

OD&DITIES

Issue Thirteen

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EDITORIAL

Back in the old days, this always used to be the hardest part of the magazine. This time, however, it should be much easier. For OD&DITIES, after a seven-year absence, is returning, and this time I hope it should be better than ever. For the last year or so, the itch has been beginning to strike me, and I've finally decided that it will be better to yield to it than carry on resisting. So – issue thirteen, at long last. Another key inspiration has been looking on at the retro-clone movement again from the sidelines; there's a lot of wonderful product out there to go through, and it's amazing to see it all blossoming to life. Another great inspiration for me.

What's different this time? Well, the first visible difference is the price tag; \$2 an issue. I want to do something with better production values than before in terms of layout, artwork, and the like, and that means it's going to cost a little, but for that you will get a 18–24 page magazine published on a strict monthly basis. This time OD&DITIES is to be released at the end of each month, on a regular rotation, and there are already a lot of interesting things scheduled for the next few issues.

Back in the old days, in OD&DITIES 'first' incarnation, one of our regular features was a column called 'Getting Started'; this will *not* feature in OD&DITIES, but this because I'm going to have *another* attempt at turning it into a book, though this time on a somewhat bigger scale than I considered before. Other columns are to be introduced – 'Magical Arsenal', 'A Touch of Class', and 'Surviving the DM's Wrath', launched in this issue. This issue also features the first appearance of the mysterious Mr. B; see the end of this issue for details. It is the intention for each issue to have a theme binding it together; this issue harkens back to an old classic, the Keep on the Borderlands, with two articles looking at the construction and design of such a fortress.

Given that now several versions of retro-D&D variants are out there, I've elected to run with 'Labyrinth Lord' as the default OD&DITIES system; this is simply because it fits the closest to the Basic/Expert '83 D&D that I've always been at home with. I should imagine that it should be next to no effort at all, of course, to use anything in this magazine with Swords & Wizardry, OSRIC, or anything else, for that matter – including, of course, the original Red and Blue boxed sets...

Other vague plans for the future? Well, I'd like to dip into Traveller, and I have some ideas for that. I've got some plans for a couple of supplements – more on Getting Started when I, well, get started on it, but there are few more possibilities in the pipeline as well. OD&DITIES will be the bulk of my output, however, and as long as people are reading it, well, I suppose I'll carry on publishing it.

Enjoy,
R. E. B. Tongue
Once More – Editor, OD&DITIES!

BUILDING THE KEEP ON THE BORDERLANDS

There comes a time in the life of every player character – usually around 9th level or so, a little less in the case of the redoubtable Halflings – when he or she elects to put down roots and form a stronghold. A place to hide away from the cares of the world, a seat of power, a place for magical and mystical research into the darkest secrets of time and space. For some, this is the end of a campaign; the party's wandering days are over, and it is time for them to retire and allow a new group to enter the fray.

Don't you believe it. Their problems are just getting started.

The decision to settle down, written off in a few words in the rulebooks, should be the resolution of a long-term intent, rather than a decision taken as soon as the players reach 9th level. There are a lot of steps that they should take in the run-up to this decision, and a lot of work that the DM is going to have to do in preparation. To begin with, right at the start of the campaign, the DM should ask whether this is something that the players *want* to do. Is the goal of their characters constructing their stronghold, and holding it against all comers, and how strongly do they feel about it? (If they are very eager to get on with this aspect of the game, it might be a good idea to accelerate this portion of the campaign, and have the process begin earlier, at 5th level, for example. Be grateful, though, if this happens to you; your players just wrote your campaign for you...)

The first steps in the process, as is always the case, involve DM preparation. The location of the stronghold should be determined, in consultation with the players; should this be a remote fortress, at the heart of a thriving town, on a small island watching the shipping lanes for pirates, or at the entrance to a great dungeon? This area needs to be designed, and in considerable detail. The different power groups need to be determined, the dangers – ecological and environmental – need to be filled in, and the resources of the area need to be nailed down. This should be completed well in advance of the characters' interest.



The next step is to introduce this to the players. Start setting adventures in this area, and highlight the features that make this a place that needs fortifying. If the 'big enemy' is an invading army from the north, have the PCs, at 3rd level, fight off a scout warband. Have them deal with a small element of the Thieves' Guild, or take out one of the Pirate Lords. Give them an idea of what they will be up against, to allow them to prepare for the struggle ahead.

The forms that this preparation will take will largely depend on the actions of the players, but as the time of constructing the settlement comes closer, more and more of their activities should focus on this goal, and the DM should provide opportunities for them to realise this goal. Examples could include.

- Making a treaty with a local Dwarven Hold, for the provision of stone to be used as construction material and architectural advisors, in exchange for protection.
- Performing a quest for the local King, in exchange for receiving permission to *build* the settlement, as well as soldiers to guard the construction site.
- Delving into the tomb of a long-dead Elven warlord, to find the location of supplies of rare magical materials.
- Saving a Halfling village from attack by Hobgoblins, in exchange for supplies of food for the fortress.

During this preparation phase, the DM has a golden opportunity to see exactly what the players have in mind. If most of their preparation involves forming alliances with local power groups, then they have in mind evolving the campaign in a political sphere. If they spend most of their time clearing out humanoid settlements, then it is probable that their main goal is military conquest or protection. A lot more can be told by the *actions* of players than by their actual words.

The DM should have been keeping careful records during the whole of the preparation process, keeping track not only of the allies and material they have gained, but also the enemies they have made, if only by omission.

To follow up on the earlier examples...

- A local human warlord may have hoped to get the Dwarven alliance for himself, and resents the PCs muscling in on his operation.
- The King's younger brother may have had plans to himself concentrate power in the area where the PCs are now to build their stronghold.
- The Elves may find out about the interference with one of their ancestors, and take diplomatic or direct steps to work against the 'desecrators'.
- The Farmers' Guild may protest the 'unfair competition' posed by the Halfling trade deal, and bring their own influence to bear.

As a general rule, for every ally the PCs make, they will gain an enemy – some they will be aware of, others they will not be aware of. This is a natural part of the campaign; resist the temptation to consider this 'unfair'. Campaigns are not about 'being fair', they are about telling an *interesting story*, and about engaging the players in unexpected ways. Your players will ultimately thank you for this, though they may throw dice at you at the time.

The time will now come for the PCs to actually build their stronghold. Ideally, it should serve the requirements of all the PCs who are going to be using it; this may include a wizard's school, a temple, a guildhall for thieves, a garrison, halfling settlement, or any of a large number of other elements. A good idea is to pick one central figure to build the settlement around, one PC to be the 'Lord' with the rest members of his 'court'; this prevents too much of a mish-mash of varying styles.

It is then time to break out the graph paper, for the PCs should then design their own settlement, making a list of all the features they seek to include. The DM should watch, and make notes of the materials being used in the construction, to work out a rough estimate of the costs involved. Encourage the players to make notes of any special abilities they have, or any spells that can be used to speed construction. (A good sourcebook for this, if one is able to get hold of it, is the old 2nd Edition 'Castle Guide'.) This should take time.

