

The Rifleman

A prestige class by Douglas Seacat with Brett Huffman & Jon Thompson

“Captain, they’re coming about to this side of the river. They’re pressing us, captain, we have to—“

“Damn it, man, can’t you see I’m busy?” I barked at my lieutenant. A short temper was not my custom, but my company was in sore shape and we were all coming apart at the seams. Our battle-chaplain was currently two hundred yards back, facedown in the mud, his life-blood flowing out and his soul passed on. Given that I knew more of tending wounds than any of the others, I had taken his place, and was in the midst of trying to stop up a gaping red gunshot wound on the leg of one of my scouts.

“But captain, we’ve no time!” Lieutenant Sedgwick pushed on. “If we don’t act now—“

“Captain, captain!” The blood-soaked man in my arms jolted suddenly, wrapping his arm about my neck. “Tell, my sister, captain, tell her...” His body went suddenly limp. The man was gone. Suppressing a curse, I laid him down gently, and forced my breathing to be smooth and controlled despite my lieutenant screaming in my ear. Collecting my thoughts, I cupped my head in my hands for a moment, the dead man’s blood streaking my sweaty brow.

“Lieutenant, assemble the men,” I said evenly.

In my opinion, the commanders of the Royal Cygnaran Military had never taken the Northern Thornwood Patrol very seriously. In some ways they were a token corps, assembled to placate a small but vociferous group of Fellig folk—most of them rangers—who wanted active duty closer to their home region. Their request was finally granted, and the small group was given the official task of patrolling the northern Thornwood and its borders.

But there was more to this patrol than met the eye. If anyone paid enough attention, they’d have seen that their patrol route ran along the Black River, not the Thornwood. This was a decision handed down by Head Scout Rebald, the Cygnaran army’s Scouts division commander. Rebald claimed to have several good reasons for putting this particular patrol together, and what remained of those reasons were standing before me. Last spring, he’d discovered roughly a dozen riflemen—all of them from Fellig—that were some of the best shots he’d seen in quite a while, and instead of breaking these men up and putting them on special sniper detail across the kingdom, Rebald saw that their request for transfer to the Thornwood was granted. He rounded out the squad with a dozen competent rangers (the only survivor among these was a cousin of mine), a seasoned commander (myself), and a battle-chaplain (another cousin, now dead). I gazed upon the muddy faces of the half-dozen riflemen I had left. An ambush mere minutes ago had thinned Rebald’s hand picked patrol considerably, but these battle-worn men had lost none of their edge. They knew the risks and were a determined lot. Each of them fingered their longarms eagerly and watched me with expectant eyes.

Not many knew the purpose of this company’s strange patrol along the Black River, but I did. We were waiting for something, something important, and it had come silently, calmly floating down the river today; it was a simple barge, but it’s what had escorted the barge that had gotten the jump on us—a patrol of mercenaries.

“This is it, men. The patrol is coming back around. How’s everyone on ammo? Did we recover any rifles during the retreat?” They each replied in their own way that they were set. “Good. We’re not through yet. Make your peace, boys. This might be it. You’re to stay here and hold the line.”

This was no easy thing for me to say. These men were my brothers and cousins, several of whom I’d just seen pass into the afterlife kicking and screaming and hacking up blood. We’d all come out of Fellig together, and we shared a bond tighter than most military companies ever could.

“There are six of you. My guess there’s two dozen of them.”

“My kind of odds,” one of them smirked confidently (my arrogant brother, of course).

“Six of us, captain?” Sedgwick asked. There were, in truth, seven men before me.

“In a moment, lieutenant,” I replied. “Now the half dozen of you are some of the best this kingdom has to offer. Any one of you could shoot a swamp fly off a gobbler’s nose at a hundred yards; hell, I’ve damn well seen ya do it.” I made a show of surveying the scene. “This is as good a position we’re gonna get, so find yourselves a spot, get situated, and see to it that not a single one of those soldiers gets by here. Is that understood?”

They nodded, each with a confident grin, and I dismissed them to their task with a nod. They scrambled in each direction, climbing into trees, digging dog ditches behind the embankment, and readying however many rifles they had for easy access. Within a minute they had all but disappeared from my sight.

"Sedgwick, your job is to follow that boat. I want to know where it's going. Find out, and above all, do not be seen. If it's headed where I think it's headed, then we all might be in for a lot of trouble."

"But captain, where are you going?"

