



THE PROPER PLACE OF CHARACTER SOCIAL CLASS IN D&D®

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Insertion of randomly determined social class is sometimes touted as an improvement or valuable addition to the existing game system. This sort of assertion seems valid on the face of it, for doesn't the game benefit from assigning social classes to player characters? Isn't a new dimension added when the rank of characters is known and considered? Before answering those questions, consider from whence the idea of social classes came. Professor M.A.R. Barker suggested social classes in his instruction manual for his monumental game, *EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE*. The *EN GARDE* game by Game Designers Workshop contained a lengthy treatment of social class and birth tables. Those who saw these works and decided to insert them into *D&D* failed to recognize one important singularity common to each of the aforementioned games which is not possessed by *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*®/ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®. Both the world of Tekumel and that of the Three Musketeers *et al* have a complex and detailed social system already devised for them — one from the creativity of Professor Barker, the other drawn from the history and legends of the period of Cardinal Richelieu, the early Seventeenth Century. *D&D* has no such cultural and social background.

Because *D&D* does not have a predetermined culture and social structure, it is totally foolish to plug in a system which assigns a class rating to characters, unless the social class determination is very basic and non-specific such as:

- 01-75 character is of common background
- 76-95 character is of aristocratic background
- 96-00 character is of upper class background

Note that this sort of determination is not particularly useful, but it does not preordain a social order, either. Use of a more specific method causes the Dungeon Master to automatically accept a social order he or she may well have no desire to include in the campaign, for lack of knowledge or personal preference or any other reason. All of the social distinction tables assume nobility or offices or professions which are not universal to all cultures. Use of such tables means that the DM has accepted the premise that his or her campaign, in fact, has such classes of nobles, professions, or offices.

D&D is a fantastic medieval game system. This does not mean that it is medieval in the European sense, although a campaign milieu based loosely upon mythical feudal Europe is not precluded. However, it could as well be set in the Near or Far East, in a mythical place, in a mythos with an ancient-medieval atmosphere (such as Robert E. Howard's "Hyborean Age"), or just about any other desired milieu. The important factor is medieval technology, not necessarily feudalism with primogeniture, entail, and a Salic Law.

So-called birth tables are likewise of highly questionable value to DMs. These tables dictate to the Dungeon Master the rank of a male player character's birth, i.e. first, second, third, etc. Again, the information is useful only when a culture which is basically feudal European (with primogeniture, entail, and Salic Laws regarding inheritance and titles) is considered. What if some other system is desired by the DM?

Out the window with the birth tables, of course. Furthermore, even if a basically feudal society is presupposed in the campaign, what use are birth tables which indicate that a player character is a first-born son of a ruling monarch or major noble? How can one conceive of such a personage going out adventuring at the risk of life and limb?! Has the individual abdicated his inheritance? Does he have amnesia? Where are his guards and retainers? Does his sire know what he is doing and where? And all of this when a compatible social order is considered. Now envision use of such systems in a milieu which is neither feudal nor male-oriented — a hierarchy based on matriarchal principles, for example. Inclusion of such tables simply is unthinkable. For these very reasons, *D&D* does not contain any systems of social classification, for the DM must first decide upon the culture and society of the campaign before any valid system can be designed, and there are far too many variables, so the task is strictly that of the DM. Any detailed system will impose its own order upon the campaign, as well as possibly forcing the DM to accept certain premises regarding player characters which do not fit into the schema of the milieu.

For the sake of discussion, a number of government forms are given below. Several of these names were coined on the spot in order to describe types of governments which would be applicable in a *D&D* campaign milieu. The list is by no means exhaustive, and DMs should feel right in devising any sort of government which is reasonable within the parameters they have set for their particular "worlds". Government forms are:

ANARCHY — No formal government and no social classes

ARISTOCRACY — Government by a privileged class, this class so vested with power to rule being determined by virtually any circumstances of social or economic relevance

AUTOCRACY — Government which rests in self-derived, absolute power (an emperor or dictator is typically an autocrat, but the variations are many)

BUREAUCRACY — Government by department, rule being through the heads and chief administrators of the various departments of the system

CONFEDERACY — A league of possibly diverse governmental and social entities designed to promote the common weal of each

DEMOCRACY — Government by the people, i.e. the established body of citizens, whether direct or through elected representatives

FEODALITY — Feudal government where each authority derives authority and power from the one above and pledges fealty in like manner

GERIATOCRACY — Government by the very old

GYNARCHY — Government by females only

HIERARCHY — Typically religious government with a structure somewhat similar to a feodality

