



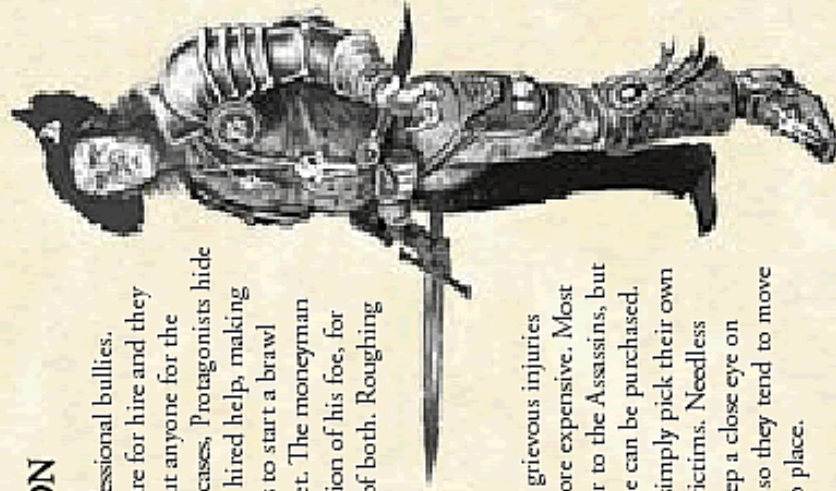
Protagonists

Professional Bullies for Hire

— PROTAGONIST —

DESCRIPTION

Protagonists are professional bullies. Their fighting skills are for hire and they will beat up just about anyone for the right price. In many cases, Protagonists hide the fact that they are hired help, making up ridiculous excuses to start a brawl with the chosen target. The moneyman watches the humiliation of his foe, for enjoyment or profit of both. Roughing up a few locals is comparatively cheap, while more formidable opponents and more grievous injuries are proportionally more expensive. Most leave outright murder to the Assassins, but exceptions to this rule can be purchased. Jobless Protagonists simply pick their own fights and rob their victims. Needless to say, Watchmen keep a close eye on known Protagonists, so they tend to move quickly from place to place.



— Protagonist Advance Scheme —

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fcl
+10%	—	+10%	—	+10%	—	+10%	—

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
+1	+2	—	—	—	—	—	—

Skills: Dodge Blow, Gossip or Haggle, Intimidate, Ride

Talents: Disarm or Quick Draw, Menacing or Suave, Street Fighting, Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Injure, Strike to Stun

Trappings: Medium Armour (Mail Shirt and Leather Jack), Shield, Riding Horse with Saddle and Harness

Career Entries: Bailiff, Bodyguard, Bounty Hunter, Estalian Diestro, Pit Fighter

Career Exits: Duellist, Pit Fighter, Racketeer, Thief, Thug

Credits and Further Reading

Article compiled by Dave Allen.

Sources include the Core Rulebooks for both editions of WFRP, Mistaken Identity, Bar Room Brawl, Lichemaster and Blood Money by C L Werner.

Many thanks to Dan White for his help with this article, and his list of Protagonist taunts in particular.

Alfreda Snert - Protagonist

Alfreda is a tough and ruthless individual, accustomed to putting his life on the line for his daily bread. He looks the part as well, the scar down his left cheek may have damaged his looks, but it makes him look menacing and people tend to treat him seriously. He is also immensely strong, and his natural ability (and inclination) to throw his weight around make him a natural for the job.

Alfreda is not above taking on jobs that leave his opponent dead. He left Altdorf after an altercation in the Mermaid, one of the sleazy inns that line Altdorf's docklands, during which he killed a Trollslayer (Alfreda never trusted nonhumans much anyway, and the merchant who contracted him paid handsomely to see the impertinent dwarf dead).

However, recent changes to the Altdorf Dock Watch have seen them less given to corruption and more effective at tracking criminals, so to escape the heat Alfreda travelled to Wurtbad in order to hook up with an old contact there. This is Leopold Arschel, who organises a number of activities, of both legitimate and illegal sorts, in the town's lively Stahlstrasse. This area can provide plenty of opportunities for a leg-breaker like Alfreda, as the abundance of taverns, brothels and gambling dens that can be found there often rely on strongmen and threatening types to lean on cheats, tattle-tales, belligerent drunks and customers who seem less than eager to settle their debts.