"The waypoint west of Corvis. This is no random scouting exercise, nor even a reconnaissance mission. Not this far south. That patrol is an escort, and I believe they're working for the Khadorans. Peace be damned, those Khardas are smuggling something, and Sir Rebal's going to want to know about this."

As I turned to head south, cutting through the trails as only a born and bred ranger could, I could already hear the crack of my men's rifles cutting through the wood. The odds were completely against them, but I had confidence that they'd see their orders through. The Khadoran mercenaries had surprised us on the first pass, but the last thing you do to a rifleman is give him time to hunker down, set up shot, and wait for you to come plodding along—especially if that rifleman is from Fellig (they don't call us "dead-eye thornies" for nothing). It was a lesson that two dozen scouts were about to learn the hard way.

—Leland Northcliffe, commander of the Cygnaran Northern Thornwood Patrol

Description

The rifleman is an exceptionally trained specialist in the use of long guns. These sharpshooters are to be found in just about any kingdom that has cultivated firearms technology, and they generally compose a small but elite segment of the local army. Almost all members of this class have had formal military training with firearms already but seek to refine their skills. These adaptable soldiers also learn skills of stealth in order to make their first shot count. A hidden rifleman makes a particularly deadly sentry.

Those riflemen who chafe at military service often turn to a life of adventure, seeking fame and fortune. Given the costs of maintaining their weapons, riflemen sometimes sell their services to the highest bidder, serving as mercenaries or adventurers for hire.

Most riflemen are former fighters, but many have backgrounds as rogues, rangers, and sometimes even stranger professions. Although this is a combat-oriented class, the rifleman's skills emphasize intelligence and dexterity over strength. This class is therefore appealing to less brawny warrior types, who choose melee weapons and feats to match (Weapon Finesse, etc.).

Weapon Preferences: Most riflemen view bows with disdain, and will only use a rifle for a ranged weapon. They commonly keep one or more small or medium melee weapons handy for when opponents get too close; short swords, daggers, clubs, hand axes, half-spears and rapiers are popular. Some riflemen have adapted their rifles by affixing spearheads or daggers to them, allowing them to fight without switching weapons if the need arises.

Hit Die: d8

Riflemen in the Iron Kingdoms

Riflemen can be found across the kingdoms, their numbers highest in Cygnar and Khador. Llael has recently begun incorporating these specialists into their army, although the mercenary Pistoleer (another PrC) serves a similar function and shares certain skills as riflemen, and are more numerous in Llael. Although most are human, the dwarves of Rhul also boast of skilled riflemen.

Requirements

To qualify as a rifleman, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Skills: Craft (small arms) 8, Spot 4

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (small arms), Weapon Focus (rifle), Point Blank Shot

Special: Ownership of at least 1 rifle. The potential rifleman must also find a willing mentor, as the skills of this class are trained, not developed innately.

Class Skills

The rifleman class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Blacksmith), Craft (Carpentry), Craft (Gunsmith), Craft (Cannoneer) (Int), Craft (small arms) (Int), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Move Silently (Dex), Ride (Dex), Spot (Wis).

Skills at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Riflemen are proficient in all simple and non-ranged martial weapons. Riflemen are proficient in all light and medium armor, but do not use shields. Riflemen who rely on stealth avoid wearing anything heavier than leather due to armor check penalties.

Far Shot: As a benefit of their special focus and training, riflemen get the Far Shot feat (PHB 84) automatically at 1st level. Those who already have this feat when becoming riflemen can pick from the feats listed below (under Bonus Feats).

Rifle Mastery: Due to focused training, at 2nd level Riflemen are considered masters in the use of long guns (any firearm 2 feet or longer), gaining a +1 bonus to attack roll and damage. The +1 to attack roll stacks with the bonus from weapon focus, and the damage stacks with specialization (if any). The bonus damage is only applied within the initial range increment for the rifle. For example, a rifleman using a military rifle could add +1 damage within 200 feet.

Sniping Shot (Ex): Starting at 2nd level, a rifleman gains the signature ability to do a sniping shot. This full-round action can only be done with a long gun, and requires the rifleman to be outside point-blank range (over 30 feet away). Most importantly, a sniping shot can only be made if the target has no idea of the sniper's location. Most snipers use the Hide skill and concealment to gain a first shot against an unsuspecting target. An initial sniping shot allows time to aim, providing a +2 to hit bonus. A successful hit with a Sniping Shot is automatically treated as a critical hit threat (as if the sniper had rolled 19 or 20) and if the critical check succeeds the hit does critical damage per the sniper's level-based multiplier. (This supersedes the weapon's regular critical multiplier for purpose of this ability. If the attack roll actually was a 19-20, the weapon multiplier can be used if it is higher than the level based multiplier.)

