

CARCASS CRAWLER

The official Old-School Essentials zine

Issue #1



New classes and races! The acolyte,
gargantua, goblin, hephaestan,
kineticist, and mage

Flexible d6 thief skills

Black powder firearms

**OLD-SCHOOL
ESSENTIALS**
RETRO ADVENTURE GAME

CARCASS CRAWLER

The official Old-School Essentials zine

Issue #1



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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME!

Welcome to the first issue of *Carcass Crawler*—the official *Old-School Essentials* zine!

Each issue of *Carcass Crawler* is packed with new material for your games, including new character classes and races, new spells and magic items, new monsters, optional and expanded rules, previews of in-development products, short adventures, and more!



IN THIS ISSUE

This issue focuses on expanded character options, with the following articles:

- ▶ **New classes:** Six new character classes! The acolyte, the gargantua, the goblin, the hephaestan, the kineticist, and the mage.
- ▶ **New races:** Three new character races for Advanced Fantasy games! The gargantua, the goblin, and the hephaestan.
- ▶ **Black powder weapons:** Complete rules for introducing renaissance-style black powder firearms into your game!
- ▶ **Fighter combat talents:** Optional rules to give fighters a little extra mechanical perk.
- ▶ **d6 thief skills:** An optional alternative system for thief skills.
- ▶ **Adjudicating thief skills:** Optional guidelines for adjudicating the use of thief skills and attempts by other characters to perform similar tasks.

COMPATIBILITY

Content in *Carcass Crawler* is compatible with all flavours of *Old-School Essentials* (e.g. Classic Fantasy, Advanced Fantasy). By extension, this means that the content is also compatible with the classic Basic/Expert game and with other games that are based on the Basic/Expert rules.

CHARACTER CLASSES

By JAMES MALISZEWSKI AND GAVIN NORMAN

This article presents six brand new character classes for your *Old-School Essentials* games. The new classes range from new fantasy demihumans, through alternatives to existing classes, to science-fiction archetypes to add a fresh new twist to your games.

Introduce them as NPCs for player characters to encounter or add them to the roster of classes players may choose from when creating a character!

Too Many Classes?

The new classes presented in this article are entirely optional. Some groups love to have as many classes as possible, relishing the variety that a wide selection of character types offers. Other groups prefer to stick with a limited selection of character classes. As always: do what brings your group the most enjoyment in your games.

One approach that works well is for the referee to select a limited set of classes (say between 7–10 in number) that are available in the campaign. For example, in one campaign, the acolyte class may replace the cleric.

In this way, the number of choices available to players when creating characters is kept within reasonable bounds, while the hand-picked set of allowed classes can heavily reinforce the flavour of the specific campaign.

Acolyte

This class is the result of a thought experiment: what would a priestly class look like if based on the percentile thief skills mechanic, instead of the standard spell memorization mechanism? Thus, the magic wielded by acolytes is not bound by memorization.

In campaigns where the acolyte is used in place of the standard cleric class, divine magic (cast spontaneously, using a skill check mechanic) and arcane magic (cast by memorizing from spell books) would be strongly differentiated.

Gargantua

The standard roster of *Old-School Essentials* demihumans is profuse with “little people” of various kinds (e.g. dwarves, gnomes, halflings, etc.). Larger-than-human species are for the most part relegated to the monster listings. The gargantua class changes this, presenting a playable demihuman race of “big people”.

The gargantua is also presented as a race, for those using the *Old-School Essentials Advanced Fantasy* option for selecting a character’s class and race separately. See *Character Races, p20*.



Goblin

A classic monster species now presented as a playable demihuman class for *Old-School Essentials*!

The goblin is also presented as a race, for those using the *Old-School Essentials Advanced Fantasy* option for selecting a character's class and race separately. See *Character Races*, p20.

Hephaestan

Inspired by popular science-fiction spins on elves, hephaestans are a race of elf-like demihumans who practice the arts of telepathy and mind control.

The hephaestan is also presented as a race, for those using the *Old-School Essentials Advanced Fantasy* option for selecting a character's class and race separately. See *Character Races*, p20.

Kineticist

Inspired by the mystical warrior sects of popular science-fiction, kineticists are unarmoured warriors who practice the art of mind over matter by manipulation of kinetic force.

The class comes complete with a set of nine mental powers to choose from.

Mage

A companion to the acolyte, this class is the result of a thought experiment: what would a wizardly class look like if based on the percentile thief skills mechanic, instead of the standard spell memorization mechanism? Thus, the magic possessed by mages is not bound by spell books or memorization.

The specific abilities of the class are heavily inspired by a certain wizard of great repute in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Due to the class' lack of flashy combat magic, it could be used as a wholesale replacement of the standard magic-user class in low-magic campaigns.

Acolyte

By Gavin
Norman

Requirements: None

Prime requisite: WIS

Hit Dice: 1d6

Maximum level: 14

Armour: Any, including shields

Weapons: Any blunt weapons

Languages: Alignment, Common

Acolytes are adventurers who have sworn to serve a deity. They are trained for battle and can channel the power of their deity.

Acolyte Skills

Acolytes can use the following skills with a range of 30', with the chance of success shown opposite:

- ▶ **Bless (BL):** Allies gain +1 to attack and damage rolls for one round per level of the acolyte. May be used once per turn.
- ▶ **Detect magic (DM):** Requires 1 turn of concentration on an object. Failed checks may be re-attempted, if the acolyte is willing to spend the additional time.
- ▶ **Know alignment (KA):** Grants immediate knowledge of the alignment of one character, monster, object, or location. May only be attempted once per subject.
- ▶ **Purify (PU):** Makes rotten, poisonous, or spoiled food and water pure and safe to consume. Affects either 6 quarts of drink, one ration (iron or standard), or unpreserved food sufficient for 12 humans. May only be attempted once per item.
- ▶ **Rally (RA):** Counters magical fear effects. May be used once per turn.
- ▶ **Turn undead (TU):** Affects undead of up to one HD greater than the acolyte's level. Penalised based on the type of undead targeted (-5% per HD). If the roll succeeds, 2d6 HD of undead are forced to leave the area, if possible. They will not harm or make contact with the acolyte. May be used once per turn.

Combat

Acolytes can use any armour. Strict holy doctrine prevents acolytes' use of weapons that have a sharp, cutting edge or stabbing point. They may use the following weapons: club, mace, sling, staff, war hammer.

Divine Magic

Acolytes cannot memorize spells, but can cast clerical spells from scrolls. See *Magic* in *Old-School Essentials* for full details on divine magic.

Holy symbol: An acolyte must carry a holy symbol (see *Old-School Essentials*).

Deity disfavour: Acolytes must be faithful to the tenets of their alignment, clergy, and religion. Those who fall from favour with their deity may incur penalties.

Magical research: An acolyte of any level may spend time and money on magical research. This allows them to research miscellaneous magical effects (see *Other Magical Research* in *Old-School Essentials*). From 9th level, an acolyte may also create magic items.

