An Introduction to Dungeons & Dragons

by Lewis Pulsipher

This article is the first in a series written for those who have little or no experience of playing *Dungeons & Dragons*. More experienced players will discover something of interest in most of the articles, for as Gary Gygax (the game's co-inventor) says, there are few DMs so skilled that they cannot improve their campaigns.

Dungeons & Dragons and its successor *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* are usually referred to collectively as *D&D*. *D&D* is a "role-playing" fantasy game, that is to say, each player acts as an individual hero, wizard, priest, or other character out of the fantasy traditions of J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, Michael Moorcock, and other authors. Pretending to be Conan, Aragorn, Gandalf, Elric, or your own made-up hero is part of the fun. A referee or "DM" (standing for "Dungeon Master") is required to establish places of adventure, and to control monsters and non-player persons which the players will encounter. The game is best with about four players plus a DM, but any number of people can play. Though competition can be arranged, normally players do not fight each other; they are on the same "team", and play against the sinister creatures controlled by the DM.

Players create their game personae or "characters" with the aid of dice rolls, and each uses the same character in each game session, trying to become more skilful, wealthy, and powerful, and pursuing whatever other goals they desire. Characters are far from Conan's equal when they begin, and death is an ever-present danger. Commonly, in a game session a group of players will explore a "dungeon" or underground labyrinth (perhaps like Tolkien's Moria), an outdoor wilderness, or a town mapped and populated beforehand by the DM. They hunt for evil monsters to kill, maidens to rescue, secrets to unravel, gold, and magical items. An adventure can take two hours or twelve, depending on the desires of the players. The average group plays once or twice a week.

Appearances notwithstanding, *D&D* is not a pastime for crackpots. It isn't necessary to believe in the occult, astrology, or other such things to enjoy *D&D*; in fact, few players do, and their ranks include lawyers, doctors, executives, and scientists – hardly crackpots. Nor is it necessarily a "kid's game"; one of the designers is in his early 40's, a minister and former insurance executive – the average age of players is around 21. Some players are accustomed to games of mental skill such as chess, others are parlour game fans, and others still don't play other games.

Anyone who reads fantasy literature knows that a willing suspension of disbelief is necessary to enjoy these works. The same principle applies to *D&D*, and once you accept the game within its own magical context, you can participate vicariously to a depth not found in any other game.

Although *Advanced D&D* consists of over 400 pages of rules, the *Basic* version is only 50 pages long and either version is *very* easy to play – you imagine yourself in the situation the DM describes and tell him what you intend to try to do. If no rules cover your idea, the DM invents them on the spot. Special 4, 8, 12, and 20-sided dice are used as well as the ordinary 6-sided kind; these are referred to respectively as d4, d8, d12, d20, and d6, and are used to determine the success or otherwise of certain actions which have less than a 100% chance of success.

Of course, the best players and DMs know the rules fairly well, but there are many play-aids to make the DM's job easier.

An example, the dialogue during a small part of an adventure might go something like this . . .

Referee: . . . you come to the bottom of the stairs. A corridor 10 feet wide and 12 feet high – stone, of course – runs east and west.

Players: We go west.

Referee: You travel 50 feet without any change in the corridor. Then you come into a large chamber. 12 kobolds are in the northern part, where you also see a chest. A fungus on the walls dimly lights the chamber.

Players: (After consultation) Brak casts a *sleep* spell, Kranor and Rill shoot their bows, and the rest of us rush the kobolds.

(A brief battle ensues, with all concerned rolling dice to see if their weapons land, and if so, how hard they hit; the DM does this for the kobolds.)

DM: OK, so there are 8 kobolds lying still on the floor, one grazed by an arrow but still standing, one definitely dead; the remaining ones run north, shouting . . .

And so on until the adventurers leave the dungeon or die. If a player imagines himself actually participating in the adventure, if he keeps alert, then he can have a fine time while knowing nothing more about the rules than he can learn from this article.

The DM is the vital figure in a *D&D* game. He must be willing to exercise his imagination to the utmost. Unlike games such as chess, in which the players know all the rules and can extrapolate all possible outcomes, *D&D* has non-rigid, open-ended rules. This is inevitable when one tries to create an entire world; the DM must not only be able to find quickly what he does not know and be familiar with all the rules, he must also make up his own rules for specific situations.

