The Old School Renaissance Handbook

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WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

Introduction

Welcome to the *Old School Renaissance Handbook*, a tour of the Old School Renaissance (*a.k.a.* Old School Revival, *a.k.a.* Old School Revolution, *a.k.a.* Oh S#!+, Run!) in tabletop role-playing.

What's Included

This document starts with a handy **table comparing twenty OSR systems**. These systems were chosen for either popularity or some unique quality. Some systems were chosen for their extreme simplicity, while *Stars Without Number* is set in a science fiction universe while using early *D&D*-style mechanics.

This is followed by **guides for each of these systems**, which includes an overview of the system's approach, mechanics, advice for DMs, and advice for players. Each guide includes five standard characters statted out in that system.

This book also includes public domain art, and interviews with Jason Morningstar of *Dungeon Squad*, James Raggi IV of *Lamentations of the Flame Princess*, Kirin Robinson of *Old School Hack*, and Michael Wolf of *Warrior, Rogue & Mage*.

What is the Old School Renaissance?

The term Old School Renaissance (or Old School Revolution, or), abbreviated OSR, is in flux. There is no single, definitive definition of the term. So, this author must do his best.

The OSR can be seen as a defense of early tabletop role-playing. It was born partly out of arguments about twenty-first century tabletop gaming, and assumptions that game design is on a linear trend of improvement, that recent games are inherently better than older ones.

OSR enthusiasts point out that early tabletop games like first edition *Dungeons & Dragons* were perfectly functional, when played according the assumptions of the time. Early *D&D* was not necessarily superior to other systems in all situations. It just works fine, thank you very much.

So, the OSR advocates an appreciation of early *systems*, as well an understanding of early *play styles*.

For example, when your character begins with few hit points, you will likely strive for crafty and unorthodox solutions to in-game problems, rather than swinging your sword. Moreover, the death of a character comes as no surprise. You don't begin the game with a strong emotional attachment to only one character. Instead, you let the game decide which character concept you'll play. There's a nice humility to this.

Meanwhile, many expressed frustration with the complexity of modern *D&D* editions (and d20 games in general), and the difficulty of finding older, simpler editions to play. Old editions were

simply hard to come by, so people started re-writing early *D&D* and publishing those rules online.

The OSR as a whole embraces both the specific systems that existed in the late 1970's and early 1980's, as well as systems built for that play style (though some eschew new systems and stick with old systems). Many of these newer systems have become known as *retroclones*, though the term remains fluid. For some, a retroclone must copy certain aspects of Original *D&D*'s rules like the six core attributes.

As with any movement, all these principles are nebulous and evolve. The OSR consists of players and bloggers, pointing out advantages of OSR game mechanics and approaches, and improving their collective understanding of role-playing as they go.

Alternatively, [Justin Smith](#) defines the OSR as "Games derived from *Dungeon & Dragons*, that structurally lean towards exploration and problem solving rather than story-focused (either making a story of following one) or overcoming combat encounters (primarily)."

[Chris Vermeers](#) defines the OSR as "A movement revitalizing games that are centered around generating events about which stories can be told (or not), as opposed to games centered around generating stories directly. There's a definite implication of actuarial-type analysis involved in and underlying the rules of those games, though it could be hidden from the players by various means and misdirection."

[Robert Fisher](#) says, "For me, it is about going back to basics. Rediscovering what made the hobby so much fun in the beginning. Striping away the extraneous cruft. And learning some things I missed the first time."

If you'd like to read another take on the OSR, see *[Quick Primer for Old School Gaming](#)*.

The Five Standard Characters

In this book, each system guide ends with character sheets for the same five characters. These are archetypal first-level characters with 0 XP, ready for a sample game of a particular ruleset.

Drimgord is a classic dwarf fighter, focusing on melee damage. Faremriana is an elven archer, focusing on ranged attacks and wilderness/survival skills. Allain is a halfling thief/rogue who wields throwing daggers. Dania is a human cleric who uses healing magic. Andreas is a human wizard/magic user who focuses on offensive spells and magical research, particularly some variation on the *fireball* or *magic missile* spell.

Of course, each character has required some adaptation to certain systems.

THE BIG MATRIX OF OSR SYSTEMS

	Price	Player Classes	Pages	Elf is a Class	Monsters	Treasure	HP by Class	Highest PC Level
Adventurer Conqueror King	$10 PDF $40 print	12	274	Kinda *	204	Yes	Yes (HD)	14
Barbarians of Lemuria	$7.50 PDF £16.14 print	N/A	43	No	0	No	No	N/A
BareBones	$10 PDF	N/A	84	No	47	Yes	No	6 **
Basic Fantasy	Free PDF	4	155	No	179	Yes	Yes (HD)	20
Basic Roleplaying (Chaosium)	$22 PDF $45 print	N/A	404	No	72 (separate)	No	No	N/A
Castles & Crusades	$21 PDF $30 print	4	54	No	0	Yes	Yes (HD)	10
Dungeon Crawl Classics	$19 PDF $40 print	7	488	Yes	110	No	Yes (HD)	10
Dungeon Raiders	Free PDF	4	10	No	16	Yes	Yes	No limit
Dungeon Squad	Free PDF	N/A	5	No	17	Yes	No	No limit
Dungeon World (Basic)	Free XML $10 PDF	4	122	No	17	No	Yes (static)	5
Labyrinth Lord	Free (no art) $22 (art)	7	138	Yes	191	Yes	Yes (HD)	Varies by class
Lamentations of the Flame Princess	Free PDF €10 PDF €30 print	7	171 / 94 (core)	Yes	0	No	Yes (HD)	Varies by class
Mazes & Minotaurs	Free PDF	12	50 (core)	Yes ***	Separate	No	Yes	6
Microlite74	Free PDF	8	28 (standard)	No	150	Yes	Depends on version	No limit
Old School Hack	Free PDF	7	20	Yes	0	Yes	No	4
OSRIC	Free PDF	9	404	No	373	Yes	Yes (HD)	Varies by class

	Price	Player Classes	Pages	Elf is a Class	Monsters	Treasure	HP by Class	Highest PC Level
Searchers of the Unknown	Free PDF	1	1	No	0	No	Yes (HD)	No limit
Stars Without Number	Free Basic PDF $20 PDF $30 print	3	210	No	25	Yes	Yes	11+
Swords and Wizardry	Free PDF $14 softcover	4	146	No	154	Yes	Yes (HD)	21+
Warrior, Rogue & Mage	Free PDF	N/A	41	No	30	No	No	No limit

* In *ACKS*, race and class are separate, but all classes are race-specific. An elf can only choose an elf-related class.

** Each of *BareBones'* 8 skills can have up to 6 levels, so if you count that way, each character technically maxes out at 48 levels.

*** *Mazes & Minotaurs* has racial classes, but no actual elves.

A Legend for the Big Matrix

"Prices" are in U.S. Dollars unless otherwise noted, as of 2012.

"Player Classes" only include those classes specifically described in the core rule book.

"Pages" lists the number of pages in the core rule book only. If the free PDF is significantly shorter than the paid version, then I list the number of pages in both.

"Elf is a Class" refers to whether races are treated as classes.

"Monsters" lists the number of monsters specifically statted out in the core rule book. Monster templates don't count, but non-monstrous humanoid enemies (like bandits) do count.

"Treasure" indicates the presence of a table or list of treasure for PCs.

"HP by Class" indicates whether Hit Points increase by class. *E.g.*, when a character levels up, do you roll a different die size based on the character's class? If so, "HP by Class" is "Yes." If Hit Points increase using a die, "(HD)" is used; otherwise, assume a static number.

"Highest PC Level" lists the highest level to which a PC can rise in the core rule book.

ADVENTURER CONQUEROR KING SYSTEM

Overview

This is based on the first edition of *Adventurer Conqueror King*, released in 2012.

The *Adventurer Conqueror King* System (*ACKS*) is arguably the most "heavy" system profiled in this book. Its rule book is certainly the longest, and it includes a large set of character proficiencies (skills).

This is partly because *ACKS* is built for long-form play. Many pages of the rulebook are devoted to higher-level play, including rules for establishing strongholds, holding chaotic domains of beastmen, assassinating rivals, and running merchant businesses.

Still, the core rules are very similar to basic *D&D*: roll 1d20 and add modifiers, with characters based on the six classic attributes, class, and race.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**12** (Assassin, Bard, Bladedancer, Cleric, Dwarven Craftpriest, Dwarven Vaultguard, Elven Nightblade, Elven Spellsword, Explorer, Fighter, Mage, and Thief)

Cost:	US **$10** PDF, $40 print	Pages:	**274**
Elf is a Class:	**Kinda**	Monsters:	**204**
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**14**		

The Mechanics

Proficiencies provide bonuses to saving throws, negates certain penalties, or otherwise overrides an existing rule. Each proficiency is limited to certain classes, so a Fighter can take the Alertness proficiency but a Mage cannot.

Attacks are 1d20 plus situational modifiers, trying to roll equal to or higher than the sum of the attacking creature's Attack Throw plus the enemy's AC.

Player Character Elements

- Six classic attributes, with bonuses
- Class
- Race
- Alignment
- Hit Points
- Proficiencies (skills)
- Attack Throw
- Saving Throws against various effects

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There are rules for many different combat maneuvers, including disarming, knocking prone, and breaking weapons, as well as rules for morale, mounted combat, sea combat, *etc*.

Advice for DMs

The chapter for DMs is mostly made up of a fantasy society economic simulator (including urban demographics and rolling for trade routes) and tables to generate dungeons.

If you're looking for more *ACKS* materials, the Autarch website (autarch.co) contains free downloads of character sheets, maps, and supplemental rules for new classes, monster types, and reputation.

Advice for Players

Note the very useful "The Combat Round" sheet on page 257 of the rules. This describes the core rules for a combat round.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Dwarven Vaultguard   **Attack 0 AC** 10+   **Damage** +1

HP 6   **AC** 3   **Weapon** 1d6/1d8

Strength 16 (+2)   **Dexterity** 14 (+1)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 11 (+0)   **Wisdom** 12 (+0)   **Charisma** 9 (+0)

Proficiencies Adventuring; Command; Military Strategy

Special +1 to surprise rolls when underground

Saves Petrify 11, Poison 10, Blast 13, Wands 12, Spells 13

FAREMRIANA

Class Elven Spellsword   **Attack 0 AC** 10+

HP 4   **AC** 2   **Weapon** 1d6

Strength 11 (+0)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 16 (+2)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

Proficiencies Adventuring; Naturalism; Precise Shooting

Special +1 to surprise rolls when in the wilderness; Keen eyes (detect hidden doors with 8+ when searching; 14+ casually); Connection to nature (see rules, page 34)

Saves Petrify 14, Poison 14, Blast 16, Wands 16, Spells 16

ALLAIN

Class Thief   **Attack** 0 **AC** 10+

HP 3   **AC** 2   **Weapon** 1d4

Strength 12 (+0)   **Dexterity** 16 (+2)   **Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 11 (+0)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

Proficiencies Adventuring; Tracking; Weapon Focus (Dagger)

Special   Backstab (+4 on attacks when target unaware); Opening Locks (18+); Finding Traps (18+); Picking Pockets (17+); Moving Silently (17+); Climbing Walls (6+); Hiding in Shadows (19+); Hearing Noises (14+; see rules, pages 23-24)

Saves Petrify 13, Poison 13, Blast 16, Wands 14, Spells 15

DANIA

Class Cleric   **Attack** 0 **AC** 10+

HP 4   **AC** 4   **Weapon** 1d6/1d8

Strength 9 (+0)   **Dexterity** 11 (+0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 12 (+0)   **Wisdom** 16 (+2)   **Charisma** 14 (+1)

Proficiencies Adventuring; Mapping; Divine Blessing

Saves Petrify 13, Poison 10, Blast 16, Wands 13, Spells 15

Spells Turn Undead (see rules, page 21)

ANDREAS

Class Mage   **Attack** 0 AC 10+

HP 3   **AC** 0   **Weapon** 1d6

Strength 14 (+1)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 16 (+2) **Wisdom** 11 (+0)   **Charisma** 9 (+0)

Proficiencies Adventuring; Healing; Collegiate Wizardry

Repertoire Detect Magic

Saves Petrify 13, Poison 13, Blast 15, Wands 11, Spells 12

BARBARIANS OF LEMURIA

Overview

This is based on the second edition of *Barbarians of Lemuria.*

Barbarians offers a refreshingly rules-light system. Each character has four attributes, initially totaling 4; four combat abilities, also initially totaling 4; Hit Points; and points in various careers (which work similarly to skills). Roll 2d6, add appropriate points, and try to hit 9 or above.

It's based on Lin Carter's *Lemuria* novels, which lends a specific air to the game. It's a world of sword & sorcery stereotypes and extremes, where the girls are always voluptuous (and usually called "girls") and priests are always crafty.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes: **0** (points in Alchemist, Assassin, Barbarian, Blacksmith, Dancer, Farmer, Gladiator, Hunter, Magician, Merchant, Mercenary, Minstrel, Noble, Physician, Pilot, Pirate, Priest, Serving Wench, Scribe, Slave, Soldier, Thief, and Torturer)

Cost:	US **$7.50** PDF, **£16.14** paperback	Pages:	**43**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**0**
HP by Class:	**No**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**N/A**		

The Mechanics

Roll 2d6 and add the appropriate attribute's points. If in combat, add the appropriate combat ability's points; otherwise, add the appropriate career's points. If the result is 9 or greater, you succeed. A natural 12 always succeeds, and a natural 2 always fails.

If a combat roll succeeds, roll the weapon's damage, and subtract from the opponent's Hit Points.

Armor increases the difficulty of an attack roll, so if attacking a girl wearing a chainmail bikini (protection 1), you must roll a 10 or higher. And yes, "chainmail bikini" is an official armor type.

Player Character Elements

◆ Four attributes (strength, agility, mind, and appeal)
◆ Four combat abilities (brawl, melee, ranged, and defense)
◆ Hit Points
◆ Careers (similar to skills in other systems)

Advice to DMs

Barbarians of Lemuria assumes a specific style of world: heroes are all muscle-bound barbarians, while girls are always young and voluptuous. It's worth running this past your group before you begin playing.

Once nice thing about these rules: you can always call for a roll. It'll always be against 9, so even if you can't decide on an appropriate attribute, there's always a chance of success even if you roll plain 2d6.

The book comes with high-level information about the world, including a list of gods, flora, fauna, races, terms, locations, and major personalities.

The "Art of Gamesmastering" section has useful advice on when to call for rolls and ways to avoid railroading.

Advice to Players

You'll only need 2d6 for standard rolls, though note that some weapons require a d4, d8, or d10.

As noted in the Advice to DMs above, this game assumes a stereotypical sword & sorcery world of hunky heroes and damsels in distress. While you can certainly run any kind of fantasy game using these rules, it's tuned for *Conan*, not *Game of Thrones*.
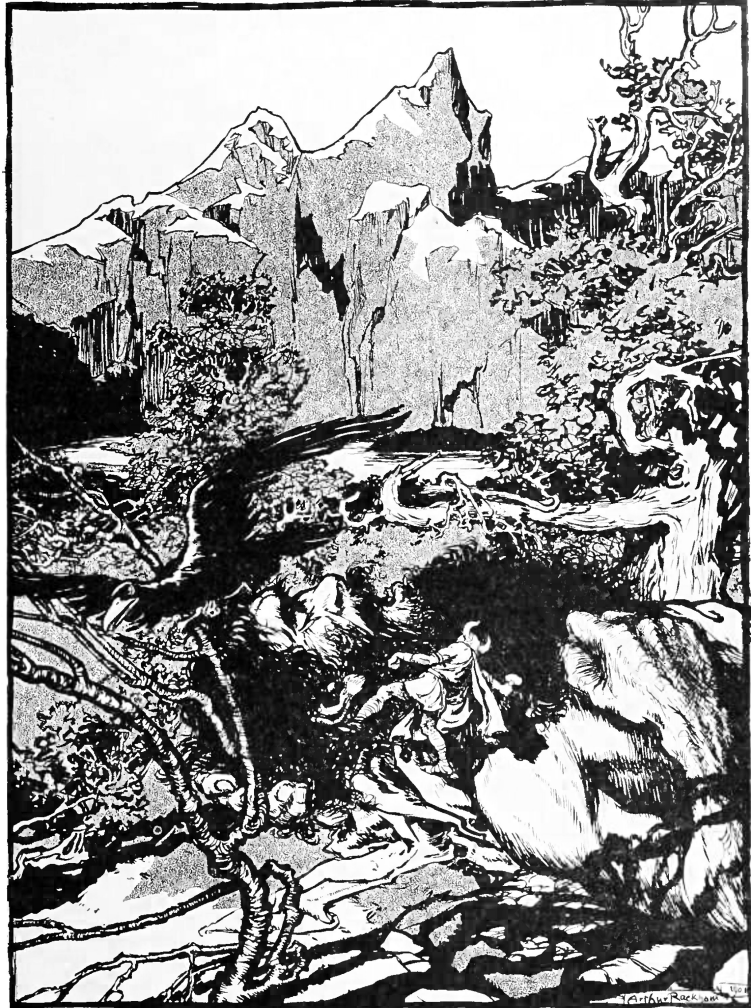
Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Strength 4   **Agility** 0   **Mind** 0   **Appeal** 0

Brawl 1   **Melee** 3   **Ranged** 0   **Defense** 0

Barbarian 2   **Mercenary** 1 **Hunter** 1   **Soldier** 0

HP 14   **Hero** 5

Armor 2 (Battle Harness 1, Gauntlets 1)

Weapons Great Axe d8

FAREMRIANA

Strength 0   **Agility** 2   **Mind** 1   **Appeal** 1

Brawl 0   **Melee** 0   **Ranged** 3   **Defense** 1

Hunter 2   **Mercenary** 1 **Magician** 1   **Noble** 0

HP 10   **Hero** 5   **Spell** 11

Armor 3 (Mail Shirt 3)

Weapons Bow d6+1, Dagger d4

ALLAIN

Strength 1   **Agility** 2   **Mind** 1   **Appeal** 0

Brawl 1   **Melee** 1   **Ranged** 2   **Defense** 0

Assassin 1   **Hunter** 1   **Mercenary** 1 **Thief** 1

HP 11   **Hero** 5

Armor 2 (Gauntlets 1, Greaves 1)

Weapons Daggers d4

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DANIA

Strength 0   **Agility** 1   **Mind** 2   **Appeal** 1

Brawl 0   **Melee** 2   **Ranged** 0   **Defense** 2

Alchemist 1   **Physician** 1   **Priest** 2   **Scribe** 0

HP 10   **Hero** 5

Armor 1 (Chainmail Bikini 1)

Weapons Staff d6, Dagger d4

ANDREAS

Strength 0   **Agility** 1   **Mind** 3   **Appeal** 0

Brawl 0   **Melee** 0   **Ranged** 1   **Defense** 3

Scribe 3   **Magician** 1   **Noble** 0   **Mercenary** 0

HP 10   **Hero** 5   **Spell** 11

Armor 2 (Leather Coat 2)

Weapons Sling d4

BAREBONES RPG

Overview

This is based on the first edition of *BareBones Fantasy*, released in 2012.

