

Aether

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Table of Contents

Volume I May/June 2003 Number 5: Combat

Articles marked with © are (except for illustrations) entirely Open Game Content (Open Game License, page 19)

Æther

09 Learning to Fight ©

You aren't born knowing how to use a glaive.

12 Smith ©

If adventurers had to make their own weapons, they'd never have enough time to go adventuring.

14 Dragonhide and Umberhulk Skin ©

You've just slain a dragon. Now wear it.

15 Vampire Fangs and Polar Bear Claws ©

16 Weapon Cards ©

Animal Companions

04 Hero's Herald: Masters of Battle

05 Hey!

12 New Weapon: Malus ©

13 New Weapon: Broad Sword ©

17 Called Shots ©

From Swashbuckling Adventures

18 New Feat: Nomenclature ©

18 Variant Races: Humans ©

19 Letters

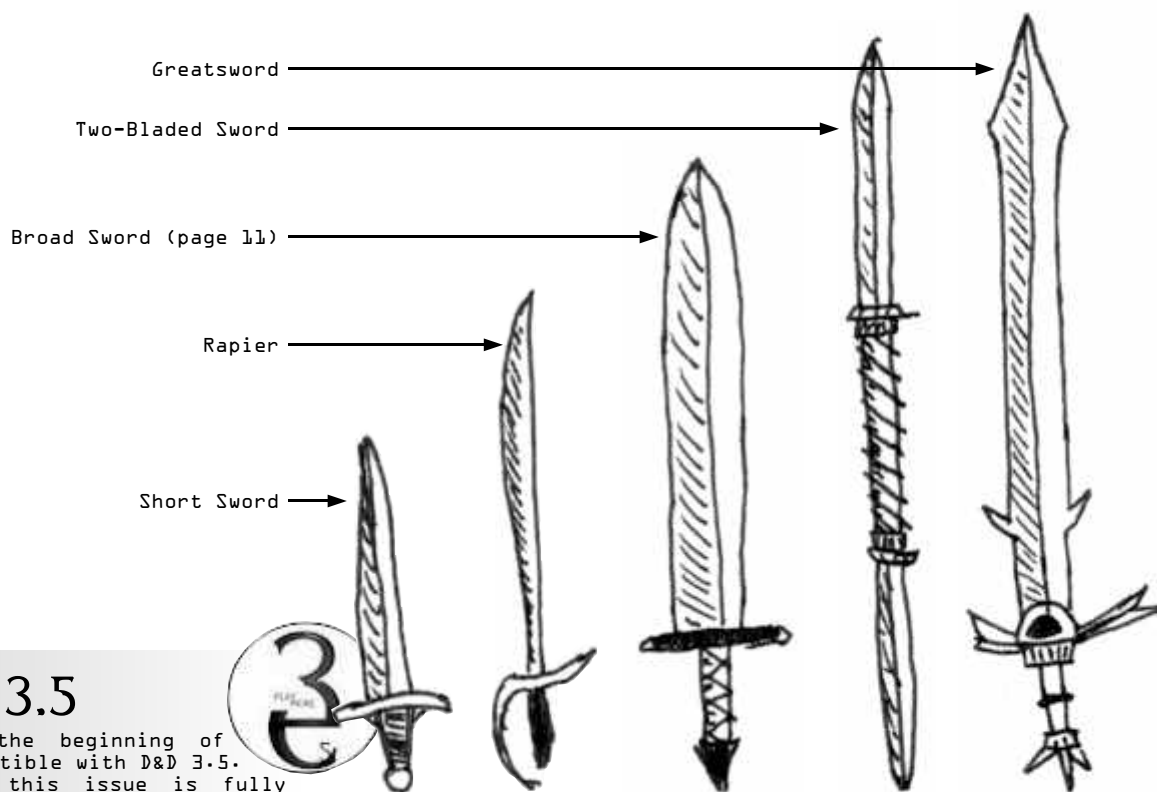
18 What do we want?

19 Open Game License

Origins and Gencon

21 Origins

22 Gencon



Æther and 3.5

This issue marks the beginning of Æther becoming compatible with D&D 3.5. Not everything in this issue is fully compatible with 3.5, but each future issue will be more compatible than the previous one.

Join the Æther discussion group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Aethergroup>

Æther is looking for staff! If you would like any position at Æther, contact Matt Halm (cow080@yahoo.com).

On the Cover: A barbarian warlord. Illustrated by Jason Engle.

Swords on this page and other pages illustrated by Matt Halm.

Alasthead

Contributing Authors

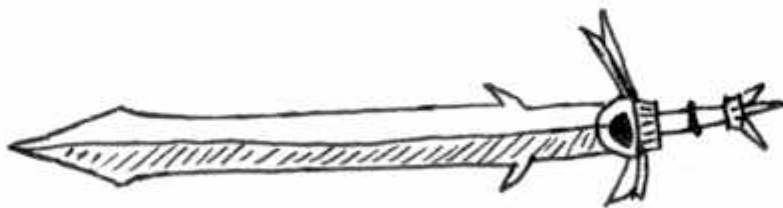
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Masters of Battle

By John Bellando



Well met, readers. It is time for another journey, and I, Harliquinn the Minstrel, will be taking you to the forefront of battle, to the lines of combat. Fighting styles used by heroes of the realms are as varied as the heroes themselves. Weapon choices, combat styles, and battle skills define a hero in the same way that personality and dreams do. In order to present some of the more unique fighting styles, I have been traveling abroad, cataloging the tactics of individuals. So sit back and enjoy the gentle fire as we continue to travel the realms in search of Heroes to Herald...

Our journey takes us from the lands of the Silver Marches to the plains of Greyhawk, where two heroes of unique fighting styles are at the forefront of the battle against evil. Daylien Taggert, a roguish-warrior of northern human descent, has a rather interesting history and motivation for his particular brand of combat. Though he refuses to speak too much of his past, I was able to deduce some information. Ballreem, a gnome small of stature but large of courage, also has an intriguing history, that too hints at his penchant for using the fighting tactics he does.

[Harliquinn] Good afternoon gentlemen, and thank you for taking time to join me in this interview. It is my goal to catalog various unique fighting styles that I encounter, and you two present wonderful opportunities for this. Could you start us off with a little bit of information about yourselves and how you came to be where you are today?

[Daylien] What's to tell really? I grew up in the eastern parts of the Silver Marches, far from the protection of Silvermoon. They've no idea what's going on in the outlying parts of the land. My mother had been an herbalist in the town, and my father was one of the town protectors. We've been pushing back orc raiders for a while, by ourselves. Well one night we were attacked, and caught unawares. The orcs had brought ogres and trolls, and their magic. We all took part in defending our home, and eventually we won out the

next morning, but my father had died along with hundreds of others. With my mother traveling west to restock some rare plants, my wounds were never healed properly; an ogre's poison had crippled me. [He takes a moment to spit on the ground.]

[Harliquinn] Wow, I'm sorry to hear that. Orcs and giantkin seem to be a problem everywhere. You seem to have recovered well.

[Daylien] Well I never was much use at melee fighting after that, weapons were too heavy to lift, and armor wasn't an option. When my mother returned, she tried everything she could, but nothing helped. So, I took to reading, studying what I could about poisons. I figured I'd keep my mind trained at least.

[Harliquinn] Well that's an important part of fighting, knowing your enemy. Ballreem, what of your background?

[Ballreem] Well, Harliquinn, the story is really quite fascinating, if for no other reason than because it's about me. Growing up, I was intrigued by fires and the explosions caused by the wizards in my hometown. I quickly realized that I had no talent for wizardly things, but my desire to make fires still burned in me. So I studied in the library to find a way to protect myself while making use of the fire that was so interesting to me.

[Harliquinn] So Daylien, tell us about your favorite weapon. I must say, I don't recall seeing another like it.

[Daylien] Well I use what's called a repeating hand crossbow. It's similar to a normal light repeating crossbow, but you can use it in one hand. It was a few years after the attack on our town that some adventurers were passing through the area. Turns out, they had done battle with Drow recently and brought stories of

continued on page 5

Hey!

