence, for that matter), leaving the matter for the referee to resolve. Common solutions include importing the rules from Chainmail or from later versions of D&D. Using the turn sequence from Swords & Spells is another possibility (more on this, below).

I've often kept initiative and the combat sequence nebulous and flexible. First, intentions are declared. Next, the referee adjudicates the action. It is often obvious that certain actions will be faster/go first. Where there is some question, the referee can use relative Dex values or weapons used to make a judgment call, or he can request initiative checks. Often, a combat will begin without using initiative rolls, but once the general chaos of melee begins, initiative rolls will begin to be more common. (Also see Robert Fisher's thoughts on dynamic combat in classic D&D.)



Lately, however, I've desired a more defined approach. I wanted a sequence that made use of miniatures and tactical positioning, accounted for different spell-casting times (similar to the use of segments in AD&D), and accounted for the traditional rates-of-fire D&D lists for some missile weapons. I found a possible answer in a Knights & Knaves Alehouse forum post by T. Foster, who suggested using the combat sequence from Swords & Spells with OD&D. I found this appealing. The system provided the elements I sought, worked well with other traditional D&D elements like weapon reach and disengaging/retreat, and springs directly from the Chainmail roots of the game. While designed with the use of miniatures in mind, the system is easily modified for use without minis (see the Knights & Knaves discussion).

### **Detailed Combat Sequence**

1. Initiative: Both sides roll 1d6 for initiative; high roll wins.
2. Missile/spell: In initiative order, both sides fire missiles, cast spells, etc.
3. Movement: Side with initiative moves up to half move
4. Movement: Side without initiative moves up to half move

5. Missile/spell: In initiative order, both sides fire missiles, cast spells, etc.
6. Movement: Side without initiative moves the remaining half move
7. Movement: Side with initiative moves the remaining half move
8. Missile/Spell: Unengaged combatants fire missile, cast spells, etc.
9. Melee: Engaged combatants fight one round of melee.

#### Rules for Missile/Ranged Attacks

- Archers standing still may fire twice (in phase 2 or 5, and phase 8)
- Archers taking a half-move may fire once (in phase 2 or 8). However, archers with split-move-and-fire ability (e.g. elves, mounted archers) that take a half-move may fire once in a missile phase of their choice (2, 5, or 8).
- Archers taking a full-move may not fire. However, archers with split-move-and-fire ability (e.g. elves, mounted archers), may take a full-move and fire once in phase 5, only.
- Slingers standing still may fire once (in phase 2, 5, or 8)
- Slingers taking a half-move may fire once (in phase 2 or 8).
- Slingers taking a full-move may not fire.
- Crossbowmen standing still may fire once (in phase 2 or 5) and reload<sup>5</sup>
- Crossbowmen standing still may reload\* and fire once (in phase 5 or 8).
- Crossbowmen taking a half-move may fire once (in phase 2 or 8) or reload\*
- Crossbowmen taking a full-move may reload\*, but may not fire
- Combatants hurling spears, axes, or hammers may fire once (in phase 2, 5, or 8) and take a full-move, including charge, if desired.
- Combatants hurling daggers or javelins may fire once (in phase 2, 5, or 8) and take a full-move with charge.
- Combatants hurling daggers or javelins may fire twice (in phase 2 or 5, and phase 8) and take a full-move without charge.

#### Rules for Spellcasting

- A spell caster cannot move and cast a spell in the same round.

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<sup>5</sup> Heavy crossbowmen require a full round (with no movement) to reload.

- A spell caster may not cast a spell while engaged in melee. If the caster becomes engaged while casting, but before the spell is finished, the spell is interrupted and lost.
- A spell caster may cast a maximum of one spell per round.
- Casting time for spells depends on the level and type of spell

1st-2nd level spells, Power Words, Holy Words, Word of Recall, Devices, Innate Abilities

IMMEDIATE/NO DELAY

3rd-6th level spells, 1st-2nd level scrolls

+1 SPELL PHASE

7th-9th level spells, 3rd-6th level scrolls

FULL ROUND

7th-9th level scrolls

FULL ROUND + 1 SPELL PHASE

### Rules for Melee & Movement

(Also see Movement in Combat and the Table of Movement Rates)

- Combatants who take a full-move may not engage in melee unless they charge.
- Combatants are considered engaged in melee when the distance between them is equal to or less than the longest reach (e.g. weapon reach, et cetera). Alternatively, this may be simplified to 10 ft.
- A moving combatant who becomes engaged may not leave engagement or continue movement to the flanks or rear of his opponent during the initial round of engagement. A combatant not already engaged in melee may move a maximum of 5' right or left in order to confront and contact an enemy attempting to bypass or move into a flanking position.
- If one combatant in a melee has allies to his immediate left or right which are not engaged with other enemies, these allies may move into flanking positions against their common enemy after the first round of melee.
- Flanking position grants a +1 bonus to hit and negates any benefit from the target's shield.
- Rear positioning grants a +2 bonus to hit, and negates any benefit from the target's shield.
- Disengage: a combatant with a clear path (i.e. through an area out of enemy reach) may attempt to disengage with up to a half-move.