Using magic items: Acolytes can use magic scrolls of spells on the cleric spell list (see *Old-School Essentials*). They can also use items that may only be used by divine spell casters (e.g. some magic staves).

Healing

From 2nd level, an acolyte has the power to heal by touch. This may be used once per day per level of the acolyte and either cures 1d3hp or allows another save vs a negative effect (e.g. a curse or poison).

After Reaching 9th Level

An acolyte may establish or build a stronghold. So long as the acolyte is currently in favour with their god, a stronghold may be bought or built at half the normal price, due to divine intervention.

Acolyte Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	Saving Throws				
				D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
2	1,500	2d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
3	3,000	3d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
4	6,000	4d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
5	12,000	5d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
6	25,000	6d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
7	50,000	7d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
8	100,000	8d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
9	200,000	9d6	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
10	300,000	9d6+1*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
11	400,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
12	500,000	9d6+3*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
13	600,000	9d6+4*	12 [+7]	3	5	7	8	7
14	700,000	9d6+5*	12 [+7]	3	5	7	8	7

THAC0: Attack matrix row to use.

(Ascending AC attack bonus in [].)

*: Modifiers from CON no longer apply.

D: Death / poison; W: Wands;

P: Paralysis / petrify; B: Breath attacks;

S: Spells / rods / staves.

Followers

Once a stronghold is established, the acolyte will attract followers (5d6 × 10 fighters of level 1–2). These troops are completely devoted to the acolyte, never checking morale. The referee decides which proportions of followers are 1st and 2nd level and which are bowmen, infantry, etc.

Rolling Skill Checks

All skills are rolled on d%, with a result of less than or equal to the listed percentage indicating success.

Player Knowledge

The referee should roll for detect magic on the player's behalf, as the acolyte does not always know whether the object being scanned is magical or not.

Acolyte Skills Chance of Success

Level	BL	DM	KA	PU	RA	TU
1	10	30	20	20	25	50
2	35	50	35	23	55	55
3	40	55	40	25	60	60
4	45	60	45	26	65	65
5	50	65	50	35	70	70
6	55	70	55	45	75	75
7	60	75	60	55	80	80
8	65	80	65	65	83	85
9	70	85	70	70	86	90
10	71	90	75	75	90	95
11	72	95	80	80	92	100
12	73	97	85	85	95	105
13	74	98	90	90	98	110
14	75	99	95	95	99	115

GARGANTUA

By James
Maliszewski

Demihuman Class

Requirements: Minimum CON 9,
minimum STR 9

Prime requisite: CON and STR

Hit Dice: 1d10

Maximum level: 10

Armour: Any appropriate to size,
including shields

Weapons: Any

Languages: Alignment, Common



Open Doors

Gargantuas open even barred doors with ease. They are treated as the next highest STR category when it comes to determining their chance of opening doors (see *Ability Scores* in *Old-School Essentials*). For example, a gargantua with STR 12 is treated as if their STR were in the 13–15 category instead.

Rock Throwing

Gargantuas are adept at using rocks as projectiles. Rocks thrown by a gargantua deal 1d6 damage on a successful hit and have a range of 5'–50' / 51'–100' / 101'–150'.

After Reaching 9th Level

A gargantua has the option of creating a stronghold that will form the basis of a new community of gargantuas. Gargantua communities can be located either near those of humans or in the wilderness (typically a forested or hilly area).

Combat

Gargantuas can use all types of weapons and armour, but it must be tailored to their large size.

Two-handed melee weapons: A gargantua can wield any two-handed melee weapon, such as a battle axe, with only one hand.

Gargantua Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	Saving Throws				
				D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d10	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
2	2,500	2d10	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
3	5,000	3d10	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
4	10,000	4d10	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
5	20,000	5d10	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
6	40,000	6d10	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
7	80,000	7d10	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8
8	160,000	8d10	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8
9	300,000	9d10	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8
10	500,000	9d10+3*	12 [+7]	2	3	4	4	6

THAC0: Attack matrix row to use.

(Ascending AC attack bonus in []).

*: Modifiers from CON no longer apply.

D: Death / poison; W: Wands;

P: Paralysis / petrify; B: Breath attacks;

S: Spells / rods / staves.



GOBLIN

By James
Maliszewski

Demihuman Class

Requirements: Minimum DEX 9

Prime requisite: DEX and STR

Hit Dice: 1d6

Maximum level: 8

Armour: Any appropriate to size, including shields

Weapons: Any appropriate to size

Languages: Alignment, Common, Goblin, the language of wolves

Goblins are short demihumans standing between 3' and 3½' tall. They possess skin ranging in colour from yellow to orange to red (and everything in between), while their eyes are usually reddish in hue and are visible even in the dark. Though many goblins live underground, not all do so, especially those most likely to interact with humans and join adventuring parties. Goblins can be somewhat surly and resentful when interacting with other beings, or even their own kin, like bugbears and hobgoblins. These attitudes are only heightened by the fact that many goblins—though not all—are aligned with Chaos.

Prime requisites: A goblin with at least 13 in one prime requisite gains a 5% bonus to experience. If both DEX and STR are 16 or higher, the goblin gets a +10% bonus.

Combat

Goblins can use all types of armour, but it must be tailored to their small size. Similarly, they can use any weapon appropriate to their stature (as determined by the referee). They cannot use longbows or two-handed swords.

Defensive Bonus

Due to their small size, goblins gain a +2 bonus to Armour Class when attacked by large opponents (greater than human-sized).

Detect Construction Tricks

Goblins are fair miners and have a 2-in-6 chance of being able to detect new construction, sliding walls, or sloping passages when searching.

Infravision

Goblins have infravision to 60' (see *Darkness* under *Hazards and Challenges* in *Old-School Essentials*).

Stealth

Underground, goblins have a 3-in-6 chance of moving silently.

Wolf Affinity

Goblins live alongside wolves, including dire wolves. They can speak to these animals and gain a +1 bonus to reaction rolls when encountering wolves. (See *Encounters* in *Old-School Essentials*.) If the result is 9 or greater, a wolf will consent to being ridden as a mount by the goblin.

After Reaching 8th Level

A goblin can establish a stronghold, whether above ground or beneath it, attracting 2d6 goblins from far and wide. Goblins typically live in clans, so goblins of the character's clan will be attracted to this stronghold. Goblins from other clans will generally be friendly and clans may collaborate in times of war or disaster.

A goblin ruler may only hire goblin mercenaries. Specialists and retainers of any race may be hired, but this is uncommon.

Goblin Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	Saving Throws				
				D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
2	2,000	2d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
3	4,000	3d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
4	8,000	4d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
5	16,000	5d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
6	32,000	6d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
7	64,000	7d6	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8
8	120,000	8d6	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8

THAC0: Attack matrix row to use.
(Ascending AC attack bonus in [].)