Role-Playing Combat. To many, it is a contradiction in terms. “If you’re in combat, you aren’t role-playing”. “If you’re role-playing, you don’t need combat.” Neither of these statements is true. A role-playing game includes many facets, all woven together to form a complete story that is both entertaining and rewarding to the characters involved. Core to the story is conflict or adversity, usually resulting in combat encounters. However, the nature of role-playing does not need to end when initiative is rolled. It is possible and very rewarding, to incorporate a bit of role-playing into combat situations. This can be accomplished in several ways, including wielding interesting weapons, choosing creative combat styles, using skills in combat, and bantering with your opponents.

A character’s choice of weapons can really set the tone for future role-playing during combat or outside of combat. While most characters take standard weapons—such as long swords, long bows, greatswords, or scimitars—it adds character dimensionality to wield non-standard weapons. Unique choice in weapons gives an otherwise 2-dimensional character a more robust feel, adding to his mystique or style. For those concerned with maintaining combat effectiveness, choose alternative weapons that give similar benefits. Examples include choosing a sickle over a dagger (extra damage vs. higher threat range), a morning star over a flail, a throwing axe over a short sword (ranged vs. higher threat range), a rapier over a scimitar (piercing vs. slashing), a battle axe over a longsword (higher critical multiplier vs. higher threat range), or a heavy flail over a greatsword (bludgeoning vs. slashing). For those wanting a complete change of pace, consider taking weapons with special properties, such as whips, saps, lances, or glaives. For those with the feats or weapon skills, the use of an exotic weapon may be what’s needed to add a bit of individuality. Hand crossbows, spiked chain, double-bladed sword, and the dire flail are all possibilities. The first step to bringing combat alive is to choose your weapons carefully and with purpose. Those you travel with should have no problem remembering your favorite weapon, and the townsfolk may be more apt to remember the hero that wielded the wicked scythe to the one using a greatsword. Even if a character to use a common weapon, such as a longsword, the hints following may serve to spark creativity in using the weapon.

After choosing the weapon or weapons a character will use, it’s important to utilize an effective but exciting combat style for the weapon. This style may be as simple as using the weapon with an alternate hand (making this hand the character’s primary), or as complicated as taking a series of feats designed to give the character unparalleled skill (archery feats, for instance). Whichever method is used, the character should develop a style that others can immediately identify with the character. When choosing feats or a style of fighting, keep an eye towards the inventive. Fighting with two-weapons is a popular combat style, offering extra attacks at a penalty to strike. While it may be numerically beneficial to wield two short swords that benefit from the same feat choices, it has been done often to become commonplace.

Instead, consider a style that uses two different weapons or the same uncommon weapon, offering variable attack types and effects. Good examples include pairing a standard weapon with a whip, throwing axe, or light hammer. Perhaps your character’s style is influenced by his family, his clan, or his environment. A Dwarven smith using two light hammers would be an interesting site indeed! Lastly, when using two-weapons sometimes it’s useful to pair a melee weapon with a ranged weapon. In this way, a character may attack with the ranged weapon as he moves to engage in combat. Ranged weapons suitable for this include hand crossbows, slings, daggers, darts, and throwing axes.

Using a two-handed weapon is another common practice, giving up the extra attacks for the chance to do huge amounts of damage. This is particularly good for characters with lower attack bonuses. However, even this style can be combined with uncommon weapons. The spiked chain offers a good choice for those wanting to trip opponents, while the glaive and ranseur offer reach in addition to higher damage. The ability to perform other tactics during combat other than a standard melee attack provides characters not only with alternative strikes but also opportunity to fight with flare! Fighting with a single weapon or a weapon and shield is a lesser used approach, but one that should not be overlooked. The benefits of a shield are obvious, providing additional protection and occasionally added attacks, such as a bash. However, there are benefits to fighting with only a single weapon. Combined with the deflect arrows feat, a character can fight and deflect at the same time. Holding a wand, rod, or magic item in the off hand would allow the character to alternatively attack and use the item without putting the weapon away. Finally, the character with a hand free is better able to use his environment for dramatic reasons: grabbing a rope, throwing a rock, or even catching hold of another character in an emergency. No matter what method the character chooses to use in combat, there are ways to make it more exciting and leave a lasting impression on both allies and enemies alike.

While certain skills have obvious uses in combat, some skills see fewer applications. Tumble is one of the most used skills in combat, as its benefits are numerous. Fighting defensively, moving through enemy combatants and avoiding falling damage are but a few uses. Other skills, when used judiciously in combat, can help turn the tide of battle, and offer the characters a chance to fight with flare. Balance is a skill that a trained character can easily use to his advantage in combat. With 5 ranks in Balance, you are no longer considered flat-footed while on a narrow surface. A good way for a rogue or other class to take advantage of sneak attacks is to lure an enemy onto a ledge, beam, or other narrow path. Using his high Balance skill, the rogue would be able to make short work of a less-skilled opponent. Bluff, as many know, is used to feint in combat, allowing a character to momentarily distract an enemy. This moment may be used to adjust your combat position, make a sneak attack, or setup an ally for a precise shot. Climbing is another skill usable in combat, though less often than some others. A good situation to use climbing is to climb a rope or ladder to a higher surface, forcing an opponent to do likewise. If the opponent is slower or makes little progress, the character may get free attacks, sometimes re-

sulting in sneak attack or other precision damage. Intimidate provides ample opportunities to demoralize and weaken an opponent. After a particularly daring show of force, there may even be situational modifiers to the roll. Bonuses such as this provide additional incentive for creative banter and flare in combat. Finally, the Jump skill may be used to provide a character with a more advantageous position in combat. Leaping from location to location can sometimes confound an opponent, and provide the momentarily opening for a flanking position. In addition, an opponent without jumping may be forced to climb or swim to reengage in combat, allowing free attacks. In any combat situation, it's important to observe the surroundings and make optimum use of them using relevant skills. By doing so, characters can enliven the combat scenario from simple hack and slash to a more memorable climactic battle between good and evil.

Combat banter is a much overlooked facet of the role-playing experience. Nothing infuriates an enemy more than taunting them during a fight. Particularly clever characters may actually force an opponent to leave themselves open to attack, make a wrong move, or forgo strategy in an attempt to merely cease the verbal jabs being sent their way. Certain skills, such as Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate and the like may be used to judge the harshness of the banter. In addition to potential combat benefits, the combat repartee may be used to draw others into the scene. The quiet fighter types may take to a slow conversation with the enemies, drawing them out. Swashbuckling rogue or ranger types may tease and taunt their opponents as they maneuver for flanking positions. Skillful monks may use spring attack to lure their opponents into positions more favorable to their allies. Paladins, clerics, or druids may give sermons to their evil adversaries, distracting them from their true goals. Wizards and sorcerers may taunt their opponents while they cast inhibiting spells upon them. Bards, with their quick wits, are often seen as the only characters capable of such banter; this is wrong. Any character with a bit of preparation can begin to enjoy combat with a role-playing bent by using even the simplest of phrases while fighting.

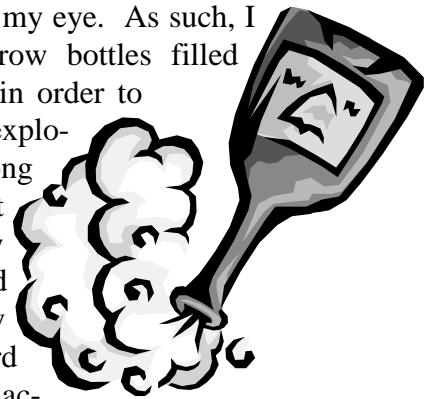
The suggestions above, and others that characters may come up with on their own, are presented with the hope that the combat in your games may be as entertaining and rewarding as the remainder of the adventure. Choosing interesting weapons, using unique combat styles, performing appropriate skills, and engaging in combat banter are all ways to spice up an otherwise dull, monotonous combat scene. With luck, soon more characters will realize that role-playing need not stop when the initiative dice are rolled.

