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BATTLE DANCERS

Many players brought into an AD&D 1st Edition Oriental Adventures campaign will never again accept a game world without martial arts. After playing a monk or a kensai, players see combat without consideration for sophisticated techniques as a stumble-bum affair. As a result, some DMs use all of the Oriental Adventures character classes in every imagined world and country, not merely the Kara-Tur setting or its equivalent. However, there is an alternative. Characters can go to a wholly different continent having nothing of an Oriental nature, yet still having martial arts -- but martial arts of a unique nature. A study of real-world history yields examples of systematized fighting styles worthy of comparison to the Asian methods yet completely independent in origin. Perhaps the best example comes out of Africa, by way of South America.

During the colonial era, many black slaves escaped from Portuguese masters in Brazil to form communities hidden in the jungle. To defend themselves against white pursuers or hostile Indians, the former slaves developed a style of fighting based on the combat methods of their African ancestors. This came to be known as **capoeira** (pronounced cop-WAY-rah) and its practitioners are capoeiristas. A new class is offered here, based on the capoeiristas (whose art is still practiced today) but using the simpler name of **battle dancer**.

The most distinctive feature of capoeira are its highly acrobatic nature (including handsprings and spinning like a top on one's head) and the fact that all its techniques are learned and practiced to music -- music that has served to pass along the oral traditions of the displaced Africans who devised the system. Regardless of whether or not battle dancers are conceived of as living anything like the fugitive-slave existence of the original capoeiristas, this cultural flavor and a strong sense of community solidarity are essential to the class.

To make a quasi-African zero-level NPC into a battle dancer, there must be a capoeira circle for his training. This circle consists of five or more battle dancers standing in a ring, simultaneously demonstrating movements and singing capoeira songs, while close at hand are two or more other persons (who can, at need, be noncombatant members of their community) playing musical instruments. The capoeira circle not only provides training but can (as will be described later) confer on its participants a sort of collective magical-clerical ability. This gives the battle dancers' villages a fighting chance of survival in a world that ruthlessly demands the use of spells to deal with some perils, yet without having any of the familiar spell-casting types present. In this way, normal PC types are just as strange to the battle dancers as the battle dancers are to the PCs. At the same time, though their survival as a group is promoted, no single battle dancer character is outrageously unbeatable.

When creating the tropical territory in which far-travelling PCs can encounter battle dancers, it is suggested that any one battle dancer village be part of a confederation of three or more such villages, and that there be several sperate confederations in the region. If there are cities in the area, there could be some urbanized battle dancers as well.

Note that battle dancers can serve both as warriors and spell-casters, but they are not as flexible as the specialized classes can be. In a capoeira culture, almost no other classes will be found. It is possible that a capoeira culture having contact with other parts of the world might find its old ways eroding under the influence of the outside world, with some hostility between the generations that practice either the battle dancing ways or the "new" and more specialized ways.

Battle dancer statistics

A battle dancer must have a strength of not less than 14, a dexterity not less than 14, a constitution not less than 12, and a combined intelligence and wisdom not less than 17. Any charisma score is allowable, but an individual with charisma lower than 8 will never rise above 9th level. A battle dancer gains no bonus for exceptional ability scores, nor can he ever have a second class. Table 1 shows most of the relevant information on the class's abilities. This class is patterned after the monk of the 1st Edition Player's Handbook.

Battle dancers have six-sided hit dice, with two dice at 1st level. Those of this class must be human, and they use the combat tables of clerics while making saving throws as thieves. Weapons useable by them are axes (hand), blowguns, clubs, daggers, darts, javelins, knives, spears, swords (one-handed), and any sort of stick (bo or jo) or staff. Oil and poison cannot be used as weapons. One weapon is learned at 1st level (with a new weapon gained every two levels thereafter) and a non-proficiency penalty of -3 applies to the use of unfamiliar weapons. Though they do not use armor, they can use shields, but while doing so they forfeit the use of their special unarmed attacks. Any magical weapon or shield can be used by a battle dancer within the above restrictions, as well as any magical item that can be used by any character class and (as described later) certain magical musical instruments.

