



We received a question from listener Shay in Israel: “If Gandalf were a D&D wizard, what spells would he have in his spellbook? And what is the D&D character level of both Gandalf the Grey and Gandalf the White?”

The hosts of the Prancing Pony Podcast have had our dice in storage for a few years now, and we aren’t up on the D&D Fifth Edition rules; so we asked listener and patron Jeff LaSala — a writer and roleplayer who has written D&D roleplaying material and a Scribe Award–nominated D&D novel — to answer the question for us. Jeff’s response was as remarkable and inspiring as the Grey Pilgrim himself. We covered the highlights of it in the Barliman’s Bag segment of Episode 083 – Oh Yes, Ees Very Nice-uh, but it really deserves to be experienced in its full glory. Enjoy.

After you’re done, visit Jeff’s biweekly Silmarillion Primer series at Tor.com for his take on the First Age: <https://www.tor.com/series/the-silmarillion-primer/>

Let me start by saying that while it's a very fun question, Tolkien's legendarium isn't especially compatible with D&D rules, mechanics, world assumptions, and cosmologies...even though the game itself was greatly inspired by his works. That said, let's go ahead and speculate under the banner of IF. What would a D&D version of Gandalf, *if* one existed, be like? Let's assume we're talking about the current edition of Dungeons & Dragons, the 5th Edition.

Now he wouldn't *normally* be a human wizard in the D&D sense, certainly not in his original form. A Middle-earth wizard—with its Quenya etymology as meaning a member of an "order"—is quite different from what we normally associate with the word. But again...IF.

First we must remember that Gandalf is a Maia named Olórin, and as such he is probably some sort of angel—a deva or archon, possibly even a modest variety of planetar or solar. But when sent by the Valar, he became part of the Istari and became subject to policies and limitations. The Istari were “*clad in bodies as of Men...subject to the fears and pains and weariness of earth, able to hunger and thirst and be slain.*” So in this form he's human for all intents and purposes, though relatively ageless.

If he must have the wizard class, then I'll go ahead and peg Gandalf the Grey at 17th level, the lowest level you have to be to access 9th-level spells. Which is super powerful by any standard. If that seems too high to anyone, remember that the Istari (according to *Unfinished Tales*) were sent by the Valar in the desire to “*amend the errors of old, especially that they attempted to guard and seclude the Eldar.*” So yeah, 17th-level power is a lot, but he still has to keep most of that under wraps. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, and even by his own admission, Gandalf is mostly just walking, running, or riding around giving people advice and inspiring them to action.

Even at the Battle of the Hornburg, when Gandalf shows up with reinforcements, Legolas says, "*Mithrandir, Mithrandir! This is wizardry indeed!*" And then a bit later Éomer says, "*You are mighty in wizardry, Gandalf the White!*"

But Gandalf waves it away by saying, "*That may be. But if so, I have not shown it yet. I have but given good counsel in peril, and made use of the speed of Shadowfax. Your own valour has done more, and the stout legs of the West-fold men marching through the night.*" This is Gandalf's style, nudging and convincing, and steering the good guys together. His wisdom *is* his wizardry, along with a lion's share of courage, improvisation, and longsuffering. Only when absolutely needed do his supernatural powers kick in.

Sorry, back to the question; let's talk D&D magic. So as a D&D wizard he's an arcane magic-user who uses a staff as his arcane focus and would own at least one spellbook so he has the means to prepare his spells each day. He'd have five cantrips—that is, minor spells he's mastered so well that he can repeat them endlessly and at will.

- ***Dancing Lights*** for conjuring harmless fire to misdirect his enemies.
- ***Fire Bolt*** for when he needs to be a bit more aggressive, such as blasting some wolves at the base of five fir-trees.
- ***Light*** to help navigate the dark halls of Moria.
- ***Minor Illusion*** to entertain Hobbits at parties.
- ***Prestidigitation*** to enact a variety of magical tricks, or etch a symbol into a Hobbit's front door for passing Dwarves to spot.

But before I go on, it's worth remembering that the Istari were "*forbidden to reveal themselves in forms of majesty, or to seek to rule the wills of Men and Elves by open displays of power.*" So while Gandalf may have a book jam-packed with spells to choose from each day, he would rarely if ever cast them (non-cantrips, anyway) in front of anyone. In fact, only Círdan, Elrond, and Galadriel know that Gandalf even came from Valinor or have some idea of what he *really* is. Which means he wouldn't go freely slinging mighty spells in front of even Aragorn, one of his wisest and best friends.

But when Elves, Men, and Hobbits are *not* around? When it's just Gandalf and some Orcs or trolls? Or, say, Nazgûl, or a Balrog? I think he can do what needs to be done to stay on task (which is to oppose Sauron).

So what might Gandalf have in this alleged spellbook? Well, spellbooks can get real big so I can't really be comprehensive about this—and no one has that kind of time. But here's an assortment of spells, 1st- through 9th-level, that he might keep at the ready just in case (and again, use surreptitiously):

1st level Spells

- ***Comprehend Languages*** for when he has a brain cramp.
- ***Detect Magic*** to help discover the works of the Enemy.
- ***Expeditious Retreat*** for when it's more prudent to run.

- **Feather Fall**, good for unexpected falls down cavernous abysses.
- **Identify** to get some secret intel on any ancient Elvish weapons found in troll hoards.

2nd Level

- **Pyrotechnics** to aid in his fireworks, or to scare away wolves and wargs.
- **Shatter** to break a traitorous wizard's staff.

