

# Battle Companions

Every combat encounter can be its own story—a tale with its own heroes and villains, its own tension and plot. And like any good story, a good combat can be ruined by poor pacing. When combat has too many combatants taking too many turns, it can slow the whole session down into a slog, and allied nonplayer characters (NPCs) can exacerbate that problem.

The rules here model a new, faster way to include such NPC allies. These battle companions' abstract mechanics keep them from slowing the action, while their radical-and-daring (RAD) features make combat fun without unbalancing the conflict or taking the spotlight from the players.

## Narrative Presence

A battle companion has only a “narrative presence” on the battlefield. The battle companion's bookkeeping is cut down simply by ignoring its position and health. Although a battle companion could come to harm through a narrative fiat as the story demands, they're protected by the following rules:

- ✦ The battle companion's position, movement, range, and line of sight aren't tracked.
- ✦ The battle companion can't be harmed or otherwise affected by enemies.
- ✦ The battle companion isn't subject to impediments or hazards on the battlefield.

The goal of abstracting the Battle Companion into a narrative presence is to reduce mental overhead.

## Running a Battle Companion

The battle companion has several special rules for its own activity during combat.

- ✦ The battle companion's turn occurs immediately after all other combatants take their turns in the round, but some RAD features let it act earlier in the round.
- ✦ The battle companion has no effect on combat except to use one RAD feature each round.
- ✦ The player with the lowest initiative is the designated “RAD Wrangler,” which is the person who decides which RAD feature the companion will use, who they target, and any other parameters for the feature.
- ✦ With the exception of *Teamwork*, the RAD Wrangler can't apply the same RAD feature to the same target(s), whether allies or enemies, for two rounds in a row.

Each combat can include a maximum of one battle companion. The players should decide who goes into battle with the party if multiple NPCs qualify. Changing which NPC acts as a battle companion takes an hour or longer as their new ally gears up, prepares spells, and otherwise readies themselves for combat. This roster change can be made during a short or long rest.

## Making Battle Companions

The anatomy of a battle companion is very simple: just choose an ability! Each battle companion has two RAD features: the *Teamwork* feature and one more that you select from the samples provided below. (Alternately, make up a new RAD feature to pair with *Teamwork*.)

Choose and flavor RAD features to match the battle companion's concept. For example, you might select a RAD feature that knocks down enemies if the battle companion is a burly giant who rolls boulders like bowling balls, a seductive siren whose song lulls enemies to sleep for a moment, or a frightening dragon whose countenance makes foes cower or grovel, dropping prone.

## Radical-and-Daring Features

RAD features are easy to apply but have a few restrictions.

- ✦ The battle companion's RAD features don't use attack rolls, nor do enemy targets get saving throws.
- ✦ An enemy with *Legendary Resistance* can spend one use of that trait to ignore a single use of a RAD feature that targets it.
- ✦ An enemy that presents *Overwhelming Odds* (its challenge rating is 3 or more points higher than the party's average level) can't be targeted by RAD features except *Teamwork*.

Each RAD feature has an “affinity” upgrade. This stronger version is a reward for players roleplaying with the NPC, engaging with the character to a degree that creates familiarity and enhances the battle companion's combat synergy with the party. You determine when (or if) the players achieve this affinity with an NPC, unlocking the more potent versions of the battle companion's RAD features.

On the next page are some sample mechanics for RAD features, including ways to fit them into the combat descriptively and their affinity upgrades.

# Companions of the Lost Mine

This section explores the cast of characters in Lost Mine of Phandelver. It gives a fun RAD feature to some NPCs that are likely to join the party. Many of these NPCs have important personal stories. Introduced correctly, these NPCs can foster exploration and discovery, motivating the party to travel the Triboar Trail and delve into Wave Echo Cave.

Since players are often unpredictable, a few generic NPCs appear here too, as do some enemies who might change sides or might join the party while pretending to be allies.

## Teamwork

*The battle companion presses the foe, relieving pressure on allies or creating openings for the party to strike.*

Every battle companion possesses this RAD feature. The battle companion targets one ally. In the coming round, that ally can claim advantage on a single attack roll or ability check they make. *Teamwork* is the only RAD feature which can target the same enemy on successive rounds or affect foes which present Overwhelming Odds.

**Affinity.** The battle companion can instead use this RAD feature as a reaction at any point in the round, targeting an ally as they makes a saving throw. The NPC grants advantage to that ally's save. This ability must be declared before the ally has rolled their saving throw.

## Rolling Rock

*The dwarf lowers his shoulder and bowls through the enemies at a strategic moment, knocking around these startled foes.*

Select one enemy; regardless of its size, that target falls prone. If the creature is Medium or smaller, you can also push it up to 10 feet in any direction.

**Affinity.** The dwarf gets vengeful when his allies are harmed. He can affect two enemies if at least one of them inflicted damage on an ally in the current round.

## Aggressive Parry

*Spry beyond his years, the old knight's training allows him to harry an enemy with great efficiency, lunging in to disrupt its attacks and spinning away to avoid retaliation.*

Select one enemy. If the creature is Medium or smaller, all its attack rolls in the coming round have disadvantage. If the creature is larger, only the first of its attacks has disadvantage.

**Affinity.** The old knight can better defend party members on the battlefield. He can apply disadvantage to all his target's attacks even if it is Large or smaller.