D: Death / poison; W: Wands;
P: Paralysis / petrify; B: Breath attacks;
S: Spells / rods / staves.



HEPHAESTAN

By James
Maliszewski

Demihuman Class

Requirements: Minimum CHA 9,
minimum CON 9

Prime requisite: INT and WIS

Hit Dice: 1d6

Maximum level: 10

Armour: Leather, chainmail, shields

Weapons: Any

Languages: Alignment, Common,
Hephaestan

Hephaestans are a race of tall (6'), thin demihumans with angular features and pointed ears. Some sages claim they are relatives of elves, hailing from a distant land or even another world. For their part, hephaestans are tight lipped on the subject of their origins. Coldly rational and seemingly without emotion, the hephaestans are highly skilled in the use of mental powers, which they employ instead of magic. Despite their aloofness, hephaestans get along well with most intelligent races.

Prime requisites: A hephaestan with at least 13 INT and WIS gains a 5% bonus to experience. A hephaestan with an INT of at least 16 and a WIS of at least 13 gains a 10% XP bonus.

Combat

Hephaestans can use leather armour or chainmail, as well as shields. They can use all types of weapons.

Listening at Doors

Hephaestans have keen hearing, giving them a 2-in-6 chance of hearing noises (see *Dungeon Adventuring* in *Old School Essentials*).

Mental Powers

Twice per day per level, a hephaestan may activate one of the following mental powers:

► **ESP:** By concentrating for 1 round, the hephaestan can read the thoughts of an intelligent, living creature within 90'. An unwilling target may save versus spells to resist. While reading thoughts, the hephaestan may move but cannot attack.

► **Gestalt:** A hephaestan can read a living creature's memories and share their own memories with the creature. To do this, the hephaestan and the creature must be in physical contact. An unwilling target may save versus spells to resist.

► **Healing trance:** A hephaestan can enter a meditative state that lasts for 1 turn, during which time they are completely unaware of their surroundings and can neither attack nor defend themselves. The trance heals $1d6+1$ hit points per use ($2d6+2$ hit points per use at 6th level or higher).

► **Mind control:** A hephaestan can alter a creature's perceptions to take control of their actions. A target within 30' must save versus paralysis or come under the hephaestan's mental control for 1d6 rounds. Acts that are self-destructive or against the victim's alignment allow another save to break the mind control.

► **Mind shield:** A hephaestan can shield their mind for up to 2 turns, granting them a +4 bonus to any saving throws to resist the effects of mental powers and mind-affecting spells and magic items.

► **Telepathy:** A hephaestan can establish bidirectional mental communication with one other living intelligent creature within sight for 1 turn. The creature need not share a language with the hephaestan.

Hephaestan Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	Saving Throws				
				D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	12	13	13	15	15
2	3,000	2d6	19 [0]	12	13	13	15	15
3	6,000	3d6	19 [0]	12	13	13	15	15
4	12,000	4d6	17 [+2]	10	11	11	12	12
5	25,000	5d6	17 [+2]	10	11	11	12	12
6	50,000	6d6	17 [+2]	10	11	11	12	12
7	100,000	7d6	14 [+5]	8	9	9	10	10
8	200,000	8d6	14 [+5]	8	9	9	10	10
9	300,000	9d6	14 [+5]	8	9	9	10	10
10	400,000	9d8+2*	12 [+7]	6	7	8	8	8

THAC0: Attack matrix row to use.

(Ascending AC attack bonus in [].)

*: Modifiers from CON no longer apply.

D: Death / poison; W: Wands;

P: Paralysis / petrify; B: Breath attacks;

S: Spells / rods / staves.



Activating Mental Powers

A hephaestan must spend a round concentrating in order to activate a mental power. This precludes moving, attacking, or taking any other actions.

Initiative: The use of mental powers must be declared before initiative is rolled.

Disruption: If the hephaestan loses initiative and is successfully attacked or fails a saving throw before their turn, the power is disrupted and fails. One “usage per day” is still consumed.

Neuropressure

Hephaestans have developed a non-lethal combat technique that applies pressure to the nerves at the back of a creature’s neck to induce temporary unconsciousness for 4d4 rounds. Neuropressure only affects targets of 4+1 or lower Hit Dice (see *Game Statistics* under *Monsters* in *Old-School Essentials*) and is ineffective against creatures larger than the hephaestan or lacking a discernible neck. Furthermore, neuropressure requires a successful attack roll against an unaware opponent to take effect. This ability is usable a number of times per day equal to the hephaestan’s level.

After Reaching 9th Level

A hephaestan has the option of establishing an academy devoted to the study of mental powers, attracting 2d6 1st-level hephaestans to study under the character. A hephaestan may only hire hephaestan mercenaries. Specialists and retainers of any race may be hired.

KINETICIST

By Gavin
Norman

Requirements: None

Prime requisite: DEX and WIS

Hit Dice: 1d6

Maximum level: 14

Armour: None

Weapons: Any

Languages: Alignment, Common

Kineticists are masters of mind over matter, their rigorous physical and mental training focusing on the manipulation of internal kinetic force. This force can be harnessed to accelerate motion and hone reactions or can be projected outward to affect distant objects.

The ability to manipulate kinetic force may be awakened spontaneously or may be learned from a master. Either way, it is often the case that this power runs in families.

Prime requisites: A kineticist with at least 13 DEX and WIS gains a 5% bonus to experience. A kineticist with at least a 16 in both prime requisites receives a +10% XP bonus.

Armour Class

As a kineticist advances in level, their honed reactions and ability to deflect attacks grant them an improved Armour Class, indicated in the table opposite.

Combat

Kineticists can use all weapons, but cannot use armour or shields, instead relying on their honed reactions and mental powers for defence in battle.

Mental Defence

Kineticists gain a +2 bonus to all saving throws against mental powers, including the powers of other kineticists.

Mental Powers

Kineticists know a number of mental powers depending on their level, as indicated in the table opposite. Mental powers are chosen by the referee, who may allow the player to choose.

The list of mental powers usable by kineticists is found on *p16*.

Frequency of Use

Twice per day per level, a kineticist may activate one of the mental powers they know. For example, a 2nd level kineticist may activate four powers per day.

Activating Mental Powers

Kineticists' mental powers take effect instantly at the beginning of the character's initiative. A kineticist may activate a power and perform other actions (e.g. moving, attacking, etc.) in the same round.

Combat sequence: Mental powers take effect at the beginning of the combat sequence, before movement.

One power per round: A kineticist cannot activate more than one power in a single round.

After Reaching 9th Level

A kineticist may establish an academy where they teach their skills to students. The kineticist will attract 1d6 apprentices, who are of level 1d4.

