

# AX&X: THE FUNNEL

Zero-level play, hirelings, and henchmen. A followers supplement for AX&X.

## THE ZERO LEVEL

Before a character is a Fighter or a Thief they are just a person with a trade and a bad idea. That is the **zero level**, and it is one statline shared by three kinds of nobody: the peasant mob of a funnel, the torchbearer you hire at the gate, and the porter who hauls your loot. All three are built the same.

- **Abilities and Kindred:** Roll **3d6 in order** for the six, and take a kindred. Its one trait applies even now: a dwarf still sees in the dark, an elf still shrugs off Sleep.
- **Hit Points:** **1d4 + CON**, minimum 1. A zero level is one bad blow from the grave.
- **Defense and Attack:** **AC 10**, or better with scraps of armor. Attacks at **+0**: no class, no Level. A pitchfork, sling, or torch is a light weapon, improvised at **-2** unless it is a real one.
- **Saves:** **1d20 + ability, 12+**. No Level to add and no class bonus, though a kindred save still counts.
- **A Past Life:** Roll on **Occupations** below. It grants a **knack**, +2 to Checks that life would cover, and the one odd thing you carried out of it.
- **They Leave the Story:** A zero level never pops back up to fight on. At 0 HP they are out of the tale for good; the roll only tells how they go. Roll **Brush with Death**, or a table of your own, and read it as their exit: **Slain** is a death, and every other result is a maiming, a breaking, or a body dragged from the field, retired from the funnel all the same, a survivor if the party wins free, a corpse if it does not. Draw your next body from your own mob first; roll up fresh zero levels only when a player's pool runs dry.

## ID20 OCCUPATIONS

Your past life. A knack and the one strange thing you kept. Generated from **occupations.csv**.

- 1 **Farmer.** Beasts, weather, and long labor. *A stout sickle.*
- 2 **Hunter.** Tracking, game, and the wild. *A short bow and a half-quiver.*
- 3 **Woodcutter.** Timber, climbing, and brute work. *A felling axe.*
- 4 **Fisher.** Water, boats, and patience. *A net and a gutting knife.*
- 5 **Blacksmith.** Metal, mending, and raw force. *A smith's hammer.*
- 6 **Mason.** Stone, walls, and what is sound. *A heavy maul and a chisel.*
- 7 **Tanner.** Hides, knots, and foul work others refuse. *A flensing knife, and a stench that turns dogs.*
- 8 **Herbalist.** Herbs, poisons, and simples. *A pouch holding one Remedy.*
- 9 **Beggar.** Cities, rumor, and going unseen. *A tin cup, and a copper that always finds its way back.*
- 10 **Minstrel.** Performance, lore, and winning a room. *A lute with one sour string.*
- 11 **Cutpurse.** Locks, pockets, and slipping a grip. *A thin blade and a set of picks.*
- 12 **Acolyte.** Rites, letters, and the names of the dead. *A holy token, warm near the unholy.*
- 13 **Gravedigger.** The dead, soil, and what should stay buried. *A spade, and a skull that was facing the wrong way.*
- 14 **Miller.** Grain, gears, and honest weights. *A heavy pestle.*
- 15 **Chandler.** Wax, tallow, and light. *A dozen candles that gutter blue near the dead.*
- 16 **Rat-catcher.** Vermin, drains, and tight places. *A terrier, loyal and loud.*

- 17 **Peddler.** Haggling, roads, and what sells. *A pack of oddments, and a map to nowhere that keeps proving right.*
- 18 **Ferryman.** Rivers, crossings, and tolls. *A long pole, and a coin a dead man paid.*
- 19 **Charcoal-burner.** Fire, smoke, and the deep wood. *A tinderbox that never fails, once.*
- 20 **Orphan of the host.** Camps, drill, and making do. *A notched sword too big for you, once your father's.*

## RUNNING A FUNNEL

A funnel opens a campaign with a crowd of zero levels and ends it with a few heroes. Each player rolls up a little mob of **three or four**, a dozen or more to the table, and marches the lot into one deadly dungeon. The dungeon does the choosing. Whoever crawls out the far side has earned a class.