An interesting element is to encourage the PCs to hire a proper architect, a role the DM can then play during the design phase, as given the propensity for argument apparent in most groups of PCs, it should be expected that this design phase will be prolonged, and frankly the DM is going to want something to do.

Once the PCs have decided what they want, it is up to the DM to throw obstacles in the way of their conveniently getting it. If any of the NPCs they have involved have abilities that are relevant to the process, then any obstacles that they perceive should be thrown up against the PCs at this point. The PCs should then start to recruit – and here will come the first big hurdle for them to jump, as it is unlikely that they at this moment have any idea of just *how many* people they are going to need. As a minimum:

- Architect.
- Skilled masons, carpenters, etc.
- Labourers.
- Guards, to protect the worksite.
- Engineers, for moats, bridges, etc.
- Cooks, to *feed* the workers.
- Mulehandlers.
- Supervisors.

In short, a small town. The bigger the fortification, the more staff required, and the more likely that more specialised personnel will be needed. For example, a new chapel may well require the services of a high-level priest to consecrate it. A circle of wizards may be required to endow a magical laboratory with the proper mystical energy. (Note. These could in themselves make interesting quests for low-level PCs, and provide the with the opportunities to make valuable contacts for later on.)

Once you've worked out how much this is going to *cost* the PCs, you can then work out the running costs as well. All of these people will require food, bedding, shelter, equipment, and an assortment of paraphernalia, and all of this will need to be transported to the site of the construction. Whether or not an established settlement is present could prove a double-edged sword; if the fortress is in the middle of nowhere, then there will be a long logistic trail, but if it is in or close to an established

settlement, then the twin troubles of an absconding workforce and the additional expense of putting the workers up.

Now comes materials. The stronger the fortress, the more materials will be required to build it. A few lumberjacks and a forest can put together a wooden stockade and some wooden buildings, but working in stone is going to require a quarry, and some transportation is going to be required in any case. If the terrain is particularly difficult, then a road may need to be cut to speed deliveries – yes, considerable building work is likely to have to take place before the actual construction of the Keep can begin.

Don't forget the *inside* of the fort, as well as the outside! Presumably the PCs will want furniture, and this will have to be made and constructed, and special weapons, such as trebuchets and catapults, will also have to be built – which means more transportation, or more specialist workers. Features such as temples and magical laboratories and libraries will also mean more expensive equipment, as well as being obvious targets for thieves. Is the plan to make the stronghold self-sufficient – if so, farmland will have to be staked out. One key material – water! Is there a nearby river, can a well be dug?

The primary focus of the campaign should, at this point, be on the actual construction of the Keep. The PCs will need to oversee all details of the construction; if they decide to simply go off and hope everything goes according to plan, the DM is encouraged to make sure this is not the case. Have cost overruns, corruption, delays, random attacks, and all manner of other problems that they would have been able to deal with, had they been in attendance.

The DM should have already prepared and introduced the local area of the keep, and have determined the 'movers and shakers'; now these notes should be used for the preparation of a timeline. Work out a sequence of events – key milestones in the construction of the Keep, arduous weather conditions (making sure to bear in mind seasonal variations and the location in general), and local events.

This latter should bear in mind the various allies and enemies that the PCs have accumulated over the previous sessions. Pencil in all manner of events – infiltrators causing acts of sabotage, visiting dignitaries, attacks on convoys of materials, armies moving in to prevent construction. All of these should lead to disruptions to the work. Remember – the bigger the fortress, the longer it will take. A small stockade may only take months, but a larger stone castle could take years to construct.

Man (or Elf, or Dwarf) Management should be another key part of the process. The workforce must be properly taken care of, or the PCs could well find their behaviour grow careless, or unruly. A fair payscale must be set up, and adhered to – late pay could well lead to strike action, or even to the workforce simply going home, leaving the job unfinished. A good idea is to create a few minor NPCs, at different sides of spectrum – from dedicated, loyal employees to the shiftless and lazy scroungers, and use them to highlight the attitude of the workforce.

The attitude of local populations must also be considered. A large workforce will be disruptive; what happens when

they commit crimes ? What tasks are *not* being done while the strong backs are building walls?

Finally, the structure should be taking shape, and the PCs should be encouraged to celebrate their success. Have several major dignitaries turn out for the grand opening. They should celebrate, for in many ways, they haven't started yet. Once the fortress is complete, it must still be manned with soldiers, servants and others. Some of these can no doubt be hired from among the construction crew – if they can still stand your PCs – but others will have to be hired in. If the PCs are to spend considerable time away from their home base, then a seneschal will have to be retained to manage affairs in their absence, and probably also a commander of the guard. All of this will largely depend on the scale of the PCs ambition; the smallest individual keep may only need a butler, three servants and a couple of bored guards, while the hugest could have hundreds of servants, and dozens of guards.

Once all this has been completed, then it is time to put the fortress under siege by a huge invading army. Time to find out just how good those designs *actually* were...

20 Reasons the Guardsman is on patrol alone at night...

1. He beat his Sergeant in a dice game; his punishment was extra guard duty.
2. His Sergeant beat him in a dice game, and he needs the overtime to pay his debts.
3. He's actually an imposter from the Thieves' Guild, on lookout for a heist.
4. He's lost – and too embarrassed to ask for directions.
5. He's an overzealous type, looking for promotion through working hard.
6. He's the new guy, and has been assigned the duty no-one else wants.
7. It's an imposter, a nutcase who likes to dress up in a guard uniform and strut about.
8. He's off-duty, on his way to an assignation with his mistress...
9. He runs a protection racket, and is wandering round the alley to 'collect'.
10. His Sergeant runs is protection racket, and is using him as a runner.
11. He has a death wish, and is looking for trouble in the roughest spots of town.
12. He's looking for the man who killed his son in a knife fight.
13. He's a spy for a rival city, gathering information.
14. He's looking to collect a bounty, on a man matching the description of a PC.
15. He's on his way to a fence to sell some 'evidence' in a recent theft.
16. He's a vampire, stalking the streets, looking for fresh blood.
17. He's actually a low-level Magic-User trying to make ends meet, looking for a rare spell component.
18. He's looking for his house key, dropped while on patrol.
19. He's a noble's spoiled son, on his way to a costume party.
20. He's a minor deity, wandering the streets, looking for mortals to 'play' with.

DESIGNING THE KEEP ON THE BORDERLANDS

Most of us got our start in D&D wandering through the Keep on the Borderlands; it's a rare player who has not ventured into the Caves of Chaos at least once. It is only natural, therefore, that a DM would wish to copy this style of campaign. A Keep, or similar fortification, makes an excellent starting ground for fresh PCs; it provides them with a place of security and safety for them to rest up in, between adventures, and as well as providing them with an example to follow themselves in later levels – or even to take over, and operate as their own stronghold, later in the campaign. (As happened when I ran the Keep on the Borderlands....)

