Introduction

O.L.D. Is...

Elven musketeers lining up in the rain to defend against an oncoming orc charge...

Mighty warriors battling ice dragons in the arctic wastes...

Epic wilderness journeys across mountain, field, and forest...

Pirates and swashbucklers battling for supremacy on the high seas...

Pale alchemists collecting and mixing complex ingredients for their latest concoctions...

Earnest clerics turning back vampires deep in unholy crypts...

Fearsome inquisitors hunting down those who use illegal sorcery...

Masters of the dark arts bringing the dead back to life...

Minstrels spreading tales of heroism and great deeds across the land...

Weathered watchmen investigating a murder in a scummy tavern...

Treasure hunters exploring ancient catacombs and dungeons...

Burglars sneaking into a great fire dragon's lair...

Evil forces from the depths of Hell seeking to extend their influence on the world...

Shining knights with sword and lance charging heroically at their foes...

Nature-loving druids striding through the woods with their animal companions...

Powerful archmagi exerting their will over the world from their high towers...

Famous gladiators fighting for their freedom against fearsome monsters in the arena...

Stoic rangers tracking their foe across miles of unkempt wilderness...

Foreword

More so than its companion science fiction game, N.E.W., I was aware while writing this RPG that universal fantasy rule sets are a dime a dozen. Making O.L.D. stand out from the pack would be a challenge.

Of course, O.L.D. uses the same innovative mechanics which I believe distinguish both games. The countdown mechanic, the streamlined rules which make movement, the environment, and tactical positioning in combat important while keeping the action moving, the life-path system which helps you to build your character's history and have it affect his current abilities and traits, the open-ended skill system, and so much more.

When conceiving this game, there were a couple of things I wanted to see dealt with thoroughly. One of those things was the concepts of herbalism and alchemy—the idea of experts preparing herbs for exotic uses or mixing substances to make things like medicines and beneficial treatments. These things are well grounded in literature, and I enjoy the idea that troll's blood can help you heal wounds, or certain herbs when mixed, drunk, smoked, made into soups or ointments, or burned as incense might have interesting effects. Appendix J of Gygax's 1st Edition AD&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* contained a lengthy list of herbs and their alleged old-world remedies, and this served as a springboard into a whole chapter which would become a central conceit of the game world.

Magic, too, needed a good look. A decade ago, I published Ryan Nock's revised version of *Elements of Magic*, a freeform spell system for D&D 3.5. The system involved learning spell lists, and then spending magic points to combine those spell lists into whatever effect you desired, and it was very well-received and used by D&D players to this day. *Elements of Magic* is, as you can see, a large influence on this rulebook.

With O.L.D. not being a class-based game, I was able to capture another "feel" that I enjoy in a roleplaying game. Anybody can learn magic, herbalism, or alchemy. Certainly, a dedicated mage, druid, or cleric will be better at it, but there's nothing to stop a knight learning a protective prayer, a farmer learning a couple of minor spells to help his crops, or adventurers learning enchantments which protect, aid, or lend them strength.

But it's not just a magical game! Martial traditions are well served; watchmen, squires, knights, musketeers and more join those servants of skullduggery—the assassins and burglars—and the eclectic medieval assortment of bards, gladiators, and inquisitors.

All in all, this medieval fantasy roleplaying game lends itself towards immersion while encouraging a broad range of settings. I hope that you enjoy it!

What's O.L.D. is N.E.W.

What's O.L.D. Is N.E.W.

—*Russ Morrissey*

The tall, graceful Grand Elf sat alone at the writing desk in her tent. On it lay the still unused journal her betrothed gave her before she left for the border. Well, she thought, no time like the present to make an entry. She opened it to the first page, took up her fountain pen, and wrote:

"I am Captain Agathe Drake, daughter of the house of Albanus. Today, it seems, I am very likely to die."

Outside, lightning flashed; seconds later came the rumble of thunder. "Awful weather for a massacre," she muttered.

"Ma'am?" Drake looked up to see Lieutenant Ivo in the doorway, his cloak drenched, rain pouring from the broad brim of his hat. "Sentries report goblins to the northeast."