BareBones Fantasy Role-playing takes some significant departures from the classic *D&D* system, while still adhering to the old-school approach.

For example, the system uses only 10-sided dice, and abilities and skills are all calculated and rolled as percentiles. There are no classes; the game relies on 8 skills, each with levels and scores.

As a result, instead of traditional leveling up, your character gains levels in skills, up to a maximum of 6 levels in each skill. Since that technically maxes you out at 48 levels, you can play for a long time with one character. You can spend Experience Points (called Development Points here) for more skill levels or to increase abilities.

The core book also comes with DM advice, a bunch of monsters, and a high-level description of a specific fantasy setting (the Keranak Kingdoms) with a history, a pantheon, and several dozen brief location descriptions.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**0** (skills in Cleric, Enchanter, Leader, Scholar, Scout, Spellcaster, Thief, and Warrior)		
Cost:	US **$10**	Pages:	**84**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**47**
HP by Class:	**No**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**6** (kinda)		

The Mechanics

There are no classes. Instead, there are several skills, each of which corresponds to something like a class: cleric, enchanter, scout, *etc*. You choose one as primary, which gives you +20 in it, and one secondary, which gives you +10. The rest are at 0. You can also put levels in each skills; some skills can only be used if you have at least one level in that skill. Each level in a skill gets you an extra +10 in that skill.

Having levels in a skill can give you special

Player Character Elements

◆ Four attributes (strength, dexterity, logic, and will)
◆ Skills (three standard, plus one primary and one secondary, plus levels per skill)
◆ Movement
◆ Initiative
◆ Body Points (HP)
◆ Rank (level)
◆ Weapon Score melee
◆ Weapon Score ranged

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abilities (for example, if you have at least one level in Leader, you can intercept a blow to an adjacent ally and take it yourself).

◆ Weapon Damage (based on weapon)
◆ Damage Reduction (based on armor)
◆ Spells (possibly)
◆ Development Points (XP)

Spellcasters choose from a list of spells, depending on the setting. In a high-fantasy setting, you know a number of spells equal to your level; in a low-fantasy setting, you can cast any of a few common spells.

To attempt any action with a chance of failure, roll equal or below your score in the relevant skill or attribute. To attack, use the Warrior score (which has a melee variant and a ranged variant). Each weapon does damage based on d10 rolls.

Rolling 00-05 automatically succeeds, while 95-99 automatically fails. Rolling doubles on a success is a critical success; rolling doubles on a failure is a critical failure.

Advice to DMs

The rules contain quite a bit of useful information for DMs, including rules for resistance checks, calculating different damage types (acid, falling, fire), conditions (dazed, immobilized, prone), range effects, magic item creation, and travel. There's also advice on how much of an NPC to stat out, building monsters at various levels of challenge, and generating adventures, with tables of objectives, areas, obstacles, features, traps, and treasure.

Otherwise, the system is pretty simple to DM. Ask for attribute rolls and skill rolls outside of combat, while the players will choose skill rolls during combat. Attribute rolls are particularly easy to call for, so they're helpful defaults if you're not sure what to roll for.

Advice to Players

If you're used to other *OD&D*-style systems, this one will take a lot of adjustment. Get used to percentile rolls. You'll always try to roll under (*i.e.*, less than or equal to) the relevant score.

Think of skills as a new class system, in which each skill is a class. The different skills act like multiclassing.

Each skill has a base score, which is based on one of the four core attributes. If you have any levels in that skill, each level adds 10 to your base score. So, if your Strength is 50, your Warrior skill starts at half that, or 25. If you invest one level in your Warrior skill, its score is 35 (25 base + 10 for the level).

You must have at least one level in the cleric, enchanter, leader, scholar, or spellcaster skills to use them, while scout, thief, and warrior can be used without any levels.

If you plan to play a spellcaster, ask your DM if you're playing in a high-fantasy or low-fantasy world. In a high-fantasy world, you'll choose from a familiar spell list, and you've memorized a

number of spells equal to your level in the Spellcaster skill. In a low-fantasy setting, you can cast any of a small list of standard spells like creating lights or small illusions.

Your moral code is a good way of defining your character's personality.

Note that initiative rolls occur at the beginning of every round, not just the beginning of combat. You roll a number of dice equal to your initiative and choose the highest roll. So, if you have an initiative of 2, you would roll 2 dice and choose the highest roll.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Strength 75   **Dexterity** 50   **Logic** 55   **Will** 60

Race Dwarf

Skills Warrior (primary); Leader (secondary, level 1)

Descriptors Survivalist; Easy to annoy

Scout 27   **Thief** 25

Warrior 57 (melee), 45 (ranged)

Leader 40

BP 32   **Initiative** 1   **Move** 6

Armor Chainmail   **DR** 6

Moral Code Somewhat Cruel; Very Focused; Somewhat Selfless; Very Honorable; Very Brave

Special Infravision 12 spaces; +10 resist poison and magic; speaks dwarvish and tradespeak.

FAREMRIANA

Strength 50   **Dexterity** 65   **Logic** 65   **Will** 60

Race Elf

Skills Warrior (primary); Enchanter (secondary, level 1)

Descriptors Notices many things; It's all about the mission

Scout 32   **Thief** 32

Warrior 45 (melee), 52 (ranged)

Enchanter 42

BP 25   **Initiative** 3   **Move** 9

Armor Stud. Leather **DR** 3

Moral Code Somewhat Cruel; Totally Focused; Very Selfless; Totally Honorable; Totally Brave

Special Darkvision 12 spaces; +10 resist charms; speaks elven and tradespeak

ALLAIN

Strength 55   **Dexterity** 70   **Logic** 50   **Will** 65

Race Halfling

Skills Thief (primary); Scout (secondary); Warrior (level 1)

Descriptors Practical; Loves his daggers

Scout 25   **Thief** 35

Warrior 37 (melee), 45 (ranged)

BP 27   **Initiative** 2   **Move** 7

Armor Stud. Leather **DR** 3

Moral Code Very Cruel; Very Focused; Very Selfish; Somewhat Deceitful; Somewhat cowardly

Special Reroll 1 failed check per encounter; +10 on hide and sneak checks; speaks Halfling and tradespeak.

DANIA

Strength 55   **Dexterity** 50   **Logic** 60   **Will** 75

Race Human

Skills Cleric (primary); Warrior (secondary); Scholar (level 1)

Descriptors Unwavering faith; Bad conversationalist; Incredible concentration

Scout 30   **Thief** 25

Warrior 37 (melee), 35 (ranged)   **Special** Use 57 when wielding longsword

Cleric 57   **Scholar** 40

BP 27   **Initiative** 1   **Move** 8

Armor Leather   **DR** 2

Weapon Longsword **Damage** 1D+3

Moral Code Very Kind; Totally Focused; Very Selfless; Very Honorable; Totally Brave

Spells Heal: heal 2D on a single target, once per day.

Special +10 on resistance checks; speaks anglish and tradespeak.

ANDREAS

Strength 50   **Dexterity** 55   **Logic** 65   **Will** 70

Race Human

Skills Spellcaster (primary, level 1); Scholar (secondary)

Descriptors Lots of notes; Naïve; Chip on his shoulder

Scout 32   **Thief** 27

Warrior 25 (melee), 27 (ranged)

Spellcaster 52   **Scholar** 42

BP 25   **Initiative** 2   **Move** 8

Armor Chainmail   **DR** 6

Moral Code Somewhat Cruel; Somewhat Unfocused; Very Selfish; Very Honorable; Somewhat Cowardly

Spells Offensive Strike: Deal 2D damage to one target, or half that to all within 3 spaces of target space. No damage resistance. Range 10 spaces.

Special +10 on resistance checks; speaks anglish and tradespeak.

BASIC FANTASY ROLE-PLAY

Overview

This is based on the second edition of *Basic Fantasy*.

Basic Fantasy starts with D&D 3rd Edition, then drastically simplifies characters' stats. A *Basic Fantasy* character sheet can fit on an index card.

A few mechanics revert to those of earlier editions. For example, a thief's abilities to open locks, remove traps, pick pockets, *etc.* require percentile rolls, of which the target number changes by level.

The publisher also provides a large variety of free downloads on its website, including an extra bestiary, modules, spreadsheets, extra classes, extra races, and alternate rules.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**4** (Cleric, Fighter, Magic User, and Thief)		
Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**155**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**179**
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**20**		

The Mechanics

Attacks are 1d20 plus bonuses, attempting to roll higher than armor class. There are extensive combat rules for climbing, diving, charging, brawling, wrestling, morale, *etc.*

Finding secret doors, opening locked doors, finding traps, and similar tasks require 1d6 rolls (except for thieves, which roll percentile dice against a table).

There are no feats or skills.

Player Character Elements

◆ Six classic attributes, plus modifiers
◆ Race
◆ Class
◆ Armor Class
◆ Hit Points
◆ Attack Bonus
◆ Saving Throws (racial)

Advice to DMs

Basic Fantasy is an interesting hybrid of old-school and new-school. While many old-school systems seek to simplify rules while keeping most of the common stats, Basic Fantasy takes the

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opposite approach. This ruleset is certainly simpler than, say, *D&D* 3.5's, but still, the combat section has rules for subduing damage, wrestling, morale, and even vehicle repair.

One advantage of this approach is the amount of support the game provides. Half a page is spent describing the "rules" governing magic items, explaining activation methods and whether magical items stack.

There's a very helpful chapter on distributing treasure (page 118), complete with many tables to roll on, if so inclined.

Note the rules about Wilderness Adventures, for rules and charts on overland travel.

If you find the rules a bit too deadly for characters, note the section on Optional Rules (page 140). There you'll find alternate rules for death, dying, and poisons, as well as other interesting rules about awarding XP for treasure, rolling against ability scores, preparing spells from memory, and a peak at the math behind thief abilities so that thieves can tweak their progression.

Advice to Players

You'll mainly need to focus on three sections of the rule book: Player Character Information (pages 3-14), The Encounter (pages 43-53), and for magic users, Spells (pages 15-35). If you're familiar with any edition of *D&D*, you can skim the Player Character Information; it will be very familiar.

To calculate your saving throws, you'll (oddly) need to jump to the Encounter section and use the Saving Throws tables on page 53.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Fighter   **Race** Dwarf

HP 6   **AC** 15   **Weapon** 1d10 (Great Axe)

Strength 16 (+2)   **Dexterity** 14 (+1)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 11 (+0)   **Wisdom** 12 (+0)   **Charisma** 9 (+0)

Saves Death Ray 16, Wands 17, Petrify 18, Dragon Breath 18, Spells 21

FAREMRIANA

Class Fighter   **Race** Elf

HP 5   **AC** 13   **Weapon** 1d8 (Longbow)

Strength 11 (+0)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 16 (+2)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

Saves Death Ray 12, Wands 15, Petrify 15, Dragon Breath 15, Spells 19

ALLAIN

Class Thief　　　　　　**Race** Halfling

HP 3　　　　　　　**AC** 13　　　　　**Weapon** 1d4 (Dagger)

Strength 12 (+0)　　**Dexterity** 16 (+2)　**Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 11 (+0)　**Wisdom** 14 (+1)　**Charisma** 15 (+1)

Special　　Open Locks 25, Remove Traps 20, Pick Pockets 20, Move Silently 25, Climb Walls 80, Hide 10, Listen 30

Saves Death Ray 17, Wands 18, Petrify 17, Dragon Breath 19, Spells 19

DANIA

Class Cleric　　　　　　**Race** Human

HP 4　　　　　　　**AC** 15　　　　　**Weapon** 1d8 (Mace)

Strength 9 (+0)　　**Dexterity** 11 (+0)　**Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 12 (+0)　**Wisdom** 16 (+2)　**Charisma** 14 (+1)

Saves Death Ray 11, Wands 12, Petrify 14, Dragon Breath 16, Spells 15

ANDREAS

Class Magic-User   **Race** Human

HP 3   **AC** 11   **Weapon** 1d6 (Light Crossbow)

Strength 14 (+1)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 16 (+2) **Wisdom** 11 (+0)   **Charisma** 9 (+0)

Saves Death Ray 13, Wands 14, Petrify 13, Dragon Breath 16, Spells 15

Spells Magic Missile (page 26)

BASIC ROLEPLAYING (CHAOSIUM)

Overview

This is based on the fourth edition of *Basic Role Playing*.

Basic Role Playing was created in 1978 for *RuneQuest*, an RPG set in the Glorantha world. The mechanics were then adapted for other settings, including *Call of Cthulhu*, *Worlds of Wonder*, *Elfquest*, and *Pendragon*.

The system is not explicitly fantasy, and it has neither classes nor levels. Characters are built out of characteristics (similar to *D&D*'s six classic attributes) and skills. As such, *Basic Role Playing* is hardly a *D&D* retroclone, but it is definitely an old-school system in the historical sense.

You can download a free Quick-Start Edition of the rules, which includes only the most basic rules but is surprisingly complete.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**0** (ranks in various skills)		
Cost:	US **$22** (PDF), US **$45** hardback	Pages:	**404**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**0**
HP by Class:	**No**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**N/A**		

The Mechanics

All rolls are percentile, attempting to roll under a score. Skills simply have a percentile value against which you roll. For characteristics, roll under the characteristic's score times 5.

Attacks that roll particularly low (such as 1/20 of the skill) or high result in special success or failure (see pages 172-175).

Player Character Elements

- Seven characteristics (attributes)
- Powers (magic, psychic abilities, *etc.*)
- Damage Bonus (Strength + Size)
- Hit Points ((Constitution + Size) / 2)
- Major Wound Level (Hit Points / 2)
- Power Points (based on Power characteristic)
- Movement
- Skills
- Profession

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Advice to DMs

There are a *lot* of optional rules in this system. There are also a lot of character options, including superpowers, psychic abilities, a set of professions, and equipment for a wide range of settings and technology levels.

However, the core mechanics are simple: roll percentile, aiming to roll less than the appropriate score.

Advice to Players

This is a very different system than many of the others in this book. Your character is composed primarily of seven characteristics and various skills. You'll roll percentile dice when attempting an action, trying to roll less than a value.

The book comes with several explanations of character creation, including a helpful chart starting on page 22.

Be prepared to spend a lot of time on character creation. The various pieces are spread throughout the rulebook, and there are a lot of pieces depending on the genre.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Strength 16   **Effort** 80   **Damage** +0

Constitution 15   **Stamina** 75   **Hit Points** 13 (major wound 7)

Size 7   **Move** 10

Intelligence 11   **Idea** 55   **XP Bonus** 6

Power 12   **Luck** 60   **Power Points** 12

Dexterity 14   **Agility** 70

Appearance 9   **Charisma** 45

Profession Soldier

Skills Brawl 30, Climb 25, Command 30, Dodge 25, Drive 20, First Aid 15, Grapple 25, Heavy Weapon (Battle Axe) 35, Melee Weapon (Axe) 25, Navigate 20

Armor Soft Leather (1 AP, 1D6-1 AP, 3.5 ENC, 2 TIME)

FAREMRIANA

Strength 11   **Effort** 55   **Damage** +0

Constitution 9   **Stamina** 45   **Hit Points** 10 (major wound 5)

Size 11   **Move** 10

Intelligence 16   **Idea** 80   **XP Bonus** 8

Power 12   **Luck** 60   **Power Points** 12

Dexterity 12   **Agility** 60

Appearance 15   **Charisma** 75

Profession Hunter

Skills Climb 20, Hide 25, Knowledge (Natural History) 20, Listen 25, Missile Weapon (Bow) 30, Navigate 25, Ride 25, Spot 25, Stealth 25, Track 30

Armor Soft Leather (1 AP, 1D6-1 AP, 3.5 ENC, 2 TIME)

ALLAIN

Strength 12   **Effort** 60   **Damage** +0

Constitution 9   **Stamina** 45   **Hit Points** 7 (major wound 4)

Size 5   **Move** 10

Intelligence 11   **Idea** 55   **XP Bonus** 6

Power 12   **Luck** 60   **Power Points** 12

Dexterity 16   **Agility** 80

Appearance 15   **Charisma** 75

Profession Thief

Skills Appraise 30, Dodge 25, Fast Talk 30, Hide 25, Stealth 25, Bargain 20, Fine Manipulation 20, Grapple 20, Insight 25, Persuade 30

Armor Soft Leather (1 AP, 1D6-1 AP, 3.5 ENC, 2 TIME)

DANIA

Strength 9   **Effort** 45   **Damage** +0

Constitution 15   **Stamina** 75   **Hit Points** 13 (major wound 7)

Size 11   **Move** 10

Intelligence 12   **Idea** 60   **XP Bonus** 6

Power 12   **Luck** 60   **Power Points** 12

Dexterity 11   **Agility** 55

Appearance 14   **Charisma** 70

Profession Doctor

Skills First Aid 25, Insight 25, Language (Own) 25, Language (Other) 25, Medicine 25, Persuade 25, Psychotherapy 25, Research 25, Science (any) 25, Spot 25

Armor Soft Leather (1 AP, 1D6-1 AP, 3.5 ENC, 2 TIME)

ANDREAS

Strength 14   **Effort** 70   **Damage** +0

Constitution 15   **Stamina** 75   **Hit Points** 13 (major wound 7)

Size 11   **Move** 10

Intelligence 16   **Idea** 80   **XP Bonus** 6

Power 12   **Luck** 60   **Power Points** 12

Dexterity 12   **Agility** 60

Appearance 9   **Charisma** 45

Profession Scholar, Magician

Skills Climb 15, Drive 25, Knowledge (Anthropology) 40, Language (Other) 25, Language (Own) 25, Persuade 20, Research 35, Ride 15, Science (Geology) 30, Spot 20

Armor Soft Leather (1 AP, 1D6-1 AP, 3.5 ENC, 2 TIME)

CASTLES & CRUSADES

Overview

This is based on the 2004 edition of *Castles & Crusades*.