Much of the attraction of the game is the fear – or anticipation – of the unknown. There are always unusual statues, pools, traps, and monsters.

The DM must devise the dungeon or wilderness in which the players adventure. Though there are rules to help him, it is still a matter of long thought and hard work. The dungeon is usually mapped out on graph paper, and a typical one might have 5-10 levels, each on one sheet. The DM draws all the rooms, corridors, caverns, pits, stairs and other features, and records in a notebook the contents of each. Despite the work involved, many players sooner or later build their own dungeons. In 1972 Dave Arneson described the original campaign to me, although I didn't know it would become *D&D*. It sounded like a normal armies vs. armies campaign, but the role-playing element existed in the background. In the next year Arneson got

together with Gary Gygax, who used his *Chainmail* fantasy rules (written with Jeff Perren) as a base for emphasising the individual action of the game. The result was *Original D&D,* three 40-page rule booklets. *Chainmail* was needed to conduct combat, and the whole game suffered from rushed production. It isn't surprising that the major wargame companies wouldn't publish such a revolutionary and undeveloped game; Gygax decided to publish it himself. *D&D* was the first role-playing game and the first fantasy game to be marketed commercially.

The rules problems, derivation from miniatures rather than from boardgames, a high price, and limited distribution all meant that the game did not immediately become the remarkable phenomenon that it is today. However, with the publication in 1975 of a supplement, *Greyhawk, D&D* began to take off. *Greyhawk* introduced a new combat system and clarified many ambiguities of the old rules. It was so popular that three other supplements were produced; *Blackmoor, Eldritch Wizardry,* and *Gods, Demi-Gods and Heroes* were published in 1975 and 1976. By this time, however, many other role-playing games were on the market, some threatening to overtake *D&D.*

Gygax then began to revise the rules completely. The result, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons,* is much larger, more detailed, and far better produced.

All three versions have much in common, but anyone who intends to move around should learn *Basic* and then *Advanced D&D,* because those who prefer the original are becoming a distinct minority. A number of *D&D* play-aids are available. These include maps of dungeons and wilderness, ready-made lists of room contents, inhabitants and treasures, composite game charts, and complete adventure "modules". The latter include everything a DM needs to run a game, so that the time-consuming setting-up can be avoided. Experienced DMs only occasionally use such aids, preferring to devise their own worlds, but novices will find them quite useful. So you've just heard about this amazing game, *Dungeons and Dragons.* How do you find other people to play with, in particular a reliable group you can comfortably play with frequently? That's an easy problem for experienced wargamers who live in big cities, but the average novice sometimes sees it as an insurmountable difficulty. I'll now try to help these unfortunates, and perhaps more experienced players as well.

Firstly, I'll assume that you don't own the *D&D* rules; after all, some people want to play before they buy a game. This eliminates the most common way to find other players – teach your friends – but leaves many possibilities.

If there's a game shop near you, ask the proprietors if they know of any local groups open to new players. There may even be a weekly session at the shop. Addresses of players might be found on a notice board. If all else fails, you can ask permission to put up your own notice – be sure to state your age and experience as well as address/phone. Unfortunately, many groups are "closed shops" because they already have enough players; and in many cases age counts for a lot, as schoolkids may not want a 25 year old player, or college students may not want schoolkids. There are so many different styles of *D&D* that a newcomer often doesn't fit into an established group, and age differences can exacerbate different views of what the game ought to be like. Don't be discouraged if your first contact with *D&D* players is disappointing; the next group may be different. I know of people who tried *D&D* and didn't like it, but who became enthusiastic about it as played by my group; and there were those who played frequently elsewhere but never cared for our kind of game.

(By the way, I don't want to emulate Emily Post, but I must say it is bad form to drop in on a group without giving prior warning, unless the group's announcement invites people to do just that. Write or phone first. This also could save your a wasted trip if a meeting has been cancelled for some reason.)

If you're in a school or university, scan the local notice boards and newspaper for references to wargames clubs. Put your own notice on boards or in the paper. You're having rotten luck if you can't find anyone this way; every fair-sized university seems to have a group.

If you're still empty-handed, don't despair; there is at least one active player per 2,000 people in the country, so unless you live in a remote area there should be players near you. Look at the "opponents wanted" and other adverts in wargames magazines. Don't look just for *D&D* – any wargamer living near you may know of local groups even if he doesn't play himself. Write to anyone near you and explain your problem. Sometimes you won't get an answer, because some gamers don't care about other people, but others go out of their way to help newcomers.