- Retreat: a combatant may retreat from melee with movement in excess of a half-move. However, he loses the benefit of his shield, and his opponent gets a free attack with a +2 bonus to hit.

### Background

This combat sequence is a slightly modified version of the combat rules in *Swords & Spells* (which is based on the original Chainmail medieval miniature combat rules). I find these rules satisfying for a number of reasons. First, they use precise positioning and miniatures to give a tactical feel to combat. Second, they provide a simple way to include spell casting times into the combat. Third, they provide rules for firing multiple missiles in a combat round. Fourth, I like the way movement is divided up so that opposing forces "meet in the middle" rather than one side closing all the distance on their turn. Lastly, I like the way these rules pull together and work with concepts from D&D (rate of fire, weapon reach, facing, spell-casting time, et cetera), and that they are firmly rooted in the traditional sources of the game. Special thanks to T. Foster (and his posts on the Knights & Knaves Alehouse forums) for the suggestion to use this sequence with OD&D, and for his assistance and advice in compiling and adapting these rules for man-to-man combat.

For those who prefer a lighter set of rules to govern combat, or who do not use miniatures, a simplified version of these rules may suffice.

### Simple Combat Sequence

1. Both sides roll 1d6 for initiative; high roll wins.
2. Winning side fires missiles, starts spells (and finishes spells of level 1-2)
3. Losing side fires missiles, starts spells (and finishes spells of level 1-2)
4. Both sides move
5. Spells that were started in 2-3 take effect; archers who didn't move and haven't been engaged in melee may fire again
6. Melee

Obviously, this simplified version of the full combat sequence may require some interpretation and adjudication by the referee. I suggest using the details of the full sequence to inform and assist in making such judgments.

### LEVEL SCALING

By default, OD&D does not have any upper-boundary on PC levels, and this is how I currently run my games (see the Addendum, below).

However, when I first started running OD&D, I applied de facto level limits for all PCs, as a "soft boundary." Under this scheme, an average "normal" man is a 0-level character with 1d6 hit points. A 1st level PC has more skill and experience than average. A 4th to 7th level PC is a heroic figure with a reputation. An 8th to 10th level PC is a superheroic and legendary figure like Conan or John Carter. Thus, 10th level is the de facto level limit in my game, and all PCs and NPCs can be gauged against the scale. Note that I called 10th level a de facto limit, rather than a de jure limit. Levels above 10th are possible under this scheme, but extraordinary circumstances are required for this type of advancement.

Individuals who advance beyond 10th level are always driven and focused, and they may be obsessed or insane in one way or another. Attaining such power always requires sacrifices of some sort, and usually requires magical aid (e.g. longevity, lichdom, etc.) or supernatural aid from divine or infernal powers. Thus, 10th level defines a "mortal limit," and those who force their way past this barrier are risking much to do so (perhaps even their humanity). It is no accident that there are so many stories of insane arch-mages or demon-ridden anti-heroes that find their power has been bought at terrible cost.

Setting a scale like this can help the referee put his campaign world into perspective, and helps in setting the power-level of any NPC or creature he devises. Also, this scale has some history behind it. OD&D grew out of the Chainmail miniatures combat game, and a "Hero" had the fighting capability of four men (i.e. fourth level), while a "Superhero" had the fighting capability of eight men (i.e. eighth level). The 1-10 scale also makes demihuman level limits more palatable for players, since the demihuman limits top-out at the low-end of "high level." Under this scheme, demihumans have the following level limits:

Dwarf: 7th lvl. Fighting Man

Elf: 4th lvl. Fighting Man / 6th level Magic User

Hobbit: 4th lvl. Fighting Man / 6th level Thief

Addendum: I've been giving additional thought to level scales, and am wondering if even the "soft boundary" of a de facto level cap is necessary. I still think 10th level or so should be a peak/stopping point of sorts, but realized that the standard approach to levels already does this with its concept of "name level," where hit dice stop accruing. Name level is a sort of "soft boundary," already, it's just up to the referee to model his campaign with that level scale in mind.

