

# RDG's Original Dungeons & Dragons Game

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## Adventures in the Fractured Empire

Here follows an account of the shenanigans that plucky adventurers have been getting up to in the weird and wonderful lands of the former Latian Empire.

### Rumour Mill

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*All distances assume travel by foot from Calaca at a Movement Rate of 12 (24 miles per day). If no distance is given, the location can be reached in less than one day.*

Rumours may be true, untrue, partially true, or otherwise misleading. (They will not, however, lead to "nothing happens". Because that would be boring.)

- About two days' travel West is an abandoned monastery, destroyed by lightning. Apparently the monks did something to anger their god.
- Two weeks' travel South lies the village of Grimmsgate. Once peaceful, the area around

it has become so dangerous that traders are taking it off their route.

- There are reports of Orc raids on the roads between Bard's Gate and Rems (a month or more to the Northwest).
- Traders report that two pixie clans are at war in the northern reaches of the Forest of Hope (2-3 weeks Northeast).
- The Elvenking Morikwen is a friend to adventurers and pays handsomely for their services (12 days South).
- A dead body was discovered on the outskirts of Amrin Ferry. He had a map on him (North).
- The Bailiff of Eastgate is thinking of calling off the annual Festival of Stars, due to trouble with the local Thieves' Guild (two days East).
- An abandoned mine has been rediscovered in the hills to the Southeast. It seems to be Dwarven (2-4 weeks).

## The Story So Far

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### Session 1

Six adventurers (Freida Silverbeard (Dwarf Fighter), Dave the Human (Human Fighter), Kane Lorath (Elf Magic-User), Morblum (Human Magic-User), Drizzit Do'Urden (Elf Thief), and Bilkin (Halfling Thief)) found themselves in the strange village of Calaca, on the South Bank of the Amrin Estuary. Decapitated humanoid corpses had been washing ashore, dressed in rough grey robes. The local fishers were refusing to fish while this continued.

After asking around, they discover the likeliest source of the disturbance was the mysterious sunken tower in the middle of the estuary, which the fishers traditionally avoid at all costs. Blando Dionikos, youngest fisher in the village, had recently rowed his boat out to the tower to impress Leto, the daughter of Chrseos Dorapolyke, the village's leading merchant. Blando doesn't remember what happened, but they found him unconscious in his boat, drifting back toward the south bank. He soon developed a stutter, a morose demeanour, recurrent nightmares, and got a new tattoo, depicting a weird snake-squid hybrid with tentacles made of human skulls.

The adventurers also discovered that the grey robes of the corpses are made of goat wool. Calaca is famous for its giant goats, which are sacred to Saint Bartholomew (whose bones reside in the town's cemetery). Sacred goat wool is their main export, and a quantity of it is missing.

Chryseos offered the party 200 gp to investigate the tower, and promised another 200 gp "finder's fee" if they recovered the missing wool in the process.

With Blando and Benavan Neoptolemus, the village's eldest fisher, steering the boats, the party set off for the sunken tower.

They avoided giant frogs, trapped stairs, and a headless animated corpse, before confronting the cultists in one of the lower levels of the tower. The cult leader got off a Hold Person spell, taking Freida, Bilkin, and Morblum out of action, after which three of the minions closed in for melee with their daggers. The party took some hits, but no one dropped. Then Kane cast Sleep, sending the cultists to dreamland - and none too soon, for two of them were in the process of opening up some floodgates in the back of the chamber.

Seeing his minions rendered helpless, and now outnumbered three-to-one, the Cult Leader dropped his dagger and surrendered.

With the immediate danger over, the party now had a prisoner, some treasure, and a few unexplored rooms. They also noticed three hapless humanoids chained to stone pillars in the chamber, and a pile of adventuring gear and weapons in the corner.

Three party members were still "held", they have yet to find any usable goat's wool, and the tide will be coming in at some point, trapping them in the tower for at least 12 hours.

What will they do next?