The first element, as with any home base, is to come up with a list of essential features that the PCs are going to need. While this generally varies from campaign to campaign, some elements are essential – a place to rest, a

place to heal, a place to obtain rumours, and a place to obtain missions. If the PCs are serving as part of the official guard of the fortress, then they can stay in the barracks, but otherwise it is not much of a stretch to put an inn inside the structure. A chapel provides healing, and there will either be a mess hall or a tavern, or possibly both, to provide rumour seeds for future missions. The head of the fort can provide missions for PCs to undertake.

Anything more can generally be written in quite easily. It's logical for there to be an armourer, and if there isn't a general store, then wandering merchants will undoubtedly use the place as a waystation. There will likely be a wizard of some type to provide magical protection, as well as instruction to any PCs of sorcerous inclination.



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The next step is an important one – why does the Keep exist? The Keep on the Borderlands danced around this one a little, simply making it a border outpost, but there are a wide range of options available. The Keep could be part of a chain protecting an important trade route between two cities, it could be defending a border against an implacable enemy, helping pioneer territory that the King is planning to open up, or as the seat of a lower-ranked noble, defending his own territory. Perhaps it even guards the top of a large megadungeon. This can play heavily into a campaign, in combination with the next step...

...Which is to determine whether the Keep *still has its original purpose*. The importance of trade routes changes over the centuries, and yesterday's enemy can be tomorrow's ally – or conqueror. A noble family can fall from grace, and the settlement of an area can be completed. Remember – just because the Keep is now of lesser importance does not make it any less interesting to the PCs, as old enemies can arise out of the forgotten shadows of the past. Also, the Keep may have uncovered a new purpose, as borders have changed and alliances shifted. It could even be a remnant from a past civilisation, rediscovered, repaired, and used anew.

This will in itself suggest new features for the Keep, all of which could help make it distinctive. Should the Keep be protecting a plain, then it might have a tall lookout tower, hundreds of feet high; in a high-magic campaign, this might even serve as a tower for magical airships. A trade route suggests that a small community might have built up around it, protected by its walls – there may be inns, markets, shrines, and the like. An old fortress may be festooned with monuments to those fallen in countless battles over the years, perhaps even some past PCs.

You're close to putting pencil to paper now, but there still remains on fixture – what is the 'feel' of the Keep? Are you going for a traditional stone castle, an Iron Age Hill fort, Roman tower, Wild West frontier post, collection of tents? (Nothing said the Keep has to stay in the same place – imagine one used by nomadic herdsmen, or Mongol-like tribesmen...)

Now divide up your list of requirements into two lists. The first is the elements that the fort required on construction – guardhouse, weapon emplacements, barracks, stables, houses for the officers, and so on. The second is everything else. When the Keep was built, they would not have had consideration for future development; they were *simply building a fortification*, and probably in a hurry at that. Now you can pick up the pencil, and start to draw in the lines of the structure.

The first step is the immediate terrain – not any slopes, rivers, lakes, scrub forest, or any notable terrain features. The builders of the fortress will not have wanted to leave any obvious avenues of attack open, so there will be considerable distance between any concealing cover and the Keep. They may have used a river as a moat, however, particularly if it has useful bends; easier construction, and good means of travel if necessary. (The trade route being defended could *be* the river, in fact.)

Then draw in the inner buildings, those on the first list. Bear in mind that they will be enclosed by walls, and keep them close together; make sure that there is sufficient access, however, and that there is a logical order. Any stables ought to be close to the entrance, for example, and there should be a drill field, or an archery butt, outside the barracks. Large forts may include a jousting ring, or there might be one set up outside in close proximity.

Once the inner buildings are completed, start on the outer walls. Straight lines are best, thick enough to withstand at least some impacts from catapults. Remember that there will be a strong gatehouse, and several towers with weapon emplacements. Keep it fairly simple, and look once again at the local terrain. The builders of the Keep will have been aware of any potential trouble spots, and will have designed the outer walls to take that into account, placing additional towers, or adjusting the wall accordingly. If there is a moat, then it goes around the outside; this will require a bridge, naturally, from the gatehouse.

After completing the first map, it is a good idea to take a photocopy, in case at some point you want a record of the layout of the Keep as it originally appeared. Then you can start to make additions. New buildings, probably constructed out of different materials than the original – wood instead of stone, most likely. Place a notation as to *when* each building was added, to add a little bit of history to the setting. You could even add some on-going construction to the site, perhaps a new tavern being built, or a temple about to be dedicated. The goal of this is to create an ongoing community with a story all of its own.

Which comes to the next point – populating your community. Take a look once again at the list of locations that you drew up earlier; each of these should have at least one NPC associated with it, and some should have more. Don't just draw up the innkeeper – write up a few of the regulars. (Cheers would have been pretty boring if it only consisted of Sam Malone staring into space for eleven seasons...) Don't do a single guard – do a faintly comedic double act.

The preparation of NPCs in themselves is beyond the scope of this article, but remember that as this is a home base, it needs to at some level play to the needs of the PCs. If they need a high-level wizard, then the Great Presto! will make his home at the Keep. If they need a Thief, then

a bandit can be operating out of the Keep. (In fact – how about an *Evil* Keep on the Borderlands, when the Evil Priests from the Caves of Chaos were victorious and overran the area...) This will again provide you with a comprehensive list. Don't stint on the workload at this point; you're going to have to live with this setting for some time, so make sure you do your homework well at this stage.

You've got your map, you've got your NPCs, and you should even have a few notes on the history of the Keep. What's left? That's down to you, and how far you want to go on the detail front – but the more you do, the greater the level of immersion that will be experienced by the players. Perhaps you could write up a menu for the local tavern, or prepare a guard schedule – so that when the PCs are trying to sneak in at 2 am, they'll know that Johan the sleepy guard will be on watch.

The most important thing of all is this: *make this Keep your own*. Put your own distinctive stamp on it. If you want a setting similar to the Keep on the Borderlands, then you might as well use the Keep on the Borderlands; play with the concepts, and concoct your own version. Just be consistent, and make sure that the setting has an internal logic, and you should be good for many months of gaming.

20 Things you may find in a Kobold's Pocket

1. A dead mouse.
2. A live mouse, bound with string.
3. A sketch of the Kobold's mother.
4. A lucky Halfling's foot.
5. A small, broken, bone flute.
6. 1d4 Copper pieces.
7. A 'Kobold-to-Common' phrasebook.
8. A bronze monocle.
9. A map with directions to 'hidden treasure'.
10. A piece of string, of indeterminate length.
11. A pair of candles.
12. A broken lockpick.
13. How to be a good henchman' guide.
14. A small stiletto knife.
15. A nugget of mithril.
16. Book of 'Twenty Best 'Dead Dwarf' jokes.
17. A bottle of Kobold Vodka, labelled 'Healing'.
18. Some pocket lint.
19. A small, pet, poisonous snake.
20. A book of Goblin Poetry.

