

HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

A GUIDE TO NONLETHAL
AND SEMILETHAL PERSONAL COMBAT

By Jamie O'Duibhir



A FIST IN THE FACE

The monk may be known for their prowess with fists and blunt weapons, but every now and then someone just needs a good kick in the teeth or a readjustment of the nose. Maybe you're calling out a local loudmouth who has been talking smack about your party for too long without a challenge. You want your opponent to know it's personal. You might hand off your weapon of choice to a friend, hastily throw your armor to the ground, and leap at that good-for-nothing yapper. Below are the feats and tools to make your next fight worthy of song.

FEATS

Some have a talent for unrefined fighting. The crude yet effective use of one's body as a weapon as a tool for personal destruction. A far cry from the martial arts skills of a monk or the trained skill of war that a battlemaster has, the feats below offer options for becoming a specialized kind of combatant.

DIRTY FIGHTER

You have no shame in using whatever is at your disposal to win in hand-to-hand combat. You have developed an affinity for subtle use of discarded items as tools in dispatching your opponent.

- When attempting to conceal the use of an improvised weapon in combat, you have advantage on all rolls to avoid anyone noticing the weapon.
- When you are unarmed and unarmored, you are proficient in improvised weapons.
- You have advantage on attacks in which you use the bag of sand to blind an enemy.

WRESTLER

Prerequisite: Grappler

You have honed your body and mind, perfected your technique, and become a master of unarmed combat. You use your body to force opponents into submission.

- Increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- When unarmed and unarmored, you have advantage on all attack rolls against a creature.

FINISHING MOVE

Prerequisite: Grappler, Tavern Brawler, or Dirty Fighter

For one reason or another, you have developed a technique used to permanently dispatch your enemy when fighting hand to hand.

- If a creature is below 10% of their health, you are unarmed or only carrying an improvised weapon, and you are unarmored; your next successful attack roll against the creature brings it to 0 hit points.
- You take two points of exhaustion if you defeat an opponent in this way. If combat continues after using this feat, your level of exhaustion increases each time you roll an attack until you take a long rest.

TOOLS OF PERSONAL COMBAT

TOOLS OF HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

Tool	Cost	Weight
Thick Oil (vial)	5 sp	1/4 lb
Bag of Sand	1 cp	1/4 lb
Hardened Knuckle Gloves	10 sp	1 lb
Flat blade	3 gp	1/2 lb

Thick Oil. A viscous oil that is used to coat the skin. A creature attempting to grapple another creature covered in thick oil has disadvantage on their grapple check.

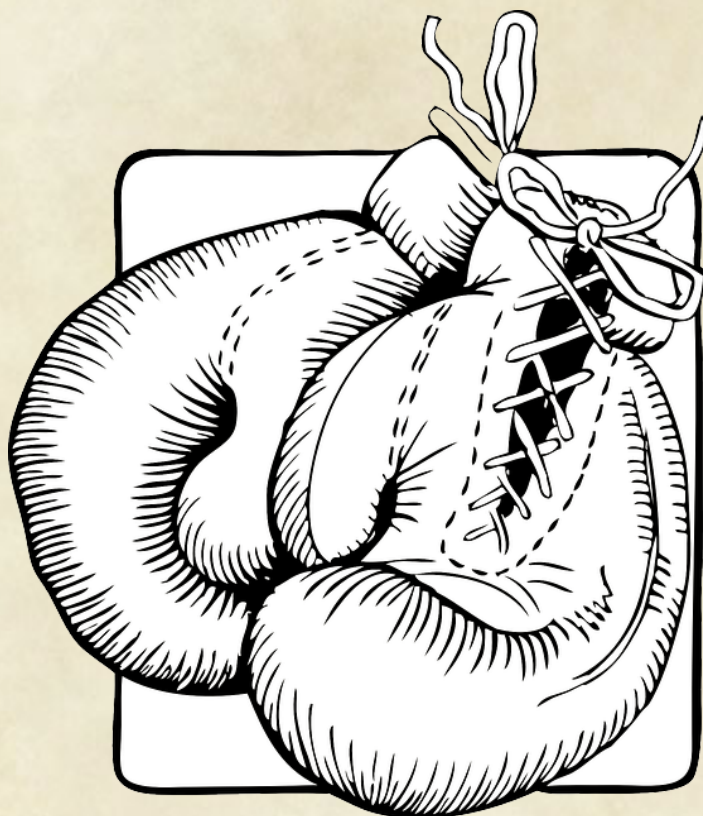
Bag of Sand. A coarse mixture of sand, salt, and spices. When the sand is thrown, make a ranged attack roll. On hit, the target is blinded for one round of combat.

