



Beyond Sylvan War Lore

Six New GURPS Martial Arts Styles for Elves

By Neal Byles

GURPS Martial Arts introduced roleplayers to the idea that Elves would likely develop their own martial arts styles. With their reputations for mastery of the sword and bow, Code of Honor to live elegantly in all things, and effectively limitless amount of time for training and leisure, Elves could not be more ideally suited to do just that. To the elegant, ageless Elves, combat is far more than just battle. It is art.

Sylvan War Lore was originally developed with this aesthetic in mind. It proved to be so effective that it was eventually taught to other Sylvan races -- Fauns, Leprechauns and the like, in order to help defend against human and Orc depredations. However, while Sylvan War Lore is the most common Elven martial art, it is not the only one, nor was it the first. For millennia Elves have kept their most powerful and elegant fighting styles secret even from other Sylvans.

In addition to the standard Skills and Maneuvers associated with each Elven style, certain spells are frequently used by certain styles. The prerequisites for spells common to a style are assumed and not mentioned individually.

Note also that non-Elves, even Sylvans, are never taught any of these styles. Even Half-Elves only rarely earn the right to study them, and then only as a reward for great deeds or if particularly high potential is detected, which can be represented by a fairly costly Unusual Background (20 points). If any non-Elves were to demonstrate knowledge of any of these styles, at best they would be hunted down, captured and magically "deprogrammed;" at worst they would become the targets of the Cloud Shadows.

These are but six of the Elven styles developed by the Fae-folk over the centuries. From the swashbuckling Blade Dancers to the stealthy Cloud Shadows, from the serene and deadly Bow Singers to the pacifistic masters of the Way of the Tree, from the primal Wolf Runners to the chivalric Eternal Defenders, the true Elven Masters are feared by all of Nature's enemies. In most cases the Combat Art is every bit as important to the Elven martial artist as the Combat Skill, as required by their racial Code of Honor. The cinematic advantage Trained by a Master is available for all of these styles, GM permitting. Cross training in more than one style is not common but does occur among the older masters, where the styles are compatible.

BLADE DANCING

14/22 POINTS

The Blade Dancers are the most flamboyant of the Elven martial artists. Traditionally, Blade Dancers are flighty even by Elven standards -- Dwarves typically can't stand them -- taking very little save their fencing seriously at all. Blade Dancers are often given to outrageous acts of daredevilry and are usually quite noticeable by their elegant dress. Armor is worn lightly, if at all. Elven Silversilk is the coveted protection of all Blade Dancers.

Fencing is the heart of Blade Dancing. The skill is learned with a primary focus on the Elven longsword but the Elven smallsword is also taught (see New Weapons, below). The most common

practice of Blade Dancing is a two-handed style with longsword in the dominant hand and smallsword in the off-hand; the latter is usually used defensively. However, some individuals prefer saving the off-hand for a cloak, buckler, the Elven equivalent of the Main-Gauche or nothing at all. If available, the Weapon Master (Fencing) advantage is open to Blade Dancers.

As the name implies, dancing is also an integral part of the Blade Dancer's training. A fight just isn't a fight without some sense of choreography to it, even if the opponent is less than cooperative. For this reason anyone with Style Familiarity: Blade Dancing who is faced with such an artist gets an additional +1 to defend against their attacks. Unfortunately the only beings likely to be familiar with Blade Dancing are other Blade Dancers. On the rare occasions that two Blade Dancers meet in mortal combat -- an Elf against a Dark Elf, for instance -- the fight can easily reach epic lengths, as both parties will tend to get lost in the beauty of the dance. Not surprisingly, many Blade Dancers are also Bards and musicians. Luck, Daredevil and Ambidexterity are common advantages.

Movement spells, especially Wallwalking and Blink, are favorites among Blade Dancers, as are spells that will enhance their grace, such as Dexterity, Balance and Ambidexterity. Legends abound of Dancing Masters who use advanced Sound spells and even Illusions to provide their own soundtracks and lightshows.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics; Dancing; Fencing; Fencing Art; Savoir Faire

Secondary Skills: Fast Draw (Sword); Fast Talk; Jumping; Tactics

Optional Skills: Brawling; Buckler; Cloak; Main-Gauche; Musical Instrument; Poetry; Singing; Stealth

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Fencing); Corps-a-Corps; Feint (Fencing); Fleche; Hit Location (Fencing); Lunge; Off-Hand Fighting (Fencing or Main-Gauche); Riposte; Stop Hit

Cinematic Skills: Light Walk

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual-Weapon Attack (Fencing); Enhanced Parry (Fencing)

CLOUD SHADOWS

12/23 POINTS

The Cloud Shadows are the spies, scouts, and sometimes assassins of the Elves. It is a rare style favored by the Dark Elves although not exclusively so. An Elf would have to have a very good reason to employ the deadlier skills of this Art, however. These reasons are usually tied to the protection of important Elven secrets or to their racial Sense of Duty to Nature.

