

Free First Issue!

#1 — June 2017

# Back to Basic X



A new quarterly Fanzine dedicated to a simpler time of RPGs—  
covering the Basic and Expert editions of Dungeons & Dragons.

## Simpler Times — A Letter from the Fanzine Creator

*Back to BasiX* has been brewing in my busy mind for some time, trying desperately to escape. Other work has always taken precedence, especially ideas that help build a financial platform for fun and low-cost products like a fanzine! With a couple of successful Kickstarters completed, I have enough extra cash to put out a free 'zine. Well, at least free for the first issue.

This fanzine will be dedicated to all things B/X; the Holmes, Moldvay and Mentzer work will all be considered when developing content, writing articles, and interviewing gamers. I personally love the Moldvay edition the best, but this series will look at all editorial versions as equally as possible. To most, there is little difference between the Basic books, at least in spirit and general game play. However, rule differences or mechanics may get spotlighted occasionally as a source for interesting material.

Additionally, we may journey into later extensions of the B/X system; we may touch upon rules or products in the “CMI” portion of the BECMI universe to break up the content once in a while. Heck, we may even write an adventure or two in the Masters or Immortals systems!

Our primary focus however, will be to produce a small fanzine dedicated to the early B/X work. We'll always have at least one adventure, a product spotlight or review, a new monster and a few unique magical items in every issue. In upcoming issues, we'll interview more legends of the industry, add a Wanted/For Sale section, and try to include more artwork for you to enjoy.

Thanks for picking up this premiere issue of *Back to BasiX*. I hope you enjoy it and find it useful! - Thom Wilson

### — Issue #1 Details —

Fanzine Sections	
Content	Page
Letter from the Creator	1
Publishing News	2
Product Spotlight	2
Interview—M. Rasmussen	3
Mythology	4
The Magic Shop	4
Dungeon Crawl	5
Spellbound	7
An Ongoing Adventure...	8

## Back to BasiX — V1 No 1

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#2 — September, 2017  
#3 — December, 2017

*Back to BasiX Issue #2 submission deadline for Ads, Wanted and For Sale posts is August 13th, 2017.*

## Publishing News

As you know, there aren't a lot of new products getting produced for the B/X system. That being said, each quarter we'll explore all the channels where new products may materialize. This includes crowd funding sites, indie publishers, and even convention publishing. We'll try to cover every angle of the industry, ferreting out new material for your B/X campaigns!

In this first issue, we'll highlight some of the known B/X products that are relatively new, at least released after the original B/X products of the 80's.

**Labyrinth Lord** by Goblinoid Games. Published in 2007 and 2009, *Labyrinth Lord* is a fairly consistent retro-clone of the Moldvay work, with expanded rules up to 20th level. Goblinoid Games has dozens of products to support the B/X system.

**B/X Companion** by Running Beagle Games. The *B/X Companion* expands on the Basic and Experts sets, providing rules for levels up to 36th, with new spells, monsters, magical items, and guidelines for mass warfare. Hard to find in print but for sale as a PDF on RPGNow.

## Product Spotlight

I've already "hinted" at my love for the Moldvay Basic Rulebook, so it seems fitting to review that product in the first issue of *Back to BasicX*. For me, it is the benchmark for all rulebooks; it is concise, has a clean layout style, and is full of inspiration.

The Moldvay Basic Rulebook wasn't the first guide; Holmes blue book, and Gygax and Arneson's earlier work were the foundations of beginning rule systems. But in the initial heyday of mass published RPG material, the Moldvay edited Basic Rulebook was the first simplified rulebook to reach the masses.

I can remember being given my copy of the red rulebook (along with the incomplete fragments of a tattered Otus box) back in 1981. The rules were laid out so simply that even my young brain could fully comprehend how the game was played. It was 64 pages of greatness.

The cover illustration by Erol Otus is one of the most inspirational early images of role-playing. That single illustration tells a story of adventure; treasure, heroes and a terrible dragon looming in the background made all my friends and I want to pick up dice and roll up a character.

Moldvay's editorial presence manifests in the layout of the book. Each section follows a carefully constructed path, allowing first time players and dungeon masters the ease of navigation from character creation through combat resolution. This book has set the benchmark for other guidelines and materials, providing a roadmap on how to publish an instructional RPG.

*Basic Rulebook, Eighth (1981) through Eleventh (1982) printings, with Erol Otus cover illustration (ISBN 0-935696-48-2, #2014).*

## Interview with a Legendary Gamer — Merle Rasmussen

I'll try to interview one author, illustrator, designer or editor who had a role and/or impact on the B/X systems each issue. In the first issue, I was able to get Merle Rasmussen to answer a few of my questions...