## Staredown

*Our Bart is a no-nonsense straight-shooter who, although generally kind, won't hesitate to make threats or stare down the bad guys.*

Bart's piercing gaze intimidates one creature that can see him, causing its confidence to waiver. Until the end of its next turn, the enemy has disadvantage on attack rolls and on ability checks to shove or grapple another creature.

**Affinity.** The affected creature "retreats" from Bart; move it 10 feet in any direction. This uses the creature's movement but does not provoke opportunity attacks.

## LUCK'S A BITCH

*Sister Gee knows when you've been pushing your luck and when it's about to run out. She's always ready with a handy curative for her friends.*

Once per round, when one of Sister Gee's allies is about to roll a d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, the priestess can invoke her deity's luck. If the d20 roll results in an odd number, add 1d4 to the result.

**Affinity.** The bonus to the roll's result is 1d6 instead of 1d4.

## BLINDING CURSE

*Shatter Staff levels a curse at a recalcitrant foe, striking it blind!*

Select one foe that has eyes. That creature is blinded until the end of the following round.

**Affinity.** The affected creature's movement is also halved until the end of the following round.

## Bone Tackle

*The dwarf's magic raises skeletal arms from the earth. These bony appendages claw at an enemy, tangling it in a necromantic embrace.*

Pick one foe of Medium or smaller size; that creature is grappled until the end of the following round, when the Necromancer can again invoke this effect against another target.

**Affinity.** When a foe currently grappled by this effect hits one of the necromancer's allies with a melee weapon attack, the rest of the necromancer's magical creation—something vaguely skeleton-shaped—erupts from the earth to intercept it. This changes the hit into a miss, though it destroys the bony conjuration, freeing that foe from the grappled condition.

## Big Bully

*The bugbear charges across the battlefield like a bellowing bull, lifting allies and throwing them out of harm's way.*

The bugbear scoops up an ally then, hands overhead, rushes that creature over to a more advantageous position on the battlefield. Select an ally of Medium size or smaller and move it to an unoccupied space within 60 feet. This does not use the target's movement. If the affected character opts to become prone upon arrival at the new location, having been thrown or rolled for part of the distance, that ally's movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

**Affinity.** Draw the shortest line possible between the affected ally's starting location and ending location. The line can bend, but only if doing so is necessary to take it around impassible obstacles. Up to three enemies within 5 feet of that line are knocked prone as the bugbear bowls past.

## Piercing Piece

*The goblin sings an annoying song. The limericks are catchy but nonsensical, and the widely-wavering pitch is hard to tune out. Cunning allies can make good use of the distraction the goblin's song provides.*

Enemies that can hear have disadvantage on concentration checks and on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

**Affinity.** The goblin can improvise lyrics for one enemy that can hear, singing in a particularly distracting way. In addition to the normal effect, the target creature's movement is halved in the coming round.

## Fair Warning

*The nothic's ability to read the foes' surface thoughts lets it shout warnings to nearby allies, allowing them to react to the creature's prescience and get into more-advantageous positions.*

At the start of combat, and at the start of each round thereafter, each of Ixal's allies can use a reaction to move a distance equal to half that ally's normal movement speed. This does not use the allies' normal movement for their turns.

**Affinity.** The granted movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

## Flash Fire

*The wizard stands ready to exploit openings created in battle, flinging deadly fire at your foes.*

Once per round, when one of the wizard's allies misses an attack, she evokes a deadly arc of power that burns the target. The missed foe takes your choice of 2d6 fire damage or 2d6 acid damage.

**Affinity.** The damage increases to 3d6.

## Dark Whispering

*The banshee sweeps across the battlefield, singling out foes and speaking dark portents into their ears. The banshee's targeted attention creates a visceral terror in those who hear her words.*

The banshee's voice terrorizes one enemy, causing it to huddle in place. During the following round, that creature can use its normal move for the turn or use its action, but it cannot do both.

**Affinity.** The affected creature also falls prone and remains prone during the following round.

## Gory Feast

*The owlbear, ever hungry, charges across the battlefield toward a newly-injured foe, feasting on the exposed innards. A fallen foe won't keep the beast's attention for long; the owlbear will rush from enemy to enemy, trailing the ropey bowels of its most recent feast, drawn to the excitement of fresh gore.*

Once each round when an ally inflicts piercing or slashing damage on an enemy, the owlbear rushes over for a feast; the damaged creature suffers 2d6 slashing damage at the end of the current turn.

**Affinity.** If the damaged enemy falls to 0 hit points at the end of the turn—killed by the owlbear's feasting—the owlbear loses interest and flings the corpse at another enemy. If that secondary target is within 20 feet of the primary target, and the primary target is Medium or smaller, the secondary target takes the remainder of the owlbear's damage as bludgeoning damage. For example, if the owlbear's damage roll is 8 and the primary target had only 2 hit points remaining, the secondary target takes 6 damage. (If the primary target was already at 0 hit points at the end of the turn, all 8 damage would transfer to the secondary target.)

## Pack Tactics

*Whether playful or ferocious, the wolf's presence distracts enemies. The creature leaps in as allies attack, getting underfoot, nipping and tripping the foe.*

Choose one foe. In the coming round, all allies have advantage on melee weapon attacks against that foe.

**Affinity.** The first time an ally hits the targeted creature with a melee weapon attack during the round, the wolf takes advantage of the enemy's reaction or imbalance; it snatches a weapon or other held item from the enemy's hand and runs off, depositing the item somewhere within 40 feet of that enemy.

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