MACOCRACY — Government by professional magic-users

MATRIARCHY — Government by the eldest females of whatever social units exist

MILITOCRACY — Government by military leaders and the armed forces in general

MONARCHY — Government by a single sovereign, usually hereditary, whether absolute in power or limited (such as the English monarchs were by the Magna Carta)

OLIGARCHY — Government by a few, usually absolute, rulers who are co-equal

PEDOCRACY — Government by the learned and savants

PLUTOCRACY — Government by the wealthy

REPUBLIC — A government of representatives of an established electorate

THEOCRACY — God-rule, or rule by a god's direct representative

Let us assume a campaign in which the DM desires to develop play around two diverse portions of the campaign area, in this instance a portion of a continental land mass. The western nation is an oligarchy, while the east is fragmented into numbers of small feudal states which the oligarchy keeps in constant turmoil and warfare through clever machination. If player characters begin in an eastern land — more likely a place for adventuring — the social order will tend to be feudal or

semi-feudal. Let us further assume they start out in a small province of a small kingdom ruled by an absolute monarch. Near equals to the king are the peers of the realm — dukes, princes, the greatest churchmen, marquises, counts (or earls), great churchmen, viscounts, barons, and lesser great churchmen. Considered separately are knights, for those given this status by the king are peers, those with lesser knighthoods still ranking amongst the nobility. Of course, nobles are not necessarily knighted; and knighthood, unlike titles of nobility, can not be inherited.

Below the nobility and knights is a broader class of society, the gentry. Gentlemen, or the gentle born, are from families with land holdings or great wealth from mercantile activity and the like. The great offices of the kingdom — chancellor, marshal, constable, etc. — are drawn from the nobles; but the lesser office holders — bailiffs, magistrates, justices, etc. — will be drawn from the gentry. Outstanding members of the class will be knighted. Exceptional knights will be elevated to the peerage. Civic leaders are typically of this class.

Next after the gentry are the freemen and artisans. This class is comprised of small landowners, tradesmen, and skilled craftsmen. This class furnishes candidates for very minor offices of the government and will be active in the affairs of small community government, usually serving under the leadership of a gentleman. Rarely will members of this class be knighted.

Below the freemen and artisans come the laborers. These are free folk, but they have neither land nor skills. They are tenant farmers, workers, and peddlers. These folk come under all of the upper classes, and they can aspire to become freemen, although there is little likelihood of this move occurring, as money or opportunity is scarce.

The lowest class is far and away the largest. It is made up of servants, bondsmen, and serfs. Servants and bondsmen can eventually move into the laborer class; serfs can have no such hope, as they are confined by law to work the land for their liege lord, be it nobleman, churchman, gentleman, or even freeman.

Player characters beginning in this social order will be of noble origin only if the DM desires to include this as a factor. Frankly, only the younger sons of any noble family would have any reason to become adventurers in most cases, for the first born will inherit the title and lands, and the second and third sons will certainly be provided for by means of clerical offices and government positions. Royal sons are always given titles and lands regardless. If first-born sons or royal family members become involved in a campaign as player characters, there must be a reason for this! Where will adventurers come from then? Not from the peasants, for they are probably absolutely forbidden to possess and bear arms, except when impressed into levied bands by their liege lords. Most adventurers will come from the laboring, freeman/artisan, or gentle class. The percentage of adventurers from each class is entirely dependent upon campaign circumstances such as the largest urban area nearby, local and regional government, economic factors, etc. Let us suppose, for the sake of the example, that there is a 5% chance that a character will be from the lowest class, 10% chance of being from the laboring class, 30% from the class of freemen and artisans, and 50% from the gentle class. (More weight is given to the more privileged classes as they are more likely to be able to afford or otherwise have the means to have their sons — or daughters — given the background necessary to become an adventurer.) A 5% chance is also given for a lesser noble class background, for anything greater in percentage or higher in class would cause severe campaign anomalies. What does this all mean?

Well, starting funds and equipment must be adjusted to suit social class, although some weight can be given to the possibility of previous gains and losses to balance things out a bit. The major effect such social level determination would have is in the area of profession. All thieves and assassins could come only from the two lowest social classes. Clerics could come only from the levels above the two lowest. Magic-users could come only from the three highest levels. Paladins could come only from the highest class. In general, skills learned before becoming an adventurer are non-existent outside those peculiar to the profession of the character. For example, the son of a cheese maker will be sent away at a young age to receive a clerical education, or serve as an apprentice magic-user, without benefit of training in his father's business. Each adventurer will have basic skills and knowledge to his or her profession and little else. Fighters are the sole possible exception, for

their apprenticeship would typically come later and consist of service with a levied or militia force, then as a mercenary or recruited man-at-arms, and only thereafter as a 1st level (veteran) fighter. Therefore, consideration to the possibility of the character possessing one or more skills in addition to fighting ability is not unreasonable. These skills would be commensurate with social class and background based upon the milieu.