## **MAGIC ARMOR & SHIELDS**

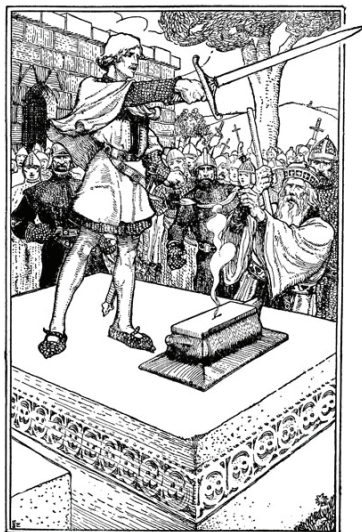
OD&D has distinctive rules for handling magical armor and shields. Unlike later editions (with the exception of Holmes), the magical bonus is not added to the PC's armor class, but is subtracted from the enemy's "hit dice" (usually interpreted as meaning the enemy's "to hit" roll, when using the "alternate" combat system). This is a distinction which helps to preserve the concept of armor class as a "class" or "type," rather than merely an indication of how hard it is to hit the PC. Also, the magical bonuses from armor and shield do not stack. Instead, the rules stipulate that if the shield's bonus is superior, there is a one in three chance that the shield's bonus should be used against a given attack roll.

I like the concept of magical bonuses from armor and shield not stacking, as it assists in moderating the tendency towards bonus inflation in the system. However, I dislike the 1/3 chance for the shield's bonus to apply; I think that introduces an unnecessary complication. In my OD&D games, I've house-ruled this aspect of magical armor and shields, such that the PC simply enjoys the higher of the two bonuses in any situation where the shield could reasonably be applied (e.g. face-to-face melee).

Lastly, note that elves can cast spells while wearing magic armor, but not while wearing non-magical armor.

## **MAGIC SWORDS**

The OD&D rules for magical swords are different from those in later versions of the game. In OD&D, magic swords grant their bonus as a bonus "to hit," but they do not grant a bonus to damage unless they have a bonus against a special category of enemy. For example, a sword +1 grants a +1 to all attack rolls, but nothing to damage rolls. A sword +1, +3 vs. dragons grants a +3 to attack and damage rolls against dragons, but +1 to attack and +0 to damage against other foes. Note that this is not true for other kinds of magic weapons. A war hammer +1, for example, grants a +1 to hit and +1 damage against all enemies.



The OD&D rules assume that magical swords are truly special items; for whatever reason (up to the referee), there is something unique about them that sets them apart from other magical weapons. ALL magical swords possess intelligence and alignment. Many magical swords will be able to communicate, and some will possess personality and ego. Some will possess potent magical powers that they will pass on to their wielder. Some will have specific purposes they will attempt to fulfill. In OD&D, a magical sword can be both boon and bane, and every magical sword the PCs find will be viewed cautiously, at first. Even picking up a magical sword can be dangerous, as touching a weapon of the "wrong" alignment will cause damage. Even like-aligned swords can be perilous, as a high-ego weapon can overwhelm and dominate its wielder, in certain situations. In my OD&D game, magic swords tend to prefer Fighting Men over Thieves, so while Thieves can technically wield a magic sword, the thief is likely to have "difficulties" with his weapon.

I love these rules. First, they make magic swords remarkable; there is no "run of the mill +1 sword" in my OD&D game. Second, they model the way magic swords are described in fiction, and I like bringing that kind of outlook to the game. Who could forget blades like Stormbringer, Excalibur, Andúril, or Terminus Est? What warrior of mettle would pass up the chance to carry a dwarf-forged blade, even at the risk of coming under its fey influence? Also, the special status of magical swords suggests all sorts of plot elements and questions. Why do all magical swords possess intelligence? Why swords, only? Perhaps the answer to these questions are a mystery, even to those who forge and enchant the blades. Perhaps "sword cults" have grown up, driven not just by a warrior ethos, but also by the fact that there is something unique about magical swords. The whole thing puts a new spin on the "riddle of steel."

## **MOVEMENT IN COMBAT**

The default OD&D rules assume a one minute combat round, but leave movement rules ambiguous (probably assuming referees would adapt rules from Chainmail). The encumbrance rules give leather armor (light) a move of 12", chainmail (heavy) a move of 9", and plate mail (armored) a move of 6". However, the OD&D rules don't follow these rates for dwarves and elves (with dwarves in chain + shield moving at 6" and elves in chain moving at 12"), suggesting these races have lower and higher base movement rates, respectively. I've adopted the following rates (light/heavy/armored):

- Humans 12" 9" 6"
- Elves 15" 12" 6"

- Dwarves 9" 6" 3"
- Hobbits 9" 6" 3"

Note that the movement rates I'm using for elves would probably be considered non-standard, by most. I like the idea of fleet-footed elves, so I grant them an unencumbered rate of 15" (quite fast) and a rate of 12" when wearing chain. However, I don't like the idea of an armored elf (i.e. wearing plate mail) being faster than a human, so I make them equal, there. This is just my interpretation. It would probably be more "by-the-book" to give elves the same movement rates as humans (i.e. 12"/9"/6"), assuming that the elves' movement rate in chain reflected the use of unencumbering elven chain, which would be considered "light" instead of "heavy."

