The Critical Hit Handbook

By **Saintheart** of the Giant in the Playground Forums.

Introduction

Let's get the obvious out of the way: you came here because you love that delicious little entry in a weapon's description line that says 20/x3. Or 19-20/x2. You love that moment when the dice turns up right and all of a sudden you're rolling many more dice to determine how much damage you've done against the target, watching as the DM shakes his head witnessing his monster die a rather more rapid death than he had counted on…

Or you're a DM who came here because a player is begging you for what looks like a critfishing build, and you want to satisfy your conscience that you're not offending some grand Platonic God of RAW by allowing the dirty player something he really shouldn't get. Or maybe you're looking to unleash a critfishing BBEG on the party. Or maybe you're just interested in how critical hits work.

Welcome, then. That's what this handbook is about. It's about how to utilise, optimise, and maximise critical hits under D&D 3.5.

The structure of this handbook is as set out at left, and broadly speaking, covers theory and some pragmatic discussions about whether critical hit optimisation is worth it, then gets into the comprehensive lists of options, builds, and lastly gets to discussions about Spell Criticals, Pathfinder, and Second Party sources.

I have reviewed, and listed below, 196 mundane and specific weapons in relation to their critical hit qualities. I have reviewed and listed below 350 distinct feats, class features, spells, prestige classes, soulmelds, weapon qualities, magic weapons, magic items, affiliations, maneuvers, stances, and other assorted materials for their possible use in critical hit builds. These cover all subjects relating to critical hits: threat range, multiplier, confirmation bonuses, rider effects. There is also a distinct section on optimising critical hits in spells. The numbers above don't count second party sources or Pathfinder options, which are included for completeness. It also doesn't count the individual spells I trawled and listed below for their utilisation with critical hits. As far as I can tell after reviewing threads, books, magazines, and web articles across multiple forums, this is the most comprehensive guide/handbook/listing currently in existence of all critical hit options available under 3.5. If I have missed something, I would very much like to know about it.

And needless to say much of what is here could not have been achieved other than by standing on the shoulders of giants; I will talk about those giants at the very end.

Colour rating system

A colour rating system is *de rigeur* for handbooks, so far be it from me to break with practice. I will say upfront that it is very tricky to try and assign a granulated range of recommendations in the critical hit space, because there isn't a single way to build a critfishing character and there is some variation in how hard you want to build it. So I've tentatively arrived on the following simple system:

Blue – a critical hit option with general application and assists materially with some aspect of critical hits, or a critical hit option good enough that the limits on its availability are on balance worth the opportunity cost of picking it up. These are relatively rare, but I caution you they're also tricky to amass in a build without an understanding DM and a lot of sourcebooks open and available.

Black – an option that is situational, but still of some assistance. Most critical hit options fall into this range. Unlike some aspects of 3.5, critical hit features tend to have been so heavily balanced (if that's a thing) that you typically don't get a *lot* that's good in a single option without paying some price in the option's narrowness of triggering or other costs.

Red – an option that is too situational and narrow and/or provides minimal assistance for its opportunity costs. These aren't too common, but neither are they rare. They are listed here for comprehensiveness or indeed on the off chance they might one day feature in an Iron Chef competition as the special, truly disgustingly bad ingredient.

List of abbreviations

I've drawn from a lot of sources here, obviously, and to save space I have abbreviated all the titles of the relevant books. Those abbreviations are below. Not all of these sources are cited in the text, but if I do add further to them, they'll use the following codes:

AEG = Arms and Equipment Guide (3.0)
BoED = Book of Exalted Deeds
BoVD = Book of Vile Darkness (3.0)
CArc = Complete Arcane
CAdv = Complete Adventurer
CChamp = Complete Champion
CDiv = Complete Divine
CMage = Complete Mage
CPsi = Complete Psionic
CSco = Complete Scoundrel
CWar = Complete Warrior
CoR = Champions of Ruin
CoV = Champions of Valor
CScape = Cityscape
DrCo = Dragon Compendium
DlanceCS = Dragonlance Campaign Setting
DMagic = Dragon Magic
DMG = Dungeon Master's Guide
DMG 2 = Dungeon Master's Guide 2
DoFRN = Dragons of Faerun
DotU = Drow of the Underdark
Dragon ### = Dragon Magazine Issue ###

DMicon = Draconomicon
DScape = Dungeonscape
Dungeon ### = Dungeon Magazine Issue ###
ECS = Eberron Campaign Setting
EE = Elder Evils
EoE = Exemplars of Evil
FN = Five Nations
Fburn= Frostburn
FC1 = Fiendish Codex 1
FC2 = Fiendish Codex 2
FF1 = Fiend Folio
FRCS = Forgotten Realms Campaign Settings (3.0)
FoW = Forge of War (Eberron)
F&P = Faiths and Pantheons
GWalk = Ghostwalk (3.0)
LEoF = Lost Empires of Faerun
LibMort = Libris Mortis
LoM = Lords of Madness
MinHB = Miniatures Handbook
MIC = Magic Item Compendium
MM = Monster Manual
MM2 = Monster Manual II (3.0)
MM3 = Monster Manual III
MM4 = Monster Manual IV
MM5 = Monster Manual V
MoF = Magic of Faerûn (3.0)
MoI = Magic of Incarnum
MotW = Masters of the Wild (3.0)
PGtF = Player's Guide to Faerûn
PGtE = Player's Guide to Eberron
PHB = Player's Handbook
PHB 2 = Player's Handbook 2
PlanHB = Planar Handbook
PoF = Power of Faerûn
RoD = Races of Destiny
RotD = Races of the Dragon
RoE = Races of Eberron
RoF = Races of Faerûn (3.0)
RoS = Races of Stone
RoTW = Races of the Wild
SStorm = Sandstorm
SSth = Shining South
SoS = Secrets of Sarlona
SoX = Secrets of Xen'drik
SrpKgdm = Serpent Kingdoms
SpC = Spell Compendium
S&F = Sword and Fist (3.0)
SM = Silver Marches (3.0)
SavSpec = Savage Species (3.0)
SRD = System Reference Document [All game rules from 3.5 PHB, DMG, MM, XPH and some parts of UA]

Strmrch = City of Stormreach
Stmwrk = Stormwrack
ToB = Tome of Battle
ToM = Tome of Magic
UA = Unearthed Arcana
Und = Underdark (3.0)
XPH = Expanded Psionics Handbook
Waterdeep = Waterdeep, City of Splendors
WoL = Weapons of Legacy

I also tend to use the following abbreviations:

ACF = Alternative Class Feature, i.e. something that allows you to swap a standard class feature for an alternative that a book gives you.

BAB = Base Attack Bonus.

EWP = Exotic Weapon Proficiency. Remember this one, it's going to come up a lot.

MAD = Multi-Ability Dependent, i.e. you need good scores in two or more stats (STR, CON, DEX, INT, WIS, CHA) to make the character work at a basic level. Also see why generally people don't use Paladins

PrC = Prestige Class.

RAW = Rules As Written, i.e. what we were given on the page

RAI = Rules As Intended, i.e. what the writers likely *thought* they gave us on the page.

SAD = Single Ability Dependent, i.e. you only need good scores in one stat to make the character work. If you have this, paradoxically you shouldn't *be* very sad.

TWF = Two Weapon Fighting.

WOTC = Wizards of the Coast, the publishers of 3.0 and 3.5 D&D.

The Rules of Critical Hits

How do you get a critical hit?

Not automatically. Even a natural 20 doesn't give you one. No, imposing a critical hit is a three-step process, albeit the last one is the most satisfying.

Step One: Score a critical threat.
All weapons – melee, ranged, even a weedy, plinking not-monk unarmed attack, have a critical threat range. For example, the longsword has a critical threat range of 19-20. This means the weapon's critical threat range rolls of 19 and 20. If it's not otherwise specified, a weapon's threat range is always a "20".

If, when you're making an attack roll--

(1) the number rolled on the dice is within the weapon's critical threat range; **and**
(2) your total attack roll is greater than the target's AC

--then you have scored a threat on the target.

A natural 20 roll is always a critical threat, because a natural 20 is always a hit, and all weapons have a critical threat range of at least 20. It is also notable, and sometimes overlooked, that any spell that requires an attack roll can score a critical hit too. In those cases, you're generally going to have to score a natural 20.

Very importantly, if you score a critical threat, then you have hit the target. That's inherent in the fact you passed the target's AC. But we don't roll damage yet, because we still have to confirm whether it's a critical hit.

Step Two: Confirm the critical hit.
You make another attack roll, with all the same modifiers as the attack roll you just made. If this roll also results in a hit against the target's AC, the original hit is confirmed, and you have scored a critical hit. The d20 doesn't have to come up with a number within your critical threat range this time; your total attack roll just has to exceed the target's AC. If this roll doesn't exceed the target's AC, the critical hit is *not* confirmed and is just a normal hit, and normal damage applies.

Step Three: Roll the damage.
As said, if you scored a threat, but you didn't confirm the critical hit, you just roll damage as you would normally.

But if you did confirm the critical hit, that's where we look at the weapon's critical hit *multiplier.* In the case of a longsword, the multiplier is "x2", or doubled. For other weapons

such as the dwarven waraxe, the multiplier is x3, and thus, tripled; if it's a x4, the damage is quadrupled, and so on. If it isn't otherwise specified, a weapon's critical multiplier is always x2.

You don't just multiply the damage you rolled. Instead, you roll your damage more than once, with all your usual bonuses, and add the rolls together. The number of times you roll is specified by the multiplier.

Can you do just a straight doubling or tripling of your normal damage roll? No, for two reasons:

(1) It's specified that you have to roll.
(2) Certain types of damage are not doubled.

The SRD simply says "*Extra damage dice over and above a weapon's normal damage is not multiplied when you score a critical hit*." That means things such as sneak attack, skirmish damage or even extra energy damage dice on your weapon are not doubled. In general, anything variable in the damage calculation can't be multiplied on a critical hit -- apart from the weapon's own damage dice.

However, the SRD's instruction to roll damage "with all your usual bonuses", by definition means that any *fixed* number on the damage roll – for example, your STR bonus to damage, a bonus on damage from Power Attack, or from a weapon quality like *Collision* – is multiplied on a critical hit damage roll too. In general, if it's a flat bonus, it gets multiplied on a critical hit.

Lastly, a weapon or a character may have certain effects or abilities that trigger only on scoring a critical hit (or even on scoring a critical threat.) Some function in addition to normal damage; some substitute their effect for the critical damage they do. These can be powerful, but we'll be looking at them in their own sections.

<u>Some things are not subject to critical hits</u>

For whatever game design or fluff reason, some stuff just doesn't take additional damage on a critical hit. This doesn't mean you can't *do* damage against them, it just means you can't double or triple your damage on a critical threat being scored. The list of annoyances:

- Constructs
- Elementals
- Oozes
- Plants
- Swarms
- Undead
- Any creature under the benefits of the "Fortification" armor quality.

This amounts to about one third of all creatures you'll encounter in your travels. However, there's one thing to re-emphasise: scoring a critical hit is distinct from scoring a critical threat. If you have a feature which functions on a critical threat being rolled, these creatures are still vulnerable to that feature. And a critical threat without being confirmed is still a normal hit.

Many times, critical options require you to go through the motions of scoring a critical hit just to see whether a rider effect is activated. That's a legacy of how WOTC worded the "immunity" in this area.

As it is, the "immunity" to critical hits isn't actually immunity. The word is just shorthand for the longer principle that if a creature is immune to critical hits, it's just not subject to the additional damage in a critical hit. *Sometimes* the creature also immune to a rider effect that requires a critical hit to trigger, but the default is that a magic weapon which imposes a given effect on a critical hit will still impose that effect on a critical-immune creature – you just won't get the additional damage dice. See page 222 of the DMG for the explicit wording.

The 3.5 FAQ proclaims itself to "correct" this and say that something immune to critical hits is also immune to rider effects. That statement can be ignored. Why? Because it's not an official errata or update to a third edition text, and per the PHB's own errata, primary sources remain correct unless an errata says otherwise. The FAQ at best is advice, not a binding rule.

("*Hey! You over there writing the critfishing handbook, why'd you leave out creatures under concealment!?*" I left them out because it's a common misconception that something which has concealment is immune to a critical hit. Not so; check your Rules Compendium again. Concealment confers immunity to *precision damage*, i.e. sneak attack or skirmish damage or the like. While things immune to precision damage *tend* to also not be subject to critical hits, they are two separate categories of immunity.)

Where concealment *might* get important is where you're a rogue-ish type who uses Telling Blow to add sneak attack or skirmish damage to your critical hits. Here, and here alone, is there an argument that a target with concealment doesn't have that damage added. Me, I don't think it's quite so simple, since Telling Blow is just adding extra damage on a critical hit, not meeting the requirements for sneak attack or skirmish. That said, since stuff that's not subject to critical hits will often be immune to precision damage as well, it's more an academic point than real.

And while we're at it? Concealment, unfortunately, *does* cut across whether you've scored a critical threat. Concealment applies to an attack roll, which is needed to score a critical threat. Even a natural 20, at least by RAW, is subject to a concealment check if the creature has it, although many DMs houserule that the "always a hit" quality of a natural 20 cuts through concealment as well. However, because concealment only applies once, it doesn't affect a critical confirmation roll (since to get to a confirmation roll, you've already scored a critical threat and therefore have scored a hit after concealment was rolled and didn't stop the hit.)

<u>How do wider critical threat ranges work</u>?

If someone says your critical threat range is "doubled", that just means you double the range of numbers on a d20 that can trigger a critical threat. So if we double a 20 critical threat range, the weapon's critical threat range is 19-20. If we double a 19-20 range, it becomes 17-20. If we double an 18-20 range, it becomes 15-20. And so on.

The standard rule in 3.5 is that a doubled double is just a triple, no matter how loudly the mathematicians may scream otherwise. For example, let's commit sacrilege and say that we

allow Improved Critical and *keen* to stack, which 3.5 doesn't allow on RAW. A 20 critical threat range would become a 19-20 under *keen,* and Improved Critical would then make it 18-20. On the other hand, a weapon with an 18-20 critical threat range would become a 15-20 critical threat range under *keen,* and then a 12-20 critical threat range under Improved Critical.

Occasionally, a critical threat range is said to be "increased by one". If so, it usually just adds one dice result to the range: a 20 becomes 19-20, a 19-20 becomes an 18-20, an 18-20 becomes a 17-20. And so on.

Obviously the way we would prefer to put our threat ranges together is to get the highest possible *base* critical range and *then* apply something like Improved Critical. WOTC didn't specify ironclad rules about how you add increases to critical threat range beyond the rule that a double of a double is just a triple. Occasionally a character option (e.g. Mythic Exemplar) *will* specify how to put the expanded range together, but in general the rules are silent and at least arguable that you add increases to the weapon's base threat range first.

How do you optimise critical hits?