Leopold has seen to it that the Protagonist has a regular source of income, but recently he received a commission for a job that he was uncomfortable to be linked to, and he and Alfreda sat inside a discrete booth in the Splintered Skull tavern to discuss the ethics of the contract. The offer took the form of a letter, delivered by an Imperial Expressways Coachman working the Nuln-Wurtbad route, promising a handsome reward if Leopold saw to it that a member of the Vintner's Guild was soundly beaten.

Leopold would never cross one of the town's powerful guildsmen, and has warned Alfreda not to accept any jobs of this sort. In fact, Leopold thinks there might be an even better reward in it if he could discover the individuals behind the offer. He has received a tip-off from a friend of his in the Watch that one of the town's Rat Catchers, a man called Jakob Bleich, may also be interested in finding out whoever's behind this.

Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
34	28	50*	36	32	34	32	30
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	12	5	3	4	0	0	3

* An advance has been taken in this characteristic.

Skills: Common Knowledge (The Empire), Dodge Blow, Gossip, Haggle, Intimidate, Ride, Speak Language (Reikspiel).

Talents: Disarm, Menacing, Savvy, Street Fighting, Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Stun, Strike to Injure, Very Strong.

Some Old Worlders get so used to its violent ways that they resort to fist or sword to earn every penny. Protagonists live by their combat skills, picking fights for small sums - even just for the price of a drink.

In many cases, Protagonists are hired to provide a beating or a damaging fencing lesson, hiding the fact that there is someone in the background who profits from or enjoys the results by provoking the fight over some ridiculous trifle.

Roughing up a few locals will be comparatively cheap, while more able opponents and more extensive injuries are proportionately more expensive, and a murder might earn the Protagonist enough to live on for several months.

When no client is forthcoming, Protagonists generally travel from place to place, challenging those they meet and robbing their defeated victims. Of course the risks are high, local law enforcement officials do not take kindly to the Protagonist's lifestyle, and an error of judgement in sizing up prospective opponents can be fatal. The Protagonists add a strangely random air to the endemic violence of the Old World.

Bullying for Fun and Profit

The Protagonist is one of the careers that are better thought of as lifestyle choices, a few Protagonists may be employed on a permanent basis by a Crime Lord or a perverse Noble, but most are simply thugs with a practised eye for a suitable victim.

Protagonists usually make a living in two ways. They obtain commissions to humiliate, hurt or kill people from vengeful or sadistic patrons, and they may go on to rob their victims if they win a fight.

Clearly, advertising yourself as the sort of person who is willing to beat other people up for money is a risky business, and any Protagonist who boasts of how he makes his living will soon find himself questioned by the local Watch, or subjected to a pre-emptive or punitive beating.

Instead "professional" Protagonists usually get in touch with a Fence, who will direct customers to him for a small fee of his own.

Some Protagonists become good at providing an opportunistic beating, and suggesting that his audience provide him with remuneration or favours for the "entertainment" he has just provided them.

The Day Job

A player who takes on a Protagonist might wish to consider how their character makes a steady living.

He may have a patron, a rich individual who wishes to keep a leg-breaker on the books. This could be a perverse Noble who enjoys seeing strangers hurt and humiliated, it could be a Fence who wants to have a professional bully he can point customers to (or threaten them with), it could be a Crime Lord who wishes to rely on someone with a little more flair than a standard Thug.

The Protagonist may have a day job, such as some sort of small-time tradesman or labourer. The Protagonist skills and advance scheme can be justified by saying the character's heart isn't in this and that he really lives for bullying. A Protagonist may pretty much be nothing more than a Thug or Vagabond in the eyes of those who notice him, and only a cold streak would distinguish him to those in the know.

Ex-army types also make good Protagonists, having been trained for a life of conflict and made callous by sights of war, they may find it hard to adjust to polite society and so find a way to continue to make a living through performing acts of violence.