Kineticist Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	AC	Saving Throws					Mental Powers
					D	W	P	B	S	
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	9 [10]	13	14	13	16	15	3
2	2,000	2d6	19 [0]	8 [11]	13	14	13	16	15	3
3	4,000	3d6	19 [0]	7 [12]	13	14	13	16	15	4
4	8,000	4d6	19 [0]	6 [13]	13	14	13	16	15	4
5	16,000	5d6	17 [+2]	5 [14]	12	13	11	14	13	5
6	32,000	6d6	17 [+2]	4 [15]	12	13	11	14	13	5
7	64,000	7d6	17 [+2]	3 [16]	12	13	11	14	13	6
8	120,000	8d6	17 [+2]	2 [17]	12	13	11	14	13	6
9	240,000	9d6	14 [+5]	1 [18]	10	11	9	12	10	7
10	360,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	0 [19]	10	11	9	12	10	7
11	480,000	9d6+4*	14 [+5]	-1 [20]	10	11	9	12	10	8
12	600,000	9d6+6*	14 [+5]	-2 [21]	10	11	9	12	10	8
13	720,000	9d6+8*	12 [+7]	-3 [22]	8	9	7	10	8	9
14	840,000	9d6+10*	12 [+7]	-3 [22]	8	9	7	10	8	9

THAC0: Attack matrix row to use.

(Ascending AC attack bonus in []).)

*: Modifiers from CON no longer apply.

D: Death / poison; W: Wands;

P: Paralysis / petrify; B: Breath attacks;

S: Spells / rods / staves.



KINETICIST MENTAL POWERS

By Gavin
Norman

Accelerated Motion

Duration: 1 round

Range: The kineticist

The kineticist makes a rapid burst of movement, driven by an internal surge of kinetic force.

Movement: The kineticist's movement rate is doubled.

Melee attacks: The kineticist may make multiple melee attacks per round. The number of melee attacks the kineticist can make depends on their level, as indicated in the table below.

Accelerated Motion: Attacks per Round

Level	Attacks per Round
1–4	2
5–8	3
9–12	4
13+	5

Control Density

Duration: 1 round per level

Range: The kineticist

The kineticist focuses kinetic force to alter the effective density of their own body, becoming lighter or heavier.

Lighter: The kineticist becomes so light that they barely touch the ground. They leave no tracks in soft surfaces and can walk across the surface of water.

Heavier: The kineticist is rooted to the spot, immune to attacks or effects that would cause them to fall or be pushed.

Crush Life

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 round per level

Range: 30'

The kineticist focuses precise kinetic pressure onto the vital organs of a living target within range, crushing the life out of them by constricting breathing, blood flow, etc.

Damage: The target suffers 1d3 points of damage per round.

Stun: The target is unable to move or act unless they make a **saving throw versus paralysis**. A save is required each round.

Restrictions: Non-living creatures (e.g. undead, constructs) are unaffected.

Concentration: Being distracted (e.g. attacked) or performing any other action (except moving) causes the power to end.

Kinetic Fist

Duration: 1 round per level

Range: The kineticist

The kineticist's unarmed attacks are charged with focused kinetic energy, making their bare hands deadly weapons.

Damage: The kineticist's unarmed attacks inflict increased damage, as indicated in the table below.

Invulnerable monsters: Kinetically charged attacks are able to harm monsters which are immune to mundane damage (e.g. which can only be harmed by magic or silver weapons).

Kinetic Fist: Unarmed Damage

Level	Unarmed Damage
1–4	2d4
5–8	2d6
9–12	2d8
13+	2d12

Kinetic Leap

Duration: Instant

Range: 10' + 10' per level

The kineticist propels their own body with a surge of kinetic force, allowing them to make a superhuman leap.

Leap: The kineticist can leap to any location within range, including vertically.

Kinetic Shield

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 round per level

Range: The kineticist

A shield of kinetic energy whirls around the kineticist's body, deflecting attacks against the kineticist.

Missiles: The kineticist is completely immune to small, non-magical missiles. No protection is granted against, for example, hurled boulders or enchanted arrows.

Melee attacks: Opponents suffer a -2 penalty to melee attack rolls against the kineticist.

Energy attacks: The kineticist gains a +2 bonus to saving throws versus magic wands, rods, and staves, breath weapons, and energy attacks.

Concentration: Performing any other action (except moving) causes the power to end.

Kinetic Wave

Duration: Instant

Range: 30'

A wave of kinetic force surges from the kineticist's hand at a single target in range.

Push: The target must **save vs paralysis** or be thrown back by the kinetic force.

If the save fails: The target suffers 1d6 damage and is thrown away from the kineticist to a distance of 10' per level of the kineticist.

Telekinetic Attack

Duration: Instant

Range: 10' per level

The kineticist telekinetically lifts an object within range and hurls it at a nearby opponent.

Weight: Up to 200 coins of weight per level of the kineticist may be lifted.

Range: The targeted creature must be within 60' of the object.

Saving throw: The target must **save versus wands** or be hit by the hurled object, suffering damage.

Damage: The damage inflicted depends on the weight of the object hurled, as indicated in the table below.

Telekinetic Attack: Damage

Object's Weight (Coins)	Damage
Up to 200	2d4
201–400	2d6
401–800	3d6
801–1,500	4d6
1,501 or more	5d6

Throw Weapon

Duration: Instant

Range: 10' per level

The kineticist throws a melee weapon they are holding in a precise, arcing flight. The weapon attacks a target within range and then returns to the kineticist's hand.

Attack: The thrown weapon is handled as a missile attack roll with a +4 bonus.

Damage: If the attack hits, any damage dealt is doubled.

MAGE

By Gavin
Norman

Requirements: None

Prime requisite: INT and WIS

Hit Dice: 1d6

Maximum level: 14

Armour: None

Weapons: Dagger, short sword, staff, sword

Languages: Alignment, Common

Mages are adventurers who study the secrets of deep magic, making them powerful allies.

Prime requisites: A mage with at least 13 INT and WIS gains a 5% bonus to XP. A mage with an INT of at least 16 and a WIS of at least 13 receives a 10% XP bonus.

Arcane Magic

Mages cannot memorize spells, but can cast arcane spells from scrolls. See *Magic* in *Old-School Essentials* for full details on arcane magic.

Magical research: A mage of any level may spend time and money on magical research. This allows them to scribe scrolls of arcane spells (see *Scribing Scrolls*) or to research other magical effects. From 9th level, a mage may also create magic items of other kinds.

Using magic items: Mages are able to cast spells from arcane scrolls and use any items that may only be used by arcane spell casters (e.g. magic wands).

Combat

Mages can use staves and one-handed blades, but cannot wear armour.

Healing

Once per day, a mage may spend 1 turn to heal an ally. This either cures 1hp per level or allows another save against a negative effect (e.g. a curse or poison).

Mage Armour

A mage's connection with deep magic grants them a +2 bonus to Armour Class.

