

First Impressions are Deceiving

Beware of this magical thief – the charlatan!

by David A. Bellis

Since the dawn of history, there has existed a class of people who try to cheat others by selling worthless products. These people are known as charlatans, and they exist even today. In an AD&D® game setting, charlatans sell fake medicines and potions, and cheat gullible people out of their hard-earned gold. The charlatan as an NPC character class is an interesting being who could wreak havoc on naive PCs.

Minimum ability scores

In order to qualify for the charlatan subclass of thief, a character must have the minimum ability scores listed in Table 1. If the combination of intelligence and dexterity is 32 or above, 10% is added to the character's earned experience points.

Racial limitations

Charlatans are able to cast magical spells of a limited sort. Since only humans, elves, half-elves, and gnomes have the ability to cast magical spells of any kind, only these races can qualify for the charlatan subclass. To find the maximum level attainable by race, add intelligence and dexterity scores, and consult the Table 2.

Combat

Charlatans are weak in physical combat potential, having $1d4 + 1$ HD per level. At 11th level and above, the charlatan gains one hp per level. Level advancement for charlatans is shown on Table 3.

Charlatans can only wear armor which can be concealed beneath their clothing (thus giving the charlatan the appearance of an unarmored magic-user). Acceptable armor types for this class are listed in Table 7. Weapons which a charlatan is allowed to use are also listed in Table 7. It should be noted that a charlatan will never openly carry a short sword or sap; such weapons are typically concealed in a wagon or cart.

Spell-casting

Charlatans have limited magical power, being able to cast only certain cantrips. Although they eventually gain a great number of these cantrips, they never have offensive or defensive spell capability of any real power. Charlatans employ their cantrips craftily, in a manner that makes the spells appear to be mighty works of spell-casting. Remember that, to most uneducated NPCs (and many PCs), *any* magic will appear to be great magic.



Charlatans are able to cast the following cantrips:

Useful: *dampen*, *exterminate*, and *sprout*.
Reversed: *hairly* and *wilt*.

Legerdemain: *change*, *distract*, *hide*, *mute*,
palm, and *present*.

Person-affecting: *belch*, *blink*, *cough*, *nod*,
scratch, *sneeze*, *twitch*, and *wink*.

Personal: *bluelight*, *firefinger*, *smokepuff*,
and *tweak*.

Haunting-sound: *groan*, *moan*, *rattle*, *tap*,
and *whistle*.

Illusion: *colored lights*, *haze*, *rainbow*, and
two-d'lusion

Charlatans memorize their spells quickly, having merely to glance at their spell books for one round to memorize a single cantrip. Low-level spells can be added to the list of usable spells at the DM's discretion keeping in mind that charlatans are not powerful spell-casters.

Charlatans often use their cantrips to create an undesirable effect in a possible customer. Such spell usage would include *belch*, *cough*, *sneeze*, *hairly* and so forth. After afflicting a person with a cantrip, the charlatan gives him a sample of one of his potions, which "cures" the affliction. Since the cantrips' effects are short-lived, it will appear as if the potion has cured the affliction. Few would then doubt the charlatan's claims as a master potion-maker and magician.

Another favorite trick employed by (charlatans involves the use of haunting-sound cantrips to temporarily haunt a house. The charlatan then enters the house, mumbles some vague words while swinging his hands around, and removes the "spirits" from the premises. In general, charlatans are very creative in using their cantrips and often employ them to attract attention to their "great powers." After such a performance as this, how could anyone resist buying the magical items the charlatan is selling?

Charlatans have four standard thief abilities: picking pockets, moving silently, hiding in shadows, and reading languages (which eventually allows the charlatan to *read magic*). See the *Players Handbook*, p. 27, for descriptions of these abilities.

Charlatans also can mix "potions." Most of the time, these potions (or oils, salves, rubs, etc.) delude the imbiber into believing that the potion has created the effect promised. This minor delusion lasts for 1-4 turns per level of the charlatan. The charlatan can, however, attempt to create potions that actually do have the desired effect. These potions can actually be magical potions or merely a mixture of non-magical ingredients which create the desired effect. The chance for success in creating real potions is one-fifth the base chance for mixing potions (rounding down). In one day, a charlatan can create

three trick potions. Real potions can be mixed in one day, but can only be mixed once a week, due to the amount of research necessary.