If the sniper is firing from a location with concealment and manages to remain hidden, he may try subsequent sniping shots. The target and any other allies are given a chance to Spot the sniper in an opposed roll at a +3 bonus against the sniper's Hide skill. If the sniper remains hidden and the target is still unaware of his location, another sniping shot can be executed. Each shot forces another opposed Spot check with a cumulative +3 bonus to Spot. The sniper can attempt to Move Silently and Hide at a different location to negate the cumulative bonus, providing they have not yet been spotted. Given reload time, trying to do several sniping shots in a row is not practical unless the rifleman has more than one loaded rifle at the ready. A team of snipers working in tandem and alternating loading, hiding and firing can take a heavy toll when ambushing an opposing force. Once the target knows the location of a sniper, this ability cannot be used although the rifleman can continue to fire regularly at the target.

Bonus Feats: Starting at 3rd level and every third level thereafter, the rifleman can choose a bonus feat from the following list: Alertness, Ambidexterity, Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Cannon), Expertise, Improved Critical, Lightning Reflexes, Mounted Archery (in this case applying to firearms), Mounted Combat, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Rapid Shot*, Shot on the Run, and Weapon Finesse. Many of these feats have prerequisites and these prerequisites must be met.

* **Rapid Shot** – Multiple shots per round with firearms are only possible in special cases, requiring either special firearms (such as dual-pistols as dual-rifles), or multiple pre-loaded firearms. In all cases reload time is a limitation and will prevent multiple shots in the same round from the same firearm unless reloading is not necessary. As an example, the only way to do 2 shots in the same round would be with one double rifle, or with a pistol in each hand, and an offhand weapon penalty would apply. The only way to do 3 shots would be with two pistols, one of which was a dual-pistol, etc. Even with multiple firearms, multiple shots aren't possible if they aren't instantly at the ready, as drawing a firearm is a move-equivalent action and prevents multiple shots unless the rifleman also has the Quick Draw Feat.

Rifle Melee (Ex): Starting at 3rd level, a rifleman can swing the stock of his rifle using both hands to do 1d6 bludgeoning damage. He is trained to do this without risk of harming the firearm (unless striking at something as hard as stone—hardness 8). Further, the rifleman can decide whether this damage is regular or subdual without the usual penalties, so long as it is declared ahead of time. In addition, if a clamp device is affixed to the barrel of the rifle, he can attach a dagger and use the rifle as a bayonet—this is equivalent to a halbspear, doing 1d6 piercing damage but requiring both hands. If the rifle is loaded during a successful bayonet strike, the rifleman can fire the rifle into the target as a free action and hit automatically. Both attack forms are considered awkward but enable the rifleman to melee without switching weapons. Riflemen do not get weapon focus or rifle mastery attack bonuses when using either melee attack.

Salvage Ammunition: Although all ammunition charges are designed for specific firearms, an experienced rifleman can salvage charges intended for one gun and adapt them to work on his own. The Salvage Ammunition feat is given free at 4th level (although the Rifleman must still meet the feat's prerequisites.)

Hairtrigger (Ex): Starting at 5th level, a rifleman holding a rifle at the ready which is already loaded receives a +4 bonus to initiative as if he had the Improved Initiative feat. This bonus does not stack with Improved Initiative, however.

Quick Load (Ex): Through long practice and training, the 7th level rifleman learns to reload firearms faster than most. This only applies to his own firearms, or those with which he has had a great deal of practice and familiarity. The rifleman gets a +2 bonus to all Craft (small arms) rolls to reload, and can reduce reloading time by 1 standard action. If the weapon is already at 1 standard action, it is reduced to a move-equivalent-action. This can allow a rifleman to fire and reload in the same round if using a firearm that regularly takes one standard action to reload, given that he has not taken a move-equivalent action.

