

d12

Monthly

Issue 3
July 2021

DEAN SPENCER

THE COMBAT ISSUE

MASTERWORK ITEMS

GET THE BEST
MONEY CAN BUY

DEFCON DUNGEONS

HOW MONSTERS
REACT TO PC INVASION

WEAPON & ARMOUR DAMAGE

EQUIPMENT
NEEDS LOVE TOO

Location: We move south to the town of Woodhove

D12 Monthly is a helpful resource for fantasy roleplayers.

The Combat Issue

Let's fight!

Combat is one of the three pillars of the game (the others being roleplaying and exploration) and is often the most discussed and played out around tables (real and virtual) all over the world.

In this issue I hope to bring some decoration to this hardy third pillar and to give you some inspiration when it comes to running better combats.

One of the often asked questions I see online is 'how do I make combat better?' and this is a worthy question as combat takes up a large part of most gaming sessions.

For me, combat is all about two things: the adversaries and location.

If you make these two exciting and compelling, then your combats will almost automatically be fun and interesting.

If you are running the PCs through a dungeon and they stumble into a 30ft x 30ft chamber with a dozen goblins in it, this has a good chance to get very boring very quickly.

However, if the PCs encounter said Goblins in a steam-filled chamber with natural columns and ledges and a river of lava

running through it, and said Goblins are descendants of their old Effretti masters from centuries ago and have fire immunity, this suddenly becomes a very different (and exciting) battle.

I can immediately picture goblins sitting on the ledges high above the PCs with pots of magma they hurl down on them. Together with their brothers hiding amongst the columns and steam, poking at the spellcasters and then disappearing again.

While memorable fights can spontaneously come about, they are usually the result of some imaginative thinking on behalf of the DM.

So, remember the two parts of any combat to have the best chance of making it memorable: adversaries and location. Make both memorable and unique and you will go a long way to making your fights great ones.

And remember, as always, happy gaming!

- Russ from YUMDM

<https://yumdm.com/>

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About Me

I have been roleplaying for over 30 years and DMing for most of those. I have played over 50 different roleplaying games, but my first love is fantasy - it's like coming home.

Want to support this zine? I have a Patreon account: <https://www.patreon.com/yumdm>

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Run Away!

Retreat rules for times when you really need to run.

Many fantasy RPGs have rules for disengaging from combat, but these are usually based on round-to-round actions; and suffer from the issue of what happens when the attacker is faster than the escapee?

In many situations it may be a good idea to have a mechanic that simulates, in an abstract way, the PCs being able to retreat from that encounter completely.

This is done via a three step process:

Step 1: How

First, the players need to decide *how* they are planning on escaping. This will depend on the situation and environment, but they should come up with an idea of how their character can escape.

Step 2: Assign Check

The DM then needs to assign a check based on the ability or skill that seems appropriate based on what the PC chooses to do, keeping in mind that what the player does suggest may not be appropriate. They also need to determine the difficulty for the check. This can be as simple as easy, moderate or difficult; or you could assign the DC based on 10+HD of the adversary.

Step 3: Outcome

The Retreat Cost table is consulted.

Table: Retreat Cost

Check...	Cost to PC
Succeeds by 10+	No cost
Succeeds by 5-9	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mundane item is lost or damaged2. Lose D4 hit points3. Gain level of exhaustion4. Lose 1 point temporarily from a related ability5. Your move is reduced temporarily by 10ft6. You are lost
Succeeds by 1-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Expensive item is lost or damaged2. Gain 2 levels of exhaustion3. Lose D6 HP4. Lose D4 points temporarily from related ability5. You are separated from a hireling or pet6. One of your hirelings or followers are badly wounded
Fails	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lose magical item2. You are completely exhausted and must rest3. Lose 2D6 HP or roll on an injury table of your choice4. Lose D6 points temporarily from related ability5. You and the party are separated.6. You fail to escape and must spend one more round with the adversary. You can then try again.

Note that even if a PC fails the check they still get away, but the cost is more severe. It was designed this way because it may become problematic if one or more PCs are left behind, negating the effect of this rule.

Example

Four PCs - a ranger, a rogue, a fighter, and a wizard - are tracking an evil necromancer through some grim woods and the DM rolls a random encounter: a Basilisk!

The DM rolls a few dice and determines that the PCs were unfortunately ambushed by the creature who was laying in wait (see the article *What the Hell are the Monsters Doing?* in Issue 1).

The PCs don't want to deal with this creature, wanting to save their energies for the necromancer and decide to avoid it.