Castles & Crusades takes a similar mechanical approach to other traditional retroclones: 6 classic attributes, a few basic classes and races, hit dice by class, and some basic combat rules. The player's handbook comes with 83 one-line monsters, and several pages of treasure and weapon tables. There's also a nice section on various kinds of magic items.

Arguably its most significant variation is its use of primary and secondary attributes. A roll against a prime attribute (one is determined by the character's class, the other by the player) is relatively easy, while a roll against a secondary attribute is very difficult.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**4** (Cleric, Fighter, Rogue, and Wizard)		
Cost:	US **$21** (PDF), US **$30** hardback	Pages:	**54**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**0**
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**10**		

The Mechanics

Attacks are 1d20 plus modifiers, rolling greater than or equal to Armor Class. Damage is per-weapon and subtracted from Hit Points.

Anything else is an Attribute Check. Roll 1d20 plus attribute bonus and level against "challenge class," which is a "challenge level" (typically 1 to 10) plus 12 if the attributed involved is one of the character's "prime attributes" or 18 otherwise. Saving Throws work the same way.

Player Character Elements

◆ Classic six attributes, plus modifiers
◆ Saving throws
◆ Class
◆ Race
◆ Hit Points
◆ Armor Class
◆ To Hit Bonus
◆ Special skills

Initiative is a straight 1d10 roll; ties go to characters with higher Dexterity.

Advice to DMs

Enemies should be about the same level as your players. Increasing the level makes enemies much harder.

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The rules have been built so that attempting an action that's outside of a prime attribute is extremely difficult at low levels.

Advice to Players

Pay attention to party structure, especially at low levels. You'll want a group with a wide variety of specialties, because secondary attribute checks are very difficult at low levels.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Fighter   **Race** Dwarf

HP 6   **AC** 14   **Weapon** 1d8 (Battleaxe)

Strength 16 (+2)   **Dexterity** 14 (+1)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 11 (+0)   **Wisdom** 12 (+0)   **Charisma** 9 (+0)

Prime Strength, Constitution

Movement 20   **Size** Small

Saves Arcane spells and spell-like effects +1, Fear +2, Poisons +2

Special -2 on charisma checks against elves, deepvision, determine depth and direction underground, +1 to hit goblins/orcs, -4 on charisma checks against goblins/orcs, +4 to AC when fighting giants/ogres, stonecraft, Find Traps +2

FAREMRIANA

Class Fighter   **Race** Elf

HP 5   **AC** 14   **Weapon** 1d8 (Longbow)

Strength 11 (+0)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 16 (+2)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

Prime Strength, Dexterity

Movement 30   **Size** Medium

Special Enhanced sight and hearing, low-light vision, move silently, spell resistance (p26), spot hidden doors with wisdom check, +1 to hit with bow, Listen +2, Move Silently +2

ALLAIN

Class Rogue   **Race** Halfling

HP 3   **AC** 11   **Weapon** 1d4 (Dagger)

Strength 12 (+0)   **Dexterity** 16 (+2)   **Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 11 (+0)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

Prime Dexterity, Charisma

Movement 20   **Size** Small

Saves Fear +2, Hide +2, Move Silently +2, Poisons +1

Special Hide with dexterity check, move silently, twilight vision

DANIA

Class Cleric   **Race** Human

HP 4   **AC** 12   **Weapon** 1d8 (Heavy Mace)

Strength 9 (+0)   **Dexterity** 11 (+0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 12 (+0)   **Wisdom** 16 (+2)   **Charisma** 14 (+1)

Prime Wisdom, Constitution, Intelligence

Movement 30   **Size** Medium

ANDREAS

Class Wizard   **Race** Human

HP 3   **AC** 10   **Weapon** 1d6 (Quarterstaff)

Strength 14 (+1)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 16 (+2)   **Wisdom** 11 (+0)   **Charisma** 9 (+0)

Prime Intelligence, Constitution, Wisdom

Movement 30   **Size** Medium

Spell Book Magic Missile (level 1), Read Magic (level 1), Comprehend Languages (level 1)

See page 20 for all spells.

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

Overview

This is based on the 2012 edition of *Dungeon Crawl Classics*.

Dungeon Crawl Classics starts with *D&D* 1E, applies a few principles from later editions (three defenses; high AC is good, as is the chance to re-use a spell after it's been cast), and adds several other useful rules (such as burning ability scores to improve die rolls).

More interestingly, *DCC* takes a liberal approach towards the definition of "die." One can roll 1d14s, 1d16s, or 1d30s instead of standard dice.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes: **7** (Cleric, Dwarf, Elf, Halfling, Thief, Warrior, and Wizard)

Cost:	US **$40**	Pages:	**488**
Elf is a Class:	**Yes**	Monsters:	**110**
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**10**		

The Mechanics

There are no feats or skills.

Attacks are 1d20 plus bonuses, attempting to roll higher than armor class. Additional attacks are represented as extra, smaller attack dice (1d16, for example). Critical misses must roll on a special table. There are extensive rules for different types of attacks, such as blinding, disarming, pushing, tripping, precision, *etc*.

Player Character Elements

- Six attributes
- Fortitude, Reflex, and Will saving throws
- Class
- Hit Points (1d4 + class bonus)
- Occupation (which determines weapon training and possessions)

Advice to DMs

The *DCC* book comes with quite a bit of advice to DM's in the *Judge's Rules* section, particularly surrounding unusual situations like building new spells and communicating with spirits. There's also advice about handing out experience points and rolling for luck.

Advice to Players

If you've played *D&D* Third Edition, you'll find *DCC* as a bit like "3E lite." You have six ability scores plus modifiers, three defenses (also used for saving throws), Hit Dice on monsters, and many other mechanics of 3E, with feats and skills sliced out.

Note that your character starts at level 0, and extremely weak. The game assumes you will weed out characters until one is lucky enough to survive to level 1, at which point they become "worth remembering" (*DCC*'s words).

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Dwarf   **Alignment**   Law

HP 6   **Attack/Dmg** +d3   **Weapon** 1d8

Crit Die 1d10   **Crit Table** III   **Action Dice** 1d20

Strength 16   **Agility** 14   **Stamina** 15

Intelligence 11   **Luck** 12   **Personality** 9

Fortitude +1   **Reflex** +1   **Will** +1

FAREMRIANA

Class Elf   **Alignment**   Neutral

HP 4   **Attack** +1   **Weapon** 1d6

Crit Die 1d6   **Crit Table** II   **Action Dice** 1d20

Strength 8   **Dexterity** 13 **Constitution** 11

Intelligence 15   **Wisdom** 17   **Charisma** 9

Fortitude +0   **Reflex** +1   **Will** +1

Spells Choking Cloud

        Detect Magic

        Invoke Patron

        Mending

        Patron Bond

ALLAIN

Class Halfling   **Alignment** Chaos

HP 3   **Attack** +1   **Weapon** 1d4

Crit Die   1d8   **Crit Table** III   **Action Dice** 1d20

Strength 13   **Dexterity** 17   **Constitution** 8

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 15   **Charisma** 9

Fortitude +1   **Reflex** +1   **Will** +1

Sneak/Hide +3

Special Infravision, double Luck bonuses; restore Luck points to 1 every morning.

DANIA

Class Cleric   **Alignment** Law   **God** Gorhan

HP 5   **Attack** +0   **Weapon** 1d6

Crit Die 1d8   **Crit Table** III   **Action Dice** 1d20

Strength 9   **Dexterity** 11   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 12   **Wisdom** 16   **Charisma** 14

Fortitude +1   **Reflex** +0   **Will** +1

ANDREAS

Class Wizard   **Alignment** Neutral

HP 3   **Attack** +0   **Weapon** 1d4

Crit Die 1d6   **Crit Table** I   **Action Dice** 1d20

Strength 14   **Dexterity** 12   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 16   **Wisdom** 11   **Charisma** 9

Fortitude +0   **Reflex** +1   **Will** +1

Spells   Comprehend Languages

       Magic Missile

       Mending

       Read Magic

DUNGEON RAIDERS

Overview

Dungeon Raiders was designed as an experiment in stepping through Original *D&D* and simplifying its rules into a streamlined, consistent system.

Dungeon Raiders does change the core mechanic, so that your class has an attack die, which you always roll to meet or beat 4. Otherwise, it's a straightforward, simplified *OD&D* clone.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**4** (Cleric, Fighter, Rogue, and Wizard)		
Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**10**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**16**
HP by Class:	**Yes**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**No limit**		

The Mechanics

To attack, roll your class's attack die, attempting to meet or beat 4. If successful, deal 1d6 damage.

Attempting non-combat actions involves rolling a d20 and attempting to roll less than or equal to the corresponding ability score. Saving throws are vs. 10 (12 for rogues), with an optional set of bonuses for specific saving throws (rays, paralysis, dragon's breath, spells, *etc*.).

Player Character Elements

- Six classic ability scores
- Class
- Hit Points
- Attack die
- Specialty rule based on class

Advice to DMs

To prepare players for games, print off pages 2-3 as a double-sided page, page 4 alone, and pages 5-6 as a double-sided page. That'll give you the rules, the character sheets, and all the spells.

As with many minimalist systems with a heavy reliance on tiny amounts of HP and relatively large dice, *Dungeon Raiders* can be very swingy. Player characters can go down fast.

Because weapons and items have minimal mechanical difference, feel free to give them a lot of descriptive weight. Make them cool.

Advice to Players

Be creative. Fights in *Dungeon Raiders* can quickly turn into uninteresting slugfests unless you're creative with your character's actions.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Fighter

HP 8   **Attack** d8   **Damage** +1

Strength 16   **Dexterity** 14   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 12   **Charisma** 9

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d8 ≥ 4. Deal d6 damage.
To attempt an action, roll d20 ≤ ability score.

FAREMRIANA

Class Fighter

HP 8   **Attack** d8   **Damage** +1

Strength 8   **Dexterity** 13   **Constitution** 11

Intelligence 15   **Wisdom** 17   **Charisma** 9

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d8 ≥ 4. Deal d6 damage.
To attempt an action, roll d20 ≤ ability score.

ALLAIN

Class Rogue

HP 6   **Attack** d6

Strength 13   **Dexterity** 17   **Constitution** 8

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 15   **Charisma** 9

Special +2 on all saving throws. +2 on all rogue-related ability checks (including but not limited to pick locks (dexterity), detect traps (wisdom), move silently (dexterity), climb (strength), hide (dexterity), and listen (wisdom)).

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d6 ≤ 4. Deal d6 damage.
To attempt an action, roll d20 ≤ ability score.

DANIA

Class Cleric

HP 5   **Attack** d6

Strength 9   **Dexterity** 11   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 12   **Wisdom** 16   **Charisma** 14

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d6 ≤ 4. Deal d6 damage.
To attempt an action, roll d20 ≤ ability score.
Once per day, you may cast one level-1 spell.

ANDREAS

Class Wizard

HP 4   **Attack** d6

Strength 14   **Dexterity** 12   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 16   **Wisdom** 11   **Charisma** 9

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d6 ≤ 4. Deal d6 damage.

Once per day, you may cast *fire bolt*. Fires a bolt of flame in a straight line up to 150 feet, dealing 1d6+1 damage to one creature (no attack roll; automatic hit).

DUNGEON SQUAD!

Overview
Jason Morningstar designed *Dungeon Squad!* to be easy for kids to play. As a result, it's a lightweight but solid system that's very easy to pick up and play.

Characters are made up of a few different dice, apportioned out among abilities and other "stuff." So, your d12 will be assigned to one ability or thing, and that's what you'll roll to use it. Ditto with your d10, d8, *etc.*

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**N/A** (dice in Wizard, Warrior, and Explorer)		
Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**5**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**17**
HP by Class:	**No**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**No limit**		

The Mechanics
A character's stats and equipment are represented by dice. Each character has a d4, a d8, and a d12 assigned to Wizard, Warrior, and Explorer. Each character also has an item or spell worth d6, and another item or spell worth d10. Each character has 15 Hit Points.

Player Character Elements
- Wizard die
- Warrior die
- Explorer die
- Two items or spells

Roll Warrior to hit in combat, vs. 2 for weak opponents, 4 for average opponents, and 6 for tough opponents. If the character hits, roll the weapon's die and subtract from HP.

Roll Explorer to be sneaky (with specific target numbers for specific tasks like 6 to disarm a trap).

Roll Wizard to cast a spell; 6 or higher casts the spell when under stress (2 or higher otherwise).

There are also rules for ranged weapons, armor, and gear that provides a +1 bonus.

The game comes with 6 spells, each with specific effects, like Fireball, Healing, and Luck.

Advice for DMs
Dungeon Squad! is ideal for pickup games, where you don't really want or need a complete adventure. It's also great for quick games, since characters are so quick to build.

If you want to run existing characters with *Dungeon Squad*'s rules, it'll be difficult to convert standard OD&D-style stats to *Dungeon Squad*. On the other hand, it shouldn't be difficult to see how a character would be represented using *Dungeon Squad*'s dice system. On the gripping hand, it may be very difficult to convert *out* of *DS*.

Monsters are wonderfully easy to run, and the monster list conveniently lists stats for different levels of monster, all on one page. If the party faces average monsters, glance at the Average list, and quickly customize any of the listed monsters.

Jason Morningstar adds: Take your players, no matter their age or maturity, quite seriously. Honor their choices and reward their enthusiasms with more stuff that interests them, rather than you. Respect their goals, no matter how weird. Don't shy away from challenges but endow everything with tough, interesting decisions and honest meaning.

Advice for Players

It can be really interesting to play around with unusual combinations of dice and items, such as d10 armor.

Note that a character with only a d4 in Wizard can still take a Healing spell and cast it outside of combat; it'll succeed 75% of the time.

Advancement is handled by gold. You can buy one HP for 20 gold, and you can spend 100 gold to increase any die by one die size (d4 to d6, d6 to d8, *etc.*).

Jason Morningstar adds: *Dungeon Squad!* is an extremely simple game with a low barrier to entry and very little penalty for failure, so dive in and have fun! Get crazy, use the lack of fictional constraints to build the character of your dreams - then go try to get that guy in trouble. See what happens.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Warrior d12   **Explorer d8**   **Wizard d4**

Axe d10   **Armor d6**

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d12 ≥ difficulty. Deal d10 damage.
When hit, reduce damage dealt you by d6 points.

FAREMRIANA

Warrior d12   **Explorer d4**   **Wizard d8**

Bow d10   **Dazzle Spell d6**

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d12 ≥ difficulty (but only if the rolled number is even). Deal d10 damage.

In battle, you cast Dazzle if you roll d8 ≥ 6. Outside battle, you cast if you roll d8 ≥ 2. One man-sized enemy hesitates (takes no action for one turn) for every 2 points rolled. Use once per battle.

ALLAIN

Warrior d8   **Explorer d12**   **Wizard d4**

Dagger d10   **Armor d6**

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d8 ≥ difficulty. Deal d10 damage.
When hit, reduce damage dealt you by d6 points.
To throw your dagger, you hit if roll d8 ≥ difficulty (only if the rolled number is even). Deal d10 damage.

DANIA

Warrior d8   **Explorer** d4   **Wizard** d12

Healing Spell d10   **Mace** d6

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d8 ≥ difficulty. Deal d6 damage.

In battle, you heal if you roll d12 ≥ 6. Outside battle, you heal if you roll d12 ≥ 2. Heal 1d10 points of damage.

ANDREAS

Warrior d4   **Explorer** d8   **Wizard** d12

Fireball Spell d10   **Lightning Spell** d6

Rules

Your attack hits if you roll d4 ≥ difficulty. Deal d4 damage.

In battle, you cast your spell if you roll d12 ≥ 6. Outside battle, you cast if you roll d12 ≥ 2.

Fireball deals d10 times 3 points of damage, while anyone nearby takes the original d10 of damage. Cast once per adventure.