The obvious ways are these:

- Improve your weapon's critical threat range (greater range = better chances of a threat). The simplest way to do this is pick a weapon that has an 18-20 threat range to start with.
- Improve the critical multiplier (greater multiplier = more damage for each critical hit).
- Improve the ability to confirm the critical hit (better confirmation = better chance of a scored critical hit).
- Improve the rider effect on a critical threat or hit (the fact your weapon does d4 damage doesn't matter if it gives you a high chance of paralysing the opponent on a critical hit.) For these purposes, effects that have saving throws that scale with character level are going to be the best, or effects that give you more attacks.
- If you're expecting a lot of creatures not subject to critical hits, improve the capacity to override that immunity (more harm minimisation than optimisation, but let's leave that to one side.) There are a few surprisingly cheap options in this space.
- Improve the flat numerical bonuses you get to damage (since additional dice outside a weapon's native damage dice are not doubled).
- Improve your attack rolls. Whatever your critical hit range, you don't score threats or confirm critical hits unless you beat the opponent's AC. We will look at some methods for that, but in general your reading should start here.

Two-Handed or Two-Weapon?

Perhaps the most important thing to bear in mind when building for critical hits is this:

A two-weapon fighter doesn't critfish the same way a two-handed fighter does.

For the critfisher using a two-handed weapon, the overall approach and philosophy is fairly similar to an Ubercharger build: you have one or two tricks that you execute each fight for a high return on investment. For example, the charge attack which drops your AC, which you are nonchalant about because whatever's at the other end of that charge attack won't be alive by the time it gets a chance to swing on your 6 AC. Or generate attacks via tripping. Or poison. And so on. The idea is that you max out one or two tricks and use them every battle. So this sort of critfishing probably works for the guy who's out to pull as much hitpoint damage as possible *off one strike*, and this type of critfishing leans more to amping up pure hitpoint damage as opposed to anything else. The idea being that if that one critical hit lands, you're not going to need two. This sort of build is therefore a bit more receptive to a low-ish critical threat range combined with once-per-encounter critical threat or confirmation

effects such as *Hunter's Mercy* or *Surge of Fortune*, because the idea is that you've built in favour of emphasising pure damage, and you deliver your one big punch once in the fight and then do something else.

When thinking about ranged critical builds, the analysis is similar, but the question is whether you're a *sniper* archer (i.e. high critical damage on one shot) or a *volley* archer (i.e. spam as many attacks, or arrows, as possible and hope that one or more gets a critical.) For sniper archers, the mindset is that of a two-handed fighter; for volley archers, think like a two-weapon fighter.

So for the two-handed critfisher, the following options not *specifically* related to critical hits are worth thinking about:

- **Power Attack.** Still the mainstay and foundation of two-handed builds. Lowers attack accuracy, but in favour of more damage on the hit. If your threat range is large and you know what you're doing, that loss in attack accuracy hardly matters.

- **Leap Attack.** +100% Power Attack damage, and it seems all but unarguable that the bonus damage is calculated *before* you work out what the critical hit damage is, which is exactly how we want it.

- **Combat Brute.** All three of the tactical maneuvers for this feat have applicability for critical hits, mainly because they amp up the base damage your weapon does. Yes, even the sunder, since, as an attack roll, you can do critical hits on sunder attacks just as with normal melee attacks.

- **Shock Trooper.** Chief attraction is the fact the feat allows you to dump your AC rather than your attack bonus for Power Attack purposes.

- **Emerald Razor.** This maneuver from Tome of Battle basically turns any single melee attack into a touch attack. Getting over the opponent's AC is a major gate on a critical hit, and if you're building towards a single big whacking hit, dropping the AC in this way is absolutely golden. The rules on critical hits include that your critical confirmation roll is made *with the same modifiers as your original attack roll.* As such, it is at least arguable that the confirmation roll is **also** a touch attack roll, which greatly helps in securing the critical hit.

- **Dive Attacks** and **Lances.** Any option that allows you to do double damage or more on a successful attack is *at least* an increase in critical multiplier of +1. The general rule is that anything which requires you to apply multipliers falls under the same rules - i.e. you don't double a double, you just impose a triple. So anything that just says "double your damage" will necessarily boost your critical hit damage by at least that much. Of course, what we really hope for is that our DM allows you to double your damage on a lance hit - or a dive attack - and *then* start applying critical multipliers to that number. This is at least arguable since while critical hit damage excludes certain things like extra damage dice beyond your weapon's own native dice, doubled damage with a lance doesn't specifically exclude it. Either way, if your main intent is to just do as much damage as possible on the one blow, don't discount mounted combat or dive attacks.

For the critfisher fighting with two or more weapons, the considerations are somewhat different. The balance is quality against quantity; damage output off any one strike is muted because you aren't fighting two-handed. So the two-weapon or multiweapon fighting type goes another way:

(1) generate as many attacks as you can
(2) offset the penalties to attack rolls via character options;
(3) offset the loss in damage from single-hand weapons via flat damage boosts; and
(4) use those additional attack rolls to trigger effects not normally available.

The simplest illustration of this is the crit-fishing fear-blaster. An (undead) two-weapon critfisher with two *Doom Burst* kukris, the Death Master feat, and Supremely Confident has the opportunity to send an opponent to cowering or fleeing in literally one pass, because whilst he might not do a lot of damage, if he gets a critical hit with each weapon, the opponent is shaken twice with no save, and then has to make further independent saves against fear from Death Master and Supremely Confident *for each critical hit*. This works because fear effects stack, and it's the sheer number of low-damage but strong-chance-of-a-critical-hit hit opportunities that crop up.

That weedy Thri-Kreen with a +1 STR but holding four *keen,* Kaorti Resin weapons isn't anything to sniff at either. Even if he takes serious penalties to his attack rolls, if he hits, it's going to hurt just as much as Thog's greataxe and +4 STR. Especially if he's got Lightning Mace and the kukris are *aptitude* weapons.

When it comes to two-weapon fighting, some of the following options might well be worth considering, outside all the options I've evaluated for critical hits:

- ***Collision* weapon quality** (MIC)**.** It's referred to further down, but a +5 to weapon damage is a massive offset to the poorer damage dice that come with most light or one-handed weapons.

- **Eilservs School** (DoTU). This is a feat that, if you're attacking with a charged magic staff, grants you +1 to damage for every 10 charges the staff contains. Staffs of 0 level spells are by definition 1,500 gp for 50 charges. Specifically applicable to two-weapon fighting, if you're focusing on the quarterstaff this is well worth a look both on price and on the fact it provides flat bonuses for price increases.

- **Kensai** (Variant Fighter, Dragon 310). No, not the prestige class. The Kensai gets to pick up proficiency in a single weapon - including an exotic weapon - with which he gets a +1 to attack and damage, and that bonus increases over the fighter levels he takes. He gets to pick up an extra attack with that chosen weapon, in effect a weapon flurry, which also adds to the total number of attacks we can make.

- **Weapon Focus** (PHB). Don't knock it til you've tried it. Leaving aside you're likely to have to pick this up at some stage as a prerequisite for *something*, it provides a +1 to attack rolls, which works towards offsetting multiweapon fighting penalties.

- **Shiba Protector** (OA). One level in this and you've got WIS to attack and damage, straight up. Seriously worth considering *if* you've got the feat space … because it takes three useless feats to qualify.

- **Knowledge Devotion** (CChamp). Also known as the thinking man's Power Attack, the moment you take this and put one measling point in a Knowledge skill, it's a +1 to attack **and** damage at least against one large category of enemies you'll run into. It can, of course, be maxed out best by Cloistered Cleric casting *Lore of the Gods* and the Collector of Stories skill trick, ramping up to a wonderful +5 to attack and damage against a target. For dwarves, Ancestral Knowledge allows you to SAD this somewhat by pushing your Knowledge checks to key off WIS.

- ***Martial Discipline* weapon quality** (ToB). If you're using Tome of Battle then your weapons should have this, mainly because the moment you hit a martial stance from a school that matches the school of the weapon quality, it's a +3 to your attack rolls.

- ***Wraithstrike.*** Either as the spell it is or some sort of effect on your weapons. This makes all your weapons hit as touch attacks for 1 round, i.e. the equivalent of Emerald Razor for two-handed fighting but better since you have lots of weapons you want to hit with in one round.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. If you can find a flat bonus which adds to each weapon hit as described above, get that stuff in there, because you're going to need it.

More heads and More arms!

This gets its own heading (see what I did there) mainly because if it's a two-weapon build, and if you have the build space available, there are some seriously decent races, classes, and templates for the purposes of generating attacks. The short list:

- **Lesser Thri-Kreen race** (SSouth). For only 2 Monstrous Humanoid HD and LA +1, 4 arms, without the drawbacks of Diopsid.

- **Multi-Headed Creature template** (SavSpec). 2 RHD and LA +2, but it completely eliminates TWF and multiweapon fighting penalties. Also grants full STR bonus to damage with offhand weapons, which is comparatively rare outside fairly obscure sources and restrictions down to particular weapons (e.g. Dwarven Thane).

- **Obah-Blessed template** (Dungeon 136). LA +2 or +3 depending on whether you want four arms or six, but provide a +12 to +20 in abilities, meaning they're damn solid and well worth the look.

- **Tempest (PrC)** (CAdv). Wipes out TWF penalties for two-weapon fighting only and as such is strictly speaking inferior to the Multi-Headed Creature template, but despite its bad reputation it has a couple of interesting tricks to offer up in five levels. One of interest is that it at least allows you to apply Improved Critical to two weapons at once, which is nice if you want to TWF and not have matched weapons.

- **Fang of Lolth (PrC)** (Song and Silence). This prestige class is 3.0 and un-updated, meaning it's still available. Takes you 9 levels, but you pick up 4 more natural attacks by way of claws, let alone that the arms can hold weapons themselves.

Rolls and rerolls

Since we're interested in rolling 20s, or rolling numbers somewhere in the near vicinity of 20, capabilities that allow us to reroll sucky dice are notionally going to be helpful to us. **That being said:** if you have a small critical threat range, the option to just reroll -- as opposed to score a natural 20 -- is more useful for critical hit confirmation than scoring threats, simply because if you roll a number in your threat range which doesn't give you a critical threat, the problem is most likely with your attack modifier, which isn't big enough to get you over the enemy's AC. And as such the odds are low that anything bar a natural 20 is going to help if a 15 through to 19 doesn't hit. In this situation, a feat that allows you to sub in a natural 20 is always going to be better than an option that just allows you to reroll.

However, as said, if your threat range is low, then rerolls are most useful in the critical confirmation space, because all that's required is to get over the enemy's AC, not that the number falls into your critical hit space as such. That reroll starts to work for you because if you've got a critical threat, then any option that gives you another shot at getting over the AC helps out.

Some of the more notable reroll options include:

- **Luck domain** (PHB) Reroll one roll you just made before you know the outcome. Useable once per day.

- **Cat domain** (Web) Same as Luck domain. Available deities include Garfield and Felix, not to mention Schrodinger. No, really, that's not just me, go read the entry.

- **Shadow Blade Technique** (ToB) This is a first level maneuver out of the Shadow Hand school. Basically, roll 2d20 on an attack instead of one. This one obviously doesn't allow you to use this on the confirmation roll, it is solely about the threat roll. On the other hand, at least it's once per encounter rather than once per day.

- **Better Lucky than Good** (CSco) A luck feat: once per day, as a swift action, treat a natural 1 as a natural 20.

- **Victor's Luck** (CSco): Luck feat again. It's referred to in the confirmation section below, and is specifically about rerolling critical confirmation rolls.

- **Fortuitous Strike** (CSco) Luck feat again. Expend two luck rerolls to reroll an attack roll specifically, and one reroll to redo a weapon damage roll. By RAW, a critical confirmation roll is an attack roll.

- **Audacious Attempt** (Dragon 318) Specific to OA/Rokugan, but once per encounter, when attempting a task that takes a natural 20 to succeed, you may roll 2d20 instead of one and take the better result. However, this is of deceptively limited use for critfishing builds. It functions only in situations where only a natural 20 brings

success. As such, the only opponent to which this would apply would be one where even a natural 19 roll plus all your bonuses doesn't get over the opponent's AC.

By definition, if your attack roll with all modifiers included can't get over the enemy's AC except via a natural 20, then the confirmation roll will be no different. This, therefore, is a feat practically of use in only 1 situation: where you swung at a target you have no hope of otherwise hitting and somehow came up with a natural 20, thus scoring a critical threat. You now have to confirm the critical, and the only way to do that is by another natural 20. Audacious Attempt gives you 2d20 to roll instead of 1d20 with that hope in mind. (You could also do the reverse: use it on the first attack roll and hopefully come up with a 20, which will give you 2d20 to roll for that … but the confirmation roll would still force you to come up with a 20 with no assistance.) Lightning Mace *might* be usable since it only requires you score threats and not critical hits, but once again, that extra attack presumably is only going to work on a natural 20 anyway. And Audacious Attempt is only once per encounter.

Possibly you can argue that your stated intent is to score a critical threat, but this in turn would necessitate that your weapon has a base critical threat range of 20 and no larger, not to mention that your DM would have to agree that you can call criticals like this.

Good stuff and good tricks

Some other general takes on critical hit optimisation, apart from anything else you might see below:

- **Kaorti Resin, Kaorti Resin, Kaorti Resin, Kaorti Resin.** Said it four times because that's how much damage and therefore critical hit value you get from this substance. In the critical hit space it is just the simplest, no-hoop-jumping way to make your weapons better on a critical hit. Buy your DM pizza, do his laundry, whatever, just convince him to let you have access to this stuff.

- **Lightning Mace + *Aptitude* weapon** = ∞ . This equation describes how many additional attacks you can theoretically get out of the combination. Lightning Mace is well-known as being nigh- if not totally broken in this space for crit-fishing builds, and even if you play nice with it, it is still well worth a look particularly for two-weapon builds but also for two-handed builds.

- ***Surge of Fortune* + *Sense Weakness* = guaranteed critical hit.** They're even both on the cleric spell list. If you can pull these out regularly, you don't need to work on your critical threat range, because these things give you a natural 20 and a choice to automatically confirm the critical.

- **Hida Defender 1 + Warblade Weapon Aptitude = +1 to critical multiplier on any weapon.** Including a Kaorti Resin weapon. Hida Defender is an overlooked Prestige Class not just for critical hits, but also as a very solid dip for Barbarian, since it has a

Rage feature that basically stacks with the Barbarian's own features. It works even better in gestalt. Which brings us to...

- **Play gestalt, tristalt, or get level buyoff if you can.** Like it or not, most of the prestige classes that advance critical hits in a powerful way will sweat you for a pretty substantial number of levels to give you something you want. (And indeed that might actually be a good thing.) You'll see when you read the prestige class descriptions. Level buyoff will give you better access to the better races and templates described above; gestalt will allow you to do something else useful while you're waiting for all those levels in Disciple of Dispater to tick over. Epic levels, of course, will also be most useful too.