Knowing the basilisk is much faster than any of the PCs, the DM enacts the flee rules and each PCs must come up with how they are going to get away.

The ranger declares he will sneak away. The rogue will distract the creature, the fighter will try and intimidate the beast, and the wizard uses a distracting cantrip.

The DM decides all these are doable and so all PCs need to make a check: stealth for the ranger, bluff for the rogue, intimidate for the fighter (at -4 or disadvantage as it is a beast), and arcana for the wizard (to use the spell in the best way possible).

All but the fighter succeed by 6 or more. Each rolls on the Retreat Cost table except the wizard, who succeeded their check by 11.



Weapons Vs. Armour

It's a fact that certain armour was better at protecting the wearer against certain weapons. The issue with simulating this in roleplaying games previously is that it involved complex tables.

To simulate this simply, the table below gives a straightforward way to add some realism into your fights without over-complicating it.

Weapons Vs. Armour Table

Weapon Type	Damage Disadvantage Against...
Bludgeoning	Leather or Hide
Piercing	Mail or Scale
Slashing	Plate

Damage Disadvantage

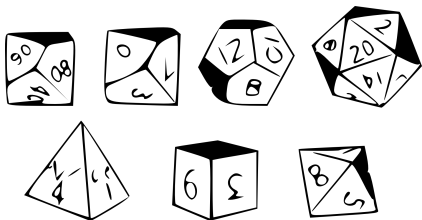
This is a relatively new concept where you roll two damage dice and take the lowest result of the two dice.

As an example, if you are using a longsword (a slashing weapon) against an opponent wearing plate mail, you would roll 2D8 and take the lower result (and then add on any bonuses).

This is only meant to come into use when weapon Vs actual armour applies, and not when the PCs are fighting a tiger or dragon (although in the latter case, you could rule a dragon's armour is like scale armour and so any piercing weapons would get Damage Disadvantage).

Never Tell Me The Odds!

Getting Better Outcomes For Your Random Tables



Random tables are useful for a number roleplaying tasks. They can help you conjure up a random encounter, help you come up with treasure, and even give your NPCs some personality.

But not all tables are created equal.

When designing your random tables it can be useful to understand the odds of certain outcomes.

Single Die

This is probably the easiest way to create a table and thus determine the odds.

For example, if your table uses a single D20 to determine the result, there is a 1 in 20 chance, or 5%, of you rolling any particular result.

If you had a D10 random encounter table, each encounter would have a flat chance of being encountered - in this case 1 in 10 (or 10%).

Double Dice

It's when you create your random table with two dice, things start to get interesting. By rolling two (or more) dice you will have varying chances of rolling each outcome.

If we had a random encounter table which used 2D10, for example, our chance of rolling a 2 is different to rolling an 8 as the following table shows.

Table 1: Odds When Rolling 2D10

Result	Odds (%)
2	1%
3	2%
4	3%
5	4%
6	5%
7	6%
8	7%
9	8%
10	9%
11	10%
12	9%
13	8%
14	7%
15	6%
16	5%
17	4%
18	3%
19	2%
20	1%

This means that on a random encounter table you suddenly have variety - some encounters will appear more often than others.

This comes in handy as it means you can add in a dragon or other rare monsters at either ends of the table (when the chance of rolling them is much less) and more common monsters or animals towards the centre of the table.

Mixed Dice

Taking it a step further, you can then mix die types to get even more variety.

The AD&D Monster Manual II uses D12+D8 for their random encounter tables and I always thought they just did this to be different - I mean, why not just use 2D10!?

Well, it turns out the odds of rolling certain numbers are different. Unlike the 2D10 roll, where you get a 'bell curve' effect, with D12+D8 you get a plateau at the top, as is indicated in Table 2.

You end up with the same number of encounters (19), but different odds of each one being encountered.

The results 9 to 13 all have the same odds of coming up. Comparing this to the 2D10 table and you can see each result has different odds.

This is something you can use to make your random tables a lot more precise and sensible. Do you have an area in your campaign world where goblinoids are much more common than any other

adversary? Then use D12+D8 on your table and add them into the positions 9 through 13.