Lightning deals d6 damage, divided as you desire, among one or many targets. Cast every turn.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JASON MORNINGSTAR

Jason designed a number of well-received indie games, including *Fiasco* and *Durance*, as well as *Dungeon Squad*.

What specifically inspired you to design Dungeon Squad?

I tried to run a game of D&D 3.5 for a group of children at my local public library. It was billed as an event for teens; I expected four or five kids. I got twelve and they skewed young and it was utter chaos. I ended up largely free-forming the session and went home determined to write something that would work in that setting, inspired by the imaginative genius and open-ended lunatic enthusiasm I had seen in the participants.

That is awesome! So what specifically about that event was the takeaway in terms of game mechanics?

These youngsters not only had no exposure to roleplaying, they had no exposure to *fantasy*. And we had 90 minutes. They did the best they could but the rules were, for them, ludicrously complex. It was a totally inappropriate tool for the job.

I love the idea of using specific dice for the three aspects and then two other specific dice for stuff. Why did you go with that particular design?

My core principle was "this needs to be engaging, simple, and maximum fun at all times". The ladder of die sizes is intuitive and playing with weird-sided dice is fun, so it all fell into place.

Was there a specific motivation for the d4/d8/d12 split for the "classes," instead of, say, d8/d10/d12?

Again, there's unity to it - lowest, middle-est, and highest. It is intuitive and results in wild success and failure. Who doesn't want wild swings of crazy fortune? It is highly desirable to an eight year old.

Where did the spell list come from?

Again, what's simple and fun and fast in play? What will be delightful for a nine-year-old and hold their attention and allow them to bust out with some sweet magic moves?

Is that the original list?

It did not change much as I recall.

Switching gears: How did you conduct playtesting?

Playtesting started with adults, my weekly game group. I wanted to make sure it held together on the most basic level. When it did I released the game. There was very little playtesting overall, as scandalous as that is, but I have gotten to play it with the target audience and it works well. Dungeon Squad is a very specific hammer for a very specific nail, and it's great for that exact situation: a wild bunch of pre-teens who need the barest framework of play.

Ha! To that point: What stories have you run with Dungeon Squad? Do you have a standard Dungeon Squad scenario?

My nephew (now ten) has run it for himself and his friends more than I have. When I do run it I present a more or less typical dungeon that I make up as I go, usually framed around a particularly cool lost treasure like a magic sword that a gang of bandits is also looking for. Kids usually don't want to just fight, they want to solve puzzles and play tricks and use their innate cleverness to work around problems, so I present a lot of open-ended challenges. I pay attention to their dudes, because they are statements about what they want to see in play. One time a kid made up this tiger warrior, like a sapient tiger-man, who was totally badass, so there was a lot of tiger-themed fighting in that adventure of course.

Something else that is key to *Dungeon Squad*: there's a lot of shopping. Big shopping lists. In my experience people—particularly young people—really love shopping for equipment and spending their hard-earned loot. Since they like this, I made it a part of the game.

DUNGEON WORLD

Overview

This is based on the first edition of *Dungeon World*, released August 2011.

Dungeon World is one of the simpler rulesets in this package. It's also one of the least like classic *D&D*.

Dungeon World grew out of *Apocalypse World*, a game seeking to represent post-apocalyptic scavengers. Turns out, this is a fitting mold for fantasy adventurers.

Mechanically, characters are made up of standard ability scores, class, relationships, and "moves" which correspond to powers or stunts in other systems.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**4** (Cleric, Fighter, Thief, and Wizard)		
Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**122**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**17**
HP by Class:	**Yes**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**5**		

The Mechanics

All rolls are 2d6, with a modifier. Rolling 10 or higher is a strong success, 7-9 is a weak success, and 6 or below is a miss or failure. Attacks are 2d6 plus strength modifier, ranged attacks are 2d6 plus dexterity modifier, *etc*.

All damage is based on class rather than weapon. Clerics deal 1d6 damage, fighters 1d10, *etc*.

Player Character Elements

- Six classic ability scores, plus modifiers
- Class
- Bonds (relationships with other characters)
- Hit Points
- Moves (special actions or modifications to rules)

At the start of each session, each player chooses two attributes to *highlight*. Use of these stats during this session results in bonus XP.

Advice for DMs

Dungeon World comes with lots of great advice for DMs, including a nice adventure. If you're running *DW* for the first time, the adventure is a great place to start and get familiar with *DW*'s approach.

Monsters are easy to build, as they consist almost entirely of HP, Armor, and Damage. Each of those stats are in the single digits, too.

Advice for Players

Players often find bonds the most difficult element to get used to. They're more useful for longer campaigns, but are also helpful for one-shots at getting into a character's head. You can think of them as relationship hooks.

Highlighting two attributes also feels strange. I like to think of them as mood hooks. If your character is feeling sneaky, highlight dexterity and wisdom. If he's angry and wants to bash things, highlight strength and constitution.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Fighter　　　　　　**Race** Dwarf

Strength 16 (+2)　　**Dexterity** 14 (+1)　　**Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 11 (+0)　**Wisdom** 12 (+1)　　**Charisma** 9 (+0)

HP 22　　　　　　　**Load** 25　　　　　　**Gold** 25

Weapon Blood-Stained Axe, +2 piercing, +messy, +forceful

Weapon Range Close

DANIA

Class Cleric　　　　　　**Race** Human

Strength 8 (-1)　　　**Dexterity** 13 (+1)　　**Constitution** 11 (+0)

Intelligence 15 (+1)　**Wisdom** 17 (+2)　　**Charisma** 9 (+0)

HP 17　　　　　　　**Load** 16　　　　　　**Gold** 18

Deity Sohanna, Goddess of Knowledge and Hidden Things

ALLAIN

Class Thief　　　　　　**Race** Human

Strength 13 (+1)　　**Dexterity** 17 (+2)　　**Constitution** 8 (-1)

Intelligence 11 (+0)　**Wisdom** 15 (+1)　　**Charisma** 9 (+0)

HP 13　　　　　　　**Load** 20　　　　　　**Gold** 27

ANDREAS

Class Wizard   **Race** Human

Strength 11 (+0)   **Dexterity** 13 (+1)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 17 (+2) **Wisdom** 9 (+0)   **Charisma** 8 (-1)

HP   19   **Load** 16   **Gold** 10

LABYRINTH LORD

Overview

This is based on the first release of *Labyrinth Lord*, released July 2007.

Labyrinth Lord is essentially a re-statement of early *D&D*'s rules, so that those who want to play early D&D can do so without having to track down and buy an old copy of Moldvay or Holmes Basic.

Moreover, it comes with an extensive catalog of monsters, some helpful examples of combat, and rules covering situations like ship-to-ship combat, hirelings, and morale.

Unfortunately, it is also table-heavy.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**7** (Cleric, Dwarf, Elf, Fighter, Halfling, Magic-User, and Thief)		
Cost:	**Free** (no art), **$22** (with art)	Pages:	**138**
Elf is a Class:	**Yes**	Monsters:	**191**
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**Varies by class**		

The Mechanics

To attack, roll 1d20 and compare to the appropriate value on the Character Attack Table (p60 of the free rules), based on character level and monster AC. Most weapons deal 1d6 damage, subtracted from Hit Points.

Each round of combat is divided into phases based on the type of action attempted (for example, missile attacks occur before melee attacks).

Player Character Elements

◆ Six standard ability scores, plus modifiers
◆ Alignment
◆ Hit Points (determined by class)
◆ Armor Class
◆ Saving Throws against various effects (breath attacks, poison, wands, *etc.*)

Saving Throws are calculated against a value determined by consulting the appropriate table (each class has its own Saving Throw values) on page 55 of the free rules.

Advice for DMs

The authors are nice enough to provide some DM advice at the end, along with a sample adventure module.

Advice for Players

The game is very table-heavy, so be prepared to consult a number of tables across the book.

Otherwise, your character is quite simple mechanically.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Dwarf

Strength 16   **Dexterity** 14   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 12   **Charisma** 9

HP 6   **AC** 2   **Saving Throw** 14 (+4 vs magic)

Initiative 1   **Alignment** Lawful   **Gold** 63

Saves Breath 13, Poison 8, Petrify 10, Wands 9, Spells 12

Roll Needed to Hit AC

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10

Weapon Battle Axe   **Damage** 1d8+2   **Armor** Padded Shield

Can Carry 175 pounds   **Max Retainers** 4 (morale 7)

Abilities Infravision 60', Detect traps/false walls/hidden construction/slopes 1-2(d6)

Languages Common, Lawful, Dwarvish, Goblin, Gnome, Kobold

FAREMRIANA

Class Elf

Strength 11   **Dexterity** 12   **Constitution** 9

Intelligence 16   **Wisdom** 14   **Charisma** 15

HP 3   **AC** 4   **Saving Throw** +1 vs magic

Initiative 0   **Alignment** Neutral   **Gold** 84

Saves Breath 15, Poison 12, Petrify 13, Wands 13, Spells 15

Roll Needed to Hit AC

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10

Weapon Longbow   **Damage** 1d8   **Armor** Padded Shield

Can Carry 73 pounds   **Max Retainers** 5 (morale 8)

Abilities Infravision 60', Detect Hidden/Secret Doors 1-2(d6)

Languages Common, Neutral, Elvish, Gnoll, Hobgoblin, Orcish, Dwarvish, Centaur

Spells Read Magic

ALLAIN

Class Thief

Strength 12   **Dexterity** 16   **Constitution** 9

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 14   **Charisma** 15

HP 3   **AC** -2   **Saving Throw** +1 vs magic

Initiative +1   **Alignment** Chaotic   **Gold** 105

Saves Breath 16, Poison 14, Petrify 13, Wands 15, Spells 14

Roll Needed to Hit AC

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10

Weapon Dagger   **Damage** 1d4   **Armor** Leather +1

Abilities Pick Locks 17, Find Traps 14, Pickpocket 23, Move Silently 23, Climb 87, Hide 13, Hear 1-2

Languages Common, Chaotic

DANIA

Class Cleric

Strength 9   **Dexterity** 11   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 12   **Wisdom** 16   **Charisma** 14

HP 4   **AC** 0   **Saving Throw** +2 vs magic

Initiative 0   **Alignment** Lawful   **Gold** 77

Saves Breath 16, Poison 11, Petrify 14, Wands 12, Spells 15

Roll Needed to Hit AC

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10

Weapon L. Hammer   **Damage** 1d6   **Armor** Scale mail, shield

Abilities Resist Cold

Languages Common, Lawful

Equipment Holy water, Silver holy symbol, garlic, lock, wooden stakes

ANDREAS

Class Wizard

Strength 14   **Dexterity** 12   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 16   **Wisdom** 11   **Charisma** 9

HP 5   **AC** 0   **Saving Throw** +0 vs magic

Initiative 0   **Alignment** Neutral   **Gold** 70

Saves Breath 16, Poison 13, Petrify 13, Wands 13, Spells 14

Roll Needed to Hit AC

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10

Weapon Dagger   **Damage** 1d4   **Armor** None

Spells Magic Missile

Languages Common, Neutral, Bugbear, Dryad

Equipment Spell book, quill pen, ring of protection +1

Scrolls Irresistible Dance, Incendiary Cloud, Polymorph Any Object

LAMENTATIONS OF THE FLAME PRINCESS

Overview

This is based on the 2010 edition of *Lamentations of the Flame Princess*.

Lamentations has received a lot of heated press for the nudity in its art and its gleefully savage world. It assumes a weird and wild fantasy world, though of course players may ignore that.

In truth, *Lamentation*'s system is very similar to the others listed here; simpler than many, in fact. The strangeness comes primarily from class descriptions and other "fluff."

Indeed, *Lamentation* is written in a more relaxed, prose style than that of many other OSR rule sets. It feels more like an experienced gamer describing a rule's most common situations and effects, rather than the clipped and precise language used in some other rule sets.

The book also comes with rules covering a wide variety of situations, including maritime adventuring, retainers, holding property, and investing money. There are also a number of recommended combat maneuvers, including rules for morale, mounted combat, throwing oil or fire, two-weapon fighting, grappling, *etc*.

Also note the existence of the free "Grindhouse" edition, which provides all the basic rules, spell lists, and so forth in one PDF.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes: **7** (Cleric, Dwarf, Elf, Fighter, Halfing, Magic-User, and Specialist)

Cost: **€10** PDF, **€32.50** print	Pages:	**94**
Elf is a Class: **Yes**	Monsters:	**0**
HP by Class: **Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level: **Varies by class**		

The Mechanics

Almost all stats are determined by class and level; AC is based on armor worn.

Attacks are 1d20 plus modifiers *vs*. AC, with high AC being good. Natural 20's are always hits, and natural 1's are always misses. Saving throws are also 1d20 *vs*. a target number.

Player Character Elements

◆ Six classic ability scores, plus modifiers
◆ Class
◆ Hit Points
◆ Armor Class
◆ Attack Bonus
◆ Alignment

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- ◆   Saving Throws

To attempt a skill-style activity like stealth, climbing, searching, and detecting traps, attempt to roll a 1 on a 1d6.

Advice for DMs

There are no pre-built monsters. The *Referee Book* provides advice on building monsters in the *Monsters* section starting on page 74, with relevant monster stats described on pages 75-76.

The *Referee Book* is, I think, the most chatty of the books, and delves deepest into the setting and play assumptions behind the game.

The *Lamentations* package does come with four sample adventures, as well as three issues of a community 'zine that describe short scenarios, puzzles, and traps.

Advice for Players

The system's pretty straightforward: you have your six classic ability scores plus their modifiers, a class (which can be a race, so elf is a class), Hit Points (rolled based on your class), an Attack Bonus (based on your class and level), alignment, and possessions. The armor you wear determines your Armor Class.

Non-combat actions are usually a 1 in 6 chance. Your ability score modifier in the appropriate trait can be added to this to give you a better chance (though note that the maximum modifier is only +3).

Pay attention to your equipment. *LotFP* assumes a tough, gritty world. You shouldn't assume that you have "standard adventuring equipment." There are rules about *dehydration*, for example.

There are also a lot of rules for retainers, and it's wise to hire some as quickly as possible. They can test for traps and carry valuable loot. Again, *LotFP* is played in a very dangerous world, so you might as well let your retainers bear some of the brunt.

You will need all your dice, as the system uses d20, d10, d6; even percentile dice.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Dwarf

Strength 16 (+2) **Dexterity** 14 (+1) **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 11 (+0) **Wisdom** 12 (+0) **Charisma** 9 (+0)

HP 5   **Attack** +1 **AC** 16 **Armor** Chain

Weapon Axe   **Damage** 1d8   **Alignment** Lawful

Saving Throws Paralyze 10, Poison 8, Breath 13, Magic 12, Magic Device 9

Special   Detect Secret Doors 2 in 6, Stonework 2 in 6

FAREMRIANA

Class Elf

Strength 11 (+0) **Dexterity** 12 (+0) **Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 16 (+2) **Wisdom** 14 (+1) **Charisma** 15 (+1)

HP 4   **Attack** +1 **AC** 16 **Armor** Chain

Weapon Long Bow **Damage** 1d6 **Range** 50', 600', 900'

Saving Throws Paralyze 13, Poison 12, Breath 15, Magic 15, Magic Device 13

Special   Detect Secret Doors 2 in 6, Surprised 1 in 6

ALLAIN

Class Halfling

Strength 12 (+0)   **Dexterity** 16 (+2)   **Constitution** 9 (+0)

Intelligence 11 (+0)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

HP 4   **Attack** +1   **AC** 14   **Armor** Leather

Weapon Dagger   **Damage** 1d4, -2 against AC >= 15   **Range** 10', 20', 30'

Saving Throws Paralyze 8, Poison 6, Breath 10, Magic 10, Magic Device 7

Special   Hide 5 in 6 outdoors, 4 in 6 indoors

DANIA

Class Cleric

Strength 9 (+0)   **Dexterity** 11 (+0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 12 (+0)   **Wisdom** 16 (+2)   **Charisma** 14 (+1)

HP 4   **Attack** +1   **AC** 16   **Armor** Chain

Weapon Mace   **Damage** 1d8

Saving Throws Paralyze 12, Poison 9, Breath 14, Magic 12, Magic Device 10

ANDREAS

Class Magic-User

Strength 14 (+1)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 16 (+2)   **Wisdom** 11 (+0)   **Charisma**   9 (+0)

HP 4   **Attack** +1   **AC** 14   **Armor** Leather

Weapon Staff   **Damage** 1d4

Saving Throws Paralyze 11, Poison 11, Breath 14, Magic 12, Magic Device 11

Spells Detect Magic (Magic Book, page 45), Hold Portal (p66), Magic Missile (p77)

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES RAGGI IV

James wrote *Lamentations of the Flame Princess*.

What inspired you to design Lamentations of the Flame Princess?

It was purely a commercial decision. My intention from the start was not just to share some stuff I'd made, but to be "a publisher." I'd started off when I was young drawing my own comic books and then writing short stories and doing all sorts of creative stuff, but it all involved printing it out (my mother's job's photocopier got a workout thanks to me back in the day!) and sharing it with other people. Hell, I remember drawing panels on a blank sheet of paper, having my mother photocopy those, then I'd draw comics in the pre-drawn panels, photocopy *those*, and then I'd sell them to neighborhood kids for 25 cents or whatever it was.

Anyway, originally my idea was just to do adventures and supplements and things, but getting traction in commercial outlets was difficult. Small publishers have enough trouble getting publicity and shelf space as it is, but being a small publisher making supplementary material for other small publishers and/or games that have been out of print for decades? Difficult.

