

BOOK of BLADES

MENTORS AND RIVALS



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INTRODUCTION

Mentors and rivals encircle heroes, helping and hindering in equal measure, yet both serve to advance the story. Who are these crucial figures?

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, author Joseph Campbell describes the “mentor” as the one who provides insight, advice, or training to help the hero during the adventure. Conversely, “rivals” are oppositional characters who stand in conflict to the hero and motivate through their antagonism.

In TTRPGs, both GMs and players can use mentors and rivals in countless ways, such as prompting quests, triggering encounters, identifying items, plotting ambushes, and so much more! They foster investment for the players and build depth into the setting.

INSPIRATION

Mentors and rivals are staples in fantasy literature and roleplaying games. Studying fictional and historical inspirations that led to the roles of these two archetypes can help flesh out mentors and rivals in your games. The following lists highlight sources of inspiration to get you started.

FICTIONAL MENTOR-STUDENT INSPIRATION

- Merlin mentored King Arthur. (Arthurian legend)
- Legendary Irish warrior, Finn McCool had two mentors, his two foster mothers who raised him in secret. Bodhmall the druidess and Liath Luachra were both known as great warriors in their own right. (Irish legend)
- The Greek goddess Athena mentored Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. (*The Odyssey*)

HISTORICAL MENTOR-STUDENT INSPIRATION

- The famous mentor train of Socrates to Plato to Aristotle to Alexander the Great.
- Ip Kai-Man was a mentor to Bruce Lee.
- Shinmen Bennosuke mentored Miyamoto Musashi.

FICTIONAL RIVALRIES INSPIRATION

- Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham
- Sherlock Holmes and James Moriarty
- Edmund Dantès, a.k.a. the Count of Monte Cristo, has a couple of rivalries, including himself in another alias as Lord Wilmore! (*The Count of Monte Cristo*)

HISTORICAL RIVALRIES INSPIRATION

- Scipio Africanus and Hannibal
- Richard the Lionhearted and Saladin
- The feuding paleontological rivalry of Edward Drinker Cope and Othniel Charles Marsh (yes, really)

MARTIAL MENTORS

Heroes seldom take their first steps out of their childhood homes and instantly become world-saving icons. Glory and greatness require time, training and, often, help. Mentors are the people behind the heroes.

Martial mentors, as opposed to other types of mentors, are primarily concerned with weapon or unarmed combat skills. They are the teachers, instructors, exemplars, and patrons who teach the craft of the blade, hammer, or bow, and encourage heroes along their path to legend.

WHY HAVE A MENTOR?

Functionally, the game doesn't require a hero to have a mentor. However, mentors can provide a clever in-game method to impart skills, feats, proficiencies, special techniques, rare weapons, or whatever else the GM and players want the character to acquire. Perhaps there is a feat or exotic weapon proficiency that would be perfect for a barbarian hero. The GM could just give it to the character, but it is more satisfying for the character to earn it.

The martial mentor can also be a source of story hooks and adventures. They can hire the heroes for various jobs and give out rewards. Above all, however, martial mentors have a vested interest in their students' success and skills. They want the heroes to succeed.



CREATING A MENTOR

The best mentors have some personal relationship with the heroes, or a previous connection with their backstories. The tables below provide a quick method of developing a martial mentor.

WHO IS THE MENTOR?

When creating a martial mentor, first think about how the mentor acquired their prowess. Are they still adventuring? If not, contemplate why they aren't still out in the world using their skills.

d8 Example Martial Mentors

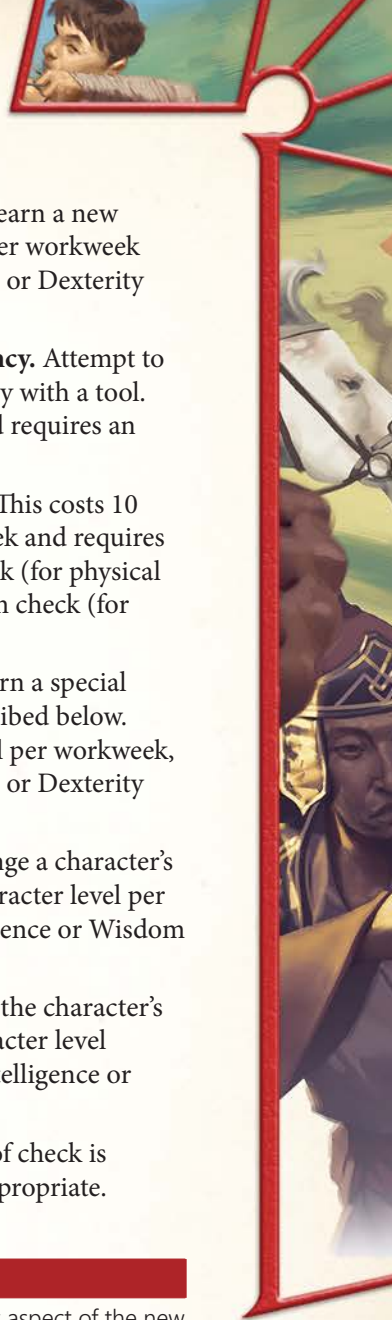
- 1 Retired adventurer who runs a secret order dedicated to combating evil.
- 2 War-weary general living a quiet life in an empty manor house.
- 3 Disgraced duelist, past his prime, wallowing in drink and despair.
- 4 Wielder of a famous magical weapon or other martial item stuck advising a king.
- 5 Traveler from a far realm or plane, looking for a way back home.
- 6 Grinning old man with a broom, the last master of an esoteric lost discipline.
- 7 Relative or family friend who just wants to be the person behind a legend.
- 8 Sentient magical item looking to teach what it knew when it was a real person.