Hardened Knuckle Gloves. A pair of gloves with bits of scrap metal or rock haphazardly attached with a paste or tar.

Flat blade. A dagger with the handle removed. It is one piece of metal with a minimum profile allowing it to be hidden in a shoe, boot, or up a sleeve. Unless the DM expressly forbids it, this weapon is improvised.

THESE WEAPONS SUCK

The tools and weapons listed in the table above are situational. The idea is not to add new weapons, but rather to offer improvised versions of tools and weapons that already exist.



A GUIDE FOR DMs

Personal combat with hands and fists is a situational form of combat that you can introduce for the purpose of dramatic tension or because you have a player who likes roleplaying being a tough customer but needs mechanics to make it fun when interacting with NPCs. There are a number of ways to make personal combat more interesting, but ultimately it is up to you and the player to create the visceral images that paint the picture and give life to these fights.

SKILL CHECKS

The *PHB* has simple rules for things like grappling, but if you want to add an extra "cool-factor" to a player's personal combat ask them to perform one of the following skill checks to add flair and flavor. You may choose to alter the DC based on the specific opponent or at higher tiers of play. This is only meant to give you some ideas, but you can always add your own.

PERSONAL COMBAT SKILL CHECKS

Attack type	Skill	DC	Result
Low kick	Athletics	12	Trips target, target is knocked prone
Kick	Acrobatics	13	Double kick, 1 extra damage die
Punch	Athletics	15	Punch followed-up with an elbow to the face, 1 extra damage die
Headbutt	Constitution	18	Target is stunned for 1 round of combat
Groinshot	Strength	12	Target has disadvantage on their next attack

EXHAUSTION

If your adventure features a lot of hand-to-hand combat, you may consider instituting an exhaustion rule similar to the one in the *PHB*. Combat can wear a creature down to the point where they can no longer fight, and in some cases to the point where their body fails them and they die. Whether your players are pirates who get into conflict with other crewmates or contracted bounty hunters who have a tendency to brawl with their mark out in public, exhaustion builds tension and encourages strategic teamwork to make sure that everyone is using their actions to the fullest.

Exhaustion is particularly useful when players are outnumbered or facing significantly larger and stronger enemies. Inform the players that after six rounds of combat, they take a point of exhaustion. Three rounds of combat after that, they take another point of exhaustion. Two rounds of combat after that, they take a third point of exhaustion. At this point, the players must make a choice about whether the combat is worthwhile or not. For each round of combat that follows, players take another point of combat. After three rounds of combat, the players die of exhaustion.

This gritty realism style of play may not be to everyone's taste. Be sure you communicate with your players about this rule if you're going to implement it at your table. You may even decide to put your players through a dungeon where they must to weigh their options between combat and avoidance. Whether they live through it or not, have them all wake up in an area outside and award them the following feat as tribute for their efforts.

PERSONAL COMBATANT

Prerequisite: Dungeon of Exhaustion Trial

You have learned the importance of choosing when to fight and when to avoid it altogether. You have mastered your mind and body to become resilient in personal combat.

- Increase your Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Once per long rest, you gain advantage when rolling a check or save to avoid combat with a creature.

ABOUT

Jamie O'Duibhir @irreverendjamie (Twitter) is an atheist minister, writer, and educator. She oscillates between ascerbic and cantakerous. Her passion for D&D began in college with a few friends who she happened to overhear were planning a session. Jamie only got to play one session before her character was wiped from the multiverse. Here's to Gigglechore, the Gnome bard who died the quickest in what eventually became a TPK. Jamie's DM style is: Maximum Worldbuilding, Maximum Suffering.

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