- **Bind Malphas, summon raven, coup de grace raven, Blood in the Water.** Or, SLEEPING RAVEN INFINITE BLOOD FRENZY, identified by **JeminiZero.** This is one of the more cute and DMG-flight-worthy tricks out there. As a Binder, bind Malphas, who allows you to summon a raven that you control. Tell the raven to go to sleep, then coup de grace it. Coup de grace, by definition, imposes a critical hit, which therefore adds +1 to your attack and damage via Blood in the Water from Tome of Battle. Repeat until you can one-shot anything in the world, since Blood in the Water's bonuses last for 1 minute.

Are critical hits worth optimising?

The short answer is: depends. The less short answer: it depends proportionally on the multiplier and the critical hit range you can get.

Over the life of a game, the statistically expected bonus damage from critical hits for a given critical multiplier and critical threat range, is as follows:

Threat Range	x2	x3	x4	x5	x6	x7	x8
20	+5%	+10%	+15%	+20%	+25%	+30%	+35%
19-20	+10%	+20%	+30%	+40%	+50%	+60%	+70%
18-20	+15%	+30%	+45%	+60%	+75%	+90%	+105%
17-20	+20%	+40%	+60%	+80%	+100%	+120%	+140%
16-20	+25%	+50%	+75%	+100%	+125%	+150%	+175%
15-20	+30%	+60%	+90%	+120%	+150%	+180%	+210%
14-20	+35%	+70%	+105%	+140%	+175%	+210%	+245%
13-20	+40%	+80%	+120%	+160%	+200%	+240%	+280%
12-20	+45%	+90%	+135%	+180%	+225%	+270%	+315%
11-20	+50%	+100%	+150%	+200%	+250%	+300%	+350%
10-20	+55%	+110%	+165%	+220%	+275%	+330%	+385%
9-20	+60%	+120%	+180%	+240%	+300%	+360%	+420%
8-20	+65%	+130%	+195%	+260%	+325%	+390%	+455%
7-20	+70%	+140%	+210%	+280%	+350%	+420%	+490%
6-20	+75%	+150%	+225%	+300%	+375%	+450%	+525%
5-20	+80%	+160%	+240%	+320%	+400%	+480%	+560%
4-20	+85%	+170%	+255%	+340%	+425%	+510%	+595%
3-20	+90%	+180%	+270%	+360%	+450%	+540%	+630%
2-20	+95%	+190%	+285%	+380%	+475%	+570%	+665%

(1-20 ranges aren't included because a natural 1 is always a miss.)

So for our standard 20/x2 weapon, we can in theory expect an additional 5% of damage from the weapon over the life of the game from critical hits. (If you wanted to get real technical, this isn't "bonus" damage, since every weapon can expect to do that 5%; every weapon has at least a 20/x2 multiplier.) This takes into account both the probability of hitting the opponent's AC and where the opponent is immune to critical hits. The foundation for this table was a calculation by a generous user by the name of **Maat Mons** on the Giant in the Playground forums and comes down to this:

> *To get the % increase, we need to take (a - b) / b, where a is the damage with critical hits, and b is the damage without.*
>
> *So, to involve way too much math, we're going to define the following variables:*
> *P_{hit} = probability that attack roll is high enough to hit target's AC*
> *P_{threat} = probability that attack roll is within weapon's critical threat range*
> *D = weapon damage before critical multipliers*
> *M = critical multiplier*
>
> *So, what's the expected value for damage against crit-immune enemies? That's pretty straightforward.*
> *$P_{hit} * D$*
> *That's the probability that we hit, times the damage we deal if we hit*
> *That's our b from (a - b) / b.*
>
> *What's the expected value for damage against enemies that are subject to critical hits? Slightly more complicated.*
> *It's the odds that we critically hit times the damage of a critical hit, plus the odds of a non-critical hit times the damage of a non-critical hit.*
>
> *The critical hit part of that is pretty straightforward. Assuming that any roll good enough to be a critical threat is also good enough to hit, it's*
> *$P_{threat} * P_{hit} * D * M$*
>
> *There are two ways of getting a non-critical hit. We can roll a critical threat and fail to confirm, or we can roll a hit that wasn't a high enough roll to be a threat. So the odds of a non-critical hit is the sum of the odds of those two events.*
> *$P_{threat} * (1 - P_{hit}) + P_{hit} - P_{threat}$*
> *And then of course multiply by non-critical damage, D.*
>
> *So the big, complicated formula becomes:*
> *$[P_{threat} * P_{hit} * D * M + (P_{threat} * (1 - P_{hit}) + P_{hit} - P_{threat}) * D - P_{hit} * D] / P_{hit} * D$*
> *Which, when you cancel out the terms, becomes the much friendlier-looking formula:*
> *$P_{threat} * (M - 1)$*
>
> *So, and this is an important result, once both the initial attack roll and the critical confirmation roll are both factored in, they both factor out.*
>
> *As such, we can very easily calculate the value of the critical threat range/multiplier of weapons:*
> *x3: +10% damage*
> *19-20/x2: +10% damage*
> *x4: +15% damage*
> *18-20/x2: +15% damage*
> *19-20/x3: +20% damage*
> *17-20/x2: +20% damage*
> *19-20/x4: +30% damage*
> *15-20/x2: +30% damage*

Note: If you're looking for the thread where these calculations were discussed, it can be found here. The discussion didn't go to full completion, but I'm always willing to hear more about it.

These percentages take into account whether you confirm the critical hit or not; in essence, the probability of hitting the AC is actually irrelevant to the calculation.

Another way to look at this is that **you don't actually start getting "free" damage from a critical hit unless your critical multiplier is x3 or more**. You don't damage a target in combat without first making an attack roll that gets past an opponent's AC. For any critical hit, you have to make two attack rolls: the first for the threat, and the second to confirm. And both rolls must pass the enemy's AC. So a critical multiplier of x2 only ends up with the same damage against the enemy as if you had another attack roll at the same bonus. A critical confirmation roll, by RAW, is an attack roll, not a skill roll or anything else, and therefore a natural 1 still results in failure.

In fact, given not all bonus damage dice are multiplied on a critical hit – sneak attack, precision damage and so on – a critical multiplier of x2 might actually get you less damage than if you just had two regular, successful attacks at your best modifier.

The counterargument is that generally it isn't that easy to *reliably* get a second, unpenalised attack roll in the same round outside the critical hit system. I'd say that depends what you define as "easy". Hurling Charge, for example, from the Miniatures Handbook does precisely that, and its only real condition is that you're doing something you generally would do, i.e. close with the enemy. Improved Trip does the same. So does *Haste.* And none of them require that you roll a 20, i.e. 5% of the time on a fair dice, i.e.e. something that's out of your hands.

Either way, at x2, critical threat range increases are just increases in the number of times in which you get another attack roll for free – and for which the damage may be less, if it contains variables anywhere apart from the weapon's own damage dice.

Once you get a multiplier of x3, for two attack rolls you're getting three lots of damage (though it's still not completely three times the damage – can't multiply variables, remember). At x4, of course, it's roughly double the damage for the same two attack rolls. And so on.

There are two other exceptions to this rule of thumb:

- Sneak attackers who take Telling Blow. In *that* scenario, extensions of critical threat range increase the percentage of occasions in which your sneak attack damage applies to the *second*, free attack roll. (This same rough analysis applies to any 'rider' effect which relies on the rolling of a critical hit to trigger, but we are speaking only about pure damage at the moment.)

- Lightning Mace and/or Roundabout Kick. These feats break the critical hit system because they provide another attack whenever you roll a threat or score a critical hit. But we'll talk about them further down.

There aren't nearly as many options to increase a weapon's critical multiplier, but those that do exist are reasonably reliable, even without kaorti resin. In practice it's not easy to get a critical threat range past the 12-20 mark – not under default 3.5 anyway. But even the damage numbers aren't exactly world-destroying unless you put a lot of work into it.

Consider one of the less outrageous combinations, a *keen* kaorti resin rapier. The rapier has a native critical threat range of 18-20 and a critical multiplier of x2. The *keen* quality extends

that threat range to 15-20. Kaorti resin raises the critical multiplier of x4.

That weapon can be statistically expected to do close to double its normal damage over the course of the entire campaign. But given you're playing with a 1d6 weapon, it's not exactly keeping up with the pouncing Barbarian with his greataxe wailing away with Power Attack for massive bonus damage every round. Not unless you have a boatload of stuff that comes after the weapon damage dice and which isn't variable.

It takes work on both the critical threat range and the critical multiplier to get really strong returns. A x8 multiplier and a 20 threat range don't get above 35% bonus damage. The other way, a x2 multiplier and a 2-20 range only gets you just under double your weapon's expected damage across the campaign. To get anything particularly significant, it takes some combination of both.

So is it seriously worth optimising for critical hit damage as such? Yes, if you're looking to push both range and multiplier as high as possible, but you can only really go that hard if you have the right rulesets available from your DM. The other thing is that these percentages are thrown out if you have a technique to generate critical threats outside pure statistical chance -- e.g. *Surge of Fortune* -- or you have an option that allows you to automatically confirm critical hits -- e.g. *Bless Weapon.*

It's also worth noting that there isn't really an outstanding "midrange" of optimisation for critical hits; either you're in legal 15-20 territory with a *keen* 18-20 weapon, or you're in the Disciple of Dispater space and getting more than 50% or more of your dice rolls as potential threats, without a lot of space in between. I have the feeling that the optimum *play experience*, i.e. the right feel, is having around a 30% chance of a critical threat, i.e. 13-20: it's not as rare as 5-10%, but it isn't as common as dirt either. Problem being that, since it's not simple to increment your threat range by 1 or 2, it's hard to calibrate a build to that. If anything it's easier to increase critical multipliers, even though the options are fewer.

Also note that critical hit optimization isn't strong at low levels. Improved Critical only comes online from 8th level for most martial builds bar cheesing out Martial Monk, and *keen* requires by definition a +2 magic weapon or a 5th level caster if you're going with *keen edge* instead. Criticals hit their stride somewhere in the teens absent very specific builds.

<u>What sort of rider effects can you get out of critical hits?</u>

There are as many, if not more, rider effects on critical hits as options to upgrade critical hits. We're going to be looking at them in this guide too. A rare few are solid. Most are distinctly underwhelming because of the gating you have to go through to get them to trigger. Most of them have saving throws attached *on top of* the fact you have to score a critical hit to get them to function at all. This results in a steadily decreasing probability of the effect actually firing as the die rolls mount, particularly where the effects have fixed DCs that are easier for monsters to meet as the levels go by. Absent a few very strong options, rider effects usually aren't worth it unless you can reliably confirm critical hits.

A closer look at some rules

There are two fundamental rules to contend with when it comes to getting better critical hits:

1) ***Keen* and Improved Critical don't stack – with each other, or with anything else.** Under 3.0, you could apply both Improved Critical and the *keen* weapon quality to result in a wider threat range. You could take something like a rapier with its 18-20 threat range, and with one feat and one +1 weapon quality have a weapon that triggers a critical threat on a 12-20.

Under 3.5, the wording for both *keen* and Improved Critical were altered. Improved Critical now explicitly does not stack with any other effect that expands the threat range of a weapon. (It's worth noting that, rather than the weapon's critical threat range as such, by RAW it's *your* threat range that's doubled.) *Keen*, meanwhile, correspondingly provides that its benefit does not stack with 'any other effect' that expands the threat range of a weapon (calling out Improved Critical explicitly.) On the face of it, that would seem to put a very big crimp on optimisation around this. Whatever critical hit option you're looking at, it won't be as easy to build as it was under 3.0.

It's traditional at this point to mention an article by Sean K. Reynolds, a writer who worked for TSR and WOTC, and whose name is on several of the 3.0 sourcebooks. Sean had left WOTC by the time 3.5 came out, but the article he wrote provides some practical arguments for why the two should stack even if they explicitly don't. That whole article can be found here, but I've reproduced it in full below:

> In 3E D&D, a *keen* weapon's increased threat range stacks with the increased threat range from the Improved Critical feat. In 3.5, this is no longer the case.
>
> Some think that this rule was made because the combo is too good, especially with creatures with a lot of bonus damage (which gets multiplied along with the crit). According to some, the change was made because having a crit range that's too big means crits happen too often, and are therefore no longer "special."
>
> I respectfully disagree on both points.
>
> **Update 2/18/04:** I've decided to redo this rant, as it's sorta scattered and makes some assumptions that are correct but some people aren't comfortable with. The first step is to do a comparison of longsword and rapier and how *keen* and Improved Critical affect their damage, and compare that to the effects of a simple energy property (such as flaming) or the Weapon Specialization feat. Eventually I'll do other comparisons and fold them back into this main document. In the meantime, please accept my apologies for directing you through multiple documents for this rant.
>
> **Is the Combo Too Good?**
> For this part, I'll prove numerically that allowing these crits to stack is necessary for the high-threat-range weapons (such as rapier and falchion) to keep up with normal-threat-range weapons, and if it's not egregious in the case of frequent crits, it isn't a problem with infrequent crits.

As a player of a character with this combo in Monte's game, I played alongside Erik Mona's paladin Zophas, who was lower-level than my character Shurrin (but our net attack bonuses were almost the same due to Weapon Focus and some levels in cleric and rogue that I had). Shurrin used a +2 *keen* rapier. Zophas used a +1 holy greatsword. Not counting Strength bonuses (and his was higher than mine, so it only would skew the example in his favor more, and he'd get x1.5 for using a two-handed weapon, which would make it even better for him), here's how it went:

Against nonevil opponents, Zophas was doing 2d6+1 damage (8 points on average) with a 10% chance of a crit (so +10% x 8 points, or +.8 points), for a total of 8.8 points per attack. Shurrin was doing 1d6+2 points of damage (5.5) with a 45% chance of a crit (so +45% x 5.5 points, or +2.475 points), for a total of 7.975 points per attack.

So right from the get-go, his character (with essentially the same attack bonus) is doing more damage per round than my character. And that's on the primary attack ... on iterative attacks we're both less likely to confirm criticals; since his base damage (not including crits) is higher than mine, it means his average damage is higher for these attacks (8 points vs. 5.5 points).

It gets really obscene when we're fighting evil opponents. His weapon is dealing at extra +7 damage per attack (15.8 total), while mine deals no extra damage. I'll remind you here that our weapons have identical plus-equivalent values (+1 enhancement +2 holy = +3; +2 enhancement +1 *keen* = +3).

And my weapon doesn't get its "bonus" (crit) damage against undead, so when fighting undead we're back to comparing the 8 points vs. 5.5 points. Note that most undead are evil, so he's probably also getting his holy bonus on top of that.

And then you have to consider that I paid a feat for Improved Crit just to keep up with his weapon damage, and I'm still behind in the average and the optimal situation.

For those who point out that the falchion is a better version of the rapier, let's run the numbers for the falchion.

