Battle Companions

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

Narrative Presence

A battle companion has only a "narrative presence" on the battlefield. The battle companion's bookkeeping is cut down simply by ignoring its position and health. Although a battle companion could come to harm through a narrative fiat as the story demands, they're protected by the following rules:

- ✪ The battle companion's position, movement, range, and line of sight aren't tracked.
- ✪ The battle companion can't be harmed or otherwise affected by enemies.
- ✪ The battle companion isn't subject to impediments or hazards on the battlefield.

The goal of abstracting the Battle Companion into a narrative presence is to reduce mental overhead.

Running a Battle Companion

The battle companion has several special rules for its own activity during combat.

- ✪ The battle companion's turn occurs immediately after all other combatants take their turns in the round, but some RAD features let it act earlier in the round.
- ✪ The battle companion has no effect on combat except to use one RAD feature each round.
- ✪ The player with the lowest initiative is the designated "RAD Wrangler," which is the person who decides which RAD feature the companion will use, who they target, and any other parameters for the feature.
- ✪ With the exception of *Teamwork*, the RAD Wrangler can't apply the same RAD feature to the same target(s), whether allies or enemies, for two rounds in a row.

Each combat can include a maximum of one battle companion. The players should decide who goes into battle with the party if multiple NPCs qualify. Changing which NPC acts as a battle companion takes an hour or longer as their new ally gears up, prepares spells, and otherwise readies themselves for combat. This roster change can be made during a short or long rest.

Making Battle Companions

The anatomy of a battle companion is very simple: just choose an ability! Each battle companion has two RAD features: the *Teamwork* feature and one more that you select from the samples provided below. (Alternately, make up a new RAD feature to pair with Teamwork.)

Choose and flavor RAD features to match the battle companion's concept. For example, you might select a RAD feature that knocks down enemies if the battle companion is a burly giant who rolls boulders like bowling balls, a seductive siren whose song lulls enemies to sleep for a moment, or a frightening dragon whose countenance makes foes cower or grovel, dropping prone.

Radical-and-Daring Features

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

- ✪ The battle companion's RAD features don't use attack rolls, nor do enemy targets get saving throws.
- ✪ An enemy with Legendary Resistance can spend one use of that trait to ignore a single use of a RAD feature that targets it.
- ✪ An enemy that presents Overwhelming Odds (its challenge rating is 3 or more points higher than the party's average level) can't be targeted by RAD features except *Teamwork*.

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 versions of the battle companion's RAD features.

On the next page are some sample mechanics for RAD features, including ways to fit them into the combat descriptively and their affinity upgrades.

TEAMWORK

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

Every battle companion possesses this RAD feature. The battle companion targets one ally. In the coming round, that ally can claim advantage on a single attack roll or ability check they make. *Teamwork* is the only RAD feature which can target the same enemy on successive rounds or affect foes which 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 they makes a saving throw. The NPC grants advantage to that ally's save. This ability must be declared before the ally has rolled their saving throw.

BLINDING FLASH

The battle companion blinds enemies for a moment. The companion might be a shaman whose curse can bind the enemies' eyes. They could be a clever alchemist shattering a flask of blinding powder. Perhaps the companion's spellwork conjures globes of darkness around the heads of foes.

The battle companion targets one foe, giving it the blinded condition until the end of its next turn. While blinded, the creature cannot benefit from invisibility.

Affinity. The battle companion can target two enemies.

CURSE CURATOR

Through some mystic means, the battle companion can transfer the afflictions allies are suffering, shifting them onto foes. Perhaps the

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