D&D was purposely sketchy and vague regarding government and social systems, for not only would any attempt at detailing such information be of considerable length, but it would also take away the prerogatives of the DM. The governments and social systems of a campaign should be devised and developed directly by each individual DM with an overview of his or her entire campaign, both the introductory milieu, and the eventual scope of the "world" and the universe (or "multiverse") in which it is set. To force any order upon the DM is to curtail the scope he or she has in devising such settings. This is not to say that it is wrong to have package offerings such as the Judges Guild *CITY-STATE* or TSR's *WORLD OF GREYHAWK*. In such as these, there can be no question in the purchaser's mind as to what is offered, a milieu which is already developed. The D&D rules are distinct, however, in that they instruct the DM as to how the game is played and mention only in passing that an entire "world" must be developed to house the campaign. The design of that world was left as the purview of each individual DM. The explosion of D&D's popularity, and human nature too, has tended to promote an increasing acceptance of social class distinctions and tables without due consideration for long term campaign effects. At the very least this has resulted in some very odd settings, and at worst it has promoted the early demise of campaigns — typically with attendant reorganization and restarting with revised ideas and rules. In order to save DMs from this difficulty, a thorough treatment of society and government forms is needed. Space and time disallow any indepth treatment, even assuming a qualified authority could be found to do a thesis on the topic for us. DMs must be prepared to research the topic for themselves and develop systems which suit their needs.

D&D is principally medieval in respect to the technology of its arms, armor, and military arts. Even assuming the DM wishes to adhere to a medieval milieu, many sorts of historic government forms and social orders are available — the English monarchy, the Swiss confederation, the Holy Roman electorate, the Byzantine Empire, various Arab states, or even the horse nomads of Central Asia can be used as models, and that is but a sampling. Consider some of these other possible forms which may or may not draw upon historical bases. Then create the societies you desire.

It is obvious then, that only the individual Dungeon Master is capable of properly establishing the social order of his or her individual campaign. Active inclusion of this consideration will necessarily place some further restrictions on player character choices as to profession, but this is not necessarily a drawback; and it might well be desirable in certain cases, as it will tend to encourage more fighters and reward them with bonuses in the area of knowledge and skills not possessed by other classes of adventurers. Inclusion of an overall social structure and classes is, of course, a necessity in any large campaign. This is not merely an embellishment; it is an integral part of the development of the milieu. Furthermore, inclusion of important personages from higher levels of society will tend to add greatly to the campaign in various ways, whether from taking service with a noble to rescuing a prince or princess, such interaction adds to the scope and meaning of the campaign.

What is also obvious is that social class is certainly not something to be added lightly, a factor to be sprinkled whimsically into the campaign or tossed into the whole by random chance. A well run and meaningful campaign will have an equally well devised social system and class determination according to forethought precepts. I suppose it is best summed up by the old adage, 'class will tell' . . .

DMG Finished

As of this writing the manuscript for *DUNGEON MASTERS GUIDE* has at long last been completed, save for a few pages of probable rewrites and transitional material which editing will uncover. This has been a long and lousy struggle for me, as there have been so many other things to do, and great numbers of interruptions in the work flow. It is fun to be

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body, Leof knew that the blow had done its work. The sharpness of the pain was all that stood but momentarily between him and the final blackness, and he sought to make these last few moments to good advantage.

He struggled with fumbling fingers to free the Holy Hand Grenade from his trappings. With the last gasp of strength he pulled the pin and hurled it directly at the brawny fighter's face.

The room was suddenly filled with screams and running feet, all trying for the door — but much too late. As the last of life leaked from the fallen elf, the expanding shock wave reached the walls and rebounded back through the room, time and time again. Only through the opened door did the explosion find relief, hurling the crowded bodies against the far side of the passage, then to pass with ever diminishing force, in both directions through the corridor.

Around a nearby corner a contingent of orc guards advanced on their hourly rounds. But as they reached the turning, those behind saw the van thrown backwards, instantly gelled by the still expanding wave-front, only, moments later, to find the selfsame doom.

Eventually the wave died out, much diminished by its travels, spent by reflection from the walls, diluted by expansion into many rooms and chambers, and once again quiet reigned.

* * *

"And that's the story," my guest was saying. "I was on the other side of the partition at the time of the fight. In fact, I was just on my way back to try to attract Roods attention to the flight of descending stairs that I had found. But when I opened the door, the grenade went off and knocked me backwards, down the stairs. By the time I climbed back up, it was over. Everywhere, pulped remains." He gulped. "Good thing I have an iron constitution."