—John Bellando
Associate Editor

the dark elves' weapons and magic. I'd been working with larger crossbows, throwing knives and slings for a while, anything I could use effectively with my strength gone. Word of the hand crossbows used by the Drow excited me at the time. With the help of one of the adventurers, we went through some texts written in the Drow language, and found some drawings. Using these, I started to work on making my own weapon. After several months of failures, I finally had a working weapon, but it was slow to load and fire. I made some modifications and soon had an effective repeating hand crossbow. The size is about the same, and the weight stayed low. Instead of laying a single bolt in the notch, it's fitted for a cartridge of 5 bolts. The cartridge has a hook that when it's drawn back, cocks the crossbow and lowers another bolt into the barrel. It doesn't do tremendous damage, but it has... other uses.

[Harliquinn] Hmm, remind me to ask about those other uses. Ballreem, your weapon choice is just as unique; care to tell us about it?

[Ballreem] As I stated earlier, fires and explosions really bring a light to my eye. As such, I discovered that I throw bottles filled with alchemist's fire in order to make very powerful explosions. It didn't take long for me to realize that this would actually make a very good weapon against my foes. I worked hard and quickly became accurate at throwing the liquid-filled bottles with pinpoint precision. As the fires engulf my enemies, they quickly become so preoccupied that they cannot focus during the fight.



[Harliquinn] Back to you Daylien. You mentioned other uses for the hand crossbow?

[Daylien] Well, the crossbow is small, so it's easy to conceal. The bolts aren't too large either, and the cartridges are light, so you can carry a lot of ammuni-

tion. I made this bandolier to hold about 10 cartridges. It fits over the chest easily enough and I can reload faster this way. Each cartridge holds a different set of bolts.

[Harliquinn] Such as?

[Daylien] After fighting a few skeletons, it was pretty obvious that normal bolts weren't cutting it [Daylien chuckles a bit here]. Anyways, so I used some of my weapon crafting experience and started experimenting with different heads for the bolts. Archers have been doing this with arrows for bows, but you don't see too much variety in bolts. I've created some blunt bolts, using rounded tips instead of points. These are great against some undead. Also, I've made some frog-crotch bolts for slashing through ropes and bindings. Then there's the delivery bolts, with hollow tips. These can hold liquids like holy water, acid, or even poison.

[Harliquinn] Sounds like you're well prepared for anything with your arsenal. Ballreem, I understand you have similar varieties of bombs?

[Ballreem] Obviously my preferred hurling weapon contains fire or explosives. However, if I prepared for them ahead of time, I could certainly use other liquids in my bottles.

[Harliquinn] Daylien, I take it you're a ranged combat fighter then?

[Daylien] Yeah, I prefer to stay near the back of the group, out of sight. My early training involved hiding and attacking from the shadows. Doing this, I could usually place a shot in a vital area. I can't get too far from the action, though, since the hand crossbow's range isn't as long as a bow, and it's tougher to aim a shot well.

[Harliquinn] I can imagine. Ballreem, given the nature of your weapon, I guess you stay out of close combat as well?

[Ballreem] Well, I am not a girly-man, so I don't mind

getting into a scrap. I tend to use the throwing devices to soften up my enemy before engaging them in a toe-to-toe fight. Of course, since I am a very handsome gnome, I try to ensure that I do not get my face cut as the ladies swoon whenever I walk into a bar. In order to do this, I typically let the big, ugly paladin get the foes mad at him before I start attacking them.

[Harliquinn] Do you use any advanced fighting techniques during combat?

[Daylien] Until recently, I used pretty standard techniques in combat. At the first sign of danger, I would take to the shadows and wait for an opening that I could exploit. After I lost the element of surprise, I would hang back, moving as needed, and keep our opponents distracted with missile fire.

[Harliquinn] Our? I take it you travel with others?

[Daylien] I'm still mostly a loner, but the last year I've been traveling with a small group. A pretty diverse group really. There's a cleric of Mystra who's taken up the mantle of paladin, of all things, and a female monk who loves pain. We also have a wizard, he's kind of dangerous with his fire. A Halfling joins us now and again, and there's a strange fighter who is always screaming and having odd lights or sounds coming from him.

[Harliquinn] [From behind some trees, a small white dragon emerges sitting on a dark gray horse! The dragon is eating a sweet roll!]

[Daylien] Oh yeah! [Laughing] I can't forget Kakixathrix, he's an old friend too. We rescued him from some goblins. He and I look out for each other. [Daylien says something in Draconic and the dragon finishes off the roll and lies down.] That's Ghost, he's a wonderful horse. We've been through a lot together. Once I road him around a clearing taking shots at some ogres who attacked us. Luckily for us, they couldn't catch him.

[Harliquinn] I see! Sounds like you've had quite a lot of adventures. You were

Answers for this interview provided by:
John Bellando (Daylien)
Marty Goff (Ballreem)

talking about your techniques and how they've changed?

[Daylien] Yeah, I've started practicing some new firing methods. I'm able to get the bolts to go further now, using better arcs and judging the wind appropriately. My aim has improved also, and I can hit vital areas a lot more than before. It helps to know how to really hurt someone. I'm planning to start using two of my repeating crossbows soon. Just have to work out a way to get them to load themselves.

[Harliquinn] That can't be easy.

[Daylien] There's a gnome cleric of Gond who travels with us sometimes, I'm gonna see if he has some ideas to help. I think rigging up a small set of pulleys and springs might do the trick. If that doesn't work, I understand there may be some magical spells that can help. I think being able to use both crossbows in combat, will give me a lot more chances to land a good shot and do some serious harm to the creatures.

[Harliquinn] Wow. I have some more questions for you in a minute. Ballreem, didn't mean to ignore you. What advanced fighting techniques do you have? Besides blowing things up?

[Ballreem] As I stated earlier, I definitely get into toe-to-toe combat. However, I am much more effective when my foe is being distracted by someone else. When the foe is distracted, I can take the time to find particularly painful spots to stick my sword. It doesn't take many times of me puncturing their kidney before they stop fighting. If I am forced to fight someone one-on-one, my quickness often makes it difficult to hit me while giving me a good chance at bypassing their defenses.

[Harliquinn] Ballreem, do you have other skills that help your group besides fighting?

[Ballreem] Yes, I do. However, I am unable to discuss such things at this time, and it would be best if you did not bring the subject up again.

[Harliquinn] How about you Daylien? What else do

you add to your adventuring party?

[Daylien] Well I've always lived outside, so I took up some survival skills early on, tracking animals, hunting, those kinds of things. I can scout for the group as well, since I don't wear heavy armor or carry a lot of equipment. Weaponsmithing is something I'm skilled at also, and even made some items for the group. I have a few other skills, but this interview isn't the time to go into them.

[Harliquinn] Hmmm, sure, whatever you say. What about the dragon? Does he fight?

[Daylien] Yeah, Kakix is a great fighter. We train around one another, and look out for each other in combat. He likes to breath on everything, freezing it to eat. Don't worry, he hasn't had human flesh in a long time. Right now, he's hooked on sweet rolls, so if you want to keep him happy, keep him well fed.

[Harliquinn] I'll keep that in mind. So any last words of wisdom for our readers?

[Daylien] Always keep your eyes open, know your terrain and use it to your advantage. Never underestimate anyone or anything, and learn to know your enemies as well as or better than your friends.

[Ballreem] Nice points, Daylien. I would like to add that you should always be aware of everyone and everything in battle. It is much more difficult to hit you if you are prepared for the attack.

[Harliquinn] I want to thank you both for your time, and allowing me to interview you. I'll keep an ear out for your further exploits.

Well readers, I hope you have gained some new knowledge into two more of the myriad of explorers traveling our lands in search of adventure and treasure. As always, remember you cannot always judge the danger of an enemy by their weapons. For even a small crossbow or innocent looking bottle can become deadly in the right hands.