So I figured if I could do my own game, and tweak things so they're more to my tastes than the standard, I could have a flagship product to help get all my stuff noticed, and maybe I could carve out a niche in Europe since I live out here and the other OSR publishers don't so there wouldn't be so much direct competition.

That's where things got really complicated. The biggest market for the game is the US, and it's sold better than everything I've written and with only one exception sold much more than anything else I've published. And that's with filling it with "adult" content that dared people not to buy it.

The "adult" content is interesting. Why'd you go that route with the art? Was it mainly to get people talking (as that certainly happened)?

When I realized the Deluxe Edition was going to sell out quickly and there was demand and I needed to put together a new edition (simply reprinting was not an option for various reasons), I did take notice of the reaction and criticism of *LotFP*. The differences between *LotFP* and the other clones and simulacra was in the text, but not presented so much visually, so it was really easy to dismiss it as another in the pile. If that's your first impression, why would you investigate further?

So I decided to make sure that the game was presented in a more personal way, and since I'm a big fan of horror movies and heavy metal I decided to go that way visually. I knew it would draw attention because gamers seem to be a sensitive bunch, but in metal or horror movie terms the entire presentation is rather tame, one or two pieces excepted.

When I got into metal in the early 1990's some of the biggest names in the scene were Cannibal Corpse and Deicide and Carcass (do a Google image search on Once Upon the Cross, Tomb of the Mutilated, and Butchered at Birth if you dare) and bands called Rotting Christ and Impaled Nazarene and Anal Cunt.

And movies...think of the imagery in *Evil Dead*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Hellraiser*, and *Brain Dead* (all commonly-known horror movies, with at least two of their directors going on to be A-list Hollywood talent), not to mention things like *Cannibal Holocaust* or *Martyrs*. I go to a film festival here in Finland where I see things like *Cold Fish* and *A Serbian Film* and things which are just numbing in their brutality.

If you don't like a certain kind of band, there's a million other things to listen to. Iron Maiden and Metallica's concert attendance (let alone, say, Madonna's or Coldplay) doesn't suffer because Rotting Christ exists. (And Rotting Christ has been going 25 years, has ten albums out with another already in the can for 2013, and has toured the world; I'm not using an obscure outlier example here.)

Similarly, *The Avengers* and *Avatar* and the *Hobbit* movie and *Twilight* don't suffer because *A Serbian Film* or *I Spit on Your Grave* exists and might screen the next theater over.

It's a non-issue in other media. But gamers being gamers, I knew some would make a big deal out of it. Some indeed did. And I was happy and had fun with it. Because only silly people get wound up about such things. Regular people either think it's cool and check it out and hopefully become fans and customers, or they don't think it's cool and they move on to find something that is cool to them.

Cool! Moving on to the system: why did you go with the game's particular design? For example, one thing that particularly intrigued me: Why'd you go with d6 rolls for skills?

Secret door searches traditionally were rolled on a six sider. Surprise rolls were done on a d6. Why not take other skills already traditionally present and pretty much make it one consistent system that way?

Why the decision to put Magic in its own book?

That's true of the earlier Deluxe Edition, but due to economic factors (it's cheaper to print a 128-page book than it is two 64-page books) there is a combined Rules & Magic book in the current Grindhouse Edition.

Honestly I like the books to be separate because not everyone uses the Magic portion of the book, and those that do don't do so all that often in the average session. It's quite common in my home campaign that there are no magic using PC's in the party for extended periods, and often no NPC's that use the standard magic system for half a dozen sessions. The spell lists and details take up more space than the rules, so it would be nice to have a nice slim and trim rulebook without the magic for more common use at the table.

Where did the name come from?

I originally used the name for a metal 'zine I made from 1998 to 2007. When I started it, I was into bands like Opeth and Katatonia and My Dying Bride and The Gathering, and I wanted a title that would distinguish it from all the death metal and black metal 'zines that were common at the time.

When I started up my RPG publishing, I didn't see any reason to change the "brand name." "*Lamentations of the Flame Princess*" still works perfectly: it evokes both the fantasy and negative atmospheric aspects of what I do.

How did you conduct playtesting? E.g., did you ask specific questions every time, or did you have surveys? What questions did you ask?

The advantage of using a 30+ year old system as the starting point for a game is that the heavy lifting is done and I could concentrate on the parts that make *LotFP* interesting and different rather than worrying if the basic mechanics worked.

So the playtesting of certain things was just part of my normal weekly game. But because it is the game I actually play, it's always a game in motion. The Grindhouse Edition was published April 2011, but if I were to do it now, it wouldn't be exactly the same. And if I did publish it right now, it's not the same as it would look if I published it in the spring of 2014.

What feedback have you received about the game? What's "stuck out?"

Some hardcore old school *D&D* people say, "This isn't real *D&D* anymore!" A lot of people that don't know old school *D&D* say, "This is just another cut-and-paste *D&D* retroclone; it offers nothing new."

They're both kind of right, in that "blind men and an elephant" kind of way.

Can you say what's next for LotFP?

Getting all the crowdfunded projects out the door, new supplements (the Early Modern stuff, the new magic supplement), new adventures, Zak's big Alice adventure, working with more people, and generally doing outrageous and hopefully interesting things that both excite people and make them scratch their heads.

MAZES & MINOTAURS

Overview

This is based on the 2012 Silver Jubilee Edition of *Mazes & Minotaurs*.

Mazes & Minotaurs pretends to be the first RPG; that is part of its fiction. Instead of taking cues from Tolkienesque fantasy, it's built around the mythology of ancient Greece.

As such, elements like class and race differ from others listed here. Instead of elves and dwarves, you can play centaurs or nymphs.

You also get quite a lot of material. *Mazes & Minotaurs* comes with three lengthy books (player's manual, maze master's guide, and creature compendium).

The Bare Facts

Player Classes: **12** (Amazon, Barbarian, Centaur, Elementalist, Hunter, Lyrist, Noble, Nymph, Priest, Sorcerer, Spearman, and Thief)

Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**50** in player's manual
Elf is a Class:	**Yes**	Monsters:	**In separate book**
HP by Class:	**Yes**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**6**		

The Mechanics

Attacks are 1d20 plus melee or missile modifier, against the enemy's defense score (high is good). All weapons except daggers do 1d6 damage.

There are quite a few rules about combat maneuvers, such as charging, holding back, forming a shield wall, wrestling, and parrying. Magic is divided into different Realms, each of which works differently as its own sub-system.

Player Character Elements

◆ Six ability scores
◆ Class
◆ Combat scores (bonuses in melee and missile combat)
◆ Initiative
◆ Charisma
◆ Defense Score (AC)
◆ Hits (HP)
◆ Saving roll modifiers

Sample Characters

THEMIOS

Class Centaur

Might 15 (+2)   **Skill** 14 (+1)   **Wits** 10 (+0)

Luck 11 (+0)   **Will** 12 (+0)   **Grace** 9 (+0)

Charisma +0

Melee +3   **Missile** +1   **DC** 14

Initiative 11   **Hits** 14

Saves Athletic +3, Danger +1, Mystic 0, Vigor +2

ARION

Class Hunter

Might 12 (+0)   **Skill** 15 (+2)   **Wits** 14 (+1)

Luck 9 (+0)   **Will** 11 (+0)   **Grace** 10 (+0)

Charisma +0   **Hunter** +3

Melee +2   **Missile** +3   **DC** 16

Initiative 13   **Hits** 10

Saves Athletic +2, Danger +3, Mystic +1, Vigor 0

ATTALIA

Class Thief

Might 10 (+0)   **Skill** 12 (+0)   **Wits** 15 (+2)

Luck 14 (+1)   **Will** 11 (+0)   **Grace** 9 (+0)

Charisma +1   **Thief** +3

Melee +1   **Missile** +3   **DC** 15

Initiative 12   **Hits** 10

Saves Athletic +1, Danger +3, Mystic +3, Vigor +1

DANIA

Class Priest

Might 10 (+0)   **Skill** 11 (+0)   **Wits** 12 (+0)

Luck 15 (+2)   **Will** 14 (+1)   **Grace** 9 (+0)

Charisma +3

Melee +2   **Missile** +2   **DC** 16

Initiative 10   **Hits** 8

Aura +3   **Mystic Strength** 15   **Mystic Power** 5

Saves Athletic +2, Danger +2, Mystic +3, Vigor +3

ANDERAS

Class Elementalist

Might 9 (+0)   **Skill** 10 (+0)   **Wits** 14 (+1)

Luck 12 (+0)   **Will** 15 (+2)   **Grace** 11 (+0)

Charisma +2

Melee 0   **Missile** +1   **DC** 14

Initiative 11   **Hits** 8

Elemental Magic Fire **Elemental Mastery** +3   **Power** 6

Saves Athletic 0, Danger +1, Mystic +3, Vigor +2

MICROLITE74

Overview

This is based on version 3.0 of *Microlite74*, released October 2011.

Microlite74 focuses on condensing 1974's OD&D (thus the name). It has quite a few rules, all things considered, but packs them all into a small, terse rule set. The core standard rules fit on 4 pages (the rest consists primarily of spell lists and monsters).

There are three versions of Microlite74: Basic (20 pages), Standard (28 pages), and Extended (32 pages). Each is a slightly different version; basic is extremely stripped down and terse (4 races and 3 classes), while extended provides a wide range of options (7 races, 8 core classes, and 7 optional classes) and many more rules.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes: **8** (Clerics, Druids, Fighters, Illusionists, Magic-Users, Paladins, Rangers, and Thieves)

Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**28** in standard edition
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**150**
HP by Class:	**Depends on version**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**No limit**		

The Mechanics

Basic Version

Initiative is 1d20 + dexterity. AC is based on armor worn and dexterity bonus.

To attack, roll 1d20 + combat bonus, trying to roll higher than opponent's AC. All weapons deal 1d6 damage.

Magic-Users can cast any arcane spell, but must use a spell book (starting with three spells). Clerics can cast any divine spell equal or below half their level. Casting a spell costs HP based on spell level.

Player Character Elements

◆ Three stats (strength, dexterity, and mind), plus bonuses
◆ Race
◆ Class
◆ Hit Points
◆ Armor Class
◆ Physical Combat Bonus
◆ Magical Combat Bonus
◆ Three Saving rolls (fortitude, reflex, and will)
◆ XP

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◆ Miscellaneous situational bonuses

Standard Version
Initiative is 1d20 + dexterity. AC is based on armor worn and dexterity bonus.

To attack, roll 1d20 + combat bonus, trying to roll higher than opponent's AC. Weapons of different sizes deal a particular die's damage (1d4, 1d6, *etc.*).

Magic-Users and Illusionists can cast any spell in their domain, but must use a spell book (starting with three spells). Clerics and Druids can cast any spell in their domain equal or below half their level. Casting a spell costs HP based on spell level.

Extended Version
Initiative is 1d20. AC is based on armor worn and dexterity bonus.

To attack, roll 1d20 + combat bonus, trying to roll higher than opponent's Natural Defense (monster-only) and AC. Weapons of different sizes deal a particular die's damage (1d4, 1d6, *etc.*). Damage is subtracted from Hit Points, then when HP are exhausted, Body Points.

There are quite a few other rules for dodging, aiding another, *etc.*

Magic-Users and Illusionists can cast any spell in their domain, but must use a spell book (starting with three spells). Clerics and Druids can cast any spell in their domain equal or below half their level. Casting a spell costs HP based on spell level.

Player Character Elements
◆ Three stats (strength, dexterity, and mind), plus bonuses
◆ Race
◆ Class
◆ Hit Points
◆ Armor Class
◆ Physical Combat Bonus
◆ Magical Combat Bonus
◆ Three Saving rolls (fortitude, reflex, and will)
◆ XP
◆ Miscellaneous situational bonuses

Player Character Elements
◆ Four stats (strength, dexterity, mind, and charisma), plus bonuses
◆ Race
◆ Class
◆ Hit Points
◆ Body Points
◆ Armor Class
◆ Physical Combat Bonus
◆ Magical Combat Bonus
◆ Three Saving rolls (fortitude, reflex, and will)
◆ Alignment
◆ XP
◆ Miscellaneous situational bonuses

Advice to DMs
It's worth reading all three versions of Microlite74. One may be too fiddly for you (or not enough).

PCs have a fair number of stats. It's worth asking for copies of every character's sheet.

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Monster stat blocks are extremely terse. It's often worth copying them into a consistently-structured stat block.

Advice to Players

There are quite a few stats and bonuses to keep track of, and they're almost all important.

Make sure you know which version of Microlite74 you're playing! They each have significantly different rules.
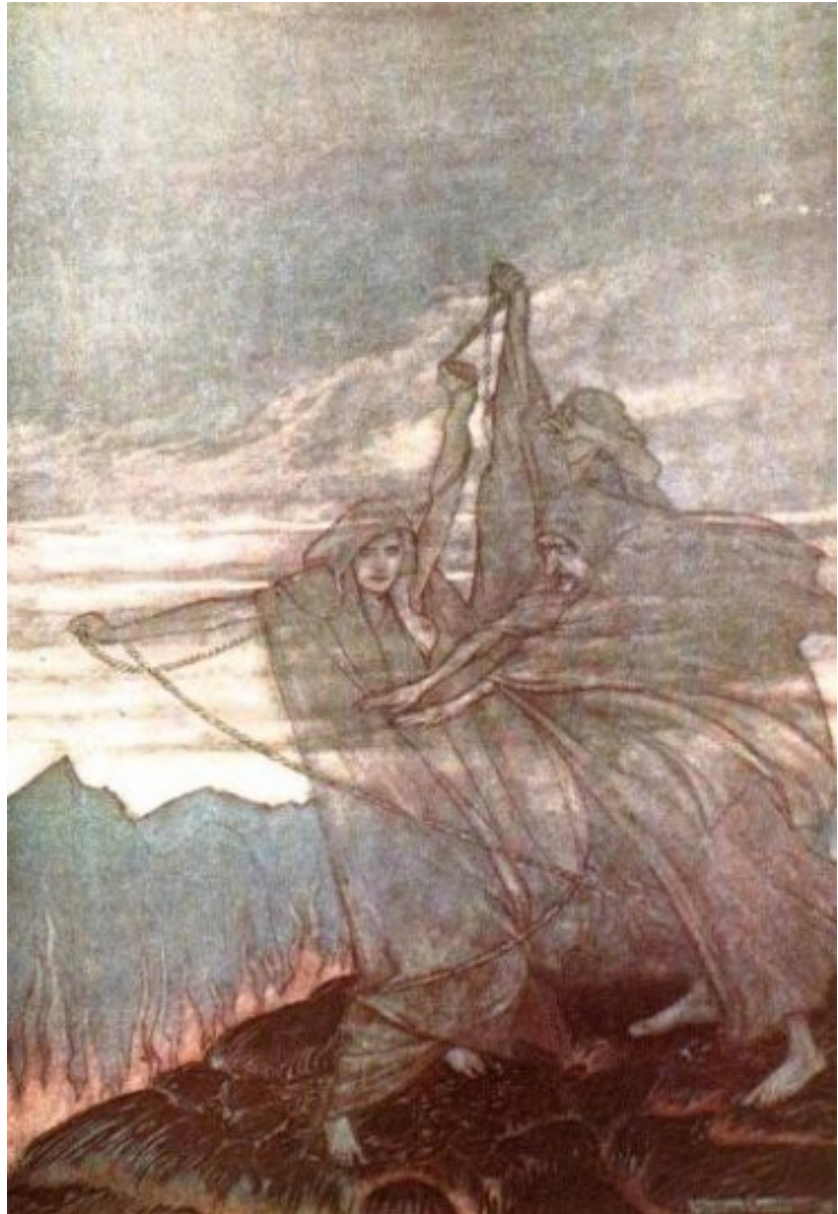
Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Fighter   **Race** Dwarf

Strength 16 (+1)   **Dexterity** 14 (+0)   **Mind** 12 (+0)

HP 12   **AC** 16

Primary Combat Bonus +1   **Magical Combat Bonus** +1   **XP** 20

Melee Attack Bonus +2   **Missile Attack Bonus** +2   **Magic Attack Bonus** +1

Weapon Battle Axe   **Damage** 1d8   **Armor** Plate

Abilities Fort Saves +2; +1 to attack and damage rolls

Saves +4

FAREMRIANA

Class Fighter   **Race** Elf

Strength 11 (+0)   **Dexterity** 16 (+1)   **Mind** 12 (+0)

HP 2   **AC** 14

Primary Combat Bonus +1   **Magical Combat Bonus** +1   **XP** 20

Melee Attack Bonus +1   **Missile Attack Bonus** +2   **Magic Attack Bonus** +1

Weapon Bow   **Damage** 1d6   **Armor** Chain

Abilities Fort Saves +2; +1 to attack and damage rolls

Saves +4

ALLAIN

Class Thief   **Race** Halfling

Strength 12 (+0)   **Dexterity** 16 (+1)   **Mind** 14 (+0)

HP 9   **AC** 13

Primary Combat Bonus +1   **Magical Combat Bonus** +1   **XP** 20

Melee Attack Bonus +1   **Missile Attack Bonus** +2   **Magic Attack Bonus** +1

Weapon Dagger   **Damage** 1d4   **Armor** Leather

Abilities +2 to hit and damage with slings and light bows
         Can blend into background (d20+1 vs 12 indoors; 16 outdoors)

Saves   Magic +4, Ref Saves +2, All +3, +1 on first attack if successful at sneaking up

DANIA

Class Cleric   **Race** Human

Strength 9 (+0)   **Dexterity** 11 (+0)   **Mind** 15 (+1)

HP 9   **AC** 12

Primary Combat Bonus +1   **Magical Combat Bonus** +1   **XP** 20

Melee Attack Bonus +1   **Missile Attack Bonus** +2   **Magic Attack Bonus** +1

Weapon Warhammer   **Damage** 1d6   **Armor** Leather

Saves   Fort and Will Saves +1, All +2

Spells   Turn Undead (DC 12 + (undead HD x 2); can be used 4 times per day)

ANDREAS

Class Magic-User   **Race** Human

Strength 14 (+0)   **Dexterity** 12 (+0)   **Mind** 16 (+1)

HP 5   **AC** 10

Primary Combat Bonus +1   **Magical Combat Bonus** +1   **XP** 30

Melee Attack Bonus +1   **Missile Attack Bonus** +1   **Magic Attack Bonus** +2

Weapon Dagger   **Damage** 1d4   **Armor** None

Saves   Will +2, All +1

OLD SCHOOL HACK

Overview

This is based on version 1.1 of *Old School Hack*, released January 2011.