Mage Skills

Mages can use the following skills on targets within 30', with the chance of success shown opposite:

- ▶ **Detect magic (DM):** Requires 1 turn of concentration on an object. Failed checks may be re-attempted, if the mage is willing to spend the additional time.
- ▶ **Open/close (OC):** Magically opens or pushes closed an unlocked door, portal, lid, etc. and holds it open/closed for 1 round per level of the mage. May only be attempted once per portal.
- ▶ **Rally/fear (RF):** Rally counters magical fear effects. Fear forces enemies to make a morale check. This skill may be used once per turn.
- ▶ **Read magic (RM):** Allows the mage to decipher magical scripts and runes. Failed attempts cannot be retried until the mage gains a level.
- ▶ **Suggestion (SU):** On a successful check, the mage's words take on a supernatural potency. Up to one HD of persons (see *Persons* in *Old-School Essentials*) per level of the mage must **save versus spells** or follow the mage's suggestion for 1 round per level of the mage. (If the suggestion would endanger a subject, that subject automatically saves). Afterwards, subjects realise they have been tricked. This skill may be used once per turn.

Mage's Staff

Invulnerable monsters: In the hands of a mage, a normal staff can harm creatures that are immune to mundane attacks.

Light: Once per day, the mage may cause their staff to radiate light in a 30' radius for 1 turn per level.

Mage Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	Saving Throws				
				D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	12	13	12	15	14
2	2,800	2d6	19 [0]	12	13	12	15	14
3	5,600	3d6	19 [0]	12	13	12	15	14
4	12,000	4d6	19 [0]	12	13	12	15	14
5	24,000	5d6	19 [0]	12	13	12	15	14
6	48,000	6d6	17 [+2]	10	11	10	13	11
7	100,000	7d6	17 [+2]	10	11	10	13	11
8	200,000	8d6	17 [+2]	10	11	10	13	11
9	400,000	9d6	17 [+2]	10	11	10	13	11
10	560,000	9d6+1*	17 [+2]	10	11	10	13	11
11	720,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	7	8	7	10	7
12	980,000	9d6+3*	14 [+5]	7	8	7	10	7
13	1,140,000	9d6+4*	14 [+5]	7	8	7	10	7
14	1,300,000	9d6+5*	14 [+5]	7	8	7	10	7

THAC0: Attack matrix row to use.

(Ascending AC attack bonus in []).)

*: Modifiers from CON no longer apply.

D: Death / poison; W: Wands;
P: Paralysis / petrify; B: Breath attacks;
S: Spells / rods / staves.

Scribing Scrolls

Mages of any level can create scrolls of arcane spells. See *Duplicating spell effects* under *Creating Magic Items* in *Old-School Essentials*.

After Reaching 11th Level

A mage may build a stronghold, often a great tower. 1d6 apprentices of levels 1–3 will arrive to study under the mage.

Rolling Skill Checks

All skills are rolled on d%, with a result of less than or equal to the listed percentage indicating success.

Player Knowledge

The referee should roll for detect magic on the player's behalf, as the mage does not always know whether the object being scanned is magical or not.

Mage Skills Chance of Success

Level	DM	OC	RF	RM	SU
1	75	30	20	50	20
2	80	35	23	55	23
3	83	40	25	60	25
4	85	45	26	65	26
5	87	50	35	70	35
6	90	55	45	75	45
7	92	60	55	80	55
8	93	65	65	83	65
9	94	70	70	86	70
10	95	75	75	90	75
11	96	80	80	92	80
12	97	85	85	95	85
13	98	90	90	98	90
14	99	95	95	99	95

CHARACTER RACES

By JAMES MALISZEWSKI AND GAVIN NORMAN

The three new demihuman races from the previous articles—the gargantua, goblin, and hephaestan—are also presented here as separate races, for groups who prefer to select character race and class separately. If using this rule, each player may decide individually whether to create their character by selecting a class alone or by selecting race and class separately.

Character Creation Procedure

If selecting character race and class separately, the following procedure should be used:

1. **Choose a race:** Choose a race from those available, bearing in mind their ability score requirements.

2. **Apply ability score modifiers:** Some races list ability score modifiers. Once you have chosen a race, adjust your character's ability scores as indicated. These modifiers cannot raise an ability score above 18 or lower it below 3.
3. **Choose a class:** The selected character race determines the classes that are available to choose from. Also bear in mind the ability score requirements of some classes.

Native Languages

When choosing race and class separately, the character's native languages are determined by the race. The languages listed in the class should be ignored.



GARGANTUA

Requirements: Minimum CON 9,
minimum STR 9

Ability modifiers: -1 INT, +1 STR

Languages: Alignment, Common

Known as the “Big Siblings of Humankind,” gargantuas are demihumans who stand about 7½' tall and weigh 550 pounds. Gargantuas typically live among or near humans, though some prefer to establish their own communities in the wilderness. They are known for their strong resistance to every kind of hardship. Gargantuas also have a reputation for being slow-witted and literal-minded that is not entirely deserved, though it is true that they lack subtlety when compared to their smaller kin. They can be steadfast allies or unyielding foes.

Available Classes and Max Level

- **Assassin:** 6th
- **Barbarian:** 8th
- **Cleric***: 8th
- **Fighter:** 10th
- **Thief:** 6th

* At the referee’s option, gargantua clerics may only exist as NPCs.

Combat

Armour must be tailored to gargantuas’ large size.

Two-handed melee weapons: A gargantua can wield any two-handed melee weapon, such as a battle axe, with only one hand.



Open Doors

Gargantuas open even barred doors with ease. They are treated as the next highest STR category when it comes to determining their chance of opening doors (see *Ability Scores* in *Old-School Essentials*). For example, a gargantua with STR 12 is treated as if their STR were in the 13–15 category instead.

Resilience

Gargantuas’ natural constitution and resistance to magic grants them a bonus to saving throws versus poison, spells, and magic wands, rods, and staves. This bonus depends on a gargantua’s CON score, as follows:

- **6 or lower:** No bonus
- **7–10:** +2
- **11–14:** +3
- **15–17:** +4
- **18:** +5

Rock Throwing

Gargantuas are adept at using rocks as projectiles. Rocks thrown by a gargantua deal 1d6 damage on a successful hit and have a range of 5’–50’ / 51’–100’ / 101’–150’.

GOBLIN

Requirements: Minimum DEX 9

Ability modifiers: +1 DEX, -1 STR

Languages: Alignment, Common, Goblin, the language of wolves

Goblins are short demihumans standing between 3' and 3½' tall. They possess skin ranging in colour from yellow to orange to red (and everything in between), while their eyes are usually reddish in hue and are visible even in the dark. Though many goblins live underground, not all do so, especially those most likely to interact with humans and join adventuring parties. Goblins can be somewhat surly and resentful when interacting with other beings, or even their own kin, like bugbears and hobgoblins. These attitudes are only heightened by the fact that many goblins—though not all—are aligned with Chaos.

Available Classes and Max Level

- **Acrobat:** 7th
- **Assassin:** 8th
- **Cleric***: 6th
- **Fighter:** 8th
- **Magic-user:** 6th
- **Thief:** 8th

* At the referee's option, goblin clerics may only exist as NPCs.