[Thom] *Everyone knows you were brought into TSR for your Top Secret RPG work, but why were you asked to write Basic and Expert D&D adventures?*

[Merle] I was not impressed by the fantasy genre, but I was inspired by role playing. Allen Hammack hired me over the telephone. I was 25 in June of 1982. The senior designers had staked out the more glamorous *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*® and TSR needed someone to write *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*® modules. *AD&D*® sold better than *D&D*®. *D&D*® sold better than *TOP SECRET*®.

[T] *You authored BSOLO (Ghost of Lion Castle), XSOLO (Lathan's Gold) and X6 Quagmire!, all released in 1984. Do you remember when you started each of them and how long it took to get them to print?*

[M] I started at TSR, Inc. in June 1982 and was downsized 22 months later in April 1984. My resume lists modules in this order: *Quagmire!* (X6), *Lathan's Gold* (XSOLO), and *Ghost of Lion Castle* (BSOLO). *Quagmire!* (X6) took over a year to produce and saw print after April 1984. I remember being told, "You finished writing that one

(module) in eight weeks. Now finish this one in seven." *The Savage Coast* (X9) was published in 1985.

[T] *Which of the Basic and Expert adventures you wrote is your favorite and why?*

[M] I was given the title *Ghost of Lion Castle* (BSOLO). TSR had promised a product with this title and it was listed in a book retailer's catalog before I wrote it. I enjoyed drawing a castle shaped like the King of Beasts surrounded by a wall. Glowing arrows shot out between its claws, molten lead dropped from its nostrils, and huge stones fell from the roof of its mouth. I enjoyed the challenge of writing the programmed text's decision matrix.

[T] *What are you working on these days?*

[M] If you look up <http://topsecretnwo.com> you will find a digital clock counting down until the launch of the *TOP SECRET: NEW WORLD ORDER*™ to occur on June 19, 2017. Together with my original editor Allen Hammack, and a design team including James Carpio, Jayson Elliot, Chad Parish, and A.J. Davenport, we have brought the classic game into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a completely new rule system for fast action, easy playability, and gritty realism. *TOP SECRET: NEW WORLD ORDER*™ is a trademark of TSR, Inc.

## Mythology

In the first issue of *Back to BasiX*, we feature a new monster straight from our Dungeon Crawl. Future issues will also feature one or more new monsters for your B/X adventures!

### Winged Snakeman

The winged snakeman is an abomination of merged species, often created from a failed wizard experiment or spell gone wrong. Part human, snake and bat, the poor creature rarely lives more than a few months, and is incapable of reproducing. Their leathery wings give them limited flight, but are better suited to gliding on strong winds. They attack with short spears or with a venomous bite (requires a save vs. Poison to avoid death).

Armor Class: 6  
Hit Dice: 1\*  
Move: 120' (40')  
Attacks: See below  
Damage: 1-4  
No. Appearing: 1-4  
Save As: Fighter: 1  
Morale: 8  
Treasure Type: Q (N or O)  
Alignment: Chaotic

Each creature has the head, torso and arms of a human and the lower half of a snake.

A group of escaped winged snakemen are often led by one alpha male who is capable of limited speech. The leader of the winged snakemen often has a few items stolen from their former wizard master (treasure type N and/or O).

## The Magic Shop

Each issue of this fanzine will have at least one magical item for your B/X campaign. Occasionally, we'll have a few unique artifacts for your homebrewed adventures. In this issue, we list three items that might be suitable for the issue's Dungeon Crawl, *Cavern of the Winged Snakemen*.

### Magic Sword, +1 vs. Snakes

A normal sword against any other creature, this blade gains a benefit against snakes or snake-like creatures (including the new monster, Winged Snakeman, listed above). Additionally, the blade adds +1 to any Poison saving throws when attacked by a snake or snake-like creature.  
Value: 1,000 gp.

### Belt of Flying

This wide leather belt gives the wearer the benefit of flight, matching that of a large bird. Movement rates are 120' (40') when flying. No limb movement is required to fly or steer; only gravity increases velocity and speed. When the wearer wishes to cease flying, they may do so at anytime (even while in mid flight!).  
Value: 2,000 gp.

### Ring of Poison Resistance

When worn, this thin emerald band provides a +1 to any saving throws vs. Poison. This ring cannot be used with another ring of the same type.  
Value: 1,500 gp.

## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl

Each issue of *Back to BasiX* will include a new, low to mid level adventure for your B/X campaign. Expect most adventures in upcoming issues to focus on first through third level groups. Please enjoy the first adventure, *Cavern of the Winged Snakemen*!