A TOUCH OF CLASS: THE ILLUSIONIST

Illusionist

Requirements: Int 12, Cha 12

Prime Requisite: Charisma

Hit Dice: 1d4

Maximum Level: None

Illusionists are magic-users who have elected to focus on the arts of trickery and deceit. One on extreme of the scale, these are the stage magicians who entrance audiences with amazing displays of the magic arts, on the other, they use their magical powers for deception, in order to trick their adversaries for their own nefarious ends, altering their enemies' perception of reality itself. They can be a powerful ally or a dangerous adversary.

Illusionists are a variant of the magic-user, and follow the same basic guidelines; they can only use the dagger or the staff, cannot wear armour, and have the same to-hit and saving throw tables. However, they have their own, more restrictive, list of spells, many of which are unavailable to the normal magic-user. Illusionists are themselves unable to use most of the spells on the magic-user spell lists, though they do have some spells in common. They begin play with three first-level spells, including Detect Magic, a critical spell for an Illusionist!

To play an illusionist is not for the faint of heart or inexperienced; the illusionist spells require considerably more care than the normal magic-user, and generally rely on the player thinking on his feet. He is able to use his abilities to change the local environment, at least his adversaries' perception of that environment, and operates through confusing his opposition. As the Illusionist's spells largely rely on images previously perceived by the caster, one primary motivation for an adventuring Illusionist is to build up a portfolio of images, sounds, and experiences.

At 'Name' Level. Once the Illusionist reaches 9th level, she is able to establish her own school. Unlike the traditional Magical Academies used by mainstream wizards, Illusionist schools are small, and concealed, with only a handful of apprentices at any one time. Traditionally, to be accepted as an apprentice, one must first *find* the school, and usually some small window in the magical camouflage is left to allow potential students with wit and guile to find, though the nature of the test can vary from school to school.

Perceive Illusion. All Illusionists are trained to recognise illusions, and all tend to adopt their own specific style. An Illusionist receives a +4 bonus to save against Illusions; if they have encountered the illusionist before, then the character may roll a second saving throw to determine his identity.

Minor Illusion. Twice per day, the Illusionist can create a minor illusion, along the same lines as the 'Silent Image' spell, with a duration of two rounds and a size no bigger than the Illusionist's hand; this is traditionally used for minor prestidigitation or for party tricks.

Illusionist Level Progression		
Experience	Level	Hit Dice (D4)
0	1	1
2,250	2	2
4,500	3	3
9,200	4	4
19,000	5	5
37,500	6	6
75,000	7	7
150,000	8	8
290,000	9	9
450,000	10	9 + 1
605,000	11	9 + 2
1,200,500	12	9 + 3

Illusionist Spell Progression

Class Level	Spell Level					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2					
2	3					
3	3	1				
4	3	2				
5	4	2	1			
6	4	3	1			
7	4	3	2	1		
8	5	3	2	2		
9	5	4	2	2	1	
10	5	4	3	2	2	
11	6	4	3	3	2	1
12	6	5	3	3	2	2

Illusionist Spells

1st Level

Detect Magic
Disguise Self
Ghost Sound
Obscuring Mist
Silent Image
Ventriloquism

2nd Level

Blur
Detect Invisible
Invisibility
Mirror Image
Phantasmal Force
Phantom Trap

3rd Level

Dispel Illusion
Ghost Writing
Improved Phantasmal Force
Invisibility 10' Radius

4th Level

Hallucinatory Terrain
Illusionary Wall
Improved Invisibility
Phantasmal Assassin

5th Level

False Vision
Mass Disguise
Persistent Illusion
Phantasmal Sorcery

6th Level

Mass Phantasmal Assassin
Programmed Vision
Project Image



ILLUSIONIST'S GRIMOIRE

Blur

Level: 2
Duration: 1 minute/level
Range: Touch

This spell blurs the outline of the subject, making him appear to shift and waver in and out of focus. It has the affect of making the subject harder to hit; he may make a saving throw against Breath Attacks to cancel any successful blow.

Detect Invisible

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Detect Magic

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Disguise Self

Level: 1
Duration: 10 minutes/level
Range: Personal

Disguise Self allows the caster to alter his appearance. He is able to change his height by approximately two feet, become fatter, thinner, change skin colouration, hair and eye colour. The nature of the change is determined by the caster, but the spell cannot be used to assume a specific form.

Dispel Illusion

Level: 3
Duration: 2 turns
Range: 10ft./level

Works as the Magic-User spell *Detect Magic*, but only works on illusionary spells. This spell *is* effective on any spells cast by Magic-Users that are also present on the Illusionist spell list.

False Vision

Level: 5
Duration: 1 hour/level
Range: 40ft.

This spell creates a shield against divination; anyone attempting to magically perceive the area protected by the spell experiences a *Phantasmal Force* of the caster's choosing.

Ghost Sound

Level: 1
Duration: 25ft. + 5 ft./level
Range: 1 round/level

Ghost Sound allows the caster to create a volume of sound that can manipulated as he desires, appearing to recede, advance, increase or decrease in intensity. The sound can be created in any form known to the caster. The volume that can be created is equal that of three humanoids per level of the caster.

Ghost Writing

Level: 3
Duration: One day/level
Range: Touch

Ghost Writing allows the caster to write on any object with his finger, forming a script that is only legible to himself and anyone the caster wishes at the time of writing. Anyone else attempting to read the writing is subject to a *Silent Image* designed by the caster at the time of the spell's casting.

Hallucinatory Terrain

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Illusionary Wall

Level: 4
Duration: Permanent
Range: 25ft. + 5ft./level

Illusionary Wall creates the illusion of a wall or floor, that appears totally realistic in the context of its environment. Physical objects are able to pass through the wall with some difficulty. This spell only affects the sense of sight, including infravision.

Improved Invisibility

Level: 4
Duration: Concentration
Range: 240'

This spell acts in the same manner as *Invisibility*, but does not end when the caster attacks a target. The spell only ends at the wish of the caster, or when he elects to cast another spell.

Improved Phantasmal Force

Level: 3
Duration: Concentration + 3 rounds
Range: 360ft.

This spell acts as *Phantasmal Force*, but anyone attempting to disbelieve the illusion has a +3 to his saving throw, and the illusion can occupy a 40' cube.

Invisibility

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Invisibility 10' Radius

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Mass Disguise

Level: 5
Duration: 10 minutes/level
Range: 50ft.

This spell works as *Disguise Self*, except that the Illusionist may change a number of humanoids equal to his experience level. He can make them all appear identical, or change them individually, altering clothes, armour and weapons as desired.

Mass Phantasmal Assassin

Level: 6
Duration: Instant
Range: 100ft.

This spell works as *Phantasmal Assassin*, except that it can affect a number of beings equal to the level of the caster.