"How many?"

"Thousands, ma'am."

She nodded grimly and stood, straightening her tunic. "Right. Time to let War-Chief Korkush know what elves are made of."

"Steel and starlight, captain."

"Steel and starlight, Ivo."

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The goblin army appeared at the crest in less than an hour. The elves could see them standing in ranks in the pouring rain, their banners held high and their spearheads glinting whenever lightning flashed. Drake had hoped the sentries' report was exaggerated, but as she gazed on them with a practiced eye she estimated at least two thousand on the field. She could see War-Chief Korkush with his captains, and could imagine the smile on the crafty old goblin's face as he counted the elven muskets arrayed against him.

"I rather hoped there'd be more," Corporal Skarskad said drily.

"That lot over there." Ivo pointed. "Look what they're holding."

"Their privates?"

"Muskets," Hawkfriend said. "Probably old and poorly cared for, and their owners terrible shots. Still, let's keep an eye on them."

"Here they come," Ivo said. A roar went up from the goblin ranks, and several hundred warriors began to charge the eastern wall. The elves at the barricades squared their shoulders, their mouths set in grim lines as they readied their muskets.

"At one hundred yards, volley fire, present!" Ivo shouted. The earth shook with the thunder of the goblin's charge.

"Aim!" A hundred musket barrels snapped into position.

"Fire!" With a deafening crash the musketeers fired into the charging goblins, spitting fire from their muzzles and filling the air with a cloud of blinding, acrid smoke. Through it Drake heard screams of pain, rage, and fear as the elf-shot found its deadly mark.

"Volley by ranks! Right rank, fire!" Ivo shouted. Another volley tore into the goblin army. Drake could see warriors falling into the mud, to be trampled by their oncoming fellows.

"Front rank, fire! Rear rank, fire! Reload!" With precision like dwarven clockwork, the musketeers took turns cutting down swaths of the enemy. But it wasn't enough, and in moments the goblins were at the walls, stabbing with swords and spears, trying to wrest the muskets from the defenders' hands. The musketeers fought back with their bayonets and sabres; some drew charged wands designed for close-range fighting and aimed blasts of frost and fire at their foes.

Drake unsnapped the holster at her hip and drew her wand of ash. Pointing it at the sky she cried out in the ancient tongue. A fountain of golden sparks leaped from its tip, rising a hundred feet in the air. They swirled, coalesced, and all at once the sign of the Summer Queen blazed brightly overhead. A cheer went up from the defenders.

"Steel and starlight!" she shouted. And drawing her blade, Agathe Drake leaped into battle with a song in her heart.

Welcome to O.L.D.

O.L.D. is a medieval fantasy role-playing game. Players take on the roles of adventurers and play through scenarios presented to them by a Game Master (GM). The GM creates the world, the places, the people and monsters who populate that world, and the adventures that the player characters (PCs) will encounter.

O.L.D. is set an indeterminate time in the past. Magic, dragons, elves, and wizards are all possible, but the setting itself is up to you.

In O.L.D., you'll create a character and adventure in a fantasy world with characters created by other players. Your characters might be warriors, wizards, rangers, thieves, or barbarians. They could be human, or they could be one of a number of other races: an Elf, a Smallfolk, or even an Ogre! Each player creates his or her own character, decides on that character's personality, abilities, and attributes, and plays that character through numerous adventures.

O.L.D. allows you to explore a haunted castle, defend a village from an invasion of barbarians, seek lost artifacts from ancient civilizations, or smuggle secrets from city to city.

What You Need

To play O.L.D. each player will need the following:

❭ A selection of six-sided dice (referred to as "d6s").

❭ A character sheet (you can photocopy the one in this book or download one from the Internet; at worst, a sheet of scrap paper will do).

❭ If the GM is using battlemaps to display combat positioning, a small miniature, figurine, or token to represent your character. You can find these in most game stores, but pennies or chess pieces will do in an emergency.