If Shurrin had a +2 *keen* falchion instead of a +2 *keen* rapier (and Improved Crit with falchion instead of rapier, of course), his average base damage would be 7 instead of 5.5. With crits included his average damage would be (45% x 7 = +3.15) 10.15 (compared to Zophas' 8.8). Iterative attacks are still less likely to crit, same situation as the rapier, so this advantage essentially disappears after the primary attack (Shurrin's 7 vs. Zophas' 8). So against nonevil crittable opponents on the first attack, Shurrin would average +1.35 points ahead of Zophas. Against evil crittable opponents Zophas again jumps to 15.8 and Shurrin is still at 10.15, and Zophas still has the advantage against uncrittable things.

So with weapons of equal value, Shurrin is a little ahead against nonevil creatures, behind on uncrittable nonevil creatures (just like with the rapier), and far behind against evil creatures (just like the rapier). This despite the fact that Shurrin had to spend a feat in order to get his advantageous crit threat range.

[Aside: Let's compare the absolute base values of a nonmagical greatsword and falchion. Greatsword = 3.5+3.5 = 7, with crits = 7.7. Falchion = 2.5+2.5 = 5, with crits = 5.75. So falchion is worse. Include *keen* or Improved Critical on the falchion and you add another threat increment of .75 damage, for a total of 6.5, which is still worse than the greatsword. Add another threat increment (if you have *keen* _and_ Improved Crit _and_ they stack) and you're at 7.25 damage ... still not as good as the greatsword! The only way Shurrin's hypothetical falchion is keeping up in base damage is that his falchion is +2 while Zophas' greatsword is only +1. The falchion is really a worse weapon than the greatsword. Likewise, the rapier is worse than the longsword.]

[Another aside: Let's be totally crazy and assume Shurrin and Zophas both have 20 Str (and

we'll take into account the x1.5 Str bonus -- 7.5 points -- for the weapons being two-handed in this example, since that might be enough to help Shurrin come out on top). Now Zophas' +1 holy greatsword averages 7base+1enhancement+7.5str = 15.5 base damage, 17.05 including crits. Shurrin's +2 *keen* falchion averages 5base+2enhancement+7.5str = 14.5 base damage, 21.025 including crits. Shurrin's ahead by almost 4 points -- woohoo!. Against evil creatures, Zophas' damage still jumps by 7 to 24.05, and against uncrittable things Shurrin's damage drops to the base value of 14.5. So with a hyped-up Strength, which is where the argument for this rule revision comes from, the falchion-wielder is just barely ahead of the greatsword-wielder in ideal circumstances (and note he had to spend one more feat than the greatsword-wielder to get there), and in non-ideal situations (such as when he can't crit, or when fighting evil creatures, or both) he still loses compared to the greatsword-wielder, even though he spent more money (25gp) on his weapon and spent one more feat (Improved Crit) than the greatsword-wielder.]

Does It Make Crits Un-Special?
Imagine an average 10th-level PC fighter. He has a +10 BAB, and say a 20 Strength (base + magic). He's spent almost all of his 49,000 gp on his weapon, a +3 *keen* rapier (32,000 gp ... and I don't have data on how much a typical fighter spends on his weapon, but I'm guessing it's not "almost all"). Assuming he's not using Weapon Finesse, his total primary attack bonus is +10+5+3 = +18. With Improved Critical, he threatens a crit on a 12+.

If you look at a range of CR10 and CR11 creatures (and only the ones that can be critted), their ACs are in the 20-30 range. That means that at worst (AC 30) the fighter has a 50% chance to hit, and about a 40% chance to threaten; if he hits, he has to confirm (about a 50% chance), so that means his odds of hitting and confirming are (50% x 40%) = 20%. So on average he's just about guaranteed a crit if he fights a creature for five rounds. And if he crits, he does an extra d6. Woohoo.

So maybe letting *keen* and Improved Critical means crits come up a lot more often. Maybe that makes crits a little less special. But we're talking about crits that are an extra weapon die of damage ... we're not talking about Arduin-style crits that do 1d100 damage, or sever limbs, or do instant-kills ... it's just another d6 or d8. They're not that special in the first place. And as established above, the weapons that crit more often need those crits to keep up with standard-crit-range weapons, otherwise there's no real point in choosing those high-threat weapons.

And there are a lot of things in the game that are "special." 9th-level spells are special. Paladins are special. Dragons are special. But we allow 9th-level spells on scrolls. And we let paladins as PCs as commonly as fighters (there are no mechanical restrictions on how often you can have paladin PCs). And we now have little wyrmling CR2 dragons in addition to the big hulking party-killer monsters. Don't those things make 9th-level spells, paladins, and dragons less special? Don't the epic-level rules make everything under 20th level less special? "It's not special" isn't really a good reason to cut a mechanically sound mechanic from the game. It's a reason to consider cutting it, but the benefit of leaving it in (as demonstrated above) is necessary for that character build and choice of weapon, and isn't that damaging to the "specialness" of crits.

Conclusion
In conclusion: For the lower-damage but higher-threat-range weapons to be viable in combat (as they were designed to be by the original core designers, who crunched all the numbers), *keen* has to stack with Improved Critical. Otherwise there is no game-mechanical reason to spend the extra 25 gp for the 2d4 falchion instead of the 2d6 greatsword, or the extra 5 gp for the 1d6 rapier instead of the 1d8 longsword, or the extra feat to increase your threat range ... choosing those high-threat weapons is just a bad choice. And if letting these mechanics stack makes crits a little less special, that's only a small mark against letting them stack.

So let them stack, dagnabbit.

(Emphasis mine). Sean went on to create a statistical comparison here to prove the rapier was far weaker than the longsword without *keen* and Improved Critical stacking. Per some of the guys at the minmax forums, Sean's numbers were off by 5% because he overlooked the fact natural 1s always miss, but because the numbers were *uniformly* off, the comparison is still valid … and telling.

(Also glossed over in Sean's article: rapiers, unlike longswords, can't be wielded in both hands to obtain x1.5 STR bonus to damage. However, the scimitar is identical to the rapier in both damage dice, multiplier, and threat range, so the analysis still holds. The fact light weapons can't access x1.5 STR bonus to damage is even more of an argument in favour of *keen* and Improved Critical stacking for light weapons at least ... since STR bonus is multiplied on a critical hit, and light weapons even miss out on *that*.)

All of that said, Sean's article obviously can't override explicit 3.5 wording to the contrary. He makes a strong design argument that you're not breaking the game to let these things stack, but it is ultimately for a DM to rule so. If the article helps you with persuading a DM as to the mechanical outcomes of letting these two stack, then it's likely achieved its goal … but that's all it is, an exhortation and argument in favour.

Perhaps one of the biggest points to note on Sean's' argument is that WOTC eventually created two-handed weapons (e.g. the Jovar or Great Falchion) with good damage dice *and* a tasty 18-20 threat range. So those two-handed weapons pull even further ahead … unless *keen* and Improved Critical are allowed to stack for the light weapons, if not the one-handers.

Anyway, the only wiggle room seemingly available is where something affects a weapon '*as if*' it had an enhanced critical threat range – because Improved Critical and *keen* both say they don't stack only with those effects that actually do expand the threat range. So if an option provides that a weapon may be treated 'as if' it had a wider threat range, then by RAW at least it is not actually expanding that range, no matter whether that was Improved Critical or *keen*'s RAI. And consequently these features might/will stack.

2) **Anything printed in D&D 3.0 is still usable in 3.5, so long as there's not a specific 3.5 version of the feature**.
This is the foundation upon which critical hit optimisation is still possible. Provided that something was not specifically updated to D&D 3.5, it is still valid for use from 3.0 as written. Some of these 3.0 sources include useful classes like the Disciple of Dispater or the Deepwood Sniper.

When you do use these sources, they arguably overwrite 3.5's rules on *keen* and Improved Critical stacking.

This comes from the position stated in the PHB's own errata:

> **Errata Rule: Primary Sources**
> When you find a disagreement between two D&D® rules sources, unless an official errata file says otherwise, the primary source is correct. One example of a primary/secondary source is text taking precedence over a table entry. An individual spell description takes precedence when the short description in the beginning of the spells chapter disagrees.
>
> Another example of primary vs. secondary sources involves book and topic precedence. The Player's Handbook, for example, gives all the rules for playing the game, for playing PC races, and for using base class descriptions. If you find something on one of those topics from the DUNGEON MASTER's Guide

> or the Monster Manual that disagrees with the Player's Handbook, you should assume the Player's Handbook is the primary source. The DUNGEON MASTER's Guide is the primary source for topics such as magic item descriptions, special material construction rules, and so on. The Monster Manual is the primary source for monster descriptions, templates, and supernatural, extraordinary, and spell-like abilities.

Where there is a disagreement between two rules sources, primary sources override unless an official errata file says otherwise. Whilst it's not defined, a primary source is usually taken as the book or source that first introduces the material in question (because the only primary sources defined by the errata were the PHB, DMG, and MM … and that errata only indicated how they override each other). Therefore an older source – i.e. a 3.0 option – can quite legitimately be said to overwrite the later 3.5 source where the two are inconsistent. Improved Critical may say it doesn't stack with any other threat-increasing source, but if a 3.0 prestige class, or whatever, says it does, that 3.0 source is the primary source and overwrites 3.5 in that respect.

Of *course* it's insane. In virtually every other realm of human existence updates overwrite or modify the *older* material, but this is also the rule underlying the principle that 3.0 material can still be used as-is in 3.5 where it's not specifically updated. And it's RAW. That said, this rule isn't of much help where the DM simply outright bans 3.0 material, as he's ultimately entitled to do and often does.

Either way, we are really just butting up against the misconception that allowing critical hit options to stack, even to a serious extent, is inherently overpowered or gamebreaking. It isn't, not as against the sort of game-breaking things (let's be kind and call them "special" things) other classes can do very easily, from *Wish* to Power Attack.

If you can't get this rule specifically, it's time to look at the other measures for getting more critical hits with the range you do have, of which there are a few. At low levels of optimisation, or if you're only looking for a small-ish boost to your weapons, you can get just as much (statistical) benefit out of picking the x4 multiplier as picking an 18-20 weapon – and indeed there are resources that allow you to hit those marks pretty easily at least.

Critical Hit Weaponry

As you'll realise when you start applying *keen* or Improved Critical, the hardest and most expensive part of getting better critical hits is shifting the dial on a weapon that natively only does 20/x2, just as more of a rocket's energy is spent in the initial thrust to get it off the ground than through most of its remaining flight.

As such, below you will find a list of close on two hundred weapons in D&D 3.5 that have a threat range of 19-20 or better, a critical multiplier of x3 or better, or both, drawn from every source I can find across books and magazines. In arranging them, I have broken them down into Simple, Martial, and Exotic Weapons, and tried to list 'Core' stuff first, i.e. PHB, moving on to the Complete books, and then on to 'environmental' books and other setting-specific ones last, leaving Dragon and Dungeon magazine until last.

Some things to bear in mind

- Light weapons cannot be wielded in two hands to give x1.5 STR bonus to damage. This is something worth thinking about before jumping automatically to the 18-20 threat range light weapons listed below -- unless of course you have a strong two-weapon fighting build in mind. As Sean Reynolds' analysis proves, one-handed weapons with small damage dice needed wider threat ranges and Improved Critical and the *keen* quality just to keep up when wielded two-handed. Light weapons with generally smaller damage dice logically fall even further behind.

- Power Attack does not permit you to add a damage bonus to a light weapon at all, although it will still nerf your attack roll with that weapon (e.g. the off hand weapon in a TWF build). There are no weapons I'm aware of that get around this stricture. The only character option I'm aware of that does address this is very specific: Revenant Blade (PGtE). At fifth level in this PrC, if you're wielding the Valenar Double Scimitar, you treat both ends as two-handed weapons, and thus can apply Power Attack to both, even if you are fighting with them as a double weapon.

- In the case of two-weapon fighting, with very rare exceptions, any weapon wielded in the off hand will only give you a x0.5 STR bonus to its damage. Again, worth keeping in mind if the reason you're going for critical hits is for the bigger hitpoint damage.

- Absent some rare exceptions, Weapon Finesse (i.e. DEX on your attack rolls) usually cannot be applied to a one-handed or two-handed weapon. On top of that, keep in mind that Weapon Finesse penalises attack rolls with Armor Check Penalty if you're using a shield. DEX to damage also isn't easy to pick up, absent certain well-known feats like Shadow Blade out of Tome of Battle.

- "What about feycraft weapons," I hear you cry. Per DMG 2, a feycraft weapon allows a one-handed weapon to be used with Weapon Finesse, but that's all it does. It does not turn a one-handed weapon into a light weapon, and therefore doesn't allow you to wield

it in the off hand without big TWF penalties. Sure, it means your feycraft one-hander can still be wielded in two hands for x1.5 STR damage, but feycraft weapons have a damage dice one less than their standard versions, so you may or may not actually come out ahead on this.

- Exotic Weapons – of which there are a *lot* in this space -- do have at least one class relevant for damage: Exotic Weapon Master (from Complete Warrior). One level in this prestige class allows a one-handed exotic weapon to gain x2 STR bonus to damage when wielded in two hands, as opposed to the normal maximum of x1.5. This is relevant if your STR bonus to damage is +1 or higher, which if you're a melee character it almost certainly will be. Either way, the more fixed numbers you can get *after* the damage dice, the more it's doubled or tripled on a critical hit.

- A modest increase in damage dice alone generally won't be worth an Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat, if that's the only difference between a given martial and a given exotic weapon. The average, expected result on a 1d6 is 3.5, i.e. 3 because you always round down in D&D. The average expected result on a 1d8 is 4.5, i.e. 4. That's chicken scratchings if the competing candidate for the feat slot is something like Power Attack that allows you to significantly ramp up your flat damage bonus.

- Projectile ranged weapons generally don't allow you to add STR to damage. Certain longbows or shortbows do, but these are usually the Composite versions and are usually hard-limited up to a given maximum STR bonus being applied to the shot's damage. Thrown weapons do add your STR bonus to damage, but they generally use your (likely suboptimal) DEX bonus for the attack roll. Brutal Throw fixes the latter, but it's another feat slot to take. And, outside Bloodstorm Blade, thrown weapons are not well-supported in terms of attack options and damage in D&D 3.5.

- When looking at weaponry out of 3.0 and seeing a "Small" weapon, bear in mind that though it *might* be deemed a light weapon under present 3.5 rules, it also would not be appropriately sized for a Medium size wielder and therefore would draw a -2 to your attack rolls. Weapons in 3.0 were able to be wielded at their given size without penalty, i.e. a "Small" weapon could be wielded by a Small character, a Medium by a Medium character, and so on. 3.5 varied this somewhat by having different damage dice for different-sized weapons.

Weapons with Threat Ranges more than 20

Simple Weapons

19-20 threat range

Dagger (PHB): 19-20/x2. Light weapon. While this weapon only does 1d4 damage, it has a 19-20 threat range and does two different types of damage. Also, unlike most options presented here, this weapon is throwable, and therefore gives you the ability to (somewhat) fight ranged if need be. If you want to know more about what's available for daggers, have a look at my thread here.