Due to their wilderness life, these characters must choose their first four proficiencies gained at 1st level from "survival skills." All proficiencies chosen must be appropriate to the campaign environment. One new non-weapon proficiency is earned for every two levels after the 1st.

The majority of battle dancers are of neutral good alignment: morally good because the survival value of cooperation has taught them to cherish love and loyalty; philosophically neutral because, while a hatred of slavery inclines them away from excessive lawfulness, the discipline of capoeira equally inclines them away from chaos. No battle dancer can be of an evil alignment, as slavery, woe and treachery are opposed to all of a battle dancer's beliefs.

Just as monks gain special abilities with advances in rank, so do battle dancers acquire abilities relating to the power of music. They improve in movement speed and inherent armor class much as monks do, and they inflict increasing amounts of damage (to human-sized foes only) with their fists and feet. Because capoeira differs from any fighting method that most characters have ever seen, its practitioners have a chance to completely surprise opponents with their handspringing kicks, flying takedowns and other movements (see Table 2). Monks, ninja, acrobats and sohei have less chance than others of being surprised, and no such person will be caught off-guard by battle dancers more than once.

The surprise attack against a non-battle dancer foe is rolled for at the start of combat, regardless of which antagonist is the aggressor -- unless the combat began with a successful surprise attack by the non-battle dancer foe. In that case, the battle dancer will get his chance at the very start of the second round. A successful attack for the battle dancer means that his opponent automatically suffers the maximum damage that the battle dancer is able to deliver by kick or punch. Thereafter, the battle dancer can either break off and retreat or else make a regular attack at +1 to hit probability before the opponent can act again. This surprise will be negated against an opponent if the opponent has a chance to see a battle dancer in action before combat is joined.

Battle dancers have many special abilities. These include the following:

They can perform martial-arts special maneuver Instant Stand automatically, a talent that takes up no special maneuver slot and can be performed at any level.

They can sing, dance and play a musical instrument, as per the appropriate non-weapon proficiencies, well enough to earn a living as an entertainer in a city.

In brawls involving no weapons, a battle dancer's adversary does not gain attack initiative if he charges to attack. Also, while brawling, the battle dancer gains a +2 bonus to his armor class against unarmed combatants, thanks to acrobatics.

The traditional songs of the capoeira culture, describing exploits of gods, goddesses and heroes have beneficial effects on members of this class. Any battle dancer hearing these songs sung by a colleague of 6th level or higher will be immune to all fear for the duration of the singing.

The radius in which a battle dancer's singing or instrument playing has a beneficial effect on other of this class equals 10' per level of the singer or musician. The battle dancer's voice will carry beyond this radius, but special abilities such as those listed here are more limited in effect.

A 2nd level battle dancer (Handstander), while hearing the singing of a 6th or higher-level colleague, gains a +2 on saving throws against psionic blast and all enchantments/charm spells and those powers involving mental control.

A 3rd level Handwalker, hearing capoeira songs sung by a 6th level battle dancer, gains the same benefits he would gain from a chant spell. The chant spell can work cumulatively with the capoeira song after a one-round delay in which the battle dancer who is singing adapts his song to blend with the cleric's chanting.

A 4th level Handspringer is immune to harpy songs and the bard's musical charm. Also (due to their skills in team actions), if two or more 4th level or higher level battle dancers fight side by side, each gets a +1 bonus to armor class.

At 5th level, a Headspinner can move silently, hide in shadows and hear noises as a 1st level thief; these abilities progress with rank. Also, if two or three battle dancers of this level or higher team up against a single opponent (which battle dancers of good alignment will not do without reason), one member of this team gains an extra attack per round (the 1-2 set-up).

A 6th level Rhythm Warrior is able to benefit lower-level brethren by his singing, as previously noted; however, he cannot do so while personally engaged in melee. It is also at 6th level that he becomes able to give qualified zero-level characters the instruction in music and movement that will turn them into 1st level battle dancers. Moreover, the Rhythm Warrior can handle a magical bardic instrument without suffering harm, and given 2-7 days to study such an instrument, has a 15% chance of being able to use it as a bard might. (This chance goes up another 15% with each level gained, so that a 9th level battle dancer is 60% likely to master any musical magic item he acquires.) Finally, the Rhythm Warrior is surprised only on a 1 in 6.

