

## Tactical Tidbits

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(Scribed by Skywolf)

My recent adventures have brought to mind something missing from the training of most would-be heroes: Weapons Tactics!! Whether it's how to use them, beat them, or get creative with them- it's almost *never* discussed beyond how good a specific person is in 1-on-1 combat!! While that kind of discussion has its place, let's face it- how often does the average adventurer get into a 1-on-1 (outside of an honor duel)? About as often as the sun rises where it sets!

So, with that in mind, I'm creating this Article in the hopes that it will keep a few more of our brave defenders against the Dark alive to fight another day. And, to start it off, I'll discuss one of the most misunderstood of all Arms- the Shield!

### Shield

The shield is a great weapon! Its drawbacks are few, and its benefits are many- even in the hands of the inexperienced. It comes in many sizes and shapes, and can be broken down into 3 main categories: Small (or Buckler), Medium (or Targe), and Large (or Coffin). Other types do exist, but are generally close enough in size or shape to be effectively compared to one of these 3. Let's look at them each in turn:

-Small/"The Buckler": Fast and light, the Buckler is the choice of many Duelers and Courtly Fighters, and more than a few Gypsies as well. Typically, its shape is a round disk- approximately 12" in size. While small (little more than the size of your hand), it offers excellent protection against weapons in the hands of an experienced user. It's light weight and small profile also makes it extremely quick and difficult to target- thereby proving the exception to the Rule that 'all shields are spell magnets'. However, this also means that it offers **no** effective protection to anyone but its wielder- something important to remember if you're "Backpacking" a fighter using such. And while it also offers little to no protection against ranged weapons (arrows, bolts, thrown weapons, etc), the fighting styles often used by those wielding such shields stress mobility and speed- making them less likely to be hit by such attacks in the first place!

-Medium/ "The Targe": Favorite of Highlanders and quick-strike units, this shield is an excellent blend of speed and protection. Typically round (sometimes shaped like a kite), these shields are normally 24" in size (approximately). The kite versions are of a similar dimension, with a common measurement of 20" across, and 30" long. Large enough to be of use against heavy weapons (such as 2-handed swords), it's still light enough on the arm to be considered maneuverable against incoming spells- making it less of a 'spell magnet' than it's larger cousins. Providing some protection versus ranged weapons (a distinct advantage over it's smaller cousins), it's wielder is often seen "turtling" behind it when faced with a volley of arrows (a trick many find useful to practice beforehand- lest you find out the hard way which parts weren't under cover when the arrows hit), or simply running full speed towards the nearest cover. A downside,

however, is the distinct lack of effective protection for anyone behind the wielder hoping to share in its cover (pay attention, backpackers- sucks to be you if you're hiding behind a warrior using one of these)! Fortunately, these shields are favored by skirmishers and quick-strike types- which generally don't use backpackers, as they just slow them down. For those who wear leather or light chain mail armors, this type of shield is an excellent choice!

-Large/ "The Coffin": So named for a popular shape amongst this size of shield, the Coffin is the de-facto shield of choice for heavy armor and formation fighters! Sometimes shaped as a teardrop, or the front of a Tower, this class of shield is typically from the user's shoulders to knees in length, and from shoulder to shoulder in width. Large enough to cover most of the body, it provides excellent protection to its wielder **and** whoever might be behind them! Its major drawback, however, is the delight of opposing casters thru-out history: at its size, this shield is the basis for the 'Spell Magnet' theories! However, for those its wielder may be shielding from enemy spells, this is a fantastic attribute (and, after all, what else are those back-packing healers for- if not to pick you up when you've fallen protecting them??)! As many wielders of the Coffin shield are heavy-armor types, it's vulnerability to incoming spells is hardly noticeable (hey- have you tried dodging death spells in full plate?? Let me tell you- NOT EASY)!

Now, most folks understand the purpose of a shield in 1-on-1 combat: to keep the other guy's weapons from hitting you. However, far fewer shield users seem to consider the tactical advantages of shields in group or unit combat. Here are a few examples:

-Armadillo/ the front line of a squad locks shields together, while the following lines place theirs over-head. Try hitting anyone with weapon's fire in one of these formations- you'll quickly find yourself wanting a caster with a few "shatter" spells! If you're using this formation, don't forget to watch out for ground-based traps, casters and the occasional Rust Monster.

-Shield Wall/ the classic line of shields, overlapping each other ("locked together"). Provides considerable protection for anyone behind such a wall, it's also fun to watch less-educated monsters hurl themselves at and wonder why they're just bouncing back- and hey- where did those new wounds come from, anyway? Best when used with short weapons, as longer-reach weapons have a tendency to get clogged up or rebound into your comrades (not something they typically appreciate).

-The Wedge/ Used when you've more shield-types than all others, this formation places the shield-users in a "V" shape- with the point aimed at the approaching enemy. While they're splitting their forces (in an attempt to go beyond the sides of the wedge), fire away with any alchemy, bows or spells you may have. It's always great to see far fewer reach the end of the wedge than did the center! However, this formation's weakness is its reliance on the toughness of the center point, and its tendency to pack lots of people behind the 'wedge points' in a very small area. Watch out for indirect fire, ground-based traps and siege weapons!

-Scorpion/ a classic 3-man combo that easily adapts to all other formation. Put 2 shields side-by-side, and then stick the 2-handed thruster of your choice (polearm, longspear, etc) between them. The result is a confused and frustrated enemy who keeps getting wounded by the 2-handed thruster (called 'the stinger'), while trying to get past and thru the 2 shields (called 'the claws') - who, of course, are attacking as well! This is a great tactic to use against Ogres, Trolls and the like. Just make certain that the claws know they are supposed to be defending, or have short weapons, else you'll have your claws swinging in front of your stinger- then both weapons are tangled and everyone's more vulnerable!