If there are no promising ads, consider placing an ad in the magazine yourself. There may be someone just across the street who reads the magazine, but who never needed to place an ad.

By this time, though, if you still haven't found any players you like to play with, you'll have to give up or buy the game and start a group the hard way, by teaching people how to play after you've taught yourself. Brothers and sisters are useful first recruits; even if they lose interest, they'll help you play the first few times. Tell your friends, especially those who enjoyed *The Lord of the Rings,* about the game. If you know a local science fiction club you might recruit players there. Many schools and universities allow informal groups to reserve rooms and use regular channels to announce meetings. For example, at Duke University (USA) in 1975 I reserved a room in the name of Duke Gamers, put an announcement in the university paper, and appeared at the appointed time. Fortunately I had earlier encountered someone who played – he was the only person to turn up. But the next week more people came around, and when we changed the time of the meeting, yet more appeared. One needs to persevere. Virtually none of these people had played before, and many had never heard of *D&D* until they saw my announcement. After several months, though, I was finally able to play myself, rather than DM, and by the end of the year we had six to eight DMs. In a situation like this you should encourage the new players to become DMs, though not immediately, and have them start with a level appropriate to the state of the campaign. For example, at Duke we ended with a 9-level dungeon and associated wilderness, two independent wildernesses, a third, a fourth, and a sixth level dungeon. If everyone starts with a first level dungeon you soon have nowhere for the more experienced characters to go. The average newcomer won't want to construct more than one level in his first six months of play.

TSR's ready-made dungeon modules can help you establish a new group. You can rely on the author's experience to establish a good adventure situation, but be sure you get a beginners' module and not one for ninth-level characters. When the players you've taught gain some experience they can run other modules before they devise their own places of adventure.

(Incidentally, I returned to Duke four years later and couldn't find a group, so I advertised in the newspaper for wargames players. Several days later someone came by and told me about the *D&D* group which still exists, but which doesn't announce its meetings in the paper. I was able to steer to this group nearly a dozen *D&D* players who didn't know about it. Moral: never quit looking.) ■

Part II of this article, in the next issue of *White Dwarf,* will compare and contrast the various styles of Dungeon Mastering.

An Introduction to Dungeons & Dragons

Part II
Dungeon Mastering Styles

by Lewis Pulsipher

The most important thing to remember about *D&D* is that the nature of play depends on the DM. If you try it once and dislike it, in many cases it will be dislike of a particular style rather than of the game itself. I have known players who tried "absurd *D&D*" and decided *D&D* was a lousy game; but when persuaded to try "wargamer's *D&D*" they loved it.

Consequently, the first thing you must decide when you start constructing your own world is "what style do I prefer?" Usually you'll want to DM the kind of game you prefer to play.

Basic *D&D* style ranges from the "simulation" through "wargame" to "absurd" and finally "novel". As one moves along this continuum the DM's procedures become less rigorous – remember that no DM uses every rule. At one extreme we have a DM who uses a pocket calculator to compute results, at the other a DM who makes up almost everything as he goes. Most campaigns fall toward the middle of these two extremes.

The simulationist wants to reflect reality as much as possible. A fight with broadsword and chainmail ought to work just as it did in the Middle Ages. Coins should be as scarce as in the same period. Some players recreate feudalism and chivalry, and model their magic after the traditional magic of the period. These people have no place in *D&D; D&D* is solidly in the w*argame* camp, and simulationists should try *Chivalry & Sorcery* or make up their own games.

The "wargame" style is how *D&D* is designed to be played, though this doesn't mean you must play it this way. Players don't play against each other, but can still "win" or "lose" according to whether they survive and prosper. As much as possible, all that happens should be believable. My standard is: could you believe the event if you read it in a fantasy novel?

Now the "absurd" style condones unbelievable occurrences. Much that happens seems arbitrary. There is often plenty of button-pushing in such a game. Monsters such as a "spelling bee" may appear, causing magic-users to foul up spells by misspelling them. This style is great for laughs when played occasionally, and some players prefer to play it exclusively. The average game tends to fall between wargame and absurd game.

Finally we have the "novel" style. In effect, the DM writes an oral novel in which the players are participating characters. This can be pretty bad, but the players don't mind because they're helping to "write" it. In such games the DM may make up everything as he goes along.