The Dancing Warrior, level 7, receives chant spell benefits when he hears any music not of a definitely hostile nature. If his fellows are singing, regardless of their levels, the Dancing Warrior gains double the chant benefits from hearing them.

The Singing Warrior, level 8, is able to sing with benefit to all colleagues while he is fighting and he can be heard even through a magical silence spell or effect.

The 9th level Music Warrior enjoys a special importance in the capoeira hierarchy. For a 5th level battle dancer to make the passage to 6th level, he must spend a day having his musical skills examined by a 9th or higher level battle dancer. There is a 10% chance for every wisdom point of the candidate less than 18 that the Music Warrior will have to give an extra 1-8 days of musical coaching before the candidate is promoted.

The Contra-Master, level 10, acquires an added point of charisma upon reaching this rank. He cannot now be surprised except by opponents using magical spells or powers such as teleportation or etherealness. Also, any 1st or 2nd level battle dancers who observe a Contra-Master serving as a practice sparring-partner for a Master (10th level or above) will enjoy a 10% bonus on any experience points he may earn in the following week.

The 11th level, Master of Equilibrium is immune to all mental attacks (including all enchantment/charm spells, possessions and attempts at mind reading, mind control and psionic assault), as long as he or another Master is singing. If another battle dancer or a noncombatant member of their community has been charmed, hypnotized, etc, the Master's song will act as a dispel magic against this influence (including psionic influences!). Furthermore, the Master can know alignment of any being heard singing -- regardless of such disguising powers as misdirection or aura alteration.

The 12th level Uncle of Masters (a female holding this rank would be called Mother, not Aunt, since these titles derive from the matrilineal system of many African cultures) is immune to all death magic (including the monk's quivering palm) as long as he or she or a colleague of Master rank is singing. Also, the Uncle of Masters is able to teach allied non-battle dancers to sing capoeira songs well enough to confer benefits on battle dancer listeners. Such teaching takes a number of weeks equal to 30 minus the student's wisdom score.

The Great-Uncle (of Grandmother) of Masters, level 13, gains an overall 25% magic resistance from sheer will-force as long as any battle dancer can be heard singing or playing a musical instrument. Moreover, if any mortal character of evil alignment uses ESP or telepathy on the Great-Uncle of Masters, the innate gracefulness and beauty of the mind being read will require the mind-reader to save vs spells or change alignment to that of the Great-Uncle. (Evil extraplanar creatures reading a Great-Uncle's mind will not change alignment, but they will temporarily forget their evil intentions, initiating no hostilities for 2-5 rounds.)

Combat skills: When a battle dancer ranks high enough to make more than one attack per round, the number of attacks made is the same whether he or she uses a weapon or not. If a shield is used, no unarmed techniques can be used and the battle dancer's number of attackers must be referenced on the following table:

Battle dancer's level	Weapon attacks per melee round
1-5	1/1
6-10	3/2
11+	2/1

When armed but shieldless, the character can choose how many of his attacks will employ his weapon and how many will employ a foot, fist or elbow. If a armed but shieldless battle dancer is fighting humanoid foes only, then once in any combat, after two rounds of using only unarmed attacks, the battle dancer can make a feint with his weapon (causing no damage), followed by an unarmed attack that enjoys a +4 bonus to hit because of the feint. If this sneak attack succeeds, it does double normal damage and can be followed up with a weapon attack at +2 to hit against the foe. Monks, ninja, acrobat and sohei are less susceptible to this strategy, so the unarmed portion of the above tactic has a +2 to-hit bonus and does only normal damage, while the armed follow-up had but a +1 bonus to hit.

Rising in rank: There is less exclusivity and conflict involved in battle dancer level gains than in those for monks. Up through level 9, there is no limit on how many characters may hold each rank. The only limit on the number of Contra-Masters (level 10) is that, in any one capoeira culture, the number of Masters of Equilibrium (level 11) cannot exceed the number of Contra-Masters, lest a Master be without a Contra-Master sparring partner to keep him in practice. This is important, because a major function of Contra-Masters in the capoeira culture is to keep Masters in mental and physical condition. Any Master who fails to work out with a Contra-Master at least once a week while not adventuring will gain only one-half normal experience credit for the next adventure he or she undertakes. A Master who passes a full year without working out or adventuring -- not counting the ordinary hunting of common game -- will **drop** a level in rank.

