

# Two Weapon fighting

An Analysis

Twin Weapon Fighting. Rapid Shot. These are perhaps two of the most contentious issues of ‘balance’ that exist within the 3e rules. Those on the dissenting side claim that they are overpowered, those on the other side are equally vehement that they are balanced and fair. In times of troubles like these, we can only do one thing: fall back on the rules and statistics.

This is a brief overview of the numbers behind these fighting styles, in an attempt to determine if we are dealing with broken rules or not. It will be written primarily in a point-form fashion, just for brevity’s sake.

## Methodology

For the purposes of comparison, I feel the best way to impartially judge the relative effectiveness of each fighting style is through average damage. This is the damage that, over time, one could expect to do each round against an opponent of a certain Armour Class. In DnD, this is what counts during combat: that you hit, and you do damage. Thus, a style with a higher average damage will be more effective in the long run.

Also, while single-handed weapon damage is included for interest’s sake, it is not presented as part of the argument. Weapon-and-Shield has its own set of benefits due to the increase of AC that comes from using a shield. Instead, only styles sans shield should be examined: Bastard Sword, Greatsword, Bows, Two Shortsword and Double-Bladed Sword are the weapons chosen.

The tables are organized as ‘Needed to Roll’ tables. This discounts AC and BAB, which may vary from level to level, instead allowing the focus to be narrower onto the dice.

Determination of average damage is based on comparing what is needed to hit and determining whether 0, 1 or 2 hits occurred, and multiplying these percentages by the average damage for weapons with average strength (.75 for dual-weapon use to represent the average of full and half-strength bonus).

## Examination of Two Weapon Fighting vs Greatsword use

Comparing two shortswords vs a greatsword is an excellent comparison. Including strength, if all weapons hit, the two short swords do the same damage as does the greatsword. The greatsword is also the quintessential two-handed weapon. Using two short swords is the best way to optimize a TWF as a single weapon focus feat then applies to both weapons (using dissimilar weapons forces extra feats to be spent for maximum efficiency). Assume both Fighters for this example have a strength of 16 (+2 damage).

If we look at the average damage tables on their own, we discover something interesting: the average damage is the same for the two fighting styles. Even with only a partial chance that the TWF will hit with both swords, the fact that he may hit more often with just one sword where the greatsword wielder may not hit at all makes the two average out completely:

| Needed To Hit | TWF: SS                | GS                      |
|---------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
|               | 1d6<br>+2 str<br>AVG=5 | 2d6<br>+3 str<br>AVG=10 |
| 2             | 9.5                    | 9.5                     |
| 3             | 9                      | 9                       |
| 4             | 8.5                    | 8.5                     |
| 5             | 8                      | 8                       |
| 6             | 7.5                    | 7.5                     |
| 7             | 7                      | 7                       |
| 8             | 6.5                    | 6.5                     |
| 9             | 6                      | 6                       |
| 10            | 5.5                    | 5.5                     |
| 11            | 5                      | 5                       |
| 12            | 4.5                    | 4.5                     |
| 13            | 4                      | 4                       |
| 14            | 3.5                    | 3.5                     |
| 15            | 3                      | 3                       |
| 16            | 2.5                    | 2.5                     |
| 17            | 2                      | 2                       |
| 18            | 1.5                    | 1.5                     |
| 19            | 1                      | 1                       |
| 20            | 0.5                    | 0.5                     |

However, remember that TWF incurs a -2 penalty (assuming you have both feats), so comparing the two, where the to-hit number is what would be required by the greatsword fighter.

So, when the greatsword fighter needs a 2 to hit, the TWF actually needs a 4, and thus his damage column moves two rows up.

Also remember that the TWF has to use a full-action to get this damage, which further limits him.

| Needed to Hit | TWF: SS                | GS                      |
|---------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
|               | 1d6<br>+2 str<br>AVG=5 | 2d6<br>+3 str<br>AVG=10 |
| 2             | 8.5                    | 9.5                     |
| 3             | 8                      | 9                       |
| 4             | 7.5                    | 8.5                     |
| 5             | 7                      | 8                       |
| 6             | 6.5                    | 7.5                     |
| 7             | 6                      | 7                       |
| 8             | 5.5                    | 6.5                     |
| 9             | 5                      | 6                       |
| 10            | 4.5                    | 5.5                     |
| 11            | 4                      | 5                       |
| 12            | 3.5                    | 4.5                     |
| 13            | 3                      | 4                       |
| 14            | 2.5                    | 3.5                     |
| 15            | 2                      | 3                       |
| 16            | 1.5                    | 2.5                     |
| 17            | 1                      | 2                       |
| 18            | 0.5                    | 1.5                     |
| 19            |                        | 1                       |
| 20            |                        | 0.5                     |

So we can see here that the TWF is already in the lurch. **BUT** what is most often forgot is that the TWF *burned two feats to be able to do this* (unless they are a ranger) – in order to make this a fair comparison, we have to give the greatsword fighter *two extra feats*.