As one passes along the continuum one finds that players are most passive in the novel style and most active in the wargame style. (The simulation style stresses realism so much that characters tend to be hostages to the dice, the rules, and the DM.) When you choose a style, keep the preferences of your potential players in mind.

In addition to choosing a style, consider other facets of the game. First, some DMs rely on fighting to provide action and interest to players, while others rely on a variety of puzzles. The average DM or player prefers fighting with an occasional puzzle to vary the pace. Unless you're good at devising puzzles you'll probably take the same line. Beware: a few players become bored with frequent fighting, but most become bored with numerous puzzles.

Another choice concerns magic. Are only the spell-casters, rare items, and even rarer areas magical, or is magic almost everywhere? I prefer the former, less "supernatural" alternative, for there is less luck. After all, magic can do anything if you let it, and if you do players won't know what to expect.

You must choose some relationship between risk and reward. When characters often die and only slowly rise in level players may become discouraged. Risk is too high for the corresponding reward. On the other hand, when reward is higher than risk some players become b bored. Level of risk and reward should be roughly the same. I prefer low levels of both. In this case experienced *players* seldom lose characters, but around ten adventures are required to raise a character one level. Other players like a game with 25% or 50% casualties per adventure, with just a few adventures required per experience level. The problem with the latter is that it becomes difficult to run the game, which isn't designed to cope with characters above tenth level. Spells become so powerful, and options available are so numerous, that the DM becomes lost in details and possibilities. *D&D* is most fun for third to sixth level characters, who are strong enough to adventure without fear of immediate death, strong enough to have more combat options than flight, melee, and *sleep* spells, but not so strong that they can laugh at monsters.

Another aspect of risk and reward is whether players earn their results. Risk can derive from frequent monster encounters, or it can come from unavoidable traps and unbeatble monsters. For example, an old dragon flies to a party of first level characters camped outdoors and kills one. At that level players can do nothing – the dragon could kill all of them with a yawn. This is arbitrary risk. Reward can be similarly arbitrary. For example, a player can pull three levers and gain two intelligence points, or a party can kill five orcs and find 5,000 gp. The players haven't *earned* these rewards. Whatever relationship of risk and reward you choose, avoid arbitrary types.

To say that risk and reward in a given campaign tends to be arbitrary is another way of saying that luck plays a great part in the campaign. Many wargamers dislike luck, for who wants to play well and still "lose"? *D&D* can never be a game without luck, but the DM can choose the extent to which luck dominates a game. My objective is to force the players to make choices. The more often they must choose, the more often the skilful player can make the better choice and increase his chance of survival. For example, some DMs allow a sword with detecting powers to operate at all times. Consequently the players gain the advantages without needing to make a choice. Better to allow the sword to detect only when the owner stops for a few rounds to concentrate on detection.

The DM's attitude affects his style. Some DMs just want to see what will happen; others want to be entertained. This is a difference between impartiality and egoism. Is the DM a neutral party or is he a "god" who demands that his subjects – the players – entertain him and do his bidding? Ideally, the DM is serving the players, not vice versa; one supposes that the DM enjoys his job also or he wouldn't do it, and many enjoy it without egoism. One may enjoy the sight of one's ideas being useful, one may enjoy enabling one's friends to have fun, or one may DM with philosophical resignation; someone has to do it.

Another form of egoism is a DM's inability to distinguish between himself and his creations. A strong sense of identification is an asset when you play but not when you DM. When the DM conceives of the monsters which inhabit his dungeon or world as extensions of himself, rather than external creations which he manipulates according to settled procedures, he loses any semblance of impartiality. You may know the type – his favourite dragon gets killed so he says "I'll get you for this" – and of course he *does,* since any DM can kill off a group without difficulty.

Granted there are players who want the DM to manipulate their characters. They won't mind who want the DM to manipulate their characters. They won't mind egotistical DMs, may even prefer them. Role-playing fantasy is big enough to offer a place for all tastes, but it is sad when inexperienced players who want to play a game get stuck with a DM wants to play god.

A new DM who has considerable playing experience will be able to choose a campaign style intelligently, but the novice may feel lost. In this case it is best to begin with a ready-made module. After you've played *D&D* a while you'll know what style of game you want to run. Whatever you choose, be consistent. There is nothing more annoying to a player than a DM who sometimes runs something one way, sometimes another. If you find you've made a mistake in choice of style, don't be afraid to change, but stick with the change – don't vacillate. ■

In next issue, Part III will take a look at the spell-using character classes – Magic-users and clerics.