Mirror Image

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Obscuring Mist

Level: 1
Duration: 1 minute/level
Range: 20ft.

Obscuring Mist brings forth a magical vapour, centred on the caster, that is stationary once created. This vapour obscures all vision, including infravision, beyond five feet. Only a magically created wind can disperse the mist prior to the end of the spell's duration.

Persistent Illusion

Level: 5
Duration: Permanent
Range: 360ft.

This spell works as an *Improved Phantasmal Force*, but does not end when the caster's concentration ceases. It only ends if *Dispel Illusion* is cast, or at the wish of the caster.

Phantasmal Assassin

Level: 4
Duration: Instant
Range: 100ft.

The Phantasmal Assassin creates an image of the greatest fears and nightmares of the target, only visible to the subject of the spell. The target must make a saving throw vs. Spells; if successful, the target takes 3d6 damage, if failed, the target dies.

Phantasmal Force

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Phantasmal Sorcery

Level: 5
Duration: Varies
Range: Varies

This spell allows the caster to mimic the effects of any magic-user spell of levels 1-3 that he has personally perceived. Magic-users receive a +2 bonus to their saving throw against this spell. The spell, unless disbelieved, has an identical effect to the spell being mimicked.

Phantom Trap

Level: 2
Duration: Permanent
Range: Touch

This spell makes a lock or small object appear to be trapped to anyone able to detect traps; anyone using an ability or spell to find traps will be completely certain that such a trap exists, and will be equally certain that they have failed to disarm it.

Programmed Vision

Level: 6
Duration: 1 day/level
Range: 360 ft.

This spell works as *Improved Phantasmal Force*, but is triggered to activate when a specific condition occurs. The trigger must be based on something perceptible to the five senses.

Project Image

As in the Magic-User spell list.

Silent Image

Level: 1
Duration: Concentration
Range: 100ft. + 20 ft./level

Silent Image creates a purely visual illusion of a creature, object or force as visualised by the caster.

Ventriloquism

As in the Magic-User spell list.

INTRODUCING NEW CLASSES TO THE CAMPAIGN

So your players have picked up a new class, and all of a sudden they are eager to play it. If you're about to start a new campaign, then this is probably a good thing; if a player is enthusiastic about trying something new, then that will generally spill over into the campaign itself. If you are in the middle of the campaign, however, this can prove somewhat more troublesome. If players insist that they want to try the new class, then there are a few options open.

Roll up a new character

The obvious solution. It has the advantage that the player will be able to get to grips with the new abilities and features of the class from 1st level, and is probably less likely to miss important details. However, if the group has

been playing for some time, then introducing a low-level character to a higher level group can be problematic; allowing the player to generate a higher-level character is of course an option.

He just never used that power before

If the class is a variant of the class the player character has now – such as Illusionist for the Magic-User, Druid for the Cleric, or Ranger for the Fighter, another solution is to allow the player to switch the character's class – using his *total experience* to determine the level of the character. In play, this can either be the result of a quest or story goal, or simply written off as the character discovering new abilities within himself, or that he has simply never attempted to use these abilities in the past.

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

It was recently noted that there is an interesting omission from the *Labyrinth Lord* rulebook; there are no statistics for dogs, despite them being suggested as a useful aid for low-level adventurers. That got me to thinking; I can't recall ever seeing any substantial articles on 'Man's Best Friend', and when such animals are mentioned, it is usually only in a single context – that of the vicious, savage, attack dog, used by either a foul adversary to wreak havoc on a group of PCs, or by a group of PCs to wreak havoc on their foul adversaries...

But there is so much more to man's best friend than just a ravaging beast, and so many more roles that it can play in an adventure. This article examines five different types of dog, as well as looking at some of the specialised equipment they require (I'm sure Mr. Scraps will like a nice collar).

Guard Dog

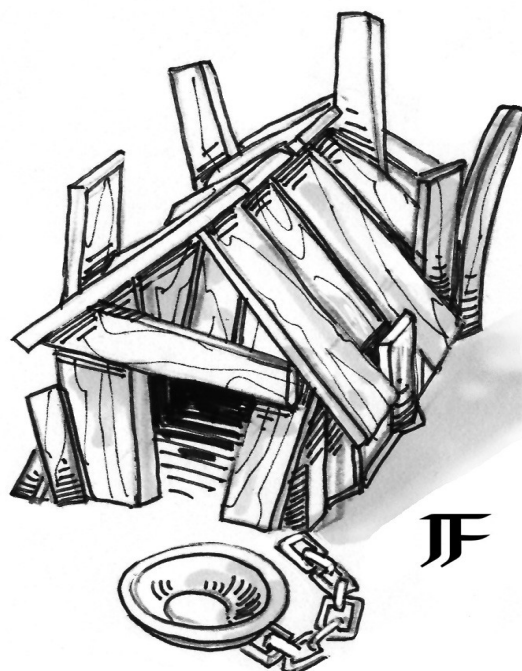
Well, we had to look at it at some point. These animals exist to fill a single role, that of protecting the party – or any NPC – from attack. Training will generally train them to defend their master from harm (or from perceived harm, which could be a problem) and to attack a designated enemy. In addition, such dogs can be trained to watch an area, and then alert, typically thorough a loud bark, their master of the presence of an intruder. Typically, such dogs will be from breeds such as Rottweiler, Bulldog, Bull Mastiff or Doberman Pinscher.

Alignment:	Lawful
Movement:	120' (30')
Armour Class:	7
Hit Dice:	2
Attacks:	1 (Bite)
Damage	1d4
Save:	F1
Morale:	10 (With Master) 7 (Alone)

Tracker Dog

A rather more specialised animal, trained to track down fleeing targets by following their scent. Once they get onto a trail, it is very difficult for them to lose it, unless the target is able to take steps to mask their presence. For every half-hour the dog is on the trail – or any time the target is able to attempt to distract the dog – the dog should make a saving throw against Breath Weapon, normally with a -12 modifier unless the DM decides that the distraction is sufficient to warrant an improved chance of escaping detection. Such dogs can come from breeds such as Harriers, Foxhounds or Bloodhounds.

Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	120' (30')
Armour Class:	8
Hit Dice:	1
Attacks:	1 (Bite)
Damage:	1d3
Save:	T1
Morale:	9 (With Master) 6 (Alone)



Guide Dog

The guide dog is trained to overcome a deficiency in the sense of its master, generally sight, but occasionally sound. (It is quite possible to consider a dog trained to replace its master's sense of smell.) These are difficult to train, but will partly alleviate the loss of one of the senses of a PC. (For example, if a blind PC has lost -8 Dex as a result, the guide dog can restore half of that.) The dog can easily be trained to take a PC to specific places on demand, making it far more difficult for him to get lost. (In play, it is recommended that this should equate to the dog having a 90% chance of taking the PC back to a distinctive location.) Typical breeds are Golden Retrievers, Labradors, and Golden Shepherds.

