

KEEP YOUR POWDER DRY!

PART 2: EARLY MODERN FIREARMS

AS INNOVATION MARCHES ON, crude early firearms give way to muskets and pistols that are easier to use and finally replace bows and crossbows as the ranged weapons of choice on the battlefield. This article takes a look at the second generation of firearms developed in the early modern period.

FIREARMS ASCENDANT

Firearms became much easier to use in the period between 1500 and 1700 CE. The muskets that replaced the heavy harquebus were more easily held and fired thanks to advancements in design that allowed for smaller bullets without reducing damage. The fickle match was replaced with new mechanisms (starting with the wheellock and culminating with the flintlock) that



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created their own sparks by striking steel to pyrite. Soldiers no longer had to worry about strong winds or excessive rain preventing their guns from firing.

Tactics changed accordingly. Armies made up for the slow rate of fire by grouping harquebusiers—and later musketeers—together in lines so that they could rotate their fire patterns. Harquebusiers were accompanied by pikemen that could keep enemies at bay while the harquebusier reloaded. Later, the development of the bayonet alleviated the need for pikemen.

The development of hand blunderbusses and pistols also changed the face of warfare. Those who could afford them often carried a “brace of pistols,” or several loaded pistols worn on the body to be used in quick succession. Hand blunderbusses and pistols could also be easily used on horseback, making firearms cavalry weapons as well. The lance-bearing armored knight evolved into the pistol-wielding dragoon.

FLINTLOCKS AND FANTASY

Historically, the evolution of firearms coincided with the end of medieval tactics. Practical armor disappeared and fencing swords and knives became the dominant melee weapons. While this could certainly point towards a swashbuckling feel in a fantasy campaign (and there’s a lot of fun to be had in a fantastical age of musketeers and pirates!) that need not be the case. Many fantasy worlds have had potent and prolific magics on the battlefield without eliminating the armored knight or axe and shield-wielding warriors. Conversely, even fantasy campaigns with a high medieval feel often accommodate rapier-wielding duelists who historically didn’t appear until well after firearms became ubiquitous.

Keeping Your Powder Dry

Matchlocks are very susceptible to the weather. If gunpowder gets wet (or even just damp), then it is rendered inert until it dries (*prestidigitation* will keep gunpowder clean). Lighting a match is difficult in the rain and keeping it lit is a challenge in windy conditions. While later firearms have done away with the match, they are still won’t fire if loaded with wet gunpowder. If any of these conditions play a factor then the GM can either impose disadvantage on the attack roll or, in really bad weather, also disallow the use of matchlocks absent magic or creative thinking to overcome it.

In short, the rules mechanics support either style. Musket-wielding rangers can walk side-by-side with mace-wielding clerics clad in chainmail and longbow-wielding elven fighters if you wish to include firearms as a potent but short-range alternative to other ranged weapons, or you can go all-in and design your fantasy world with a 17th century aesthetic, with swashbuckling, pistol-wielding fighters and rogues being the dominant martial classes. Either way, firearms can add a lot of flavor to your campaign!

FIREARM DESCRIPTIONS

Blunderbuss. This short musket has a flared barrel and is designed to fire shot rather than bullets. Unlike a hand cannon, blunderbusses require specially-made pellets rather than using whatever’s at hand. In a pinch, a blunderbuss can be loaded with improvised shot, but its damage is reduced to 2d4 and until the gun is cleaned during a short rest, any misfire result breaks the barrel (as the improvised shot has compromised it). In melee the blunderbuss may be used as a two-handed club dealing 1d6 damage.