❭ If you are the GM, you will need a copy of this book and some kind of scenario or adventure. You can devise one of your own, or purchase a pre-written one.

How to Play

This book provides you with the core rules of play. It tells you how to create characters, adjudicate challenges and combat, and more.

During a game of O.L.D., the GM will describe the environment and events of the game world, and the players will describe what their characters do within that scenario in a collaborative story-telling manner. Often the success of an action is not guaranteed, at which point you will use your dice to determine the outcome. Some tasks will be more difficult than others, and some characters will be better at certain types of activity than others.

As your adventures throughout the world, he or she will earn or find money and equipment and will gain Experience Points (XP) which can be spent to improve his or her capabilities. The GM awards XP to the players when they complete storylines or defeat challenges and enemies.

Example of Play

Ian, Elijah, Sean, and Liv are playing in an adventure being run by Cate. They play Mandallan, Selena, Gimnor, and Agathe, members of the Grey Fellowship, a group of itinerant adventurers. The characters are about to enter a dark and foreboding place—an ancient, abandoned dwarven city—and they confront that staple of fantasy campaigns: a door!

Cate (the GM): The door before you is made of solid iron. It stands nearly ten feet high, and it is covered with elaborate carvings. The workmanship appears to be of excellent quality—the door is flush with the stone wall.

Sean (playing Gimnor): Ah, fine dwarven craftsmanship! I'm a dwarf—can I read the engravings?

Cate (the GM): There are no words; the engravings are ornate pictures of thrones, crowns, scepters, and other symbols of rulership.

Liv (playing Agathe): Can I sense anything magical about the door?

Cate (the GM): Your innate elven senses do not alert you to any enchantment. As far as you can tell, the door is of excellent quality, but not magical.

Sean (playing Gimnor): I assume it's locked? I'll give it an experimental push…after checking it over for traps, of course! I roll my Intuition of 3d6, and my *thievery* skill gives me another 1d6. 4d6 … I roll 14.

Cate (the GM): Lucky you checked! Yes, there is indeed a trap. If you'd tried to open the door, a rockfall would have crushed you! You believe you can disable the trap, though, with an Agility check.

Sean (playing Gimnor): OK. Agility is 2d6, *thievery* again for another 1d6, makes 3d6. And my high quality thieves' tools give me another 1d6. 4d6 again, rolling 12.

Cate (the GM): It was a *Routine [10]* task, so you disabled the rockfall.

Ian (playing Mandallan): Right! I draw my sword and push on the door.

Cate (the GM): It opens easily and smoothly. Beyond you see a dark, natural hewn passageway descending into darkness. There are no light sources, and a faint smell of something rotten wafts out.

Elijah (playing Selena): I whisper a quick light spell, centered on me, radius of 30 feet, and follow behind Mandallan.

Liv (playing Agathe): I have my musket ready as we enter. Anything moves, it'll get musketshot right in the face!

Cate (the GM): Well, everyone make an Intuition check please. Add *perception* if you have it. Liv, Agathe's acute hearing counts for this, so add that 1d6 bonus.

(All: Assorted rolls are made, and the results quickly reported).

Cate (the GM): Agathe and Gimnor both hear a scrabbling sound, and look up to see a giant spider, about the size of a large dog, directly above you! It's about to drop down, in an attempt to ambush you all. Luckily, you spotted it in time. Roll Initiative, everybody!

Liv (playing Agathe): Like I said. Musketshot. Right in the face.

About this Book

This book is the main rulebook for O.L.D.: The Role-playing Game. Using just this book, you can run a complete fantasy roleplaying campaign. It describes how to create a character, adjudicate the game, run combat, and design settings and adventures.

This book is divided into five main sections.

> **I: Character Creation.** The first section of the book deals with character creation. It takes you through the process of generating new player characters from start to finish, including attributes, races, and traditions, as well as detailing equipment, armor, and weapons that your characters can purchase.

> **II: Running the Game.** This section describes how to run a game of O.L.D. It covers the core game mechanics, including attribute checks and countdown pools, and the combat rules, along with details on the environment, objects, and movement.