Alignment:	Lawful
Movement:	120' (30')
Armour Class:	8
Hit Dice:	1
Attacks:	1 (Bite)
Damage:	1d3
Save:	F1
Morale:	11 (With Master) 6 (Alone)

Sheepdog

Sheepdogs are used for the defence of flocks of livestock, usually sheep against wild animals, such as wolves; they are also used to control such herds, cajoling them too and from their pens. Although generally these will be of limited use to a PC, in the countryside they will be encountered fairly often, and they can be just as great a foe to PC rustlers as to wolves. Breeds tend to vary from location to location, and are generally bred to be suited to both the terrain and the type of animal being protected.

Alignment:	Lawful
Movement:	120' (30')
Armour Class:	7
Hit Dice:	1
Attacks:	1 (Bite)
Damage:	1d4
Save:	F1
Morale :	9 (With Flock)

Mount

Smaller races – such as halflings and gnomes – are often hard-put to find suitable mounts to ride into battle. Although ponies can be used as simple riding mounts, they often lack the ferocity that a trained war-horse has. The answer lay in the riding dog, trained as a mount for a halfling or a gnome rider; such a beast can prove a loyal steed and a noble ally in battle. These are the hardest to train, and breeds are generally the larger dogs, such as the St. Bernard.

Alignment:	Lawful
Movement:	120' (30')
Armour Class:	7
Hit Dice:	1 + 1
Attacks:	1 (Bite)
Damage:	1d3
Save:	F2
Morale:	10 (With Rider) 6 (Alone)

Husky

Over the wildest terrain, such as the icy wastes of the far polar regions, or the dank forests hugging the tundra, one of the best ways to travel, especially with cargo, is by sled, towed by a team of trained dogs. Huskies have been employed in this role for hundreds of years, and are typically used in teams of four to ten. They will be able to sense the nature of the terrain around them, testing for weaker parts of ice floes, and will to some extent be able to care for themselves in ways that other beasts cannot. Typical breeds include Siberian Huskies and Alaskan Malamutes.

Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	120' (30')
Armour Class:	7
Hit Dice:	1 + 1
Damage:	1d3 (Bite)
Save:	Fighter 4
Morale:	9 (With Owner) 6 (Alone)

Pet

Finally, one has the normal pet; generally simply a well-loved companion, who will likely be unable to perform tasks more complicated than fetching a stick, or staying in one location. Many of the above types of dog can have aspects of this, but this represents the dedicated childhood pet, or the mongrel dog that adopts itself to you when you least expect it. Any in-game benefits should be adjudicated by the DM on a case-by-case basis.

Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	120' (30')
Armour Class:	8
Hit Dice:	1 – 1
Attacks	1
Damage:	1d2 (Bite)
Save:	Normal Man
Morale:	9 (With Owner) 5 (Alone)

Training

Dogs are not born knowing how to track game, or pull carts; they must be trained to do so, and bonded with their owner. To successfully bond with a dog should require that the PC spend considerable time with him, and although the PC can naturally engage in other tasks while acquiring this bond, he or she will have to deal with a recalcitrant dog, which can provide all kinds of opportunities for a malevolent DM. Mechanically – for ever week spent, have the PC attempt to roll equal to or under his Charisma. If successful, then the PC has made a new friend. If failed, he or she must attempt again the following week. For each dog already travelling with the PC, impose a cumulative penalty of -1.

This is not the end of the story, however, for the dog must still be trained to carry out its specific task. There are two choices; the PC can attempt to train the dog himself, or he can hire a specialist. The former option will take longer, but cost a lot less (unless the PC has some background skill that allows him to be considered as a specialist dog trainer), while the latter will either involve a specialist henchman travelling with the party for a time – which will cost a considerable amount, or enrolling the dog in some type of training school, which will cost less

but either tie the PCs down to a specific area for a length or time, or require the dog begin left behind. (In the latter case, it would be reasonable for the PC to make another throw against Charisma upon being reunited with the dog, lest he has bonded with the trainer. Unscrupulous NPCs may choose to deliberately bond with the dog, in order to introduce a 'spy' into the group.)

To indicate that the dog is trained, the dog receives a saving throw against Petrification; if the dog succeeds, then he has accepted the training and been successfully taught to master his natural instincts. The Intelligence and Charisma modifiers of the trainer, PC or NPC, should be used to help or hinder the roll. (Note that the price given in the list is for an *untrained* dog of the correct breed; add the cost of professional training if the dog is being bought as trained, for example at the beginning of a campaign.)

Magic

In a fantasy game, it is likely that PCs will attempt to use magical alternative to help speed this process; it is still more likely that specialist NPCs may make use of such abilities. *Charm Monster* may be read as 'Charm Animal', and used to automatically make a dog bond with its new master, as an example, and illusion spells can prove invaluable to demonstrate good behaviour. This should largely be judged according to the DM's own judgement, but as a rule of thumb, assume a magical trainer will cost twice as much, for half the time

New Spell: Speak with Animal

Level:	Cleric 2
Duration:	1 minute/level
Range:	Touch

For the duration of the spell, you can comprehend and communicate with animals; you may ask basic questions and receive answers. This spell does not render an animal more co-operative, and wary animals are likely to be cunning and evasive.

Equipment

Collar, Simple	1 sp
Collar, Ornate	1 gp
Collar, Spiked	5 gp
Dog Saddle	10 gp
Dog Cart	20 gp
Dog Sledge	30 gp
Dog Barding, Leather	25 gp
Dog Barding, Chain	55 gp

The **Collars** are basically self-explanatory; the spiked collar grants an additional -1 to the dog's armour class, representing the reluctance of an opponent to injure himself on the spikes. (Evil types *can* apply poison to the spikes, of course...) The **Dog Saddle** is required for a gnome or a halfling to ride the dog, and is essentially a smaller version of a standard horse saddle. A **Dog Cart** is, again, a cut down version of a normal cart, and can carry 500cn of weight; the **Dog Sledge** has the same carrying capacity, but has runners for rough, icy terrain. Finally, the two types of **Dog Barding** work in the same manner as the horse equivalent, reducing AC by 2 and 4 respectively. These *must* be built to fit a specific breed of dog; if found as treasure, the DM should adjudicate the breed of dog the found armour is designed to fit.

<u>Training Type</u>	<u>'PC' Training Time</u>	<u>Specialist Training Time</u>	<u>Training Expense</u>	<u>Cost of Dog</u>
Guard Dog	1 month	1 week	15gp / 5 gp	15gp
Tracker Dog	2 months	2 weeks	15gp / 10gp	20gp
Guide Dog*	3 months	1 month	40gp / 20gp	25gp
Sheepdog	1 month	2 weeks	10gp / 8gp	10gp
Mount*	4 months	2 months	50gp / 30gp	35gp
Husky	1 month	2 weeks	10gp / 5gp	15gp

*For this training, the intended master of the dog *must* be present.

K-9 Patrol...