An Introduction to Dungeons & Dragons

Part III: The Spell-Using Classes

by Lewis Pulsipher

The Magic-User

Fifteen large hellhounds approach down a long corridor. What can the adventurers do to avoid crippling damage? "Step aside," says Orion the Mage. From his finger a spark flashes, becoming a deafening, raging bolt of energy as it streaks down the corridor. When their eyes readjust, the adventurers see five dead hellhounds and ten more running away. "'Twas nothing," says Orion, modestly . . .

Every *D&D* veteran remembers the first time he used a lightning bolt, and how satisfying it felt. The magic-user class is the overwhelming favourite of experienced players, partly because magic is the unique aspect of fantasy games, but also because magic-users are the most powerful characters at high levels. One of the flaws of the game is that magic-users become capable of mass destruction at relatively low levels. Moreover, unless the Dungeon Master works to restrict certain spells, by strict rule interpretation or by rule changes, they get out of hand.

A magic-user's strength is in his spells; everything else is weakness. About one quarter of a party will be magic-users; many of them elves. Magic-users should be protected by armoured characters, but able to see beyond the front or back line of the party. Since they represent the party's last line of defence, they should be closely protected; each spell they must use for their own survival is one less for the party to call upon at need. A party with only one magic-user is asking for trouble, since a single *charm* or *magic missile* can incapacitate him.

Most magic-users pick a dagger as their first weapon, but a few like darts; throwing either weapon can be surprisingly effective.

TACTICS

A magic-user can play many roles, some of which are:

Commando: This role calls for high hit points, or magical protection such as *Bracers of Defence,* and some kind of *invisibility.* The ideal is a fighter/magic-user. The character uses spells to penetrate enemy defences, then strikes from the rear, a favourite target being the strongest enemy magic-user. Careful planning is required, or poor co-ordination may leave him stranded. Common infiltration spells are *fly, invisibility* and *dimension door.*

Radar: *Detect magic* and *detect invisible* are often used. The latter is vital when magic-using enemies are expected. *Wizard eye* is good for scouting complexes or dark chambers.

Information gatherer: A *charmed* person can reveal a lot. *ESP* and *clairvoyance/clairaudience* are used to 'case' a place for a future attack. *Read language* and *identify* can only be taken if you have spells to burn.

Decoy: *Dancing lights* or *phantasmal force* combined with *audible glamer* or *ventriloquism* can play a big part in evasion or attack. The illusionist subclass is better suited to this.

Defence: A *web* is good defence in a dungeon, and so it's the most commonly used second level spell. *Stinking cloud* also stops pursuit. Both spells can be used offensively as well. *Hold portal, wizard lock, protection from evil, invisibility, haste,* and *dispel magic* are all commonly used.

Anti-individual: *Charm, hold person* and *suggestion* are often used against powerful individual opponents. To petrify a small group, a magic-user can use a *phantasmal force* of a medusa head.

Provider of cannon fodder: *Charmed* persons can sometimes be persuaded to open chests or fight for the party. More fun are *charmed* monsters, if you can speak with them. Learn trollish, for a regenerating *charmed* monster is worth any two others. Before an adventure a magic-user can *polymorph* an insect into a troll, then *charm* it. What a bodyguard! And it impresses the yokels.

Artillery: Most players prefer to use magic-users as heavy artillery. When tough monsters appear, *lightning bolt, fireball, fear,* and *confusion* are unlimbered. Although *charming* a dragon is elegant, blowing it up is more exciting. Nonetheless, a magic-user who relies on brute force will meet a bad end. There are many possibilities for the victory of brain over brawn — don't waste them. In your spare time, read through the spells to think of new uses and combinations. For example, *ventriloquism* can be used to convince ignorant creatures that a skull is a god. Some spells are ends; others are means.

Most magic-users try for a *homunculus* when they reach seventh level, depending on their hit points and the availability of the necessary spells. Most ignore the *find familiar* spell, because the average familiar's powers aren't worth the loss of hit points when it dies.

Much of this applies to illusionists as well as the standard magic-user. This subclass lacks the heavy artillery, though; spells tend toward deception and uncertainty. The illusionist player must be more cerebral.