It also includes a selection of monsters and enemies for use in the game.

> **III: The Elements of Magic.** This section describes how to create and adjudicate spells and magic; it also contains details on herbalism and alchemy.

> **IV: Strongholds & Travel.** This section of the book tells you how to build and maintain castles, groves, towers, and more. It also details wilderness travel and exploration.

> **V: Worldbuilding.** The final section of the book contains rules and guidelines for designing your own setting, races, traditions, places, monsters, and more. It is a GM's toolkit for campaign and adventure design.

"Rule Zero"

The GM is the final arbiter of what happens in the game. If a rule needs to be interpreted, it is the GM who decides how to resolve it. At times, the GM may need to create new rules, or alter existing rules. In other words, the rules in this book should be viewed as guidelines, and they should neither interfere with nor hinder your game.

The ultimate goal of this game—like that of any game—is to enjoy it and have fun. There is no right or wrong way to play O.L.D. If you're all enjoying yourselves, you're playing it correctly.

The Setting

O.L.D. is set in a medieval fantasy world. That world might be our own world in an alternate past, or it might be a fictional one of your own devising. Your setting might be small in scale—perhaps a village and its environs—or it might encompass a whole world or more with myriad fantasy races, cities, and civilizations. Here are some example setting briefs:

› **Holdenshire is a peaceful county.** Ruled by Lord Pemberton, the villages of Hengistbury and Thornbury exist in a friendly rivalry. All is not well, however. Children have been disappearing into the Weirwood; howls of an unearthly nature have been echoing across the Fogmoor; and Three-Fingered Jake, the county's itinerant bard, has been spreading rumors of treasure and hauntings in the ruins of Brockendale Castle. And that's not to mention the lizardmen aggression or the bandits upriver! And there's that dragon in Skull Mountain...

› **Steam and soot darken the skies above the city of Flint,** and winds sweeping across its majestic harbor blow the choking products of industrial forges into the fey rainforests that dot its knife-toothed mountains. Since the earliest ages when the people of Risur founded this city, they feared the capricious beings that hid in those fog-shrouded peaks, but now as the march of progress and the demands of national defense turn Flint into a garden for artifice and technology, the old faiths and rituals that kept the lurkers of the woods at bay are being abandoned.

› **As the new year turns, winter's grip intensifies.** Worry rises as regular channels of communication between nations cease like a candle suddenly snuffed. Slowly, throughout the lands claimed by the Ragesian Empire, rumors spread between isolated villages, traveling by foot and horse and word of mouth. The rumors say Drakus Coaltongue, the immortal emperor who conquered every land he set his gaze upon, has fallen in a distant land far to the west. How the tyrant was defeated is unknown, but if it is true, everyone knows that war is coming.

The generals of Emperor Coaltongue will strike for control, oppressed peoples will rise up in rebellion, and dangers once held in check only by fear of the mighty warlord will bring doom to the world.

Other settings might include naval adventures complete with swashbuckling pirates, excursions to other planes of existence, or environs based on the Far East or Viking cultures. The scope of O.L.D. is bound only by your imagination!

A Brief Glossary

This is a short introduction to some of the terms you'll encounter throughout this book. These elements are building blocks for a character—some are bigger, and some are smaller, but when put together they create an overall picture.

Race. Your character is one of a number of available fantasy races (including Human)—perhaps a fierce Orc, a diminutive Smallfolk, or a serene Grand Elf.

Attributes. Attributes represent a range of core measurable facets of your character in numerical form. These attributes are Strength, Agility, Endurance, Logic, Intuition, Willpower, Charisma, Luck, and Magic. The higher an attribute, the more your character exemplifies that attribute.

Attribute Check. Many actions in the game require an attribute check. This is a test whereby one of your character's attributes helps determine how many dice you get to roll to accomplish an in-game task such as shooting at a bandit or lifting a heavy object.

Benchmark. The difficulty of an in-game task is described by its benchmark. This is a descriptive word and numerical value (such as *Challenging [13]*) which is the target value for an attribute check. Any attribute check result that matches or exceeds the benchmark numerical value is a success.