Typical Charges for a Protagonist's Services

There is no such thing as typical charges for the services of a Protagonist, they vary from place to place, the type of person the Protagonist is and the type of person the intended victim is. The problem of typical charges is exacerbated by the fact that Protagonist is a lifestyle choice and not technically a career as such. "Protagonists" such as Fiarel Leafmantle (see opposite) would probably take offence should someone approach them with an actual commission.

However, in places where the services of a Protagonist can be found with relative ease, and where a number might compete with one another (such as the docks of Altdorf, for example) a rough idea of a "best price" for certain services exists. Note though that even fairly hardened Protagonists may balk at inflicting serious injury or death on a person they haven't met, and that they may have moral scruples that prevent them from attacking certain types of individual. Most Protagonists will also think twice before accepting a commission to attack a Noble or a Priest. Some commissions might even lead to a Protagonist becoming angry with his clients, informing their intended target or the local Watch about the requested attack, or even attacking them himself.

The risk of this (which is admittedly small, few Protagonists hold much in the way of moral scruples and realise that in order to make their living they can't be fussy about who they hurt) can be mitigated by contacting a Protagonist through a Fence. Most Fences will get to know Protagonists in the area and find out what they will be willing to do to a potential victim. The Fence will take a cut or charge a fee, which will tend to be a modest 10% in most cases, but may rise up to 25% if the requested violence is to be especially severe, or if the intended victim is a person of some importance.

A scare, such as an aggressive insult that need not lead to violence - *3 pennies*
A humiliation, like a public challenge that the victim may bow out of - *8 pennies*
A harassment, challenging the victim as above over an extended period - *1 shilling*
An infliction of a trifling injury, such as a bruise or split lip - *1 shilling, 4 pennies*
An infliction of a small injury, such as a shallow cut or broken digit - *2 shillings*
A sound beating, leaving the victim hurt but in a stable condition - *5 shillings*
A violent thrashing, leaving the victim badly hurt and in a serious condition - *12 shillings*
An infliction of multiple injuries, leaving the victim in a critical condition - *2 crowns*
Murder (theoretically, many Protagonists will draw the line long before this) - *5 crowns*

As mentioned above though, many factors will lead to the increase of the price, and the following factors would certainly be considered by many Protagonists:

- The reputation and social station of the client.
- The reputation of the Fence the client used to contact the Protagonist.
- The reputation and social status of the intended victim.
- The species and gender of the victim.
- Whether or not the attack has to take place in public.
- If so, the sort of area the attack is likely to take place.
- Is the Protagonist currently under any sort of "heat" from the law?
- The experience and skill of the Protagonist.

Caught Between Cults The man in the Ten-Tailed Cat was recommended to Oxtongue Volt by Judder the Fence and the two of them slid into a secluded booth at the back of the bar room. Oxtongue is well known to all the serious drinkers of Talabheim as a practised pugilist who is willing to start a brawl for the most tenuous of reasons.

The man struck Oxtongue as a little shifty and strange, but such displays of paranoia are not uncommon in Talabheim and Oxtongue was soon reassured by his clever speech and the pouch of silver coins he offered. What the man wanted Oxtongue to do was to accost a man called Gunter Hegel in a public place and make him bleed. How he did this was not important, but if none of the man's blood was spilt then the man would keep his silver to himself.

With the help of Judder the Fence Oxtongue learnt a little about Gunter, and was able to find something to be angry with the man about. He was one of the legion of clerks that the chancellor of Talabheim needed to administer the multitudinous and labyrinthine taxes of the city, and Oxtongue was only too happy to mash Gunter's nose whilst accusing the man of taking bread from the mouths of orphans in order to see that the Countess received a new brocade gown, or something.

Gunter sank to his knees and pressed his hand to his broken face, but he could not stem the flow of tiny pale maggots that leaked from his nostrils. Gunter Hegel was thus exposed as an altered worshipper of the Fly Lord and, whilst he was feted by the city authorities for exposing a mutant, Oxtongue began to suspect that he had been used as a pawn in a secret dispute between the fractious followers of the Ruinous Powers. He has not heard back from the man who promised him the pouch of silver, and keeps a wary eye on anyone he meets who bears the marks of pox.