- **The Mob:** Everyone runs their handful at once. Track them in a row and expect to cross names out. A zero level hauls light, fights poorly, and dies easily, so the play is cleverness, caution, and numbers, not heroics.
- **Spend the Bodies:** Send the expendable to prod the floor and open the door. That is the funnel's grim joke and its honest lesson: the survivors learn the dungeon is the enemy, long before the goblins are.
- **The Dungeon:** It ships as rules, not a map. Bring your own deadly place and stock it with the core procedure, pitched a notch crueller than a Level 1 party would meet.
- **Graduation:** Live to the end and the character **becomes Level 1**. Pick a class, your kindred and past life already yours: take the class Hit Die at maximum plus CON for new HP, gain its features, keep the knack and whatever gear and scars you carried out, and roll a Tie. The past life colors the choice, a cutpurse leans Thief, an acolyte Cleric, but never binds it. The funnel's XP carries over.

## HIRELINGS

A hireling is a zero level you pay by the day. Build a torchbearer or a porter exactly as a funnel peasant, kindred, past life, and all; a man-at-arms is a cut above, a trained hand at Level 1.

- **The Hired:** Torchbearer or porter **1 GP/day**, a zero level. Link-boy, bearer, and camp-hand are the same. A **man-at-arms** at **5 GP/day** is Level 1: HD 1, a weapon and light armor, Atk +1.
- **Shares:** A hireling draws its wage and a **half share** of XP. Let that XP ride and a hireling can reach the Level 1 threshold and graduate just as a funnel survivor does, choosing a class and coming up a henchman.
- **Loyalty:** Asked first to risk death, a hireling makes a **CHA check**, yours, or balks, flees, or quits. After that it tests **morale** like any creature: 1d6, breaking on 1 to 3 when the blood runs. Fair pay, fair shares, and not being spent as bait all weigh for you, and the GM may shade the roll.
- **Specialists:** A trade expert, an alchemist, a sage, a sapper, costs more and bargains harder, but brings a knack no slot-filler has. Price it to the job.

---

## HENCHMEN

A henchman is not hired but won: a loyal adventurer who throws in with you for a share and a cause, levels at your side, and may one day carry the torch when you fall.

- **How Many:** You may lead henchmen up to your **CHA modifier + 1**, minimum one. A charmer draws a following; a boor leads no one.
- **Where They Come From:** A funnel survivor you kept, a captive you freed, a Lifepath Comrade or Retainer, a faction's gift, or a likely sort won in a tavern with a **CHA check**. Each is a full character, rolled up, entering at Level 1 or a Level below you.
- **The Deal:** No wage. A henchman takes a **half share** of loot and XP and **levels on it**, and gets a say in how both are split. The share is theirs by right, not your largesse.
- **Loyalty:** Loyalty is won by use. Share fairly, spend them as comrades not fodder, and they hold. Cheat or risk them past reason and loyalty frays: a CHA check or a morale test when pushed, and a broken henchman walks, or turns, a ready-made Rival or Enemy.
- **The Succession:** When your character dies, a henchman is the replacement the core already promises: leveled, equipped, and tied to the party. Promote one, and roll a fresh henchman in their place.

---

## FROM PEASANT TO HERO

One ladder runs under all of it. A zero level is the bottom rung, peasant, torchbearer, and porter alike. Earn a half share through a funnel or a hired season, cross the Level 1 threshold, and pick a class to graduate. Throw in for a cause and a share, and a graduate becomes a henchman who levels with you. Outlive your patron, or strike out alone, and a henchman becomes a hero in their own right. When the whole crowd takes the field, the Warband supplement runs them as one host, the funnel's mob mustering under a banner.