Weapon Focus and Power Attack will allow the greatsword fighter to gain a +1 to damage, with no penalty to hit.

Which, as you can see, leaves the TWF further behind. It gets even worse at second level fighter, where one can gain a +2 to damage from Power Attack.

| Needed to Hit | TWF: SS                | GS PAWF                |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|               | 1d6<br>+2 str<br>AVG=5 | 2d6<br>+3/+1<br>AVG=11 |
| 2             | 8.5                    | 10.45                  |
| 3             | 8                      | 9.9                    |
| 4             | 7.5                    | 9.35                   |
| 5             | 7                      | 8.8                    |
| 6             | 6.5                    | 8.25                   |
| 7             | 6                      | 7.7                    |
| 8             | 5.5                    | 7.15                   |
| 9             | 5                      | 6.6                    |
| 10            | 4.5                    | 6.05                   |
| 11            | 4                      | 5.5                    |
| 12            | 3.5                    | 4.95                   |
| 13            | 3                      | 4.4                    |
| 14            | 2.5                    | 3.85                   |
| 15            | 2                      | 3.3                    |
| 16            | 1.5                    | 2.75                   |
| 17            | 1                      | 2.2                    |
| 18            | 0.5                    | 1.65                   |
| 19            |                        | 1.1                    |
| 20            |                        | 0.55                   |

If the TWF burns another feat and gets a double sword, the damage begins to equalize somewhat, but the TWF still lags behind at the higher ACs, and has spent a third feat to boot.

This third feat could be used by the greatsword wielder to gain Cleave – ending one of the advantages of TWF (see below).

| Needed to Hit | TWF: DS                | GS PAWF                |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|               | 1d8<br>+2 str<br>AVG=6 | 2d6<br>+3/+1<br>AVG=11 |
| 2             | 10.2                   | 10.45                  |
| 3             | 9.6                    | 9.9                    |
| 4             | 9                      | 9.35                   |
| 5             | 8.4                    | 8.8                    |
| 6             | 7.8                    | 8.25                   |
| 7             | 7.2                    | 7.7                    |
| 8             | 6.6                    | 7.15                   |
| 9             | 6                      | 6.6                    |
| 10            | 5.4                    | 6.05                   |
| 11            | 4.8                    | 5.5                    |
| 12            | 4.2                    | 4.95                   |
| 13            | 3.6                    | 4.4                    |
| 14            | 3                      | 3.85                   |
| 15            | 2.4                    | 3.3                    |
| 16            | 1.8                    | 2.75                   |
| 17            | 1.2                    | 2.2                    |
| 18            | 0.6                    | 1.65                   |
| 19            |                        | 1.1                    |
| 20            |                        | 0.55                   |

### Advantages/Disadvantages of TWF

Advantage – On low HD creatures damage is seldom ‘wasted’ – two lower damages can be better than one large one (unless the GS wielder has Cleave)

Advantage – Sometimes, it is necessary to hit, and hitting harder isn’t necessarily better – with two chances to hit vs one, even at the –2, the TWF has a better chance to hit up until they need a 17 or so.

Advantage – If you only hit on a 20 either way, you have double the chances to hit than the GS fighter.

Advantage – When you have two magical weapons of equal power, and you manage to hit twice, you can do more damage as you are doubling the magical damage bonus (but see below).

Advantage – As you are wielding two weapons, you can get a good range of special effects that you can use simultaneously (but see below).

Disadvantage – You need two magic weapons, which in theory will cost more.

Disadvantage – If you do not have magic weapons and you come across an opponent with DR, you may be out of luck.

## **Conclusion**

TWF is underpowered compared to a fighter wielding a greatsword, and even more so when equal feats are taken into consideration. (Whether this is an indication of a greatsword being too powerful is left up to the reader to debate) Neither style benefits from a shield, harming their AC. But the TWF is also penalized by not being able to do their full potential of attacks unless they spend a full action (and thus cannot move).

