

Olde House Rules: Basic Fantasy

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A fantasy campaign of barbarian heroes in a primitive world threatened by terrible invading armies, foul monsters, and treacherous magic.

The world and game systems are based on fairy tales, myth, older swords & sorcery, and how we played role-playing games back in the '70s/early '80s. This is not "modern fantasy", D&D fanfic, or Tolkien-ism.

The core rules are [Basic Fantasy RPG, 4th Edition \(BF4E\)](#).

Reading List

- Bear, Greg: Songs of Earth and Power (aka The Infinity Concerto/The Serpent Mage)
- Burroughs, Edgar Rice: Barsoom, Pellucidar, Tarzan
- Cook, Glen: Black Company, Dread Empire
- Howard, Robert E.: Conan, Kull
- Leiber, Fritz: Fafhrd & the Gray Mouser
- Lovecraft, H.P.: Dream Cycle, "The Nameless City", etc.
- Moorcock, Michael: Elric saga, The Eternal Champion
- Peake, Mervyn: Gormenghast
- Pini, Wendy & Richard: ElfQuest
- Smith, Clark Ashton: Zothique, Averroigne
- Spenser, Edmund: The Faerie Queene
- Vance, Jack: Dying Earth, etc.
- Zelazny, Roger: Amber Chronicles, Jack of Shadows, Lord of Light

See also my [Inspirational Media for Fantasy Games](#)

And **No Clerics Allowed**: Obviously I'm using BF instead of my customized D&D now.

I recommend using [James V. West's character sheets](#)

Characters

Abilities

- **Adjustment:** You can swap one pair of scores.
- **Hopeless Characters:** If you roll all six scores 12 or lower, you can discard and reroll.
- **Ability Roll:** (BF4E pg.179), difficulty modifiers: Easy is +5, Average is +0, Hard is -5, Challenging is -10.

Hit Points (HP)

All character species add their CON/2 to base Hit Points, and add Hit Dice to that. PCs can always reroll 1's on Hit Dice.

Background Skills

See BF-Background-Skills supplement. Tasks related to the background skill will be possible, or one difficulty easier when making Ability Rolls.

d100	Background	d100	Background
01-04	Advocate	53-56	Jeweler
05-08	Alchemist	57-60	Mason
09-12	Armorer	61-64	Merchant
13-16	Blacksmith	65-68	Navigator
17-20	Bowyer/Fletcher	69-72	Physician
21-24	Brewer	73-76	Potter
25-28	Cobbler	77-80	Sailor
29-32	Carpenter	81-84	Tailor
33-36	Cook	85-88	Tanner
37-40	Engineer	89-92	Weapon Smith
41-44	Farmer	93-96	Weaver
45-48	Gem Cutter	97-100	Woodsman
49-52	Herbalist		

Species

- **Human**
 - **Classes:** Fighter, Thief, Magic-User.
 - **Lucky:** Once per session, can reroll one die roll just made.
 - **Experience:** +20% to all gained experience.
 - **Lifespan:** 70 years.
- **Dwarf**
 - **Classes:** Fighter, Thief, or multiclass Fighter/Thief. Thief is limited to max 6th-Level.
 - **Lifespan:** 120 years.
- **Wood Elf**
 - **Classes:** Fighter, Thief, or multiclass Fighter/Magic-User. Single-class Fighter is limited to max 6th-Level, multiclass is limited to max 4th-Level.
 - Does not have Darkvision.
 - **Lifespan:** 210 years (but often extended with magic).
- **Halfling**
 - **Classes:** Fighter, Thief. Fighter is limited to max 4th-Level.
 - **Lifespan:** 90 years.
- **Other:** Other humanoids or near may be allowed, after they have been met and allied with in play. Goblins, Hobgoblins, Trolls, and Ogres are not going to be friendly.

Class

Fighter

Warriors are by far the most common, and generally competent & powerful character type.

- **Parry:** By fighting defensively, Fighters take a -2 penalty on attack bonus, but gain +2 AC bonus for the round.
- **War Machine:** Single-class Fighters attacking foes of 1 HD or less, make attacks equal to their Level.
- **Martial Skill:** Single-class Fighters at Levels 3, 6, 9, 12, etc. can pick one Martial Skill:
 - **Archery:** Gain +1 to hit & damage with a Longbow or Shortbow, and increase ranges by 10/20/30.
 - **Attack Speed:** At 6th-Level, make 2 attacks per round if foe is of equal or lower Level. At 12th-Level, this increases to 3 attacks. Does not "stack" with War Machine.
 - **Berserker:** Only Chaotic Fighters may choose this. Once per day up to 5th-Level, twice at 6th- to 11th-Level, thrice at 12th-Level and up, you can go Berserk. You cannot Parry, use magic items, use a Shield or ranged weapon, or carry a burden (even backpack), you must throw them down. You gain +2 to hit & damage, and +2d6 temporary Hit Points, and must charge to fight all foes until none remain. 2d6 rounds later, it ends. Any damage taken in excess of the temporary remains.
 - **Weapon Mastery:** Pick one specific melee weapon type to master; the same weapon cannot be chosen twice. When using the mastered weapon, gain non-magical +1 to hit & damage. May be able to do "stunts" (disarming, throwing, etc.) at Referee's whim.

