

Pits & Perils

Rules for 1:1 Scale Role-Playing Games in a World of Medieval Fantasy

by
James & Robyn George



Wide
House
Rules

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Electronic Edition

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INTRODUCTION

Fantasy role-playing games were born in the early 1970s. Back then, they were just a special kind of war game. They still used miniatures and emphasized tactical situations, but instead of commanding an army, each player ran a single character (called a 1:1 scale) and worked together to explore a medieval world of magic, monsters, and deadly traps.

The earliest games were a primitive affair. Most rules were designed by amateurs for their own enjoyment, typed in someone's basement, and shared with friends in the war-gaming community. The result was often a crappy little rulebook with bad print and makeshift artwork.

But despite their shoddy appearance, the games were fun. The rules were kept simple and open-ended, so the referee could change anything to suit their own campaign or playing style. And the lack of detailed rules meant that players had to rely on their wits as much, if not more, than the abilities of their characters. Everything else was left to the imagination.

This book aims to recreate the earliest fantasy games, right down to the artwork, influences (early 1970s), and writing style. However, it is more than just a clever recreation. These rules are fully playable and meant to be enjoyed by anyone desiring a simpler game. Of course, the rules are just a guide, and creative players are free to imagine anything!

GETTING STARTED

Fantasy war games work like this:

One player is the referee. They design an adventure, often, a dungeon or similar underground area to be explored. The remaining players each create their own character, with 3-5 being ideal for a fantasy campaign.

During play, the referee describes what is happening, and the players decide what, if anything, their characters are going to do. The rulebook is then consulted and dice rolled to determine the outcome of things like combat and/or magic use, etc. However, the referee has the final say.

Each new game picks up where the last one left off as part of an ongoing fantasy campaign. If the characters survive, they will gain valuable experience and get better at what they do. Some may even find unique magic items to boost their power. Of course, others will die (the player simply creates a new one), although death is seldom permanent. Survival depends on more than just a character's powers and abilities. The players must cooperate and make good decisions, and the best dungeons force everyone to think.

Players should act out the part of their characters. Often, success will depend on what they say and do in the game. Likewise, the referee may assume the role of enemy monsters and/or various supporting characters. Clever negotiation can sometimes accomplish more than fighting. This is a fantasy war game, but it is also a role-playing game.

Teamwork is very important. The players are not competing with one another and must work together to survive. Likewise, the referee is an impartial judge and moderator. While they devise challenges for the characters, they are not out to get the players and must be fair and just. The game is more of a social contract, like Cowboys and Indians, with dice and rules.

GAME CONCEPTS

Players should know the following:

DICE

Unlike other systems, Pits & Perils uses regular 6-sided dice, commonly referred to as a d6. When the rules say to roll two dice, this will be written as 2d6 (2 is the number of dice to be rolled). Combat actions require a 9 or better on 2d6 and non-combat actions 7 or better, although this is subject to modifiers for difficulty and/or certain magic items.

FIGURES

Miniatures can be used to represent characters and monsters. This is not required, although their use is recommended because it adds spectacle and makes position and movement very important. If using miniature figures, the following should apply:

The game is played on a 1:1 scale, where one figure on the tabletop equals a single character or monster, etc.

For game purposes, 25/28 mm (1:72 scale) figures are best.

On the tabletop, 1 inch equals 10' (called a 1:120 scale). This is measured using a ruler or by sight if everyone agrees.

ROLE-PLAYING

Any character run by a player is referred to as a player character. Of course, the referee will run supporting characters, like a kindly innkeeper or enemy warlord, etc. These are called non-player characters. Sometimes, this includes enemy monsters, like a goblin chieftain or vampire lord.

A SAMPLE GAME

Bardo (a fighter), Rasputin (a magician), and Thingul (the dwarf) are exploring the cellars beneath an old castle:

REFEREE: You find the entrance to a darkened room.

BARDO: What does it look like?

REFEREE: It's too dark. Are you going in?

BARDO: I use the torch and look inside. Do I see anything?

REFEREE: It's a 10' x 10' room with stone walls and a wooden floor.

BARDO: Can I see anything else?

REFEREE: There's what looks like a chest on the opposite wall.

RASPUTIN: It might be a treasure!

BARDO: Or a trap. What's the condition of the floor?

REFEREE: The wood looks dry, but stable.

THINGUL: I'll go in. I'm lighter, and I want what's in that chest!

BARDO: Let's extinguish the torch so we don't attract monsters.