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SIMPLE RANGED WEAPONS

Name	Cost ¹	Damage	Weight	Properties ^{2,3}
Blunderbuss	250 gp	special	8 lb.	Ammunition (range 20/60), loading, loud, misfire, shot (2d6 piercing), two-handed
Gun Shield	250 gp	1d10 piercing	7 lb.	Ammunition (range 20/60), loud, match loading, misfire
Hand Blunderbuss	175 gp	special	2 lb.	Ammunition (range 10/30), loading, loud, misfire, shot (2d4 piercing)
Hybrid Pistol	250 gp	1d10 piercing	Var.	Ammunition (range 20/60), loading, loud, misfire
Matchlock Musket	200 gp	1d12 piercing	10 lb.	Ammunition (range 40/120), loud, match loading, misfire, two-handed
Matchlock Pistol	150 gp	1d10 piercing	2 lb.	Ammunition (range 20/60), loud, match loading, misfire
Musket	300 gp	1d12 piercing	10 lb.	Ammunition (range 40/120), loading, loud, misfire, two-handed
Pistol	200 gp	1d10 piercing	2 lb.	Ammunition (range 20/60), loading, loud, misfire

¹ Costs are for settings where such firearms are commonly available. The GM should feel free to increase the cost if the weapons are sufficiently rare; in some settings they may even be considered priceless “magic” items!

² New properties are described in “Keep Your Powder Dry! Part 1: Firearms for Fantasy Campaigns”*

³ Wheellocks are prone to misfire more often than other types of firearms. The wheellock version of this weapon misfires on a d20 roll of 1 or 2 when making a ranged attack.

Hand Blunderbuss. A hand blunderbuss (commonly called a “dragon” in our world, probably not so much in a fantasy setting with real dragons!) is a one-handed blunderbuss and can use improvised shot like a regular blunderbuss, but its improvised damage is reduced to 1d4. In melee the hand blunderbuss may be used as a club dealing 1d4 damage.

Gun Shield. This is a defensive version of a hybrid pistol—the pistol is built directly into the shield. A standard shield pistol requires two hands to use (one to hold the shield and the other to fire the gun), although an enterprising gunsmith could create a trigger that could be pulled by the hand holding the shield.

A gun shield can be crafted using a hand blunderbuss instead of a pistol; the cost is the same but the mechanics of the hand blunderbuss are substituted for the gun shield’s in combat.

Hybrid Pistol. With the introduction of the wheellock it became easier to meld firearms—specifically the pistol—with melee weapons, particularly one-handed ones. The pistol is built into the hilt of a melee weapon in such a way as not to compromise the integrity of the weapon. The weapon may be fired as a pistol or wielded in melee as a regular melee weapon of its type.

Matchlock Musket. The matchlock musket is an improvement on the earlier harquebus. While its weight is unchanged, it fires smaller bullets with greater accuracy and can be easily handled by anyone trained to use it. In melee the matchlock musket may be used as a two-handed club dealing 1d6 damage.

Matchlock Pistol. This early one-handed firearm has the same weather problems of its musket counterpart, although it does allow a creature to use it and draw and fight with another weapon in its off-hand. If you fire more than one matchlock pistol in the same round, then you have disadvantage on all ranged attacks due to the awkwardness of lighting and firing so quickly. In melee the matchlock pistol may be used as a club dealing 1d4 damage.

* **Get Part 1:** Walt Ciechanowski, “Keep Your Powder Dry! Part 1: Firearms for Fantasy Campaigns,” *EN World ENsider*, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/7797923>

Musket. This weapon dispenses the need for a match; pulling the trigger creates a spark that lights the gunpowder. Thus, muskets aren't as vulnerable to inclement weather as the earlier matchlock muskets. In melee the musket may be used as a two-handed club dealing 1d6 damage.

Pistol. This is a one-handed version of the musket and shares all of its features save range. In melee the pistol may be used as a club dealing 1d4 damage.

EQUIPMENT AND CUSTOMIZATION

All of the equipment and options listed under Gunpowder and Ammunition and Customizing Firearms in Part 1 (see footnote on previous page) are available for the firearms contained in this article. In addition, there are a few new and amended options listed here.

Ammunition, shot (20). Blunderbusses and hand blunderbusses require specially-made pellets that make up a load of shot. Each shot of pellets is effectively the same as a bullet in terms of price and weight. 1 gp. 2 lb.