Harliquinn Whiteshadow



Learning to Fight

By Matt Halm, using Open Game Content from the *Dragonstar Player's Companion* published by Fantasy Flight Games

Anyone who finds and trains under a master of the ancient arts is called a student. A student may pay gold and spend XP to learn a master's secrets and apply them in his own adventures. Typically, each master offers a series of 10 lessons, each progressively more difficult to learn. Once a student has learned five or more lessons from a single master, he may in turn teach others the tricks he knows. Each master's body of knowledge is known as a school, though his body of knowledge is rarely presented in a codified manner. Instead, each master draws on his experience and the bits of knowledge gleaned from older masters to form the basis of his instructions. Despite this scattershot approach, over the decades and centuries, a few typical schools have emerged that share the same lessons and knowledge.



Each lesson must be studied in order, from the first to the last. Therefore, a student cannot initially master the third lesson and then proceed to the fifth or first. Furthermore, it becomes progressively more difficult for a student to learn the ways of more than one school. The first school a student studies with is known as his primary school. When training in schools other than his primary one, a student must pay twice the XP costs as he struggles to juggle his original training and his new talents.

The level cap listed on Table 5-1 reflects the general worldliness and experience a student should have before attempting to master a specific talent. A school's teachings draw on both the master's and the pupil's experiences and knowledge. A student may attempt to learn a lesson if he does not meet the level cap but he must pay an additional 20% XP to complete his training. The student struggles to keep up with the master and must devote additional energy to learning talents that are beyond his understanding.

School Descriptions

The first school is from the *Player's Companion*, and is used as an example. It has been modified slightly to fit a more fantasy-style campaign.

Children of the Blade

TABLE 5-1: COSTS AND TRAINING TIME

Lesson	XP Cost	Gold Cost	Time Cost	Level Cap
1	100	500	7 days	1
2	300	1,000	1 day	2
3	600	1,500	2 days	4
4	1,000	2,000	3 days	6
5	1,500	2,500	4 days	8
6	2,100	3,000	7 days	10
7	2,800	4,000	10 days	12
8	3,600	5,000	14 days	15
9	4,500	7,000	21 days	18
10	5,500	10,000	30 days	20

Lesson 1: Quick Reflexes

In any battle, quick thinking and quicker reactions can keep a person alive. By placing students in dangerous situations and inflicting electrical damage with various spells, the Children teach their students to react quickly and to use their intuition. In times of battle when fast reflexes and intuitive decision-making are called for, this training becomes very useful. This technique grants students a +1 bonus to attack rolls on any attacks of opportunity.

Lesson 2: Parry

Once the Children have imparted improved reflexes on their students, they teach the ability to use those reactions to defend. By watching melee opponents, the Children learn to see what movements come before an attack. Such perceptive wisdom when facing a real opponent allows the Children to better prepare themselves to fend off an attack. This technique grants a +2 dodge bonus against melee attacks. This technique is effective only against a single melee opponent. If the student is in combat with more than one opponent, he must select which opponent to use the technique against and this decision lasts until the student's next turn.

Lesson 3: Grace of the Fallen

As part of their training in dealing with not only other melee fighters, but also ranged attacks, the Children study how to use

cover and move as fluidly as possible. This technique allows the student to stand up from a prone position as a free action, rather than a move-equivalent action.

Lesson 4: Strike the Craven Blade

Mastery of melee combat requires that the Children not only control their own weapon, but that they learn control of their opponents' weapons as well. By learning to anticipate the moves and attacks of their enemies, students learn how to attack their opponents' weapons effectively. This technique grants a +2 competence bonus to disarm attempts and attacks against the opponent's weapon.

Lesson 5: Rain of Steel

Though the Children focus on the use of melee weapons, they also train to use those weapons at a distance. At times, there can be no substitute for ranged attacks and students of this school learn to use their melee weapons as thrown weapons for those moments of desperation. Thrown melee weapons of the student's size or smaller have a range increment of 10 ft. Thrown melee weapons one size category larger than the wielder have a range increment of only 5 ft.

Lesson 6: Shielding Blade

The true test of the Children's philosophy is when they face an opponent using ranged attacks. The same lessons of observing one's opponent are of use against more distant opponents. With careful observation, timing, and quick reflexes, the Children can often avoid ranged attacks. This technique grants a +2 dodge bonus against ranged attacks, as long as the student is not in melee combat with any other opponents. Like parry, this technique is only useful against one opponent at a time.

Lesson 7: Favored Weapon

The majority of the training the school focuses on revolves around movements and tricks that can be applied to any weapon. This lesson is instead centered on a specific weapon. The Children who are the accepted masters of the student's chosen weapon design a series of exercises and challenges. When the student has passed all challenges, he has mastered this technique. Favored weapon grants the student a +1 bonus to attack rolls with one melee weapon type.

Furthermore, the selected weapon type is considered one size category smaller for the student. Thus a human might learn to wield a large weapon in one hand, though even with this technique he could not wield two such weapons. A medium-size student might also learn to wield a Medium-size weapon as if it were light, making it easier to fight with two such weapons.

Lesson 8: Grace of the Cat

As part of their continuing training, the Children of the Blade stress mastery of acrobatic movement. Masters of the school teach their students by leaving them unarmed and surrounded by opponents. Students must learn to move with fluidity and grace until they can escape the mock battle without injury. This technique grants a +2 competence bonus on all Bal-

ance, Escape Artist, and Tumble checks.

Lesson 9: Smite

The Children of the Blade generally view their skills as a defensive art. Despite this predisposition, their abilities naturally also include more effective attacks with their weapons of choice. By practicing quick strikes at vital points and learning how to discern the most vulnerable areas of an opponent, the Children learn how best to smite down their foes. This technique enables the student to smite once per day, and the smite must be declared before any rolls are made. The smite attack receives a bonus on the attack roll equal to the student's Wisdom modifier (if positive) and a damage bonus equal to character level.

Lesson 10: The Art of Defense

The final mastery for the Children of the Blade is to learn the art of defense. Multiple attackers challenge students so that they might learn how better to defend themselves against several attacks while still maintaining the ability to inflict damage themselves. This technique allows the student to use the total defense option in combat and still make a single melee attack. The student gains the normal benefits for fighting with total defense and may move his normal speed, plus make one attack at his full base attack bonus.

Improvisational Combatants

Adept at holding their own in bar room brawls and other fights that spring up in every-day areas, the improvisation combatant is never without a weapon as long as there is an odd object lying around.

Lesson 1: Hidden Weapon

You never know what might happen, so you always keep a dagger or other small weapon on you somewhere, such as in a boot. The DC of anyone searching you for that weapon increases by +10.

Lesson 2: Bottle Proficiency

You can wield a bottle or tankard. A bottle does 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage on the first hit and 1d4 points of slashing damage on each hit after that. A tankard does 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage.

Lesson 3: Improved Unarmed Strike

Just in case you can't find an object usable as a weapon, students trained in the art of improvisational combat learn to use

New Rules

In this article, there are several new items that add to the idea of schools.

There are school-related feats that alter the way schools work.

Just as there are 5-level prestige classes, there are 5-lesson schools presented in this article.

their fists as weapons. You gain the Improved Unarmed Strike feat.

Lesson 4: Unarmed Objects

When the student learns the fourth lesson, they gain the ability to use improvised weapons such as bottles as though they were unarmed strikes, gaining any benefits associated with unarmed strikes.

Lesson 5: Improvised Weapons

You can use nearly anything you find as a weapon, such as chairs and candlesticks. No matter the item, it does 1d6 points of damage. The type of damage varies on what object you use. For example, a chair (like most objects) would do bludgeoning, but a butter knife would do slashing damage.

Wielders of the Pike

The wielders of the pike focus on using polearms in combat – they learn to wield them with deadly effectiveness, and can use them in ways other combatants have never seen.

Polearms include the following weapons: glaive, guisarme, halberd, lance, longspike, ranseur, and trident.

Lesson 1: Ankle Swipe

When a student Wielder of the Pike gains the first lesson, they become able to use their polearm to trip their opponents. The student gains the Improved Trip feat, but only when using a polearm.

