FEATS

OF

EXPLORATION

An Alternate Reward System for Old-School RPGs

by Jon Britton

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH

OLD-SCHOOL ESSENTIALS

FEATS OF EXPLORATION

Reward your players for quick thinking, uncovering secrets, paying attention to detail, and a multitude of other exploration-based activities! This framework for awarding experience slots seamlessly into the existing XP reward system of Old-School Essentials and many other classic iterations of the world's first roleplaying game.

XP for what really matters!

Requires **Old-School Essentials**

FEATS OF EXPLORATION

An Alternate Reward System for Old-School RPGs

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INTRODUCTION

Feats of Exploration is a system for awarding experience points to player-characters (PCs) in Old-School Essentials games. It is fully compatible with all roleplaying games that utilize a combination of point-based experience with a robust leveling system.

In most iterations and retro-clones of the original fantasy roleplaying game, experience points (XP) are awarded for monsters defeated and treasure attained. The latter is commonly viewed as the primary impetus for exploration, especially in dungeon environments, wherein the dangling carrot of "what's around the next corner" often provides sufficient motivation for forward progress. Furthermore, monster XP is usually substantially less than the XP gained from the treasure that those same monsters guard. This facilitates clever thinking on the players' part in their efforts to accrue XP while minimizing the amount of risk and resource depletion.

Feats of Exploration are intended to supplement (not supplant) existing award structures. It is often a burden for the referee to place sufficient treasure and monsters to ensure a satisfactory pace of leveling. In addition, the lure of treasure can lose its luster when other goals arise naturally from emergent gameplay, e.g. faction interplay, resolving quests, overcoming environmental obstacles, unearthing ancient lore, and so forth.

Whereas the tacit assumption in old-school play is that exploration is its own reward, the Feats of Exploration system takes an alternate approach by explicitly rewarding player-characters for interacting and progressing forward in campaign environments. These environments can manifest as dungeons, wildernesses, cities, planar jaunts, or any other setting in which exploration is a key pillar of play.

In short, if a referee chooses to implement Feats of Exploration in their game, there are now three primary means of accruing XP:

▶ **Defeating monsters**

▶ **Attaining treasure**

▶ **Exploring campaign environments**

Adding a third way to gain XP inevitably (and intentionally) leads to a faster leveling pace, which may not be desirable at some tables. However, before dismissing it outright, the referee should consider the following benefits of the system:

▶ **The rate of XP gain is much steadier.** Players not only proactively seek to achieve feats, but also accrue XP by exploring naturally.

▶ **Numerical awards for achieving feats creates a positive feedback loop.** Players desire to continue exploring the environment, both for the inherent fun in engaging with the environment and also for the simple reason of gaining more XP.

▶ **It rewards teamwork.** All party members receive a given award regardless of who achieved it.

▶ **The formula for determining the amount of awarded points favors low-level characters in higher-level parties.** The outsized amount of XP gained by neophytes attached to a seasoned party affords them the ability to level quite quickly (if they can survive). See the *Procedure Example* on pp. 10-12.

Although there is a requisite amount of referee fiat baked into this framework, it should be noted that Feats of Exploration is not a "milestone" award system, wherein PCs gain entire levels based on arbitrary and predetermined story beats. PCs accrue experience points in an incremental manner for achieving specific goals during emergent gameplay, just like the default XP system which Feats of Exploration is designed to complement.

SYSTEM ELEMENTS

*Refer to the Feats of Exploration **Worksheet** on pp. 8-9 for the terms and fields described.*

Feat: An arbitrary descriptor for a discrete exploration achievement.

Total XP Needed (TXP): The amount of XP a PC needs to advance from the start of their current level to the next level. For example, referring to the OSE Fighter Level Progression table, a 3rd level Fighter always has a TXP of 4000, regardless of their current XP total.

Award Values:

▶ **Minor:** yields 2% of TXP per Feat. Minor awards are the most commonly achieved during a session, and represent the normal challenges faced during exploration.