Old School Hack is arguably the system most mechanically foreign to original *D&D* out of all the systems described in this package.

Designed by Kirin Robinson to capture the feel of old-school gaming, *OSH* is what would result if Gygax and Arneson were teleported from 1970 to today, shown all modern tabletop mechanics, then teleported back in time and made *D&D*.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes: **7** (Cleric, Dwarf, Elf, Fighter, Goblin, Magic User, and Thief)

Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**20**, plus printable tokens
Elf is a Class:	**Yes**	Monsters:	**0**, just broad types
HP by Class:	**No**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**4**		

The Mechanics

Attacks are 2d10 plus various bonuses against armor class (high AC is good). Armor class is based mostly on the actual armor worn by combatants. A successful attack deals one point of damage (plus one in some circumstances).

Player Character Elements

- Six attributes, plus bonuses
- Talents (special abilities)
- Class
- Armor Class

Advice to DMs

Old School Hack is great for unscripted play. It's very easy to build monsters and encounters on the fly.

The big differences here from other systems are arenas and initiative order.

Arenas are rough areas that indicate where each part of a fight is taking place, and where different groups are gathered ("the main tavern room," "behind the bar," "on the stairs," *etc.*). This is a wonderfully freeing concept, and makes it very easy to use real-world maps; just draw rough lines around each arena.

Initiative in combat is determined by the type of action taken. Long-range attacks occur before movement, which occur before melee attacks. Keep page 14 handy (or print the combat tracker

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on pages 23 and 24). This initiative system was actually in early *D&D*, but apparently people rarely used it.

Advice to Players

Your DM will likely give you two sheets: a class sheet and a character sheet. Your class sheet lists the talents available to your class, your inherent talent and limitation, your experience points, your level, and your starting equipment. Your character sheet is used to track your basic statistics, health, weapon, armor, and equipment.

Remember that every player must play a different class; there can't be two elves in the party.

Your character is made unique primarily through the **talents** you choose.

Pay attention to **arenas**, the name for sections of the battlefield. Your ranged attacks can target other arenas, and you must understand the layout of arenas in a particular battlefield.

Each arena has a **type**, such as "open" or "dense," and certain types of weapon get +2 when used in an advantageous type of arena. Consider buying a one or two extra weapons of different types.

Remember that **action order** is determined by the **type of action** you choose. Within each round, firing a ranged weapon always happens before moving, which happens before melee attacks.
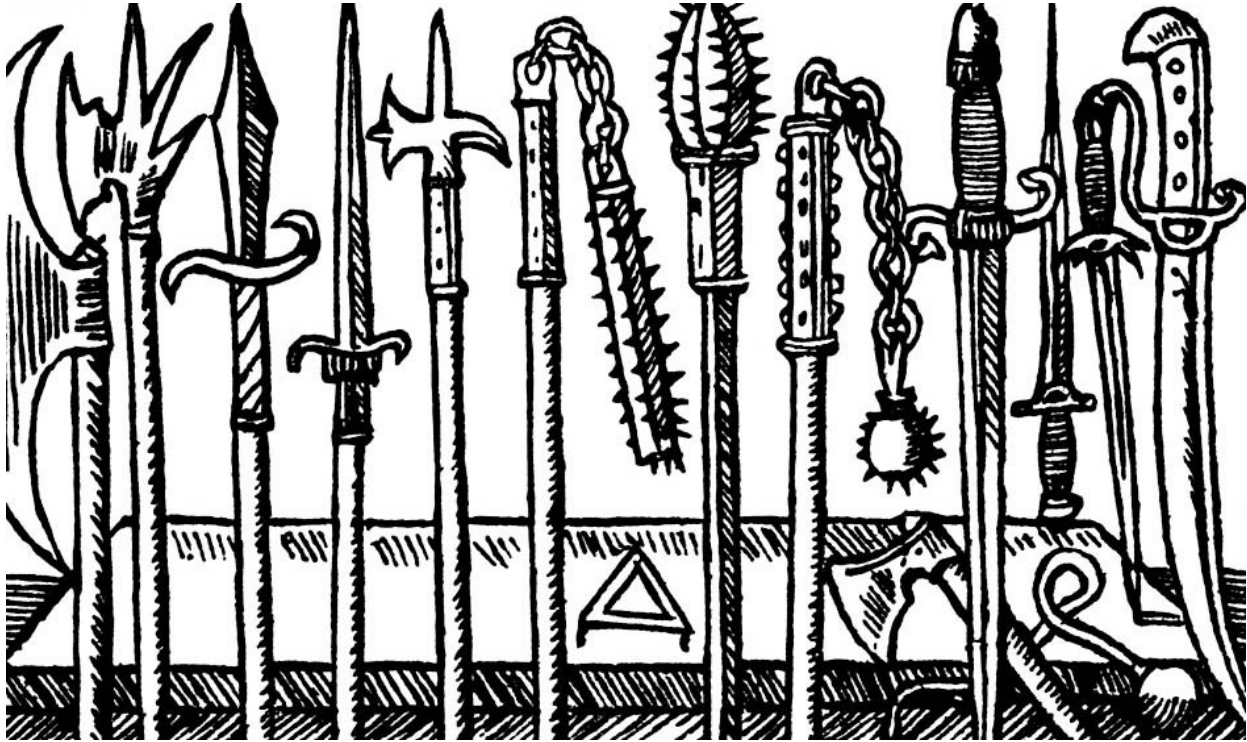
Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Dwarf

HP 5	**Weapon** Heavy	**AC** 12
Brawn 16 (+3)	**Cunning** 14 (+2)	**Commitment** 15 (+2)
Awareness 11 (+0)	**Daring** 12 (+1)	**Charm** 9 (+0)

Talent Under the Mountain (you can never get lost underground, and +4 on Awareness tests regarding stonework)

FAREMRIANA

Class Elf

HP 5	**Weapon** Ranged	**AC** 10
Brawn 8 (-1)	**Cunning** 13 (+1)	**Commitment** 11 (+0)
Awareness 15 (+2)	**Daring** 17 (+3)	**Charm** 9 (+0)

Talent Perfect Accuracy (+2 on delayed, uninterrupted ranged attacks)

Special +2 on initiative rolls

ALLAIN

Class Thief

HP 5	**Weapon** Light	**AC** 10
Brawn 13 (+1)	**Cunning** 17 (+3)	**Commitment** 8 (-1)
Awareness 11 (+0)	**Daring** 15 (+2)	**Charm** 9 (+0)

Talent Endless Daggers

Special Once per session, automatically succeed on a *Cunning* test, *Daring* test, or attack roll.

DANIA

Class Cleric

HP 5   **Weapon** Light   **AC** 11

Brawn 9 (+0)   **Cunning** 11 (+0)   **Commitment** 15 (+2)

Awareness 12 (+1)   **Daring** 16 (+3)   **Charm** 14 (+2)

Talent Prayers of the Hurt (someone with ≥ 2 HP returns to full HP – 1)

Special You wear a holy symbol.

ANDREAS

Class Magic User

HP 5   **Weapon** Reach   **AC** 10

Brawn 14 (+2)   **Cunning** 12 (+1)   **Commitment** 15 (+2)

Awareness 16 (+3)   **Daring** 11 (+0)   **Charm** 9 (+0)

Talent Magic Missile (automatic 2 damage; take 1 HP damage and make it 3 damage)

Ability Veil Touch (you see the residue of magic, and can leave magical markings)

AN INTERVIEW WITH KIRIN ROBINSON

Kirin wrote *Old School Hack*.

What inspired you to design Old School Hack the way you did?

In terms of the PDF presentation and layout? Useable table presentation strikes me as an undervalued component of tabletop role-playing games. For many years when I'd run new and interesting RPGs the first thing I would do while reading them is put together cheat sheets or reference sheets for us to play with, simple immediate reads like "combat turns go in this order" or "this is how you resolve a common situation" kind of thing.

Even games that include such things (common charts or ready-reference tables, usually in an appendix) often don't offer them as downloadables for printing. Fortunately the fan base usually steps up and makes their own. *Old School Hack* was really built from that perspective, making a game that *started* with just a bunch of reference sheets, rather than being after the fact.

In terms of the system? My group was going through a phase of new parenthood, and we were watching our gaming time dwindling to only a couple hours a week after bedtime for the kids.

A lot of RPGs don't do so well in a two-hour session slot. Usually the first half-hour or hour is just sorting through what's happened so far in the campaign, leveling up characters, going shopping, or just deciding what to do. Often times you have to cut the game off in awkward, media res moments. It's hard to have that emotional arc I love so much in longer sessions where you decide to explore something, things are revealed, risky things happen, and then you either survive or you don't.

So I began exploring the OSR, which was offering much swifter, simpler *D&D*s, as well as other systems that allowed for a much more finger-snapping pace of events. The small campaign of *Red Box Hack* (the system *OSH* is based off of) was absolutely perfect. Wild, interesting things happened, and they happened fast. I began thinking, "I want to see a *D&D* game that works like that."

Interesting! So what were the wild, interesting things that happened during your Red Box Hack campaign?

I don't know if you've looked at Red Box Hack at all (you can download it on [the Old School Hack website](#)), but the talents are a lot more wuxia, things like being able to split in two, being able to run around on exploding debris, being able to make rocks dance, *etc*. I'd been challenged to find combat in story-games as exciting and engaging as the more tactical combat of traditional RPGs (often being a lot more negotiatory what-if-y, if you know what I mean) and this was my first proof that it could be done! That you could have these sort of narrative powers that diagetically effected a combat turn-by-turn, without slowing it down to negotiate rule-of-cool. There's this thing where instead of just trying to come up with something awesome (which

is great, but sometimes leads to everyone-looking-at-you paralysis) you've got a handy menu of interesting things to do, which still sort of calls for some creativity in how you do them.

How much were early D&D rules an inspiration?

A fair bit. I like races-as-classes (from B/X *D&D*) a lot as I like the idea of nonhuman characters being somewhat archetypal as they often are in mythology—like the *Dresden Files*-ish take that fae and demihumans are more powerful, but are more "slaves to their nature." I really found myself re-evaluating the value of phase-based combat, and the changes in strategy that results from What You Are Doing effecting When You Get To Do it. Also the lesser focus on grid-based combat is, of course, the quickest way to speed up combat, but playing entirely in the Theater of the Mind (I kinda hate that term) reduces a lot of the strategy as well.

Lastly, there's a certain sense of humor that I really like that's a lot more apparent in the early rules (when rulebooks had cartoons in them). I know it's not for everyone, but it's very much how I like my *D&D*: playing off of cliché, characters having more extreme personalities, recognizing the frequent absurdity that results from collaborating fantasy adventuring situations. I'm not saying that *Old School Hack* should be played non-seriously, and I think a lot of the thrill of the game does come from verisimilitude and a certain degree of gritty, nervous risk! But I like recognizing those funny, don't-quite-make-sense things that happen as well, and I think that comes through in the rules I wrote.

I completely agree about the tone of the game: one thing I love about OSH is its conversational, hey-it's-just-a-game voice. Was that tone in the text from the beginning, or did you go back and ensure it was there?

I like to think that that's the OSR philosophy coming though, but that's also basically just my own voice, when I run games, or when I try to do anything fun, really. I struggle with heavy authorial or procedural design, because I feel like the nature of the organic tabletop roleplaying experience is often more fruitful the more elastic you are with the rules. Generally speaking, if the rules say you have to do something in a very specific way, but it would be clearly Much More Interesting to do it another way (care given to player/GM agency and fairness, of course), I don't want the rules to say, "No, you can't do that."

That being said, there was a fair amount of back-and-forth in editing and looking at that tone and seeing how people read it. I wanted to strike an even balance, where the rules are quite clear—if you choose to follow them—but are presented along the lines of "Here's a way to do it, if you want."

Where did you explicitly decide to take a different direction from D&D?

The most obvious is replacing the Halfling with the Goblin. When I designed the classes, I brainstormed quite a bit about each archetype, making a long list of "what makes a fighter a *fighter*" kind of thing, to help me come up with talents. My list for the halfling was just a lot shorter than the other classes in terms of coming up with "uniqueness," and a lot of them were about eating. So I considered a more interesting, monstrous alternative, and the list just exploded.

Then, of course, the six attributes, which are quite different from the traditional Str/Con/Dex/*etc*. In no way do I mean to belittle the classic attributes; there's still something so elegant about encapsulating all these components of an individual across a 3-16 bell curve like that. But there was something freeing about making the attributes more skill-based. Not only does it make the skill system (such as it is) direct and fundamental, but it provides for interesting archetype twists that aren't necessarily suboptimal (the puny fighter, the dedicated thief, *etc*.). Separating the combat system much more from the attributes helped that as well.

Many of the other diversions are more about the system, much of which really is lifted from *Red Box Hack*.

One other thing I particularly like about character creation is the limitation. I know that came from Red Box Hack, but how have you seen it used in play in OSH? Did something in particular drive you to include it in OSH?

Wanting to bring the interesting Ninjas-Mystics-and-Bears world of *Red Box Hack* back into the thoroughly over-gamified world of *D&D* prompted the natural question of "why?" What's so amazing about this other done-to-death game of fighters and clerics and magic-users and dungeon crawling that makes me want to play in it so bad? What do these rather extensively derivative archetypes have that's so special? People talk about *D&D* being a kind of *lingua franca*, that these fantasy archetypes are familiar enough that anyone rather immediately gets it —"Oh yeah, a dwarf is badly scottish and drunk and mines stuff and hits things with an axe"-- yet they're still quite tweakable or expand-upon-able to make such a character one's own. There's this rather crucial and somewhat rare middle ground of "everyone knows what this is, but can still sort of be anything you want it to be."

What that has to do with Limitations: Well, as a game mechanic, having this optional "This is sort of what a character's about: thieves are greedy; magic-users are power-hungry; elves are restless" thing is like a recognition of something to play off of, but also a way to say "That's the archetype, how the world sees you. You can work that if you want or work against that if you want." It's a way to recognize that recognizability while also stressing the freedom to do something different.

One of my favorite aspects of OSH is its layout, particularly the aesthetics of that layout. Was layout a separate phase after you wrote the text? If so, what happened? Any surprises?

The layout influenced the writing considerably! The original text was just pages and pages of notes, so everything was rewritten with graphical presentation in mind, as I was laying it out. That's how I make reference sheets and character sheets, it seemed legitimate to design the system that way too.

How much did the game evolve as you designed it? Anything major you dropped or added?

Old School Hack version alpha had all this sandbox adventuring stuff in it at first, with these tables you used to build a map, and this funky rumor system for generating plot hooks. It was very geared towards trying to build the perfect adventure jumping-off point. I think I was cribbing from Vincent Baker's *Storming the Wizard's Tower* a lot at that point. None of this made

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it into the beta, because none of it ever actually got used in playtesting! It was just extraneous to what I, as a GM, wanted to run and what the players wanted to do with making characters.

Some of that's coming back in as I finalize the Basic Game, but I'm being really careful about it. A make-an-adventure toolkit is handy and important and definitely part of a complete game, but it's super important to me that people be able to do anything they want with this game. I don't want a whole adventure-generating system to end up being terribly authoritative "This is the kind of adventure/kind of game you're supposed to play this game for," if that makes any sense. So, I'm trying hard to encourage a sort of completely optional usefulness.

The Attributes took a lot of design finessing to both cover the wide range of adventuring activities as well as just get the right sounding words. I remember agonizing over those a lot. I think it wasn't until I'd worked out the 6-circle Venn diagram on page 16 that I really felt like, "This should cover about everything," and I liked the elegance of the six attributes matching a three-point triangle covering physical, spiritual, and social challenges. That's probably one of the things I'm proudest of.

How much did it evolve as you playtested? Any major changes?

The Combat System (especially the phase order) went through a huge number of playtesting revisions. I have to give a lot of thanks to Scott Moore and Luke Withrow who really helped the fine-tuning, and there were a lot of great discussions about how putting things in what order affected different things. Combat is this tricky thing where interestingness seems to lie in this surprisingly narrow window between too simple and too complex, and of course that window is in different places for different people. All I can say is that the current complexity of *OSH*'s combat is just right for me and the people I playtested *Old School Hack* with.

I can't think of any major changes per se, but none of the changes felt that small, either.

How much did the talent lists change?

Some—in fact, many—worked great right from the initial draft, but a few—the more combat-centric ones for the most part—took some finessing to balance (balance being a fairly fluid and relative estimation though), and of course had to evolve along with the combat system. What I loved about the story-gameyness of *Red Box Hack* was how evocative and "These Abilities Create Interesting Stories" its talents are, and the wide mixture of Far-ranging Narrative Ability and Fairly Specific Combat Ability, that alone result in them being somewhat unbalanceable. I wanted to capture some of that for *Old School Hack*, but also wanted to ensure a more limited, bare-bones take on them for beginning adventurers.