3rd Level

- **Counterspell** when facing sorcery-wielding foes.
- **Dispel Magic** to help lift Saruman-placed enchantments or counter the magical deceptions of the Enemy.
- **Lightning Bolt** because who wouldn't find this one useful?
- **Magic Circle** as a defensive measure, such as keeping Ringwraiths at bay on, say, Weathertop.
- **Remove Curse** because curses abound in Middle-earth.

4th Level

- **Banishment** to buy time when squaring off with evil Maiar.
- **Confusion** would be a perfect resource for when Orcs are crowded together.
- **Ice Storm** to use against demons of shadow and flame.
- **Wall of Fire**, another good defense against Ringwraiths.

5th Level

- **Animate Objects** to help him in enspelling diamond studs that fasten and unfasten themselves.
- **Cone of Cold**, which I bet a certain Balrog gets a full blast of in the face.
- **Legend Lore** to get the full story on a given magic item (note: does not work on Rings of Power; that still requires research).
- **Telekinesis** to snatch and disarm allies and foes of their weapons when they're foolishly brandished.

6th Level

- **Chain Lightning**, perfect for when goblins have captured your Dwarves in the Misty Mountains and you need to take a bunch out at once.
- **Flesh to Stone** for when there's no time to wait for dawn itself to defeat some trolls.
- **Tenser's Transformation** for when it's time to just wade into battle and fight like a fighter.

7th Level

- **Prismatic Spray** for when there are just too many foes around, such as when assaulting Dol Guldur with his White Council posse.
- **Whirlwind** for when a little bit of Manwë's breath is just what the doctor ordered.

8th Level

- **Power Word Stun** to avoid having to bandy crooked words with Gríma Wormtongue.
- **Sunburst** for when some Nazgûl and the host of Morgul need pushing off the flanks of some retreating knights of Gondor.

9th Level

- **Foresight**, for when a quick peek back at the Music of the Ainur would come in real handy.

Gandalf is a wizard, not a sorcerer, but I think a special consideration would be made to grant him, as one of the Istari, access to him some Metamagic options from the sorcerer class. Probably just Quickened Spell and Subtle Spell, for those times when he needs to use some magic *without* being obvious about it and so that his allies take less notice of him.

Now we come to it. What about Gandalf the White? Does he just level up some more? I think it's more than that. In older D&D editions, death was a shock to your soul, and usually you come back a bit weaker; you lose some experience points. But Gandalf was sent back from death by those who gave him his mission. I'll go as far as to say that he gained some levels...in a different class! That's right, I submit that Gandalf the White is a multiclassed character. I think he picked up some levels of cleric and therefore gained some divine magic when he "*strayed out of thought and time*" and came back again.

Now he's got the Channel Divinity ability, and Turn Dead would be especially useful against the Nazgûl. I won't list all the cleric spells he might have returned with, but I'll say that spells like **Greater Restoration** sure would help Théoden King shake off Saruman's influence, **Enhance Ability** would help bolster his allies, and **Commune** could help Gandalf check in with his Valar superiors for some basic yes-or-no advice. ("*Should I counsel them to call out Sauron's hidden strength in hopes that he will empty his land and give the Ring-bearer his one and only chance?*" "Yes." "Is there another way to defeat the Dark Lord aside from destroying the Ring?" "No." "Will the captains of the West survive a confrontation at the Black Gate?" "Unclear." "If we give it our best shot, will you send the Eagles to help?" "Maybe!")

So that's all just one way to stat up Gandalf in Dungeons & Dragons. Never mind his ability scores; I think his Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution are all as a normal Man's, but he is given to sudden bursts of great strength, speed, and stamina that belie his apparent age. His Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma would be exceedingly high, especially Wisdom—for he spent much time in the company of Nienna.

I should lastly mention Narya, the Ring of Fire. It would be easy to say that it would give Gandalf all kinds of cool spells of flame—like *Fireball* or *Fire Shield* or *Heat Metal*. But I don't think that's right. Its fire is more metaphysical (most of the time). Where the other two Elven Rings were used to protect and preserve whole realms, Narya was used to spur *people* and rally them against evil. Círdan gave Gandalf Narya "*for aid and comfort*," so it likely boosted his Constitution and hit points, gave him resistance to fire damage, and of course was also "*for the*

kindling of all hearts to courage.” Which all really boils down to Gandalf’s own Charisma-based actions.

We also invited Jeff to “feel free to speculate about the levels of Balrogs, Witch-kings, and anything else you need to justify your answer.”

I don’t think anyone has the time to hear me nerd out on all of that. But here’s a crash course in speculation: Wargs are wargs. Goblins and Orcs are one race (in D&D they’re quite distinct). Barrow-wights are more like D&D specters with the additional ability to animate corpses into zombies or skeletons. The Ringwraiths are a unique form of undead, seeming like a hybrid of D&D ghosts and death knights. The Witch-King himself certainly seems more like a death knight or lich. While the Nazgûl can be defeated, they can only be destroyed utterly by the power of prophecy or by the destruction of the One Ring. Balrogs would have to be statted up from scratch. There’s a demon in D&D that goes way back to the 1970s called the balor (or Type VI demon), and it’s *clearly* inspired by the Balrogs of Tolkien’s world (right down to the whips of flame they carry). But it’s still too different to be simply renamed. Besides, balors have wings and can fly. Which...c’mon.

Thank you, Jeff! And now we know why we get along so well.