It is not just adventurers and their enemies that will be using the dogs described in this article; they can become an interesting 'leveller' for low-level NPCs as well. The town guard may have a K-9 unit of guard dogs, with dedicated handlers. That shopkeeper may keep an dog in his store to ward off intruders. The PCs won't be so casual about escape if they think they have a pack of tracker dogs on their tail.

Rabies

Rabies is a common canine disease, almost always fatal. If bitten by a rabid dog, a PC should make a Save vs. Poison to avoid contracting it; else his Constitution will fall by 1 each day until it reaches 0, at which point the PC will die. This can be treated with a *Cure Disease* spell. Some nefarious types have been known to deliberately infect their dogs, to render them a deadlier threat. Of course, a PC should *never* think of such a thing...

SURVIVING THE DM'S WRATH:

PARTY FORMATION

One of the best ways to ensure that a party can survive anything that can be thrown at it is to make sure that it is well-rounded. What does a party of Thieves do when it stumbles into the Ogre Fortress? Throw the one with the lowest Dexterity at the Ogres, and run like hell. Fun for most of the party, not so much fun for the player in question. (And yes, I've seen this done.) This article will provide a breakdown of the seven basic Labyrinth Lord classes – as well as the Illusionist from this issue, and some of those published by Brave Halfling Publications – and try to give some guidance from a player point of view as to what makes a good party, under circumstances of limited player numbers. A mob of seven or eight will have a good combination of classes, but when there are only two or three players, it becomes a rather more testing choice.

The **Fighter**, brave and redoubtable warrior, frankly does not bring a vast amount to the table. He advances reasonably quickly, can wear all armour, use all weapons, and has a good reservoir of hit points, but has no special abilities or features. The one thing that can be said in its favour is that it is an excellent choice for a beginning player, who can concentrate on moulding an interesting character based on his or her own likes.

The **Cleric**, at first level, is a slightly inferior version of the fighter, with the exception that the class has the ability to turn undead; although the weapons selection is limited, this is only a minor problem, as the weapons that *are* available are among the best. Advancement is rapid, and from second-level, the class begins to accumulate spells, from a wide selection that include valuable party healing. At this point, I'm going to label this the best of the seven basic classes to play, and probably the best by far for solo adventuring.



The **Thief**, let's be honest, is not great at first glance. The skills mostly have a low chance of success, with one exception, and has few hit points. The saving graces here are threefold. The first is Climb Walls; all Thieves begin at 87%, and this, played well, should be what saves the Thief, and turns him into a top-class scout. The second is the backstab ability, which can allow him to devastate powerful opponents in a single blow, again right from first level. (This is a thief? Sounds more like a ninja, or an assassin!) The third is extremely rapid advancement. Should you survive, you're going to rack up the levels quickly, especially in the early stages of a campaign.

Magic-Users are perhaps the weakest of the basic seven classes. Slow level progression, limited hit points, very limited weapons and armour selection, and only a single spell at first level. This one has amazing potential, however; should you survive to even fifth level, then the abilities become far stronger. The trick is getting there, and it is hard to recommend this to a small party.

Looking at the racial classes, these begin with the redoubtable **Dwarf**; just like a Fighter, but slightly slower level progression and more abilities, especially when underground. Another good, solid class, and probably a good replacement for the poor Fighter. A selection of additional languages make this a powerful choice.

The **Halfling** is the matter of much scorn, but I'm going to go ahead and call it the second-best class in the basic book. Excellent level progression, defence bonuses, initiative bonuses, and an excellent ability to hide in the wilderness. An ideal advance scout, in fact, with the only slight blow a limited weapons selection. This is not a major problem, however, especially if twinned with a more powerful character. In some ways, this class can serve as a replacement for the thief.

Finally, from the basic book, we have the **Elf**; this is the 'do-it-all' class for the undecided. Fighter and Magic-User all rolled into one, with the advantages of both. The *huge* disadvantage to this class, however, is its extremely slow level progression. While at first level this is truly 'one class to rule them all', by the time it reaches second many of the other classes will have passed third. The thief will be working on fourth. I'd actually rate this the worst

of the classes, for that reason.

If one is using the whole panoply of classes available, then some more options open up. The **Illusionist**, in this issue, is an interesting variant on the magic-user, far more specialised but with a slightly improved spell progression and advancing at a slightly faster rate. While this class is limited in scope, it is a good choice for smaller groups, especially if they are of a sneaky mentality.

Looking at the Brave Halfling classes, let us begin with the **Gnome**. This class is hard to recommend; slow level progression, even worse than the Elf, and a more limited spell selection. However, some interesting special features do provide a wide variety of options, and paradoxically this class does slightly improve the Elf if working as a team. The class *does* have a lot of the advantages of a Halfling. Frankly – if you are going to accept a slow level progression, this is probably superior to the Elf.

Now we come to the **Bard**, which in this incarnation is very much a class all to itself. His *charm* ability does provide some useful options in play, and *legend lore* can be invaluable in gaining pre-delve knowledge. However, I feel this class is a tad to specialised, and the level progression a little too slow.

I've never liked the **Monk**. Anyone who has played with me will tell you that. I don't really feel it fits in with the Westernised mainline-D&D. In an Oriental campaign, excellent. This one is very much as it should be – an alternate Fighter, right down to the level progression rate. At low levels, however, I feel he is a hard character to justify; once you rack up to the higher levels, he becomes a superior choice to the fighter.

Paladins are in some sense an evolution of the Cleric. I've always held that this is what a Cleric ought to be perceived as – a 'holy warrior', rather than a wandering vicar. Another fighter variant, this one, with some useful abilities and sidelines to add onto his combat prowess. If this class is in use, then frankly he replaces the Cleric as 'best solo character', as he gets the best of both worlds, though again at the cost of a slowed level progression.

The **Ranger** is another fighter-variant, this time sharing some of the abilities of the Thief, as well as the Wilderness Survival skill. This one is slightly harder to justify than a Paladin, as the skills require more work, but once again we have an interesting variant to the Fighter (all of these variants are making the Fighter seem less and less attractive, I fear), albeit at the cost of, once again, a higher-level progression.

Finally, we have Daniel Proctor's **Assassin**, from Sons of Orcus. This is another interesting variant on the Thief, with the same experience table but a range of new abilities to disguise himself, and to kill instantly. The catch is that the thieves' skills do not kick in with this class until higher levels, making the already poor skill progression of the thief even worse.

Having covered the different classes available, we can look at the best combinations. For a solo campaign, then there are three choices, but my favoured remains the **Cleric**. Fast level progression, tough and effective, with a range of interesting abilities. If using additional classes, then the **Paladin** or **Ranger** are also good choices. This I think is a little more limiting, in that for a solo campaign you are completely reliant on your own devices, rather than working as a team, therefore you must have decent hit points and have some other useful abilities.