**Cavern of the Winged Snakemen** by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 3-5 characters of 1st or 2nd level.

*Background:* Local townsfolk whisper of a strange cave system near town where some have claimed to see large, flying snakes. Of course, there are no villagers with actual proof, but the stories run rampant at the local tavern. Surely, this is a great adventure for brave and eager heroes?

*Detailed Background:* A group of winged snakemen have migrated to the nearby cavern, escaping the laboratory of a mad wizard. These creatures were to be destroyed; after all, they were failed experiments! The winged snakemen had other ideas however, and fled their imprisonment. After taking a few valuable items with them, they are currently being hunted by the wizard's minions who seek to return the stolen goods.

The creatures are half man and half snake, with usable wings for limited flight and gliding. See the Mythicology section on page 4 for more details.

### Cavern Entrance

The dark entrance to the cavern system is littered with the bones of forest creatures and molted snake skin. Zigzagging tracks in the sand indicate that large snakes have entered and exited the caves frequently.

#### A1: Large Cave

A large, wet cave spans several dozen feet in width and length. Fallen boulders and old tree logs are found throughout the area. Behind a pile of rubble, 2 winged snakemen (AC 6, HD 1\*, hp 5 each, #AT 1, D 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML8) work to clear the space. They will attack the characters on sight.

#### A2: Tunnels

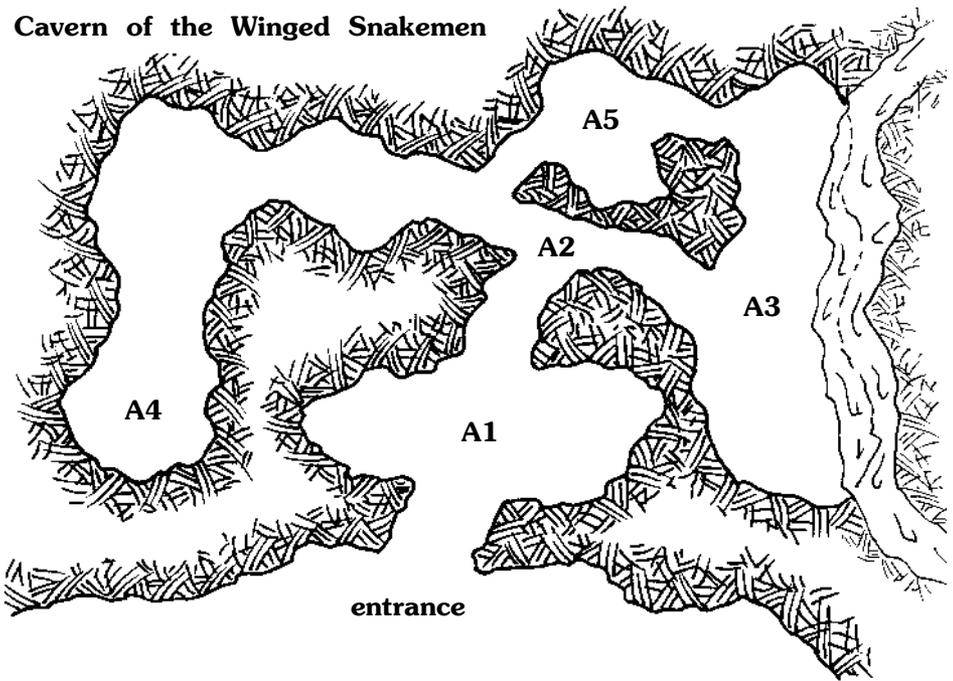
Several tunnels traverse the underground cavern system, leading to several different caves and chambers. There is a 25% chance that characters may encounter one winged snakeman or an acolyte from A4.

#### A3: Main Chamber

An underground stream fills the back corner of this large, open chamber. The ceiling is over 40' high, allowing the winged creatures a chance to glide downward in their attacks (adding +1 to their to-hit bonus).

3 winged snakemen are relaxing in the watery pool while 2 sit upon upper ledges, guarding the area (AC 6, HD 1\*, hp 4 each, #AT 1, D 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML8). The two guards will glide down to attack as the others exit the pool, grabbing spears.

## Cavern of the Winged Snakemen



### A4: New Temple

A wayward priest, recently encountering the winged creatures, has convinced their leader to erect a temple to worship their kind. The priest is nearly done with the shrine and has recruited 2 acolytes to help finish it.