## **Session 2**

The three active party members acted quickly to bound and gag the Cult Leader. A search of his robes revealed an unholy symbol (in the shape of Blando's tattoo) and a set of keys on a steel ring. After some negotiation, they decided to release the three captives: a Cleric, a Paladin, and Fighter (all human). Getting the Cult Leader to release the three held PCs also required some threats, but he eventually dropped his spell.

There was some debate about what to do with the captives, but the majority decision was that dispatching them all was the safest option.

The party then set about exploring the rest of the tower, ever conscious of the ticking clock of the tide. They discovered two fine crystal basins full of spell scrolls, and some warped and bulging doors that they elected not to open (for fear of flooding the tower). But their greatest discoveries lay in the lowest level, carved into the bedrock upon which the tower was built.

There they discovered a series of rooms with locked doors, apparently used as a prison. The doors opened easily with the keys; most contained only headless corpses, dressed in common clothes consistent with the village of Amrin Ferry, on the North bank of the Estuary (from which place the three new PCs had been kidnapped). They also discovered a chest containing two gems (one of which was a valuable-looking emerald) and, at least, the goat's wool. About half of it was gone, presumably used to make the cultist robes.

Behind the wool was a secret door, revealing a long, foul-smelling passage that possibly leads to the underworld. The party decided to leave it for now.

In the last chamber they discovered a pulsing glow, which turned out to be an elaborately trapped sarcophagus, decorated with a minotaur motif, and surrounded by piles of brass weapons and shields.

Fortunately, they had read about this sarcophagus in a book they found in one of the upper rooms. It was apparently the sarcophagus of *Kazleth*, Maze Lord of **Rappan Athuk**. Their sources described the effects of the various traps, but not how to bypass them, so the party opted for the Holy Trinity of Things that Trigger Traps: 1) ball bearings, 2) Halflings 3) Poles or pole weapons.

Tossing a couple of ball bearings at the sarcophagus revealed a kind of force field around the sarcophagus and the weapons. Stripping himself of metal, Bilkin carried a vial of strange red liquid apparently referred to in the trap descriptions and carefully crawled into the chamber with a rope tied around his waist. He safely bypassed the force field, grabbed a bronze shortsword (which is a normal sword for him) and returned to the corridor.

By this time they were really pushing it for time, so they beat a retreat, where they discovered Blando and Benevan dressing a giant frog, which they planned to eat later. The boats were now burdened with treasure and extra passengers, but they managed to reach Calaca safely, where they began selling off their new acquisitions.

### **Session 3**

The party returned to Calaca to find a lone trader caravan in the village, owned and operated by the traders Zhest and Zhivago. As much of the party's recovered loot was on the macabre side, the traders decided the only place they could sell it on was in the ill-famed metropolis and port city of Castorhage, some 2,400 miles away (the better part of a year's journey).

The party intended to return to the sunken tower the next day for the remainder of the loot, but Zhest and Zhivago were keen to depart, having a long journey ahead of them. In the end they agreed to stay in town if the party (all 9 of them) agreed to sign on as caravan guards on the perilous journey. The party agreed, fixing on a rate of 1 gp per PC per day. Zhest and Zhivago then promptly sacked their existing two guards, Mutt and Geoff.

The next day, the party re-entered the tower and made off with the rest of the bronze weapons and the statue of the skull-squid thing. They also discovered an old map of a maze in the sarcophagus (no body, though). There is as yet no indication of where the maze is located or what lurks inside it. Two possibilities:

- There may be a maze within the megadungeon of Rappan Athuk
- Far to the south, in the land of Hellas, there is a legendary island which is said to have a maze or labyrinth, wherein lurks a powerful minotaur.

Flush with cash from their shopping, the PCs geared up for the 50-day journey northwest to the city of Bard's Gate, where Zhest and Zhivago hope to sell their less ghoulish wares. Squire Ollius, a native of Bard's Gate, re-hired Mutt and Geoff as his personal hirelings.

## Original Dungeons & Dragons

*[These rules] provide the framework around which you will build a game of simplicity or tremendous complexity — your time and imagination are about the only limiting factors...*

Gary Gygax, "Introduction", *Dungeons & Dragons*, 1974

This game is an attempt to recreate the original version of *Dungeons & Dragons*, as published in 1974 in three little brown booklets.