MENTOR-STUDENT BACKSTORY

Next, consider how the heroes first encounter the mentor, the beginning of their relationship. In some games, the mentor can be a figure from a characters' background, but in others the mentor is someone the heroes meet during the campaign. From their origin, the relationship with the mentor can build and deepen in importance.

d8 Martial Mentor Origins

- 1 Discovered in a chance encounter along the road.
- 2 Challenged the heroes during a tournament.
- 3 Rescued, or rescued by, the heroes.
- 4 Was one of the heroes' first teachers.
- 5 Owes one of the heroes a great debt.
- 6 Runs a school the heroes applied to join.
- 7 Hired the heroes for a job.
- 8 Observed the heroes in action.



MENTOR MOTIVATIONS

Finally, think about what the mentor wants. This is usually a longer-term goal with connections to their backstory. This goal can revolve around the heroes, but doesn't necessarily have to even involve them.

d8 Martial Mentor Motivations

1	Wants one of the heroes to be their successor.
2	Wants revenge against an old foe.
3	Wants to hand down an artifact-level weapon to a worthy student.
4	Is secretly in league with a great evil.
5	Needs to train someone to rescue an old companion.
6	Follows a prophetic vision.
7	Is actually one of the heroes, sent back from the future.
8	Cursed to train the only person able to kill them.

DOWNTIME: TRAINING WITH YOUR MARTIAL MENTOR

A character working with a martial mentor spends free time between adventures studying, practicing, and testing themselves to gain new abilities. The exact nature of the new ability depends greatly on the needs of individual campaigns, but most often involves learning new weapon proficiencies, skills, feats, or special techniques.

Some GMs might permit a character to train with a martial mentor to change their subclass, or even their class. Players should consult with their GM when using these optional rules.

Training with a martial mentor covers a workweek of practice and instruction. A character must spend one week training with their mentor for at least 8 hours a day, and put forward the requisite coin to pay for supplies and expenses.

TRAINING POINTS

Training points represent a character's progress with their training. A character collects training points to spend on a desired benefit.

To gain training points, make an ability check (as listed in the training type) after each workweek of training. Add the character's current number of training points (if positive) to the ability check roll.

Compare the check's outcome to the Check column of the Martial Training table. The corresponding Result on the table specifies how many training points the character gains (or loses) for the week's effort.

Training points a character accrues can be spent on benefits from the mentor. Note that training points are not spent when added to ability checks on the Martial Training table.

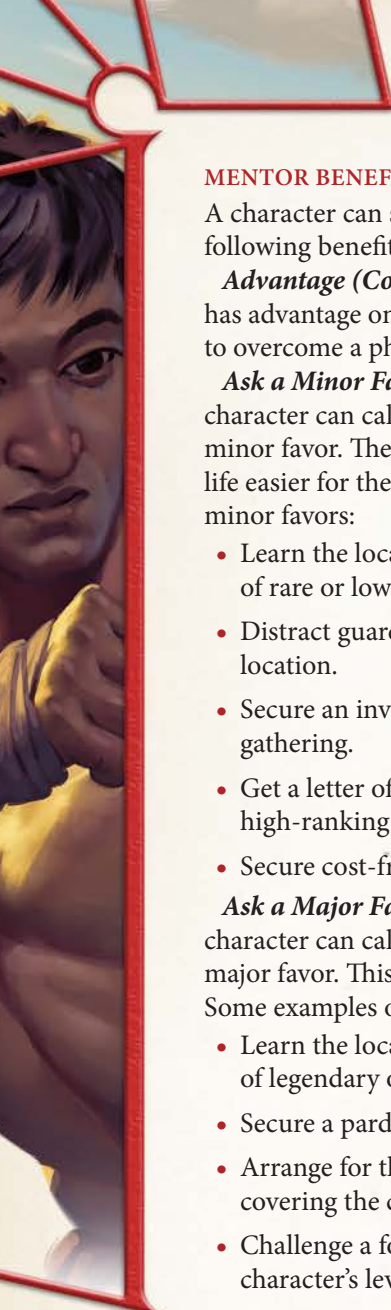
TYPES OF TRAINING:

