

The 'Segment of Action' System Takes AD&D Melee One Step Further

Lenard Lakofka

I have designed many complex melee combat systems that have included such items as "hit location" and even "special damage." These systems have met with good reception by players, who have found them realistic, exciting and time consuming. Alas, the time taken when a figure has a good armor class, many hit points and/or many henchmen makes the system *very* time-consuming!

Thus I have decided that the simpler combat system, as espoused by Gary Gygax, is probably better in the long run. However, there are items in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* basic melee system that I do not like. Therefore I have come up with the following "Segment of Action" system that has the advantages of versatility and the potential for complexity (if the Dungeon Master really likes to include weapon length and speed factors into a melee).

I will take the system in stages from basic hand-to-hand combat, to spell casting, miscellaneous actions, movement and special treatments.

I. The basic hand-to-hand melee system in which figures are fighting with weapons (natural or otherwise) that have the same basic length and spell factors is as follows: (Charges and multiple blows in the melee round will not be considered at this time. Note: Length and speed factors are not inherent in the system but can be handled by it, as seen later.)

Roll d10 and d20 for each figure. The first die measures "initiative" and the second measures the normal chance "to hit." (Note: This use of the word "initiative" does not equate with the AD&D use of the word.)

The d10 tells when in the melee round the event, in this case the blow with the weapon, will occur. Thus if a 7 is rolled the weapon will be used in the seventh melee segment. The d20 gives the chance "to hit" in the normal manner.

I do not wish to enter, for a lengthy period, the subject of why a figure only gets one blow. Remember the melee is NOT static and that movement, distance, and range in AD&D is NOT meant to be scaled to "real life." Thus, a figure gets his/her/its one blow per round with a weapon, and the Segment of Action system tells you when that blow will be dealt. If you and your players decide that you want "real life," divide all spell-casting times by 6, multiply ranges by 6, multiply movement by 6, reduce melee to 10-second periods, etc. If ONE portion is tampered with, everything involving range, distance, and time MUST change. This radical change is just not worth it. After all, it is only a game.

By knowing when the weapon will be used, it is a simple manner to add other factors at a later time. Note that dexterity does NOT alter this roll in any way (though you may want it to). Dexterity is taken into account in defensive armor class and when surprise is measured.

For example, a hobgoblin with armor class 5 and a long sword is fighting a warrior with armor class 7 who also has a long sword.

Warrior rolls 7/17 (meaning d10 = 7 and d20 = 17).

Hobgoblin rolls 3/5.

The Hobgoblin has the chance to strike first (segment #3) but misses with a roll of 5 "to hit." The warrior does not get a chance to strike until segment 7 but then succeeds with a 17.

If the Hobgoblin is not killed, melee continues.

Warrior rolls 5/18.

Hobgoblin rolls 5/20.

Simultaneous blows, and both hit! Again let us say neither is slain.

Warrior rolls 4/18.

Hobgoblin rolls 7/16.

Welcome to

Deomand's Tiny Mat

The Warrior goes first and hits. If he kills the Hobgoblin, the melee is over since the Hobgoblin's chance to hit does not come until the 7th segment.

Option: If a figure is killed, he/she/it will still get his/her/its blow as long as he/she/it strikes simultaneously. If "initiative" is off by 2 or more segments the blow is always lost. However, if the blow is only 1 segment late the dying (unconscious) figure still is allowed a blow if the dying figure makes a normal saving throw versus death. Obviously this option does not apply if the weapon (action) paralyzes, disintegrates or somehow destroys free action.

II. Figures with multiple attacks or with multiple blows per round:

If a fighter has two blows per melee round, d10 is not used for initiative, 2d6 are used instead. The first d6 gives the segment of the first blow, the second d6 added to it gives the time of the second blow. If the sum of the two is 11 or 12, then the last blow is still awarded but it is the last action of the round. If three blows are allowed, use 3d4 for the first, second and third blows. Different-colored dice are recommended.

If a monster has multiple attacks (e.g. claw, claw, bite), initiative can be measured in two different ways. I suggest only one die for all three attacks if they are all against one opponent. If against more than one opponent, then use a separate d10 for each opponent. If a monster charges with two horns, even if there are two opponents, I'd use just one d10.

Monsters with more than three attacks per melee round, even if versus the same opponent, should likely be measured by multiple d10, e.g. a Demon Type V gains 7 attacks. Using only one d10 is likely not best, but 7d10 is difficult. Compromise on 3d10, the first roll for 3 arms, the second for 3 more and the last for the tail. Obviously, you can rule on this any way that is most playable.