Steiger Lieb Back in '21 when times were hard, The Bucket of Blood was one of the Borderlands most violent dives and of all the clientele Steiger Lieb was known as a man to keep on the right side of. Rumour had it that Steiger was the inbred son of a clan from the Empire, who had moved to the Borderlands in order to escape the scorn their ill reputation earned them. On good nights he was satisfied to sit at one of the better tables playing cards. When he got his blood up though (or when his purse was empty) he soon accused one of his opponents of cheating, then bloodshed always followed.

Steiger left the Borderlands for the Empire later that year, his luck had run out, the towns citizens were organising to have him shot and his wife didn't want him any more. But every time he settled in a town the people soon turned against him. No matter how warmly they welcomed a strong sword arm and hard labourer at first they soon ran him out of town, as though the blood on his hands was there for every citizen to see.

One dark Kaldzeit night Steiger finally made it to Salzenmund, arriving on foot half drowned by the driving frozen rain. The guard who demanded a toll from the bedraggled figure before him met Morr before he could raise the alarm, and Steiger slipped unnoticed into Salzenmund's vice-ridden docklands.

Dora Essel wants someone hurt and Kurt Weiss, her regular laughing powder dealer, took her to a docklands tavern and introduced her to a tall and thin man with black hair and mean features, a man who speaks Reikspiel with an odd accent. Her commission is an odd one though, as the person she wants beaten up is herself.

Adventure Seeds for Protagonists

A Trip to Tilea. Disturbed by the constant rumours of Skaven beneath his town Direktor Liebrecht Schleicher, head of the Delberz guild for safety and sanitation, has studied accounts of the histories of Tobaró and Miragliano. Based on his knowledge of these cities he is planning to finance an expedition to Tilea in order to hire the services of some of the country's most experienced Skaven hunters.

There is a darker side to the Direktor, he is a vain man and something of a sadist. It is something of a passion for him to get involved in an argument with a man from out of town only to step aside and let his friend, Nan Mahler, take over when things get heated. Liebrecht greatly enjoys watching Nan pummel the various tourists, foreigners and country folk who he has picked a fight with, but he's willing to go without this form of entertainment for a few months as he has arranged for Nan to join the group he has put together to undertake the expedition.

The Skaven have had word of the planned excursion to Tilea, and have contacted human agents of the Poison Claw cult to organise a welcoming committee. The Tavelli family of Miragliano have served the Skaven for generations and, like many Tilean families of any size and import, their ranks contain many fine bladesmen. Fabio Tavelli, a Duellist of some skill, has heard that the enemies of his masters have a notable fighter in their ranks. Fabio is keen to beat Nan at his own game, if and when the Protagonist finally reaches Miragliano.

The Union. Within the lawless lands of the Border Princes violence is arguably even more endemic than in other areas of the Old World, and in the town of Hangman's Ending exists The Union, a group of Thugs, Protagonists and Assassins for hire. The Union have their own Guildhouse and a strict group of rules for their conduct (though there is plenty of skulduggery, of course). The only rule governing the Union is that they do not target anyone who belongs to their parent principality - though Hangman's Ending changes hands too often for any realm to claim it for any length of time.

Part of the reason for this is that The Union is a very lucrative resource, people come to Hangman's Ending from all over the Old World in order to hire a Protagonist (or a group of Protagonists) to perform some beatings or dish out some threats.

They are primarily used to keep workforces in line, or used by the criminal underground to back up threats. They even have differing rates (and members) for different areas of society; 'Priest' who specialises with religious beatings, Zeb 'Thumb-breaker' Villanstein, who sorts out the peasants and Frederick 'The Broker' Bruick who deals with Burghers and the like. Rumour is that they even employ a variety of nonhumans.

The Commission Jeb Knakker isn't at all fussy about who hires him to hurt whoever, but his latest customers have given him the creeps. A creepy Tilean and his stunted companion who was swathed head to toe in a ragged cloak and hood that hid his face. He spoke in a high pitched whine. Both of them stank of night soil and piss.

The target of their ire also seems unlikely, a willowy and wan youth who studies Bestiaria at the University of Altdorf. Apparently Jeb is to break his fingers one at a time until he chooses a different subject for his dissertation. The money's alright, but what's the poor inky ever done to deserve this, wonders Jeb.