Combat

Armour must be tailored to goblins' small size. Likewise, goblins can only use weapons appropriate to their stature (as determined by the referee). They cannot use longbows or two-handed swords.

Defensive Bonus

Due to their small size, goblins gain a +2 bonus to Armour Class when attacked by large opponents (greater than human-sized).

Detect Construction Tricks

Goblins are fair miners and have a 2-in-6 chance of being able to detect new construction, sliding walls, or sloping passages when searching.

Infravision

Goblins have infravision to 60' (see *Darkness under Hazards and Challenges in Old-School Essentials*).

Resilience

Goblins' natural constitution and resistance to magic grants them a bonus to saving throws versus poison, spells, and magic wands, rods, and staves. This bonus depends on a goblin's CON score, as follows:

- **6 or lower:** No bonus
- **7–10:** +2
- **11–14:** +3
- **15–17:** +4
- **18:** +5

Wolf Affinity

Goblins live alongside wolves, including dire wolves. They can speak to these animals and gain a +1 bonus to reaction rolls when encountering wolves. (See *Encounters in Old-School Essentials*.) If the result is 9 or greater, a wolf will consent to being ridden as a mount by the goblin.

HEPHAESTAN

Requirements: Minimum INT 9

Ability modifiers: -1 STR, +1 CHA

Languages: Alignment, Common,
Hephaestan

Hephaestans are a race of tall (6'), thin demihumans with angular features and pointed ears. Some sages claim they are relatives of elves, hailing from a distant land or even another world. For their part, hephestans are tight lipped on the subject of their origins. Despite their cold rationality and aloofness, hephestans get along well with most intelligent races.

Available Classes and Max Level

- **Acrobat:** 10th
- **Assassin:** 10th
- **Cleric***: 7th
- **Fighter:** 7th
- **Illusionist:** 11th
- **Magic-user:** 11th
- **Thief:** 10th

* At the referee's option, hephestan clerics may only exist as NPCs.

Listening at Doors

Hephaestans have keen hearing, giving them a 2-in-6 chance of hearing noises (see *Dungeon Adventuring* in *Old School Essentials*).



Neuropressure

Hephaestans have developed a non-lethal combat technique that applies pressure to the nerves at the back of a creature's neck to induce temporary unconsciousness for 4d4 rounds. Neuropressure only affects targets of 4+1 or lower Hit Dice (see **Game Statistics** under **Monsters** in *Old-School Essentials*) and is ineffective against creatures larger than the hephestan or lacking a discernible neck. Furthermore, neuropressure requires a successful attack roll against an unaware opponent to take effect. This ability is usable a number of times per day equal to the hephestan's level.

BLACK POWDER FIREARMS

By GAVIN NORMAN AND DONN STROUD

INTRODUCTION

This article presents rules for introducing black powder firearms of the types used in the Early Modern period of history into your *Old-School Essentials* games.

Very early guns were essentially hand-held cannons, but this article skips ahead to the musket style guns from the 1400s onward. The term “musket” is used for simplicity although there were many names applied to these early guns.

The Basics

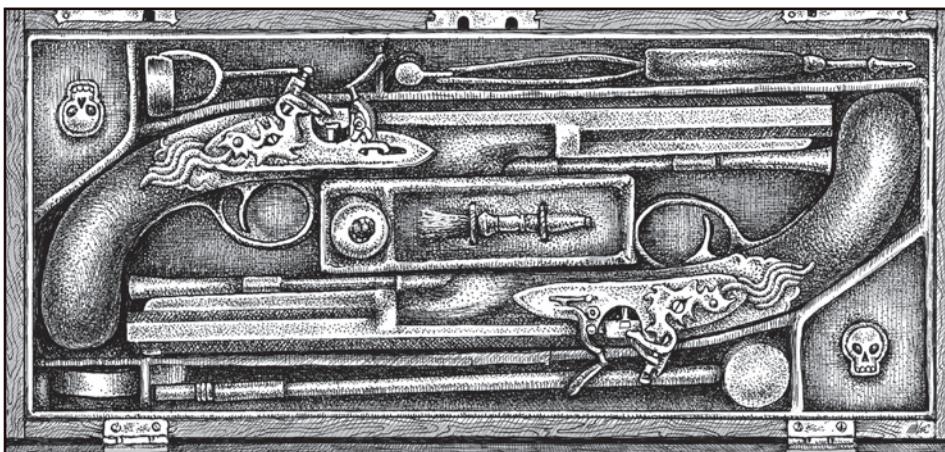
A gun is loaded through the muzzle, first with gun powder, then with wad and balls (or shot). A small tool is used to set the ball and wad into the tip of the barrel, and a longer ramrod is used to firmly seat these against the gunpowder. The

priming pan is also loaded with gunpowder and the weapon fired by applying a spark to the pan, causing the powder to burn, thus igniting the load in the barrel and pushing the wad and ball out of the gun at explosive speeds. The only thing that changed over 3 to 4 hundred years was the firing mechanism: the method of causing the spark.

Types of Firearms

Three types of firing mechanisms (matchlock, wheellock, and flintlock) and four types of firearms (blunderbusses, muskets, heavy muskets, and pistols) are described overleaf.

Availability: Historically, different types of firing mechanisms were developed and used at different points in history. The referee should decide which types are available in the campaign.



Usage

The major advantage of firearms, which eventually made them dominant over bows historically, is their relative ease of use. Using a bow effectively takes extensive training, whereas firearms can be mastered in a short time.

Non-martial classes: May use a pistol but no other firearms.

Semi-martial classes: May use a pistol, blunderbuss, or musket, but not a heavy musket.

Martial classes: May use any firearm.

Clerics: The referee should decide whether or not firearms are prohibited by the religious doctrine of clerics.

Behavioural restrictions: Other classes may have special restrictions that limit their use of firearms, despite theoretically being able to use them. For example, the knight class in *Old-School Essentials Advanced Fantasy* is prohibited from using missile weapons. This also precludes firearms. The referee should rule on such cases if they arise with other classes.

Martial, Semi-Martial, Non-Martial

For the sake of determining firearm usage, character classes are divided into three categories: martial, semi-martial, and non-martial. The category each class falls under is determined by the rate at which its THAC0 and saving throw values improve, as follows:

- ▶ **Martial classes:** Gain an improvement to their THAC0 and saves every 3 levels (e.g. fighter).
- ▶ **Semi-martial classes:** Gain an improvement to their THAC0 and saves every 4 levels (e.g. thief).
- ▶ **Non-martial classes:** Gain an improvement to their THAC0 and saves every 5 levels (e.g. magic-user).

Keeping Firearms Loaded

Another advantage of firearms over bows is that they can be loaded in advance of combat and easily carried in a ready-to-fire state.

Fire and falling: The referee may rule that pre-loaded firearms may go off if a character falls or is subjected to fire. In such cases, it is likely that the character themselves may be damaged by the shot!