-The Pole/ not a shield per se, but a shield-like use for certain shaft-based weapons (such as bows, spears and staves). Hold such a weapon in a vertical fashion, move side-to-side as needed, and you have turned your weapon into a mobile "wall" blocking incoming melee weapons- granting considerable protection against such, without the vulnerability to spells that conventional shields have. This lets certain 'fighter types' be extremely difficult to hit, and since a spear is only a one-handed weapon, you can still counter-attack with whatever weapon you have in your other hand (typically swords). Used by a caster, you can block with one hand and cast with the other. Make it a staff, and casters have a much better chance of surviving until the fighter-types can make it over to them. Make it a bow, and those same casters have much more damage potential at range, with near identical defensive capabilities as the staff! Just watch out for casters with a "shatter" spell, or warriors capable of similar strike techniques!

### **Downsides**

As with any study of the usefulness of an item, you must also look at its downsides and its weaknesses. For all their usefulness and variety, shields have 3 main flaws: Bulk, Spell Vulnerability and Weight. I shall try to define these flaws, and make you more aware of them, so you can be better prepared to counter them when the situation arises that highlights them.

-Bulk/ Specifically, the difficulty a shield imposes when trying to hide, be stealthy, or otherwise conceal your location. Not a problem so much with the lighter, smaller shields (such as the Buckler), but trying to crouch down behind a bush while holding on to a 24" circle and not looking out of place can really be a pain sometimes!

-Spell Vulnerability/ The amount of danger you are in from holding your shield when the spells start flying. Again, not so much a flaw with the smaller shields, but the larger the shield- the more difficult it is to not get it hit by incoming spells (and that's assuming you aren't holding it defensively in front of you)!

-Weight/ The age old trade off: maneuverability vs. protection! The more protection you get from something, the heavier it tends to be. While the weight of a shield shouldn't be a major hindrance in a single battle, many adventurers and professional mercenaries/ soldiers know that where there's one battle- many more are soon to follow! A single fight might leave you winded, but if you don't train specifically to offset fatigue from your gear, you will quickly find yourself worn out and unable to move after the second or third

wave- making yourself one heavily armored corpse for your friends to have to worry about!

## **Material and Massive Damage**

When discussing any hand-crafted item, how it's made is often just as- if not more so- important as who made it. While there are many debates of which race's techniques are more effective, they do not concern the intent of this article- and so shall be avoided. However, the materials one uses to make their weapons out of **are** important to this topic, so let's discuss them for a moment. Typically, weapons are made out of 4 materials- and shields are no different- so here's a comparative analysis of each material, as they apply to shields:

-Bone/ A primitive material, bone shields are often made of several bones attached to a sturdy backing (wood, boiled leather, etc). This material is not really durable for prolonged use, as any hit against it begins to chip away at the protective layers- making it less effective the more it is used! Used only in out-of-the-way wild lands and some Barbarian tribes, it is not a material the serious adventurer or combatant should ever consider for use!

-Rare Ores/ These include many things, but most especially metals such as Adamantium, Mithril and Cold Iron. These are all rare metals that often give the shield special properties (such as resistance to shattering effects), but are usually price-prohibitive for the average user. Still, the extra properties and excellent durability of most such ores make these shields "Must Have" items for many who use them.

-Steel/ Time and again, **the** most common material, steel (or any similar metal composition-Brass, Bronze, Iron, etc) is an excellent choice for shields. Durable, easy to acquire, and relatively inexpensive- shields made of such have only one real vulnerability: "Shatter" spells and effects! Be it a caster, an explosive or acid trap, or the bane of all heavy armor types (the dreaded Rust Monster) - steel has no real resistance to any of these attacks. Blending steel with certain strengthening agents gives them some protection, but that is also an expense that is prohibitive to most. The most common material for many reasons, steel is the standard in shields for a reason.

-Wood/ Perhaps the second most used material, wood is used by many cultures and peoples that live in the wilds (or that have little to no access to ores and forges). It is slightly lighter than steel (on the average), is generally just as protective as steel, and has only 2 notable distinctions: 1) wood shields are also vulnerable to fire traps, as well as explosive and acid traps 2) because of their lack of ferrous ore, they are proof against Rust Monster attacks. A minor trade-off (and one not typically considered, save in rare circumstances), wood is an acceptable substitute for steel in almost all circumstances.

-Massive Damage/ Ok, I know this isn't a material for shields- but it needs to be discussed. Creatures or traps that inflict this level of damage are always a danger to a

shield user- no matter its construction material! Block a giant's swing, put your shield between you and anything that deals this type of damage- whatever the source, your shield is no defense against such. The damage will pass right thru, and you will feel the worse for it! My advice to you, if facing such a threat, is this: if in light armor- get out of the way! The best defense against any incoming threat is, of course, not to be there when it comes in. However, if you are in heavy armor (or have to be the blocker for the rest of your team): suck it up and deal, and make certain your healer is standing by (preferably with "Magic Armor" spells at the ready)!

Well, that's a brief run-down of shields- construction, formations, types, use and weaknesses. Hopefully, this has been useful for you- and you'll take advantage of this new information and keep fighting (at least) one day longer than you would have before you read this! Remember though, this is only a general overview! There are many nuances and finer points to using shields that this article did not cover, so never doubt there are more things to learn! Until next time, may your blades be sharp and your Arms strong!