Cloud Shadows are deadly combatants when they are seen, but some would argue that their mission has failed when open combat occurs. Through the use of Stealth, Invisibility Art, the Invisibility spell, and the clever employment of Sound and Illusion spells, there are few living creatures capable of avoiding detection as well as the masters of this style.

While Cloud Shadows are quite adept at unarmed combat, theirs is primarily a weapon art. The most common choices of primary weapons are the short sword or knife and the short bow, with fencing weapons and throwing knives following closely behind. The Weapon Master Advantage, both the general and specific forms, is common to the masters of this art.

Sound, Light/Darkness, and Body Control spells are a must for Cloud Shadows. Illusion, Air, Communication/Empathy, and Mind Control spells are also common. Assassin Cloud Shadows almost always learn the Deathtouch spell as well, which is deadly when used in conjunction with the Hand of Death skill.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Camouflage; Climbing; Jumping; Stealth; Wrestling; any two Weapon Skills

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics; Survival (Woodland); Swimming; other Weapon Skills

Optional Skills: Breath Control; Escape; Hypnotism

Maneuvers: Feint (Weapon or Brawling); Ground Fighting; Hit Location (Weapon or Brawling);

Riposte

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Breaking Blow; Hand of Death; Invisibility Art; Light Walk; Mental Strength; Power Blow; Pressure Points; Pressure Secrets

Cinematic Maneuvers: Binding; Roll with the Blow

BOW SINGING

6/26 POINTS

Next to Sylvan War Lore, this is the most common style for Elves to learn and is largely responsible for the Elves' reputation as experts with the bow. The masters of this art are truly fearsome with the Elven longbow -- in fact, it was the Bow Singing Masters who first developed the secret to creating this fantastic weapon (see "Medieval and Fantasy Missile Weapons" by Dan Howard for details on the Elven longbow). The Weapon Master (Bow) Advantage is essential to this style in campaigns in which it is allowed.

While singing isn't as integral to the Bow Singer style as dancing is to the Blade Dancers, it is still a common skill. Many Bow Singers use song to focus their concentration on their art. The sound of the Elves' ethereal voices singing gentle, melodious tunes, along with the harmony of an arrow in flight have been the last sound ever heard by many an unfortunate Orc. These artists often perform Singing and Meditation as one single action.

Bow Singers sometimes study their weapon to the exclusion of all others, taking a Major Vow to use no other weapon, but this is not required. Some of the style's practitioners have learned to use their bows to parry missile weapons, although this can only be accomplished when there is no arrow nocked in their own bows. They are also capable of using their bows to parry melee weapons but few Bow Singers will risk damaging their beloved weapons this way. Rather they have perfected the art of avoiding attacks altogether. The masters of the style have also learned the legendary trick of nocking and firing two arrows at once; this is reflected in the Dual-Weapon Attack cinematic maneuver and takes an extra round to ready. Fast drawing two arrows at a time is at -2.

Bow Singers almost always learn the Dexterity and the Hawk Vision spells. Singers with a mind toward defense often learn Shield and Missile Shield as well. Elemental spells are also commonly studied toward the end of learning Fiery Missiles, Lightning Missiles and/or Icy Missiles to use on their arrows and Shape Stone/Metal to make arrowheads. All Bow Singers are required to learn Shape Plant to make their own bows and arrows. This spell is absolutely necessary, along with master-level skill in Armoury (Bowyer/Fletcher), in order to fashion an Elven longbow.

Primary Skills: Armoury (Bowyer/Fletcher); Bow; Fast Draw (Arrow); Meditation; Stealth

Secondary Skills: Brawling; Camouflage; Parry Missile Weapons (Bow); Survival (Woodland); Tactics (Ranged Combat)

Optional Skills: Musical Instrument (usually stringed); Singing; other Weapon Skills

Maneuvers: Hit Location (Bow)

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting (Bow only); Pressure Points (Bow only); Pressure Secrets (Bow only); Zen Archery

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual-Weapon Attack (Arrow); Enhanced Dodge

THE WAY OF THE TREE

7/37 POINTS

The disciples of the Way of the Tree are perhaps the most rare Elven martial artists of all. Only true adherents to the style's ultra-pacifistic philosophy are ever taught this style. However, the masters of this art are nearly impossible to defeat when forced to defend themselves or Nature.