RASPUTIN: Good idea.

THINGUL: Yeah, that way I can see in the dark.

REFEREE: It takes a round for your eyes to adjust, and then you go in.

THINGUL: What do I see?

REFEREE: It looks like an old storage room. There are piles of debris along the north wall and some broken crates to the south.

THINGUL: What about the chest?

REFEREE: It's in better condition, but that's not saying much.

THINGUL: I keep going. How do the floorboards sound when I walk across?

REFEREE: The floorboards creak, but that's about it.

THINGUL: OK, then I head for the chest. What does it look like?

REFEREE: It looks dusty, but otherwise intact.

THINGUL: OK, I...

REFEREE: Just then, you feel something ticking your neck.

THINGUL: What is it?

REFEREE: A giant spider is attacking from above. Roll initiative, and take off -2 for being surprised.

THINGUL: I got a 2.

REFEREE: I rolled a 4, so the spider gets first attack.

THINGUL: I should have checked the ceiling!

REFEREE (rolling attack dice): The spider gets 9. Roll saving dice at -1.

THINGUL: I got a 5, even with my bonus (+1 for being a dwarf).

REFEREE: You take 1 hit of damage and become paralyzed.

BARDO: Do I see anything? Rasputin lights the torch, and we look in!

REFEREE: This takes a full round.

RASPUTIN: Fine.

REFEREE: You see a giant spider wrapping Thingul in a web. It looks like he's unconscious or something.

BARDO: I draw my sword to attack.

RASPUTIN: I grab the vial of anti-venom and prepare a Bolt spell...

Play continues until the spider is slain. From here, the party may either turn back or keep exploring. The choice is theirs. This book contains everything needed to get started, including how to create a character, play the game, and run a campaign. However, these rules are just a guide. Anything not included can be added by an enterprising referee. Dark dungeons await...

I. PLAYER RULES

Pits & Perils is a fantasy war game. This is sometimes called a fantasy role-playing game instead. Each player creates their own character and goes on adventures run by another player, called the referee. He (or she) will have already designed an adventure, usually, a dungeon or similar underground area to explore. This section explains how to create a character and equip them for these challenging and perilous expeditions.

ABILITIES

First, players establish their character's attributes and abilities. This is done by rolling 2d6 on the following table:

2d6	ABILITY	ACTIONS	LIMITS
2	Strength	bend bars, lift gates	men only
3-4	Intelligence	know legends, lore	--
5	Dexterity	climb walls, stealth	--
6-7	Wisdom	detect lies, find clues	--
8	Constitution	withstand adversity	--
9-10	Charisma	lead, persuade others	elves, men
11-12	Any 2 (choose)	--	--

Abilities determine what actions a character may attempt in the game. These will affect play as follows:

STRENGTH relates to physical prowess. All characters are strong to some extent, but only men (humans) can be mighty. The character may attempt feats of great strength, like forcing open a stuck door, etc.

INTELLIGENCE refers to knowledge and learning ability. Note that while players are expected to think for themselves, learned characters might recall facts about the game world, like the location of some artifact.

DEXTERITY is a measure of speed, balance, and coordination. Fast characters can attempt to hide, sneak, and steal small objects, like a coin purse. However, this may not be possible in metal armor and/or shields.

WISDOM means empathy and intuition. Players must still rely on their own judgment. However, wise characters might notice things others miss, like fresh tracks or knowing when someone is lying to them.

CONSTITUTION indicates health and well-being. Hardy characters can hold their breath and swim rough waters, etc. The referee might also grant them a bonus (+1) to saving dice against things like disease and/or poison.

CHARISMA is charm and leadership ability. Players should always act out their personal interactions. However, leaders can attempt to influence others and even lie to them. Dwarves are too surly to be charismatic.

CLASS AND RACE

Next, players choose their character's class (or profession). Sometimes, class will be the same as race. Non-human folk rarely interact with the race of men, and those who do tend to share similar abilities. The different character classes include the following:

CLASS	ARMOR	WEAPONS	SPECIAL ABILITIES
Cleric	any	non-edged	turn away undead, work miracles
Dwarf	any	any	better saving dice, find traps
Elf	chain	any	cast spells, detect magic
Fighter	any	any	better hit points, fighting skill
Magician	none	dagger, staff	cast spells, create magic items
Thief	leather	dagger	disarm traps, pick locks, stealth

This game imagines a world where men (humans) predominate. Except where noted (dwarves and elves), all classes are human. Dwarves and elves have their own clerics, but these only interact with their own kind.

