

A NEW CHARACTER TYPE FOR DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: THE THIEF!

by Gary Gygax

Recently I received a telephone call from Gary Schweitzer who hales from sunny California. It isn't all that sunny out there, however, for are many dungeon expeditions regularly being led beneath the grim pile of the castles which are scattered throughout that land. Anyway, during the course of our conversation he mentioned that his group was developing a new class of character - thieves. Gary gave me a few details of how they were considering this character type, and from these I have constructed tentative rules for the class. These rules have not be tested and should be treated accordingly.

CHARACTERS:

There are now four (4) main classes of characters.

Fighting Man  
 Magic-Users  
 Clerics  
 Thieves

Thieves: This class is different from any of the others. Thieves are generally not meant to fight, although they are able to employ magic swords and daggers (but none of the other magical weaponry), and the only armor they can wear is leathern. They have no spells such as magic-users and clerics are able to employ, but they do have certain unique abilities:

Open locks (by picking or even foiling magical closures)  
 Removal of small trap devices (such as poisoned needles)  
 Climb almost sheer surfaces rapidly, up or down  
 Steal items by stealth and/or sleight-of-hand  
 Strike silently from behind  
 Listen for noise behind a closed door  
 Move with stealth  
 Hide in shadows

Thieves are always neutral. Their prime requisite is dexterity. Men, Dwarves, Elves, or Hobbits may become thieves.

<u>Thieves</u>		Hit	Open Locks/ Remove Traps	Hear Noise	Move Silently Hide in Shadows
		Dice			
Apprentice	0	1	15%/10%	1-2	20%/10%
Footpad	1200	1 +1	20%/15%	1-2	25%/15%
Robber	2400	2	25%/20%	1-3	30%/20%
Burglar	4800	2 +1	35%/30%	1-3	35%/25%
Cutpurse	9600	3	40%/35%	1-3	45%/35%
Sharper	20000	3 +1	45%/40%	1-3	55%/45%
Pilferer	40000	4	55%/50%	1-4	60%/50%
Master P'r.	60000	4 +1	65%/60%	1-4	65%/55%
Thief	85000	5	75%/70%	1-4	75%/65%
Master Thief	115000	5 +1	85%/80%	1-4	85%/75%
M.T., 2nd	230000	6	95%/90%	1-5	95%/85%
M.T., 3rd	345000	6 +1	100%/95%	1-5	100%/90%

THE THIEF! (continued)

A "Master Thief 4th level" would have seven dice for accumulated hits, a 100% chance to remove traps, and a 95% chance to remain undetected when hiding or moving through shadows, gaining these advantages when 460,000 experience points had been accumulated. At the 5th level a Master-Thief would have 7 +1 hit dice, always hear noise, and always be able to hide without being seen provided he wasn't observed prior to hiding, and there were shadows, of course. Another 115,000 experience points would be required to go from 4th to 5th level Master Thief.

Other Possible Considerations:

Third level thieves (Robber and above) are able to read languages, so treasure maps can be understood by them without recourse to a spell.

Ninth level thieves (Thief and above) are able to understand magical writings, so if they discover a scroll they are able to employ any spells thereon, excluding clerical spells.

Example of a Thief in Action: Assume that a fifth level thief (Cutpurse) is a member of an expedition aimed at looting a known treasure on a dungeon level. After the guardian of the treasure has been dealt with, the thief goes into the area and examines several chests in the room. He notes that two have traps - which he has a 35% chance of successfully removing. He succeeds on the first, and a vial of poisonous gas is removed; however he cannot open the lock (the referee rolled above 40%) so it must be forced open -- a very time-consuming process. Failure to remove a trap, incidentally, activates it with regard to the thief and any others within its range. After lucking out on his second chest all around, the party is heading back when a slight detour takes them past a monster which immediately goes into pursuit of the adventurers. As the party dashes around a corner to throw off the pursuit, the thief remains in hiding. If the monster fails to notice him (35% chance) he can then slip into its lair and snatch the loot while it is elsewhere. This same Cutpurse later sees a man with some item he desires. His chance of removing the object, be it from the person of the owner or from his immediate vicinity, is 45%, the same likelihood as he has of moving with absolute silence. If the thief strikes silently from behind he will do two dice of damage for every four levels he has attained, minimum damage of two dice, and hit probabilities from behind should be increased by 20% (+4 on numbers shown to hit).