▶ **Major:** yields 5% of TXP per Feat. Major awards represent either less common challenges or more difficult versions of minor challenges, e.g. disarming a significantly complex trap or solving a puzzle with remarkable outside-the-box cleverness.

▶ **Extraordinary:** yields 10% of TXP per Feat. Extraordinary awards are very rarely achieved, and usually coincide with major campaign developments and shifts, e.g. factions changing alliances or filling power vacuums due to PC actions, major quest completions, etc.

▶ **Campaign**: yields 15% of TXP per Feat. Campaign rewards should be created by the referee as bespoke and extremely difficult goals for entire campaigns. They are highly specific, e.g. "Retrieve the Ancient Regalia from the four corners of the Empire", "Reinstate the Lost King to his throne", "Banish the Ravening Horde to the Abyss", etc. In emergent play, campaign rewards can (and should) be created and awarded on the fly as the story unfolds.

FEATS OF EXPLORATION	
FEAT	**DEFINITION**
Exploration	Explore at least 5 areas of a single dungeon level.
Lore	Apply in-world lore in a useful or flavorful manner.
Rumor	Confirm a rumor's veracity.
Secret	Find a secret or interpret hidden lore.
Puzzle	Solve a puzzle.
Trap	Overcome a trap.
Hazards	Surmount an environmental obstacle or hazard.
Skills	Use equipment or abilities in an unorthodox but useful manner.
Location	Discover an important location.
NPC	Interact beneficially with an important NPC when stakes are at play.
Faction	Manipulate or cripple a faction to your benefit.
Quest	Complete a quest..
Safe Haven	Establish a reliable safe haven.

Instances: Tick a box next to a given Feat every time the party achieves it. At the end of the session, multiply the number of boxes ticked by the percentage associated with the Feat to arrive at the total percentage of TXP for that Feat.

Description: Use this field to jot down a brief description of the circumstances when a Feat is achieved, e.g. "Skazz translated runes" in the description field of the "Secret" Feat, or "Grondur negotiates surrender" for the "NPC" Feat, etc.

THE PROCEDURE

*Refer to the Feats of Exploration **Worksheet** on pp. 8-9 while following these steps. Permission is granted to make copies of the worksheet for personal use.*

1. At the beginning of every session, note the number of players attending, the names of the PCs, and their current level in the fields provided.

2. Calculate the Total XP Needed (TXP) for each PC currently playing in the session. TXP is the amount of XP needed to advance from the start of the current level to the next level.

   Note: Do not include retainers in this calculation.

3. Total all of the TXP and input that value in the "Party TXP" field. This number is constant until either or both of the following occurs, at which point TXP should be re-calculated:

   3.1. The party make-up changes. This most commonly occurs due to player absences, or at an open table where player attendance fluctuates wildly between sessions. Other reasons could be character death or the choice to play a different character during a particular session.

   3.2. A PC gains a level. Because that PC's TXP is now exponentially higher, the Party TXP likewise increases.

4. Calculate the percentage values of the Party TXP for Minor (2%), Major (5%), Extraordinary (10%), and Campaign (15%), and input these values into the appropriate fields on the worksheet.

5. When a Feat is achieved, regardless of who achieved it, the entire party is awarded the predetermined percentage of TXP listed under that Feat. Divide that number by the number of players present during the session to arrive at the per-PC share.

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE REFEREE

▶ Mark feat achievements during play by ticking the appropriate boxes and jotting down a brief description of the circumstances.

▶ Notify players every time they achieve a Feat.

▶ Tally all Exploration XP and award shares at the end of the session, so you aren't performing arithmetic mid-session.

▶ Do not award retainers with Exploration XP, and do not include their presence when determining per-share division of Exploration XP specifically. Retainers should be awarded as per the default rules in Old-school Essentials with regard to Monster and Treasure XP.