My OD&D games use a 10-12 second combat round, so I needed to convert the movement rates, above, into distances at that tactical/encounter scale. After making calculations based on 4.5 feet-per-second average walking pace, I came to the conclusion that the B/X rule of encounter speed equalling movement rate divided by three is a reasonable (and convenient) approximation. Thus:

- 24" 80' per round (160' per round charge)
- 21" 70' per round (140' per round charge)
- 18" 60' per round (120' per round charge)
- 15" 50' per round (100' per round charge)
- 12" 40' per round (80' per round charge)
- 9" 30' per round (60' per round charge)
- 6" 20' per round (40' per round charge)
- 3" 10' per round (20' per round charge)

## **MOVEMENT WHILE EXPLORING**

OD&D handles movement while exploring the dungeon in ten minute turns. A character gets two moves (calculated in feet) during a ten minute turn. (Note that this is different from some later editions, which give a single move during a ten minute turn.) Thus, a man in plate mail (move of 6"), would move 60 ft. x 2, or 120 ft. This assumes cautious, exploratory movement and mapping; flight or pursuit situations allow faster movement (i.e. double), but no mapping.

The Holmes Basic rulebook offers an interesting variation. It uses the OD&D rates (e.g. a man in plate mail moves 120 ft. in a turn, while exploring), but gives a double movement rate to "normal movement" (i.e. not cautious/no mapping), and a triple movement rate to flight or pursuit. It also stipulates that a "heavy load" halves the movement rate.

Thus, a fully armored man with a heavy load of gear/treasure will move 60 ft. per turn while exploring.

## **MULTIPLE ATTACKS**

Multiple attacks by a single PC occur infrequently in OD&D; normally, a PC will only get a single melee attack roll per round.<sup>6</sup> A major exception to this rule is Fighting Men in melee with opponents of 1HD or less. A Fighting Man who is in a melee where all his engaged foes are 1HD or less may make a number of melee attacks equal to his level. Thus, a Hero (4th level) battling a group of goblins may attack four times in a single round. A Superhero (8th level) facing the same goblins would attack eight times each round! I see this as OD&D's "mow down the mooks" rule; a higher level Fighting Man is a force that normal men rightly fear.

Note that even a single higher HD opponent in the melee will negate this ability, being a more skilled or dangerous threat that demands the high-level Fighting Man's attention. This is a great boon for PC henchmen and hirelings, since it allows even a Veteran (i.e. a 1st level Fighting Man has 1+1 HD) to prevent the massacre of weaker party members when confronted by a dangerous foe (such as an evil Hero). This rule has its origin in Chainmail's concept of fantastic vs. non-fantastic melee (and its use is illustrated in the OD&D FAQ originally published in the Strategic Review). Since monsters in Chainmail's non-fantastic melee get multiple attacks, I extend the multiple attacks to monsters in OD&D, as well. That is, an Ogre attacking a group of normal men will attack four times. However, if there's a Veteran guard amongst those men, the combat is considered fantastic, and the Ogre is limited to a single attack.

(This rule also exists for Fighters in AD&D, but was modified to only work against enemies of less than 1HD. I speculate that this may have been done because a 1st level Fighter in AD&D is considered a 1HD foe, where a 1st level Fighting Man in OD&D is considered a 1+1HD foe.)

## **PLAYER SKILL VS. PC SKILL**

The original OD&D rules do not include a defined skill system. As a result, OD&D sometimes calls on the player to use his own skills and

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<sup>6</sup> This is also true of monsters. In the three brown books, most monsters get a single attack in fantastic combat, rather than an attack routine (e.g. claw/claw/bite). The single attack roll represents their entire attack routine. This includes monsters like ghouls and trolls, which get multiple attacks in later supplements and editions. In three brown book OD&D, only very special monsters like multi-headed hydras get more than one attack in fantastic combat.

creativity when adventuring. This is a different approach than many gamers are used to, and running with it can take some adjustment if you're in the habit of handling all PC actions with some sort of skill system that models that PC's capabilities. Some players don't like the idea at all, arguing that the game should be testing their PC's capabilities, not their own: relying on player skill goes against the idea of the character. They have a point, but I think there is room for a different approach in role-playing. It boils down to the fact that relying on player skill for some situations is fun. I think it also encourages thinking outside the box, and immersion in the situation the character is in.

Consider the following observation from Mike Mearls (a lead developer for 4E D&D):

I think that OD&D's open nature makes the players more likely to accept things in the game as elements of fiction, rather than as game elements. The players reacted more by thinking "What's the logical thing for an adventurer to do?" rather than "What's the logical thing to do according to the rules?"

OD&D and D&D 4 are such different games that they cater to very different needs. For me, in OD&D things are fast, loose, and improvised...[OD&D players] are probably more likely to accept...a game that requires a bit more deductive reasoning (I disable a trap by wedging an iron spike into the lever that activates it) as opposed to D&D 4 (I disable a trap by finding the lever then making a skill check).

I think Mike nails it when he says OD&D's approach caters to a different need than the skill-based approach used in some other editions. If you've never tried running D&D without skills, I encourage you to give it a shot. It might be different from what you're used to, but it's fun.