Table 2: Odds When Rolling D12+D8

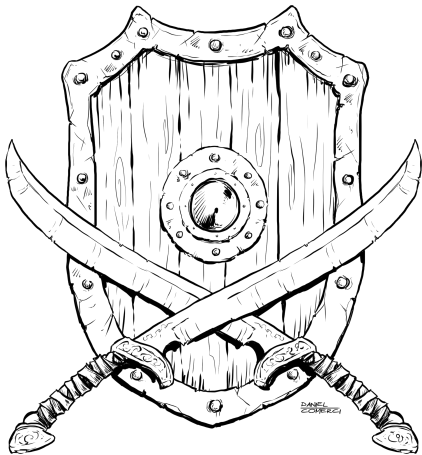
Result	Odds (%)
2	1.04%
3	2.08%
4	3.13%
5	4.17%
6	5.21%
7	6.25%
8	7.29%
9	8.33%
10	8.33%
11	8.33%
12	8.33%
13	8.33%
14	7.29%
15	6.25%
16	5.21%
17	4.17%
18	3.13%
19	2.08%
20	1.04%

Next time you create a random table, think about what you want to achieve. If you think that all results are equally possible, then use a single die; but if you want to give each result (or some of the results) different odds, then create a table using multiple dice.

Weapons & Armour

Damage

Equipment Needs Love Too



Weapons, armour and shields all take damage in combat. It is assumed the characters will tend to minor fixes between combat and during rests, but if you want a little more realism in your campaign, and actually allow characters to use those craft skills and proficiencies they have invested in, then it may be worth tracking more significant damage to weapons and armour.

Armour & Shield Damage

Each time someone wearing armour takes a critical hit, the armour is damaged. You could substitute a shield instead if this is being used by the defender.

Each time the armour is damaged simply reduce its armour bonus by 1.

If leather armour had an AC of 11 (10+1) then the armour would provide no protection (AC would become 10) until it was repaired. A shield's protection would be similarly reduced by one.

Weapon Damage

Each time the attacker rolls a natural 1 to hit with a weapon, the weapon itself is damaged.

This is represented by lowering the damage dice by one each time it is damaged. From

D12 -> D10 -> D8 -> D6 -> D4 -> D3 -> Ruined

Repairing Items

This is where the characters will get to use their craft skills or proficiencies.

A character can repair an item during a longer rest (8 or more hours) assuming they have access to both the skill and the tools. The cost is minimal and is assumed to be absorbed into usual background costs of being an adventurer*.

This can however, be a noisy exercise and the GM may roll for random encounters or introduce other repercussions depending on the environment and situation.

If the character waits and gets someone else to repair their item, then it will cost 50% of the original price of the item to be fully repaired.

* If you really want to track this, then have the cost of repairing something 25% of the cost of the item.

Masterwork Items

Get the best money can buy



Dungeons & Dragons 3rd edition had a lot of cool features. One of them being masterwork items.

Masterwork items simulated well-crafted weapons, armour, and other items, which gave you minor bonuses when used.

Masterwork Weapons

Masterwork weapons provide a +1 to hit.

Note: For editions that use bounded accuracy, like 5th, you could change this to +1 damage instead.

The bonus inferred by the masterwork quality does not stack with any magical bonus.

The masterwork quality adds 300 gp to the cost of a normal weapon (or 6 gp to the cost of a single unit of ammunition, such as an arrow).

Masterwork Armour

The rules for masterwork armour are slightly different.

The advantage of a suit of masterwork armour will depend on the edition of the game you are playing, but it will generally make the armour easier to use.

Whether that's making it lighter (by a factor of 25%) or lowering its armor check penalty by 1, or the equivalent in your version of the game.

A masterwork suit of armor or shield costs an extra 150 gp over and above the normal cost for that type of armor or shield.

Masterwork Equipment

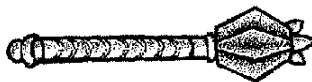
Masterwork items can also be created and give a small bonus.

Masterwork items give you a +2 circumstance bonus to your skill check when using them. For example, masterwork thieves' tools would give you a +2 bonus to picking locks.

Masterwork tools cost 50GP each, except for masterwork thieves' tools, which cost 100GP.

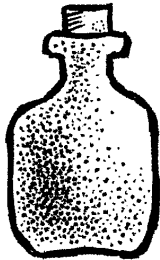
Making Masterwork Items

You can craft masterwork items - you simply have to make a difficult craft check on top of the craft check for the item itself (craft is equivalent to Tool proficiencies in 5th edition) to successfully make an item masterwork.



Natural Healing

Healing Throughout the Editions



In *Issue 2* we looked at death throughout the various editions of the game. This week we cover natural healing.

Basic D&D (including: OD&D, B/X &

BECMI/Rules Cyclopedia)

For every 8 hours of rest per day you heal 1 hit point.

AD&D

Each full day of rest, you heal 1 hit point. After 30 days of rest, you start to regain 5 HP per day.

AD&D 2nd Edition

Second edition allows a character to heal 1 hit point per day of rest. If they have complete bed rest, they regain 3 HP per day, and if they rest this way for a complete week, they may add their constitution bonus to that total.