Bayonet. You can turn your musket into a spear by plugging a long knife into the end of the barrel. Since affixing the bayonet requires some time, a musket may not be fired and used as a spear in the same round, although you may freely switch between them each round. (Historically, socket bayonets weren't common until the 18th century, although an enterprising gunsmith might develop one earlier.)

Double Barrel. It is possible to purchase muskets and pistols (including matchlocks and

Wheellock Firearms

Wheellock firearms predate flintlocks by about a century (although some "proto-flintlocks," such as the snapchance, were invented a few decades earlier) and, while they had a huge advantage over matchlocks, wheellocks were far more difficult to construct and maintain. Thus the cheaper matchlock remained in service until the more cost-effective flintlocks finally phased them out. The Weapons table does not distinguish between flintlocks and wheellocks as there is little mechanical difference between them in combat; the blunderbuss description, for example, could be used for wheellock blunderbusses as well as flintlock blunderbusses.

There is some debate whether wheellocks were actually faster than flintlocks. While this difference would be negligible in a 6-second round, a GM might decide to give wheellocks an edge, making it an aristocratic weapon of choice even after the introduction of flintlocks. In this case, wheellocks do not have the loading property (enabling them to be fired more than once per round). In this case, a wheellock would command double or triple the cost of its flintlock counterpart.

the harquebus) with two barrels. A double-barreled firearm costs 1½ times its original price and weighs nearly twice as much. A double-barreled musket also has the heavy property.

Double-barreled firearms with the loading property can be fired twice before reloading.

A misfire generally only fouls one barrel; the other may be used normally until it too misfires.

Rifling. Firearms that do 1d12 damage do 2d6 damage instead with a rifled barrel.



NEW MAGIC ITEMS

This section lists three magic items that appear along with firearms. Their rarity depends on how common firearms are in your campaign.

Adamantine Bullet

Weapon (bullet), uncommon

These bullets are made of adamantine, one of the hardest substances in existence. Attacks with *adamantine bullets* score critical hits on rolls of 19 or 20 (if you normally score a critical hit on a 19 or lower, then the *adamantine bullet* scores a critical hit on lower die results on a 1-for-1 basis; for example, if you normally score a critical hit on a 19 or 20 then the *adamantine bullet* scores one on a roll of 18, 19, or 20).

If you fire an *adamantine bullet* at a creature wearing adamantine armor, then you only score a critical hit when you normally would (a roll of 20 for most creatures) but the adamantine armor does not downgrade the critical hit.

Adamantine bullets are typically cast in groups of 20.

Dragon's Breath Shot

Weapon (shot), rare

When you fill your blunderbuss or hand blunderbuss with this shot, it fires a cone of energy similar to a particular dragon's breath weapon rather than doing its normal damage. *Dragon's breath shot* does 8d6 damage of the appropriate energy type. Creatures may make a saving throw against the shot as normal (including having advantage at long range), but a successful save still causes half damage.

There are five types of *dragon's breath shot*: black (acid), blue (lightning), green (poison), red (fire), and white (cold). Each type is easily identifiable by the color of the pellets in the shot.

The Proclaimer

Weapon (any musket or pistol), very rare (requires attunement by a cleric)

This firearm is dedicated to and blessed by a particular deity. You gain a +2 on attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon (the Proclaimer automatically misfires if an unattuned creature tries to use it). When you hit an undead with it, you do an extra 2d8 radiant damage.

The Proclaimer also has 7 charges. If you are a cleric dedicated to that deity (or on otherwise friendly terms if not worshipping that particular deity), then you may expend one of the charges when making a ranged attack with the Proclaimer against an undead creature. If the bullet hits, then in addition to the ammunition's normal damage that creature and all undead within 30 feet of it are affected as if you had used your Channel Divinity: Turn Undead class feature (this does not count as a use of your Channel Divinity).

The Proclaimer regains 1d6 + 1 charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the Proclaimer loses its magic. You must perform some service for your deity in order to be deemed worthy to have the Proclaimer restored. 