These trends continue and worsen when the wielder's BAB reaches 6, and they gain a second attack. The TWF now has a maximum of  $3d6 + STR + STR + \frac{1}{2}STR$  damage, while the GS wielder has a maximum of  $4d6 + 3xSTR$ .

## **Suggestions**

Allowing the TWF to always make their two attacks as a standard action is more fair; they still cannot beat the greatsword wielder, but they are not as hosed as often.

3.5e rumours seem to indicate that it may take only one feat to achieve what now takes two with TWF/Ambi. This would also help redress the balance.

Partial Tables

| Needed to Hit | TWF: SS |            |            | TWF: DS    |            |
|---------------|---------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|               | 1d6     | 1d6 +2 str | 1d6 +4 str | 1d8 +2 str | 1d8 +4 str |
|               | 3.5     | 5          | 6.5        | 6          | 7.5        |
| 2             | 6.65    | 9.5        | 12.35      | 11.4       | 14.25      |
| 3             | 6.3     | 9          | 11.7       | 10.8       | 13.5       |
| 4             | 5.95    | 8.5        | 11.05      | 10.2       | 12.75      |
| 5             | 5.6     | 8          | 10.4       | 9.6        | 12         |
| 6             | 5.25    | 7.5        | 9.75       | 9          | 11.25      |
| 7             | 4.9     | 7          | 9.1        | 8.4        | 10.5       |
| 8             | 4.55    | 6.5        | 8.45       | 7.8        | 9.75       |
| 9             | 4.2     | 6          | 7.8        | 7.2        | 9          |
| 10            | 3.85    | 5.5        | 7.15       | 6.6        | 8.25       |
| 11            | 3.5     | 5          | 6.5        | 6          | 7.5        |
| 12            | 3.15    | 4.5        | 5.85       | 5.4        | 6.75       |
| 13            | 2.8     | 4          | 5.2        | 4.8        | 6          |
| 14            | 2.45    | 3.5        | 4.55       | 4.2        | 5.25       |
| 15            | 2.1     | 3          | 3.9        | 3.6        | 4.5        |
| 16            | 1.75    | 2.5        | 3.25       | 3          | 3.75       |
| 17            | 1.4     | 2          | 2.6        | 2.4        | 3          |
| 18            | 1.05    | 1.5        | 1.95       | 1.8        | 2.25       |
| 19            | 0.7     | 1          | 1.3        | 1.2        | 1.5        |
| 20            | 0.35    | 0.5        | 0.65       | 0.6        | 0.75       |

| Needed to Hit | One Handed |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |        |
|---------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
|               | 1d6        | 1d6+2 | 1d6+4 | 1d8   | 1d8+2 | 1d8+4 | 1d10  | 1d10+2 | 1d10+4 |
|               | 3.5        | 5.5   | 7.5   | 4.5   | 6.5   | 8.5   | 5.5   | 7.5    | 9.5    |
| 2             | 3.325      | 5.225 | 7.125 | 4.275 | 6.175 | 8.075 | 5.225 | 7.125  | 9.025  |
| 3             | 3.15       | 4.95  | 6.75  | 4.05  | 5.85  | 7.65  | 4.95  | 6.75   | 8.55   |
| 4             | 2.975      | 4.675 | 6.375 | 3.825 | 5.525 | 7.225 | 4.675 | 6.375  | 8.075  |
| 5             | 2.8        | 4.4   | 6     | 3.6   | 5.2   | 6.8   | 4.4   | 6      | 7.6    |
| 6             | 2.625      | 4.125 | 5.625 | 3.375 | 4.875 | 6.375 | 4.125 | 5.625  | 7.125  |
| 7             | 2.45       | 3.85  | 5.25  | 3.15  | 4.55  | 5.95  | 3.85  | 5.25   | 6.65   |
| 8             | 2.275      | 3.575 | 4.875 | 2.925 | 4.225 | 5.525 | 3.575 | 4.875  | 6.175  |
| 9             | 2.1        | 3.3   | 4.5   | 2.7   | 3.9   | 5.1   | 3.3   | 4.5    | 5.7    |
| 10            | 1.925      | 3.025 | 4.125 | 2.475 | 3.575 | 4.675 | 3.025 | 4.125  | 5.225  |
| 11            | 1.75       | 2.75  | 3.75  | 2.25  | 3.25  | 4.25  | 2.75  | 3.75   | 4.75   |
| 12            | 1.575      | 2.475 | 3.375 | 2.025 | 2.925 | 3.825 | 2.475 | 3.375  | 4.275  |
| 13            | 1.4        | 2.2   | 3     | 1.8   | 2.6   | 3.4   | 2.2   | 3      | 3.8    |
| 14            | 1.225      | 1.925 | 2.625 | 1.575 | 2.275 | 2.975 | 1.925 | 2.625  | 3.325  |
| 15            | 1.05       | 1.65  | 2.25  | 1.35  | 1.95  | 2.55  | 1.65  | 2.25   | 2.85   |
| 16            | 0.875      | 1.375 | 1.875 | 1.125 | 1.625 | 2.125 | 1.375 | 1.875  | 2.375  |
| 17            | 0.7        | 1.1   | 1.5   | 0.9   | 1.3   | 1.7   | 1.1   | 1.5    | 1.9    |
| 18            | 0.525      | 0.825 | 1.125 | 0.675 | 0.975 | 1.275 | 0.825 | 1.125  | 1.425  |
| 19            | 0.35       | 0.55  | 0.75  | 0.45  | 0.65  | 0.85  | 0.55  | 0.75   | 0.95   |
| 20            | 0.175      | 0.275 | 0.375 | 0.225 | 0.325 | 0.425 | 0.275 | 0.375  | 0.475  |