Lesson 2: Polearm Mastery

Upon learning the second lesson, a student gains the Weapon Focus feat on a specific polearm. Students are trained in the use of their chosen weapon, and learn to use it more effectively than usual.

Lesson 3: Dexterous Moves

When fighting with his chosen polearm, a student who has reached the third lesson may use his Dexterity modifier instead of his Strength modifier when calculating attack rolls, as though he has the Weapon Finesse feat. If he already has the Weapon Finesse feat for his polearm, he gains an additional +1 bonus in addition to his Dexterity modifier.

Lesson 4: Thrown Polearm

When a student learns the fourth lesson, they gain the ability to throw their chosen polearm as a ranged weapon. The weapon has a range of 10 ft.

Lesson 5: Double Strike

At the climax of his training, the student learns to wield two polearms at once. For his chosen polearm, he can wield one in each hand as though they were one-handed weapons and as though he has the two-weapon fighting feat.

School-Related Feats

The following new feats are designed for players who are or are planning to learn a school.

I Already Know That

You think you already know a lesson, but you don't really.

Benefit: You may skip the first lesson (and pay no costs) in a particular school, but you do not gain the benefit associated with that lesson.

Special: You may take this feat more than once. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take the feat you choose a different school.

It Makes Perfect Sense to Me

You understand more than a typical student.

Benefit: You may train in a lesson one lesson higher in a particular school than the level cap restricts you to.

Special: You may take this feat more than once. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take the feat you choose a different school.

Smith

By Matt Halm

A smith crafts weapons for local adventurers and town guards. For the purposes of this article, a smith is considered a blacksmith, that is he crafts only weapons. Many other types of smiths also exist, however.

Class Features

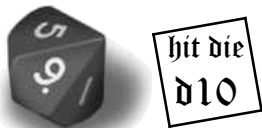
All of the following are class features of the smith.

Weapon and Armor Proficiencies: If a smith has made a certain weapon or type of armor, he is proficient with it. Most smiths have made many of the types of simple weapons and armor. In addition, a smith is proficient with (but does not wield in combat) the malus.

Craft: A smith can make a certain weapon or armor quicker

TABLE 5-2: THE SMITH

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+1	+0	+0	1st Craft
2	+0	+1	+0	+0	
3	+1	+2	+1	+1	
4	+1	+2	+1	+1	
5	+1	+3	+1	+1	2nd Craft
6	+2	+3	+2	+2	
7	+2	+4	+2	+2	
8	+2	+4	+2	+2	
9	+3	+5	+3	+3	3rd Craft
10	+3	+5	+3	+3	Train apprentice
11	+3	+6	+3	+3	
12	+4	+6	+4	+4	
13	+4	+7	+4	+4	4th Craft
14	+4	+7	+4	+4	
15	+5	+8	+5	+5	
16	+5	+8	+5	+5	
17	+5	+9	+5	+5	5th Craft
18	+6/+1	+9	+6	+6	
19	+6/+1	+10	+6	+6	
20	+6/+1	+10	+6	+6	



Class Skills

The class skills of the smith (sorted by key ability) are:

Str
Dex
Con
Int Craft, Knowledge (armor, weapons)
Wis Profession
Cha

In addition to those skills, the smith may choose any six skills to be class skills.

Skill Points at 1st Level: (6 + Int modifier) × 4

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 6 + Int modifier.

than usual. He chooses one item at 1st level. For the chosen item, a smith can make it in half the time. When using the craft skill to make the chosen item, make two checks for each week.

At 5th, 9th, 13th, and 17th level the smith can choose a new item.

Train Apprentice: When he reaches 10th level, the smith has gained enough knowledge about his trade that he is able to teach others to do the same thing. There are several options when training an apprentice.

NPC apprentice: A smith can train another NPC to be a smith. The apprentice gains levels in the smith NPC class as he watches and helps his master. For each year he serves his master, he gains 1 level. After about 3 years, the apprentice has enough knowledge to begin gaining levels on his own. A smith can have a maximum of two NPC apprentices.

PC apprentice: A smith can train a PC to be a smith's apprentice. The apprentice gains levels in the smith's apprentice prestige class (on page 11) as he watches and helps his master. To gain a level in the class, he must gain experience as a normal

New Weapon

Malus

The malus, more commonly known as a blacksmith's hammer, is used for crafting arms and armor. To effectively wield a malus as a melee weapon, a character needs a Strength score of at least 20. If a character has a Strength score between 15 and 19, he can wield the weapon, but suffers a -2 penalty to attack rolls with it.

A malus is a two-handed exotic weapon.



Cost	Damage	Critical	Range	Weight	Type
50 gp	1d10	×3	—	20 lb.	Bludgeoning

character would, and he must serve his master for one full month (30 days). A smith can have a maximum of one PC apprentice.

Smith's Apprentice

The smith is an expert at creating weapons, but he lacks the first hand experience needed to excel at his trade. The smith's apprentice can, with training and help from his master, achieve the same level of quality in less time.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the smith's apprentice.

Weapon and Armor Proficiencies: In addition to the requisite proficiencies (simple weapons, the maul, simple armor, and shields), a smith's apprentice gains proficiency with every weapon, suit of armor, or shield he creates.

Craft: A smith's apprentice can make a certain weapon or armor quicker than usual. He chooses one item at 1st level. For the chosen item, a smith's apprentice can make it in half the time. When using the craft skill to make the chosen item, make two checks for each week.

At every level after 1st the smith's apprentice can choose a new item.

Gaining Levels: In order to gain another level in this class, a character must serve his master for one month with no interruptions in addition to gaining the necessary experience.

Class Skills

The class skills of the smith's apprentice (sorted by key ability) are:

Str

Dex

Con

Int Craft, Knowledge (armor, weapons)

Wis Profession

Cha

In addition to those skills, the smith's apprentice may choose any six skills to be class skills, usually ones similar to those his master chose.

Skill Points at 1st Level: (6 + Int modifier) × 4

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Requirements

To become a smith's apprentice, a character must fulfill all of the following requirements:

Craft (weaponsmithing or armorsmithing): 4 ranks.

Knowledge (weapons or armor): 4 ranks.

Weapon Proficiencies: Simple weapons and maul.

Armor Proficiencies: Simple armor and shields.

Special: Must be trained by a smith.

TABLE 5-3: THE SMITH'S APPRENTICE

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
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1	+0	+2	+0	+0	1st Craft
2	+1	+3	+0	+0	2nd Craft
3	+2	+3	+1	+1	3rd Craft
4	+3	+4	+1	+1	4th Craft
5	+3	+4	+1	+1	5th Craft



New Weapon

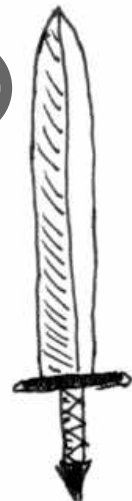
Broad Sword



A broad sword is slightly shorter than a long sword, and twice as wide. A character can wield a broad sword with two hands, or with one if they are proficient with it.

A broad sword is a one-handed exotic weapon.

Cost	Damage	Critical	Weight	Type
70 gp	2d4	×3	10 lb.	Slashing



Dragonhide and Umberhulk Skin

Crafting Armor from Natural Defenses



By Matt Halm with John Bellando

Armor made from a creature you have slain is a way of showing that you have defeated that monster in battle. Everyone who sees you wear it knows of your bravery.

To remove a piece of hide suitable for armor from a creature, you must make a Survival check. The DC of the check is listed on table 5-3: Armor from Creatures. You must have either some sort of slashing or piercing weapon, or skinning tools to remove the hide. If you simply use a weapon, you suffer a –2 penalty to the check. If you use skinning tools, you do not suffer any penalty, and if you use masterwork skinning tools you gain a +2 bonus to the check.

To create armor from the hide, you must make a craft check. The DC of this check is equal to 15 + the armor bonus provided by the hide.

The armor check penalties and arcane spell failure changes for the various creatures are as follows.