Heavy/Light Crossbow (PHB): 19-20/x2. These are essentially ranged versions of the Bastard Sword and the Longsword respectively, as well as being Simple rather than Martial weapons. The other advantage they have is that they actually have longer range increments than the longbow or the shortbow. However, since they don't add STR to damage, they don't deal out the highest amount of smash.

Hand Crossbow (PHB): 19-20/x2. 1d4 damage, and basically the equivalent of the dagger, but also with a better range increment of 30 feet and some dedicated feats for it. Still can't add STR to damage with it, though.

Muspelrule (PlanHB): 1d4, 19-20/x2. Bludgeoning version of the dagger, although unlike the dagger (and indeed unlike the bludgeoning Light Hammer) it can't be thrown.

18-20 threat range

Barbed Dart (RoF): 18-20/x2, 1d4 damage, Piercing. This is the only Simple weapon in D&D 3.5 that carries an 18-20 threat range. It's specifically a thrown ranged weapon, though, with a range increment of 20 feet.

Martial Weapons

19-20 threat range

Short sword (PHB): 1d6, 19-20/x2. Light melee weapon, meaning it can be used in the off hand for two-weapon fighting. Note however that it does piercing damage. (There is also the **wakizashi** from Oriental Adventures, which is identical to the short sword except that it's a masterwork short sword, in the same way that the katana is just a masterwork bastard sword.)

Longsword (PHB): 1d8, 19-20/x2. One-handed. Boring, but also has more than a 20 threat range. Does slashing damage.

Greatsword (PHB): 2d6, 19-20/x2. Two-Handed. Where this weapon really shines is its base damage, rather than the threat range as such, though again at least it's a Core weapon and therefore more likely than others to be accepted.

Ripper (PlanHB): 19-20/x2. It's identical to a Greatsword except doing piercing damage.

Heavy Flail (PHB): 19-20/x2. Two-Handed. A 1d10 damage dice and 19-20 critical range rarely turns up in bludgeoning weapons, but the greatsword is better on damage, is also two-handed, and also isn't an exotic weapon.

Cutlass (FRCS, Stmwrk): 1d6, 19-20/x2. Again a light melee weapon, so can be used in the off hand, and gets a +2 circumstance bonus against being disarrrmed (yes, I went there, you thought you'd make it through this entry without a pirate joke being made, well, get used to disappointment). Finally, it does both slashing and piercing damage.

Saber (FRCS): 1d8, 19-20/x2. One-handed. Really, a cavalry saber. Overlooked in the 3.5 update and thus still valid, this weapon is the same as a longsword, except that it gives you a +1 to attack rolls while mounted. That's handy if you don't want to wield a lance and you're intent on maxing out mounted critical damage via a combination of Spirited Charge, Riding Boots, and the *Valorous* weapon quality. Does both slashing and piercing damage.

Dart Thruster (Und): 1d4, 19-20/x2. Ranged weapon, 40 foot range increment. It fires darts, can hold three at once and can specifically be fired iteratively in a full attack sequence. Probably a DM won't allow you to combine this with Barbed Darts, even if they come from the same setting, on fluff reasons: Dart Thrusters tend to be used by deep gnomes in the Underdark while Barbed Darts are crude and heavy and used by lizardfolk.

Chondathan Steelsword (RoF): One-handed weapon, 1d8, 19-20/x2. It's … treated as a masterwork longsword that gives you a +2 when attempting to break a foe's weapon, i.e. Sunder.

Main-gauche (Dragon 301): 1d4, 19-20/x2. Light weapon. Posh name for an unthrowable dagger. However, it grants a +2 on disarm attempts and Parry attempts, if you're using the Parry rules out of Dragon 301.

18-20 threat range

Kukri (PHB): 1d4, 18-20/x2. Light weapon. At first glance, the kukri doesn't seem very good. What it has going for it is that it's the only Core martial weapon that is Light and has an 18-20 threat range, i.e. it's least likely to draw frowny faces from DMs opposed to wide sourcebook access. On top of that, if you're using Tome of Battle, it's front and centre in the Tiger Claw discipline. Because of this, kukris are best used in pairs, or wielded in your off-hand with a better weapon in your main hand.

Rapier or **Scimitar** (PHB): 1d6, 18-20/x2. One-handed. These two weapons are mostly interchangeable aside from weight and damage type (the rapier is a Piercing weapon and

the scimitar is a Slashing weapon). However, only the rapier can be used out-of-the-box with Weapon Finesse, and its drawback is that you can't wield it two-handed for bonus damage.

Falchion (PHB): 2d4, 18-20/x2. Two-Handed. If your focus is your critical threat range and you don't want to dual-wield or use an exotic weapon, this is going to be your best choice out of Core, hands down.

Gehennan Lancet (PlanHB): 1d4, 18-20/x2. Light weapon. A kukri, only it does piercing damage instead.

Razorfeather Ammunition (MM V): When bolts or arrows are made from the feathers of a Steelwing bird (i.e. the said razorfeathers) the ammunition is considered (a) masterwork (b) adamantine and (c) **considered to have the *keen* weapon property**. (Accordingly, the threat range for this ammunition depends on what weapon you're using, since crossbows tend to have 19-20 threat ranges and longbows start with a 20.) This is some of the best ammunition around for ranged weapon PCs if only for the adamantine and masterwork qualities, which add a +1 to attack and get over all but the most stubborn damage resistance (the bane of the low-damage dice archer.) The average crossbow has a critical threat range of 19-20/x2. With razorfeather ammunition this becomes a range of 17-20. This won't stack with the Deepwood Sniper's *Keen* Arrows as it is a *keen* effect, but it *will* work with *Bless Weapon* since razorfeather ammunition is explicitly not magical … and accordingly allows you to auto-confirm critical hits at least. And that's before you consider that bolts or arrows can be made from kaorti resin (presumably the arrowheads) which have a critical multiplier of x4.

Halfling Rapier (Dragon 301): 1d4, 18-20/x2. Small and therefore a Light weapon, it's … just a small rapier, although at least it's a martial weapon and not exotic.

Exotic Weapons

19-20 threat range

Bastard Sword (PHB): 19-20/x2. With a 1d10 damage die, the bastard sword is theoretically better than the longsword, albeit at the cost of a feat to wield it one-handed (unless your class somehow gets free proficiency). This weapon only has a 19-20 critical threat range, but the higher damage die compensates somewhat. The **katana**, from Oriental Adventures, is identical except that a katana is a masterwork bastard sword. I went into some depth about the options available specifically for bastard swords and katana here.

Two-Bladed Sword (PHB): 1d8/1d8, 19-20/x2. You know you want to be Darth Maul. It's nothing to really write home about otherwise.

Repeating Heavy and **Light Crossbow** (PHB): 19-20/x2. The crossbow, More Dakka version, except sucky because of the massive reload time.

Double Hand, Heavy and **Light Crossbow** (RoTD Web enhancement): 19-20/x2. Similar issues as regular crossbows. However, they're not well-written and if you're absolutely *keen*

(see what I did there) on crossbows you might want to look into these carefully with your DM.

Barbed Dagger (CAdv): 1d4, 19-20/x2. Light weapon. Oh, you think this is a regular dagger? Not exactly. It counts as a dagger for feats like Weapon Focus, but if you have 5 ranks in Sleight of Hand, it grants a +2 on sneak attack damage … and, explicitly, "this bonus also applies (and is therefore doubled) on successful critical hits with the weapon!"

Broadblade Shortsword (CAdv): 1d6, 19-20/x2. Light weapon again, but grants a +2 dodge bonus to AC when fighting defensively or using total defense. Counts as a short sword for stuff like Weapon Focus.

Gnome Tortoise Blade (CWar): 1d6, 19-20/x2. Light weapon, a gnomish racial weapon but it'll take DM fiat to deem it such. It's designed to be used in the off hand, provides a +1 Shield bonus to AC, -1 Armor Check Penalty and small spell failure chance. But of course you don't get the Shield bonus when you attack. Can be enchanted as shield or weapon, or both, but you have to pay for and apply the enhancements separately.

Gnome Quickrazor (RoS): 1d4, 19-20/x2. Light weapon, this weapon is beloved by Iaijutsu and sneak attacking types the world over because it can be drawn and sheathed as a free action, thus setting up flatfooted conditions and free action weapon draws.

Gnome Swordcatcher (RoS): 1d8, 19-20/x2. One-handed weapon which gives a +4 to disarming checks.

Claw Bracer (AEG) 1d4, 19-20/x2. Basically you can cast spells normally while wearing this and can't be disarmed of it. That in turn would suggest your hands are free while using it and can be taken up with more crucial things like wands or staves. Nothing specific about whether this thing occupies the forearms slot for magic item purposes, and it appears it only occupies one armband anyway.

Triple Dagger (AEG) 1d4, 19-20/x2. Not to be confused with the Manyfang Dagger, this thing just gives you extra bonuses to Disarm checks.

Chain and Dagger (AEG): 1d4, 19-20/x2. Medium-size weapon, so could be argued to be a single-hander. Gives a useless +2 bonus to disarm checks, but also allows you to make trip attacks and gives you a +2 on the attempt!

Gyrspike (AEG): 1d8/1d8, 19-20/x2. Don't bother, it's a double weapon that gives you a +2 on Disarm attempts.

Fullblade (AEG): 2d8 damage dice, 19-20/x2. Okay, look, yes this thing does more damage than a greatsword or even a greathammer, but it's a hot mess, I mean hot damn right out of Uptown Funk, thanks to the interaction between 3.0 and 3.5 rules on weapon size. AEG's table says it's a Huge weapon. Under 3.5, that means that it's a two-handed weapon for a Large character, full stop, and *cannot* be wielded by a Medium character because the difference in size makes it something other than a two-handed weapon at Medium size. The text, however, states that the Fullblade can be wielded as a two-handed weapon by a Medium character as an exotic weapon, and that a Large character can wield it one-handed with a -4 to the attack roll, and in two hands as a martial weapon. Text trumps table, and it's

a primary source … and then we have the question of size penalties, since 3.5 holds that if a weapon is not appropriately sized for the wielder, you take a -2 on the attack roll for each category of difference. This is one where you would have to urge your DM to rule it as a two-handed weapon with EWP. Otherwise, well, as said the main thing is the damage dice.

Stump Knife (AEG): 1d4, 19-20/x2 Basically, it's like a punching dagger but can be secured to the stump of a missing limb and you can't be disarmed with it. But wait: against foes to whom you have dealt damage during a continuous melee, the stump knife's threat range is doubled, making it explicitly 17-20. It'd take a very kind DM to let the 3.5 versions of *keen* or Improved Critical stack with it, though; by the text, neither do on RAW.

Notbora (SavSpec) 2d6/2d6, x2 or 19-20/x2. Two-handed. The critical range isn't much to write home about, but the damage dice sure are. It's Huge and therefore has similar interpretation problems to the Fullblade, but one end of the weapon can also be used to make trip attacks.

Tail Blade (SavSpec) 1d8, 19-20/x2. Basically it adds one more attack if you mount this thing on your tail, though the rules on Multiweapon Fighting then apply to you.

Scissors Sword (SavSpec) 2d8, 19-20/x2. Even better damage dice than the Notbora, but also has a specific rider effect on a critical hit: a proficient wielder can choose to grapple the opponent with two of the blades at a +2 to the grapple check. If the grapple is successful, the wielder can automatically deal 1d8 damage against the grappled opponent each round. That said, the damn thing is normally a Marilith weapon and explicitly needs six arms to use it, it's got three blades and three hilts, i.e. hello all you Thri-Kreen edgelords who make DMs roll their eyes.

Annulat (PlanHB): 1d6, 19-20/x2. It's expressly a ranged weapon (specifically, thrown) but the range increment on it is 30 feet, making it just the right distance for ranged sneak attacks. Also penalises cover bonus by 2 on its targets. Neraphim treat it as a martial weapon.

Collapsing Crescent Fan (SStorm) 1d6, 19-20/x2. Similar to the War Fan further down, it's also a light melee weapon and therefore wieldable as an off-hand weapon. Also, while the War Fan imparts (by RAW) a +4 to all your attacks in the first round, this fan applies a +4 to attacks with itself, *whenever* you attack a flat-footed opponent with it.

Manople (SStorm) 1d6, 19-20/x2. Light melee weapon that does slashing or piercing. It provides +1 Shield bonus to AC, but unlike a spiked shield you retain the AC bonus even when you attack in the round. No Armor Check Penalty, but a 5% spell failure chance. You can't be disarmed of it. Not bad.

Iuak (Fburn), 1d8, 19-20/x2. Slashing weapon, if used against an object it ignores the first 3 points of hardness. If you don't use it with EWP, making a critical hit with it forces a Reflex saving throw or the weapon is destroyed.

Goblin Stick (RoF): Medium Size, 1d6/1d6 damage, 19-20/x2. Double weapon, can be used to make trip attacks. Piercing damage. Used mainly by bugbears to hunt goblins.

Blade Boot (FRCS): Small, 1d4, 19-20/x2. Can't run or charge when the blade is extended. Yes, you can have a matched pair. Monks using the blades "attack as if unarmed". No

mention of the 3.0 wording as with the Butterfly Sword. That's at least an improvement on the monk's unarmed critical threat range. Weapon Finesse can be applied to them, too. Some DMs will say the **Boot Blade** from Complete Scoundrel overwrites it, but that thing is considered a dagger while the Blade Boot is something else.

Drow Long Knife (RoE): 1d6, 19-20/x2, 10 foot range increment. Better damage dice than a dagger. There are some Eberron-specific feats that specialise in use of this weapon, in particular Drow Scorpion Warrior, mentioned further down.

Drow Scorpion Chain (RoE): 1d6, 19-20/x2. Two-Handed weapon. This is a Reach weapon and resembles a spiked chain; indeed, you can make trip attacks with it, and a +2 to disarm rolls. Finally, Weapon Finesse can be used with it, even though it isn't a light weapon – and again, Drow Scorpion Warrior applies to it and has some critical-related effects.

Ribbonweave (RoE): 1d8, 19-20/x2. One-handed weapon, and again Weapon Finesse can be applied to it … but you also can't wield it in two hands to get x1.5 STR bonus. Easily concealed; takes a DC 18 Search check to realise it's a weapon.

Cutting Wheel (SoS): 1d6, 19-20/x2, piercing and slashing. Light weapon. Provides +2 bonus against being disarmed. Can flurry with it if you're proficient with it.

Spinning Sword (SoS): 1d6, 19-20/x2. One-handed melee weapon, but Weapon Finesse applies to it.

Butterfly Sword (OA): 1d6, Small size so likely a light weapon, 19-20/x2. Because this was from a 3.0 book, it has the old wording about monk weapons, i.e. "*A monk using a butterfly sword fights with her unarmed base attack bonus, including her more favorable number of attacks per round, along with other applicable modifiers.*" Monks under 3.0 had a different BAB depending on whether they were fighting armed or unarmed. The distinction no longer exists under 3.5, though a straightforward houserule might be to rule the Butterfly Sword as a special monk weapon usable in a flurry.