Thus, if a community has Masters and Contra-Masters in equal number, any promotion-eligible Contra-Master will just have to wait until two or more Music Warriors climb to Contra-Master rank, unless there exists another capoeira community of freindly alignment that has an extra Contra-Master available for transfer. For this reason, many Contra-Masters will take Music Warriors out on frequent adventures so that one Music Warrior, rising to fill a Contra-Master's post, will free that Contra-Master to seek his own promotion to Master. In such cases, the former Music Warrior usually becomes the sparring partner of the former Contra-Master who helped him or her rise in rank.

The promotion from Contra-Master to Master involves combat, but no one is demoted thereby. In fact, it is not against the Master of Equilibrium that the Contra-Master fights, but against any of these combinations of opponents, in order of preference; two fellow Contra-Masters, in immediate succession; one fellow Contra-Master, followed by fighting two Singing Warriors simultaneously after a brief rest; or a Singing Warrior and two Dancing Warriors simultaneously on one day, followed by fighting two Music Warriors in immediate succession the next day. These combats are fought unarmed and to the accompaniment of capoeira music (performed by Masters where possible) from which both sides draw benefit. Damage is treated as subdual damage, not killing damage. Once the would-be Master has passed the trial by combat, he spends 2-5 days composing an original capoeira song (a creative opportunity for any player with musical or poetic talent). Upon performing the song for the community and teaching it to enough people to use it in a capoeira circle, the character is initiated as a Master of Equilibrium.

The promotion to Uncle/Mother of Masters is conducted in a somewhat more monklike fashion. There can be only one active Uncle of Masters in any capoeira community. The eligible Master fights the reigning Uncle (as with the monkish promotion, the challenger here temporarily acquires powers equal to the incumbent). If the challenger loses, he drops in experience points to the minimum number for a Master of Equilibrium. If the challenger defeats the Uncle of Masters, the loser does not drop in rank, but the defeated Uncle of Masters must do one of three things, as decided by the victorious new Uncle of Masters. First, he or she can go into semi-retirement, occupied mainly with noncombatant activities like song composing. (In this case, the defeated Uncle's fighting ability will drop one level after a year and another level every six months thereafter, but if and when the successor Uncle goes on to achieve the topmost rank in capoeira, the ex-Uncle, if less than 60 years old, can resume normal activity and work upward in level again.) Second, he or she can leave the community, accompanied only by two or three high-level followers and their families, to found a new settlement not less than two days' travel away. Third, he or she can remain in the old settlement with a similar handful of companions (plus anyone unfit for travel), while the new Uncle of Masters leads the majority of the villagers away to found a new community in some desirable location.

The Grandmother/Great-Uncle of Master is like the monkish Grand Master of Flowers in that there can be only one holder of this title per region. However, the highly artistic and fraternal nature of capoeira makes it feel inappropriate to decide possession of the top rank merely by the outcome of a slugfest. Two alternate methods of filling the position are suggested, both operation under the assumption that the Great-Uncle/Grandmother holds lifetime tenure and that a contest for this rank can occur only when he or she dies or retires:

1. All candidates are told by their gods in a vision to undertake some quest beneficial to the order of battle dancers as a whole. The one who best fulfills the mission becomes the Grandmother/Grand-Uncle of Masters.
2. All candidates must compose new capoeira songs, to be judged by the old Great-Uncle/Grandmother (if living) or by an assembly of all Masters of Equilibrium; the best song earns the promotion. This would be very much in the capoeira spirit.

The Capoeira Circle

What follows is a typical set of capoeira-circle spell-like powers, which the DM feels free to modify from one confederation or alignment to another.