CLERICS are members of a religious order. They are good fighters in their own right and can perform miracles and turn the undead. At high levels, they can even raise the dead. Most clerics are lawful, although a few may be chaotic (evil) instead. The nature of religious worship is such that clerics can never be neutral, and the referee will monitor the character's behavior to ensure that it remains pleasing to their gods.

As fighting priests, clerics can wear full armor and shield. However, their religion forbids the shedding of blood, so they may only fight with non-edged weapons, like the club or mace (arrows are not allowed). Clerics get faith points (FP) to work miracles. These can be used to cure disease or heal, as per the magician spells of the same name. They may also attempt to turn away undead enemies, like skeletons or zombies. At 9th level (high priest), clerics can raise the dead, although this is very difficult.

DWARVES are a race of short, stocky underground people. They stand 4' tall and live in the mountains, where they mine the earth and fashion items of exquisite beauty. Dwarves prize gold and tend to be greedy. In fact, gold is the reason most leave home in the first place. For all this, dwarves are lawful and value personal honor above all things. To outsiders, they appear stubborn. Players rolling either strength or charisma must take constitution instead, although other dwarves will still see them as great leaders.

Despite their small size, dwarves are hardy folk. This gives them +1 to all saving dice, +2 against manmade traps. All dwarves live underground, so they can identify unsafe construction one-third of the time (1-2 in 1d6). This includes mechanical traps and natural hazards, like knowing when a ceiling might collapse. For game purposes, dwarves can see in darkness (except magical darkness) out to 30'. This is negated by torchlight. They speak their own language and the tongue of humanity.

ELVES are a race of slender, graceful, forest dwellers. They stand 5' tall and have pointed ears. Elves are immortal, or nearly so, and they often seem detached from mortal concerns. In truth, their longevity gives them unique insight, and they are innately good and wise. Elves are neutral, but only because they can see the big picture. They are too frail to be strong. If the player rolls strength, they must take wisdom instead.

Lithe fighters, elves cannot wear more than chainmail armor. They prefer bows (except crossbows) and small, light weapons. Magically attuned, elves cast spells like an apprentice (1st level) magician, although spell duration and effect do not improve, even as the character advances. They can identify the presence of magic one-third of the time (1-2 in 1d6) if within 30'. Elves speak their own language and the tongue of men, and the referee may allow them to communicate with other woodland creatures.

FIGHTERS are men-at-arms. They can wear full armor and shield and fight with any weapon. Fighters get +1 to attack dice and start the game with better hit points than other classes. At 9th level (champion), they get 2 melee attacks per combat round. Fighters can align themselves with law, chaos, or remain neutral. Most are simple mercenaries. What fighters lack in the way of magic, they make up for in sheer physical might.

MAGICIANS are powerful spell casters. This can be anything from a tribal shaman to a highborn sorcerer. The druids (followers of the old, nature-based religion) were doubtless magicians of the highest order. They are generally poor fighters, preferring instead their books. Magicians can follow law, chaos, or remain neutral, and this may affect what kind of magic items they use in the game. In general, lawful characters seek the knowledge to do good, while chaotic and neutral types just want power.

Physically weak, magicians cannot wear armor or shield and may only fight with a dagger or staff. However, they get spell points (SP) to work magic and have access to powerful spells. Furthermore, they can use a wide variety of unique magic items, like staves and wands. At 9th level (wizard), they can fashion a variety of magic items, although this takes time. The referee may also let them distil their own potions. Magicians can become very powerful at higher levels, balanced by their lack of armor and effective weaponry.

THIEVES are scoundrels. They hide, sneak, and steal when the opportunity presents itself, often from their own companions. However, their skills are in high demand, so they often join adventuring parties. By their very nature, thieves can never be lawful. Most are chaotic (evil) or neutral, and all seek wealth through guile and treachery. At higher levels, thieves can make deadly sneak attacks. They are not to be trusted.

Given to stealth, thieves cannot wear more than leather armor and may only fight with a dagger. They cannot use shields. For game purposes, thieves get dexterity in addition to whatever else the player rolls. Should the player roll dexterity a second time, they get +1 to all dice for stealth. Furthermore, thieves can disarm traps and pick locks. At 9th level (robber baron), they attack from behind for double (backstabbing) damage.

The above-listed classes cover most fantasy types. For instance, a knight is simply a lawful fighter with a sworn oath to protect the weak. Of course, the referee is free to add new classes or modify existing ones to suit their own campaign. Having a good back-story, like the aforementioned knight, is another way to make good characters. This is a role-playing game, so a character's background and personal history will be very important.

