

Unearthed Arcana: Feats

Based on feedback from our surveys and a number of requests on Twitter (I'm @mikemearls if you want to give me a shout), this month's Unearthed Arcana introduces new feats for fifth edition D&D. Before we get to the details, though, let's take a moment to talk about feat design and the place of feats in the game.

To begin with, since using feats is an optional rule, it's important to never assume that a particular feat will be a part of the game. For instance, a class can't refer to a feat, and feats should never be granted as class features. As well, we can't rely on feats to carry the mechanical load for actions and abilities that should be captured in the core rules. A hypothetical feat that makes you a skilled gambler can't assume that the DM uses any specific rules for wagering, as we don't have core rules for those. Instead, such a feat might grant you a bonus to Wisdom checks to reflect your ability to read others, as well as granting advantage on any ability check made as part of a game of chance.

Just as importantly, feats shouldn't add a mechanical layer to parts of the game where we expect the Dungeon Master to make a judgment call or to adjudicate things on the fly. For example, a feat that allows you to adopt an alias would have to be written in such a way as to allow characters without the feat to still attempt such a deception. The feat might give you proficiency in one or more skills, a bonus to Charisma, and a specific benefit (such as a reroll) when adopting an alter ego you've spent time practicing, all of which can improve your chances of success. But it shouldn't serve as a barrier that prevents a character without the feat to assume someone's identity by way of ability checks and good roleplaying.

Mechanically, feats are also meant to be all-in-one options. We avoid chains of feats, just as we avoid making assumptions about your proficiencies or character class (unless this is unavoidable). A feat is a package that covers all the bases, allowing it to benefit any character.

Ultimately, feats should serve to flesh out your character's identity. By creating feats with names like Tavern Brawler and Sharpshooter, we're using language that you can imagine characters using to describe themselves. By having a place in the world—a tangible essence that people can recognize—feats can add a layer of flavor and texture to your character without overpowering the class features that define who your character is.

Weapon Mastery Feats

Let's take a look at feat design by way of example. I think it would be cool to create a series of feats that can grant characters expertise with specific weapons, similar to how Polearm Master works. What might that look like?

Warhammer Master

When you hit a creature with a warhammer, the creature must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier) or be knocked prone.

In addition, you can use your warhammer to knock away a foe's shield. If you hit a creature that's using a shield, you can have the attack deal no damage and force the creature to drop its shield.

Why I Hate this Feat

This first attempt at creating a feat for characters using a warhammer has huge problems. To start with, it triggers additional die rolls every time a character hits. That's irritating enough at low levels, but at higher levels and with multiple attacks, it can quickly run out of control.

The ability to knock aside an opponent's shield is nifty—but that's something any character should be able to attempt. Locking that down into a feat threatens to limit the game's flexibility. You could argue that anyone could still try that trick, but the way the feat frames the ability makes it sound like only characters with this feat can succeed. This option is an area that I'd want

DMs to adjudicate on their own, rather than bloating the game with fiddly rules.

Finally, this feat is fairly narrow. It applies to only one weapon, when its net effect could probably apply to almost any bludgeoning weapon.

Here's a different take on it.

Fell Handed

You master the handaxe, battleaxe, greataxe, warhammer, and maul. You gain the following benefits when using any of them:

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with the weapon.
- Whenever you have advantage on a melee attack roll you make with the weapon and hit, you can knock the target prone if the lower of the two d20 rolls would also hit the target.
- Whenever you have disadvantage on a melee attack roll you make with the weapon, the target takes bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength modifier (minimum of 0) if the attack misses but the higher of the two d20 rolls would have hit.
- If you use the Help action to aid an ally's melee attack while you're wielding the weapon, you knock the target's shield aside momentarily. In addition to the ally gaining advantage on the attack roll, the ally gains a +2 bonus to the roll if the target is using a shield.

Why I Like this Feat

A number of things about this improved version of the feat make me happy. To start with, it applies to a broad range of characters. I toyed with the idea of having it apply just to heavy weapons, but I like the flavor of capturing a range of weapons normally associated with dwarves.

The attack bonus is a handy benefit that applies to every attack you make, without requiring any obnoxious handling or interruptions.

The benefit on advantage and disadvantage gives you a nifty added edge in a fight. It reflects the idea that, as an ironhanded master of weapons, you can turn an advantage into an

overwhelming edge and can rescue some shred of success from disadvantage.

Finally, the added benefit to the Help action grants a narrow but useful option without overriding improvisation. This type of benefit improves a standard action you can take, while coloring that action with a special benefit applicable to your expertise. It doesn't stop another character from attempting something similar while using the Help action. It simply leaves it up to the DM to decide what check that character needs to make in order to accomplish what your training allows you to do automatically.

Of course, our collective playtest efforts have the final say on this feat. But hopefully it provides you with a good idea of our design direction as we look at adding more feats to the game.

The rest of this article presents a number of new feats, each of which has been designed with the concepts outlined here in mind. Each feat also includes a short commentary to give you some insight into the thinking behind it. By giving you more insight into feats, we hope the feedback you give us in return will help sharpen our sense of what works and what you'd like to see more of.

Blade Mastery

You master the shortsword, longsword, scimitar, rapier, and greatsword. You gain the following benefits when using any of them:

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with the weapon.
- On your turn, you can use your reaction to assume a parrying stance, provided you have the weapon in hand. Doing so grants you a +1 bonus to your AC until the start of your next turn or until you're not holding the weapon.
- When you make an opportunity attack with the weapon, you have advantage on the attack roll.