Thief

Rogues are the next most common character type. Their thieving skills are preternatural.

- Requirements: Must be Chaos or Balance.
- Add DEX score to chance for Open Locks, Pick Pockets, Move Silently, Hide in Shadows.
- Add INT score to chance for Remove Traps, Listen.
- Skill chances max out at 98%, after all modifiers, 99-00 always fails.
- **Poisons:** Thieves can safely handle poisons at 3rd-Level. Low-Level Thieves and all other classes must make a DEX Roll when applying poisons, or they inject themselves.
- **Sneak Attack:** Does 3x damage at 5th-Level, 4x damage at 9th-Level.

Magic-User

Magic-Users are somewhat rare, and their arts are untrusted by superstitious folk. While there are Magic-Users of all alignments, those of Law are rare, most are Chaos or Balance, as disrupting natural order is inherently un-Lawful.

- Add INT Bonus to 1st-Spell Level spells/day at 1st-Level & up.
- At 1st-Level, pick Read Magic, Detect Magic, and 1 + INT Bonus 1st-Spell Level spells to know. At each new Level, learn additional spells to match spells/day increase.

For example, a Magician with INT 13 (+1) starts able to cast two 1st-Spell Level spells per day, and knows RM, DM, and 2 other spells. At 2nd-Level, one 1st-Spell Level spell is learned. At 3rd-Level, one 2nd-Spell Level spell is learned, and so on.

Cleric

Does not exist.

Zero-Level

(aka "Normal Men", see BF4E pg. 53)

90% of the population are Level 0, Hit Points = CON/2, Saving Throws NM, XP -1000 to -1. At apprenticeship, they make a class choice, and use that class's weapons and armor, and can use magic items as that class. If they reach 0 XP, they become Level 1, and add a hit die. Militia & thugs are 0th-Level Fighters, beggars & urchins are 0th-Level Thieves, students & scribes are 0th-Level Magic-Users.

Multiclass (aka "Combination Classes")

- Fighter/Thief can only use thieving skills in Leather. They can use all weapons.
- Fighter/Magic-User can only cast spells in Leather, or Magic Chain Mail. They can use all weapons.
- Thief/Magic-User can only cast spells in Leather. They can use all weapons.

When a class reaches max Level, it continues consuming EP, but provides no further benefit, use only the other class's HD, attack bonus, etc. *e.g. an Elf Fighter/Magic-User reaches 4th-Level (4d6 HP, +3 AB) at 18,000 EP; 5th-Level needs 36,000 EP (16K for Fighter, 20K for M-U), provides only +1d4 HP, and AB won't increase to +4 until 9th-Level.*

Languages

Suggested languages:

1. Beastfolk		11. Goblinoid
2. Caveman		12. Harpy
3. Demonic		13. Kobold
4. Draconic		14. Lizardfolk
5. Dwarf		15. Medusa
6. Faerie / Low Elven		16. Minotaur
7. Gargoyle		17. Naga
8. Giantish		18. Troll
9. Gnoll		19. Undeath
10. Gnome		20. Ancient / High Language

Alignment

Choose your cosmic faction.

Law, Balance, and Chaos are primal, alien factions. They have nothing to do with mortal conceptions of "good" or "evil".

There are no "gods" as mortals typically consider them, but there are powerful Avatars of each faction. Avatars are capable of meddling in the material plane, but this draws the attention and reprisal of the opposed faction, so they almost entirely work through mortal agents.

Betrayal of Alignment loses benefits, earns curses, and ultimately leads to punishment by an Avatar. Characters cannot typically leave their Alignment, even through death; some pacts do allow Alignment change, but they will be forever changed and marked by it.

- **Law:** Static, eternal tyranny, and uniformity. Feudal civilizations are usually Lawful. The Avatars of Law are Archons.
- **Chaos:** Freedom, disruption, and uniqueness. Barbaric and democratic cultures are usually Chaotic. The Avatars of Chaos are Demons.
- **Balance (aka Neutral):** Nature's desire to be left alone. Faeries, wild folk, hermits, communal "hippies", and other isolated people are Balance. The Avatars of Balance are Elementals.