III. Missile fire:

Missile fire does not use d10 if a figure has multiple missile capacity per round. Thus, if an archer is allowed two arrows per melee round 2d6 would be used. If the archer is ready and "guarding" you might allow d4 for the first arrow and d6 for the second. Even if the total of the 2d6 is 11 or 12, the second arrow is allowed unless the archer is hit/killed. An archer who takes damage from a missile (or spell or blow, for that matter) should lose some initiative when firing. An addition of 1-4 to the second d6 is a reasonable penalty and can be a function of actual damage taken. Remember that archers hit by a fire ball, e.g., will not have any bowstrings left, to say nothing of bows and arrows.

Missiles fired simultaneously, as in a Manticore blast, used d6 for the segment of fire and not d10. Firing missiles is usually faster than jockeying for position to strike a blow with a hand-held weapon. Thus, d6 or even d4 is used for missiles with only a single firing per round, like a spear, throwing ax, dagger, sling bullet, etc. This assumes the figure is not surprised and has weapon and ammunition at hand!

If a figure is charging and throwing a missile and then closing for melee (or if he fires and is then closed with by an opponent) the missile is measured by d4, and the segments needed to move the required distance are calculated. Another d4 (or perhaps d6 or even d8 for a

large, heavy weapon) is rolled for the weapon action. If this roll plus the first roll and the movement come out to 10 or less, he can strike with the weapon; if 11 or higher is rolled either the weapon action is prohibited or comes last in any event.

For example, a fighter has a spear and a short sword. He wishes to throw the spear and then cross "three inches" to melee an opponent. Roll d4 for the spear, add '3' for the movement, then since the weapon is small (sword) and light he can draw it and still strike (roll another d4) in the same round after the movement.

However, if an archer wishes to fire an arrow, drop his bow, cross "five inches" and then attack with a two-handed sword, it is another matter. Roll d4 for the arrow (let's say a 3), then add '5' for the movement, which means it is the 8th segment when the man arrives at his opponent's location. For the weapon I'd use d8 since it is heavy and awkward. If 1 or 2 comes up, the blow is allowed since it will fall in the 9th or 10th segment of this round. But if 11 to 16 comes up the blow should be disallowed altogether, i.e., the fellow got there but the weapon was not in place for a blow.

Most "double actions" can be measured in this way. It is common for a figure to discharge something (even a spell), move, and still want to fight. Such actions are surely not unreasonable but are impossible unless some way to measure the segment(s) of action is possible. This system easily allows for such multiple actions by choreographing the round and deciding when each action occurs. A figure should NEVER be allowed two actions in one segment (even though we as real people could do more than one action in one segment) as that is grossly unfair within the rules of the game.

IV. Spell Casting:

Spell casting is measured from a base of d4. This will give the segment in which the spell begins. Remember that spell-casting time must also be added in! Thus, if a 1 is rolled on d4 the spell caster begins his/her casting in segment #1 and finishes as many segments later as the spell-casting time dictates. If he/she is hit during the casting, the spell is ruined and useless. If he/she is hit before the spell casting begins, he/she, if not killed or immobilized, might still be able to cast the spell. You might wish to throw for "surprise" in such a case using d6. A roll of 4 to 6 means no "surprise" and the figure may cast his/her spell, but a roll of 1-3 is added directly to casting time as a delay due to the effects of the hit. (Note: A spell caster who is missed or who makes his/her saving throw and thus takes NO damage will not be delayed in his/her spell.) It is essential that the DM realize that material components must be "at hand" before d4 can be used for spell initiative. If they must be gotten out then d6, d8, d10 or worse might be in order! Also, d4 assumes no "surprise."

In a melee situation it is unlikely that any spell can succeed, but the DM might allow quick 1- or 2-segment spells to be attempted. Longer spells will require relative immobility, which will decrease armor class by at least 4 levels. Thus, while *Shield* or *Magic Missile* might be tried a longer spell would surely be spoiled by the mere fact that the opponent is right on top of the spell caster and can grapple or just push him/her if not hit him/her with a weapon.

Breath and Glance Weapons could use d4, as they are very rapid. However, the slow movement of the catablepas, for example, might allow up to d10.