| Needed<br>to Hit | Two<br>Handed |        |       |       |
|------------------|---------------|--------|-------|-------|
|                  | 1d10+3        | 1d10+6 | 2d6+3 | 2d6+6 |
|                  | 8.5           | 11.5   | 10    | 13    |
| 2                | 8.075         | 10.925 | 9.5   | 12.35 |
| 3                | 7.65          | 10.35  | 9     | 11.7  |
| 4                | 7.225         | 9.775  | 8.5   | 11.05 |
| 5                | 6.8           | 9.2    | 8     | 10.4  |
| 6                | 6.375         | 8.625  | 7.5   | 9.75  |
| 7                | 5.95          | 8.05   | 7     | 9.1   |
| 8                | 5.525         | 7.475  | 6.5   | 8.45  |
| 9                | 5.1           | 6.9    | 6     | 7.8   |
| 10               | 4.675         | 6.325  | 5.5   | 7.15  |
| 11               | 4.25          | 5.75   | 5     | 6.5   |
| 12               | 3.825         | 5.175  | 4.5   | 5.85  |
| 13               | 3.4           | 4.6    | 4     | 5.2   |
| 14               | 2.975         | 4.025  | 3.5   | 4.55  |
| 15               | 2.55          | 3.45   | 3     | 3.9   |
| 16               | 2.125         | 2.875  | 2.5   | 3.25  |
| 17               | 1.7           | 2.3    | 2     | 2.6   |
| 18               | 1.275         | 1.725  | 1.5   | 1.95  |
| 19               | 0.85          | 1.15   | 1     | 1.3   |
| 20               | 0.425         | 0.575  | 0.5   | 0.65  |

| Two Handed, Power Attack +1 |        |       |       |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1d10+3                      | 1d10+6 | 2d6+3 | 2d6+6 |
| 9.5                         | 12.5   | 11    | 14    |
| 9.025                       | 11.875 | 10.45 | 13.3  |
| 8.55                        | 11.25  | 9.9   | 12.6  |
| 8.075                       | 10.625 | 9.35  | 11.9  |
| 7.6                         | 10     | 8.8   | 11.2  |
| 7.125                       | 9.375  | 8.25  | 10.5  |
| 6.65                        | 8.75   | 7.7   | 9.8   |
| 6.175                       | 8.125  | 7.15  | 9.1   |
| 5.7                         | 7.5    | 6.6   | 8.4   |
| 5.225                       | 6.875  | 6.05  | 7.7   |
| 4.75                        | 6.25   | 5.5   | 7     |
| 4.275                       | 5.625  | 4.95  | 6.3   |
| 3.8                         | 5      | 4.4   | 5.6   |
| 3.325                       | 4.375  | 3.85  | 4.9   |
| 2.85                        | 3.75   | 3.3   | 4.2   |
| 2.375                       | 3.125  | 2.75  | 3.5   |
| 1.9                         | 2.5    | 2.2   | 2.8   |
| 1.425                       | 1.875  | 1.65  | 2.1   |
| 0.95                        | 1.25   | 1.1   | 1.4   |
| 0.475                       | 0.625  | 0.55  | 0.7   |

Analysis, etc by Oliver Bollmann  
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