## **ROSE COLORED GLASSES**

For some reason, when I tell other gamers I'm playing OD&D (or AD&D, or B/X, et cetera), I often hear comments about my "nostalgia" or my "rose colored glasses." I find this both odd and annoying. The idea behind "rose colored glasses" is that your perception is being altered, and that you aren't seeing things as they truly are. If you're "looking back through rose colored glasses," it means that you're not seeing clearly, with the implication that time has tricked your memory, making the past seem better than it actually was. You only see the

good stuff through the rose colored glasses. So this is a neat turn of phrase, a flippanant dismissal of any fond feelings for older editions like OD&D. Nevertheless, while glib, the phrase doesn't apply to me and my enthusiasm for OD&D.

Rose colored glasses only "work" when you're looking back on an experience. Once you actually go back and experience it, again, the glasses stop working. At that point, the experience must stand or fall on its own merits (or lack thereof). I'm not looking back fondly on OD&D, I'm currently playing it. When I say I like it, it's not because rose colored glasses have skewed my perception of the past; it's because I like the experience I'm currently having. Rose colored glasses? Nope.

## **SCROLLS**

My OD&D game had its roots in a game using the Holmes Basic rules, and consequently includes an uncommon rule for handling scroll creation. Typical old-school D&D campaigns don't allow characters to create scrolls until around 7th level. However, the Holmes Basic rules allow magic users of all levels to create scrolls, provided that the magic user pays the cost (100gp per level of spell), takes the time (1 week per level of spell), and can cast the spell to begin with (i.e. it's in his spell-book). The Holmes rules do not explicitly cover the creation of clerical scrolls (although they do mention the existence of clerical scrolls); nevertheless, I extend the same capability to clerics. The ability to create scrolls gives low-level casters some additional power, which can be desirable or not, depending on your view. However, in practice, the ability to create scrolls can still be regulated by the referee, thus avoiding "scroll proliferation" in the campaign. As referee, I keep scrolls from getting out of hand by:

Enforcing the relative inconvenience of scrolls. That is, they're delicate to transport, you have to get them out when you need them, you can't get them wet, you need light to use them, et cetera.

Having scroll-spells take longer to cast (q.v. Initiative and the Combat Sequence)

Strictly enforcing the time required to create them. While the PCs are making scrolls, events in the campaign continue to march on and develop.

Controlling the abstraction-level of the material requirements. The 100gp per level cost is an abstraction that represents the rare and costly materials that go into making a scroll: for example, the highest quality media, giant squid ink, powdered gems, a quill from the feathers



of a fantastic creature, components from various monsters, et cetera. The referee can add detail to this abstract requirement, at his option. An easy way to do this is to rule that a required component is unavailable for purchase, and must be obtained through some other method (typically an adventure). For clerical scrolls, this might mean a special pilgrimage, or an adventure to acquire the materials for a special offering.

Clerical scrolls possess some unique characteristics. In my OD&D game, clerical scrolls are prayers associated with a certain alignment or deity. They are not written in "magical language" like magic user scrolls, but rather in a "normal" language which could be the vernacular or perhaps a church-specific variant of an alignment tongue. Anyone who is capable of reading the language can glean the function of a clerical scroll, but only clerics can invoke the spells therein. Even then, a cleric may not wish to invoke the prayers if the scroll is oriented towards an alignment, deity, or ethos which is antithetical to his own. He may do so, but should be prepared to face any consequences that might arise (within the church hierarchy or in his relationship with his deity, et cetera).

## **SPELL SPECIAL EFFECTS**

In my OD&D game, spell-casters enjoy the capability to produce minor magical effects related to the spells they have currently memorized. For example, a magic user who has fireball memorized might be able to



light his pipe with a small flame from his thumb, or make smoke come from his ears when annoyed. A sorceress with gust of wind memorized might have her hair constantly blowing in an otherwise non-existent breeze. Using a special effect does not cast or use up the spell it is related to; they're not so much "spells" as they are tangible evidence that the magic user has a spell memorized. I do not codify these effects, but rather rely on the players to suggest or request an effect, which I then approve or deny. While I do not have a hard-and-fast rule against special effects that have a mechanical game effect, special effects are always minor, cantrip-like effects.

I like this house-rule for several reasons. First, it adds to the weird otherworldliness of magic users, and I love weird and fantastic

elements in my D&D game. Second, it gives low-level magic users something arcane and archetype-supporting to do without using up their memorized spells or abandoning the concept of Vancian magic. Third, it's just cool to play a wizard that can make his eyes glow, or make his smoke rings come out different colors, or whatever. I know that players enjoy the special effects, and also enjoy trying to figure out what spells an NPC caster has based upon what his special effects reveal. The only real danger is allowing effects which are too potent, which could erode the feel of the Vancian magic system. It's up to the referee to make that call on a case-by-case basis.