Fiarel Leafmantle

"Ah, excuse me for a moment won't you? The gentleman in the corner seems to object to the shape of my ears. I'll buy us all a drink when I get back."

Now in middle adolescence for an Elf, Fiarel decided to leave his native Loren forest and see the world outside. He had no clear idea of how he was going to get by, until someone in a tavern made a derogatory comment about Elves. After a brief but lively discussion outside, Fiarel found that unconscious humans can be a reasonable source of income. He briefly considered life as a Footpad, but the Protagonist lifestyle appeals to his sense of natural justice - if he waits for a racist comment and then deals with the person who made it, then honour is satisfied as well as material need. Besides, being insulted by humans is so amusing - rather like watching a blind man trying to hit a target with a longbow.

Fiarel is tall and well-built for an Elf, with white hair and blue-green eyes. He is softly spoken with a light-hearted and pleasant manner which seems at odds with his profession. When he fights, however, he fights to win - there is no blow too foul, no tactic too low, provided it works.

Protecting Oneself from a Protagonist

Most Old Worlders, particularly those of some importance, know that they live within a violent society and take some pains to protect themselves from its excesses.

For the poor and powerless these pains extend to little more than travelling in groups and keeping their heads down when in strange places. This siege mentality can mean that a sense of community builds up in poorer areas, and travelling Protagonists find that rural taverns often prove difficult nuts to crack, and that even seemingly obvious victims can summon support when threatened or insulted.

Rich individuals tend not to go unaccompanied either, and they are able to hire bodyguards and thugs of their own. Particularly canny rich people may even keep a Fence or two on the books, which not only buys them some protection from Protagonists, but may even earn them the names of the people who offered to pay to see them beaten up.

There is also some protection afforded by the law, albeit that the justice of the Old World is rough, corruptible and varies greatly from place to place. Protagonists who come to the attention of a local Watch force or Verenan priest can find themselves arrested and tried under a number of charges; such as disturbing the peace, slander, money with menaces, affray, assault, robbery, and murder.

Watch Captains and Fences often come to understandings, and few Watch Captains refuse to accept bribes in order to keep a profitable Protagonist at large. Sometimes it can even be dangerous to complain to the Watch about a Protagonist, as they may prove sympathetic with the bully and agree with his justifications for starting the fight, meaning that the victim of a Protagonist ends up a victim of the law as well. That said, whilst a Watch officer may or may not be corrupt Fences most certainly are. They are usually willing to sell out a Protagonist whose liberty affects the reputation of the local Watch if the price is right. Pressure from Shallyans and Verenans also make life difficult for Protagonists. Any Protagonist stupid enough to perform overtly violent jobs in one place for long is certain to find himself in gaol, no matter how good his contacts are.

In the end practically minded Old Worlders tend to take the view that the best form of defence is offence, and that the best way to protect yourself from the attentions of a Protagonist is to hurt them before they hurt you. However, this attitude can lead to lending the acts of a Protagonist some legitimacy, and a clever Protagonist can exploit the hot-headedness of certain Old Worlders to justify the fight that follows. For this reason, northerners, foreigners and Dwarfs can make favourite targets of a Protagonist.

Robber Knights

Thanks to their violent way of life most Protagonists tend not to remain in any one place for long, and sometimes a Protagonist will become so notorious that there isn't a Watchman, Bounty Hunter or Thug in the city who isn't keeping a watchful eye out for him. In order to maintain their lifestyle such Protagonists have to move regularly, and whilst in rural locales they often take on the mantle of the robber knight.

Typically this involves staking out an area like a crossroads or a bridge and rudely demanding a toll from people who use it. Most of the Protagonists will be quick to perceive insult in any reluctance to pay this toll, and demand satisfaction in order to reap a larger reward from his defeated victims.

This can be a good way of escaping from the attentions of human authorities, as an area outside the jurisdiction of Roadwardens is not too difficult to find, but it is also very risky as any long tenure in the wilderness can attract the attention of the outlaws, beastmen, mutants and greenskins that live there.

In order to survive in such an environment Protagonists may have to befriend the inhabitants of a nearby village or coaching inn in order to have a secure base to work from, and to shelter in during bad weather or long, dark nights. Of course the Protagonist would ensure that such generous protectors receive a fair cut of his takings, or are too intimidated to refuse to help him.