Being an old-school-style advocate, I consider balance to be overrated anyway, and just going ahead and putting social skills like Win Any Drinking Contest You Enter talent against obviously-take-this-to-be-the-combat-badass talent hints at how much different things should be important in the game.

I'm particularly intrigued by the level cap of 4. Why'd you decide to stop there?

That's a tricky question to answer. The leveling from 1 to 4 is fairly lateral: you don't increase in health or necessarily attack power, you just increase in options. But that felt to me like it wouldn't sustain for a super long-term game, and I did want increases in power to happen eventually. I just wanted those increases to map with the assumed goals of the game changing as well. So *Old School Hack* Basic characters are explorers and mercenaries, often just poking around the area, getting into trouble, Finding Things Out, and Cleaning Places Out. What I have in my notes for the Heroic game is more about epic questing: Some stuff's on the line, so the players become more empowered through purpose. You get more health and access to more utilitarian magic, but you sort of have to commit to something to get it (even if you're just committing to greed or the desire for power).

Then, if I ever get to the Mythic Game, the next "power bump" comes tied to some form of responsibility, usually in the form of building a stronghold or a thieves guild or just some sort of reputation or whatever. I'm excited!

But since progress has been slow, I've been pleased to see a number of people putting together their own hacks for beyond-4th-level adventuring. You certainly can do it with the current system; I'm just looking forward to doing something else interesting when I get to it.

Finally: Holy hell, do I love Arenas. Where did that idea come from?

Arenas are in *Red Box Hack*, but that combat is quite a bit simpler, so getting to explore what could be done with them in *Old School Hack* I like to think got taken to the next level. I didn't know that *FATE* used something similar (zones) until later, but it's a wonderful "middle ground" between grid-based and narrative.

OSRIC

Overview

This is based on version 2.2 of *OSRIC*, released in 2008.

OSRIC, like *Labyrinth Lord*, is a straight re-statement of original *D&D*'s rules. However, *OSRIC* leans more towards *Advanced D&D*, with a clear distinction between race and class and several more classes (assassins, paladins, illusionists, and druids).

OSRIC has gone through quite a few revisions. This guide is based on *OSRIC* version 2.2.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**9** (Assassin, Cleric, Druid, Fighter, Illusionist, Magic User, Paladin, Ranger, and Thief)

Cost:	**Free**	Pages:	**404**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**373**
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**Varies by class**		

The Mechanics

Players roll 1d20, add modifiers, and consult a class-specific table to determine if an attack hits. The weapon then does random damage according to its type, subtracted from the enemy's HP.

Class can restrict choices for weapons, armor, and weapon specialization.

Player Character Elements

- ◆ Six classic attributes
- ◆ Class
- ◆ Hit Points
- ◆ Alignment

Advice for Players

Note the incredibly handy compendium of all the relevant tables at the end of the PDF.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Fighter   **Race** Dwarf

Strength 16   **Dexterity** 14   **Constitution** 15

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 12   **Charisma** 9

HP 6   **AC** 5

To Hit +0   **Damage** +1

Resurrection 94   **System Shock** 91

Languages +2   **Henchmen** 4

Move 90'

Special   +1 to hit against goblins, half-orcs, hobgoblins, and orcs
+1 bonus per 3.5 points of Con to saves against magic and Poison
-4 penalty to any attacks made against the dwarf by giants, ogres, ogre mages, titans
and trolls.
Infravision

Saves Magic Items 18; Breath 20; Death, Paralysis, Poison 16; Petrification 17; Spells 19

To Hit Armor Class

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
20	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12

FAREMRIANA

Class Ranger   **Race** Elf

Strength 11   **Dexterity** 12   **Constitution** 9

Intelligence 16   **Wisdom** 14   **Charisma** 15

HP 6   **AC** 5

To Hit +0   **Damage** +0

Resurrection 70   **System Shock** 65

Languages 5   **Henchmen** 7   **Loyalty** +15   **Reaction** +15

Move 120'

Special   +1 to hit on any pulled bow, longsword, and short sword
   Detect secret doors (see rules, page 4)
   Surprise (see rules, page 4)
   Alert against surprise (see rules, page 21)
   Tracking (see rules, page 21)
   +1 damage against evil humanoids or giantish opponents

Saves Magic Items 16; Breath 17; Death, Paralysis, Poison 14; Petrification 15; Spells 17

To Hit Armor Class

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11

ALLAIN

Class Thief   **Race** Halfling

Strength 12   **Dexterity** 16   **Constitution** 9

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 14   **Charisma** 15

To Hit +0   **Damage** +0

HP 4   **AC** 6

Surprise +1   **To Hit Missile** +1

Resurrection 70   **System Shock** 65

Languages 2   **Henchmen** 7   **Loyalty** +15   **Reaction** +15

Move 90'

Special   Surprise (see rules, page 4)
          +1 bonus per 3.5 points of Constitution against magic and poison
          +3 to attacks with bow or sling
          Infravision

Saves Magic Items 14; Breath 16; Death, Paralysis, Poison 13; Petrification 12; Spells 15

To Hit Armor Class

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
20	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12

DANIA

Class Cleric　　　　**Race** Human

Strength 9　　　　**Dexterity** 11　　　　**Constitution** 15

Intelligence 12　　　　**Wisdom** 16　　　　**Charisma** 14

To Hit +0　　　　**Damage** +0

HP 5　　　　**AC** 5

Resurrection 94　　　　**System Shock** 91

Languages 3　　　　**Henchmen** 6　　　　**Loyalty** +5　　　　**Reaction** +10

Mental Saves +2

Saves Magic Items 14; Breath 16; Death, Paralysis, Poison 10; Petrification 13; Spells 15

To Hit Armor Class

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11

ANDREAS

Class Magic User　　　　**Race** Human

Strength 14　　　　**Dexterity** 12　　　　**Constitution** 15

Intelligence 16　　　　**Wisdom** 11　　　　**Charisma** 9

To Hit +0　　　　**Damage** +0

HP 3　　　　**AC** 10

Resurrection 94　　　　**System Shock** 91

Languages 5　　　　**Henchmen** 4

Saves Magic Items 11; Breath 15; Death, Paralysis, Poison 14; Petrification 13; Spells 12

To Hit Armor Class

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 AC
20	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12

SEARCHERS OF THE UNKNOWN

Overview

Searchers of the Unknown radically simplifies early *D&D*, using the premise that a monster's few stats should be good enough for the player characters. The entire rule set fits on one side of one piece of paper. This only includes fighters, but there are other one-page supplements that add spell casting, rogues, *etc*.

The [Searchers of the Unknown RPG Collection 2012](#) collects 40 of these supplements into one PDF.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**1** (Fighter)		
Cost:	Free	Pages:	**1**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**0**
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**No limit**		

The Mechanics

Attack an opponent by rolling 1d20, attempting to roll less than or equal to the opponent's AC plus the attacker's level. So, a level 3 adventurer attacking a level 6 monster would be trying to roll 9 (6+3) or below. Then subtract 1d6 damage from opponent's HP.

To attempt a difficult physical action that's not an attack (sneak, climb, *etc*.), roll 1d20 vs. character's AC + character's level, attempting to roll below the target number. All other actions (detecting traps, picking locks) and saving throws are 1d20 vs. character's level + 4, also rolling low.

Player Character Elements

- ◆ Armor Class
- ◆ Movement Rate
- ◆ Hit Points (1d8 per level)
- ◆ Weapon

Advice for DMs

Searchers of the Unknown is the most free-form system profiled here. Every monster consists of only a few stats, and those are almost the only stats in the game. It's ridiculously easy to run *mechanically*.

So, if you like to improv, this is a great system for you. On the other hand, if you like to define everything up-front, you can build a huge array of monsters quickly…but anything outside of

that will turn into a saving throw. If you rely on mechanics, this may not be the system for you…or it may help break your reliance.

If you'd like a little more variety in weapons, consider adding small, medium, and large weapons. A weapon deals 1d6 damage against weapons of the same size or smaller and 1d4 against larger ones. The smallest weapon deal 1d6 damage against the largest weapons, representing smaller weapons' ability to sneak around large ones.

Advice for Players

Prepare to improv. *Searchers* gives you minimal mechanics. Fights become dull slugfests within a few rounds unless you get inventive.

Your DM may be very free-form with this game, or very rigid. It conforms well to either approach. If the DM doesn't specify, consider asking if you have to itemize everything you carry.

You will likely play with one or two supplements, of which there are many.

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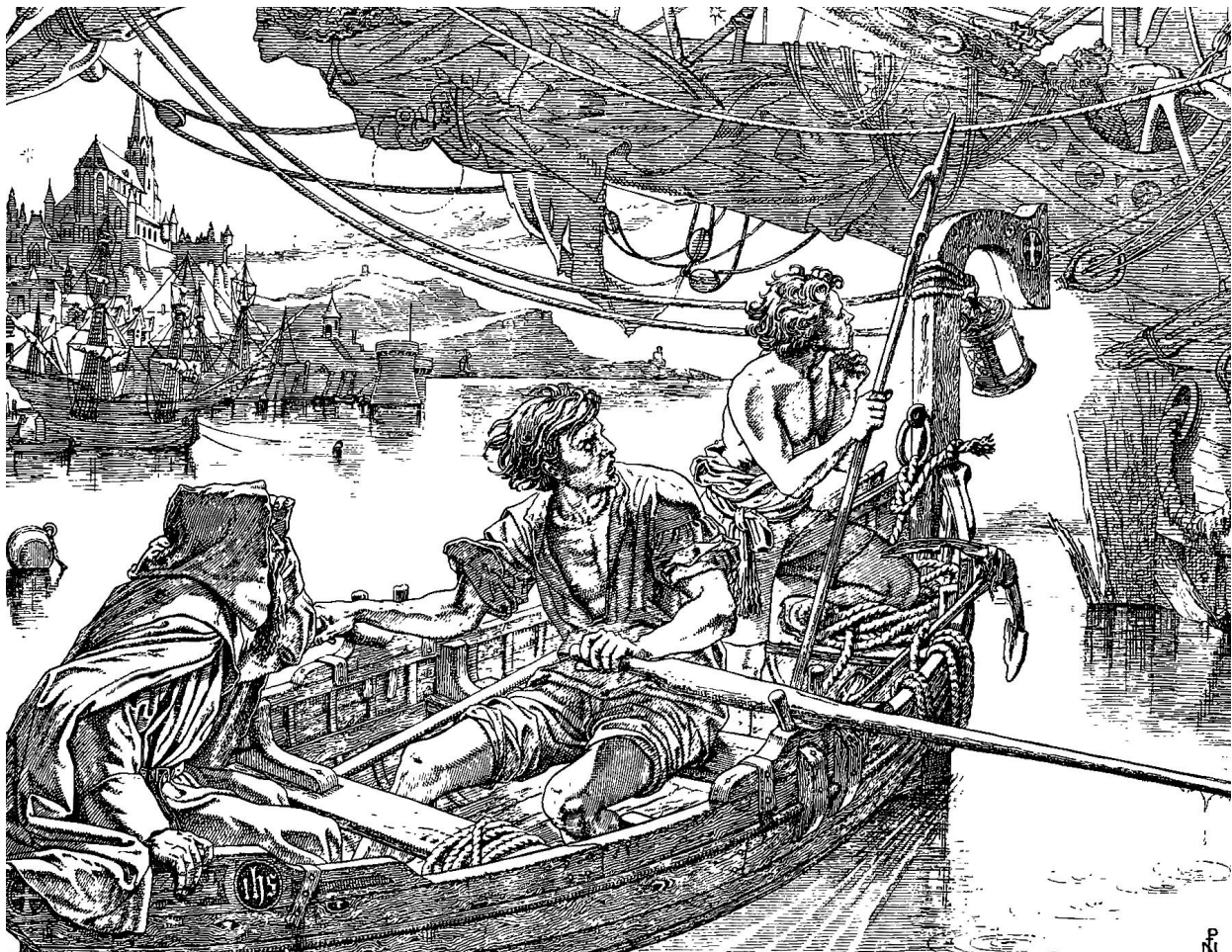
Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Dwarf Fighter

HP 6   **AC** 3   **MV** 3   **Stunts** 4   **Saves** 5

Weapon Battle Axe, 1d8 dmg   **Armor** Plate mail

Weapon 2 Hammer, 1d8 dmg

Rules

You succeed on an *attack* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 1 + opponent's AC. Roll damage and subtract from opponent's HP.

You succeed on a *difficult physical action* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 4

You succeed on a *difficult non-physical action* or *saving throw* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 5

Special: You succeed on a saving throw against magic or poison if you roll 1d20 ≤ 9

FAREMRIANA

Class Elf Fighter

HP 5   **AC** 7   **MV** 9   **Stunts** 8   **Saves** 5

Weapon Bow, 1d6 dmg   **Armor** Leather

Weapon 2 Sword, 1d8 dmg

Spells Read Magic

Rules

You succeed on an *attack* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 1 + opponent's AC. Roll damage and subtract from opponent's HP.

You succeed on a *difficult physical action* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 8

You succeed on a *difficult non-physical action* or *saving throw* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 5

ALLAIN

Class Rogue

HP 5   **AC** 7   **MV** 9   **Stunts** 8   **Saves** 4   **Sneak** 6

Weapon Dagger, 1d4 dmg   **Armor** Leather

Rules

You succeed on an *attack* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 1 + opponent's AC. Roll damage and subtract from opponent's HP.

You succeed on a *difficult physical action* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 8

You succeed on a *difficult non-physical action* or *saving throw* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 5

DANIA

Class Cleric

HP 4   **AC** 5   **MV** 6   **Stunts** 6   **Saves** 5

Weapon Mace, 1d8 dmg   **Armor** Chainmail

Carrying One scroll of *cure light wounds*; heals 1d6 HP.

Rules

You succeed on an *attack* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 1 + opponent's AC. Roll damage and subtract from opponent's HP.

You succeed on a *difficult physical action* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 6

You succeed on a *difficult non-physical action* or *saving throw* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 5

ANDREAS

Class Wizard

HP 3   **AC** 9   **MV** 12   **Stunts** 10   **Saves** 5

Weapon Polearm, 1d10 dmg   **Armor** None

Spells *Magic Missile* (150' range) Fire one missile, dealing 1d4+1 damage (automatically hits)

Rules

You succeed on an *attack* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 1 + opponent's AC. Roll damage and subtract from opponent's HP.

You succeed on a *difficult physical action* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 10

You succeed on a *difficult non-physical action* or *saving throw* if you roll 1d20 ≤ 5

STARS WITHOUT NUMBER

Introduction

This is based on the 2010 edition of *Stars Without Number*, which I believe is the first release.

Stars Without Number takes basic early *D&D* mechanics, streamlines them, and applies them to science fiction gaming.

Stars Without Number also has only three classes: warrior (fighter), expert (rogue or any other skilled professional), and psychic (magic user).

Moreover, it comes with a fairly detailed universe, complete with back story and monsters.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**3** (Expert, Psychic, and Warrior)		
Cost:	**Free** basic PDF, **$20** full PDF, **$30** print	Pages:	**210**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**0**
HP by Class:	**Yes**	Treasure:	**No**
Highest PC Level:	**11+**		

The Mechanics

Initiative is 1d8 + dexterity.

Attacks are 1d20 + various bonuses (combat skill, target's armor class, weapon bonus, *etc.*), attempting to equal or exceed 20. Low armor class is good.

Psionics are the magic of this system, and work like spells. Each has a discipline and level.

Player Character Elements

- ◆ Six classic attributes
- ◆ Class
- ◆ Skills (based on background and training packages)
- ◆ Homeworld
- ◆ Hit Points
- ◆ Languages

DM Advice

If you're looking to generate a sector in *Stars Without Number*, check out the *SWN Sector Generator* at http://www.emichron.com/swn/

Player Advice

Your chosen homeworld is important to your character's makeup, and can go a long way towards explaining your character's backstory.