SESSION & PARTY INFO		
Session No.		
No. of Players Attending		
Name	**Level**	**TXP**
PARTY TXP:		

FEATS OF EXPLORATION

MINOR FEATS - 2%		
XP Value:		
Feat	**Instances**	**Description**
Exploration	☐ ☐ ☐	
Hazard	☐ ☐ ☐	
Lore	☐ ☐ ☐	
Puzzle	☐ ☐ ☐	
Rumor	☐ ☐ ☐	
Secret	☐ ☐ ☐	
Skills	☐ ☐ ☐	
Trap	☐ ☐ ☐	
	☐ ☐ ☐	
	☐ ☐ ☐	
Total XP Earned:		

MAJOR FEATS - 5%

XP Value:

Feat	Instances	Description
Faction	☐ ☐ ☐	
Hazard	☐ ☐ ☐	
Location	☐ ☐ ☐	
NPC	☐ ☐ ☐	
Puzzle	☐ ☐ ☐	
Quest	☐ ☐ ☐	
Skills	☐ ☐ ☐	
Trap	☐ ☐ ☐	
	☐ ☐ ☐	
	☐ ☐ ☐	
Total XP Earned:		

EXTRAORDINARY FEATS - 10%

XP Value:

Feat	Instances	Description
Faction	☐ ☐	
Quest	☐ ☐	
	☐ ☐	
Total XP Earned:		

CAMPAIGN FEATS - 15%

XP Value:

Feat	Instances	Description
Safe Haven	☐	
	☐	
	☐	
Total XP Earned:		

Total Party XP Earned:

Total XP Earned per PC:

PROCEDURE EXAMPLE

A referee and four players are in a dungeon-centric game. What follows is an example of how the referee might award XP after a session.

PCs:

▶ **Thief, Level 5**

▷ Current XP: 11000

▷ XP Threshold to Level Up: 20000

▷ Total XP between Level 5 and Level 6 (TXP): **10400**

▶ **Dwarf, Level 1**

▷ Current XP: 1900

▷ XP Threshold to Level Up: 2200

▷ Total XP between Level 1 and Level 2 (TXP): **2200**

▶ **Magic-User, Level 3**

▷ Current XP: 8000

▷ XP Threshold to Level Up: 10000

▷ Total XP between Level 3 and Level 4 (TXP): **5000**

▶ **Fighter, Level 6**

▷ Current XP: 50000

▷ XP Threshold to Level Up: 64000

▷ Total XP between Level 6 and Level 7 (TXP): **32000**

At the start of the session, the referee notes the party make-up and the TXP for each PC. The calculated party TXP is **49600**. The referee inputs this number into its assigned field on the worksheet.

The referee calculates the percentage values for each reward level, and inputs those values into the appropriate fields on the worksheet.

▶ Minor (2%) = 992

▶ Major (5%) = 2480

▶ Extraordinary (10%) = 4960

▶ Campaign (15%) = 7440

The party is dungeon-crawling. During the course of a four-hour session, they accomplish the following, all of which nets them XP:

Monsters Defeated

▶ 3 Carcass Crawlers - 225 XP

▶ 5 Giant Centipedes - 30 XP

▶ 2 Minotaurs - 550 XP

▶ 1 HD 5 Hydra - 175 XP

TOTAL: 980 XP

Treasure Attained (and returned to a safe haven)

▶ 6000 sp - 600 XP

▶ 300 gp - 300 XP

▶ Emerald Necklace, worth 1500 gp - 1500 XP

▶ Silver Brooch, worth 750 gp - 750 XP

TOTAL: 3150 XP

Feats of Exploration

▶ Trap (Minor) - Dwarf detects a boulder trap and gets everyone out just in time - 992 XP

▶ Lore (Minor) - Magic-User recalls conversation with a sage about minotaurs' ability to smell their prey. Party deliberately stays upwind of minotaurs, allowing for a surprise ambush - 992 XP

▶ Skills (Minor) - Thief twirls his lockpicks in a dexterous manner across and between his knuckles in order to delight a small child kept prisoner in the dungeon - 992 XP

▶ Quest (Major) - The party returns the small child to their parents back in town - 2480 XP

TOTAL: 5456 XP

Summing the totals for all three award categories, the final amount earned by the party is **9586**. There were four players in the session, so each PC receives a share equal to **2397** XP (rounded up).