If the leader of a capoeira circle is of Rhythm Warrior level or above, the songs of that circle can, once a day, render a nonmagical weapon temporarily able to damage weapon-resistant monsters. This weapon will gain no to-hit or damage bonuses, but it can hurt all monsters regardless of the magical bonus usually required to hit them. The duration of this power in combat is a number of rounds equal to the experience level of the circle's leader, plus the number of other battle dancers who joined in singing over the weapon. If not used immediately, the weapon will hold its special power for a time equal to the circle leader's charisma times 12 hours. A circle with a Master leading can empower two weapons per day; with an Uncle of Masters, a weapon can remain empowered for twice as long as usual; and a Great-Uncle of Masters can, over his lifetime, permanently empower a number of weapons equal to his wisdom score. (The DM can decide whether the song-enchanted weapons will work equally well for all wielders or for only battle dancers.)

With a Dancing Warrior or above as leader, the circle can cast (once each per day) a "half-strength" version of cure disease and neutralize poison spells -- that is, the victim's life will be saved, but he or she will need time to recuperate. With a Contra-Master or above as leader, these spell effects will be of full clerical quality.

With a Singing Warrior or above as leader, the circle can cast remove curse and control weather.

With a Music Warrior or above as leader, a dispel magic can be cast.

With a Contra-Master or above, strength can be cast on all in the circle.

With a Master leading, dispel evil, exorcise, heal and tongues spells can be cast.

Once a year, with an Uncle of Masters leading, the circle can invoke the direct aid of some powerful creature such as a lammasu or baku. With a Great-Uncle of Masters, the ceremony can be done twice a year.

Battle dancers and others

If player characters of non-Oriental types should happen upon battle dancers, they should not find these NPCs too terribly astonishing -- at least, not if they've ever seen thief-acrobats before. But Oriental Adventure types may be very taken aback by them -- not because of their surprise attacks or techniques, but because -- realizing battle dancers to be a kind of martial artist -- Oriental-type characters will expect battle dancers to act like denizens of Kara-Tur....and the battle dancers will not do so.

Members of the capoeira culture, even ones of lawful alignment, are cheerfully indifferent to many of an Oriental character's concerns for honor and "face." In particular, a samurai's readiness to commit seppuku will strike the battle dancer as ridiculous, since a person who throws away his or her life is depriving family and friends of his or her help and protection. And an Oriental character who tries to engage a battle dancer in a psychic duel is likely to achieve no greater result than having the battle dancer ask him, "Are you feeling ill?"

Whether visited by "Eastern" or "Western" player characters, these "Third World" martial artists should serve to lend color to a far-ranging campaign -- and force adventuring parties to stay on their toes -- or else land on their backs.

TABLE I
Battle Dancer Experience and Skills

Experience Points		Level six-sided hit dice		AC	MV	Attack	Damage	Title
0	2500	1	2	9	14"	1	1-3	Tumbler
2501	4750	2	3	9	15"	1	1-4	Handstander
4751	9000	3	4	8	16"	1	1-6	Handwalker
9001	17,500	4	5	8	17"	5/4	2-8	Handspringer
17,501	40,000	5	6	7	18"	5/4	2-12	Headspinner
40,001	80,000	6	7	7	19"	4/3	2-16	Rhythm Warrior
80,001	160,000	7	8	6	20"	4/3	4-16	Dancing Warrior
160,001	320,000	8	9	6	21"	3/2	3-18	Singing Warrior
320,001	600,000	9	10	5	22"	2	2-20	Music Warrior
600,001	900,000	10	11	4	24"	5/2	3-24	Contra-Master
900,001	1,200,000	11	12	3	25"	3	4-24	Master of Equilibrium
1,200,001	2,000,000	12	13	2	26"	4	3-30	Uncle/Mother of Masters
2,000,001+		13	14	1	27"	9/2	4-32	Grandmother/Great-Uncle of Masters

TABLE 2
Surprise Attack Success Probability

Level of battle dancer	opponent has never seen capoeira	opponent has seen capoeira before	martial artist equal or lower level	martial artist of higher level
1	2%	0%	0%	0%
2	5%	0%	0%	0%
3	10%	1%	0%	0%
4	15%	5%	0%	0%
5	25%	10%	1%	0%
6	35%	20%	5%	0%
7	45%	30%	10%	1%
8	55%	40%	15%	5%
9	65%	50%	20%	10%
10	80%	65%	25%	15%
11	90%	75%	30%	20%
12	95%	85%	35%	25%
13	99%	90%	40%	30%