Countdown Pool. A countdown pool is a special sort of dice pool used to add suspense when racing against an unknown clock. It involves periodically rolling a dice pool and removing any dice which show a certain value until the pool is empty.

d6. A d6 is a regular six-sided die. O.L.D. is based around pools of dice in which you roll a number of dice, add up the total, and compare that to the task's difficulty, or benchmark (*q.v.*). If you need to roll *x* dice and add them together, this is expressed as *x*d6—for example, "3d6" means "roll three dice and add them together," while "5d6" means "roll five dice and add them together."

d66. When the rules ask you to roll a d66, you should roll 2d6 but read them a little differently. Instead of adding them together, you read the first as "tens" and the second as "ones"—for example, if you roll a 3 and a 2, you read that as 32. Similarly, rolling a 1 and a 6 yields a result of 16. This way of rolling dice is mainly used by the GM when rolling on random tables.

Descriptor. At the top of the character sheet you will see an area known as the "descriptor." The descriptor presents a number of fundamental things about your character in the form of a single summarizing sentence.

Dice Pool. A dice pool is the handful of dice you roll when making an attribute check. It can be formed in various ways (for example, you might add dice because of your character's attributes, skills, or equipment) and is limited in size by your character's grade.

Die Bonus/Penalty. If something grants a die bonus or inflicts a die penalty (usually in the format "a +2d6 die bonus"), this refers to additional dice which can be added to (or which must be removed from) your dice pool when you make an attribute check.

Experience Points (XP). Characters earn Experience Points by accomplishing tasks, defeating enemies, and completing adventures. After they are earned, you can spend XP on a range of abilities and character improvements.

Exploits. Exploits are individual abilities or benefits. There are different types of exploit—race exploits, tradition exploits, attribute exploits, age exploits, and universal exploits. Exploits include such things as an assassin's death blow or an Ogre's thick, damage-soaking hide. These abilities are recorded separately and may be used to achieve effects that other characters will not be able to emulate.

Game Master (GM). The GM is the referee of the game. The GM describes the universe to the players and controls the actions of NPCs and monsters.

Grade. Your character's grade is simply the total number of career grades he or she has taken. A starting character is Grade 5. Your character's grade is important because it determines the maximum size of the dice pool you can form when your make attribute checks (*qq.v.*).

Non Player Character (NPC). An NPC is a character which is not played by one of the players. Instead, all NPCs are played by the GM.

Skills. Skills are smaller, concentrated packets of interest, expertise, or training. They include things like *cooking*, *swords*, *brawling*, *poetry*, *sailing*, *dungeoneering*, and more. Your character picks up new skills throughout his or her life. The skill list is open-ended and unlimited; a skill kicks in at any time your character performs an activity related to it.

Tradition. A tradition is a temporary building block which helps your character develop. Characters take traditions for periods of time during character generation as the process works its way through their lives. Each tradition affects attributes and skills. For example, a few years spent working as a sailor might enhance a character's nautical skills. At any given time, a character will have a current tradition.

Setting the Tone

O.L.D. is designed to fit a wide range of fantasy styles, from heroic high fantasy to gritty low fantasy. Whatever your favourite fantasy setting, you should find that you are able to play it with O.L.D.

Later in this book you'll find an entire chapter which discusses the creation of your own setting, along with rules and guidelines for designing worlds, races, monsters, traditions, and more.

What follows is a short introduction to some of the styles and settings an O.L.D. game might encompass. It does this by looking at two concepts: Advancement Level and Genre. The first is a scale that determines the technology available in a setting (for example, whether firearms like muskets are available), while the second is a rough indication of how common fantastical elements are within the setting, especially magic. These are only guidelines, but they can help you peg the tone of your campaign.

Advancement Level

Advancement Level (AL) is a broad technological scale. O.L.D. settings are typically AL 2–3 (Medieval or Renaissance) with occasional examples of earlier time periods. ALs 0–3 are collectively known as the Archaic Era, which is broken down into four Ages.