Sample Characters

SERGEI ORTOV

Class Warrior

Strength 16 (+1)   **Dexterity** 14 (+1)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 11 (0)   **Wisdom** 12 (0)   **Charisma** 9 (0)

Background Soldier   **Training** Space Marine

Skills   Combat/Energy Weapon 0
Combat/Primitive 0
Combat/Projectile 0
Combat/Unarmed 0
Culture/Spacer 0
Culture/World (Sepulchre) 0
Exosuit 0
Tactics 1
Tech/Astronautics 0

HP 5   **AC** 3

Attack +1   **Weapon Damage** 1d12 (burst)

Saves Physical Effect 12; Mental Effect 15; Evasion 14; Tech 16; Luck 13

SHU LONG

Class Warrior

Strength 11 (0)   **Dexterity** 12 (0)   **Constitution** 9 (0)

Intelligence 16 (+1)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

Background Tribesman   **Training** Mercenary

Skills   Business 0
Combat/Primitive 0
Combat/Projectile 1
Combat/Unarmed 0
Culture/World (Hutton) 1
Perception 0
Survival 0
Tactics 0

HP 5   **AC** 3

Attack +1   **Weapon Damage** 2d8

Saves Physical Effect 12; Mental Effect 15; Evasion 14; Tech 16; Luck 13

ALLAIN CARTER

Class Expert

Strength 12 (0)   **Dexterity** 16 (+1)   **Constitution** 9 (0)

Intelligence 11 (0)   **Wisdom** 14 (+1)   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

Background Con Artist   **Training** Criminal

Skills   Business 0
       Combat/Primitive 0
       Culture/Criminal 1
       Culture/World (Tecalco) 0
       Gambling 0
       Perception 0
       Persuade 1
       Security 0
       Stealth 1

HP 3   **AC** 3

Attack +0   **Weapon Damage** 1d6+1

Saves Physical Effect 16; Mental Effect 15; Evasion 12; Tech 11; Luck 14

DANIA MILLER

Class Psychic   **Discipline** Biopsionics **Psi Points** 1

Strength 9 (0)   **Dexterity** 11 (0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 12 (0)   **Wisdom** 16 (+1)   **Charisma** 14 (+1)

Background Biotech Crew   **Training** Healer

Skills   Culture/Spacer 1
       Perception 0
       Science 0
       Tech/Astronautic 0
       Tech/Medical 1
       Tech/Psitech 0

HP 2   **AC** 5

Attack +0   **Weapon Damage** 1d6+1

Saves Physical Effect 13; Mental Effect 12; Evasion 15; Tech 16; Luck 14

ANDREAS ARELLANO

Class Psychic

Strength 14 (+1)   **Dexterity** 12 (0)   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 16 (+1)   **Wisdom** 11 (0)   **Charisma** 9 (0)

Background Researcher   **Training** Academy

Skills   Combat/Psitech 0
             Culture/World (Gateway) 0
             Perception 0
             Persuade 0
             Science 0
             Tech/Medical 0
             Tech/Psitech 1

HP 2   **AC** 7

Attack +0   **Weapon Damage** 3d4

Saves Physical Effect 13; Mental Effect 12; Evasion 15; Tech 16; Luck 14

SWORDS AND WIZARDRY

Overview

Swords and Wizardry has perhaps the most straightforward heritage of all the rulesets in this package. There are two editions:

1. A direct copy of the first three original *D&D* booklets and Supplement One, with a couple of minor rule tweaks to address clear imbalances and many alternate mechanics (the "Core Rules")
2. A simplified, streamlined version of the above rules (the "White Box").

This is based on the fourth printing of the Core Rules (May 2011) and the first print edition of the White Box (January 2009).

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**4** (Cleric, Fighter, Magic-User, and Thief)		
Cost:	**Free** PDF, US $19 hardcover	Pages:	**146**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**154** (!)
HP by Class:	**Yes (HD)**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**21+**		

The Mechanics

Core Rules

Each attribute score affects other aspects of the game (Dexterity affects AC, Constitution affects HP, Charisma affects number of hirelings, *etc*.). Each class rolls different dice for HP and advances at a different rate.

Low Armor Class is good, though the Core ruleset includes a parallel system for ascending Armor Class.

Attack rolls are based on character class, character level, and opponent AC and require a table lookup. Saving throws are rolled based on character class, character level, and type of saving throw and also require a table lookup.

Player Character Elements

- Six classic attributes
- Race
- Class
- Hit Points
- Armor Class
- Alignment
- Saving Throw

White Box
Each ability score or bonus is used in certain situations.

Characters also have a "Base Hit Bonus," added to the d20 roll.

Advice to DMs
About half of the book is for the DM, so you'll find plenty of advice, monsters, treasure, *etc*.

Spend a good amount of time reading through the alternate mechanics presented in boxes throughout the ruleset. Some alternate mechanics are simpler than the standard ones.

The most important alternate rule concerns **ascending or descending AC**. Descending AC is traditional, but confuses many players. Decide between them as early as possible, and tell your players.

Monsters are relatively complicated, and very "swingy." For example, a shambling mound can have anywhere from 7 to 72 HP, and can deal between 4 and 32 points of damage on each attack.

So, if you're new to DMing an OSR game, consider multiplying each monster's number of Hit Dice by 4 instead of rolling. Your game will move more quickly, and you'll get a better feel for what the PCs can handle.

Advice to Players
Ask your DM early about his decision on **ascending or descending AC**.

Monsters can be very tough. Defeat through guile or intimidation where you can, and don't be afraid to run.

You will often roll on tables for certain effects. If the DM expects players to roll, make sure to have at least one printed copy of the rules at the table, or at least a searchable digital copy.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Class Fighter   **Race** Dwarf

Strength 16 (+1)   **Dexterity** 14   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 12   **Charisma** 9

HP 5   **AC** 3 [16]

Weapon Battle Axe   **Damage** 1d6+1   **Armor** Plate

Abilities +1 against orcs and goblins; keen detection; -2 to be hit

Saves Poison +1, Magic +4

FAREMRIANA

Class   Fighter   **Race**   Elf

Strength 11   **Dexterity** 12   **Constitution** 9

Intelligence 16 (+1) **Wisdom** 14   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

HP 5   **AC** 5 [14]

Weapon Long Bow   **Damage** 1d6   **Armor** Chain

Abilities +1 against goblins, orcs, intelligent undead, and lycanthropes; immune to paralysis
        by undead

Saves Poison +1, Magic +2

ALLAIN

Class Fighter   **Race**   Halfling

Strength 12   **Dexterity** 16 (+1)   **Constitution** 9

Intelligence 11   **Wisdom** 14   **Charisma** 15 (+1)

HP 3   **AC** 7 [12]

Weapon Dagger   **Damage** 1d6-1   **Armor** Leather

Abilities -2 to be hit; +2 when firing missiles; hard to see and hear

Saves Poison +1, Magic +4

DANIA

Class Cleric   **Race** Human

Strength 9   **Dexterity** 11   **Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 12   **Wisdom** 16 (+1)   **Charisma** 14

HP 4   **AC** 3 [16]

Weapon Warhammer   **Damage** 1d6 **Armor** Plate

Saves Poison +2

Spells Turn Undead

ANDREAS

Class Magic-User　　**Race** Human

Strength 14　　　　**Dexterity** 12　　　**Constitution** 15 (+1)

Intelligence 16 (+1)　**Wisdom** 11　　　**Charisma** 9

HP 5　　　　　　　**AC** 9 [10]

Weapon Dagger　　**Damage** 1d6-1　　**Armor** None

Spells Light I

Saves +2 vs. magic

WARRIOR, ROGUE & MAGE

Overview

This is based on the Revised Edition of *Warrior, Rogue & Mage*, released in 2010.

Warrior, Rogue & Mage brings a classless approach to old-school gaming. Not a retroclone, *WR&M* features three primary attributes—the Warrior, Rogue, and Mage of the title—in which each character has a total of ten points. Players roll a d6 and add the appropriate attribute score, hoping to hit a target number.

In addition, the system provides a set of skills (which are binary, and always provide a +2 bonus on a roll), and special abilities that apply in certain circumstances. Hit Points are calculated from Warrior, Fate Points (like bennies in *Savage Worlds*, allowing players to re-roll a die or ignore a killing attack) are calculated from Rogue, and Mana is calculated from Mage.

Interestingly, this allows *every* character to do at least a little fighting, a little sneaking, and a little magic.

The book also includes a low-magic variant, *Warrior, Rogue & Scholar*.

The Bare Facts

Player Classes:	**None**

Cost:	**Free** PDF	Pages:	**41**
Elf is a Class:	**No**	Monsters:	**30**
HP by Class:	**No**	Treasure:	**Yes**
Highest PC Level:	**No limit**		

The Mechanics

Roll a d6 and add the appropriate attribute (Warrior, Rogue, or Mage), trying to roller higher than a target Difficulty number. If you have an appropriate skill, add 2 to your roll.

In combat, roll vs. the target's Defense. Deal the weapon's stated damage to the target's Hit Points.

Dice can "explode" as follows: if you roll a 6, add it to your result and roll again, adding the second result too.

Player Character Elements

◆ Warrior, Rogue, and Mage attributes
◆ Skills
◆ Talents
◆ Hit Points
◆ Fate Points
◆ Mana
◆ Defense (calculated from Warrior and Rogue)

Spells cost Mana (which recharge with sleep), and also require a Mage roll against a target Difficulty.

Advice to DMs

This section on DM Advice is courtesy of Michael Wolf, the creator of WR&M.

Be prepared to improvise. *Warrior, Rogue & Mage* is not a game that gives you a rule for every situation. The design of the rules follows my GMing style and I prefer coming up with rulings or house rules when needed instead of looking up complicated rules.

One frequently asked question in playtesting was how spellcasters acquire their spells. I think the rules mention that you need to buy (or find) spell scrolls but most people assume you get a couple of spells for free. This is not the case; you have to buy them.

This is actually one of the issues the game has. Because of that players start with quite a lot of money which can easily lead to novice adventurers wearing full plate armor. I might reconsider this if I ever release a 2nd Edition.

Advice to Players

One nice thing about this system is its simplicity: roll d6, add attribute, and maybe add +2 for a skill.

It can be very useful to have more than 1 point of Mage. Even if your character isn't a traditional spellcaster, magic lets you keep a few powerful tricks up your sleeve.

Pay attention to your Fate Points. It's tempting to save them all up for the final battle, but you probably won't get that many chances to use them.

Note the Character Creation Summary on page 35, which takes you through each step of character creation.

Sample Characters

DRIMGORD

Warrior 5   **Rogue** 3   **Mage** 2

HP 11   **Fate** 3   **Mana** 4

Axe 1d6   **Armor** Light Plate   **Defense** 14

Skills Axes (Warrior), Athletics (Rogue), Unarmed (Warrior)

Talent Massive Attack (add Warrior to melee attack damage, once per combat)

FAREMRIANA

Warrior 4   **Rogue** 4   **Mage** 2

HP 10   **Fate** 4   **Mana** 4

Longbow 1d6+2   **Armor** Scale   **Defense** 11

Skills Acrobatics (Rogue), Bows (Rogue), Riding (Warrior)

Talent Precise Shot (add Rogue to ranged attack damage, once per combat)

ALLAIN

Warrior 3   **Rogue** 6   **Mage** 1

HP 9   **Fate** 6   **Mana** 2

Dagger 1d6-2   **Armor** Leather   **Defense** 10

Skills Acrobatics (Rogue), Daggers (Rogue), Thievery (Rogue)

Talent Sixth Sense (Before any ambush, roll; on a 4+ you are not surprised and may act first)

DANIA

Warrior 3   **Rogue** 2   **Mage** 5

HP 9   **Fate** 2   **Mana** 10

Warhammer 1d6   **Armor** Scale   **Defense** 9

Skills Alchemy (Mage), Awareness (Mage), Blunt Weapons (Warrior)

Talent Armored Caster (no armor penalty)

ANDREAS

Warrior 1   **Rogue** 2   **Mage** 7

HP 7   **Fate** 2   **Mana** 14

Sword 1d6   **Armor** Padded cloth **Defense** 8

Skills Alchemy (Mage), Lore (Mage), Thaumaturgy (Mage)

Talents Channeller (add Mage to magic attack damage, once per combat)

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL WOLF

Michael Wolf wrote *Warrior, Rogue & Mage*.

What inspired you to design Warrior, Rogue & Mage*? Why did you go with those three abilities, with the rest of the system very much branching off from them?*

I think I just had replayed the old computer RPG *Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos*, which actually features a similar mechanic. Each character had the three abilities Fighter, Rogue, and Mage that leveled up depending on how often you used these abilities. I was under the shower thinking about how this could be used for a rules-light pen & paper game when I came up for the basics for *WR&M*.

Makes sense. How much of it was fleshed out at that point?

Not much. I just had the basic idea with the three "classes as attributes" and I knew that I wanted to use six-sided dice. I think it was on the next day when I started writing down the rules and after a couple of hours the first draft of *WR&M*, a three-columned, 7-paged document, was ready to be released. At this point I was actually looking for another name because I found *Warrior, Rogue & Mage* a bit too generic.

What were some of the names you considered?

I am sorry, but I can't remember. The main reason for that was that almost everyone I asked to help me come up with a new name actually liked *WR&M* a lot. So in the end I decided to stick with it.

How much has changed between the first draft and the one that's out there now?

When it comes to mechanics: not that much, actually. I added a few optional rules like the Warrior, Rogue & Scholar variant and non-human player characters. My friend Andrew Modro helped me a lot during this phase. He not only did the editing, he also motivated me whenever I lost interest in the project or let myself get distracted by computer games. I seriously couldn't have done it without him. And having a native speaker editor helped to make the final product much, much better.

The biggest change between the first draft and the final game was the layout. The first draft was done in Microsoft Word and was pretty plain. For the final version I invested some money into fantasy stock art and did a proper layout in Adobe InDesign. That took me quite a while, but I guess it was worth it.

Did you know InDesign going into this project?

Yes, I had worked with InDesign before. One of my first larger layout jobs was the layout for the Deluxe edition of the One Page Dungeon Codex 2009 that even was sold as a print copy at gen

Con 2010. I learned a lot while I worked on that project and put it to good use when I worked on *WR&M* shortly thereafter.

I was particularly intrigued by the Warrior, Rogue & Scholar rules when I first read them. Cool idea for changing the rules to create a different world feel. Where'd that part of the ruleset come from?

I have always been a fan of more grim and gritty low-magic settings. So I thought about how I could modify the existing ruleset to allow low-magic settings where not everyone has easy access to magic. The WR&S variant was the easiest solution I came up with. Just change Mage to Scholar (aside from magic it still covers the same skills) and create a talent needed for spellcasting and voila, there's your low-magic ruleset.

Switching subjects for a moment: What was playtesting like?

The first version I released actually hadn't been playtested at all, but before I started working on the final version I asked people for feedback and did some playtesting with my regular gaming group. I remember that we fixed a few minor things, but there have been no big surprises. But I noticed a few omissions (like the missing dodge and block rules) during playtest that I released as the first supplement, "The Art of Combat". I also came up with alternate armor rules because I noticed some issues with well-armored characters that became extremely hard to hit.

How did you conduct playtesting? E.g., did you ask specific questions every time, or did you have surveys? What questions did you ask?

I am not that organized! We basically played the game a couple of times and talked about what the players liked, what worked and what didn't work. I don't know how the people who sent me their feedback conducted their playtests, but I guess they pretty much did the same.

*Fair enough. Anything else you wanted to mention?*

I want to thank everyone who helped to turn WR&M into what it is today. Special thanks go to Andrew Modro, Colin Chapman, and Brian Brousseau. Thanks again for your support!

MODULES

If you're looking for adventures or modules for your OSR games, here are a few online lists:

- [Hoard and Horde](#) lists 700 different OSR products, of which 329 are modules. Each module is listed by publication date, print/PDF, a flag if it's free or paid, publisher, and system. It does not list specific prices.

- [List of Available AD&D1 modules](#) lists 106 modules. The advantage of this list is that each module can be sorted and filtered by player level and module price, and many entries include links to reviews.

- [Dragonsfoot's Adventure Modules](#) lists 38 adventure modules. It has the advantage of module descriptions and thumbnails, but fewer stats about each module.

- In addition, the following modules have received significant attention:

- *[Barrowmaze](#)* ("A Classic Megadungeon for *Labyrinth Lord*™ and other Fantasy Role-playing Games")

- *[Stonehell Dungeon](#)* (another megadungeon for *Labyrinth Lord* and other OSR systems)

- *[Death Frost Doom](#)* (for *Lamentations of the Flame Princess*)

- *[Xylarthen's Tower](#)* (free) by Jeff Rients
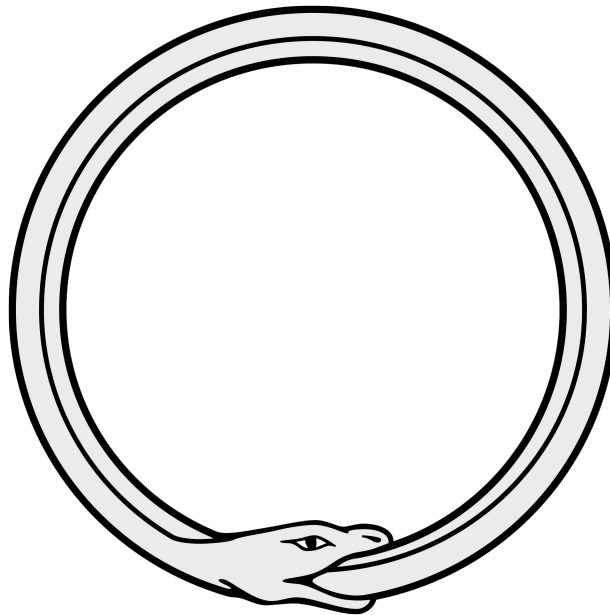
CODA

This book was written by <u>Brent P. Newhall</u>. For more information about this book, please visit <u>http://rpg.brentnewhall.com/osrhandbook</u>

The second edition of this book added profiles of *Barbarians of Lemuria*, *Basic Fantasy Role-Play*, *Basic Roleplaying (Chaosium)*, and *Castles & Crusades*; added interviews with Kirin Robinson, Michael Wolf, Jason Morningstar, and James Raggi; and expanded the profile of *BareBones*.

Big thanks to Alexander Jack for his comments on the first edition of this book.

Huge thanks to Kirin Robinson, Michael Wolf, Jason Morningstar, and James Raggi for allowing me to interview them about their systems.

All the art in this book is public domain, including:

- Will Poany's dragon on page 7
- The anonymous nature scene on page 12
- John Batten's king on page 17
- Richard Heighway's wolf on page 23
- The anonymous monster on page 28
- The anonymous monster on page 37
- Richard Heighway's ghost on page 42
- John Batten's eagle on page 53
- The anonymous monster on page 57
- The anonymous norns on page 76
- Magnus's weaponry on page 81
- Noel Patton's landscape on 95

This book was written using LibreOffice 3.6.0.4 on Mac OS X 10.7. The headers are typeset in Charlemagne Std and Futura, and the text is set in Book Antiqua.

BARROWMAZE

A Classic Fantasy Megadungeon for Labyrinth Lord
by Greg Gillespie