Action in the Melee Round

Leomund's TINY HUT

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Melee is a source of controversy in *AD&D*. It can very easily be shown that a figure with selected magic items and weapons can perform 10 separate actions in a melee round. This "reality," however, does not fit within the context of the rules of AD&D. "Reality" will allow some characters to perform too many actions while others, usually those without magic devices, will be limited to one action per round.

The following melee system is still in the "playtest" stage. I have been using it to answer the question, "How many actions can be performed in a melee round?"

The number of actions that can be performed during one melee round are limited to three (3). (There are a few exceptions: High-level monks are allowed four (4) open hand attacks per melee round; a pummeling attack might include more than three (3) attacks in one round; a person under the effect of a *Haste* spell or a *Potion of Speed* is allowed double the normal physical attacks in a melee round; and so forth.)

In the vast majority of cases, actions are limited to these three types:

1. Physical action (including moving)
2. Spell action
3. Device action

Rule 1. Only one spell can be cast in a melee round. Haste will not alter this rule. Some rare magical device might allow for multiple spells per round if and only if the DM accepts such an item and places it in his/her game.

Rule 2. The character is limited to a certain number of purposeful attacks in a melee round. If he/she/it is allowed only one attack, then only one can occur. If he/she/it is allowed three attacks every two rounds then one attack plus the chance for one more would occur. A character cannot perform more attacks than he/she/it is entitled to *(Haste* would be taken into account). Thus, a Magic-User with only one attack allowed in a melee round could fire a Wand of Fire (for a Fire Ball), but then no offensive spell could be cast by him/her in that same melee round. In like manner, the Magic-User could not then move and attack with a dagger in the same melee round.

Rule 3. A figure who casts *Teleport, Dimension Door, Wind Walk,* etc. cannot cast an offensive spell nor use a device to attack in that same melee round. That includes such striking weapons as the Staff of the *Magi* or a Staff of Striking, but not a magical or non-magical weapon like a dagger, mace or sword. However, such a figure might instigate a physical attack by an opponent with weapon, claw or fang, and would certainly be allowed a chance to physically defend himself.

What constitutes an offensive spell or an attack from a device? Obviously, a *Fire Ball* is an attack; so is a *Magic Missile* (Note: If fired from a wand, two missile discharges are allowed per attack because of the nature of that particular wand.). But what of a *Wall of Ice* or *Darkness* 15' *Radius?* If a spell inhibits a figure directly *(Hold Person, Charm Person, Paralyzation, Stinking Cloud, Darkness 15' Radius,* Slow, etc.) it is an attack. If a spell has the potential to damage, even if the spell is not being used to damage, it is considered an attack *(Burning* Hands to light a torch, *Wall of Ice* to close a passage, *Explosive Runes* to trap a book, *Glyph of Warding* to protect a door, *Flame Arrow, Fire Shield, Polymorph Other, Enlarge* a sword so it

will do more damage, etc.). Spell-like functions from devices fall in these same categories.

Rule 4. A figure can use a device with a spell or even use two devices as long as only one potential attack is involved. Thus, a held sword could be commanded to *Detect Magic* and a *Figurine of Wondrous Power* could be ordered to attack someone in the same melee round. A figure could cast *Protection from Evil* and then jump into a well using a *Ring of Feather Falling.* A figure could cast *Invisibility* on a party member and then put on a *Ring of Invisibility* him/herself.

Rule 5. A figure can never purposefully use three devices, or two devices and one spell, in the same melee round. Thus, if a lone figure were on a *Flying Carpet* he/she could cast a Fire Ball, but if a *Ring of Invisibility* were then put on, it would not function immediately since the lone figure had used a spell and a device (the carpet) already in that round. However, if a Manticore attacked in the same round and knocked the Magic-User off the carpet, an already worn *Ring of Feather Falling* would work, since the Magic-User had no purposeful intent to activate the device. The Magic-User would get quite a surprise if he/she purposefully tried to jump off the carpet in the same round he/she fired the *Fire Ball* for then the Ring would not function.