Also anyone with pure self-interest or unawareness of the cosmic war. Most rural people, animals, and monsters are Neutral.

Experience

Level up happens between sessions. Usually this does not require training, the character is assumed to have been working on their skills and researching new spells during the Level.

There are several new sources of experience:

Source	Award	Notes
Defeating an Enemy	as usual	—
Completing a Quest Objective	quest Level x 100 EP	Often a single larger quest will have several objectives, each of which is distinct but adds to the mission. For example, defeating each boss of a dungeon, and then exploding a hive where they spawn from.
Exploring an Unknown Area Completely	area Level x 100 EP	A small dungeon floor, wilderness map page, town, or whatever, typically 10-30 areas / points of interest is a good Unknown Area. Secret and restricted areas should be found and explored. Large maps can be broken up into several areas, or just increase the award.
Gaining a Magical Item	item bonus x 200 EP	The first person to take ownership, use it extensively, and bind or attune to it earns experience. Borrowing, hand-me-downs in party, or buying from a shop provide no award.
Donating Wealth	GP donated x 1 EP	Only gold which is spent uselessly earns experience. Donation to town or temple, carousing, training, commissioning public art, etc. If you gain anything material from it, it's worth no EP.
Class-Related Task	Level x 1-100 EP	Any activity using your class's skills. Multiple depends on the situation, from casual use: 1x, in combat: 10x, saving others (not just your party): 20x, saving the world: 100x.

Equipment

Starting Items

Adventurers roll 3d6 GP, take the Everyone bundle, and a bundle for their class; multiclassers pick one. Then choose either a 1st-Level spell Scroll, a Healing Potion, or Antidote Potion potency 1.

Everyone	Fighter	Thief	Magic-User
Clothing, Traveller	Leather Armor	Cloak	Staff
Club or Dagger	Shield	Dagger	Spellbook
2 Large Sacks	Spear	Sling & 20 Stones	Quill
Blanket	Hand Axe or Mace	Thieves Picks	Ink
6 Torches	Sling & 20 Stones	50' Rope	20 sheets Paper
Tinderbox		12 Iron Spikes	
7 Days Trail Rations		Mallet	
Waterskin			
(total: 21 GP)	(total: 38 GP)	(total: 38 GP)	(total: 38 GP)

Items

- **Crossbow, Light & Heavy:** Does +1 damage, ignores 2 AC of target (minimum 11).
- **Sword:** All swords are double price, +1 damage against low-armor targets (AC 14 or less), or against giant-size targets.
- **Candle:** A breeze will blow it out on 1 on d6, strong wind on 1-5 on d6.
- **Holy Symbol, Holy Water:** Has no magical effect.
- **Lantern:** Lanterns are not available (won't be invented until 18th C).
- **Oil, flask:** Does not work like napalm, see **Alchemy** below.
- **Paper:** 1 SP per sheet.
- **Torch:** Burns for 12 Turns. A strong wind will blow it out on 1-2 on d6.

Weapons	Cost	Weight	Notes
Blowgun	5 GP	1	Range 30/60/90.
Blowgun Dart	1 SP	*	Dmg d3, often poisoned.
Caltrops, 12	1 GP	5	Covers a 5' r., save to avoid (+AC bonus, +2 for hard boots, +1 for soft boots), does Dmg d3, 1/2 MV until healed.
Main Gauche	8 GP	3	Dual wield weapon, Dmg d4+1 or +1 AC.
Mallet	2 SP	1	Tool, dmg d3.
Net	5 GP	10	Dmg d4, entangle unless save vs. paralysis.
Whip	1 GP	2	Dmg 1, entangle unless save vs. paralysis.
Armor & Clothing			
Boots, Hard	4 GP	—	Solid foot protection, noisy, +2 AC if feet are targeted.
Boots, Soft	2 GP	—	Moderate foot protection, +1 AC if feet are targeted.
Clothing, Peasant	1 SP	—	-2 reaction when persuading anyone above Peasant.
Clothing, Traveller	1 GP	—	-1 reaction when persuading anyone above Citizen. Good against hard weather.
Clothing, Winter	8 GP	—	Good against cold winter weather.
Clothing, Craftsman	5 GP	—	-1 reaction when persuading anyone above Citizen.
Clothing, Merchant	20 GP	—	+1 reaction when persuading.
Clothing, Noble	75 GP	—	+2 reaction when persuading.
General Goods			
Bucket	5 SP	5	Bulky.
Lantern	1 GP	2	Holds a candle, but cannot be blown out by wind.
Notebook, 128 pages	15 GP	3	