Attack Ability, Alternative Combat System: For purposes of attack probability only treat Thieves (class) as Clerics, advancing probabilities in four levels/group.

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From "The Great Plains Game Players Newsletter" #9 (June 1974?; pages 8-9); editor Jim Lurvey.

Transcription possible through the kind generosity of Jim Lurvey, original editor for "The Great Plains Game Players Newsletter" (later "Gamelog"). See <http://www.mage-page.com/bio-lurvey> for Jim's bio and for information on M.A.G.E. - Midwest Area Gaming Enthusiasts (successor to "The Great Plains Game Players Newsletter").

Original contents presumably copyright 1974? by Gary Gygax and/or Tactical Studies Rules.

Transcription and analysis performed by Allan T Grohe Jr ([grodog@gmail.com](mailto:grodog@gmail.com)) on 13-14 June 2009. All introductory matter, analysis, and additional text is copyright 2009 by Allan T Grohe Jr.

#### Original Text

Original text appears on two quarto pages of manual typewriter text. I have tried to preserve the original format and line lengths by using the Courier New font, which is rather typewriter-ish in style. Spelling, punctuation, grammar, and formatting errors in the original text have not been corrected.

#### Unclear Text

Several areas of text are not clear in the scans Jim provided, primarily because they're third-generation copies. The level titles (in particular "Sharper" and "Master P'r") and XP values in the table were particularly unclear, and may not be accurate; they titles do, however, align cleanly to **Greyhawk** (to which I compared them only after completing the transcription), so I think that I've deduced them correctly. In addition, the final word of the article is also very unclear, though I was able to deduce it correctly, as well by comparing to **Men & Magic**.

Analysis: Key differences herein from **Greyhawk, Supplement 1**:

- **Greyhawk** specifically omits the use of shields
- the listing of thief abilities is reordered in **Greyhawk** and the language and punctuation describing several abilities are changed
- alignment for thieves is broadened in **Greyhawk** to neutral or chaotic, and inserts restrictions on hiring thieves by lawful PCs (one-time is OK for lawful missions)
- **Greyhawk** specifically mentions that demi-humans have unlimited level advancement as thieves

- Hit Dice in **Greyhawk** are reduced to d4
- **Greyhawk** thief ability percentages identical to the article (which also helped to validate unclear text); **Greyhawk** also reorders the columns, adds "Pick Pockets" to the MS/HS column (which significantly reduces the scope of this ability, as the "Example of a Thief in Action" in the article amply demonstrates!), adds racial bonuses to thief abilities, and annotates that all thief abilities may not be retried if they fail; **Greyhawk** reduces CW from automatic to a level-based percentage
- **Greyhawk** clarifies (or reduces?) backstab damage from 2 dice for every 4 levels (which can be read as: 2 dice/x2 damage at levels 1-4, 4 dice/x4 damage at levels 5-8, 6 dice/x6 damage at levels 9-12, 8 dice/x8 damage at levels 13-16, etc.) to 1 additional die for every 4 levels (and is the standard progression we now know)
- **Greyhawk** reduces RL at 3rd level to 80% effective
- **Greyhawk** adds a level to reading magic scrolls, and allows for 10% reverse effect for reading (then-new) 7th and higher level spells
- **Greyhawk** details no provisions for the consequences of failure in a thief's ability check; the article specifically calls out "Failure to remove a trap, incidentally, activates it with regard to the thief and any others within its range"!! :D

Lastly, Gary Schweitzer is not listed among the Special Thanks sections in **Greyhawk**, the **Players Handbook**, or **Dungeon Masters Guide**, which is a significant omission, unfortunately.

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Allan would like to thank Paul Stormberg: without Paul's willingness to share information about TSR's early days, Allan would never have known of the existence of the "Great Plains Game Players Newsletter" in the first place!