Magic weapons and armor do not count in this discussion of devices when the weapon is used to strike. If a weapon has a power or an ability then it does count. Example: A fighter has a sword with a Fly ability. He has a *Horn of Valhalla* and a *Wand of Enemy Detection.* If he is in the air and blows the horn, he will find that if he also tries to activate the wand, the wand would not function in that round. If he is in the air and activates the wand, the horn will not function in that round. If he uses the horn and then activates the wand, the sword will not let him fly in that round.

Devices are considered to be activated on the round they are obtained or put on, with the exception of Rings of Protection, Cloaks of Protection, Magic Armor and Magic Weapons (unless the weapon has some power or ability that also comes into play when drawn, like a *Holy Defender Sword).* Thus, putting on a *Ring of Invisibility, Ring of Feather Falling, Ring of Fire Resistance, et. al.,* would count as a device action in that round even if the ring did not provide a use in that round. Removing an item is considered deactivation of a device and does count as a device action.

Rule 6. If a figure moves before or after some action in the melee round, that movement is counted as one of the three actions allowed in the round. Movement of less than ten (10) feet total can be taken in two stages in the same round and will count as only one physical action. Thus, a figure can step into a doorway, discharge a missile/device/spell and then step back behind the wall, and only one physical action would be charged for the movement. If the figure had to step into a wide corridor, however, more than ten feet would be traveled and two physical actions would be counted. Note that popping up from behind a rock, peeking around a door, and similar actions (without actually traveling) count as movement by this rule but the figure could duck back down behind the rock or move back around the door without having that count as a separate physical action. Exception: If the figure is damaged in mid-move or enspelled in any way, then the first half of the move is considered one full physical action in the round.

If a figure uses his/her full attack potential (killing an opponent or rendering it helpless), then he/she cannot instigate any more attacks in that round. Thus, if a figure kills an opponent in segment one of a round he/she may still elect to move in the balance of the round but he/she could not grapple, overbear, pummel or attack someone/something later in that round. The moving figure could be attacked by someone else, of course.

Rule 7. If a figure is allowed to fire multiple missiles in a melee round (arrows, darts or whatever), he/she is allowed no more than ten feet of movement during a round in which he/she fires all of those millies. Example: A Fighter can fire two arrows or three darts per round. If he fires them all he can move no further than ten feet. If arrows are used, the ten feet can be split if and only if the split move is taken before the first shot and after the second shot. If darts are used, splitting the ten-foot movement allowance is forbidden.

Rule 8. A figure who has multiple missile capacity but does not discharge all of his/her missiles is only allowed a weapon blow if he/she is entitled to at least three blows every two rounds. Thus, a fighter (or any other class) cannot fire an arrow/crossbow/dart/sling and then attack with a weapon if he/she is allowed only one attack per round. A charging character, however, can throw a spear, ax, throwing dagger or javelin and still get a normal blow under certain circumstances. (Note: Most daggers are not balanced for throwing (only 15% are) and a character must be trained to throw a dagger. Thus, a first- to fifth-level Magic-User cannot throw a dagger at all. He/she must learn to wield the dagger as a hand-held weapon first, no matter how much the Magic-User will argue to the contrary!)

The thrower must launch the missile at the beginning of his/her charge with no penalty "to hit" (first to fourth segments). If the thrower is in motion when the missile is launched, consider the weapon - 1 "to hit." The launching takes one full segment of movement potential in all cases, even if the launcher is mounted. If the charging figure has some segments of movement left after the charge is over, he/she/it can use a weapon if he/she/it can roll a number equal to or less than the number of segments remaining on d8. Those who attack with claw and/or fang use d6. Example: A Fighter charges with a spear. He launches it in segment two. He travels for three more segments to reach his opponent. There are five segments left. If he rolls 1-5 on d8 he may attack; 6-8, he may not. This rules applies to pummeling, overbearing and grappling as well.

Rule 9. A figure is allowed to defend his/her person with a weapon if the attack is brought to the figure and if the figure's three-action-per-round limit has not been exceeded. Thus, a Fighter launches an arrow in segment number two. In segment number five an orc arrives to hit the fighter. The Fighter normally would not be allowed a weapon attack, but he may draw his blade and defend his person in this situation. However, he could not defend himself by striking, so that he would obtain more than his allowed number of blows per round. If he had attacked and killed an orc in segment number two with his sword and another orc arrives on segment number five, he could not strike another blow. However, in either case, the Fighter may elect to parry the incoming blow—assuming the weapons are ones that can oppose one another in that manner. Parrying a large weapon with a smaller one is done at +1 to the defender's armor class. Parrying an equal-sized weapon gives + 2 to armor class. Parrying a small weapon with a larger one gives +3 to armor class. However, initiative and weapon speed factors must be considered. The slower weapon is always at least - 1 on initiative to parry (-2 if the speed factors are four or more points apart). Finally, if the attacker has at least two full points of Strength more than the defender, a + 1 to the defender's armor class is erased. The obverse is not true, however.