D&D 3rd Edition

Third edition requires a full night (8 hours) of rest to regain your character level in hit points. If you have complete rest for 24 hours, you gain double your level in HP.

D&D 4th Edition

The fourth edition of the game introduces the short and long rest (called 'extended rest'). A short rest lasts 5 minutes and allows you to make as many 'healing surges' as you had available. The extended rest allows you to heal all hit points and regain all your healing surges. Each healing surge allows you to gain $\frac{1}{4}$ of your max hit points back.

D&D 5th Edition

Fifth edition modified the short and long rests from 4th edition. With a short rest (now 1 hour in length) you can regain a number of hit dice up to your level. For a long rest (8 hours in length) you regain all your lost hit points.



DEFCON Dungeons

How monsters react to intrusions

Humanoids sometimes live in large numbers inside dungeon complexes. When the PCs invade a monster's lair it is sometimes difficult to



understand how the monsters may react. Especially over time, as the PCs retreat and then delve deeper into their home.

This is where DEFCON levels come in.

DEFCON Levels in Our World

The DEFCON system* prescribes five graduated levels of readiness (or states of alert) for the U.S. military. But we can apply them to roleplaying games as well.

* You can find the original table on Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DEFCON>

Table: DEFCON Levels

Readiness Condition	Condition	Description	Readiness
DEFCON 5	No sign of any enemies or immediate threats	Lowest state of readiness	Normal readiness - normal patrols and/or guards. Not expecting any problems
DEFCON 4	Evidence of a potential threat. Tracks, dead guards found, noises heard	Increased watch & strengthened security measures	Above normal readiness - same number of guards but they receive a bonus on any awareness checks
DEFCON 3	Definite sightings, some encounters already.	Increase in force readiness above that required for normal readiness	Additional guards and more frequent & larger patrols. A strike team assembled and ready to deploy. All guards are expecting trouble and are alert.
DEFCON 2	Attacks are fierce and/or regular. Previous encounters ended badly.	Next step is all-out war	All troops deployed and defensive points set up and heavily guarded. Retreat measures considered.
DEFCON 1	Attack on the leader or a sensitive location	All-out war!	Maximum readiness. Immediate response - reinforcements are sent immediately. Retreat if things go badly.

Applying this to Monster Lairs

I have reworked the DEFCON table to show how a monster may react when their lair is invaded.

This, in turn, will give you some idea on how the creatures may react. Assuming they have a modicum of intelligence.

This works best for lairs of goblins or orcs or gnolls, or other intelligent humanoid monsters, but you could adjust it to the lair of one strong monster with minions.

For example, a vampire's castle could work like this. He would just send his minions out to fight in the first instance.

Obviously, a lot of the actual reaction will depend on the monster or creature that lives in the lair. A vampire lord will react very differently than an orc chieftain, for example, and deploy different counter-measures.

But what this gives you is a framework to build on and come up with a list of actions the monsters will do at each level.

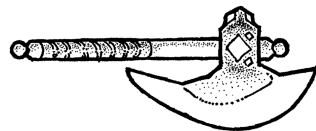
Then it is just up to you, using the triggers, as to when you will shift from one DEFCON level to another.

With this basic table, let's apply this to a typical Orc lair. On the table *DEFCON Levels for Orc Lair* you can see the Orcs specific reactions for each level.

Obviously each trigger and actions taken would be different for each monster.

Table: DEFCON Levels for Orc Lair

Readiness Condition	Readiness
DEFCON 5	Two guards at entrance and two scouts patrol an area within 1 mile of the lair.
DEFCON 4	Above normal readiness - a new patrol is sent to find the initial one and/or guards are replaced but they are more alert: they receive a +1 on any awareness checks. Perhaps an increase in random encounter checks.
DEFCON 3	Guard numbers are doubled or tripled. A strike team, led by the Orc's best warrior, is assembled and ready to deploy with next sighting.
DEFCON 2	All troops deployed and defensive points set up and heavily guarded. Escape access is assessed. Non-combatives are rounded up and leave and/or are protected. Retreat measure for chief considered.
DEFCON 1	Maximum readiness. Immediate response - reinforcements are sent immediately. Retreat route for chieftain taken, if possible.



Location, Location, Location!

This month we head south from Dolfar, across the Ashwood Forest to the town of Woodhove.

Town of Woodhove

Woodhove is a town located where the Ashtrail Road from the city-state of Ashmount and the Dragon Blood River meet. In the warmer months the 3,000-head population swells to over 4,000 as pit fighters, spectators, and gamblers descend upon the town for the annual gladiatorial contests.