Why I Like this Feat

This feat is simple, but it provides a tangible boost to both offense and defense.

The bonus to attack rolls captures the idea that your focus makes you better with blades than you are with other weapons. The math is simple enough that it doesn't slow down the game.

The second benefit tries to capture the idea of a sword as a superior defensive weapon, as compared to axes, hammers, and so on. By focusing on defense rather than keeping your eyes open for the opportunity to counterattack, you make yourself harder to hit.

The final benefit is a contrast to parrying. If you forgo your sword's defensive capabilities, you can strike quickly and more efficiently when taking advantage of a foe's distraction.

Flail Mastery

The flail is a tricky weapon to use, but you have spent countless hours mastering it. You gain the following benefits.

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with a flail.
- As a bonus action on your turn, you can prepare yourself to extend your flail to sweep over targets' shields. Until the end of this turn, your attack rolls with a flail gain a +2 bonus against any target using a shield.
- When you hit with an opportunity attack using a flail, the target must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier) or be knocked prone.

Why I Like this Feat

I tackled the weapon mastery feats first, and I wanted to make sure that each of them had a distinct flavor. The sword version of this feat is fairly generic by design, since it needs to appeal to a broad range of players. That means the other feats can appeal to players looking for something a little more esoteric. The Flail Master feat thus specializes in neutralizing shields and trying to knock opponents prone, playing into the idea of a flail's ability to whip around an object or entangle a foe's legs.

Spear Mastery

Though the spear is a simple weapon to learn, it rewards you for the time you have taken to master it. You gain the following benefits.

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with a spear.
- When you use a spear, its damage die changes from a d6 to a d8, and from a d8 to a d10 when wielded with two hands. (This benefit has no effect if another feature has already improved the weapon's die.)
- You can set your spear to receive a charge. As a bonus action, choose a creature you can see that is at least 20 feet away from you. If that creature moves within your spear's reach on its next turn, you can make a melee attack against it with your spear as a reaction. If the attack hits, the target takes an extra 1d8 piercing damage, or an extra 1d10 piercing damage if you wield the spear with two hands. You can't use this ability if the creature used the Disengage action before moving.
- As a bonus action on your turn, you can increase your reach with a spear by 5 feet for the rest of your turn.

Why I Like this Feat

This feat looks a little different from the other members of the weapon mastery family because it focuses on a simple weapon. It grants the same +1 bonus to attack rolls as the other feats, but it also boosts the spear's damage to make it equal to martial weapons.

The third element focuses on making the spear a useful defensive weapon. Given that fifth edition D&D doesn't have a specific action for charging, the ability to skewer an incoming enemy requires a bit of finesse. This feat sets up a situation that requires an opponent to move a noticeable distance toward you. Shutting off your attack with Disengage allows a creature to approach you carefully by forgoing its action to attack, even as forcing you to commit to a specific opponent makes the benefit faster to resolve. This way, the DM doesn't need to check whether you want to attack every single creature that moves up to you.

The extra reach is a minor ability, but one that reflects the spear's nature in a simple, easy way.

Tool Feats

Weapons are fun, but feats are intended to support all parts of the game. To that end, here are a few feats that grant proficiency with tools and some additional thematic benefits.

Alchemist

You have studied the secrets of alchemy and are an expert in its practice, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with alchemist's supplies. If you are already proficient with them, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with them.
- As an action, you can identify one potion within 5 feet of you, as if you had tasted it. You must see the liquid for this benefit to work.
- Over the course of any short rest, you can temporarily improve the potency of one *potion of healing* of any rarity. To use this benefit, you must have alchemist's supplies with you, and the potion must be within reach. If the potion is drunk no more than 1 hour after the short rest ends, the creature drinking the potion can forgo the potion's die roll and regains the maximum number of hit points that the potion can restore.

Burglar

You pride yourself on your quickness and your close study of certain clandestine activities. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with thieves' tools. If you are already proficient with them, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with them.

Gourmand

You have mastered a variety of special recipes, allowing you to prepare exotic dishes with useful effects. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Constitution score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with cook's utensils. If you are already proficient with them, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with them.
- As an action, you can inspect a drink or plate of food within 5 feet of you and determine whether it is poisoned, provided that you can see and smell it.
- During a long rest, you can prepare and serve a meal that helps you and your allies recover from the rigors of adventuring, provided you have suitable food, cook's utensils, and other supplies on hand. The meal serves up to six people, and each person who eats it regains two additional Hit Dice at the end of the long rest. In addition, those who partake of the meal have advantage on Constitution saving throws against disease for the next 24 hours.

Master of Disguise

You have honed your ability to shape your personality and to read the personalities of others. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with the disguise kit. If you are already proficient with it, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- If you spend 1 hour observing a creature, you can then spend 8 hours crafting a disguise you can quickly don to mimic that creature. Making the disguise requires a disguise kit. You must make checks as normal to disguise yourself, but you can assume the disguise as an action.

Why I Like these Feats

Tools are a fun part of the game, but it sometimes takes a lot of work from the DM to

bring them into play. For example, cook's utensils are only as useful as the adventure or campaign allows them to be, since they don't have a clear role in the three core pillars of the game: combat, interaction, and discovery. On top of making the numerical bonus provided by tools significantly higher, the feats above try to add concrete benefits to those tools. Thieves' tools are an exception, though. Because traps and locks are such a common part of the game, the extra bonus the feat provides is powerful enough in and of itself.