TOTAL HITS

Hit points (HP) represent a character's ability to suffer harm. Any damage taken in combat is subtracted from their total hits. When these fall to zero or less, that character is dead. Magic and miracles can restore lost hits immediately, and high-level clerics can raise the dead. Otherwise, the wounded must rest. This is explained in the game rules.

CHOOSING SIDE

All characters have a personal philosophy, called their side. Except where noted, they can follow law, chaos, or stay neutral:

LAWFUL characters are honorable and generally "good" in behavior. They cooperate with others and keep their word. If nothing else, lawful types are steadfast in their support of party objectives.

CHAOTIC types are unpredictable and, often, quite evil. In general, chaotics are self-interested, making them difficult to trust unless the party appeals to their selfish interests. For instance, the promise of riches.

NEUTRAL characters are non-committed. They are practical enough to see the value of cooperation, while remaining firmly self-interested. Mercenary fighters, henchmen, and adventurers in general fall into this group.



CLERIC



DWARF



ELF



FIGHTER



MAGICIAN



THIEF

Players must behave according to their chosen side. When it becomes clear that a character has actually changed sides, there may be repercussions, like a backlash from the church (lawful) or the lower powers (chaos). Note that lawful characters must always declare their orientation to others. Chaotic dwarves and elves are rare, but possible. Such characters will be shunned by their own kind and mainly associate with men.

ARMOR AND EQUIPMENT

Characters start with a backpack, bedroll, 1 week's rations, and a single weapon of the player's choice. They also get 1d6 x 10 gold pieces (GP) to cover additional needs, like armor or a pack mule. Of course, players are free to pool their money for group purchases:

ARMOR	PROTECTION	COST	EQUIPMENT	NOTES	COST
Leather	light (+1)	10	Backpack	--	2
Chainmail	medium (+2)	30	Bedroll	--	1
Plate mail	heavy (+3)	50	Lantern	--	3
Shield	light (+1)	10	Mallet	--	2
			Pole	10'	1
MISSILES	RANGE	COST	Rations	7 days	5
Bow, long*	200'	25	Rope	50'	3
Bow, short*	150'	15	Spike, iron	--	2
Crossbow*	180'	20	Stake, wooden	--	1
Sling shot*	200'	5	Tinder box	--	3
			Torch	--	1
WEAPONS	RANGE	COST	Water skin	1 quart	2
Axe, hand#	30'	3	MOUNTS	NOTES	COST
Axe, great*	10'	7	Bit/bridle	--	10
Club	10'	2	Cart	--	20
Dagger#	30'	1	Feed/oats	7 days	5
Flail*	10'	3	Horse, riding	--	40
Hammer#	30'	6	Horse, war	--	50
Mace	10'	5	Mule	--	10
Morning star*	10'	7	Pony	--	20
Pick	10'	6	Saddle	--	5
Spear#	30'	3	Saddle bags	--	10
Staff	10'	2	SERVICES	NOTES	COST
Sword, great*	10'	9	Night at the inn	--	1
Sword, long	10'	7			
Sword, short	10'	4			

*Two-handed weapon (+1 damage), no shield use; assume that arrows, crossbow bolts, and sling stones cost 1 GP per 20 bought

#Maximum range for thrown melee weapons; otherwise, range will be 10'

The ability to wear armor and fight with weapons is an advantage, especially for major combatants, like clerics or fighters:

ARMOR protects the wearer by adding a bonus to their total hits (see the equipment table). For example, leather armor +1. Shields add +1 hit alone or in combination with other armor worn, so a fighter in chainmail (+2) and shield (+1) would get +3 total hits. This is written as 10/+3 to distinguish between actual hit points and armor worn.

Note that while bonus hit points are lost when armor is removed, wounded characters never fall below 1 hit when this happens.

WEAPONS will be of two types. One-handed weapons leave a hand free for shield use, but inflict less damage due to their smaller size. Bows, including crossbows and two-handed melee weapons, do not allow shield use, but grant a damage bonus (+1) as befits their greater size. Note that archers can switch to a smaller, one-handed weapon for melee purposes.

ENCUMBRANCE

Characters may wear armor (including shields) and carry 10 items, provided these are small enough to fit in a regular backpack or hang from a belt. They may also carry 1,000 GP (jewelry is too light to matter). Anything more is simply too much. Characters cannot perform if overburdened with equipment, and gold coins are bulky in large amounts. Good players will have a plan, and this may require pack mules and/or porters to move treasure.