Ninja-to (OA): Small size so likely a Light weapon. 1d6, 19-20/x2. More or less indistinguishable from a short sword or wakizashi other than that you can store stuff in its scabbard or use it for other things.

Shadowstaff (DlanceCS): 1d8, 19-20/x2. One of the more exploitable weapons out there, mainly because it's poorly-written. The book doesn't even tell us whether it's a two-handed weapon or not, and it doesn't mention being a Reach weapon either. It's a piercing weapon topped with a curved hook. Once an opponent Medium size or smaller is hit with it, it's caught on the hook (NO SAVE) and suffers -2 to attack rolls and -4 penalty to DEX. In addition, the target continues to suffer 1d8 damage per round until it makes an Escape Artist check opposed by the wielder's STR. It can also be used as a tripping weapon and gets a +2 on disarm attempts as well. Let's also note that since there's no indication it's a light weapon, there's no reason you couldn't use it in two hands and pick up x1.5 STR bonuses with it.

Iron-Toothed Maw (Dragon 341) 3d6 piercing damage, 19-20 /x2. It's a warforged component that has a biting mouth that projects out from the girdle to which it's mounted. 10 bite attacks per day, has a 5 foot reach, and is considered a magic weapon for the purposes of DR.

Stone Celt (Dragon 331): 1d8, 19-20/x2, bludgeoning. It's basically a wood club with a stone head attached, i.e. it's the forerunner of the heavy mace. You don't often see a bludgeoning weapon with this extended threat range.

Atlatl Dart (Dragon 331): 1d6, 19-20/x2, Piercing. See Atlatl Javelin further down.

Japute (Dragon 352): 1d4, 19-20/x2, slashing weapon. Light weapon, but it's specific to the Olmen of the Isle of Dread in the Savage Tide adventure path.

Garrotte (Cord) (Song and Silence) 1d6 damage, 19-20/x2. This is 3.0 material that was never updated, and requires a garrotte attack in the terms described in Song and Silence, i.e. something akin to a grapple attack. The idea at least is cool.

18-20 threat range

Quickblade Rapier (CAdv): 1d6, 18-20/x2. Counts as a rapier for Improved Critical, and explicitly Finessable despite the fact it's a one-handed weapon like the rapier. Also grants a +2 on disarm attempts and a +2 on Bluff checks to feint in combat. Also might give you a free +1 to attack rolls because of the weapon description: "Most quickblade rapiers are at least masterwork in quality."

Elven Lightblade (RoTW): 1d6, 18-20/x2. The lightblade at first glance is just an exotic version of the rapier. Even elves can't use it as a martial weapon by RAW. However, it is a light weapon, meaning unlike the rapier it can be used in the off hand with minimum TWF penalties, and at d6 it has a better damage dice than the kukri. If you can get your DM to consider it martial for your elf character, this might be worth thinking about.

Elven Thinblade (RoTW): 1d8, 18-20/x2. Now, the thinblade has a 1d8 damage dice – one of few 18-20 range, one-handed weapons that do. This makes it superior to the longsword in that respect. It possibly even puts it a whisker ahead of the falchion, which whilst it has the same threat range, has dice that more rarely come up with maximum damage (2d4) versus the thinblade's 1d8. But again there's the issue of the EWP; once again, ask your DM if he can consider it a martial weapon for your elf character, and if he can, it's well worth the look.

Elven Courtblade (RotW): 1d10, 18-20/x2. As with the lightblade and thinblade, the elven courtblade is also an exotic weapon, and explicitly two-handed. It's about the only 1d10, two-handed melee weapon that can be used with Weapon Finesse. Not as much damage as the Jovar further down, but that's the tradeoff.

Great Crossbow (RoS): 2d8, 18-20/x2. The range increment is on par with a longbow and has a superior threat range to either a longbow or a crossbow, not to mention damage dice that outstrips even a greatsword. But once again you're stuck with the fact you can't add STR to damage.

Gythka (SavSpec) 1d8/1d8, 18-20/x2. It's a double weapon with the capacity to make trip attacks, so not too bad for a double weapon, and on top of that is the solid base critical threat range.

Jovar (PlanHB): 2d6, 18-20/x2, and it's a two-handed weapon, i.e. a greatsword's damage

dice with a better critical threat range.

Great Falchion (SStorm): 1d12, 18-20/x2. Now this is a bit more like it! Big upgrade on a normal falchion's damage dice. It is "often" (i.e. always ☺) crafted as a masterwork weapon, i.e. it's a +1 to attack, and it's explicitly an executioner's sword, meaning executioner antics (further down) could be used with it.

Great Scimitar (SStorm): 1d8, 18-20/x2. The bastard sword version of the scimitar, can't wield in one hand without special training but can wield it in two hands as though it's a martial weapon. One damage dice less than a bastard sword and a better critical threat range.

Eagle's Claw (SStorm): 1d6, 18-20/x2. Light weapon, gain a +1 to Sleight of Hand checks to conceal it on your body.

Khopesh and **Double Khopesh** (SStorm): 1d6, 18-20/x2. The double khopesh is just a double weapon version of the khopesh, same statistics on both ends. Aside from the critical threat range, the main thing about this weapon is that you can make trip attacks with it.

Razor Skipdisc (Fburn) 1d6, 18-20/x2, thrown weapon. Now this thing is just plain silly. You can basically skip it across open ground with somewhere between a 10 and 30 foot range increment.

Glot (Fburn): 1d4, 18-20/x2, thrown weapon. A smaller and arguably sillier version of the razor skipdisc, it's a ten-pound metal ball you can skip along the ground. If you're going to throw ball bearings at people for the damage, then for goodness sake just go and get an Orc Shotput … but if on the other hand you want to pull ranged trip attacks, then this weapon's worth considering, since it's capable of doing that when thrown.

Jambiya (RoF): 1d3, 18-20/x2, slashing weapon. Tiny weapon. FEAR ME, MORTALS, WITH MY GAUNTLET PUNCHING DAMAGE AND 18-20 CRITICAL RANGE. Yeah, nah - even if its Tiny size probably means it counts as a Light weapon for halfling-sized characters.

Valenar Double Scimitar (ECS): 1d6/1d6 18-20/x2. Also showed up in the AEG as a double scimitar, but mainly of interest for the Valenar-ity of it which has some features tagged to it such as being able to treat it as a special monk weapon useable in a flurry, and indeed if you're a Valenar, this is a martial rather than exotic melee weapon. Also notable since, via the Revenant Blade PrC from PGtE, this is the only way you can get Power Attack to apply to both ends of a double weapon when using it for two-weapon fighting.

Talenta Tangat (ECS): 1d10, 18-20/x2. The Jovar above is better on damage dice, but if you're from Talenta this is a martial weapon, not an exotic weapon. It's basically a big-@$$ curved sword.

Garrotte (Locking, Wire) (Song and Silence) 1d8 damage, 18-20/x2. Again, 3.0 material never updated and also requires garrotte attacks, albeit these ones deal more damage per round and have a better critical threat range -- although it's not entirely clear how critical hits intersect with the rules.

Sharktooth Gauntlet (Dragon 315): Exotic Light Melee Weapon, 1d4 piercing or slashing

damage, 18-20 /x2 damage. Basically you're paying a feat to get a kukri that does piercing damage as well. Probably of most use to the Shark Cultist Prestige Class from the same Dragon issue, though I guess some "unarmed" builds could use it for something.

Elven Longblade (Dragon 351): 1d8, 18-20/x2. Identical to the elven thinblade above, but made of bone rather than steel. This was a weapon made for the Dark Sun setting. One strategy is to ab/use Unguent of Timelessness (DMG) with this weapon, since bone by definition is a substance that was once living, and the unguent can be applied after a spell's been cast on the weapon thus giving the spell a duration of hours rather than minutes.

Daishalar (Dragon 301): 1d6/1d4 Double weapon. Critical range 18-20/x2, and can be used with Weapon Finesse. It's basically a rapier with a dagger blade attached to the pommel.

Pistol and **Musket** (Dragon 301) (weapon, firearm): critical 18-20/x2, ranged touch attack, requires standard action to reload, but you can buy a few of them and pass them off one at a time to your Unseen Servant to reload them. Not to be confused with Dragon 321's weapons, but also distinctly off-theme to most standard D&D campaigns.

Chatchka (Dragon 319) 1d6 throwing weapon, 20 feet range increment. 18-20 / x2 Crystalline throwing wedge.

Braid Blade (Dungeon 120) light weapon, 1d3, 18-20/x2 critical, woven into hair rather than held. You have both hands free for other stuff. You can make an attack action or make an extra attack as part of a full attack at a -5 penalty … but if you've got 5 ranks in Tumble, that penalty drops to -2. Also a +2 bonus to Bluff checks for feinting in combat! Just a wonderful themed weapon, but really its utility is probably more for the extra attack it gives you than the damage as such.

Garrote Ring (DrCo) Grappling weapon used with Garotte attacks out of Song and Silence. 18-20/x2 critical.

Bladed Gauntlet (S&F) 1d6 damage, 17-20/x2 … at least that's how it was printed in Sword and Fist. Unfortunately, it was errata'ed down to a 19-20, and the latest version in AEG retains that.

Weapons with Multipliers greater than x2

Simple Weapons

x3 multipliers

Longspear and **Spear** (PHB): 1d8 damage dice, x3 critical multiplier. The longspear is the better choice for the early levels at least since it's a Reach weapon. The spear can be thrown (20 foot range increment)

Punching Dagger: (PHB) 1d4 damage. The punching dagger despite having a x3 crit multiplier lacks both the slashing damage type and the ability to be thrown, making it much less useful for our purposes.

Fauchard (Dragon 331) 1d8 damage dice, x3 multiplier, Reach weapon and two-handed. Identical to the longspear except it does slashing damage instead.

x4 multipliers

Hook (Dragon 318) 1d4 damage, me hearties, a Light, simple melee weapon with a critical multiplier of x4!

Martial Weapons

x3 multipliers

Longbows, Shortbows (PHB): All the ranged martial weapons out of the PHB have a x3 critical multiplier. The Composite versions allow you to add some STR to damage.

Handaxe (PHB): 1d6, x3 multiplier. Can't throw it, but it's a light melee weapon, so the idea is that this is the off-hand weapon for the dwarf who wants to TWF.

Glaive and **Halberd** (PHB): For our purposes, these weapons are mostly interchangeable. Both have a x3 critical multiplier and a 1d10 damage dice. That said, the Glaive is a Reach weapon while the Halberd for some insane reason is not, but the Halberd has slightly more support in sourcebooks (i.e. Spinning Halberd).

Guisarme and **Ranseur** (PHB): Almost interchangeable with x3 critical multipliers, with the scythe's 2d4 damage dice and Reach, differing only in the damage type (piercing vs. slashing). The Guisarme pulls ahead since you can make trip attacks with it, while the Ranseur only has a +2 to disarming people.

Lance (PHB): 1d8 damage dice, x3 critical multiplier, Reach weapon. The weapon of choice for mounted types since all lances do double damage – i.e. a free +1 to critical multiplier at least – when used from the back of a charging mount, and even better, can be used in one hand while mounted.

Warhammer and **Battleaxe** (PHB): 1d8 damage dice. Both have x3 critical damage multipliers, differing only in their damage type. However, insofar as I recommend one or the other, at least there's a number of things you can do with the warhammer. Even then, the battleaxe is particularly useful for Hida Defender.

Greataxe (PHB): 1d12 damage dice and a x3 critical multiplier. No extended threat range which you'd have to work on, but that 1d12 is difficult to go past.

Atlatl (SStorm): 1d4, 20/x3, martial ranged weapon. Now, this one is interesting mainly because of its range increment – 50 feet, better than the average thrown weapon – but also because its text description calls it a cross between a projectile and thrown weapon. The Atlatl, in short, is a sort of spear thrower and does piercing damage which allows you to add your STR to the attack roll, but the fact it comes within the category of a projectile weapon possibly makes it more useful for things like Deepwood Sniper. And as said it's even a martial weapon. However, compare this with the Dragon magazine version of the Atlatl, further down.

Stabaxe (PlanHB): Identical to the Handaxe except it does piercing damage for some weird reason.

Arrows (Dragonsbreath, Serpentstongue, Swiftwing) (RoTW): All have a x3 critical multiplier and their damage dice vary from 1d8 to 1d6. Yes, all of them are martial weapons.

Flight Lance (RoF): Large weapon with only a 1d8 damage dice, so it's a two-handed weapon. Has a x3 multiplier but can be used as a melee weapon as if it were a shortspear.

Aquatic Longbow (RoF): Martial Ranged Weapon, Large Size, 1d8 damage, x3 Critical. Piercing. Operates as normal longbow except when sea arrows are fired from it underwater. Very situational weapon.

Maquahuitl (MM 4): 1d10, x3 multiplier, piercing and bludgeoning. And here you're really having to reach a bit. The weapon entry on page 88 records the critical multiplier of this weapon as x2, but the statistic entry of the Dark Talon Soldier – who wields this weapon – says that the multiplier of his maquahuitl is a x3. It's otherwise a greatclub augmented with teeth. If you're that desperate to cheese it up and you have the MM IV available, why not just go and pick up the Minotaur Greathammer that's literally out of the same book?

Nagamaki (OA): 2d4, x3 multiplier, slashing damage. Unless you're specifically going Oriental Adventures, don't bother: it has no Reach or anything interesting other than the 2d4, and there are plenty of 2d4 weapons that are better.

Bardiche, Naginata, Voulge (Dragon 331): 1d10, x3 multiplier, two-handed. These are all part of a Dragon special on Polearms. The Bardiche isn't a Reach weapon, the others are. The Naginata also appeared in Oriental Adventures with the same stats.

Duom (Dragon 331): 1d8, x3 multiplier, two-handed. Ah, but this weapon has one thing going for it: it's a Reach weapon, but you can also attack adjacent foes by taking a -2 on the attack roll. It falls just short of saying that you threaten adjacent squares to you, but given it explicitly allows you to make "attacks" – which might include attacks of opportunity – then you have a basis to argue the point …

Partisan (Dragon 331): 2d4, x3 multiplier. It's a Reach weapon, but for this you could just get a Lucerne Hammer which has the same damage dice and a better multiplier.

Pilum (Dragon 331): 1d8, x3 multiplier. Thrown weapon. ROMA VICTORIA, sorry, got a little carried away there … anyway, it has a range increment of 20 feet as well as Reach. You can make sunder attempts on enemy shields with it at range, and if the pilum does more damage than the shield's hardness, the pilum sticks in the shield, causing a -2 to attack rolls, AC and Reflex saves to the enemy unless they drop the shield!

Spetum (Dragon 331): 2d4, x3 multiplier, provides a +2 bonus on Disarm attempts. Meh.