The priest is 2nd level and wears black **leather armor +1** and a **Ring of Fire Resistance**. He has but one spell (Protection from Good) that he will immediately cast when the characters arrive. (AC 5, C2, hp 8, #AT 1, D 1-6, Save F1, ML10). He carries a **Potion of Neutralize Poison** for emergencies. He uses a normal mace in combat.

The 2 acolytes are fanatical, doing what they are told to do by the priest (AC 7, C1, hp 3, 4, #AT 1, D 1-6, Save F1, ML10). They wear leather armor and carry maces.

### A5: Chieftain Chambers

Leading the escape, the newly elected winged snakeman leader uses this area as his personal quarters. A single female survived the experiments, and has partnered with the leader in hopes of successful reproduction.

The leader is quite tough (AC 5, HD 2\*\*, hp 9, #AT 2, D 1-6 or 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML12), attacking with two spears or a single, venomous bite. His mate will use a shortbow, firing arrows at the characters from afar (AC 6, HD 1\*, hp 6, #AT 1, D 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML10).

A small wooden crate near the pair's nest contains the goods stolen from the mad wizard; along with **250 sp** and **50 gp**, **2 Scrolls of Magic Missile** and **3 Potions of Healing** are found inside the small box.

Choosing spells for your low level cleric, magic-user or elf can be challenging, especially since few choices exist in the earlier B/X rulebooks. **Spellbound** will be a recurring article that highlights or compares existing spells, or details new spell ideas.

How many GMs running B/X campaigns allow their players to pick their spells? Do you let Magic-Users and Elves pick them but force Clerics to roll for their new spell? I've played with many GMs that do both. Here are my thoughts on picking and rolling for spells.

Aside from the characters discovering scrolls or spell books in their adventures, and assuming the group hasn't been shopping at the local Magic Shop, how do the characters find a new spell on level advancement? I've always believed that the character has been studying or praying throughout their adventures and upon gaining a level (as part of that study or prayer), have finally made the breakthrough needed to cast something new.

I personally prefer the method of allowing Magic-User and Elf characters to pick their spell, but to have Clerics roll for theirs (however, I may try to attune the spell choices to the character's god or pantheon). Furthermore, I usually have Magic-User and Elf players tell me what their characters are going to study for their next spell choices upon level advancement. What's your method?

### Floating Disc, But Why?

Our initial spell review is for the first level Magic-User and Elf spell, *Floating Disc*. I can honestly say that I can never remember ever picking this spell. Why? First of all, the spell lasts 6 turns, or 60 minutes. If you have but one spell per day, and you choose *Floating Disc*, you can basically carry 500 pounds of loot (or fallen comrades) for an hour before dropping everything. This makes the spell somewhat useless, especially if your first level character has but one spell. If you are deep within a dungeon, *Floating Disc* isn't going to help. A Bag of Holding, now that would help more.

When one of my players chooses *Floating Disc*, I tend to enhance the spell to make it more worthwhile. I also try to remember that we're playing B/X so I try not to complicate things. I extend the duration to 6 hours instead of 60 minutes (36 turns) or until concentration is broken. That means if the caster has to get involved in an encounter or perform a strenuous activity, the *Floating Disc* spell ends. But if the group is exiting the dungeon and meets with little to no resistance, they have more time to get all that hard fought treasure out safely.

In the next issue, we'll review the Cleric spell, *Purify Food and Water*.

Do you have a spell you'd like to discuss? Let me know!

## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 1

On page 10 of this issue, you'll find the first installment of the *Dungeon Delver* comic series by Travis Hanson. This series will follow the adventures of three heroes as they search for a fabled artifact in a deserted abbey. Each issue, we'll parallel their adventure by providing a B/X representation of the comic; you'll get maps, encounter area, statistics, and more.

*Background:* Bindor Flameheart (dwarf), Whystal (thief), and Ensa Rassal (magic user) have embarked on their first quest, to retrieve a mysterious artifact from a long deserted abbey. It is rumored that the monks that once lived there watched over their most precious gift from their strange god. A magical hammer made from a meteorite was said to protect the abbey from disease and injury. One day, the lone bridge to the mountain abbey was found destroyed and the monks, vanished.

With the bridge gone, no one has been able to find a way into the abbey. That is, until Ensa Rassal found an old map which detailed a separate, secret entrance. Using the map as a guide, the three heroes have reached the cliff near the abbey where a secret door is supposed to be.

*Crimson Abbey Exterior:* The old monastery is falling into ruin, it's exterior no longer maintained by the monks of the Broken God. The chasm between the mountain cliff and the abbey is over 100' wide, and the remnants of a bridge are evident.

The abbey was built into the cliff face on a large ledge jutting out from a steep mountain. Its location was perfect for the secluded order; the lone bridge could be recoiled, easily defended or destroyed as a last resort.