- **Weapon Proficiency.** Attempt to learn a new type of weapon. This costs 25 gp per workweek and requires a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.
- **Language, Skill, or Tool Proficiency.** Attempt to learn a new skill or gain proficiency with a tool. This costs 25 gp per workweek and requires an Intelligence check.
- **Feat.** Attempt to learn a new feat. This costs 10 gp per character level per workweek and requires either a Strength or Dexterity check (for physical feats) or an Intelligence or Wisdom check (for mental feats).
- **Special Technique.** Attempt to learn a special technique. Some of these are described below. This costs 20 gp per character level per workweek, and requires a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.
- **Change Subclass.** Attempt to change a character's subclass. This costs 100 gp per character level per workweek, and requires an Intelligence or Wisdom check.
- **Change Class.** Attempt to change the character's class. This costs 1,000 gp per character level per workweek, and requires an Intelligence or Wisdom check.

If more than one option for the type of check is available, the GM decides which is appropriate.

MARTIAL TRAINING

Check	Result
1–5	Wounded! You fail to grasp a key aspect of the new training and suffer a minor injury. Lose 1 training point. If you have no training points when you roll this result, you have disadvantage on the next check you make to determine training points.
6–10	Distracted! Other matters weigh heavy on you, pulling you away from your training. You make no progress. You gain no training points this workweek.
11–15	Advancement! You make solid progress on your training. You gain 1 training point.
16–20	Inspiration! You push through difficulty and feel accomplished about your training. You gain 2 training points.
21+	Breakthrough! Everything clicks into place, and you make significant progress. You gain 3 training points.



MENTOR BENEFITS

A character can spend training points on the following benefits.

Advantage (Costs 1 Training Point). The character has advantage on a Strength or Dexterity check made to overcome a physical obstacle.

Ask a Minor Favor (Costs 2 Training Points). The character can call upon their martial mentor for a minor favor. These are small actions that may make life easier for the adventurer. Some examples of minor favors:

- Learn the location (and price) of a magic weapon of rare or lower rarity.
- Distract guards at the entrance to a building or location.
- Secure an invitation to an important event or gathering.
- Get a letter of introduction to a noble or other high-ranking individual.
- Secure cost-free lodging and food for one week.

Ask a Major Favor (Costs 4 Training Points). The character can call upon their martial mentor for a major favor. This might include illegal activities. Some examples of major favors:

- Learn the location (and price) of a magic weapon of legendary or lower rarity.
- Secure a pardon for a major crime.
- Arrange for the resurrection of an ally (but not covering the cost).
- Challenge a foe with a CR equal to half the character's level.
- Secure cost-free lodging and food for 1 month.

Weapon Proficiency (Costs 5 Training Points). The character gains proficiency with a weapon.

Learn New Language, Skill, or Tool Proficiency (Costs 5 Training Points). The character learns a new language or skill, or gains proficiency in a tool.

Learn Special Technique (Costs 6 Training Points). The character learns a new maneuver or technique, and it becomes one of their character features.

Learn New Feat (Costs 8 Training Points). The character learns a new feat. The character must fulfill any prerequisite for the feat before beginning the training. Feats gained in this manner only grant ability score improvements at the GM's discretion.

Subclass Change (Costs 10 Training Points). The character replaces all of their old subclass features with the features of the new subclass at their level and lower.

Class Change (Costs 12 Training Points). The character replaces all of their old class features (including subclass features) with the features of the new class at their level and lower.

COMPLICATIONS

Characters who spend their time honing their physical skill risk falling prey to a complication. A character has a 10% chance of triggering a complication for each workweek spent training with their martial mentor. This check is made at the beginning of the workweek. When a complication occurs, the GM can roll d8 and consult the Martial Mentor Complications table, or create a unique complication suitable to the campaign.

MARTIAL MENTOR COMPLICATIONS

d8 Complication

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | You accidentally break important training equipment but finally get the lesson. Training costs an additional 100 gp per character level to cover expenses, but gain 1 extra training point this week. |
| 2 | You suffer a major injury and can't gain training points this week. |
| 3 | A series of failures makes you doubt yourself. Lose 1 training point. |
| 4 | Your mentor accepts a new student who insists on shadowing your every move. |
| 5 | A rival warrior defeats you in a practice bout. Lose 1 training point. |
| 6 | You take time off to participate in a series of tournaments. You gain 100 gp per character level but gain no training points this week. |
| 7 | You have a major disagreement with your mentor. You have disadvantage on this check to determine your training points this week. |
| 8 | You impress your mentor! You have advantage on the check to determine your training points this week. |

OPTIONAL RULE: SPECIAL TECHNIQUES

Martial mentors can reward characters with special combat abilities, at the GMs discretion. Special techniques are little tricks that can surprise a foe, but are unlikely to work repeatedly. These can be features created by the GM or pulled from the examples here.