Gunsmith Expertise: By 10th level most riflemen have such intimate familiarity with firearms that they excel as Gunsmiths. All riflemen with this ability get a +2 bonus to any skill checks involving Craft (Gunsmith), and can reduce the costs of materials involved in crafting firearms by 20%. Some veteran riflemen will work with dedicated professional gunsmiths to hone and personalize their weapons. Examples of modifications include: 1) Adding a simple double-lens device for magnified targeting, which grants +1 to attack rolls on aimed shots. 2) Customized stock giving perfect fit for a specific rifle wielder, granting another +1 bonus to attack rolls on aimed shots. 3) Customized harness straps allowing rifle to be brought to readiness quickly, giving +1 initiative. All of these modifications require a week to complete, paying a cost of 1/5 the total weapon price, a check at a DC of 25 and only provide their benefits for the person for which they were designed. A botched check on modifying a weapon means the firearm is damaged and is no longer functional until repaired.

Advancement

	Fort	Ref	Will	
Level	BAB	Save	Save	Save Special
1	+1	+2	+2	+0 Far Shot
2	+2	+3	+3	+0 Rifle Mastery, Sniping Shot (x2 critical)
3	+3	+3	+3	+1 Bonus Feat, Rifle Melee
4	+4	+4	+4	+1 Salvage Ammunition, Sniping Shot (x3 critical)
5	+5	+4	+4	+1 Hair-trigger
6	+6	+5	+5	+2 Bonus Feat, Sniping Shot (x4 critical)
7	+7	+5	+5	+2 Quick Load (small arms)
8	+8	+6	+6	+2 Sniping Shot (x5 critical)
9	+9	+6	+6	+3 Bonus Feat, Quick Load (cannons)
10	+10	+7	+7	+3 Gunsmith Expertise, Sniping Shot (x6 critical–max critical)

New Feats

Salvage Ammunition [General]

This feat is the only non-magical way to convert ammunition fabricated for one gun to use in another. The only way new ammunition can be created is by a difficult magical & alchemical process.

Prerequisites: Alchemy 2, Craft (Blacksmith) 2, Craft (small arms) 10, Ownership of a Gunner's Kit, and membership in either the Rifleman or Pistoleer prestige classes. NPC alchemists and gunsmiths can have this feat without the usual prerequisites. At a GM's discretion a PC of another class who spends considerable time training under a mentor can gain this feat if he meets the other prerequisites.

Benefit: Via this feat, ammunition charges are disassembled into their components (two types of blasting powder, wrapper, projectile), and then reassembled to work with a different firearm. Along with measuring out and wrapping blasting powder charges, this process also entails altering the ammunition projectile. Use of this feat requires several hours (generally 1/2 a day) and allows salvage of anywhere from 10-100 charges.

How many charges are salvaged depends upon the size of the old charges versus the size of the new. It is never possible to salvage 100% of charges as this process always results in loss, but larger charges converted to smaller results in greater salvage, while trying to make larger charges from smaller results in less salvage. The base is 70% salvage if converting charges for firearms of approximately the same size, represented by dice of damage. Therefore, if converting charges for a 2d6 pistol for another 2d6 pistol, 70% of charges are salvaged. Each increment in dice adds to or reduces from this by 10%, with a maximum salvage of 90%. For example, using this feat to convert 30 charges of Military Rifle ammunition (2d8) to Small Pistol (2d4) would result in 90% salvage, or 27 salvaged charges. Converting 30 charges of Small Pistol (2d4) ammunition to Military Rifle (2d8) ammunition would result in 50% salvage, or 15 salvaged charges.

Cannon charges cannot be converted into small arm ammunition or vice versa, as these charges use slightly different alchemy. At the DM's discretion a rifleman with Craft (Cannoneer) can use this feat to salvage different sizes of cannon ammunition the same way as described above.

Normal: Tampering with firearm charges without this feat will always fail, ruining the charges, and is also dangerous. Trying to take apart firearm charges has a 50% chance of exploding the charge, causing half the damage the charge would usually do if fired from a firearm to the person tampering, along with igniting anything flammable within 2 feet (including other charges, which would also explode).

Rifleman Equipment

Gunner's Kit (100 crowns): This kit includes a number of tools useful for cleaning, disassembling and reassembling firearms. It also includes a scale for measuring blast powder, and some tools for altering firearm projectiles, and generally has a secure area for storing completed ammunition charges. Blasting powder is a magic item requiring an alchemist who is also a 5th level caster to prepare, so this kit does not allow the creation of blasting powder. This kit is required for the Salvage Ammunition feat.