Executioner's Mace (Dungeon 135): 2d6, x3 multiplier. Combination mace and axe with a long spike, which is why it can do bludgeoning and piercing damage or bludgeoning and slashing damage. This was drawn from the Age of Worms adventure path, though, so good luck getting to use it, but if you do, this is one of the more potent martial bludgeoning-ish weapons out there.

x4 multipliers

Light Pick and **Heavy Pick** (PHB): Both of these weapons have a mighty x4 critical multiplier and they're Core martial weapons. 1d6 and 1d8 damage dice respectively. Piercing weapon.

Scythe (PHB): There is no way to bring up critical hits without mentioning this one. Basically it's the best damage dice (2d4) for a two-handed martial weapon that has a x4 multiplier. Slashing or piercing weapon.

Lucerne Hammer (AEG, Dragon 331, DrCo): Has a x4 critical multiplier, but also Reach on top of it. Better yet, it's a martial weapon rather than exotic. Large size, though, so always two-handed, not that we really care much about that. The AEG version lists it only as doing piercing damage, which is consistent with its text description as an oversized pick, but Dragon 331's version of the same weapon has it doing bludgeoning *or* piercing, which we would obviously prefer … and the Dragon Compendium replicates the Dragon 331 version.

Exotic Weapons

x3 multipliers

Gnome Hooked Hammer (PHB): it's a double weapon, and depending which end you use, you're doing x3 bludgeoning or x4 piercing critical damage, which is not too damn bad to start with. Hooked Hammers can also be used to trip, but double weapons are an irritatingly expensive weapon to build up and then use; the only pro in favour is that they're a gnomish racial weapon.

Orc Double Axe (PHB): 1d8/1d8, x3 multiplier. Stupider version of the Gnome Hooked Hammer, and not just because of the race. It's a double weapon.

Dwarven Urgrosh (PHB): 1d8/1d6, x3 critical multiplier, slashing on one end, piercing on the other. At least it's a dwarven racial weapon which conveys proficiency as a martial weapon, although it's still a double weapon with all the awkwardness that entails.

Dwarven Waraxe (PHB): 20/x3. With a 1d10 damage die and a x3 critical multiplier, this weapon is functionally identical to most of the weapons in the "polearms" category, save that it lacks reach. I'm only mentioning it here because dwarves get proficiency with it for free, which makes it a much better option for them.

Dwarven Buckler-Axe (CWar): 1d6 damage. A light melee weapon with a x3 critical multiplier, it's the best buckler out there because it provides a shield bonus as well as being able to be wielded freely in the off hand, and the buckler can be equipped with shield spikes which are their own fertile field for optimisation.

Composite Greatbow (CWar): With a 1d10 damage dice and a x3 multiplier, this weapon is theoretically capable of dishing out some pretty heavy damage. The reason this guide recommends the composite version is because it allows you to add your STR bonus to damage, which is better for obvious reasons. Per page 116 of Complete Adventurer, it's likely that your Weapon Focus feats in Longbow also apply to this weapon too.

Maul (CWar): 1d10 damage dice, bludgeoning, x3 multiplier. The maul was originally introduced in FRCS, where it was a martial, two-handed weapon. CWar updated it to become an exotic, one-handed melee weapon, and doing so, turned it into the bastard sword of hammers: wieldable in one hand with Exotic Weapon Proficiency, wieldable in two hands as a martial weapon. The damage dice makes it sort-of equivalent to the dwarven waraxe except the maul isn't a racial weapon. If you want to just crush face, this is a nice weapon and all, but really the Goliath Greathammer or even the Minotaur Greathammer is better and both are bludgeoning weapons. About its only advantage is that, as an exotic one-handed weapon, you can pull x2 STR bonus to damage from Exotic Weapon Master.

Greatspear (CWar): Essentially, an exotic polearm: 2d6 (that is, greatsword) damage with a x3 critical multiplier and Reach. It also is designed to be thrown since it has a 10 foot range increment, but you would be mad to do this since it's a full-round action to throw a

two-handed weapon (which this is.)

Heavy Poleaxe (CWar): Does either piercing or slashing damage and can't be thrown, but otherwise identical to the greatspear.

Double Hammer (CWar): 1d8/1d8, x3 multiplier. Possibly just as silly as the orc double axe, but at least it's a bludgeoning weapon.

Longaxe (CAdv): 1d12, x3 multiplier, two-handed weapon. It's treated as a greataxe for the Weapon Focus line of feats, but its most interesting feature is that if you take at least a -3 on your Power Attack rolls, you can use it as a Reach weapon. This decision is made round by round with your decision to use Power Attack.

Dwarven Double Spear (RoS) Two-handed double weapon with a 1d8 damage dice, x3 critical multiplier. Deals double damage if set against a charge. Slashing or piercing damage.

Foot Spike (RoTW): 1d4, x3 multiplier, light weapon. Basically only used for aerial combat, and you can put one on each foot to do two-weapon fighting passes when you do as if wielding two light weapons.

Footbow (RoTW): 1d8 damage, x3 critical multiplier. This is a bow used mainly by Raptorans with their feet while in the air, and it can be built in the Composite variety, i.e. adding STR bonus to your damage rolls. Most interestingly, the RAW Footbow doesn't have an upper limit on the STR rating such a composite bow can receive, i.e. you could by RAW get a +10 STR rated Footbow for 1000 gp (each +1 adds 100 gp to the cost.). Lastly, it doesn't say you can *only* use it with your feet even if it's so designed.

Thrombash (SStorm): 1d6 damage, one-handed, and a 10 foot range increment, but there's a lot of other x3 critical multiplier weapons to choose from.

Battlehorn (SStorm): 1d8/1d8, double weapon, x3 multiplier. Can be set against charges for double damage.

Fingerblade (SStorm): x3 critical multiplier, and only 1d6 damage, but if you're proficient with it you do +1d6 damage to a flat-footed foe on the first round of combat … although it's open on RAW as to whether this damage has to be done with the fingerblade or with any other weapon you happen to be holding. Could be useful for Iaijutsu. Also, this is one of the few light weapons that has a x3 multiplier (as opposed to a better critical threat range).

Crescent Scythe (SStorm): x3 multiplier, 1d8/1d8 double weapon that for some weird reason allows you to do +1 point of damage when using Whirlwind Attack.

Bone Bow (FBurn): 1d10, x3 critical, ranged weapon. Not only does the bone bow have a better damage dice than the standard longbow, but it also has a slightly better range increment: 130 feet. It also functions as a Composite longbow with respect to adding your STR bonus to it. And because it's a bow made of bone, i.e. a substance that was once living, Unguent of Timelessness shenanigans apply to it.

Ritiik (FBurn, Dragon 331): 1d8, x3 multiplier. It's a two-hander, but it imposes an interesting effect: hit and if the target fails a saving throw (DC 10 + damage dealt) it's hooked

into the target's flesh. If hooked in, you can immediately make a trip attack with it. Creature can take the ritiik out, but it deals damage equal to the initial damage dealt .. i.e. a sort of critical hit in effect.

Icechucker (FBurn, Dragon 349): Good grief, what in the Nine Hells is this thing? 1d12 damage dice and x3 multiplier, and it's specifically a ranged weapon, but the range increment is far smaller than the crossbow family puts out – 30 feet. That said, its fluff indicates it's basically a bigger crossbow than a heavy crossbow, so it might well satisfy crossbow-based feats. And best of all, you don't even need to fire icicles with it; when that's not available, it will shoot javelins instead doing the same damage!

Stingray whip (Stmwrk): 1d6, x3 critical, one-handed weapon. Deals no damage to any creature with +2 armor bonus or +4 natural armor bonus which just sucks, but you can use Weapon Finesse with it, and it can impose a relatively minor poison effect.

Skipping blade (Stmwrk) 1d3, x3 critical, 10 foot range increment though it's 15 feet when skipped across water. About as silly as the Razor Skipdisc out of Frostburn, although it is treated as ammunition for the purposes of drawing them and so forth.

Monk's Spade (SoS): 1d8/1d8, x2/x3, bludgeoning or slashing. Double weapon, but at least this gives you a slightly better damage dice and critical multiplier than the boring old quarterstaff. Can flurry with it as a monk if you're proficient with it. Can also presumably do gardening in the monastery with it.

Zulaat (SoS): 2d4/2d4, x3 multiplier, slashing. Scythe damage dice on a double weapon without a scythe's critical multiplier.

Yuan-Ti Serpent Bow (SoX): Basically the Yuan-Ti answer to the elvencraft bow. As a melee weapon, it does 1d6; as a ranged weapon, 1d8 but both carry a x3 critical multiplier and a not-bad 80 foot range increment. You can also freely interchange melee and ranged attacks with it in the same round, making it an excellent choice for Targetteer shenanigans.

War Fan (AEG, OA): x3 critical multiplier, and if you win a Bluff vs. Sense Motive check against the enemy, you get +4 on attacks against the enemy in the first round. Note that by RAW that's on all attacks, not just attacks with the War Fan. It's Small and therefore likely to be considered a light weapon, so this one might be something for the off hand even if you don't actually use it at all! Compare the Collapsing Crescent Fan from Sandstorm which is similar-ish but trades the multiplier for a slightly better critical threat range.

Manti (AEG): 1d8, x3 critical multiplier. It's a two-handed weapon with no Reach, but with one interesting feature: it allows you to make one extra Attack of Opportunity per round. Handy for AoO optimisers anyway!

Sang Kauw (OA): 1d8/1d8, x3 multiplier, piercing damage. If you attack only once in the round, get a +1 Shield bonus to AC from the buckler in the middle of the weapon.

Three Section Staff (OA): 1d8, x3 multiplier, bludgeoning damage. Large size, so it's a two-handed weapon, but even a monk has to take EWP to use it. Contains the same meaningless notation as Butterfly Sword that a 3.0 monk could use his unarmed attack bonus when using it.

Chakram (OA): 1d4, x3 multiplier. Ranged weapon, slashing damage. Has a 30 foot range increment which is solid for 1d4 throwers, but otherwise not terrible remarkable.

Sharktooth Staff (SavSpec): 2d6, x3 critical multiplier. If you hit Small or Medium size opponents, you can initiate a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Salamander Halfspear (SavSpec): 1d8, x3 critical multiplier. An all-metal halfspear that does more damage than usual. 10 foor range increment, nothing to write home about.

Hellspear (FC 2, p. 129): 2d6, x3 critical multiplier. This is unique to orthron demons (hence the reference to the creature's statblock), but is called a longspear that is (a) a two-handed weapon and (b) though it's a Reach weapon, it explicitly *can be used against adjacent targets.* And it's a masterwork cold iron weapon, just because.

Atlatl Javelin (Dragon 331): 1d8, x3 multiplier. The Sandstorm Atlatl makes the ranged weapon itself the weapon that does the damage … and only a 1d4. That said, at least it's a martial weapon. The Dragon version does it the other way around: the Atlatl itself is just a launcher. The Atlatl Javelin and Atlatl Dart are the Atlatl's ammunition in effect. In any event: the Atlatl Javelin is notable mainly for its 120 foot range increment, on par with the best bows and crossbows. The main interest is that it's unclear and therefore arguable that the Javelin at least, being launched from the Atlatl, is a thrown weapon, i.e. able to benefit from STR bonus to damage. (The Atlatl Dart is 1d6, 19-20/x2, and has a range increment of 80 feet – again considerably better than most thrown weapons.)

Lochaber Axe (Dragon 331): 1d10 damage dice and x3 multiplier. Two-handed weapon. Another lovely option for the axe-wielding dwarves, because it has Reach and you can make trip attacks with it.

Dwarven Warpike (Dragon 331): 2d6 damage, x3 multiplier. Has Reach, deals double damage when set against a charge, and can be used to make trip attacks. And it even has a greatsword's damage. Just brilliant, especially if you can get it deemed a dwarven racial weapon and thus useable as a martial weapon.

Microlith Barbed Longspear (Dragon 331): 1d10, x3 multiplier. It's another two-handed Reach weapon, albeit the damage dice is better than the standard longspear.

Flight arrow (Dragon 349): Has a x3 multiplier same as a longbow or shortbow, but the biggest benefit is that it increases the range increment of your bow by 25% or so.

Panther Claw (Dragon 281): 1d4 weapon. As punch dagger but with two extra blades (which contribute only to disarm attempts). Has a critical multiplier of x3 and gives a +4 to disarm attempts.

Firearms (Dragon 321): Everything from a musket to a spear rocket launcher, but they all have a critical multiplier of x3 and no upgrade to the critical threat range. All ranged weapons, and all deeply off-theme to a standard campaign.

Awl Pike (Dragon 331): 1d8, x3 critical multiplier. Two-Handed weapon. The Reach weapon for the man who's insecure about his Reach weapon. This one allows you to threaten opponents 15 feet out rather than the standard 10, but you can't threaten anything

closer than that. Does double damage when readied against a charge, which is a situational addition to multiplier I guess...

Tail Hammer (Dragon 308): As the Tail Pick further down, but a x3 critical multiplier instead, and bludgeoning.

Greatcleaver (Dragon 352): 2d8 damage, x3 critical multiplier. As with the Rivebow further down, this two-handed melee weapon is from Bas-Lag, the setting of the China Mieville novel *Perdido Street Station*, which was treated in this issue of Dragon. Cactacae treat this as a martial weapon rather than exotic. Main thing going for it is the damage dice - 2d8, outstripping every other martial melee weapon out there … along with the fact it is said to have a '10 foot reach' without being specifically defined as a Reach weapon!

x4 multipliers

Goliath Greathammer (CWar). 1d12, 20/x4. This is either an earlier version of the Minotaur Greathammer or its own weapon, +2 to Sunder attempts.

Dire Pick (CWar): The bastard sword version of the light or heavy pick: has the same x4 critical multiplier as the other picks, but also a better damage dice as a d8 rather than d6. I doubt the slightly better damage dice is worth an exotic weapon proficiency.

Warsling (RoTW): 1d8, x4 critical multiplier. However, it's a ranged weapon, and if you use skiprocks in particular you can ricochet the rock off someone's head to another target of the slinger's choice. Halfing Warslinger in particular uses this weapon.

Greatpick (RoTD Web Supplement) 1d10, x4 multiplier, piercing damage. It's basically a great big pick. Note that kobolds explicitly treat this as a martial weapon rather than exotic, which is a lovely complement to all your Dragonwrought kobold cheese.

Ice Axe (Fburn): 1d6, x4 critical multiplier. One handed weapon. It can deal piercing or slashing damage, but even the description says it's more a tool than a weapon. If you have EWP, it gives you a +4 on Climb checks.

Tigerskull Club (Fburn) 1d8, 20/x4 critical, bludgeoning and piercing. Provides a +2 on trip and disarm attempts, as well as being a tripping weapon. Most of the exotic weapons out of Frostburn are deemed primitive weapons, i.e. if you don't have the EWP feat and *do* score a critical hit with the damn thing, you have to make a pretty high-level Reflex saving throw or the weapon breaks and becomes useless.