## **SURPRISE**

My OD&D game uses a house-ruled system of surprise that draws on the wyvern surprise example on pages 8-9 of *The Underworld & Wilderness Adventures*, the additional combat rules in *Eldritch Wizardry*, and the AD&D surprise rules. There are two categories of surprise: normal surprise and complete surprise. Normal surprise allows unsurprised enemies a single action. Complete surprise allows unsurprised enemies two actions (or a surprised enemy one action).

<u>Die Roll</u>	<u>Result</u>
1	Surprise (1 action)
2	Complete Surprise (2 actions)
3-6	No Surprise

Examples of an action include closing to striking range (if necessary), making a melee attack, nocking and firing an arrow from a bow, firing a loaded crossbow, et cetera. Spells may be started as a surprise action. Whether they take effect prior to the start of the normal round depends on the circumstances. Spells of 1st-2nd level, Power Words, Holy Words, Word of Recall, Devices, and innate abilities take effect immediately. Other spells take effect in their normal place within the round. As always, the caster may cast only one spell during the round, regardless of surprise.

The table, above, gives the results for the standard surprise situation. Circumstances may modify this. For example, some monsters surprise on 3 in 6, rather than 2 in 6. In this case, a roll of 3 would indicate the monsters are allowed three surprise actions. Similarly, some monsters or characters might only be surprised on a 1 in 6. In this case, a roll of 1 would indicate normal surprise, and a roll of 2 would indicate no surprise.

## **THAC0?**

Just about everyone who has played TSR versions of D&D is familiar with the concept of THAC0, even if they didn't use it. Even many "new school" D&D players know what THAC0 is. For those who aren't familiar with it, it means "To Hit Armor Class 0." It's a number that indicates what roll on a d20 your PC would need to hit an enemy with AC0. To figure out what you need to hit other armor classes, you subtract the enemy's AC from your THAC0 (e.g. if your THAC0 is 17, and you're attacking an enemy with chainmail (AC5), you need to roll a  $17-5=12$ ).

Opinions on THAC0 and its utility vary within the D&D community. Some find it easier to eschew any formulas at all, continuing to use the "to hit" attack tables rather than perform a calculation (this is especially easy for players, since they only need to write down a single line from the appropriate chart onto their character sheet, and it's very fast and simple to reference). Players of original AD&D (i.e. first edition) also have the "repeating 20s" issue to consider, which complicates the THAC0 concept, although it's something of an edge case. Many prefer the "higher AC is better" and "base attack bonus" approach of the d20 system. In that system, you add an attack bonus to your die roll, and the result indicates what AC you hit (e.g. your bonus is +3, and you roll a 12, meaning you'd hit an AC of 15 or less). All the math is addition, which many find easier.

To my mind, this issue is not critical. The formulas are different methods of arriving at the same end result (generally). Nevertheless, I tend to prefer the traditional "lower is better" AC values. Part of the reason is habit; I've used those values for a long time, and it seems natural that platemail and shield is AC2, or chainmail is AC5. Part of it is that most of the gaming material I use is stat'd for the traditional AC approach. Lastly, I also like the implied model where AC0 is a "balance point," and negative AC values represent a sort of "supernatural" defensive ability. (In fact, some OD&D referees require magic weapons to hit negative ACs.) I think this gives armor class a sense of scale (and implied limits). I prefer that over a more open-ended feel.

I'm adopting a slightly different formula from THAC0. It keeps the traditional AC system (i.e. AC2 is platemail and shield), but uses an attack bonus with addition, like the formula of the d20 system. PCs and monsters have an attack bonus (calculated from  $20 - \text{THAC0}$ , although I'm using a "smoothed" progression). When rolling to hit, add your die

roll + your attack bonus + your enemy's AC. If the total is 20 or higher, you hit.

Following are the (smoothed) attack bonuses that I'm using:

<u>Level</u>	<u>Fighting Men</u>	<u>Magic Users</u>	<u>Clerics</u>
F1	+1	+1	+1
F2	+2	+1	+1
F3	+2	+1	+2
F4	+3	+2	+2
F5	+4	+2	+3
F6	+5	+3	+3
F7	+6	+3	+4
F8	+7	+4	+5
F9	+7	+4	+6
F10	+8	+5	+6
F11	+8	+6	+7
F12	+9	+6	+7
F13	+10	+6	+8
F14	+11	+7	+8
F15	+12	+7	+9
F16	+13	+8	+9

<u>Monster HD</u>	<u>Bonus</u>
Up to 1	+1
1+1	+2
2 to 3	+3
3+1 to 4	+5
4+1 to 6	+6
6+1 to 8+x	+7
9 to 10+x	+9
11+	+11

## **THIEVES & THIEF SKILLS**

The Thief class is not part of the original three OD&D books, but was added in Supplement I. Weak in combat and casting no spells, the main feature of the class is its special skills like climbing sheer walls, disarming small mechanical traps, moving without making a sound, hiding in shadows, executing surprise backstabs, et cetera. Over time, I've come to prefer the game without the Thief class (i.e. using only the original three classes). The role the thief usually plays (scout/sneaky-guy) is easily filled by the other classes; everyone can attempt to be stealthy, search for traps, et cetera. Also, without the Thief and his special abilities, these activities are often performed by the player

describing how he goes about it, rather than rolling against a skill, which I think is a lot of fun.