The players add this amount to each of their characters' current XP totals, yielding the following:

▶ Thief: 13397 XP

▶ Dwarf: 4297 XP

▶ Magic-User: 10397 XP

▶ Fighter: 52397 XP

Both the Dwarf and the Magic-User gain enough XP to level up to Level 2 and Level 4, respectively. The Dwarf, having started the session at Level 1 (but adventuring with a doughty group of higher-level veterans), has not only attained Level 2, but is only a mere 103 XP away from attaining Level 3!

DESIGN NOTES

▶ The implementation of the listed Total XP Needed (TXP) percentages is designed for a balance of noticeable yet incremental XP accrual. The number of Feats achieved during a session will vary depending on a scenario's design, the referee's adjudication, and the players' actions.

▶ Low-level PCs and classes with easier leveling requirements will benefit much more than higher-level PCs and classes with restrictive leveling requirements. For example, if a session's Exploration XP award is 900, that has much more impact on the party's 1st level Thief (1200 XP required for 2nd level) than the party's 5th level Elf (32000 XP required for 6th level).

▶ The *Feats* listed on p. 5 are tailored toward classic dungeon exploration, but they are not proscriptive. A referee is encouraged to expand and modify the tables to their own whims and the peculiarities of their campaign. For instance, if a safe haven is readily available in a particular game and establishing a new one is not a factor, then the referee should by all means excise the Haven reward completely. Likewise, if exploring five distinct areas of a dungeon is a particularly arduous task in a game, the referee should consider increasing the Exploration reward to 5% or even 10%, or perhaps reducing the amount of required areas to three.

▶ For Feats that have multiple award levels (both Minor and Major, for instance), it is up to the referee to determine what actions define a given level. See the *Award Values* section in System Elements for guidance.

▶ There is no limit to the number of times a given Feat can be achieved during a session.

FEATS IN OTHER SETTINGS

The modularity of the rewards is one of the great features of the Feats of Exploration system. A referee can create and insert any type of Feat into the system, encouraging whole different modes of play based on what the referee chooses to award; the math will always take care of itself. Suggestions for tailoring the chart for other common settings are provided below.

Wilderness

▶ **Hex** (Minor): Enter an unexplored hex for the first time.

▶ **Weather** (Minor or Major): Successfully navigate particularly dangerous weather conditions.

▶ **Settlement** (Major): Enter and rest in a particular settlement for the first time.

▶ **Explore** (Major or Extraordinary): Discover and interact with all features of a single hex.

▶ **Pathmaker** (Extraordinary): Forge a navigable route through wilderness between two points of civilization.

▶ **Stronghold** (Campaign): Construct and maintain a stronghold.

City

▶ **Neighborhood** (Minor): Enter a new neighborhood for the first time.

▶ **Authority** (Minor or Major): Discover who holds the real power in a scenario where it is not obvious.

▶ **Chaos** (Major): Disrupt the normal routines of a neighborhood's citizenry.

▶ **Clout** (Major or Extraordinary): Gain a significant reputation with a notable faction or neighborhood.

▶ **Business** (Extraordinary): Establish a profitable business venture.

▶ **Power** (Campaign): Command the allegiance and/or attain authority over an entire neighborhood's populace or faction's membership.

Planar Jaunt

▶ **Exotic** (Minor): Interact substantively with a planar-native creature or being for the first time.

▶ **Planehop** (Minor or Major): Enter a new plane for the first time.

▶ **Landmark** (Major): Interact with a noted landmark of a given plane.

▶ **Survival** (Extraordinary): Survive an entire session without deleterious effect on a plane actively hostile to mortal life.

▶ **Deity** (Extraordinary): Proactively encounter and interact with a deity in a beneficial manner.

▶ **Shift** (Campaign): Actively induce an alignment change in a naturally-aligned planar power or environment.