A charlatan can also mix poisons at half the base chance for mixing potions (again, rounding down). Charlatan poisons are never directly fatal — they merely cause sickness, sleep, pain, etc. These poisons have durations lasting from 1-2 hours per level of the charlatan. One or two doses of each can be made in a day. Each dose is capable of affecting 1-6 people. A charlatan will often poison a whole town, then rush in selling the cure. The cure may be a real one or merely a minor delusion.

The ability to create pyrotechnics is available to all charlatans. This ability is not magical; rather, the effects are caused by throwing powders or liquids onto a fire source. The effects are similar to those associated with the spells *affect normal fires* and *pyrotechnics*. The effects of these powders or liquids occur instantaneously. Duration, range, and so forth should be determined by the DM, based on the fire source and amount of substance used to create the effect.

Since charlatans often sell magical or alchemical substances, they can approximate the values of these substances accurately. Given 1-4 rounds for examination, a charlatan can guess the price within a 10% deviation above or below the actual price a mage or alchemist would pay for such items.

Convincing disguises can be created by a charlatan of 5th level or higher. This ability is necessary to the class, as a charlatan often visits towns where his face may be recognized by angry citizens. This ability is similar to the assassin's ability of disguise mentioned on page 29 of the *Players Handbook*.

At 10th level, charlatans may gain followers. These followers number 4-16, and include fighters, thieves, charlatans, and apprentice magic-users.

Also at 10th level, charlatans gain their greatest ability — that of beguilement. With this ability, the charlatan emanates a minor form of empathy as he speaks. Any intelligent creature within hearing distance regards the charlatan as a trusted friend and a respected mage. People thus beguiled will buy as much as they can afford from the charlatan. This ability is usable once a day and lasts for one round per level of the charlatan minus 1d4 rounds. After this amount of time, people apathetically drift away from the charlatan. Characters are allowed to make a 1d20 roll against their wisdom as a saving throw against beguilement, with a +2 modifier added to the die roll. If the modified number is equal to or less than the character's wisdom, the effects of beguilement are avoided.

Explanations of special abilities

A. The charlatan has the non-magical ability to create pyrotechnics with effects

similar to the magic-user spells *affect normal fires* and *pyrotechnics*.

B. The charlatan can approximate the values of magical and alchemical substances.

C. Disguises can be donned by a charlatan of 5th level or higher. Disguises can lower height by 1-2" or raise it by 3-4". Disguises can also make the charlatan appear to be almost any race, any class, or as either sex. Chance of discovering the charlatan's disguise is the same as for the assassin's disguise ability.

D. The charlatan can decipher magical writings as a thief of 10th level. Scrolls with magic-user or illusionist spells of third level or less can be read, although a 25% chance of miscasting the spell exists if the charlatan attempts to cast them.

E. At this level, the charlatan gains the power of beguilement.

Followers

Charlatans gain 4-16 followers at 10th level. These followers come in four groups of 1d4 members each. Roll percentile dice on Table 5 to determine the class and level of each group. In determining the race of these followers, roll 1d8 and add the following modifiers: if the charlatan is a gnome, -2; elf, -1; human +1. Cross-reference the modified number on Table 6 to determine the race of these groups.

Status

All charlatans are cheats and tricksters. They are never of a lawful alignment, are rarely good, and are usually highly chaotic. Charlatans are always from a lower social class, though they are hardly ever from one of the lowest classes.

Charlatans vary in personality and mannerisms, except for one common aspect: They are all great cowards. Charlatans intimidate weaker characters and talk tough, but if forced to back up their claims, they try to stall, run away, or talk their way out of trouble.

Disadvantages

Charlatans constantly have to deal with constables and dissatisfied customers. They are always in danger of getting the stuffings beat out of them by angry citizens. Whenever a charlatan fails to succeed in making a potion (note that the charlatan always believes he has succeeded in creating the desired potion), the user immediately becomes aware of the charlatan's true profession, becoming enraged 85% of the time.

Additionally, any magic-user has a chance to identify charlatans for what they truly are. This ability (which requires one turn of observation) is equal to the intelligence score of the magic-user plus the magic-user's level, times two (i.e., 2 x (intelligence + level)).