Disciples of the Way of the Tree must learn their Philosophy at IQ level or higher. As the name implies, this philosophy holds the tree as the ultimate example of how to live, especially as life pertains to violence. The tree lives its life aiding the life cycle and, most importantly, doing no

harm. It is steadfast and resilient and always protects all that it shelters. Followers of the Way must take the Disadvantages Major Vow: Use No Weapons, Pacifism: Self-Defense Only and Pacifism: Cannot Kill, as well as the Code of Honor: Protect All Innocents (-5). The pacifism practiced by the Way is very nearly Total Non-Violence. Its practitioners will defend themselves and other innocents and most assuredly the Nature they are sworn to protect, but neither will they kill nor cause any lasting (i.e. crippling) harm to their enemies. Plant Empathy is almost universal among disciples and Animal Empathy is common, but neither is required.

The Way of the Tree is one of the few Elven styles that does not teach the relevant Art skill (in this case Judo Art) as part of its requirement. This is because the philosophy of the Way considers it unseemly to make art out of any act of violence, no matter how non-lethal.

All followers of the Way of the Tree learn extensively from the Plant College of magic and often the Animal College as well. Body Control, Mind Control, and Healing magic are also common, both to aid in non-damaging combat and to repair any damage they may inadvertently cause. Air, Water, and Earth spells are standard areas of study but disciples of the Way are loath to learn any Fire spells, with the exception of Extinguish Fire. While such Elves will learn Ignite Fire as the necessary prerequisite, they will not cast the spell once it is learned. Most disciples rely on Water spells for the same purpose. Exceptionally noble disciples have attempted to learn Resist Fire and Flameturning to help protect their forests but few are able to stomach learning all of the necessary prerequisites.

Primary Skills: Judo; Philosophy; Meditation; Naturalist

Secondary Skills: Botany; Camouflage; Climbing; Stealth;

Optional Skills: Any Medical or other natural Science skills; Musical Instrument; Singing

Maneuvers: Arm/Wrist Lock; Breakfall; Disarming

Cinematic Skills: Blinding Touch; Mental Strength; Pressure Points; Pressure Secrets; Push; Yin-Yang Healing (or its equivalent)

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry (Judo); Hand Clap Parry; Roll with the Blow; Sticking

THE FOREST RUNNERS

17/23 POINTS

Sometimes called the Wolf Runners or the Fae Beasts, the Forest Runners have used an intimate knowledge and understanding of animals to develop one of the deadliest styles of all the Elven martial arts. All of its practitioners either have or develop the Animal Empathy advantage, and many have the Beastkin Advantage as well. The Minor Vow of Vegetarianism is common but not required (except of the Beastkin).

Other Elves often look upon Forest Runners with a mixture of confusion, envy, and pity. These Elves seek elegance in the perfect communion with nature, particularly the animals, an interpretation that is not often shared by their kin. Their Sense of Duty to Nature is taken extremely seriously, even by Elven standards, and they can sometimes become quite feral in their pursuit of natural synergy. The Forest Runners tend to be minimalists when it comes to clothing and fashion and will never wear any armor beyond furs or light leather, and only rarely those. Moreover it is uncommon for Forest Runners to use weapons at all and even then they usually restrict themselves to stone axes, knives or spears (Major or Minor Vow, respectively). The Weapon Master Advantage is obviously inappropriate for this style. The disadvantages Primitive and Technophobia are common, as is Claustrophobia.

Obviously Animal magic is integral to the Forest Runner style with Shapeshifting spells considered to be the height of mastery. A common practice among Runners is to use the Partial Shapeshifting spell (p. G11) to assume predatory teeth and claws while engaged in combat. True lycanthropy is typically viewed as a blessing of the Eternal among the more fanatic Forest Runners. As all of the Runners' skills and maneuvers were derived from studying and emulating various animals, most of them may be utilized even in full animal shapes, at the discretion of the GM. Healing, Sound, Plant

and Elemental (Air and Water) spells are also common.

Primary Skills: Jumping; Karate; Karate Art; Running; Stealth; Survival (Woodland)

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics; Camouflage; Climbing; Tracking

Optional Skills: Animal Handling; Musical Instrument (usually percussive); Singing; Veterinary

Maneuvers: Cat Stance; Feint (Karate); Ground Fighting (Karate); Hit Location (Karate); Jab; Jump Kick; Kicking; Riposte (Karate); Spin Kick; Sweeping Kick; Neck Snap

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Light Walk; Power Blow; Flying Leap

Cinematic Maneuvers: Acrobatic Kick; Springing Attack

ETERNAL DEFENDERS

11/25 POINTS

The Defenders of the Eternal is the closest thing to a religious and chivalric order that the Elves have produced. They are the self-proclaimed protectors of Life, Nature, the Eternal (see p. F36-37) and everything Sylvan. Dark Elves often name themselves Defenders and pursue mastery of this art, creating a marked schism in interpretation of the philosophy of the style.