ANGLED BLADE

After you make an attack on a target, you quickly angle your blade to reflect light right into your foe's eyes. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until your next turn. The target must have eyes and must be able to see you. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

TOE CRUSHER

After you make an attack on a target, you drop your bludgeoning weapon onto the target's feet before catching the handle again. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or their speed becomes 0 until your next turn. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

WEAPON BIND

In place of one of your attacks this round, you can lock your weapon with a target's weapon. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or the target may not use their weapon until the beginning of your next turn. During this time, you also can't use your own weapon. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

SEVER THE STRING

Instead of dealing damage to a bow wielding target with a successful ranged weapon attack, you can aim at the target's bowstring. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw (DC 20 for a magical bow), or their bow becomes nonfunctional for 1d4 rounds. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

UNARMED FILCH

When you make a successful unarmed attack on a target, you can choose to deal no damage and instead attempt to grab something in the target's possession. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to take an object from a target. You must be able to see the object. The object must be something you can hold in one hand, and not something currently held by the target. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

SAMPLE MENTORS

Presented below are two martial mentors who can appear in any campaign.

THE MAESTRO, ROYAL DUELMASTER

One of the greatest blades to ever compete, the Maestro ended a legendary career to open a Dueling Academy with the support of royal patrons. Bitter about his advanced age, he is a tireless taskmaster, demanding perfection from every student. While the majority of the academy lessons are handled by lesser teachers, the Maestro still occasionally chooses exceptional prospects to tutor personally.



Motivation. To find a student worthy of his most secret techniques.

Quirk. Never remembers anyone's names.

Secret. In talks with evil forces to acquire a potion to bring back his youth.

The Maestro

Medium Humanoid (Human), Neutral

ARMOR CLASS 21 (glamoured leather armor, Skilled Defense)

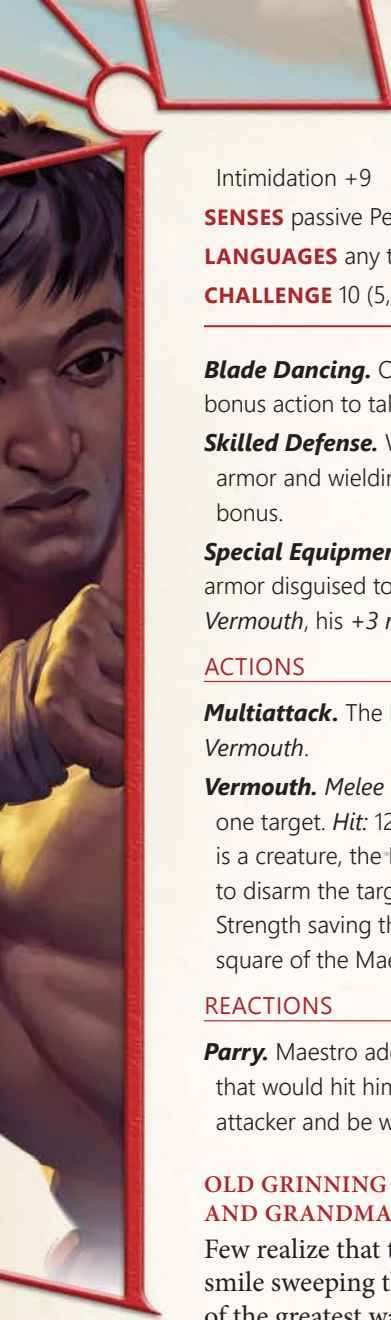
HIT POINTS 104 (19d8 + 19)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	18(+4)

SAVING THROWS Dex +9, Wis +6

SKILLS Acrobatics +9, Athletics +8, Insight +6,



Intimidation +9

SENSES passive Perception 16

LANGUAGES any three languages

CHALLENGE 10 (5,900 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +4

Blade Dancing. On each of his turns, the Maestro can use a bonus action to take the Dash or Disengage action.

Skilled Defense. While the Maestro is wearing light or no armor and wielding no shield, his AC includes his Charisma bonus.

Special Equipment. The Maestro wears glamoured leather armor disguised to look like training gear. He wields *Vermouth*, his +3 rapier.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Maestro makes three attacks with *Vermouth*.

Vermouth. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (1d8 + 8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, the Maestro can choose to deal no damage to disarm the target. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or one item it is holding falls to a square of the Maestro's choice within 10 feet.

REACTIONS

Parry. Maestro adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, the Maestro must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

OLD GRINNING BOG, STREETSWEEPER AND GRANDMASTER

Few realize that the old, bent woman with the wide smile sweeping the storefronts for a few coins is one of the greatest warriors in the realms. Master at armed and unarmed combat, she has had a thousand names and spawned as many ballads and legends. Hers was the hand that brought low the mightiest of dragons. Vast armies marched at her command. These days though, she lives a simple life content with simple pleasures. On the rarest of occasions, a unique talent catches her eye and she offers to impart a few lessons. Tragically, most dismiss the old woman as worthless.

Motivation. Sweeping, and a mug of ale at the end of the day.

Quirks. Always grinning. Uses quaint sayings to impart her lessons.

Secret. She knows the secret to eternal life.