The Cleric

A bedraggled, sorrowful band of adventurers carries a body to a temple at dawn. "O enlightened high priest," pleads the paladin, "Ammendil the ranger gave his life to defend us, killing four ogres before he fell. Is there no way to restore him to our ranks, to be an example to all by his deeds and dedication to our cause?"

The priest ponders; then intones: "In the name of our patron saint Georgias, I beseech thee, O Lord, to restore life to our lost comrade-in-arms. Let him once again smite thine enemies, for thy Name's sake."

And the dead man awakens!

Raising the dead is the most unusual move in gaming. It is the definitive attainment of any good cleric, and its opposite, *slay living*, is the aim of any evil one. Since most clerics are good, this advice is addressed to them; just remember that evil clerics are in every way opposed to what the good clerics stand for, though tactics are occasionally similar.

In *D&D*, clerics are religiously inclined warrior-spellcasters. They are not such a popular class as magic-users or fighters, but this stems partly from misconception of their role. A cleric who merely casts spells while watching events is wasting his potential, for many of the best warriors in *D&D* are clerics. Their spells are comparatively unspectacular and weak. A cleric might hang back when first level for lack of hit points, but thereafter he should smite in his god's name whenever a good chance appears. The cleric has no outstanding strength, but no weaknesses; in many ways, this is the most interesting character class.

Roughly 20% of a party will be clerics; they take positions near the front or rear of a party, where they are well-placed to drive away undead or cast spells as well as fill a hole in the front line during a fight.

There are three good choices for a cleric's first two weapons: mace, hammer and flail. A mace does more damage, but requires twice as much room as a hammer; a flail is useful only outdoors or in large rooms.

THE CLERIC'S ROLES IN A PARTY

Despite what I've said above, the cleric must think of spells first and fighting second. On the other hand, the stereotype healing cleric wastes the character. Options are:

Healer: *Cure light wounds* is the most common first level spell. *Cure serious wounds, raise dead, neutralise poison,* and others all serve the cleric-as-medic.

Radar: *Detect magic* and especially *detect evil* can be useful. *Know alignment* can be useful in town, dealing with artisans and merchants — just don't let them know you're using it. *Commune* is a marvellous source of information which many players fail to use.

Defence: *Speak with animals* is excellent outdoors, since it often prevents meaningless fighting. *Protection* shouldn't be forgotten, especially when demons and devils are around. *Continual light* should be cast on objects well before an adventure, since it lasts until dispelled.

Offence: *Silence* is great against spellcasters or when you want to sneak about. *Light* and *darkness* are also useful. *Hold person* is better than the magic-user's *charm*. *Bless* should be used against opponents of good armour class. *Command* can be used in some situations. — usually 'surrender' is the word.

Many players avoid cleric characters because they prefer neutral or non-religious types. The good cleric must concern himself with the conversion of unbelievers, kindness to the innocent, and devotion to his gods. In some campaigns he will not want to hurt a fly, but more often he is a church militant willing to smite evil whenever necessary. Even so, he must not turn a blind eye to unnecessary violence. He is the strongest proponent of teamwork in a party.

Subclasses

Monks are closer to fighters than clerics, and will be dealt with next issue. Druids are really a separate class, with strong, specialised outdoor magic. They should use the *animal friendship* spell and *speak with animals* to gain scouts and bodyguards — even a trained dog is a match for most first level characters. Space precludes dealing with them in any detail though.

Next issue, in Part IV, I shall examine the other two main character classes: Fighters and Thieves. ■

An Introduction to Dungeons & Dragons

Part IV: Fighters and Thieves

by Lewis Pulsipher

THE FIGHTER

The list of heroic warriors in epic fantasy stretches endlessly. Even though magic-users are more popular in *Dungeons & Dragons* than fighters, the latter are preferred to clerics and thieves, probably because of the close identification with the literary origins of the game. Magicians are the bad guys in fantasy if they figure at all — a "hero" is by definition a fighter. Yet there isn't much one can say about the *D&D* fighter, for this is the most limited of the classes in its fields of action, though very efficient and powerful within this narrow purview. Fighters have more hit points than other classes, the best armour, and the best weapons. They defend the spell-casters, attack when necessary or when spells must be conserved, and do those deeds which require toughness. On the other hand they can use few magic items not related to melee, their save vs. magic is poor, and they probably take more casualties than other classes by virtue of being more exposed. Where the magic-user is finesse, the fighter is brute force; but even the most avid MU cannot deny the joy one feels at chopping a balrog or giant.