The Defender style centers on the Fae Knife (see New Weapons, below), a light, pointed, hand-and-a-half sword similar to the Katana but with a straight, two-edged blade. The Fae Knife uses the Katana skill and like the Katana it may be used interchangeably one- or two-handedly (at +1 to damage for two-handed use) with Parry at 1/2 skill when used one-handed and 2/3 skill when used two-handed. The Weapon Master (Katana) advantage is available to Defenders where appropriate.

The Defenders follow a Code of Honor, the tenets of which are: own no more than you can carry; never refuse a worthy request for help; defend Nature at all costs; always protect the innocent and those weaker than yourself; and never put personal feelings or honor over the welfare of others. Obviously, the Dark Elf version of this Code is selective in its interpretation, only including Sylvans in the "innocent/weaker" and request for aid categories. This Code is worth -15 points (-10 for Dark Elves). Fanaticism and Megalomania are not uncommon disadvantages for Defenders, as is Pacifism: Cannot Harm Innocents.

The standard practice of the style is to fight with the Fae Knife alone, although dual-weapon variations do exist. While the shield is not a native tool for Elves, it has been adopted by many of the Fae-folk for its defensive capabilities and is sometimes used by Eternal Defenders. Defenders may or may not wear armor as a matter of personal preference. Light mail (see "Ancient and Fantasy Armor Revisited" by Dave Steele for stats on light mail), usually enhanced with Fortify, Deflect and Lighten spells, is popular and Silversilk (similarly enchanted) is sometimes bestowed upon the Masters of highest status and reputation. The bow is one of the few weapons that Defenders will learn in addition to the Fae Knife but they only use them when necessary.

Eternal Defenders often recognize that the best way to defend the Sylvan lands, especially from human encroachment, is through diplomacy not warfare. As such many Defenders are trained diplomats and bards and some even study human politics. Defenders are often charismatic and generally have excellent reputations among Sylvans.

Typical spell choices for Defenders are Protection, Body Control, Mind Control, Communication/Empathy, Healing and Movement spells. The various Nature Colleges (Animal, Plant and Elemental) are also common, as are most battle magic spells.

Primary Skills: Breath Control; Katana (Fae Knife); Katana Art (Fae Knife); Meditation; Philosophy; Savoir Faire

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics; Body Language; Diplomacy; Parry Missile Weapons; Tactics

Optional Skills: Bard; Bow; Brawling; Politics; Shield; Stealth; Wrestling

Maneuvers: Feint (Katana); Hit Location (Katana); Lunge; Riposte; Stop Hit

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Body Control; Flying Leap; Immovable Stance; Light Walk;

Mental Strength; Power Blow (Katana only)
Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Parry (Katana); Whirlwind Attack

New Weapons

There are several weapons that are unique to Elves and especially Elven martial artists. Note that stats for the Elven longbow are reprinted for convenience from the article "Medieval and Fantasy Missile Weapons" by Dan Howard, which should be consulted for a complete description. Note also that Elves never make these weapons at less than Fine quality; these stats reflect this. Elven longbows can't be made by non-Elves, and average or cheap knock-offs of Elven blades should reduce all damages by 1. Very fine quality Elven blades should add 1 to the values below (see B74 for more about weapon quality). Prices are estimated for beginning Wealth purposes only as Elves never sell these weapons.

Hand Weapons

Weapon	Type	Damage	Reach	Cost	Weight	Min ST	Special Notes
FENCING (DX-5)							
Elven smallsword	imp cut	thr +2 sw	C, 1 1	\$2000	1 lb.	—	Max 1d+2
Elven longsword	imp cut	thr +2 sw +1	1, 2 1	\$3000	1 1/2 lb.	7	Max 2d-1
KATANA (DX-5 or Broadsword -2)							
Fae Knife	cut imp	sw+2/+3 thr +3	1 1	1,2	\$5000	4 lbs.	10

Ranged Weapons

Weapon	Malf	Type	Dam	SS	Acc	1/2Dam	Max	Wt	Cost	RoF	Shots	ST	Spec.
BOW													
Elven longbow	crit.	imp	thr+4	14	4	STx25	STx30	3	\$40K =		1	10	Max 1d+4

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