SPECIALISTS

The following new types of specialists may be hired by characters.

Gunsmith

Craftspeople who specialise in the manufacture and maintenance of firearms.

Wage per month: 100gp.

Producing firearms: A gunsmith can make five matchlock firearms per month, one wheellock firearm per month, or two flintlock firearms per month.

Maintaining mercenaries' firearms: A dedicated gunsmith is required per 50 troops.

Assistants: A gunsmith's output (either in terms of firearms produced or troops maintained) may be doubled by hiring two *assistant gunsmiths* and one *blacksmith* (see *Old-School Essentials*). If four assistants and two blacksmiths are hired, the gunsmith's output may be quadrupled. A gunsmith cannot coordinate more assistants than this.

Assistant Gunsmith

Apprentices who may work under a gunsmith to increase the rate of production. See *Gunsmith*.

Wage per month: 15gp.

EQUIPMENT

Matchlock Firearms

Weapon	Cost (gp)	Weight (Coins)
Blunderbuss	25	45
Heavy musket	35	150
Musket	30	75
Pistol	20	20

Wheellock Firearms

Weapon	Cost (gp)	Weight (Coins)
Blunderbuss	200	45
Heavy musket	300	150
Musket	250	75
Pistol	170	20

Flintlock Firearms

Weapon	Cost (gp)	Weight (Coins)
Blunderbuss	100	45
Heavy musket	140	150
Musket	120	75
Pistol	80	20

Accessories

Item	Cost (gp)
Ammunition pouch	5

Encumbrance (Optional Rule)

If the optional rule for *detailed encumbrance* is used (see *Old-School Essentials*), the listed weight of weapons is tracked. The listed weight of missile weapons already includes the weight of the ammunition and its container.

Firing Mechanisms

Matchlock guns: Lit with a slow burning rope that pushes against the flash pan when the trigger is pulled. Loose historical timeline: 1400s–1500s.

Wheellock guns: Lit with a spinning wheel that is set by turning the mechanism with a wrench. Loose historical timeline: 1500s–1600s.

Flintlock guns: Sparked by a piece of flint striking against steel when the trigger is pulled. Loose historical timeline: 1600s–1800s.

Gun Types

Pistol: A single-handed gun with a barrel length less than 16". Unlike most missile weapons, a pistol can be fired in melee.

Blunderbuss: (Also known as a musketoon.) A two-handed gun with a barrel from 13–30" long. It is shot from the hip. Unlike most missile weapons, a blunderbuss can be fired in melee. It uses shot composed of many smaller balls, instead of a single, large ball and, at longer ranges, causes damage to targets in an area.

Musket: A two-handed gun with a barrel length of 40–60".

Heavy musket: A two-handed gun with a barrel length over 60". It requires a forked prop to aim and fire. If fired without the prop, the attack roll is penalised by -2. (Unlike the other firearms presented here, heavy muskets are too large and unwieldy to be used as a club in melee.)

Accessories

Ammunition pouch: Enough balls (or shot), powder, wadding, and cord for 20 shots.

Firearm Combat Stats

Weapon	Damage	Qualities
Blunderbuss	1d6	Club (1d4), Loud, Misfire, Missile (5'-10' / 11'-25' / 26'-40'), Point blank, Reload, Spread, Two-handed
Heavy musket	1d10	Misfire, Loud, Missile (5'-70' / 71'-140' / 141'-210'), Reload, Slow, Two-handed
Musket	1d10	Club (1d6), Loud, Misfire, Missile (5'-50' / 51'-100' / 101'-140'), Reload, Slow, Two-handed
Pistol	1d8	Club (1d4), Loud, Misfire, Missile (5'-25' / 26'-50' / 51'-90'), Point blank, Reload

Damage: Die rolled when using the optional rule for variable weapon damage

(see *Combat* in *Old-School Essentials*).

Weapon Qualities

Club: May be used as a club in melee (5' or less), for the damage listed. On an unmodified attack roll of 1-3, the weapon is damaged and cannot be fired until repaired by a gunsmith.

Loud: The first time in an encounter a weapon with this quality is fired, the noise triggers a wandering monster check and causes animals (except those trained for battle) to make a morale check or flee. At the referee's discretion, human-like creatures of 2 HD or less from cultures without firearms may also be affected.

Misfire: Unmodified attack rolls in a certain range (see table below) indicate that a misfire occurs. The firearm must be fully cleaned before it can be used again. Cleaning requires 1 turn.

Armour Penetration (Optional Rule)

If the referee wishes firearms to have a stronger advantage over other missile weapons, the following rule may be used.

Bonus vs metal armour: Firearms gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls against targets wearing non-magical metal armour (e.g. chainmail, plate mail).

High-tech armour: The armour penetration bonus only applies to armour of pre-modern construction (e.g. middle ages, renaissance). Modern or futuristic metal armour is not affected.

Point blank: May be fired at an opponent in melee range (5' or less). +1 to hit.

Reload: Requires a round to reload between shots; can only be fired every second round.

Slow: The character acts last in each combat round (see *Combat* in *Old-School Essentials*).

Spread: At medium or long range, targets all creatures in an area—a 5' square at medium range and a 10' square at long range. Make a single attack roll and compare against each target's AC; roll damage for each target hit.

Two-handed: Requires both hands; the character cannot use a shield.

Misfires by Unmodified Attack Roll

Firing Mechanism	Normal Conditions	Damp Conditions
Matchlock	1-3	1-6
Flintlock	1-2	1-4
Wheellock	1	1-2

Missile: Fired weapon (greater than 5' distance). The distances for short (+1 to hit), medium, and long (-1 to hit) range are shown in parentheses.

OPTIONAL RULES

By GAVIN NORMAN

COMBAT TALENTS

An Optional Rule for Fighters

Groups who prefer fighters to have a little more mechanical complexity may allow characters to select one of the following combat talents at 1st, 5th, and 10th levels.



- 1. Cleave:** When in melee with multiple foes, if the fighter strikes a killing blow, they may immediately make another attack against a second foe. The second attack roll is penalised at -2.
- 2. Defender:** When the fighter is in melee with a foe, any attacks the foe makes at characters other than the fighter are penalised at -2.
- 3. Leader:** Mercenaries or retainers under the fighter's command and within 60' gain a +1 bonus to morale/loyalty. All the fighter's allies within 60' gain a +1 bonus to saves against fear effects.
- 4. Main gauche:** When fighting with a dagger in the off hand (in place of a shield), the fighter may choose each combat round to gain a +1 bonus to AC or to attack rolls.
- 5. Slayer:** The fighter gains a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls when in combat with foes of a specific type. The type of enemy must be chosen when this talent is selected. (Examples: undead, clerics, dragons, giants, etc.)
- 6. Weapon specialist:** The fighter is an expert with a specific type of weapon chosen by the player (e.g. maces, two-handed swords, longbows, etc.). They gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls using this type of weapon. (If using the optional weapon proficiency rules in *Old-School Essentials Advanced Fantasy*, this combat talent should be disallowed.)