### **Opposing Cliff:**

The cliff across from the Crimson Abbey is narrow, no more than 5' wide at its largest section. A moderately difficult climb along a winding ledge from the bottom of the mountain ends on the opposite side of the chasm, facing the Crimson Abbey.

A secret door can be found at the end of the winding ledge trail. The monks hid the entrance well, also protecting it with a lightning trap (deals 1d4 damage). The secret door opens inward, revealing a long unlit passage into the mountain behind the deserted abbey...

### *Story Characters*

#### **Bindor Flameheart, Dwarf**

Strength: 15

Intelligence: 9

Wisdom: 13

Dexterity: 11

Constitution: 14

Charisma: 7

Level: 1, AC: 4, HP: 7

Gear: Chainmail armor, shield, hammer, short sword, backpack (with supplies)

Bindor is a serious fellow, eagerly seeking his place in the world of legendary heroes. He is cautious, but a fierce combatant. He is loyal to his two friends, and will sacrifice himself for their safety.

## Story Characters (cont'd)

### Whystal, Thief

Strength: 12  
Intelligence: 12  
Wisdom: 11  
Dexterity: 15  
Constitution: 13  
Charisma: 16  
Level: 1, AC: 6, HP: 4 (3\*)  
Gear: Leather armor, cloak, dagger, short bow, quiver w/ 12 arrows.

Whystal is rash young thief, preferring to think on his feet (often, not thinking at all). He tends to rush into situations unprepared, forcing his compatriots to "save" him time and again.

\* *After the lightning trap and Potion of Healing, Whystal is at 3 hp.*

### Ensa Rassal, Magic User

Strength: 9  
Intelligence: 16  
Wisdom: 12  
Dexterity: 11  
Constitution: 9  
Charisma: 15  
Level: 1, AC: 9, HP: 2  
Gear: Robe, dagger, Wand of Magic Detection, Potion of Healing\*, map of the Crimson Abbey. Spell: Magic Missile

Ensa is a smart, young wizard's apprentice who has recently acquired the map of the Crimson Abbey. She has taken leave of her studies to pursue the fabled treasures of the deserted abbey. Like Bindor, she is fiercely loyal to her friends.

\* *The Potion of Healing has been used, no longer available.*

## Want Ads / For Sale

**Wanted:** Any condition copies of B2 Keep on the Borderlands, and Moldvay Basic and Expert Rulebooks. [throwi@gmail.com](mailto:throwi@gmail.com)

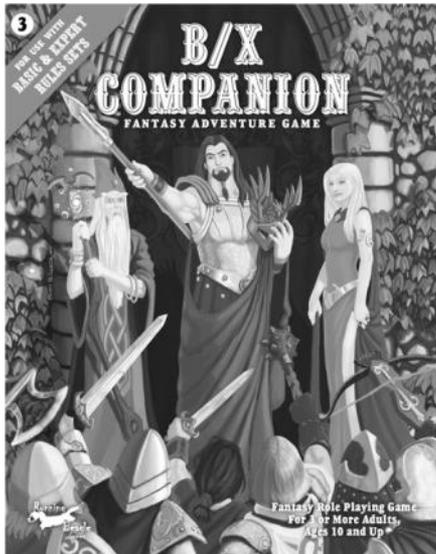
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If you have an idea for a short piece for *Back to BasiX*, contact [thom@throwigames.com](mailto:thom@throwigames.com) for submission guidelines.

Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for making sense of my 'Crimson Abbey of the Broken God' story and drawing it perfectly!

Additionally, a very special thanks to Merle Rasmussen for his candid responses to my goofy questions.

**For Sale:** B/X Companion by Running Beagle Games.



PRINT orders available at  
[bxblackrazor.blogspot.com](http://bxblackrazor.blogspot.com);  
PDF available at  
[DriveThruRPG.com](http://DriveThruRPG.com)



TO BE CONTINUED...

# Back to BasiX

B/X Fanzine

## What's in this issue?

Product Spotlight  
Publishing News  
A Dungeon Crawl  
New B/X Monster  
New Magical Items  
Spell Casting Article  
A New Comic Strip  
Interview with a Legendary Gamer

## What's being added in the next issue?

Artist Spotlight  
Expanded Want Ads / For Sale  
Additional pages of content!

## How do you get the next issue?

Contact Thom Wilson at [thom@throwigames.com](mailto:thom@throwigames.com).  
Issues can be purchased from ThrowiGames and mailed, or found at vendor booths at well attended RPG conventions throughout the United States.

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**Issue #1**