Old Grinning Bog

Medium Humanoid (Human), Chaotic Neutral

ARMOR CLASS 21 (Suave Unarmored Defense)

HIT POINTS 97 (15d8 + 30)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	21 (+6)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	21 (+5)	22(+6)

SAVING THROWS Dex +11, Con +7, Wis +10

SKILLS Acrobatics +11, Athletics +6, Deception +11, History +8, Perception +10

DAMAGE RESISTANCES Bludgeoning, Piercing and Slashing from nonmagical attacks

CONDITION IMMUNITIES Charmed, Frightened, Poisoned

SENSES Blindsight 60 ft., Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 20

LANGUAGES understands and speaks most languages

CHALLENGE 15 (13,000 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +5

Eternal Master. When Old Grinning Bog drops to 0 hit points, she is dead for 1d4 days. Then her body vanishes, and she reappears in a location of her choice within 100 miles.

Legendary Resistance (2/day). If Bog fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Attacks. Any weapon wielded by Old Grinning Bog is considered magical as are her unarmed strikes.

Magic Resistance. Old Grinning Bog has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Suave Unarmored Defense. While Bog is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, her AC includes her Wisdom and Charisma modifiers.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Old Bog attacks three times using her broom or unseen strike or both.

Broom. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) force damage.

Unseen Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft. one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) force damage. If the target is a creature, Bog can choose one of the following effects:

- The target must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be pushed 10 feet away from Bog.
- The target must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be thrown to unoccupied square within 15 feet, landing prone.

- The target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or their speed is 0 until the end of Bog's next turn.

Disruptive Touch (Recharge 5-6). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft. one target. *Hit:* The target must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target is stunned until the end of Bog's next turn.

REACTIONS

Redirect Missile. In response to being hit by a ranged weapon attack, Bog deflects the missile toward a new target. The damage she takes from the attack is reduced by half, and she chooses a new target within 15 feet. If the original attack roll of the ranged weapon attack is enough to successfully strike the new target, the new target takes the same amount of damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Old Grinning Bog can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Bog regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

- **Step of the Wind.** Old Bog vanishes and moves invisibly up to her speed without provoking opportunity attacks. She reappears when she reaches the end of her speed.
- **Unseen Strike (Costs 2 Actions).** Bog makes one Unseen Strike.
- **Reknit Flesh (Costs 3 Actions).** Bog regains 30 hit points.

MARTIAL MENTOR QUEST HOOKS

Adventures involving a martial mentor can occur in a number of ways. A few suggestions:

- Your martial mentor has long sought a fabulous lost weapon, and now new information points toward a tomb complex rumored to have been constructed to test the greatest warriors in the world.
- A decades-long animosity exists between your martial mentor and the head of a rival fighting school. With a grand tournament soon to begin, your mentor needs you and your companions to win to settle the conflict once and for all.
- The grandmaster who instructed your martial mentor vanished long ago on a mysterious island. The map leading to that same island has recently been found. Your mentor begs you to recover the remains of his teacher so they can be properly laid to rest.

MARTIAL RIVALS

Martial rivals serve very specific functions in roleplaying games. While they can serve as the ultimate bad guy, this is usually not their role. They act as obstacles for the heroes. This can be a physical barrier, such as a group of mercenaries blocking the entrance to a dungeon. They can also provide subtle pressure of tension or adversity, such as a group of rival adventurers racing the heroes to an ancient relic. The versatility of martial rivals allows them to be used in a variety of different ways within the campaign.

CREATING A MARTIAL RIVAL

Rivals are not nameless thugs. They are full-fledged characters with their own goals, fears, and motivations. The more they feel like real people, the more dangerous they appear. When creating a rival, think about three key aspects: type, motivation, and actions.

TYPES OF MARTIAL RIVALS

Generally speaking, rivals fall into four thematic categories. However, rivals can move from one category to another as needed by the demands of the campaign.

THE ADVERSARY

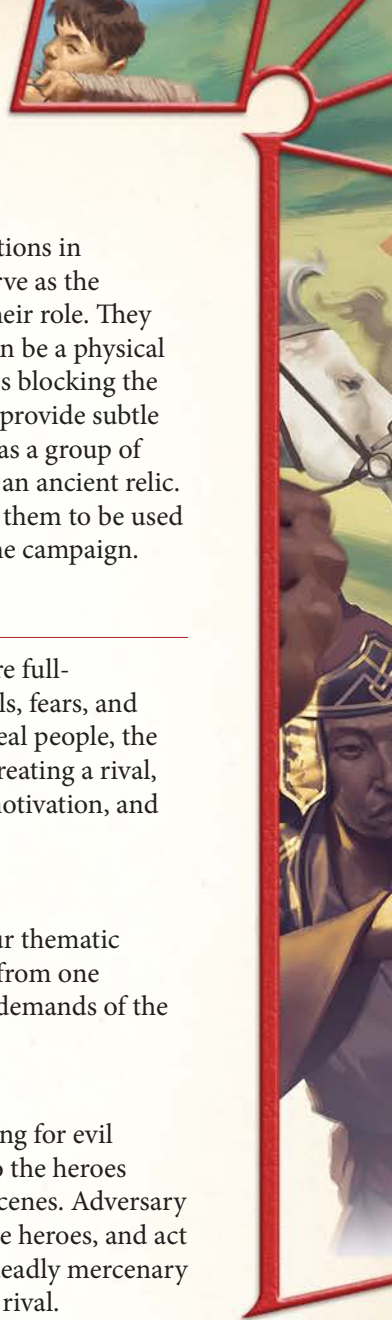
These are the archetypal rivals. Working for evil forces, they are in direct opposition to the heroes either out in the open or behind the scenes. Adversary rivals usually do not get along with the heroes, and act to thwart them. The elite assassin or deadly mercenary is the primary example of this type of rival.