Finally, in the discussion of missiles, spells, breath and glance weapons comes ranges and time. An arrow/sling bullet might take a segment or two to travel to its target, perhaps 1 segment consumed per 6" of flight. Breath and glance weapons consume no time in this respect so the breath would reach its full proportions within the first segment. Spells that fire a projectile might be considered as rapid arrows while those that produce an effect would be instantaneous. Thus *Lightning Bolt* and *Earthquake* are instantaneous but *Magic Missile* might consume 1 segment per 12" traveled, just as *Fire Ball* might take some time to travel. The DM must rule and think out this situation for him/herself before play begins.

V. Magic items:

Magic item discharge can fit into this system too. Most items have a casting time explained in the text of the item in the *DM Guide*. Add to this d4 or some other appropriate die to simulate getting the item out

and ready for use. Items can be used in melee and are often not foiled by grappling or even a strike "to hit," since concentration is not always broken by a physical action. Decisions on this must be made on an item-by-item basis. E.g., a wand in a belt would be ready in 1-4 segments, or a Golden Lion can be taken from a pocket and cast down in 1-4 segments. But if the Lion is in a backpack, as many as 12 segments could be used in finding the device before casting it down. The Lion might still take some segments to grow.

VI. Surprise:

Surprise is still used in melee, of course. It is usually d6 for the party and d6 for the monster. I suggest using d6 per character and not for the group. This is not feasible if the melee is too large, of course. Dexterity applies to surprise. I might add that the example in the *Players Guide* and repeated in the *DM Guide* does not seem to be correct. I and the other proofreaders did not catch the mistake and omission in the list given in the example.

When measuring surprise, be sure that nomenclature is the same to avoid confusion. Thus, measure the chance "to surprise", or the chance "to be surprised" for each figure; do not measure the party's chance to surprise a monster but the monster's chance to be surprised. You will go nuts. Sometimes this means changing the numbers given about a monster/race so that both sides are measuring the same thing.

Surprise often applies only to a figure(s) who can see an oncoming problem, and thus the entire party can not throw for the result. If the reaction is to an area effect or a loud noise, then the entire party can be diced for. Remember that surprise does not always apply to a situation or even to both sides in a situation. There is no real surprise if the sides see each other at 200 feet. There may be surprise if one side is seen while the other is hidden. Once surprise, if any, is determined, and the number of free segments, if any, is measured, melee goes on as outlined herein.

At first it may seem that the separate initiative on a character-by-character basis is very time-consuming, but it plays rapidly if both "initiative" and "to hit" are diced at the same time.

As new situations occur, the *Segment of Action System* can easily be molded to cover them. The Dungeon Master makes a decision as to which die size should be used to determine the segment of action and then lets the player cast that die/dice for the action (or he casts the die/dice as necessary to maintain secrecy).

Weapon speed factors, of course, can be added. Weapons of speed 1-3, e.g., add no time to melee; those of factor 4-6 add 1 segment; 7-9, 2 segments; and 10+, 3 segments. Naturally, you can refine even those numbers if you wish, but I can not recommend this, as it will produce an unplayable result.

Weapon length can be considered, especially in a charge or climbing situation, by dispensing with the initiative die when weapons are set to repel.

The system will clearly tell you when an event occurs in a complex melee. Thus, if fighters A, B & C battle Giant X, but Orc Y and Orc Z are attacking A and B respectively, the situation would normally be difficult. In this system, roll d10 for initiative for A, B & C obtaining 3,5,& 9. The Giant rolls 4, the Orcs 7 and 4 respectively. Therefore the attack order is: A (with a 3); the giant and last orc (with 4s) (if either attack kills a fighter yet to attack the giant, that fighter loses his blow); next fighter B (with a 5); orc Y (with a 7) and Fighter C is last with a 9. The order is clear and the battle can be resolved in order.

You will note the system allows for the question of whether a figure can get out of melee before a blow is struck at him/her. If the figure who is fleeing can beat the initiative of his attacker (and assuming there is someone to take his place), he can escape jeopardy. The attacker can still attack the new replacement, of course, if the other figure has fled his grasp!

The Segment of Action System is very flexible. It allows for normal situations but also allows the DM to provide for new actions easily. The old system of one side first, then the other side is rather unfair and not any easier once the mechanics here are grasped. For huge battles I would recommend a set of miniatures rules and not individual melees in any case.

I may well have missed some detail but the skeleton of the system has been used by my players for over two years with good results.