The following quote from Mike Mearls (a lead developer for 4E D&D) sums it up, for me:

I've thought a lot about this for my OD&D game, and I decided to stick to the original three [classes] without the thief.

As others have mentioned, the thief is a self-justifying class. More importantly, I'd rather the players use critical thinking and deduction to figure out traps, unlock doors, and so on. I'd prefer to allow any player of sufficient creativity and wits to figure a way past an obstacle. To me, that's the appeal of original D&D. ([link to original post](#))

While I prefer to run without the Thief class, there are campaigns where I've allowed them. When I allow Thieves, their class skills are treated as extraordinary capabilities. That is, anyone can hide, but a Thief can hide in shadows. Anyone can move quietly, but a Thief can move silently, without even making a sound. Anyone can climb, but a Thief can climb sheer walls. Et cetera.

As an example, consider the act of sneaking up behind a human sentry. The Fighting Man takes of his mail and hard boots, and makes an effort to be quiet on his approach. I'd probably give him an increased chance of surprising the sentry: maybe 3 or 4 in 6, depending on the exact circumstances. If a Thief were trying the same thing, he'd use his move silently ability. If the Thief makes his roll, he's moving without making any audible noise, and since he's out of the sentry's line of sight (i.e. behind him), I'd give him automatic surprise. If the Thief failed his move silently roll, he made some noise, but he's still moving quietly; I'd give him the same chance to surprise as the stealthy Fighting Man (i.e. 3 or 4 in 6).

I posted a few ideas on an alternate OD&D Thief class [here](#) and [here](#). The main difference is that the mechanics use a more OD&D-ish approach, and the descriptions make it clear how the abilities relate to similar, but less extraordinary actions by other classes.

### **Level/HD/Attacks as Supplement I Thief**

**Stealth** - When actively sneaking or hiding, the Thief gets +1 to surprise (e.g. instead of a standard 2:6 chance of surprise, the Thief gets a 3:6 chance of surprise). At level 9, this increases to +2 to

surprise. (Note that a group uses the surprise chance of the least stealthy group member.)

**Perceptive** - The Thief is only surprised on a 1:6, rather than the standard 2:6. He can detect secret doors on a roll of 1-3. When listening, he hears noises on a roll of 1-2. At level 6, his ability to hear noises improves to 3-6.

**Mechanical Manipulation** - With proper tools, the Thief has a chance of opening mechanical locks without damaging them, or of removing or disabling small mechanical traps, like spring-loaded poison needles and the like. (Note that traps can also be disabled or bypassed with other precautions, described in-play.) His chances to do so are as follows:

Level 1-4 = 2:6 (roll 1-2 on 1d6)

Level 5-8 = 3:6 (roll 1-3 on 1d6)

Level 9+ = 4:6 (roll 1-4 on 1d6)

**Sneak Attack** - When making a melee attack on an enemy who is unaware of the PC, a successful attack deals maximum damage. At level 5, this improves to maximum damage + 1d6. At level 9, this improves to maximum damage + 2d6.

**Amazing Climber** - The Thief can climb sheer surfaces that most would find impossible without ropes and climbing gear. His chances to climb such surfaces are as follows:

Lvl 1-4 = 17:20 (roll 4-20 on a d20)

Lvl 5-8 = 18:20 (roll 3-20 on a d20)

Lvl 9+ = 19:20 (roll 2-20 on a d20)

## **TURNING UNDEAD**

The Cleric's ability to turn undead is one of those areas of the D&D rules that leaves much open to referee interpretation. Common questions on the subject includes things like:

- What, exactly, happens when he succeeds?
- Can the cleric make multiple attempts?
- How long do the effects of a successful turn attempt last?
- Is there a range limit?

The rules do not provide comprehensive answers to all of these questions, but here's how I handle it. I view turning as an ability that stems from the Cleric's faith, allowing him to channel divine power

against the undead. A successful turning attempt causes affected undead to flee from the Cleric. As the OD&D rules state, a successful turn attempt affects 2d6 of undead. I allow one turning attempt per round. In the case of mixed groups of undead, the least powerful are affected first. I allow the Cleric to continue making attempts to turn more undead on subsequent rounds, until he fails a turning attempt. At that point, his faith is shaken, and he may not make further attempts.