Campaign Role: Adversary rivals act as obstacles, furthering the plans of the campaign foes, and/or seeking to kill the heroes.

THE COMPETITION

The player characters are not the only heroes in the world. Competition rivals are on the same path as the heroes, and contend for the same jobs or glory. The heroes might have good relations with these rivals, swapping tall tales at the local tavern when their paths cross. On the other hand, they might hate them for past encounters where the rivals seized the prize. The opposing adventuring group is the primary example of this type of rival.

Campaign Role: Competition rivals act as inspiration, spurring the heroes to act or strive harder. They also are perfect for stirring up roleplaying drama.





THE NEWBIES

These rivals are new to the martial life. Their armor is so new, it squeaks. While not a major obstacle in terms of prowess, the newbie rival's combination of pluck and overconfidence gets them into trouble over and over. They may look up to the heroes as examples, or they may be gunning for them, trying to take the heroes' place on the top of the heap.

Campaign Role: Newbie rivals act as plot advancers. They often need rescuing, or inadvertently pass on some critical bit of information to the heroes.

THE JENKINS

These rivals interfere with the heroes' quests, ignoring any warnings to rush headlong into danger (and usually die). Their relationship with the heroes tends to be abrasive, since they have no intention of listening to good advice.

Campaign Role: Jenkins rivals act as a warning to the heroes. They demonstrate the seriousness of a location or situation. Sometimes, in their death, they provide the heroes with a vital clue.

MARTIAL RIVAL MOTIVATIONS

The reason why a rival acts is almost as important as what they do. Think about what a rival needs, and why the heroes stand in the path of achieving that goal. The conflict this generates is the heart of the hero-rival struggle, and can inspire many adventures. A rival could be looking out only for themselves or acting under the direction of some more powerful figure. Whatever their reasons, a rival's actions in the game are usually to further their goals. Rivals can acquire new goals over the course of a campaign. Listed below are a few possible rival motivations.

d10 Martial Rival Motivations

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Prove they are the best by defeating the heroes. |
| 2 | Kill a legendary creature before the heroes do. |
| 3 | Prevent the heroes from meddling. |
| 4 | Steal a powerful item possessed by the heroes. |
| 5 | Collect the bounty on the heroes. |
| 6 | Win glory or renown before the heroes do. |
| 7 | Become one of the heroes' companions. |
| 8 | Get revenge on heroes for their transgressions. |
| 9 | Just following orders. |
| 10 | Tired of hearing the songs about the heroes. |

MARTIAL RIVAL ACTIONS

When a rival acts, it is to further their goals. The "when" and "how" of these actions depends greatly on the type of campaign the heroes are involved in. Think about one of the hero-rival conflicts in the campaign. What are the rivals trying to achieve, and what are two or three actions they might engage in to reach that goal? These actions can take place as the heroes adventure, or they can take place during downtime. Try to arrange these actions so it impacts the heroes either directly or indirectly. Listed below are a few sample rival actions to act as inspiration.

d10 Martial Rival Actions

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Tries to kill the heroes or one of their allies. |
| 2 | Opens a fighting school in the heroes' hometown. |
| 3 | Ambushes the heroes when they least expect it. |
| 4 | Hires a popular bard to perform satirical songs about the heroes. |
| 5 | Kidnaps one of the heroes' henchmen. |
| 6 | Convinces townsfolk to avoid the heroes' business. |
| 7 | Challenges one of the heroes to a duel. |
| 8 | Pays off a magistrate to revoke the heroes' charter. |
| 9 | Unleashes a monster to kill the heroes. |
| 10 | Offers a bounty on the heroes, dead or alive. |

ADVANCING A MARTIAL RIVAL

Rivals should grow in power just as the heroes do, advancing by Tier. This provides ever-increasing tension and conflict. Listed below are the suggested tiers (along with a suggested CR) for martial rivals.

Tier 1. Heroes are levels 1–4. These rivals are relatively new to the adventuring life. They have a few notches on their scabbards but have a lot to learn. Suggested Rival Challenge: CR 3.

Tier 2. Heroes are levels 5–10. The rivals are now accomplished in their fields, and are often found working for powerful employers. Suggested Rival Challenge: CR 8.

