

Core Rules

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, combat can be ruined by poor pacing. When combat has too many combatants taking too many turns, it can slow the whole session to 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.

Companions in the Party

Although the party might have multiple battle companions, only one can participate in each combat. The players should decide who goes into battle with the party if multiple NPCs qualify. Changing the active battle companion takes an hour or longer as the new one gears up, prepares spells, and otherwise prepares for combat. This roster change can be made during a short or long rest.

To reduce the mental overhead of having this NPC in the party, the battle companion has only a “narrative” presence on the battlefield. It's position, movement, range, and line-of-sight aren't tracked. It cannot be harmed or otherwise affected by enemies except when you decide (by fiat) that it should take an injury in service to the story.

In combat, a battle companion has no effect except to use one of its RAD features each round. Unless stated otherwise in its description, the RAD feature occurs after all other combatants have taken their turns for the round. The player with the lowest initiative is the “RAD Wrangler,” deciding which RAD feature the companion uses, who it targets, and any other parameters for the feature.

Radical-and-Daring Features

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

- ✦ With the exception of Teamwork, the companion can't use the same RAD feature to affect any target on two consecutive rounds.
- ✦ Although RAD features don't use attack rolls or allow saving throws, an enemy can spend one use of Legendary Resistance to ignore a use of a RAD feature targeting it.
- ✦ Some creatures present Overwhelming Odds; their challenge ratings are at least 3 higher than the party's average level. These creatures can't be affected by RAD features except Teamwork.

Additionally, 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 version of the battle companion's RAD features.

New Battle Companions

An earlier supplement in this series provides rules for making any NPC into a battle companion. To save you time, the rest of this supplement converts the main NPCs of this particular adventure, giving each one a suggested RAD feature.

TEAMWORK

In addition to its character-defining rad feature, every battle companion also has Teamwork.

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

The battle companion targets one ally. In the coming round, that ally can claim advantage on one of its attack rolls or ability checks. Teamwork is the only RAD feature that can affect the same enemy on successive rounds or affect foes that 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 it makes a saving throw. The NPC grants advantage to that ally's save. This ability must be declared before the ally has rolled the saving throw.

BOTANICAL TOXIN

This RAD feature would be appropriate for an alchemist, assassin, rogue or general herbalism-focused character.

As an ally prepares to attack, the battle companion rushes over to smear poison onto the weapon's striking edge.

As a reaction the battle companion takes when a party member makes an attack with a weapon that would inflict piercing or slashing damage, the companion quickly poisons the weapon (or its ammunition) prior to the attack roll. If the attack hits, it inflicts an additional 1d8 poison damage and the target—if it is not immune to the poisoned condition—has its speed reduced by 10 feet until the end of its next turn. The toxin dries quickly, so it only affects the current attack.

Affinity. The battle companion uses enough poison for the ally's next weapon attack to also apply this toxin on a successful hit, so long as that next attack is made on the ally's current turn or following turn.

D8	RAD FEATURE
1	Botanical Toxin
2	Cloud of Chaos
3	Evasive Cloud
4	Hey, Get Serious!
5	Pilfered Projects
6	Repulsing Force
7	Shock Line
8	Tinker's Toy

CLOUD OF CHAOS

This RAD feature would be appropriate for a swarm of smaller character who could behave as a mob like kobolds, goblins or children.

With a collective roar, the mob of battle companions swarm across the battlefield, raising a cloud of dust and confusion in their wake.

Designate a 10-foot by 10-foot area somewhere on the battlefield. Each of the party's foes in that area is moved to an unoccupied space just outside of the affected area, touching its edge. Alternately, the foe is knocked prone and placed somewhere within the affected area. The Rad Wrangler chooses which option to apply to each foe and the location it ends up.

Affinity. In the confusion, one of the affected creatures (chosen by the Rad Wrangler) loses any weapons or objects it was holding. The items fall to the ground in that foe's original location.



EVASIVE CLOUD

This RAD feature would be appropriate for a plant-based character, like a mushroom man, a dryad or some kind of awakened tree.

The battle companion spurts sensory-enhancing spores that target a creature, granting a precognitive ability to react to danger.

Choose one ally (or two allies if they are within 5 feet of one another). On the coming turn, the affected ally or allies can use the Dodge action as a bonus action.

Affinity. The battle companion sprays spores over everyone, affecting all its allies regardless of their distance from one another.

HEY, GET SERIOUS!

This RAD feature would be appropriate for a military-focused character, like a retired commander, a mercenary or an arms instructor.

The battle companion gruffly admonishes an ally for a failed attack, eliciting renewed effort.

As a reaction she takes in response to an ally missing a melee attack roll, the battle companion causes that ally to make another attack of the same type (using the same weapon against the same target). This additional attack does not require the ally to use an action or reaction.

Affinity. If the ally's new attack hits, it inflicts an additional 1d6 damage of the weapon's type.

PILFERED PROJECTS

This RAD feature would be appropriate for a pair of characters with flight, like winged kobolds..

These cackling battle companions flutter across the battlefield, misusing the experimental flamethrower they've stolen from an inventor.

As a reaction the battle companions both take in response to an ally taking acid, cold, fire, lightning, radiant, or thunder damage, the their device sucks away some of that force, giving the ally resistance to that instance of damage. The device immediately converts the absorbed energy into a gout of flame that falls onto a selected foe, inflicting 2d6 fire damage.

Affinity. If the battle companions can't find energy to absorb, they stuff the flamethrower with rocks, debris, and other, smaller devices. This risky maneuver allows the battle companions to apply the damage to a foe even without absorbing damage first.

REPULSING FORCE

This RAD feature would be appropriate for a magic user or a dragon circling high above.

With a dramatic exhalation and a turn of her head, the battle companion spins the air into a magical whirlwind.

Choose a point on the battlefield. Each creature within 20 feet is pushed directly away from that point, going a number of feet equal to 20 minus its Strength score.

Affinity. Allies designated by the RAD wrangler are unaffected by this blast.

SHOCK LINE

This RAD feature would be appropriate for a lightning-themed dragon, either metallic or chromatic.

By reserving some power with each use of his breath, the battle companion can deploy his lightning rapidly and reliably without exhausting this magical resource.

Choose a point on the battlefield as the origin of this feature. From that point, draw a line in any direction, affecting an area 5 feet wide by 40 feet long. Each creature in the line takes 2d8 lightning damage. Creatures with cover (half, three-quarter, or full cover) relevant to the origin point are not affected.

Unlike a breath weapon, Shock Line does not require a recharge roll. It instead has the regular use-limitations of a RAD feature.

Affinity. Creatures with half cover or full cover are affected by the battle companion's Shock Line. Only those with full cover relative to the origin point can avoid the damage.

TINKER'S TOY

This RAD feature would be appropriate for an inventor, engineer or otherwise handy character.

The battle companion quickly assembles an ambulatory contraption from the many limbs and mechanical body parts protruding from her pack. With a quick wind of its crank, she releases the construct onto the battlefield.

The contraption's only useful action is to leap into the path of an enemy attack. As a reaction battle companion takes in response to an ally being hit by a weapon attack, she directs the contraption to take the blow instead. If the ally agrees to be knocked prone (pushed out of the path of the attack) the ally is unhit and the contraption dies with a human-sounding scream of its grinding, bent gears. (By the time it goes silent, Myla will have assembled a replacement contraption.)

Affinity. The battle companion deploys her best contraption parts in defense of her allies. The assembled creature can intercept a weapon attack or a spell attack, and an affected ally is not knocked prone.

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