Creature	AC Penalty	Spell Failure
Bulette	–4	20%
Chuul	–2	10%
Dragon	–3	15%
Formian	–2	10%
Gargoyle	–2	10%
Hydra	–3	15%
Mummy wrapping	–1	5%
Phase Spider	–2	10%
Purple Worm	–3	15%
Remorhaz	–2	10%
Umber Hulk	–2	10%
Wyvern	–3	15%

There are a few special rules regarding some of the armors.

Dragon: If you wear dragon hide, your future relations with dragons will probably be challenging. This is usually only a problem for good characters wearing chromatic dragon hide. If the characters ever happen to come across a dead chromatic dragon, they are probably best off not salvaging the hide.

Mummy Wrapping: The DC for salvaging a mummy's wrappings is 0, but you run the risk of contracting the disease mummy rot. At the GM's discretion, you might also risk the mummy's curse.

TABLE 5-4: ARMOR FROM CREATURES

Creature	Armor Effect	Salvage DC
Bulette	+8 AC bonus	22
Chuul	+5 AC bonus, immune to poison	22
Dragon (Adult)	+10 AC bonus*	24
Black	Acid resistance 20	24
Blue	Electricity resistance 20	24
Green	Acid resistance 20	24
Red	Fire resistance 20	24
White	Cold resistance 20	24
Brass	Fire resistance 15, immune to <i>sleep</i>	24
Bronze	Electricity resistance 15, immune to <i>repulsion</i>	24
Copper	Acid resistance 15, immune to <i>slow</i>	24
Gold	Fire resistance 15, immune to <i>weakness</i>	24
Silver	Cold resistance 15, immune to <i>paralyze</i>	24
Formian (worker)	+4 AC bonus, immune to poison, petrification, and cold; electricity, fire, and sonic resistance 10	20
Gargoyle	+2 AC bonus, DR 10/magic, freeze	20
Hydra	+5 AC bonus, fast healing 15	22
Mummy wrapping	+5 AC bonus, DR 5/—, vulnerable to fire, –4 Charisma	special
Phase Spider	+1 AC bonus, <i>ethereal jaunt</i>	20
Purple Worm	+7 AC bonus	22
Remorhaz	+5 AC bonus, heat	22
Umber Hulk	+3 AC bonus, tremorsense	20
Wyvern	+4 AC bonus, immune to <i>sleep</i> and paralysis	20

*A dragon must be at least adult for its hide to be salvageable. For dragons older than adult, instead of +10 AC, use half their natural armor bonus (rounded down). The salvage DC increases by two for each age increment beyond adult.

Vampire Fangs and Polar Bear Claws

Crafting Weapons from Natural Attacks



By Matt Halm

TABLE 5-5: WEAPONS FROM CREATURES

Creature	Weapon Effect	Salvage DC
Ankheg (claw)	Sickle; +1d4 acid damage	20
Assassin vine (vine)	Whip; constrict 1d6+7	22
Dragon (horn)	Dagger; with the following quality	22
Black	+1d6 acid damage	22
Blue	+1d6 electricity damage	22
Green	+1d6 acid damage	22
Red	+1d6 fire damage	22
White	+1d6 cold damage	22
Brass	+1d6 fire damage	22
Bronze	+1d6 electricity damage	22
Copper	+1d6 acid damage	22
Gold	+1d6 fire damage	22
Silver	+1d6 cold damage	22
Drider (leg)	Shortspear; poison (see MM)	20
Gorgon (horn)	Dagger; 1d8 damage	22
Howler (quill)	Rapier; -1 penalty to rolls	22
Manticore (spike)	Rapier; 1d8 damage, 19-20/x2	20
Polar Bear (claws)	Spiked Gauntlet; +1d4 cold damage	22
Skeleton (arm, leg)	Club; +2 to attack rating vs. undead	18
Vampire (fangs)	Dagger; blood drain	30

Using a weapon crafted from a creature you have slain is often seen as the ultimate revenge against that type of creature. When you wield a weapon made from the type of monster you are fighting, you gain a +1 luck bonus to attack rolls and damage against that creature.

To remove a claw, tooth, or other piece from a creature, you must make a Survival check. The DC of the check is listed on table 5-4: Weapons from Creatures. You must have either some sort of slashing or piercing weapon, or special tools to remove the item. If you simply use a weapon, you suffer a -2 penalty to the check. If you use special tools designed for removing claws, teeth, and the like, you do not suffer any penalty, and if you use master-work tools you gain a +2 bonus to the check.

To create a weapon from the item, you need to add a handle or haft to it. The DC of this check is determined by the type of weapon to be made, as follows. Items where the DC is 15 or lower do not require any additional materials – for example, the assassin vine functions properly as a whip by itself, but a bit of fashioning is required to make it easier to use.

Weapon	Craft DC	Materials
Club	15	n/a
Dagger	25	a sword handle
Rapier	30	a sword handle
Sickle	25	a sword handle
Shortspear	20	a pole or spear shaft
Spiked Gauntlet	25	a gauntlet
Whip	15	n/a

Note that a sword handle simply refers to the type of grip used on a sword, not a handle specifically designed for a sword.

There are a few special rules regarding some of the weapons.

Dragon: If you wield a dragon's horn, you might run the risk of angering other dragons. If you gained the horn weapon without actually killing the dragon, or if the dragon was already dead, you might be able to convince other dragons of this. Such excuses will probably only work for dragons of similar alignments to your own.

Weapon Cards



By Matt Halm, Photograph taken by Matt Halm

Random Weapon

A deck of random weapon cards contains 22 cards: ace, two, jack, queen, and king of each suit and two jokers. If you use a real deck, the jokers do not need to be distinguishable from each other.

When a card is drawn from a random weapon deck, the weapon represented by that card appears in place of the card (the card is destroyed in the process). The character may then wield that weapon for 1 round, at which time the weapon disappears. The weapon does not need to be drawn, and there are no other penalties associated with drawing a card (such as attacks of opportunity).

All the weapons created by random weapon cards are masterwork unless noted otherwise.

Caster Level: 10th; *Prerequisites:* Create Wondrous Item, *major creation*; *Market Price:* 20,000 gp.



TABLE 5-6: RAMDON WEAPON CARDS

Card	Weapon
A ♠	Short Sword
2 ♠	Bastard Sword
J ♠	Two-bladed Sword
♠	Longsword
♠	Greatsword
A ♣	Club
2 ♣	Greatclub
J ♣	Warhammer
♣	Morningstar
♣	Mace
A ♦	Hand Axe
2 ♦	Battleaxe
J ♦	Orc Double Axe
♦	Dwarven Waraxe
♦	Greataxe
A ♥	Hand Crossbow
2 ♥	Light Crossbow
J ♥	Repeating Crossbow
♥	Repeating Crossbow
♥	Heavy Crossbow
Joker	Draw again. That weapon is +1. If you draw the
Joker	other joker, draw again. That weapon is +2.

Throwing Cards

Throwing cards are cards that turn into throwing weapons when thrown. Throwing cards come in decks of 52. There are two types of throwing cards that turn into either throwing knives or throwing axes. Treat these magical items just like the weapons they turn into, except as noted below (a dagger is used for the throwing knife).

	Cost					
	per deck	Damage	Critical	Range	Weight	Type
Axes	1040 gp	1d6	×2	10 ft.	2 lb.	Slashing
Knives	520 gp	1d4	19-20/×2	10 ft.	1 lb.	Piercing

Called Shots



From Swashbuckling Adventures, published by AEG

When you roll an attack and score a critical hit, you may – instead of multiplying the damage by the weapon's Critical Multiplier – declare a called shot. Choose one of the effects below. Some may have a prerequisite that you must meet before you may use the effect. The effect of the called shot follows that. Finally any extraordinary restrictions or rules are listed under Special.