Tier 3. Heroes are levels 11–16. These rivals are names to be respected or feared. Their deeds are spoken of in taverns across the lands, and their accomplishments can alter the fates of nations. Suggested Rival Challenge: CR 13.

Tier 4. Heroes are level 17–20. At the pinnacle of their power, the rivals are living legends. Only the greatest (or worst) figures can afford to hire them, and their actions can have far-reaching consequences. Suggested Rival Challenge: CR 18.

WHEN/HOW TO KILL OFF A RIVAL

The best rivals are the ones who appear repeatedly over the course of a campaign, perhaps beginning as a minor annoyance then growing in strength until their defeat is worthy of legend.

Before every encounter with the heroes, give the rival a plan for escape if things go poorly. This could be a convenient magic item, the well-paid intervention of the constabulary, or just a really fast horse. However, don't bend or break the rules to keep a rival alive. If the rival can't escape from the heroes, give the players their moment of glory and start thinking about how the next rival will enter the campaign.

REWARDS FOR DISPATCHING A MARTIAL RIVAL

The rewards for disposing of a rival depend greatly on the campaign, and might take the form of looted equipment, payments from mentors, or discovered treasures. Described below is a guideline for possible rewards they might earn for their victory.

Tier 1

- 50–100 gp
- Common or uncommon magic item
- A favor from a local merchant or minor noble

Tier 2

- 400–800 gp
- Uncommon or rare magic item
- Patronage from an important noble, membership in a guild or organization

Tier 3

- 1,200–2,200 gp
- Rare or very rare magic item
- Deed to property, specialized information from a sage or archmage

Tier 4

- 4,000–8,000 gp
- Very rare or legendary magic item
- Rank or granted land from a king or national ruler

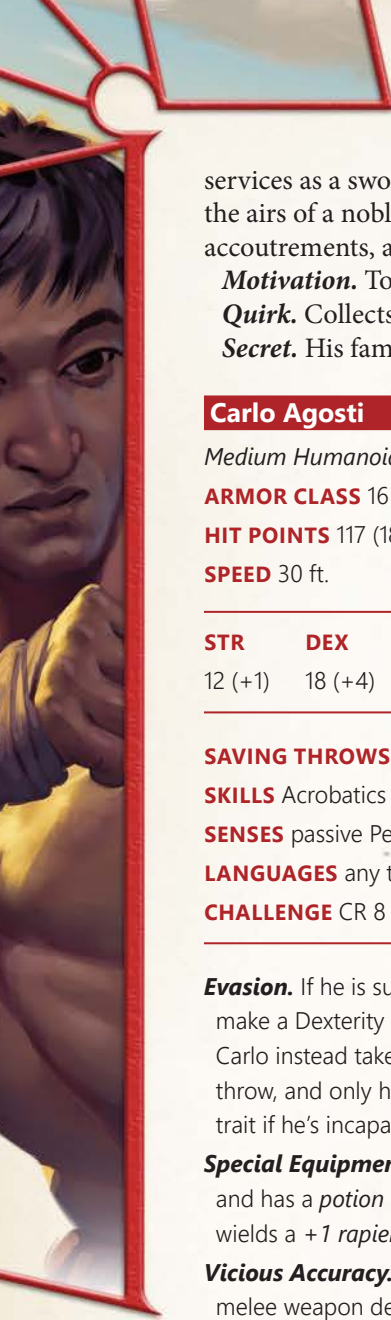
SAMPLE MARTIAL RIVALS

Presented below are two martial rivals who can appear in any campaign.

CARLO AGOSTI, BLADE FOR HIRE

Claiming to be of minor nobility, Carlo's skill with a blade is only matched by his cunning, ambition, and complete lack of morals. Currently, he offers his





services as a swordsman and duelist. Carlo puts on the airs of a noble, demanding the finest comforts and accoutrements, and tolerates no disrespect.

Motivation. To make money.

Quirk. Collects fine porcelain figurines.

Secret. His family were commoners.

Carlo Agosti

Medium Humanoid (Human), Chaotic Neutral

ARMOR CLASS 16 (studded leather armor)

HIT POINTS 117 (18d8 + 36)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	16(+3)

SAVING THROWS Dex +7, Wis +6

SKILLS Acrobatics +7, Deception +3, Perception +6

SENSES passive Perception 16

LANGUAGES any three languages

CHALLENGE CR 8 (3,900 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Evasion. If he is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, Carlo instead takes no damage on a successful saving throw, and only half damage if he fails. He can't use this trait if he's incapacitated.

Special Equipment. Carlo wears a *cape of the mountebank*, and has a *potion of greater healing* in a belt pouch. He wields a +1 rapier.

Vicious Accuracy. Carlo's attacks deal extra damage. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Carlo hits with it (included in the attacks below).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Carlo makes three attacks with his +1 rapier, or two attacks with his throwing daggers.

+1 Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) piercing damage.

Throwing Dagger. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage when used as a melee weapon, or 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage when used as a ranged weapon.