For the two-player game, my favoured choice would be **Cleric** and **Thief**. Very fast level progression means hit points will rise rapidly, and the range of skills between the two PCs will cover most situations. If using additional classes, then one can go the other way completely, and go for **Elf** and **Gnome**. While advancement is going to be very slow, this will be less apparent if the entire party is advancing at this rate, and the range of skills is going to cover even more eventualities. Another possibility for the right sort of campaign would be **Illusionist** and **Bard**, but that campaign would more resemble 'The Sting' than 'Lord of the Rings'. For a more combat-heavy game, then go for the 'Odd Couple' – **Paladin** and **Ranger**, two heavy-hitting fighters with interesting additional abilities.

A three-player game provides far more options, including the ability to have a proper fighter. Do we pick the **Fighter**? No; a better choice is the **Dwarf**, with his additional abilities. Throw in a **Cleric** for some back-up healing, and the **Thief** to scout ahead, and this is an excellent choice for a party. If a slightly more sneaky approach is being employed, an interesting variant could be to swap out the **Thief** for an **Illusionist**. Slower level progression, but it does provide some more magical firepower for the party. If going for the longer-view, then another possible mix is **Paladin**, **Ranger** and **Magic-User**. All will be advancing at about the same rate, and the two strong characters can protect the weaker one while he gains in power.

This is about the top-end here, but looking at the four-player group shows more interesting choices. Default is probably **Thief**, **Cleric**, **Fighter**, and **Magic-User**, but again I'd be tempted to mess with the pattern a little. Swap out the **Thief** for the **Halfling**, and the **Fighter** for the **Dwarf**, and you have a group more capable of getting to grips with the enemy. For more finesse, drop the **Thief**, and try a second **Magic-User**; you've still got some good combat power at the front, have the healing, and have two spellcasters to support each other. If using advanced classes, then you have room for something interesting. Take a **Dwarf** for muscle, a **Cleric** for aggressive healing, a **Thief** to scout ahead, and then try one of the others; **Bard**, perhaps, as the party 'faceman', or a **Gnome** to add an interesting variation to the scout concept.

At the end of the day, remember that party survivability depends on striking power first, and the ability to recover after a fight second. That means hit points, good 'to hits', and healing, as the prime requirements for a small group. Picking the right class combinations at the start of the campaign can make it more likely that it will be a long one.

MAGICAL MISCELLANY: THE RINGS OF ALTAR PERRAINE

One of the first illusionists to walk the Argolian Plains was Altar Perraine, the leader of the Death Walker adventuring group, whose accomplishments included killing the Seven-Headed Serpent King, bringing down the tyrant King Toltos, and leading a victorious army against the Caphor to the south. For most of his career, the world assumed he was simply a powerful magic-user, but late in his life, it became apparent that he was, in fact, a master of illusion; he had hidden this talent for the simple reason that given his renown, it would have naturally been assumed that any spell he cast was an illusion, and his spells would have been less effective.

When he died, his body was buried in a mausoleum by the surviving Death Walkers, the Thief Poreta and the Elf, Lord Dolfa. Although they concocted a series of traps for those who may loot his body, they did not foresee the invasion of the Sea People, and their dark masters entered the tomb and stole the most precious objects buried there – the three Rings of Altar Perraine, the source of much of his power. They are still missing, buried in deep vaults or hidden in shipwrecks, waiting to be found...

Ring of Minor Magicks

This ring appears as a heavy golden ring, with a series of twelve small runes around the outside; it shrinks to fit any finger it is placed upon. The effect of this ring is simple; it allows all Illusionist casting *Phantasmal Force* to make that spell appear to be any 1st-level Magic-User spell, with a -4 penalty to the saving throw of the user. (Altar know of the existence of a ring with a similar effect, but allowing the user to transform his *Phantasmal Force* into any 1st-level *Clerical* spell, but was unable to locate this artefact despite years of searching.) This was the key to Altar's deception, as it allowed him to appear to 'cast' most of the basic spells of the magic-user.

Ring of Distraction

This is transparent, and barely visible – except to the wearer, who perceives it as a deep amethyst. The ring has an unusual ability, in that it serves to distract the target of an illusionist's spell, focusing his attention elsewhere.



The target will see something in his peripheral vision, or hear a noise just at the range of his hearing. He has no saving throw against this power, which provides a -4 penalty against any saving throw against an illusionist's spell.

Ring of Heart's Desire

The Ring of Heart's Desire is said to have been forged by Dyeus himself as a means of tricking his adversaries; it has the unique property of reaching into a man's soul and finding the one thing he most wants to see – a lost love, dead parent, forgotten friend; when used in connection with a *Phantasmal Force* spell, it can be devastating; it provides a -8 penalty against any saving throw against one particular illusion. However, once the illusion ends, the target often becomes irrational, and will do anything to reclaim his lost vision. If he successfully perceives it as an illusion, he will attack the illusionist.

M^R. B'S LAST WORD

"The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra."

—Jimmy Johnson

Guess what – first level sucks...

A first level character is not special! If you don't believe me, lets all look back and ask the question – "What is first level?"

D&D's origins were from war games; every army has to have sword fodder by the hundred to die at the command of the gods and the generals for whatever cause. That's the role of the fighter. They do have a chance to survive, and might live through **two** hits in a fight (though most games now give the wizard types a few more HP – rendering the fighter *pointless* until they gain a few levels, by which time your wizard is smashing away with his Fireballs and Lightning Bolts – but I digress.)

Speaking of the wizard – my old group called them the 'sleep and slit' specialists. One use and 'bang' – that's it for the day. Better to just kill him and make up a new one. Who cares if they die or not! Don't get me started on the cleric...and by the time a thief can pick a lock successfully they should be thinking about establishing their own guild!

In the old books, they called 4th Level 'hero', and 8th Level 'superhero'; but to get there takes time, and I haven't got that level of patience any more. Time waits for no man, and should not be spent hacking rats...

Let's take a look at the classics, the basis for the Gygax/Arneson era of D&D. Take Conan. Even in his youngest days, the *lowest* level he could be is 3rd. And his stats must have been *amazing*! Or Luke Skywalker, farmboy made good. Perhaps back at the farm he was 1st level, but that's one over-powered homebrew class – and the 'school of imperial marksmanship' to help him. Is the answer to fudge the dice, so that every orc, goblin and rat misses? Hell no! Risk is one of the best parts of the game!

The first session of a campaign sets the tone, and most often a campaign starts at 1st level. Most new players will start at 1st level. And for those coming in later, it can prove a hell of a culture shock. (In my first old school game, 11 dead characters. At least character creation is fast in the earlier editions. Once someone died in the first round of a combat, and his new character turned up just in time to die in the *last* round of the combat.!)

Now, dear reader, I'll let you into a little secret. What makes a 1st level character special?

You.

You must be smart and savvy. Know to check for traps with the ol' 10-foot pole, and know all the dirty tricks, as these have become the tropes that the D&D-iverse is based on. Yes, some might call it 'meta-gaming' – but if you roll up a 1hp fighter, I call it 'survival'.

Yours,

Mr. B

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