Called to the	BAB	Effect	Special
Arm	2	+1d4 points of damage. -4 penalty to all checks and attack rolls made with wounded arm for 1d6 rounds unless healed. The opponent drops anything held in that arm and is considered immediately disarmed.	You may not target an arm equipped with a shield.
Eye	10	+1d6 points of damage. -4 penalty to all attack rolls and Reflex saves. -10 ft. from Base Speed. -4 penalty to all Dexterity based checks. All effects (except bonus damage) last for 1d6 hours unless healed.	If an opponent suffers two called shots to the eye, the opponent is essentially blinded. After the 1d6 hours have elapsed, the opponent must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) to return his eyesight to normal. If the roll fails the opponent loses the use of his eye unless a regeneration spell or similar effect is applied.
Groin	2	The opponent is staggered and may only take partial actions for 1d6 rounds, unless healed.	
Gut	4	+1d4 points of damage and the opponent takes an additional 1d2 points of damage every half-hour for 5d6 hours, unless healed.	
Head	8	+1d4 points of damage. Opponent is stunned and flat-footed for 1d4 rounds. Anyone attacking the opponent will receive a +2 circumstance bonus to their attack.	
Throat	12	+1d6 points of damage. Opponent is stunned and flat-footed. Furthermore the opponent must make a Fortitude save (DC equal to your Strength or Dexterity score, whichever modifier you are adding to your attack roll) or begin suffering the effects of drowning (<i>See the DUNGEON MASTER's Guide</i>).	
Leg	2	+1d4 points of damage. Base speed is halved (round up). -4 penalty to all Climb and Swim checks. All effects (except bonus damage) last for 1d6 hours unless healed.	



New Feat

Nomenclature

By Matt Halm

You can use your knowledge about combat to increase your fighting ability.

Prerequisites: Int 16+, base attack bonus at least +6, at least 0.5 ranks in Knowledge (combat).

Benefit: During combat, you may temporarily decrease your Intelligence score. For every point removed from Intelligence, add either 1 point to your attack roll, or 0.5 points to your damage roll. Your Intelligence score may not drop below 12 for the purposes of this feat.

Special: For the purposes of this feat, your Intelligence score is +1 for every 2 ranks you have in Knowledge (combat) or Knowledge (weapons).

Variant Races

Humans

By Matt Halm

Instead of an extra feat, extra skill points at 1st level (still gains additional skill points at every level after first), and favored class:

- +1 base attack bonus
 - Extra simple weapon proficiency
 - Bonus feat from fighter list
 - Favored Class: fighter, barbarian, or ranger
- or
- +1 Strength
 - Pick a weapon to be proficient with
 - Proficient with all armor
 - Bonus feat from fighter list
 - Favored Class: fighter, barbarian, or ranger

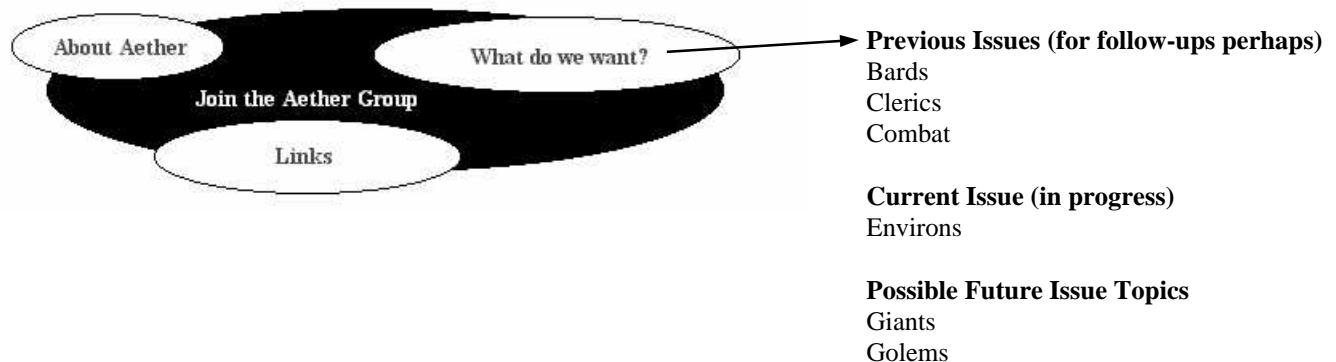
What do we want?

Many people, when encouraged to submit articles to *Æther*, ask "well, what do you want?" The simple answer to this common question is "anything," but quite often people are discouraged by that answer and then do not know what to write. To aid in this respect, a new section of our website (<http://www.geocities.com/cow080/>) will post the upcoming issue topics (which are always subject to change) for potential submitters to look at in search of inspiration. Also posted will be sub-topics of various ideas for future issues.

Also be sure to check out the back cover of each issue, which provides the topic of the next issue. Reviews of d20 products are always welcome!

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Æther



Letter(s)

What's the most memorable combat encounter you were in, either as a DM or a player?

Mail letters to: Letters, 1350 Corry Street, Yellow Springs, OH 45387

Email letters to cow080@yahoo.com or post them at the *Æther* group (<http://groups.geocities.com/group/aethergroup>)

To hoo it may3 consurn

Meez kreeaytor (Greg McMillin) iz mad dat hiz name wuz left out uv da artikul about meez. Meez tinkz yuz shoold print dis. While yuz iz at it yuz kin add Jillian's kreeaytor's name also (Patty McMillin).

Tanks,
Zortuk

Zortuk is correct, in last issue's Heroes' Herald we forgot to mention the names of the people who supplied the answers for Zortuk and Jillian (Greg McMillin and Patty McMillin, respectively). In the future we will attempt to correct such errors before printing.

CONVENTION ISSUE UPDATE

Instead of two separate issues as explained earlier, one "convention" issue will be released featuring images and event descriptions from both Origins and GenCon. To tide you over, a special convention section has been prepared and appears on pages 20-23 of this issue.

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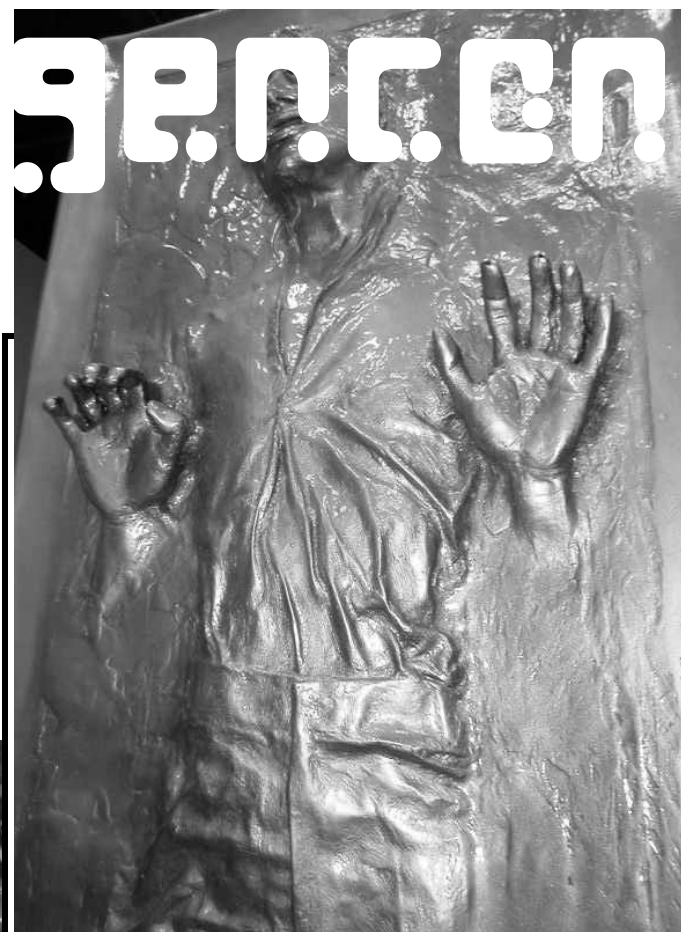
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Origins and Beyond



The new D&D miniatures (from Origins, out now)

ORIGINS™

International Game Expo & Fair

Thursday, June 26 2003

By Zukpok (a.k.a. Greg McMillin)

Now that almost 3 months have passed since the "beginning" of our convention season for 2003 what remains of Origins is dim memories of good times and even dimmer memories of anything negative that might have taken place there. Let's take a moment to think back...