Blinding Powder (Recharge 5-6). Carlo throws a handful of fine powder into the face of a creature within 10 feet. The target must succeed on DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

REACTIONS

Flashing Defense. Carlo adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, Carlo must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

STADLER THE STALWART, PROFESSIONAL ADVENTURER

The self-proclaimed "professional adventurer" certainly knows how to strike a dramatic pose. Stadler began as the henchman of a renowned band of adventurers who, unfortunately, met their end inside a purple worm's maw. Now on his own and calling himself Stadler the Stalwart, he seeks to right wrongs, do daring deeds, and accomplish the impossible. Stadler is very image conscious and boastful of his amazing feats, though he has little skill to back up his claims. Hapless yet also amazingly lucky, he expects to be famous any day now.

Motivation. To be as famous as he thinks he is.

Quirk. Sings self-written ballads about himself.

Secret. He is a bit of a coward.

Stadler the Stalwart

Medium Humanoid (Human), Chaotic Good

ARMOR CLASS 16 (breastplate and shield)

HIT POINTS 90 (20d8)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	12(+1)

SAVING THROWS Dex +3

SKILLS Animal Handling +1, Performance +4

SENSES passive Perception 8

LANGUAGES any two languages

CHALLENGE CR 5 (1,800 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Action Surge (Recharges when Stadler Finishes a Short or Long Rest). On his turn, Stadler can take one additional action.

Infuriating Blow (1/Turn). Stadler deals an extra 5 (1d10) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack. If the target is a creature, they must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or only attack Stadler until the start of Stadler's next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Stadler makes two longsword attacks or two heavy crossbow attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage plus 5 (1d10) slashing damage if Stadler uses Infuriating Blow.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) piercing damage if Stadler uses Infuriating Blow.

BONUS ACTIONS

Desperate Action. On each of his turns, Stadler can use a bonus action to take the Disengage or Hide actions.

Unintentional Intentional Strike. If Stadler misses with both of his melee weapon attacks on the same turn, he can use a bonus action to make a longsword attack on another foe within range.

REACTIONS

Accidental Shove. When an attack Stadler can see hits him, he can halve the damage against himself and move up to his speed in a straight line toward another foe without provoking opportunity attacks. If Stadler ends his move within 5 feet of a foe, that foe must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be pushed 10 feet away from Stadler.

MARTIAL RIVAL QUEST HOOKS

Conflicts with martial rivals can occur in myriad ways. A few suggested ones are described below.

- While journeying toward a dungeon or lost treasure site, the heroes hear rumors of another adventuring group after the same goal. This band of rivals is ahead of the heroes, prompting a race to reach the treasure.
- The heroes have been a thorn in the side of a powerful foe, so a martial rival is hired to stop their meddling. This rival studies the heroes for a time before arranging a deadly ambush!
- Unrelated to their overall goals, the heroes inadvertently interfered with the activities of a cabal of cultists or wealthy merchants. A number of martial rivals begin plaguing the heroes, all to keep them away from the cabal's interests.



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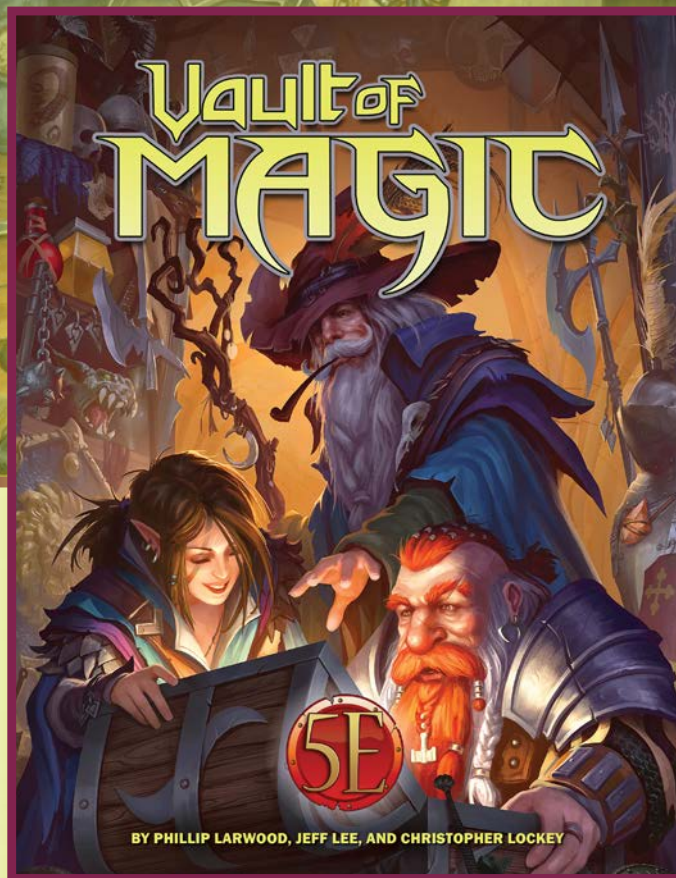


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