Miscellaneous

In all aspects not mentioned above, charlatans behave as thieves. This in-

cludes, but is not limited to, saving throws, combat tables, and magical items usable. Miscellaneous information showing various charlatan characteristics is listed on Table 7.

Table 1
Minimum Ability Scores

Ability	Min. score
Strength	—
Intelligence	12
Wisdom	9
Dexterity	13
Constitution	—
Charisma	14

Table 2
Level Limitations by Race

Combined int. & dex.	Racial type			
	Gnome	Elf	Half-elf	Human
25-28	5	5	7	U
29-30	5	7	10	U
31-34	7	10	U	U
35-36	10	13	U	U
37 and up	U	U	U	U

U indicates level advancement is unlimited up to the class level limit of 15th level.

Table 3
Experience Levels and Hit Dice

Experience points	Level	Hit dice (1d4)	Level title *
0-1,700	1	1+1	Apprentice
1,701-3,400	2	2+2	Hoaxer
3,4001-6,800	3	3+3	Cheat
6,801-13,500	4	4+4	Con man
13,501-28,000	5	5+5	Defrauder
28,001-58,000	6	6+6	Deluder
58,001-95,500	7	7+7	Deceiver
95,501-150,000	8	8+8	Sharper
150,001-205,500	9	9+9	Grifter
205,501-300,000	10	10+10	Swindler
300,001-525,000	11	10+11	Quack
525,001-750,000	12	10+12	Charlatan
750,001-975,000	13	10+13	Master Charlatan
975,001-1,200,000	14	10+14	Grand Charlatan
1,200,001 and up	15	10+15	Grand Master Charlatan

* Charlatans often use the level title appropriate to the level title of a magic-user one: to two levels higher than the charlatan. They only reveal their true title to those who know they are charlatans.

Table 5
Class and Level of Followers

Die roll	Level and class *
01-10	1st-level fighters (1d4)
11-20	1st-level thieves (1d4)
21-30	1st-level assassins (1d4)
31-40	1st-level charlatans (1d4)
41-45	1st-level magic-users (1d4)
46-50	1st-level illusionists (1d4)
51-60	2nd-level fighters (1d4)
61-70	2nd-level thieves (1d4)
71-80	2nd-level charlatans (1d4)
81-90	3rd-level charlatans (1d4)
91-95	4th-level charlatans (1d4)
96-00	Extra 1-2 followers, plus two more rolls

* For each group of four fighter followers, a leader of 4th-level fighting ability is also gained as a follower.

Level	Cantrips usable	Pick pockets	Move silently	Hide in shadows	Read languages	Potion mixing*	Special abilities
1	3	40%	10%	10%	—	46%	A,B
2	4	45%	15%	15%	—	50%	—
3	5	50%	21%	20%	—	53%	—
4	7	55%	27%	25%	20%	56%	—
5	8	60%	33%	31%	25%	59%	C
6	9	65%	40%	37%	30%	62%	—
7	11	70%	47%	43%	35%	65%	—
8	12	80%	55%	49%	40%	69%	D
9	13	90%	62%	56%	45%	73%	—
10	15	100%	70%	63%	50%	77%	E
11	17	105%	78%	70%	55%	81%	—
12	19	110%	86%	77%	60%	85%	—
13	21	115%	94%	85%	65%	90%	—
14	23	120%	97%	93%	70%	95%	—
15	25	125%	99%	99%	75%	99%	—

* Base chance for trick potions. The chance to create real potions is one-fifth of the base; the percentage chance to create non-lethal poisons is one-half the base chance (round down in both cases).



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Table 6
Race of Followers

Die roll	Race
1	Gnome
2-3	Elf
4-5	Half-elf
6-7	Human
8	Other (DM's discretion)

Table 7
Combined Information

Racial stock: gnome, elf, half-elf, and human.
 Hit dice: 4 + 1.
 Spell capability: limited to cantrips.
 Class level limit: 15th (Grand Master Charlatan).
 Armor permissible: leather and elfin chainmail.
 Shield: none.

Weapons allowable: dagger, knife, dart, sap, sling, staff, short sword, and garrote.
 Flaming oil allowable: yes.
 Poison allowable: only self-manufactured poisons (used by neutral or evil NPCs).
 Weapon proficiency:
 Initial number of weapons: 2.
 Non-proficiency penalty: - 3.
 Added proficiencies/level: 1/4.
 Alignment: any nonlawful.