I borrow a rule from a later edition (i.e. AD&D) to cover the duration of the turn effect: 3d4 rounds. If the duration expires, the cleric may attempt to turn the undead, again (he can continue doing this as long as his turn attempts continue to succeed). However, the cleric must maintain the effect for the duration; that is, he must continue to actively exert his influence, and may not take other actions like casting spells or attacking. I do not impose a strict range limit, preferring to handle this based on the situation.

Other than the cleric ceasing to maintain the effect, I do not use the concept of "breaking the turn." Instead, I consider the undead as being under a strong compulsion to flee the cleric. They act accordingly. This helps when adjudicating situations like undead being cornered or trapped. Say there are a group of ghouls in a 30x30 room with one door. The cleric is standing in the doorway, turning them. These ghouls would move away from the cleric, probably clustering in the corner or against the far wall, clawing at the stones of while hissing and moaning. If further pressure is put on them, they will react, but their actions will also be affected by the turn compulsion.

For example, if the cleric starts approaching them, the ghouls will shy away and will probably make for the door, giving the cleric a wide berth. If the cleric moves to block one, that one will attack him, but only in passing as it tries to break past and flee.

Another common example might be the cleric maintaining his position in the doorway, while his comrades fire missile weapons into the ghouls. The ghouls are intelligent; they know that this is an intolerable situation, and they won't just sit there. However, they remain under compulsion to flee the cleric. There might be a round or so of confusion, but I'd rule that the pressure would cause the ghouls to rush the door in an attempt to escape, attacking or overbearing anyone (including the cleric) in their way. Their main goal wouldn't be to kill -- just to escape and get farther away from the cleric.

I handle animated undead like skeletons or zombies in a similar fashion, keeping their lack of intelligence in mind. They would tend to

react as individuals, not as a group, and would be slower to react to other pressures (like attacks). For example, replace the ghouls in the earlier example with zombies. If the cleric stood in the doorway while the fighting man fired arrows into a zombie, only that zombie would react to the attack. I see created undead as possessing a limited 'self preservation' instinct that is part of their animating magic. The zombie would try to end the immediate threat by escaping the intolerable situation -- probably by trying to kill the archer. A mindless undead that finds itself close to the cleric, for some reason, might try to escape past him (especially if it saw a long passage beyond), although it's more likely the mindless undead would simply retreat, again.

In other words, situational pressures won't break the turn, but they might influence the turned undead such that they'll get close to (or even attack) the cleric, temporarily, in order to get farther away.

## **TWO-WEAPON FIGHTING**

In my OD&D game, PCs typically receive a single melee attack roll per round (q.v. Abstract Combat), so I needed a rule to handle PCs that fought with a weapon in each hand. I reasoned that two weapons would likely do more damage, assuming they were used competently, but that it would be harder to use two weapons effectively. My house rule states that Fighting Men, Thieves, Elves, and Halflings can use a weapon in each hand, making a single attack roll each round. If they hit and they have a Dex of 13+, they roll 2 damage dice (i.e. 2d6) and take the highest of the two rolls as the damage. Those with Dex of 12 or less inflict standard damage (they lack the dexterity to gain a significant benefit from wielding two weapons).

Addendum: I'm also kicking around a different idea for two-weapon fighting. Instead of altering the way damage is rolled, wielding two weapons could result in an increased chance to hit (i.e. +1). Going this route gives you three basic options: weapon + shield (increased defense), weapon + weapon (increased chance to hit), or two-handed weapon (increased average damage), which is nice, mechanically.

## **VANCIAN MAGIC**

The system of Vancian magic (i.e. spells which are memorized and then "forgotten" when cast) is one of the essential elements of D&D. I concede that you can play the game using a different system for handling magic (spell points, or whatever), but to my way of thinking, doing so casts aside a huge portion of the feel that makes D&D what it is. I love Vancian magic. I love grandiose names for the spells; in fact, the more grandiose and fantastic they are, the better I like them (and I encourage my players to use those kinds of names for their spells). I





love the idea of magic users scheming to obtain a certain enchantment or charm. I love the concept of a magic user "equipping" himself with a certain set of spells when he sets out in the morning. For a sample of the original "Vancian" flavor, check out "Just so you know, THIS is Vancian magic."

My OD&D game will always use Vancian magic. Complaints that it is too constraining for low level magic users fail to impress me. There is no doubt that playing a low-level magic user is a challenge. However, the rewards for success are great, as higher level magic users are incredibly potent and powerful characters. Suck it up and pay your dues, and such power might be yours. I'm unwilling to cast aside the rich atmosphere and feel of Vancian magic to make things easier on low-level magic users. Besides, my current game allows low-level magic users to create magical scrolls (a rule which has its source in my game's Holmes Basic roots), and I also allow minor "special effects" based on the spells you currently have memorized, so even with the Vancian system, magic users (and clerics) still have some options that don't require them to "take their one shot and wait for the next day."

You just can't have D&D without Vancian magic.