Max Ernst

"Why don't you country bumpkins wash the swill off you before you enter a civilised city?"

Ernst has a reputation around Altdorf as a heartless and brutal thug and a person to be avoided if at all possible. He is a mean-looking cold-blooded sadist, a tall, gaunt character with aquiline features and a deep scar along his left cheek. He never wears any colour other than black, and rarely says anything that does not contain some sort of insult.

Max haunts the many inns along Altdorf's waterfront. He typically waits for some kind of argument or brawl to take place and then tries to exacerbate the situation so that he can profit from it somehow. Max isn't merely motivated by the chance to make money though, he is quite happy to indulge in violence for its own sake.

Highwayman as Career Exit?

The career exits for a Protagonist are mainly urban in nature, and some may feel that there is little to distinguish the way of life of a Protagonist who acts as a robber knight in rural locations, and that of the Highwayman.

As such GMs may like to allow a PC with a Protagonist character to add Highwayman to his Career Exits provided he has spent some time making a living in this way.

A Short List of Protagonist Taunts (Far from Comprehensive)

- "I've seen corpses/greenskins/Brettonians/Ulricans prettier than you."*
- "Are you going to use that blade of yours before you faint, or what?"*
- "If you bleed on me when I knock you over, there's really going to be trouble."*
- "Nothing personal, you're just business. And an ugly business it is too."*
- "Let's see that blue blood of yours."*
- "My old ma used to say 'never mock the afflicted'. Are you afflicted boy? 'Cos the eyes say no, but the drool suggests otherwise."*
- "Wash the mud out of your ears farmer boy. I don't want anything cushioning the blow."*
- "What are you dressed as, an Orc/Ostlander/Tilean?"*
- "I'm doing the work of the gods, son. Throwing out the rubbish. Trouble is, I've done that already and I'm left with you. Was it dark at the bottom of the barrel?"*
- "Your father was a rabbit and your mother smelt of gooseberries!"*
- "So that's what the bottom of the food chain looks like."*
- "Is there a Sister of Shallya in the house? This ****'s going to be in the need of some serious healing and mercy in a minute."*
- "I've been paid to give you a world of pain. How much will you pay me not to take your stuff afterwards?"*
- "With ears like that, you should have heard there was a price on your head."*
- "You're worth five shillings? I feel so bad about that, that I'll have to beat up your family as well."*
- "I bumped into a Goatman in the forest. It wanted me to tell you that it wants it's face back."*
- "I'm gonna box your ears boy... they'd look good on my mantelpiece."*
- "Looking that scared suits you."*
- "Does your mother work for a coaching line? I imagine that's hard slog, what with pulling the carriages and all."*
- "You're not even good enough for cannon fodder."*
- "Is there any Halfling blood in you? I can smell the pies from here."*
- "Which knee do you need?"*
- "I've dug a ditch, now I'm going to put you in it."*
- "If there was a law against stupidity you would be locked up for life."*
- "You can run boy... for now, but you can't hide. I can hear your blubbing from miles away."*
- "Vomit has its uses. You however, have none."*
- "I tracked you with my dog here. He's after a mate."*
- "You're the only person I've ever seen who would look prettier with a sword sticking out of him."*
- "Sorry to keep you from the village idiot meeting, someone else will have to take the chair."*
- "I would have allowed you to look in my mirror, but even I'm not that cruel."*
- "To which end am I speaking?"*
- "Felicitations, madam."*
- "You've got a yellow streak a mile-wide. How do you think I found you?"*
- "I see even Averlanders don't breed true these days."*
- "When they were giving out good looks, you were still in bed weren't you?"*
- "When you're dead, may I give your clothes to my daughter?"*
- "You've got nothing between your ears but hair, and even that's dumb."*
- "Your breathing offends me."*
- "Are you wearing those garments on a dare?"*
- "You're so stupid you can't even manage to be a complete idiot."*
- "The world says it wants its air back."*
- "You smell so bad even the wind won't touch you."*
- "The last time I met someone like you my sword came down with the pox."*
- "I had heard rumours of Ratmen, but until now I didn't believe them."*
- "What was it your Dooming said about me, boy?"*