Places of Interest

Woodhove is known for two things: pit-fighting and wagon-making.

Fighting Pits

The Pits (as they are known locally) are a series of four large holes in the ground with seating surrounding them. Large sums of money are gambled on the outcome of these pits and the owner - **Garm Ringbold** (*Hu M NE; Greed, Shaggy sideburns, Uncivil*) - has become a very wealthy (and powerful) individual locally. And he is always looking for ways to make the pits even more exciting.

Currently, he has regular gladiators fighting, sometimes in pairs; as well as gladiators versus animals, gladiators versus monsters, and he is currently planning some form of magical duels.

Young locals have formed into three loose affiliations that support various "gladiator houses". Each group is known after their



team colours: The Scarlets, The Glaucous, and The Azures. And each are fierce rivals of the other two teams. This rivalry sometimes spills onto the streets around the Pits as fights break out between their fans.

Due to many different races competing in the pit fighting tournaments, Woodhove residents tend to be more open-minded with regards to some of the rarer races, like tieflings and half-orcs. They can even hero-worship some of these fighters if they do well in the pits.

And the pits are always looking for new talent (a nice hook for any martial PC).

Wagon-Makers

The Woodbinders, a famous wagon-making family, lives and works in Woodhove. For three generations the Woodbinders have made all sorts of wooden items, from barrels to houses to shields, but they are most famous for their good quality wagons and coaches.

Headed up by Farrik Woodbinder, and helped by his three sons Dol, Samol (Twins), and Kalim (see *Personalities of Woodhove*), they work around the year producing some of the best wagons in all of the Freelands.

Personalities of Woodhove

Here are some of the personalities in Woodhove. See *Shorthand Your NPCs* in Issue 0 (or the sidebar on this page) for more information on the NPC write-ups that follow.

Shorthand Your NPCs

From Issue 0

A handy trick when creating NPCs is to use what I call the MAP method:

Motivation
Appearance
Personality

When creating an NPC, give them a short description for each of these descriptors.

For example, a cleric could have:

Motivation: Parishioners
Appearance: Overweight
Personality: Gregarious

Instantly you have an idea about how this NPC looks, acts, and what motivates them. And, in turn, as you roleplay them, so too will your players.

Garm Ringbold

Garm Ringbold is the owner of *The Pits* and is an uncouth thug who has made it good, despite himself. He wears his wealth on his hands with



multiple jeweled rings adorning his weathered fingers and is not adverse to showing his wealth.

Garm Ringbold (*Hu M NE; Greed, Shaggy sideburns, Uncivil*)

Ramil is Garm's beast-tamer and is in charge of capturing the animals and monsters that make their way into the pits.

Ramil Northwald (*H-O M CN; Revenge, Scarred, Gruff*)

Farrik Woodbinder is a proud father and savvy businessman who honours the legacy of the family business.

Farrik Woodbinder (*H M LG; Family, Tall, Pragmatic*)

Dol and Samol Woodbinder are twins and next in line to head up the family business and take that position seriously. They are as studious and pragmatic as their Father.

Dol and Samol Woodbinder (*H M LG; Family Business, Blonde wavy hair, Professional*)

Kalim Woodbinder is the black sheep of the family. Younger brother to Dol and Samol, he is usually getting into some sort of scrap. Unbeknown to any of his family, he has racked up a sizable gambling debt with the local gambling house (owned by the Thieves' Guild).

Kalim Woodbinder (*H M NG; Making it big, Disheveled, Capricious*)

End Table

Ashtrail Road

The Ashtrail Road runs all the way from the city-state of Ashmount to the east to the city-state of Myrbridge, which sits in the mid-Freelands, running right through Woodhove.

Encounters Along Ashtrail Road

Roll	Encounter
2	Pilgrimage: 3D10 Members
3	NPC Party: D4+1 NPCs + Any Hirelings
4	Exciseman + D6+6 guards
5	Coach with VIP + D6+6 Guards + D6+4 People as part of Entourage
6	Merchant Caravan: D4 Wagons + associated guards and others
7	Entertainment Troupe: D10+5 Members
8	Priests (D6: 1-4 Cleric of Dusrin Messenger*, 5-6 D4 Clerics of another deity)
9	Troupe of Entertainers
10	D4+1 Hunters (D6: 1-3 Heading out on hunt, 4-6 Returning)
11	D4 Smugglers (Posing as Traders)
12	Monster! Roll on appropriate plains encounter table

* See Issue 1 of *d12 Monthly*



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