A party of about 12 characters will include about five fighters, two or three in both front and back lines as the party marches down a corridor. Often a bow-armed fighter will follow a dwarf fighter. Dwarf fighters are popular, but elf fighters are rare. Combination fighter-magic-users, thieves, or clerics are also popular and are the most powerful characters at low levels.

The fighter has a broader weapon choice than any other class. Normally a fighter will choose one bow, one outdoor weapon such as a lance, one sword, and one weapon good against plate mailed opponents. A composite longbow is the best, though some DMs don't allow use of any longbow indoors. Silver tipped arrows are a must. Heavy lance is an extremely useful weapon for horseback — 3-18 damage to larger than man size is hard to beat. Longsword is superior to broadsword or shortsword against good armour classes and large opponents, but 20% of magic swords are broadswords, so a few characters may lean toward them. The bastard sword is an excellent compromise for the aggressive fighter, but very few magic ones exist. Remember that fighters choose another weapon at fourth level, so they can learn to use a magic sword if they obtain one of inappropriate type. A military pick is the best weapon vs. plate and shield; against a monster with AC 2 you'll use whatever weapon does most damage since hit probability modifications don't apply. Some bronze or stone weapons should be carried for use against rust monsters.

Often parties are cursed with hack-itis. The fighters are so eager to lay steel on flesh that alternatives are neglected. Some DMs alter the rules to encourage this. For example, most "spell point" magic systems allow clerics to cast large numbers of cure spells. The party hacks anything it sees, the fighters are cured, the party hacks, cure, hack, *ad nauseam.* This is a perversion of the game, and boring to boot. In a good campaign those with "hack-itis" will die of it. Fighters should fight only when no other course of action offers a better chance of success. A sensible fighter will want the odds against him reduced by magic or other means before he wades into the fray.

Another aspect of hack-itis is poor organisation. Fighters should arrange themselves to have the maximum number attacking the minimum number of enemies. A replacement should be ready if a wounded man must disengage. Except in desperate circumstances, or during a mop-up, several characters able to melee should wait in reserve. Some fighters are big dumb guys with muscles, but thought is needed in any battle.

Subclasses

The really interesting fighters are the ranger, paladin, and (somewhat oddly) the monk. These classes fight often, but they have other powers. The monk's ultimate role is to fight, but he can use his thief-like abilities to gain an advantageous position before he dives in. Even at low levels when hand-to-hand combat can be dangerous, a monk can contribute by throwing a spear, speaking with animals ("keep the mules calm"), or scouting ahead.

Paladins and rangers are closer to normal fighters, and the uses of their powers are obvious. Don't waste a paladin's laying on of hands to cure hit points; disease is a more fearsome enemy. Any cleric can cure hits, but a fifth level cleric is needed to

cure disease.

General Party Tactics.
If you can, first read Gary Gygax's advice on pages 107 and 109 of the *Players Handbook.* Knowing when to fight, when to run away, when to go home, are essential to survival. If you're not sure you can beat the enemy, don't attack. Ascertain enemy strength and location using spells like *detect magic* and *detect evil.* Always question non-player adventurers, local rulers, and denizens of inns and taverns, to discover what you might encounter. If an encounter looks too tough you can come back later fully prepared to attack. *DON'T BE GREEDY.* In a good campaign those whose avarice exceeds their wisdom die.

THE THIEF

*"Someone's coming," whispered the elven thief. "You lot wait back there," he said as he seemed to disappear into the shadows of the corridor. Soon two men in armour, followed by another in robes, advanced confidently down the passage; the fighters charged the adventurers while the MU began a spell. *CRUNCH* – the MU fell as the thief cleaved his skull from behind, and soon after the enemy fighters died or surrendered. Thus a first level thief inflicted 14 hits on a fourth level magic-user, killing him from behind in one blow. This is the stuff of thievish legend, but the over-confident thief's fate is a warning: later on he tried to sneak down a corridor during an archery "firefight", but the enemy saw him and shot him dead.*

The average *D&D* player treats a thief as a weak, sneaky fighter or chest opener. But to succeed as a thief one must think thievishly, to accomplish tasks by stealth rather than force. The strengths of the class are the ability to move silently (and hide in shadows when not moving), to go where no one else can (climb, open locks), to strike swiftly (backstab). Thieves are poor warriors owing to poor armour class and low hit points. And while they're good at opening chests, this is a minor facet of their abilities. Most neutral thieves are non-human, not only to gain bonuses to abilities but to have infravision. A human thief in the dark isn't much use to anyone.