MOVEMENT

When it comes to armor, characters sacrifice speed for protection. Unarmored characters move 50' per round and enjoy free action unless circumstances dictate otherwise. Shields do not affect movement, but may interfere with some actions, like climbing walls or sneaking:

ARMOR	MOVE	RESTRICTIONS
Leather*	40'	--
Chainmail	30'	no stealth, swimming at half speed
Plate mail	20'	no swimming or stealth (thievery)
Shield*	--	no bows or two-handed melee weapons

*Indicates no restrictions or referee's option

Note that characters wearing plate armor cannot swim and must roll saving dice at a cumulative -1 per round to avoid drowning, although the referee can make exceptions for things like shallow water or weak currents, etc.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

As characters go on adventures, they gain experience (EXP) and get better at what they do. This is represented by level (LVL). Characters reach successive levels and improve their abilities on the following:

CLERICS					DWARVES			
EXP	LVL	HP	FP	TITLE	EXP	LVL	HP	TITLE
0	1	8	1	Acolyte	0	1	9	Delver
150	2	+2	--	--	220	2	+2	--
300	3	+4	2	Minister	440	3	+4	Miner
600	4	+6	--	--	880	4	+6	--
1,200	5	+8	3	Prelate	1,700	5	+8	Engineer
2,500	6	+10	--	--	3,500	6	+10	--
5,000	7	+12	4	Priest	7,000	7	+12	Sapper
10,000	8	+14	--	--	14,000	8	+14	--
20,000	9	+16	5	High priest	28,000	9	+16	Dwarf-lord
40,000	10	+18	--	--	60,000	10	+18	--

ELVES					FIGHTERS			
EXP	LVL	HP	SP	TITLE	EXP	LVL	HP	TITLE
0	1	6	2	Hunter	0	1	10	Squire
300	2	+1	--	--	200	2	+2	--
600	3	+2	--	Scout	400	3	+4	Veteran
1,200	4	+3	--	--	800	4	+6	--
2,400	5	+4	--	Forester	1,600	5	+8	Warrior
4,800	6	+5	--	--	3,200	6	+10	--
10,000	7	+6	--	Ranger	6,400	7	+12	Hero
20,000	8	+7	--	--	12,000	8	+14	--
40,000	9	+8	--	Elf-lord	24,000	9	+16	Champion
80,000	10	+9	--	--	50,000	10	+18	--

MAGICIANS					THIEVES			
EXP	LVL	HP	SP	TITLE	EXP	LVL	HP	TITLE
0	1	5	2	Novice	0	1	7	Bandit
250	2	+1	--	--	120	2	+1	--
500	3	+2	4	Initiate	240	3	+2	Outlaw
1,000	4	+3	--	--	480	4	+3	--
2,000	5	+4	6	Adept	1,000	5	+4	Burglar
4,000	6	+5	--	--	2,000	6	+5	--
8,000	7	+6	8	Sorcerer	4,000	7	+6	Rogue
16,000	8	+7	--	--	8,000	8	+7	--
35,000	9	+8	10	Wizard	16,000	9	+8	Robber baron
70,000	10	+9	--	--	30,000	10	+9	--

When characters earn enough experience points, they advance to the next higher level. The referee may allow this to happen immediately or make them return to civilization first. Either approach is acceptable. However, characters should never earn enough experience to advance more than 1 level in a single adventure or playing session. Higher-level characters might continue play, build a stronghold, and/or retire.

LANGUAGES

For game purposes, all characters speak the common tongue of men. Dwarves and elves speak a racial language, and the referee may allow any character to learn another, as per the game rules.

A SAMPLE CHARACTER

Finally, players choose their character's name and gender. Using these rules, they might create the following adventurer:

NAME - Otto the Evangelist	GENDER - male
LEVEL - 1	SIDE - law
ABILITIES - charisma	
CLASS - cleric (cure disease, heal, turn the undead)	
HIT POINTS - 8/+3	FAITH POINTS - 1
EQUIPMENT - chainmail (+2), backpack, bedroll, mace, rations, rope, shield (+1), tinderbox, torch, water skin	
MOVE - 30'	LANGUAGES - Common
EXPERIENCE - 0	TREASURE - 1 GP

Otto is heavily encumbered, but may still carry 1,000 GP. If he survives his adventures, he will gain experience, magic items, and treasure!