Archaic Era

Age	AL	Earth Example
Stone and Bronze Ages	0	Until 1200 BC
Iron Age	1	1200 BC–400 AD
Medieval	2	5th–15th century AD
Renaissance	3	15th–17th century AD

N.O.W., the game of 80s action, covers the Modern Era, which is AL 4–5 (Industrial through Information Ages), while N.E.W. picks up at AL 6+, the Future Era.

Genre: Low/High Fantasy

Many factors work together to make up a complete fantasy setting, but arguably the preponderance and power of magic is one of the fundamental things that help define its tone. In a particular setting, magic might encompass only minor rituals designed to ward off sickness, or it might include epic spells capable of destroying entire cities in great fiery conflagrations; it might be limited to enchantments which harden armor or heal minor injuries, or it might include complex rituals capable of summoning awesomely powerful archdevils from the depths of Hell. Some settings may eschew magic altogether, while in others, all PCs and many NPCs can use some magic.

The terms "low fantasy" and "high fantasy" mean different things in roleplaying games than they do in literature. In literature, "low fantasy" refers to a fantasy story set in the real world, while "high fantasy" means a story set in a fictional fantasy world. In RPGs, however, and in this rulebook, these terms are used to determine the prevalence and power of magic on a scale from the near-realistic to the mythical.

This book is designed to handle a wide range of magical potency. None of this is iron-clad, of course—exceptions are, after all, often the rule of the day. The "default" Genre of this book is somewhere in the middle, near the Tolkien level.

No Fantasy

A no-fantasy setting has no magic in it. In O.L.D. it remains the Archaic era, but spells and magical items are absent. There may perhaps be one example of magic—maybe a single holy relic or other item—but this single example will be the only exception.

Low Fantasy

Low fantasy emphasizes a more realistic worldview. While magic exists, it is not commonplace or overly flashy. The works of Robert E. Howard are low fantasy, as are the Arthurian myths and the Game of Thrones series. In a low-fantasy setting, magical items tend to be rare, even unique, and magic is deeply mysterious and generally feared.

Medium Fantasy

Medium fantasy is best exemplified by the work of J. R. R. Tolkien. While powerful creatures such as balrogs and dragons exist in that world, magic does not usually tend towards great fireballs; it is more subtle, rarer, although it can still be powerful. For example, the greatest magical item in Middle-Earth is fairly low-key despite its mighty power.

High Fantasy

High fantasy encompasses such settings as those portrayed in Dungeons & Dragons and many other fantasy roleplaying games. Magic is widespread and powerful, gods and monsters walk the world, and magical items abound in great quantities. Other high-fantasy settings might include the Shannara series, or the novels of C. S. Lewis, as well as some Greek or Norse mythology.

BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT THAT MEANS!

These categories are somewhat arbitrarily chosen as a way of delineating different game setting flavors. If you feel that a given author or show belongs in a different category, that's okay. You're right.

It's also worth noting that nothing fits into a box perfectly. There are always exceptions, and a given setting might fit one category most of the time, except for one or two things.

PUTTING THE TWO TOGETHER

Using a combination of AL and Genre, you can easily summarize the tone of a setting and determine which elements of this rulebook are applicable to the setting and which are not.

For example, if the world has a typical AL of 2 and is a medium fantasy setting, you will know that muskets are not available, but that Elves are appropriate.

DEFAULT ASSUMPTIONS

The primary default assumption in this book is that your setting is what you want it to be. It can be high or low fantasy, and you are encouraged to build, hack, bash, tweak, and design as much as possible. However, in general the game does have a sort of "starting baseline" of its own.

> ⟩ Magic exists, and anybody can theoretically use it if they have the aptitude. However, spectacular immense effects are much rarer than minor enchantments, even from the greatest of mages.
> ⟩ Dragons, elves, monsters, and demons can all be found in the world.
> ⟩ Gunpowder exists, and muskets and other archaic firearms are in use.
> ⟩ Demons and devils are dark and truly evil; they aren't just powerful combatants.
> ⟩ Gods and other supernatural entities exist and influence the world in subtle ways.