The ruleset we will be using is a "retroclone" (updated version of an older edition of D&D, published under the Open Game License) called Swords & Wizardry WhiteBox. It is available as a free pdf, and as a print-on-demand book from Lulu.

There is also a "clone of the clone": White Box by Seattle Hill Games, also available as a free pdf. This version has some slight differences from Swords & Wizardry, and when the two come in conflict, we will probably go with Swords & Wizardry.

*Swords & Wizardry* comes in two other versions: Core Rules and Complete Rules. These are very different games (Core is closer to Basic D&D and Complete is closer to Advanced Dungeons & Dragons), and we will not be using these rulesets.

## How is it different?

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There are only three classes: Fighter, Magic-User, and Cleric (I will also allow the Thief class). Classes didn't change much as they levelled up.

There are only four races: elf, dwarf, Halfling, and human.

There is no skill system, so most actions are resolved without rolling dice!

There are only two dice needed: a d20 and some d6s.

Spells only go up to 6th level (or 5th for Clerics).

Clerics didn't get a spell at first level.

No Magic Missile!

# Game assumptions

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## Low fantasy, low magic

The "visible" part of the world is human. Towns and cities are exclusively human. Non-humans (Elves, Dwarves, and Halflings) have their own civilizations, largely hidden from the human world. To go there requires an adventure quest. This does not, however, bar players from choosing a non-human race.

Magic is hidden, mysterious, poorly understood, and usually suspect. A level 1 Magic-User is most likely the only person in town who can actually do magic.

There is a lot of "lost" or undiscovered magic out there. The Original Game only had a handful of spells, but I have hidden many, many more out in the dungeons and wilderness, in the form of spell scrolls, spellbooks, and evil Magic-Users. Discovering spells that aren't in the rulebook is a significant and valuable form of treasure. It is also possible for players to invent their own new spells.

## Rulings, not rules

There are fewer than ten specified dice mechanics in the original game. Whenever possible, I intend to resolve actions without dice, based on your descriptions of your character is doing.

When dice are required, I intend to roll in the open as much as possible, and I may not use a screen at all.

## Your character

An Old School character is more like your avatar in game than a fleshed out fictional creation. Instead of frontloading their backstory and personality at character creation, the tendency is to develop the character through play, inventing the details as they become relevant.

## Character death and encounter balance

Encounter balance was not a thing in 1974. You can never assume that combat is winnable. Death is always a possibility. Avoid combat when possible. Trick or evade monsters. Attack when you know you have an advantage. Run away and live to fight another day.

Also, have a look at this [Primer for Old School D&D](#).

# Other Resources

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## Character Sheets

The original "character sheet" was a 3x5 inch index card, and you're welcome to use these. I will most likely be bring some of these to the game. You can also use some plain lined paper.

If you want a pre-printed character sheet, there are two that I endorse:

My favourite one, from [Bloat Games](#)

and [this one for Swords & Wizardry Light](#)

## Player Options

The Original Game claimed to be a "framework around which you will build a game of simplicity or tremendous complexity". So it was probably never intended that there would only be three classes.

However, before Supplements with additional player options were published, Players and Game Masters had to make up any additions to the game themselves! So if there's a class, or a spell, or any other character ability that isn't in the main rules, "homebrewing" our own version would be a good way to add it in while keeping in the original spirit of the game.

Barring that, I recommend you stick to playing the three original classes or the Thief for your first character.

## Thieves

The Thief class I use comes from the [White Box Companion](#), published by Barrel Rider Games.

The class is open to humans, elves, and halflings. Elves and Halflings have no level limits when playing the Thief class. Thieves have no alignment restriction (you may be a Lawful Thief), nor must they literally be "thieves" (any more than Bilbo Baggins was literally a burglar). Thieves do not have the ability to climb walls without climbing gear. They are not Spider-man.

## Other Classes

I don't usually allow Bards or Monks, but there are some other [Player Options](#) I will consider, especially as play continues beyond the first session.

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