<Key Wayne's World flashback sound effects>

welcome to origins 2003!

After checking into our hotel, the Crown Plaza, which lies directly across the street from the Columbus Hyatt Convention center. The first order of business was to go secure our badges and the onsite event booklet. While the waiting in lines there was not that bad they could have been much better. Apparently the geniuses that plan out their queues thinks that there are an equal number of people that start with the last names that start with U-Z as there are for the J-O. That is a falsehood that hopefully they will catch on to sometime in the future. Anyway, that mild delay aside the process was fairly painless.

The next step was to wait for the others to arrive and to contact our long lost friend Mike a.k.a. Dwyn to arrange dinner plans. Harliquin, Cap'n Tim, and cranes all arrive and badges are secured for everyone so we head off to Buca de Beppo's a little later than we would have liked, but pretty much par for the course with us. Buca's is a kick ass family style Italian restaurant with portion sizes that could kill an unwary person. The servers at Buca's are very friendly and we ended up having a decent length conversation with a fairly attractive waitress who also happened to be a gamer. There is hope for all you single gamer-males after all...well, except for the fact that she had a gamer boyfriend already. Dinner is followed up by a search for the elusive cup of coffee. Success! The all night café in the convention center provides us with delicious caffeinated beverages to top off a very filling dinner. We walk back towards the hotel and bid Mike farewell and good luck...He had the fortune or misfortune to be moving residences that weekend rather than gaming like he

should have been.

The rest of the con is pretty much a whirlwind of games and meandering through the Exhibit Hall with a brief respite where a few of us went to see Charlie's Angel's: Full Throttle. Seeing a movie on the Friday of the CON has become somewhat of a tradition for us over the last few years. Kiss of the Dragon and X-Men are two of the movies we attended in the past. X-Men made memorable by our good friends Victor and Bob. They know who they are should they ever read this.

Venturing into the Exhibit Hall, Tim made a wonderful find. One of the merchants had all of the gaming stuff they were selling at 50% OFF. He managed to pickup the Spycraft Rulebook. I managed to locate and purchase the Ussura Nations Book for 7th sea and Hexarcana for Deadlands. All of them were excellent finds at half-price.

I of course had to make my required stop at the Dwarven Forge both to see Stefan. His product is fantastic. I just wish I had more time to use it. Not that it stops me from buying more of it when new stuff is released.



on to the games!

I played a mixture of games throughout the CON. The games ranged from the kick ass fun and social game called "Are you a werewolf?" to the deeply disturbing Adults Only "sign a waiver so you can't sue us" Call of Cthulhu game.

The exact order of games is blurred from the time since the CON, but I do recall that Tim and I played at least two Spycraft games that were both a blast! B.D. Flory can run an awesome game of Spycraft indeed and he writes good product too. We played the Outback and Agent Down Living Spycraft scenarios. Excellent stuff.

The Outback scenario had us tracking down and putting a stop to some Australian Arms dealers and terrorist who was planning to obtain some Anti-Aircraft weaponry. Keep in mind that

stealth is a key to many an adventure and that a .40 Hand-gun without a silencer is not that stealthy. Oops!

The next scenario we played took place in Detroit of all places. We were tasked with tracking down and recovering a missing agent. He had disappeared while on an investigation. After getting our asses kicked in the restroom of a Nightclub by a very angry woman named Maria. We managed to track him down to a warehouse in the industrial district where he was being held. We took a three prong attack/infiltration plan which rapidly turned into a pitched firefight. Needless to say, we won the day, I won the girl, and we all lived to accept another mission. Besides the fact that two of our teammates ditched us in the middle of the fight. He was whining something about his corvette getting scratched. <shrug>

BTW...X-ray specs and armor piercing rounds are a wonderful combination.

I was fortunate enough to play in an amazing 7th Sea game run by Big Daddy Thwak. Thanks go out to Patty for signing us up for that one. It was so good that we made every effort to play in a follow-up adventure at Gencon 2003 and will be making every effort to play in some games at Archcon as well. Big Daddy Thwak is the bomb diggity of 7th Sea Game Masters.

Tim and I spent a number of hours hanging out in the Big Experiment run by Looney Labs. We played a great game of Chrononauts followed by eleventy-billion games of "Are you a werewolf?" all brought to us by the wonderful folks at Looney Labs. Half way through the evening I was moderating the "Are you a werewolf?" games since the number of players had quickly outgrown the number of Looney Lab's Lab Rabbits.

There is a smattering of other games that I cannot exactly remember, but the convention experience culminated with the following event:

The adventure was titled "AC/DC" and was an Adult's Only Call of Cthulhu game sponsored and run by the demented folks of Rogue Cthulhu. While I will not go into any graphic details here in this recount, I will go so far as to say it was a very enjoyable scenario for Captain Tim, Harliquin, Patty, and myself. Okay, okay a few details...the bulk of the adventure took place on the Campus of Miami Oxford and in the great city of Cincinnati. It involved a hodge-podge of college age folks with a few grizzled police detectives thrown in for good measure. The investigation started as we were looking for our missing friend, a fellow college student. These unsuspecting individuals were quickly and irrecoverably thrust into a seedy world of sex cults, swinger's parties, and at least one succubus. Not necessarily in that order. Then it got really weird. Suffice to say, we managed to save our friend and keep at least a shred of our sanity.

the end

Well, I for one had a blast at this convention and I am eagerly

waiting to see what all is offered at Origins 2004. Maybe next year we'll be able to recruit a few more folks to attend with us.



By Chris Haynes

2003 was the first year for the convention at the Indianapolis venue. Overall the area was enjoyable. There were plenty of hotels and restaurants to frequent, but only hotel food or Stake and Shake were open for the late night gamers.

New events for GenCon 2003 was True Dungeon. True Dungeon is a d20 Variant that allows players to experience their D&D adventure within a life-size, dungeon environment. Not a LARP, True Dungeon focuses on problem solving, teamwork and tactics while providing exciting sets and interactive props. Players may find themselves creeping down a dark passageway and entering a long-forgotten crypt. After dispatching a lurking

guardian, the players may have to solve a cryptic puzzle or find a secret door in order to gain a wondrous treasure chest - a chest that might hold a shocking surprise if opened without care. It will take two hours to explore the dungeon, and teams of six players need only bring their imagination and quick wit. See <http://www.truedungeon.com/> for more details. This year was also a first for the 64 PC LAN. The PCs were loaded with the latest games. It provided a nice place to blow off some steam between the other events at GenCon. There was a large screen display for those who were not playing to watch.



ind the halfling!

Long Lines at GenCon

Unfortunately the convention's success was undermined by intolerably long lines, especially on Saturday. This particularly frustrated attendees who only had time to come to GenCon for Saturday. Many of the Saturday only crowd spent a disproportionate amount of their time in line, missing out in opportunities to shop, secure celebrity autographs, attend seminars - or play games! Long lines are generally a part of a large-scale show such as GenCon, and one of the ways we hope to counter your wait on site is by offering pre-registration. Pre-registration enables you to buy your badge through our website (www.gencon.com) and have your badge mailed to you before the show starts. We are also looking at other means of pre-registration to help ease the line problems.

GenCon 2004 Date Change

GenCon Indy, The Best Four Days In Gaming (TM), announces today the official date change of GenCon Indy 2004. The show, originally scheduled to take place on August 5 - 8, 2004 will now be held on August 19 - 22, 2004. The change comes on the heels of the announcement of the Indianapolis Brickyard auto race to take place in Indianapolis during the convention's original dates of August 5 - 8. "The decision to move GenCon Indy to the week of August 19 didn't come lightly," said Peter Adkison, CEO of GenCon LLC. "We had to take a look at the needs of our customers, and moving GenCon Indy allows us the opportunity to put on the best show possible for our attendees and for the city of Indianapolis."



A city in Eberron, the upcoming otC campaign setting (from GenCon, due out in Summer 2004)

Next Issue:
Environ