

Kismet's Bard

A bard can be many things: a showman, a diplomat, a go-to guy, a lover, a fighter, a healer, a king – you name it. What a bard cannot be is confined; there are simply too many marvels to see and too many stories to tell for the bard to hold back. And at higher levels, a bard will not be forgotten, because by then he will know how to inspire and manipulate hearts and minds wherever he goes.

The bard class presents a wonderful flexibility, blending spells and a host of skills with abilities that can help a party as a whole. As a class rooted in Charisma, bards rely on magnetism for their spells, a number of their skills, and for a natural role in the party: that of the face. It is through a bard that many parties make their reputations with high and low. An enterprising Dungeon Master can use a bard as a walking plot device, gathering adventures and allies wherever they step.

An enterprising player will take advantage of the bard's strengths. Bards can have a lot of social power and more leeway in their interactions. Unlike paladins, bards aren't restricted by a strict code of conduct, and unlike clerics, bards aren't representatives of gods. With a high Dexterity, bards can take advantage of light armor and with a moderate to high Intelligence, they can give rogues a run for their money when it comes to skill points. With their additional skill bonuses, like Lore Master, bards can end up providing more information than most other classes.

Bards can be found nearly anywhere for a reason. They have spells to make travel easier, know-how to find dangerous dungeons, and influence to make staying in a city quite interesting.

Races: Nearly all races have their storytellers, musicians and entertainers. Some have encouraged bards more than others, but it is important to remember that appearances can be deceiving - some races simply discourage certain arts in favor of others they deem more worthy. Bards of some type or other can be found in nearly every intelligent race, because even "savage" tribal societies value things that bards can do best.

Of the goodly folk, bards are most often associated with humans, elves and half-elves. Halflings are quite swift of foot and their bards have often been overlooked during important, newsworthy events. Gnomes, likewise, can make great bards; they are hardy and have a few natural tricks up their sleeves. Dwarves have rich storytelling traditions and their bards pass on some of the oldest stories that can be heard, for while dwarves are not as

long-lived as elves, they have tended to keep more tightly knit communities in which to retain their ancient folkways.

Background: Some bards discover their talents on their own and work their way up to mastery, while others find mentors to teach them particular arts. It is quite common for bards to form troupes or bands in order to have access to more skills and to stage more elaborate shows. It is also common for bards of all kinds to engage in fierce competition with each other, leading to nasty (and sometimes lethal) rivalries.

Religion & Alignment: Bards are exposed to a great number of religions through their travels and in stories. Many bards follow gods of travel, knowledge, poetry, music or thievery but they can also end up following exotic or lesser-known deities. Some bards regularly worship a whole collection of gods out of appreciation, while others just try to get as much help as they can.

Bards can be of any alignment, and that means their approaches to their powers can vary greatly. A lawful good bard might be the epitome of chivalrous manners, holding kingdoms together through diplomacy and acting as a swift messenger. But not all bards are kind or true, and many can make better villains than you'd initially think. A neutral evil bard might be the classic manipulator, telling people whatever they want to hear in order to get what she wants. A chaotic evil bard could sweep into town like the pied piper and carry loved ones away, to be returned for a price. Whichever way they go, bards are supported and protected by others - and that makes them difficult to disarm.

Musical Instruments: Although some bards inspire others through rhymes, dance, and other methods, many continue to rely on the language of music. Adventuring bards tend to favor portable musical instruments, the sturdier the better. Some possibilities include violins (or other small stringed instruments, like the rebec and lyre), horns, rattles, flutes, chimes, drums, triangles, gongs, and tambourines (or the more ancient sistrum). Musical instruments can gain the benefits of masterwork craftsmanship and they can be enchanted with magical abilities, as well. Summoned instruments (as in the *summon instrument* spell) are generally mediocre versions that only play for a limited time, so many bards favor permanent versions.

Gear & Tactics: Bards should be lightly armored and should consider carrying a shield, since they do not suffer from arcane spell failure until they use heavier armor. Since they do not have the hit points or Armor Class to

really sit well on the front line, bards should always have good ranged weapons at hand, as well. Bards should invest in at least one masterwork instrument, and any other gear that grants bonuses for relatively little investment. At low levels, things like alchemical acid, bandoleers, and potional belts can give bards extra options for less cash.

Bards should make Knowledge checks often, particularly when they might remember something that can help the group (like the weaknesses and strengths of new creatures). Bards should also consider trying to talk their way into discounts at stores, favors from NPCs, and peace with enemies the party might not want to face. Players should pay attention to their groups, rather than trying to hog the spotlight with these kinds of checks. If you are using my version of the bard, tap into your cohort and followers for extra support.

Skill & Spell Suggestions: Bards do not gain many spells during their careers, so each one counts. A careful player will pay attention to other spellcasters in the party, especially primary casters like clerics, so their bard does not overlap other characters' repertoires too much. While more healing can be useful, taking heroes' feast when the cleric is more likely to use it cuts down on your other options.

Consider taking some spells from what I think of as the Feets Don't Fail Me Now Package: *resistance*, *expeditious retreat*, *mirror image*, *blink or invisibility sphere*, *dimension door*, *mislead*, and *find the path*. These will help keep the bard out of harm's way. Spells with the sonic descriptor, like *shout*, are less likely to be guarded against than fire and electricity spells. Spells like *silence* can help a bard hobble other spellcasters. Buffing spells like *cat's grace* can bolster the party and even enhance bonuses from bardic music.

Although bards do not have access that many damage-inflicting spells, they do get some offensive magic. Do not forget the usefulness of spells such as *sleep*, *blindness/deafness*, *sound burst*, and *summon swarm*. They also get *summon monster* spells, which can come in handy despite their short duration. If you are using my version of the bard, consider area effects for the one spell per level you can choose from other lists - and don't forget your encore spell.

Linguistics in Pathfinder is useful not just for deciphering and learning languages but also for forgeries; putting a

few points into it, particularly at early levels, can make *comprehend languages* far less appealing. It is also worthwhile to keep in mind that bards have the Use Magic Device skill, which is based on Charisma. If a bard spends the maximum number of skill points buying ranks and has a high Charisma, they can utilize all sorts of magical items (divine or arcane) without much risk.

Rules: Start with the Pathfinder rules for the bard, and add or adjust the following:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: In addition to the normal range of weapons, the bard is allowed the use of one new martial or exotic weapon every three levels. Bards tend to travel and learn the ways of others – and have an affinity for whatever weapon looks best in their hands.

Spells: In addition to the normal parameters for bardic spellcasting, the following rules apply:

Bard spells generally come from a special list; however, one spell the bard knows per level can be drawn *from any other list*. The particular spell must be decided in advance. If the spell is listed for multiple classes at different levels, the lowest level determines the level at which the bard can cast it. (Thus, *dispel evil* would be a 4th level spell for a bard, as it is for a paladin.)

Upon reaching an even-numbered level, a bard can choose to learn a new spell in place of one he already knows (instead of waiting every three levels after fifth). The new spell must be of the same level as the one being lost.

Encore (Sp): When tapped out of their normal allotment of spells for the day, a bard can cast an echo of any spell they have already used since the last time they rested. They may use this ability once a day at third level, and gain an extra use per day every three levels thereafter.

Die-Hard Fans (Ex): Upon achieving sixth level, the bard has garnered enough attention to acquire the Leadership merit. Followers are typically admirers, patrons, and aspiring apprentices.

Tongues (Sp): At tenth level, the bard is able to speak with any creature that has a language, as per the tongues spell (caster level equal to the bard's). This ability is always active.