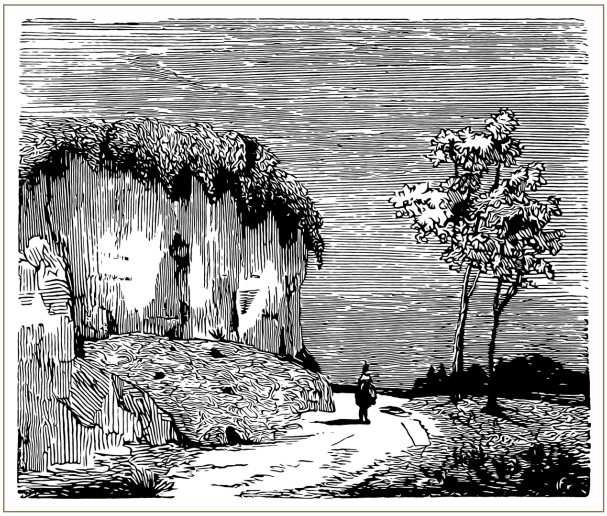
WIZARDS & LIZARDS

THE LEVEL-ZERO FUNNEL

A Wizards & Lizards supplement



B E T A

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A campaign opener for a crowd of nobodies. Instead of starting as heroes, each player runs a **handful of ordinary folk**, marches them into somewhere deadly, and finds out which ones walk back out. The survivors become the party's first heroes, and they will remember the night the others did not.

This is an optional rung on the pamphlet ladder. It runs on the base engine (`srd/10`, `srd/15`) and adds one wrinkle: characters begin below a hero, and each player runs several at once.

The Peasants

A level-zero character is a person with a trade and no training for danger. This is the deliberate exception to the rule that every hero is better than Poor at something (see the SRD, Characters).

- **Attributes:** no +1. Spread **0, 0, 0, –1**, or all zeroes. They start every roll at **Poor**, and at **Desperate** in the –1. They are better than Poor at nothing.
- **Background:** one line, their old trade (baker, drover, hedge-priest). It grants permission for what that trade plainly covers, and nothing else.
- **Kit:** whatever the trade would carry, pressed into service as a weapon. **No armor**, or padded scraps at best. No relics.
- **No rank:** a peasant has nerve but no Expert reroll. Five stress boxes as usual; at five, further strain wounds them.
- **Condition track as normal**, but with no armor and no reroll a peasant is one or two bad rolls from Dying.

Three Lives Each

Here is the trick that makes a funnel playable: **each player runs three peasants at once.** They move as a little knot, and when a challenge comes the player picks which one tries it. So a player effectively gets **three attempts at anything** and **three lives to spend** getting through it. Send the poacher up the wall; if he falls, send the tanner; if she falls, you still have the sexton. Poor odds, taken three times, get *someone* through, and losing a body is a setback, not the end of your evening.

This redundancy is the funnel's only cushion. There is no armor worth the name and no reroll to buy. What keeps a player in the game is having spares, and spending them.

Running It

Throw **Lesser and Common** threats, hazards, and traps at the crowd and let the dice fall. Deaths should be frequent, cheap, and often funny: the tone is a disaster the survivors will tell stories about, not a tragedy. A dozen going in and half coming out is a good night.

- The crowd's own numbers cut both ways. A knot of peasants **outnumbers** a lone Lesser foe and swamps it (see the outnumbered rule); but a swarm, or a trap that **splits them up**, turns their numbers against them and thins the herd fast.

- Do not soften the dice, and do let a clever plan or the right old trade save a life. A funnel that is all slaughter and no cleverness is a die-rolling chore.
- Withhold armor. The moment peasants are armored they stop being peasants; armor is part of what they earn by surviving.
- **Keep it short.** A funnel is a few encounters, not a long gauntlet. Twelve peasants swamp a lone swarm and walk away nearly whole, but stack three or four hard waves back to back with no breather and the crowd is wiped before anyone graduates. Aim for one or two thinning encounters (a knot of Common foes, a trap that splits them) so a handful survive to become heroes.

Graduating

A peasant who lives becomes a **level-one hero**, and this is where the heroic guarantee kicks in. They gain their first **+1 attribute** (a roll they now start at **Fair**, better than Poor at last), a **signature piece of kit or armor**, and they step into a starter's full character options, keeping their funnel background and the name they made for themselves. The ones who did not make it are why the survivors are heroes.

A player who ends the funnel with more than one peasant alive keeps one as their hero and may keep the rest as hirelings, or retire them to safety with their share.