Example: A Fighter with chainmail and shield (armor class 4) is attacked by an orc. Both have long swords, both are Strength 17. The Fighter may consider himself armor class 2 if he can beat or tie the orc's initiative. If he does not beat the orc's initiative, then he is still armor class 4. If he were Strength 17 and the orc only 15 there would be no change. If he were Strength 16 and the orc 18, then one "plus" to armor class is negated, so the Fighter becomes armor class 3. If the orc had a halberd and the fighter a sword the armor class is

boosted by only + 1 for the fighter, but the orc is -2 on initiative due to the weapon speed factor difference of 4 points (halberd 9, long sword 5). A figure can always attempt to thwart an overbearing, pummeling or grappling attack with his/her weapon, regardless of the number of actions already taken in that round.

Rule 10. Figures must state their intentions based upon what they can sense (usually see) at the beginning of the melee round. "I will attack the 4th orc with my sword." "I will cast a Fire Ball tying to hit the four orcs now together on the hilltop." "I will charge the human Fighter on the left." The Magic-User in this example can change his/her aim slightly, since in the three segments needed to cast, the orcs might split up to some degree—he/she can name his/her final target once two segments have passed in the casting, needing only one segment to aim. A spell-user can never begin casting and then invoke *Castus Interruptus.* A spell is cast from beginning to end (or until the spell is spoiled) with no pauses. If an event occurs before a figure's stated action has taken place he/she might be allowed a new action or a change in the stated action. To effect such a change, one segment must be used in making up one's mind. If a spell-casting is in progress it must be completed. If a spell from a device is in progress it must be completed. A figure must sometimes roll to see if he/she specifically observes the event in question. Consider observation automatic if the appearance or event takes place within ten feet of a target of his/her present action. A saving throw (with no alteration for magic, spell, race, device or dexterity) is required on any questionable observation. It can be altered by a number from - 1 to -8, depending on how out-of-the-way the action is from the figure's line of sight. The DM must rule on the amount of a saving-throw modifier on a case-by-case basis.

One character seeing an event can warn another who does not see it. One segment must be used in stating the warning (or making gestures). Example of a - 1 modifier: A figure appears 20 feet to the left of a target orc. The appearing figure is in broad daylight. The orc and figure are over 60 feet from the observer, so the angle between them is small. There is nothing between the figure, the orc and the observer. Example of a -8 modifier: A figure is firing a bow. A demon teleports behind him/her 10 feet away. There is much noise and no one warns him/her of the demon coming up from behind. Even if someone did warn him/her, he/she might still not be able to react since the demon is so close. The best he/she could hope for would be negating the demon's +2 to hit from behind. The figure would not be able to get the first blow and would not be able to swing around and fire the arrow at the demon.

If a figure is not in the middle of an action or if the action has not yet started, he/she/it might be allowed to react to the new information. Example: A Magic-User states that he/she will fire a *Magic Missile* at an opposing Magic-User who at the beginning of the round is facing away from the caster. The Magic-User rolls 4 for initiative but on segment number one the opponent Magic-User vanishes (Invisibility? Teleportation? Dimension Door? Illusion?). The first Magic-User might change to a new target, and might be allowed a new spell altogether. He/she must use a segment (minimum) if a new spell or action is contemplated. (It might be much longer if a material component is required.) If the components for a new spell were not at hand, he/she might get no action that round.

As you test this system, you may want to make other rules. I would be anxious to hear what those additions might be. Since this system has had only a short playtest time other rules might well be needed. Players, as you know, can be very inventive.

Future articles will deal with more realistic movement rates and the spell-casting times needed to go with them—and there will be no provision for Olympic feats or "GI Joe"/"Conan" characters when movement is considered!