"That's some story," I said, ignoring his levity. "Tell me, what do you think went wrong?"

"Well, they were obviously a badly matched group. After they lost their leader the natural inclinations of each just oozed out and inhibited their working as a team."


"And that's it?" I said incredulously, knocking the ashes from my pipe.

"Not all of it, by any means," he replied. "Although that did contribute a good deal to the situation." He paused for a long pull at his glass.

"While all of this was building beneath the surface, even then it may not have come into the open," he continued. "Had Snafu not so evinced his greed over that dagger things may not have gone so poorly."

* * *

MORAL: Keep your hands out of stranger's drawers.

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able to create in an atmosphere of calm and quietude — someday I'll get a chance to try it. I do hope all of you enjoy the end result. In addition to the credits inside DMG, and the list is very long, I would like to mention the following individuals who have contributed as follows: Outside reading and considerable input into the final product, in order of input — Len Lakofka, Tom Holsinger, and our usual stalwarts Gay Jaquet, Will Niebling, and Jim Ward. TSR's new Design Department, namely Lawrence Shick and Jean Wells, undertook the authorship of two sections — ostensibly to test the mettle of these good folk, but actually to assure that the whole manuscript would be finished in a timely manner. Lastly, and it is unfair that it always comes thus, the Production Department staff headed by Mike Carr and ably seconded by Tim Jones and Al Hammack, have done wonders in organizing, emending and otherwise cleaning up what I wrote in a stream-of-consciousness fashion, often under stress or too hurriedly.

This is also a good time to pass on thanks to the good people who

GENCON XII Status Report

By the time you see this report, the convention information packet will finally be ready to be mailed out. The numerous goodies inside are legion and even I am impressed by the wonderful response we have received from many individuals wishing to judge tournaments and tourneys. I only hope that our hobby's manufacturers will be as generous. Some of these events bear mentioning even before the convention packet is mailed.

BOARDGAMES: Avalon Hill has graciously said they would sponsor an Avalon Hill Classic. (A special tournament based on the oldies, but goodies, such as Africa Korps, Waterloo, Stalingrad, and sometimes D-Day or Battle of The Bulge). SPI & GDW will also be sponsoring tournaments. Not to mention the numerous small tourneys put on by TSR Staff and Friends.

SEMINARS: John Prados (designer of AH's *Third Reich* and OSG's *Panzerkrieg*) has committed to do a solo seminar on designers and game design, and a workshop where budding game designers can talk over design theory and receive help with design problems. We have received several maybes from other game designers and developers, but John is the first one to come up with a concrete proposal.

MINIATURES: I am getting some remarkable help from R. Johnson and the Milwaukee Wargaming Community. Ships, Tanks, D&D®, Napoleonic, Ancients, EPT, and English Civil War will all be represented, as well as many other aspects of miniature gaming. Besides this, we are moving the miniature playing area to less chaotic surroundings. I believe this area to be one of the true highlights of the convention.

ROLE-PLAYING — last but certainly not least, as the saying goes. The D&D Masters Tournament (Sorry folks by Invitation Only) begins on Thursday. Friday AND Saturday sees the beginning of the D&D Open Tournament (Sorry, only 500 openings!) A *Dungeon!* tournament will also run on Saturday. Numerous other events such as EPT, Runequest, Chivalry & Sorcery, Boot Hill, and other games including the infamous Schurmarshultz and Sorcery, Numerous tourneys in this area of gaming interest.

OPEN GAMING ROOM — This is the room where you can leave messages about floating games, find opponents and generally where we can help you get all the open gaming your heart desires.

As you can see we have a lot of stuff cooking. How I am ever going to put it all in a convention handbook is beyond me. Anyway hope to see you at GENCON XII.

Joseph G. Orlowski
GENCON Coordinator.

Judges/Events Wanted FOR GenCon XII

Many of you complained that there were not enough miniature games, boardgames, role-playing games, computer games ectera etal at last year's GenCon. If you think GenCon needs more of *Something*, why don't you help make sure it's available in large quantities in GENCON XII.

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write to me with comments, ideas, criticisms, and whatever — people, such as Steve Marsh, John Sapienza, John Baillie, and many others. While we do not always agree, I do appreciate the exchange of ideas and opinions offered thereby. I enjoy the opportunity to "talk shop" in person or through correspondence, although time often prevents me from replying at length to any missive. The foregoing material was written immediately after our *Spring Revel* minicon, where I DMed four sessions and spent a few hours discussing the game with the folks there. Now let's see what comes from my upcoming trip to CANGAMES in May.