Materials

- **Normal** weapons & armor (metal) are made with high iron or low steel, but can be upgraded. Mostly wood & leather items cannot (currently?).
- **Bone or Stone** weapons & armor are 10% cost, but do half damage or AC bonus, and break 1 on d6 each hit given or taken.
- **Bronze or Cold Iron** weapons & armor are full cost, have normal effect, but break on a natural 1 on attack or 20 on defense. Wood Elves much prefer bronze. Cold iron may be effective against some monsters.
- **High Steel** weapons & armor are 500% cost, do +1 damage or AC, can only be purchased from Dwarfs.
- **Silvered** weapons (normal iron core with silver plating) cost 10x, **gilded** weapons (gold plating) cost 100x, both do normal damage but may be effective against some monsters.

Alchemy

Typically available only in the largest cities, but there are some rural witches and alchemists who sell a few potions, or more often offer them as rewards for quests. Supplies will be limited, d6 each of the cheapest, d4-2 of the better ones. Better magic items are rarely found, and will be thousands of GP, usually auctioned off.

Each potion type is typically only usable once per day, repeated use has no effect or may act as a Potency 1 poison.

Item	Cost	Notes
Acid	100 GP	Can be thrown with 10' range, does d6 damage to target, 1 HP to all within 5'. Make a saving throw or be permanently scarred, -1 CHA. Items make a saving throw or degrade one step (Referee's discretion). Acid throwing is illegal in civilization.
Alchemical Fire	100 GP	Burning sticky oil, works like napalm.
Poison, Blade, Potency 1	100 GP	Inflicts Potency 1 poison, stays on weapon for 3 hits or 3 turns. Only Thieves can use it safely.
Poison, Blade, Potency 2	400 GP	Inflicts Potency 2 poison, stays on weapon for 3 hits or 3 turns. Only Thieves can use it safely.
Potion, Antidote, Potency 1	200 GP	Neutralizes Potency 1 poison.
Potion, Antidote, Potency 2	800 GP	Neutralizes Potency 1-2 poison.
Potion, Extra-Healing	400 GP	Heals 3d8+3 HP, usable 1 / day.
Potion, Healing	100 GP	Heals d8+1 HP, usable 1 / day.
Potion, Heroism	500 GP	Gives +2 to attack bonus, +10 HP, for 4+d4 Turns.
Potion, Love	400 GP	May cause a target to fall in love with the first person they see. Duration varies.
Potion, Speed	200 GP	Doubles movement, +1 attack/round, for d4 Turns.
Poultice, Healing	25 GP	Herbalism. Restores d4 HP over next hour, usable 1 / day.
Scroll	100+ GP	See Magic .

Retainers, Specialists, Mercenaries

(aka Henchmen, Specialists, Hirelings)

Mercenary prices are per week, not per month. Porters, cooks, and other "camp followers" cost 1-4 GP per week.

Advertising for assistants costs 1-20 GP per week. 2d6 mercenaries have a GP x 25% chance to be found, d3 specialists or potential retainers have a GP x 5% chance.

Mercenaries & specialists will **never** enter a dungeon or monster lair. They're only suited to guarding wagons & camps, fighting bandits and other mundane threats.

Retainers want a stipend of 1-10 GP per week, and a 1/10 to 1/2 share of treasure (assuming each main PC gets 1 full share), which will increase their morale & loyalty. Retainers earn 50% as much XP as adventurers. Even a lowly torchbearer must be hired & motivated as a retainer to get them to enter a dungeon.

Memorization

Magic-Users must study their spells from a "spellbook", which may be a scholarly grimoire, a witch's book of shadows, or a hexenhammer or holy book; or a skull, idol, cauldron, magic mirror, or standing stone where a spirit is trapped; or cave paintings or mosaics in a magic cave; or any other source of knowledge. In many cases all common spells are actually recorded in the spellbook, but only certain ones are understood and can be memorized.

No more than one copy of a spell may be memorized. Spells cast are not forgotten, but dormant until the next day. Re-memorization is only needed to change spell load-out.

Evil indicates only supernatural beings and hostile magic. No mundane, mortal being or object is considered Evil, regardless of intentions. So there's also no reversed form of these spells.

There are no "Clerics", but a limited amount of "Light Magic" spells are available to Magic-Users, typically at one level higher, and many can never be used more than once per day on the same target. Instead, use potions.

