

OLD-SCHOOL ESSENTIALS

RETRO ADVENTURE GAME

Author's Notes on the Rules

Old-School Essentials is the product of over two years of poring over venerable tomes, discussing rules minutiae with the elite of online RPG geeks, laborious writing, and painstaking layout work.

The result—in the form of the *Core Rules* and *Classic Fantasy* books—is a game 100% compatible with the classic Basic/Expert rules from 1981. However, no game is perfect, and *Old-School Essentials* attempts to fix some of the most irksome errors in the Basic/Expert rules.

This document describes the tweaks that I made, for those with a passion for rules archaeology.

Ambiguities and Omissions

The original Basic/Expert rules are not devoid of ambiguities: some rules are incomplete; some rules are described in a way that could be interpreted in multiple different ways; some rules even contain contradictions.

With the aim of increasing the playability of the game, I decided to iron out such ambiguities in the rules. In doing so, I was careful to cleave as closely as possible to what I interpreted as the intent of the original rules. Other interpretations of the rules—and other resolutions of the areas of contradiction—are certainly possible, though.

Expansions of Scope

I have expanded the scope of a small number of rules, applying them to more general situations than are explicitly allowed by the original rules.

Additional Rules

I decided (after much soul-searching!) to include a single, additional rules option to the game: ascending Armour Class. The rationale for this is discussed overleaf.



**NECROTIC
GNOME**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTES

CORE RULES

Ambiguities and Omissions

Ability Checks

The original rules are somewhat ambiguous on whether ability checks are an optional rule or not. They are specified as an optional rule in the original Expert rules, but are recommended for use in climbing. The original Basic rules do not specify ability checks as an optional rule. On balance, I decided against specifying ability checks as optional. Their application is, of course, entirely up to the referee.

Encumbrance

The original Basic rules contain ambiguities relating to the encumbrance system. I have attempted to resolve these ambiguities in a sensible and consistent way, but other interpretations of the original rules are possible.

Retainers

The original Basic rules stipulate that retainers only receive half the experience points due to them. There are two possible interpretations of this. It may be that retainers receive 1 XP per gp of treasure they earn (the same as any other adventurer), but that there is an unspoken assumption that retainers receive a half share of treasure. It may, alternatively, mean that retainers only receive ½ XP per gp of treasure. The actual intention of the Basic rules is unclear; I chose to favour the latter interpretation.

Traps

The distinction between room traps and treasure traps is implicit in the original Basic rules, but is never clearly pointed out. In my opinion, the rules presented in *Old-School Essentials* are the clearest way to resolve the ambiguity between the general adventurer ability to find traps (i.e. room traps) and the traditional thief class' ability to find small traps (i.e. treasure traps). The clarification presented is far from the only possible resolution, though.

Movement in Combat

The original Basic rules do not make it clear whether characters may run in combat (using the rules for evasion and pursuit in the dungeon). However, a later edition of the game makes it clear that this is not possible, so I have followed that clarification in *Old-School Essentials*.

Morale

The original rules are ambiguous as to whether a morale check is triggered the first time a member of the monsters' side in combat is killed, or whether a check is triggered the first time a member of either side is killed. I have clarified this to what I feel is the most sensible interpretation: monsters check morale the first time one of their own number is killed.

Treasure Type Average Values

According to my re-calculation of these averages, there were errors in the original Basic rules. The average value for treasure type M, in particular, was way off.

Expansions of Scope

Hirelings

The original rules do not use this term (or indeed any term) to refer to non-adventuring NPCs that may be hired by PCs. The term hireling is introduced to conveniently refer to all types of such characters, including mercenaries and specialists.

Subduing

The rule for subduing is mentioned in the original rules in the context of dragons. I chose to place this rule in the combat section in *Core Rules*, as it could easily apply to other types of creatures (including humanoids).

Vehicles

The rules listed in this section originally applied only to water vessels. I have broadened their scope to encompass all types of vehicles.

Types of Magic

In the original rules, the two types of spells are simply described as “cleric spells” and “magic-user and elf spells”. In order to expand the scope to potentially include other character classes, I use the terms “divine magic” and “arcane magic”.