A dungeon party of about 12 characters normally includes just one thief (and occasionally a monk with thief-like powers). The thief usually lurks in the middle of the party until his skills are required. The thief is by far the least liked of the four main character classes, though not with complete justification despite the weaknesses. A player who uses his thief abilities fully has more options than a fighter and more chances for glory than an MU. Look at the roles the thief can adopt:

Pure Thief. Sadly, a thief in a dungeon or wilderness has many more chances to steal from his supposed friends than from non-player characters. This can be unhealthy, for many players happily (and justifiably) kill anyone who tries to steal from them. For a thief to steal from NPCs consistently he must adventure in a town, either alone or with other thieves; thieves are so unpopular with players partly because the average DM doesn't provide enough opportunities for theft. Moreover, stealing is a dangerous vocation – traps and wary NPCs can kill a low level thief pretty easily. Consequently, many thieves reach fourth level without stealing anything – except from their associates.

Scout. My thieves like to scout ahead of the party, especially when a friendly MU has turned one *invisible.* An *invisible* (and possibly *silent)* thief is pretty safe if he has infravision, and he may be able to steal something before he returns to tell his associates what is ahead. Pits are a danger, but one can never be completely safe. The party is safer with a scout ahead, and for that reason they're likely to offer *invisibility* to a thief unless they distrust him. It isn't always in the thief's interest to steal, especially from a predominently good party. Of course, with a bunch of evil characters the thief must look after number one.

Commando. A brave thief can cause havoc to enemies by raids into their rear. The thief who killed the fourth level MU is a good example. More commonly, thieves depend on their ability to climb and disappear from sight to engage in one-man flanking movements. A high level thief reading a scroll can be devastating. A successful raider can pick up choice treasure before the party arrives. But careful planning is needed. In all cases thief and party must work out recognition codes so that the party won't accidentally kill the thief. When raiding, always kill magic-users first, for they are most powerful offensively and weakest defensively of all classes.

Chest Opener. Thieves are good at detrapping and unlocking chests. A smart thief doesn't depend solely on the dice for safety; positioning and investigation may reveal something or save the thief even if a trap is sprung. Don't stand right in front of a chest! And before you try to unlock it, be sure it's locked – I've seen thieves inadvertently lock unlocked chests.

Missile Firer. Any tall thief can help a party by throwing darts or daggers during melee. If he can climb to a balcony or tree-branch he can have a field day, but this is not recommended if the enemy carry bows. Sometimes missilery is more effective, and safer, than a backstab.

Reserve. A thief can fight passably for a while; with high constitution or good magic items he can be a formidable opponent, but thieves should fight only as a last resort.

Miscellaneous
For his first two weapons a thief usually chooses longsword and darts or daggers. A thief's most prized magic item is a *Ring of Invisibility.* This, combined with silent movement, trebles the thief's power. Hiding in shadows is uncertain and cannot be combined with movement, a weak thing compared to *invisibility.*

A smart thief will devise simple objects to aid him: A hollow breathing tube allows the thief to sneak through shallow pools and rivers out of sight; a rope ending in a three-pronged hook, a kind of extensible pole, and piton rings all help climbing; caltrops slow pursuit; and a fake magic item or two may scare the rubes. Some thieves like to dress as magic users to sell fake scrolls, especially when an accomplice can cast *Nystul's aura* or *magic mouth* on them.

Always "case" a target for several days; if you blunder into a theft head first you'll end up without a head. Try to "frame" someone so there will be no pursuit after a theft. If the heat's on, get out of town and stay out. Some victims go to great lengths to revenge themselves on a thief. A thief who steals from the powerful must be prepared to migrate periodically!

Subclass
Assassins are similar to thieves but for their avowed purpose. Assassins may choose to scare people and build a reputation, or to seem like a normal thief. Naturally assassins often work alone or with evil rather than neurtal or good parties. Much depends on how your DM structures the world.

REMEMBER – THINK THIEVISHLY.

Next issue: Characterization and Alignment. ■