D6 THIEF SKILLS

An Alternative System for Thief Skills

The traditional thief class is probably the most commonly house-ruled character class—so much so that “fixing the thief” has become something of a time-honoured tradition among rules-tweakers.

Two of the most common complaints about the thief are its percentile-based skills (a mechanic not used by any other rules subsystem) and its fixed, inflexible skill progression (must all thieves focus primarily on climbing to the detriment of all other skills at lower levels?).

This article presents an alternative system for thief skills, designed as an attempt to address these issues, with d6-based skills replacing the percentages and a simple point allocation system adding flexibility.



Thief Skills

Thieves have the following skills: climb sheer surfaces, find or remove treasure traps, hear noise, hide in shadows, move silently, open locks, pick pockets, read languages. These skills function as described in *Old-School Essentials*, except that skill checks are rolled on a d6, rather than with percentile dice. The chance of success with skills is described under *Expertise*.

Modified Skills

When using d6-based thief skills, usage of the following skills is modified.

Pick Pockets

The chance of success is reduced by 1-in-6 per three levels of the victim (e.g. a 6th level victim reduces success by 2-in-6). A roll of 6 means that the attempted theft is noticed. The referee determines the reaction of the victim (possibly using the reaction table under *Encounters* in *Old-School Essentials*).

Read Languages

Thieves have the ability to read languages from 1st level and may improve their chance of success as with all other skills—see *Expertise*. (Under the standard rules, thieves gain the ability to read languages at 4th level and never improve their chance of success.)

Expertise

Base chance of success: All skills begin with a 1-in-6 chance of success.

Expertise points: Thieves gain *expertise points* to improve their chance of success with their skills. Each point allocated to a skill improves the chance of success by 1-in-6. Multiple points may be allocated to a skill, further increasing the chance of success. For example, if 2 points are allocated to a skill, the chance of success is raised to 3-in-6 (from the base 1-in-6 chance of success).

At 1st level: At character creation, a thief has 4 expertise points to allocate.

Gaining levels: A thief gains 2 additional expertise points to allocate.

Maximum chance of success: No skill may be raised above 5-in-6.

ADJUDICATING THIEF SKILLS

Optional Guidelines for the Referee

Thief skills—especially those relating to sneaking and hiding—are one of the most commonly debated aspects of the game. The traditional Basic/Expert rules on which *Old-School Essentials* is based are somewhat lacking in detail in this area, requiring each referee to make their own rulings as to how thief skills are handled.

This article presents optional guidelines which may be used when adjudicating the skills of thieves (and related classes) and attempts by other characters to perform similar tasks.

Back-Stab

Thieves gain a bonus to attack and damage rolls when attacking an unaware opponent from behind.

Surprise: A surprised opponent is considered unaware for one round. (See *Encounters* in *Old-School Essentials*.)

Hiding: An enemy who does not notice a hiding thief is considered unaware. See *Hiding*.

Sneaking: An enemy whom a thief who successfully sneaks up on is considered unaware. See *Sneaking*. Note that in the middle of combat, a roll to move silently is rarely required.

Other characters: Do not have the expertise to attempt this feat.

Climbing

Thieves have the skill to climb *sheer surfaces* (i.e. vertical or very steep surfaces with only minimal handholds) without special equipment.

Easier circumstances: Thieves can climb non-sheer surfaces without a roll.

Other characters: May require a DEX check when climbing in a difficult or tense situation. Non-thieves cannot climb sheer surfaces without special equipment.

Finding/Removing Treasure Traps

Thieves' expertise with small, complex mechanisms allows them to find and remove treasure traps.

Room traps: Thieves have the standard 1-in-6 chance of finding room traps (see *Searching* under *Dungeon Exploration* in *Old-School Essentials*).

Other characters: Do not have the expertise to attempt this feat.

Descriptive handling of traps: PCs of all classes may try to find or remove traps of all kinds by describing their actions (e.g. poking a dagger in a lock, pouring water over a floor, etc.). In this way, it may be possible to find, bypass, or disable traps without a roll. The referee should adjudicate the effects of such actions based on the mechanisms of any traps present.

Hear Noise

All characters can attempt to hear noises (see *Doors* under *Dungeon Exploration* in *Old-School Essentials*). Thieves' chance of success increases with level.



Repeating Checks (Optional Rule)

Under the standard rules, checks to search for traps or secret doors, remove treasure traps, and open locks may only be attempted once per character. The referee may allow repeated checks at the expense of time: one turn per attempt. Spending extra time brings its own risks in the form of wandering monsters and diminishing resources (e.g. light).

Hiding

Thieves have the skill to hide *in shadows* (i.e. when no other cover is available).

Easier circumstances: Thieves can hide behind decent cover without a roll.

Halflings and gnomes: Characters of these classes have a similar hiding ability to thieves which may be adjudicated using the same guidelines.

Other characters: May be required to roll (e.g. a DEX check or 2-in-6 chance) to successfully hide behind cover. Non-thieves have no chance of hiding if the only cover available is shadows.

Reading Languages and Codes

Thieves' expertise with maps and secret messages allows them (from 4th level) to read non-magical text in any language (including dead languages and basic codes).

Level of comprehension: The referee should decide how much of a text the thief comprehends. In the case of obscure languages, the thief may only understand the basic gist of a text, not the finer details.

Other characters: Do not have the expertise to attempt this feat.

Codes as puzzles: Adventures sometimes contain puzzles involving simple codes for players to unravel. The referee should decide whether to allow thieves' read languages skill to aid in solving such puzzles.

Sneaking

Thieves have the skill to move *silently* (i.e. making absolutely no sound whatsoever).

Silent environments: Moving silently is required to sneak unnoticed in a completely silent environment. e.g. if a guard is standing quietly listening for intruders, a roll to move silently may be required.

Noisy environments: Thieves can sneak unnoticed without a roll in environments with background noise (i.e. where moving absolutely silently is unnecessary). This includes combat.

Failed rolls: A thief who fails their roll to move silently is still assumed to be moving quietly, thus the normal surprise rules apply (see notes below).

Other characters: When exploring (i.e. not in combat or fleeing), it is assumed that characters are attempting to move around quietly. In environments with some level of background noise, the surprise roll (see notes below) covers characters' chance of sneaking unnoticed. Non-thieves cannot sneak unnoticed in silent environments.

Surprise: If PCs' presence is not otherwise obvious (e.g. due to light sources or noisy actions), the standard surprise roll covers the chance of characters sneaking unnoticed *in a non-silent environment*. See *Encounters* in *Old-School Essentials*.

Opening Locks

Thieves' expertise with small, complex mechanisms allows them to pick locks.

Other characters: Do not have the expertise to attempt this feat.

Picking Pockets

Thieves are trained in the subtle art of picking pockets.

Other characters: Do not have the expertise to attempt this feat.

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