Additional Rules

Ascending Armour Class

The optional rule for ascending Armour Class is not present in the original Basic/Expert rules. There are two strong reasons for integrating this option into the core rules:

1. Use of ascending AC is probably the most common house rule applied by modern players to the classic Basic/Expert rules framework. (The second most common probably being separating character race and class, in the vein of the traditional Advanced rules.)
2. Armour Class is a fundamental game mechanic, and, as such, is referred to throughout all rules modules (for example, in equipment lists, many spells, all monster descriptions, etc.). Applying house rules to such core mechanics of the game is awkward, entailing either the significant adaptation effort of all materials in use, or an on-the-fly conversion whenever the mechanic comes up. Neither is trivial. (In contrast, for example, optional rules for creating characters with separate race and class can be easily addressed in a rules supplement, without affecting the core rules of the game.)

On balance, I felt it was better to include ascending AC as an option for those groups that prefer to use it. Groups that prefer the traditional AC mechanic may simply ignore the optional rule for AAC.

CLASSIC FANTASY: GENRE RULES

Ambiguities and Omissions

Halfling

The original Basic rules include a halfling tongue in the list of languages that characters may learn, but do not specify whether halfling adventurers speak this language. I chose to make the obvious clarification that halfling characters do speak this language, in the same way that dwarf and elf adventurers speak their racial languages.

Fighter Extra Attacks at High Levels

The suggestions for high-level play in the original Expert rules are ambiguous about the level at which fighters gain extra attacks per round.

Weapons

The weights of the following weapons are not specified in the original Basic/Expert rules, and have been extrapolated from similar items: javelin, lance, sling, staff.

Weapon Combat Stats

The range of the javelin is not specified in the original Expert rules, and has been extrapolated from similar items.

Water Vessels

The exact capabilities of the different types of ship in the original Expert rules are somewhat contradictory. The details presented in *Old-School Essentials* resolve these contradictions in one possible way, while sticking as closely to the original rules as possible.

Unseaworthy Vessels

The draft of canoes and rafts were not defined in the traditional Expert rules. The listed values are extrapolated from similar vessels.

Mercenaries

The original rules are unclear about what type of horses mounted mercenaries ride.

Specialists

The wages of assistant armourers are not defined in the traditional Expert rules. The listed value is extrapolated from similar specialists.

Strongholds and Domains

The original Expert rules for calculating the cost of towers are highly ambiguous. The rule presented in *Old-School Essentials* is only one possible resolution of this ambiguity.

Expansions of Scope

Land Vehicles

AC and hull point ratings are listed for carts and wagons. These were not specified in the original Expert rules.

CLASSIC FANTASY: CLERIC AND MAGIC- USER SPELLS

Ambiguities and Omissions

Detect Invisible

I added a description for this famously absent spell, drawing the details from a later edition of the game.

CLASSIC FANTASY: MONSTERS

Ambiguities and Omissions

Bull Shark

The original rules state that bull sharks use a ram attack to stun prey, but do not give mechanics for it. The rule in *Old-School Essentials* is derived from a later edition of the game.

Dervish

The suggested equipment is adapted from the 1979 Advanced rules.

Giant Bass

In the original Expert rules, the giant bass is only mentioned inside the nixie monster description. In *Old-School Essentials*, I have adapted it to a full monster, referring to a later edition of the game for the descriptive details.

Ochre Jelly

The description of the ochre jelly in the original Basic rules is ambiguous on several points. I have attempted to resolve these ambiguities in a sensible and consistent way, based on the mechanics used for similar monsters, but other interpretations of the original monster are possible.

Sea Dragon

The sleeping percentage is extrapolated from dragons of like HD.

Sea Snake

The original rules do not specify the effects of sea snakes' poison. This has been clarified to be death one turn after the poison's effects are noticed.

CLASSIC FANTASY: TREASURES

Ambiguities and Omissions

Gauntlets of Ogre Power

The description of this item in the original Basic rules is somewhat ambiguous. It's not clear that the bonuses only apply to melee attacks. The listed unarmed attack damage also contradicts what is listed in the Expert rules.

Potion of Growth

The original Basic rules do not note by how much the character's STR increases, and are not explicit that only damage of melee attacks is increased.

Staff of Wizardry

The exact nature of this staff's whirlwind power is not clear in the original Expert rules. I have specified a duration of 3 rounds, based on the pillar of flame effect of the efreeti monster.

Warhammer +3, Dwarven Thrower

The range of this weapon is not specified in the original Expert rules, and was taken from a later edition of the game.