In this world, there is a moral/extradimensional power source distinction between **Light Magic**, which is about healing and protection; **Dark Magic**, which is about harm, torment, and violation of natural law; **Grey Magic**, which is utility spells in between; and **Green Magic**, which is purely nature-oriented. Mechanically, we're not dealing with that, but if you want to stay in character, Chaotic Magicians would prefer Dark or Grey, and rarely use Green; Balance would prefer Grey or Green but can use all; Lawful would prefer Light and rarely use even Grey or Green.

"The tomes which held Turjan's sorcery lay on the long table of black steel or were thrust helter-skelter into shelves. These were volumes compiled by many wizards of the past, untidy folios collected by the Sage, leather-bound librams setting forth the syllables of a hundred powerful spells, so cogent that Turjan's brain could know but four at a time."

Turjan found a musty portfolio, turned the heavy pages to the spell the Sage had shown him, the Call to the Violent Cloud. He stared down at the characters and they burned with an urgent power, pressing off the page as if frantic to leave the dark solitude of the book.

Turjan closed the book, forcing the spell back into oblivion. He robed himself with a short cape, tucked a blade into his belt, fitted the amulet holding Laccodel's Rune to his wrist. Then he sat down and from a journal chose the spells he would take with him. What dangers he might meet he could not know, so he selected three spells of general application: the Excellent Prismatic Spray, Phandal's Mantle of Stealth, and the Spell of the Slow Hour."
—Jack Vance, "Turjan of Miir"

Light Magic Spells

Level 1

1. Purify Food & Water
2. Remove Fear *
3. Resist Cold

Level 2

1. Cure Light Wounds * (1)
2. Resist Fire
3. Speak with Animals

Level 3

1. Charm Animal
2. Find Traps
3. Silence, 15' radius

(1) Can only be used on a target once per day.

Level 4

1. Create Water
2. Growth of Animals
3. Speak with Dead
4. Speak with Plants
5. Sticks to Snakes
6. Striking

Level 5

1. Create Food
2. Cure Serious Wounds * (1)
3. Insect Plague
4. Neutralize Poison * (1)

Level 6

1. Animate Objects
2. Blade Barrier
3. Heal * (1)
4. Speak with Monsters
5. True Seeing

New Dark Magic Spells

- **Featherweight** (M-U 1st): Range: 10' /Level, Duration: 1 round/Level, Area: 1 target/Level, maximum weight 200 lbs/Level. Can be cast instantly with no preparation or more than a second's time. Requires & consumes a feather, which must be in the caster's possession or pockets. The creatures or objects affected assume the mass of the feather. Falling is reduced to 30' /round, and landing inflicts no damage. Missiles affected do no damage. Creatures affected may jump up to 10x normal distance. Gusts of wind will pick up and blow the targets along.

Alchemy Production

- **Scrolls:** Magic-Users can create scrolls of known spells, this takes 1 week per spell level, and costs Spell Level² x 100 GP in vellum and rare inks.
- **Potions:** At 5th-Level, Magic-Users learn alchemy and may create potions at a setup cost of 1000 GP for a lab and ongoing cost of 200 GP per week to produce 4 vials of a lesser potion or poison, or one vial of a greater potion. This requires 4 hours of work per day, so at most 2 to 4 (with some chance of failure) batches can be run at once, in separate labs. Each potion's recipe must be learned separately, rarely given out by the Referee or learned by magical research.

Adventure

- I don't generally track encumbrance. Armor and guesstimate of light or heavy load determines movement. Don't be jerks and we won't have to do accounting.
- Normal movement speeds are 3x listed. In dungeons, there are two move phases per Turn (so unarmored, light load move 120' per round, or 240' per Turn). Running is a further 3x, but is incautious and permits no mapping or detection of traps or secrets.

Encounter

These are mostly optional "tweaks", but fit the setting better than the standard rules:

- **Initiative:** Combatants act in order from highest DEX to lowest; resolve ties in any reasonable way. Quick DEX for monsters = Movement rate x 3/10' (e.g. 40'=DEX 12).
- **Death:** Save vs Death optional rule (BF4E: pg. 178)
- **Poison:** On failure, inflicts 1d6 damage per round for Potency rounds (BF4E: pg. 179)
- **Critical Hit:** On a natural roll of 20, always hit and do maximum damage.
- **Fumble:** On a natural roll of 1, always miss. Roll d6: 1-2: Drop weapon, 3-4: Fall prone, 5-6: Hit ally.
- **Combat Options:** See BF-Combat-Options-Supplement: Two-Weapon Combat, Defending, Shield Bash, Light Weapons, Called Shots, Mounted Combat (Fighters only).
- **Subduing Damage:** Only actual blunt weapons (Club, Staff, Mace, Flail, etc.) can be used to inflict subdual damage, and there is no attack penalty.

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