Ribbon Dagger (FF1): 1d4, x4 critical multiplier, +2 to disarm attempts. This, in short, is a dagger made of kaorti resin, of which substance the critfishers sing and which is described further down. That said, this particular dagger takes EWP even for a kaorti to wield it.

Tail Scythe (SavSpec, Serpent Kingdoms): 2d4 damage, x4 critical multiplier. It's basically a scythe to be mounted on your tail. Also allows you to make trip attacks, though you obviously can't drop the weapon if the trip attempt fails.

Gnome Battlepick (AEG): Partially because of the weirdness of weapon size rules between 3.0 and 3.5, the gnome battlepick inflicts 1d6 damage at **Small** size, thus making it

functionally the same as a Small-sized Dire Pick. However, it can explicitly be wielded by a Small character two-handed as a martial weapon. It otherwise has the x4 critical multiplier of all picks. As with most other weapons that have a race in the title, you're probably best advised to try and convince your DM to make it a martial weapon for a certain race, which would eliminate the EWP feat tax.

Mercurial Longsword (AEG): x4 critical multiplier, otherwise a longsword except that you take a -6 on attacks with it if you don't have an EWP for it. There is, however, one bit of particularly stinky cheese in the rule that text trumps table. The wording of Mercurial Longsword is "*As the mercurial greatsword, except* [slightly less attack penalty than the Greatsword.]" You could argue, then, that whilst the mercurial longsword has an entry specifying its damage dice on the table, the text trumps that and gives the mercurial longsword the statistics of a mercurial greatsword … i.e. 2d6 damage dice at least and counts as a Large weapon despite the fact longswords are one-handed weapons.

Tail Pick (Dragon 308): It's a weapon you put on your tail which does x4 on a critical hit. Of course, you need an actual tail. The damage dice is dictated by the amount of damage done by the creature's tail slap attack.

Double-Bladed Scythe (Dungeon 95) 2d4/2d4 damage, x4 critical multiplier, piercing and slashing on both ends. Now you can Darth Maul with your scythe too!

Bec de Corbin (DrCo, Dragon 331) 2d4, x4 critical multiplier. Reach weapon, can be set against charging opponents for double damage: basically, it's the scythe on a longer stick.

Weapons with a threat range greater than 20 AND a multiplier greater than x2

I have not been able to find any weapons with both of these features that are simple or martial weapons; one and all, they are **exotic weapons**.

Orc Shotput (AEG): 2d6, 19-20/x3. Since thrown weapons automatically add your strength modifier to their damage, that makes this weapon equivalent or maybe even better than the Greatsword if you have a ranged build.

Lynxpaw (RoTW): 1d6/1d4, 18-20/x2 or 20/x3. Can be used for two-weapon fighting, can make trip attacks and gets a +2 to disarm checks … but most interestingly, and almost uniquely among the double weapons, it can explicitly be used with Weapon Finesse even though it isn't a Light weapon.

Minotaur Greathammer (MM 4): 1d12, 19-20/x4. One exotic weapon seriously worth the lost feat slot. 1d12 damage dice, i.e. the biggest default damage dice of the lot *and* 19-20 threat range *and* a x4 critical multiplier *and* a +2 to sundering weapons. This combination is rare amongst bludgeoning weapons, let alone all weapons across the board.

Talenta Sharrash (ECS): 1d10, 19-20/x4. Does slashing damage, is a Reach weapon, and can be used to make trip attacks. Best of all, if you are native to Talenta, you treat this as a martial weapon, not an exotic weapon. **Important note:** The ECS errata nerfed the multiplier down to x2, so this might not be anywhere near as good a weapon as it once was if your DM is aware of it.

Flutter Blade (Und): 1d6, 19-20/x3. One-handed melee weapon – i.e. not light -- which can do piercing or slashing damage.

Dragonsplit (MM 4): 19-20/x2 or 20/x4 critical, piercing or slashing damage respectively, depending on how you choose to fight with them. These are one-handed weapons, and thus wieldable in two hands for x1.5 STR damage … but they specifically count as light weapons for Weapon Finesse and – explicitly – Two Weapon Fighting. Which means you can use them in pairs in two weapon fighting without a problem.

Shatter Bolt (DrCo): 18-20/x3! It's crossbow ammunition, but no other ammunition picks up both the wide threat range and the multiplier to go with it.

Ghost Spike (Dragon 348): 19-20/x2 and 19-20/x3 critical, exotic double weapon, Ninja and Assassins receive weapon proficiency for free. However, it's specific to the Mountain Ghost dwarves.

Rivebow (Dragon 352): exotic ranged weapon with 40 ft range increment, 19-20/x3 critical, base damage 2d6 slashing. It's basically a crossbow that shoots buzz blades.

Githyanki Scythe-Sword (Dungeon 100): 2d4 20/x4 critical, slashing and piercing, and 1d8 19-20/x2 critical, slashing. Double weapon, obviously.

Specific Weapons and Items of Interest

There are a lot of specific weapons scattered across the sources which just have the *keen* quality stuck on them out there. For space reasons alone, I'm not going to try and list them all, or even any of them. Instead, I'm listing as many weapons as I can find that have something interesting on them otherwise. Generally book magic items are overly expensive; if you want a *keen* weapon, build one yourself or get one built to specifications.

Staff of Rapture (BoED): While normally this magical staff functions as a standard +1 quarterstaff like any other stave, when the wielder uses it against a creature with an Evil alignment, it has a natural threat range of **17-20**!! All the damage is nonlethal damage, but nonlethal has a little secret: energy resistance does not apply to Merciful weapons. And an unconscious opponent is a dead opponent one coup de grace later.

Manyfang Dagger *(*SrpKgdm*)* This +1 Dagger deals x4 damage on every hit, and on a critical hit, it deals x5 damage instead. From the sourcebook that brought you the Sarrukh and thus the road to Pun-Pun.

Harrowheart *(*BoVD*)* This +2 Rapier deals x3 damage instead of x2 damage when used to crit Good-aligned creatures, i.e. an 18-20/x3 critical hit range and multiplier useable with Finesse.

Stormchaser's Cudgel (WoL) From first level, on a successful critical hit against a Humanoid of 4 HD or less, target must make a Will save or be dazed for 1 round. At 10th level, it doubles its critical threat range against creatures and objects smaller than you, explicitly stacks with all other effects that improve critical threat range. However, the weapon is a Greatclub, so with *Weapon of Impact* and Improved Critical that's a 15-20 threat range in total … although I suppose you could argue stuff like the Disciple of Dispater also stacks with it too. However, as with all Legacy Weapons, you pay a substantial price in attack roll, saves, and lost hitpoints … on top of the fact it's a Large weapon and can't be wielded by Medium size people without some special ability to do so.

Namarra (MoF) +2 *keen* longsword, glows, can cast *silence* upon itself as often as desired.

Frostfell Figurine of Wondrous Power, Malachite Smilodon (FBurn) Figurines of Wondrous Power are interesting on their own, but this one creates a smilodon – i.e. a sabretooth tiger -- with 17-20/x3 critical threat and multiplier.

Hammer of Flatlander's Doom (Web) -- Scottish nationalist, the weapon. It's a minor artefact. A hammer of flatlander's doom deals +2d6 points of damage when used against creatures native to nonmountainous regions. Additionally, **against such targets, the hammer's threat range for critical hits becomes 19-20**. A non-mountain-dwelling creature who is **critically hit by a hammer of flatlander's doom must make a successful DC 18 Fortitude saving throw or be stunned for 1d4 rounds**. At a minimum, a creature whose environment entry does not include mountains is not a mountain dweller. If used against a

creature that dwells in mountainous regions, though, the hammer loses all of its magic properties for 24 hours, right after it bestows a curse on the wielder.

Crescent Knife (Dragon 275) An exotic light weapon with 20/x2 critical, but each attack becomes 2 discrete attack rolls, resolved separately, allowing wielder potentially increase damage by 100% and double up for all striking effects. This weapon was from very early in 3.0's run and the fact it wasn't thought through by the designers is apparent.

Scourge (Dragon 275) Exotic one handed weapon with 20/x2 critical, but each attack becomes 3 discrete attack rolls, resolved separately, allowing wielder potentially increase damage by 200% and to triple up for all striking effects. Whilst it shares a name with the weapon in Complete Warrior, this weapon has different damage and special rules. DM fiat may render this weapon inaccessible for similar reasons as the Crescent Knife above.

Character Options

It's here we start talking about the various options to enhance range, multipliers, critical confirmations, and effects. I've attempted to group these by categories where feasible, though some options enhance both critical threat range and some other aspect of critical hits (in which case they have their own heading).

Increasing Critical Threat Range

Prestige Classes and ACFs

Disciple of Dispater 4, 8 (BoVD) When using an iron or steel weapon, the Disciple of Dispater's threat range doubles, then at level 8 it triples. This ability stacks with Improved Critical, but not the *Keen* property. Requires Evil alignment to take.

Most of the discussion around this PrC tends to be how to get your weapons considered as steel. It's not necessary. The RAW only requires that you "use" an iron or steel weapon, not that you necessarily strike with it. The benefits – the increases to threat range and so on – are given to the DoD, not to one specific weapon he's holding. Simplest suggestion to put on your DM: suppose you're TWFing, wielding a longsword in one hand, and a wooden club in the off hand. By RAW, the benefits of DoD likely apply to both weapons, not just the steel one. This becomes even more interesting for monks, who can certainly hold a special monk weapon made of steel such as a sai but can carry out all manner of unarmed strikes with any part of the body. As with Improved Critical, it's the *Disciple's* threat range that is doubled, but unlike Improved Critical, it's not confined to one weapon, and certainly not just to the iron or steel weapon you "use". Simplest way to exploit this? Braid Blade, mentioned above … or more significantly, the Ward Cestus from AEG which is considered an unarmed attack when used, and whose operative part is a steel band. The PrC also has a bunch of other slightly interesting bits and pieces … one of which includes proficiency with all types of armor and shields, i.e. all exotic armors are included as well. Disciple of Dispater was a 3.0 PrC, but it was not updated to 3.5, and thus stands as available.

Targetteer (Dragon 310) A variant Fighter, the Targetteer's Sniper ability allows them to sacrifice their iterative attacks in a full attack and increase the base critical threat range of their weapon 1 for 1. A Targetteer can't give up all their attacks to power this ability, but this is an asset to the critfishing archer due to the myriad ways one can acquire more attacks. Particularly nice is that whilst the RAI was that this ability was only meant to apply to ranged attacks, by RAW it refers only to "attacks". For the elvencraft and Yuan-Ti bows which explicitly allow the user to alternate melee and ranged attacks, the argument is even stronger. (Unfortunately, by RAW it probably isn't possible for a person to *Aptitude* the Sniper ability into other weapons, because it's expressed as a special ability in place of a bonus feat - it is not a feat itself. *Aptitude* weapons only draw off feats that apply to a

specific weapon.) It's also worth noting that -- by the barest of margins -- this is not 3.0 material: the 3.5 PHB was published in July 2003, and Dragon 310 came out one month later, in August.

Mythic Exemplar 2 (CChamp) (PrC) Least Paragon's Gift, Sunyarta. Once per day, increase the critical threat range of a weapon by 1 for class level/rounds. Explicitly stacks with all other sources of critical range extension.

Barbarian 7 (Web) (ACF) When a Streetfighter Barbarian makes a charge attack or attacks a flat-footed opponent, their threat range increases by 1. This ability explicitly stacks with either the Improved Critical feat or the *keen* enchantment, but not both.

Arcane Duelist 7 (Web) (PrC) The duelist's False *Keen*ness class feature expands critical threat range by penalising attack accuracy. The duelist takes 1 point of attack accuracy for every point of threat range he extends it. For example, wielding a kukri with a threat range of 18-20, the duelist can subtract 3 from his attack roll and suddenly his threat range is 15-20. This ability "does stack with the increased threat range granted by the Improved Critical feat and by a *keen* magic weapon," which is very interesting terminology. By RAW this might therefore allow *keen* and Improved Critical to stack *with each other* in this one specific instance, given other Prestige Classes usually specify whether it's either/or (e.g. the Barbarian ACF above or indeed Disciple of Dispater).

False *Keen*ness might seem bad. However, there's more to it. The Arcane Duelist's *other* significant ability – Dexterous Attack at level 3 – allows the Duelist to subtract from his weapon's maximum potential damage and add it to the attack roll. You nerf your weapon's damage capacity doing this, but if it's critical effects you want, this is a good way to expand the threat range *and* get better odds of scoring both the threat and the hit. The best application is if your DM agrees that a *keen* weapon's "normal threat range" is 15-20, which seems somewhat open at the text. If so, False *Keen*ness alone, before Improved Critical is applied, drops that range down to 10-20, with Improved Critical dropping it to an insane 5-20. And finally, there is another gambit … namely, Power Attack with a weapon wielded in two hands. As the guys over at the minmax forums noted: "*If you have a greatsword and a strength bonus of +4, your max damage is 18. Take 5 points from that, for a max damage of 13 and +5 to hit. Now power attack for 5 points. You gain +10 damage, or a max damage of 23. For every point from the max damage you take, you can turn it into an extra point of damage. Or mix with combat expertise for extra defense, or against high AC enemies, you can use the extra attack*."

Vengeance Sworn 10 (Dragon 296) This PrC's critical threat range is doubled when it makes attacks against a creature of the dragon type. Explicitly stacks with Improved Critical and *keen*. But the PrC is extremely focused on dragons to almost the exception of everything else.

Dragonslayer 7 (Dmicon) Very focused on killing dragons, at this level the Dragonslayer gains the effect of Improved Critical for any weapon used against a dragon. Doesn't stack with any other "ability" (i.e. not a spell, i.e.e. *keen edge* and possibly *keen* still stacks with it by RAW) that increases the threat range of a weapon. The Dragonslayer also gets a bonus to damage rolls against dragons which multiplies on critical hits. Also, by a quirk of RAW, the Dragonslayer is proficient with all armors, which would include all exotic armors, and might be proficient with all shields (exotic and otherwise) too.

Orc Blademaster 4 *(*Dragon 299*)* At 4th level in this orc-only PrC, the character adds +1 to their critical threat range with a bastard sword. This stacks with any other sources of extended threat range, but this bonus must be added last. (So with Improved Critical (bastard sword) you wind up with a threat range of 16-20.)

Thayan Gladiator 2 *(*CoR*)* At second level, you gain the benefit of the Improved Critical feat with the natural weapon you selected for your Improved Natural Attack at the first level.

Warsling Sniper 4 (RoF) (PrC) At 4th level, the warslinger gains Improved Critical (Halfling Warsling).

Glaive of Azharadian 5 *(*Dragon 293*)* 1/day wielder can apply *keen* quality to a longsword or battleaxe for class level/rounds. If the weapon is already *keen*, the power has no effect.

Green Hunter 6 (Dragon 295) At sixth level, this prestige class gives you Improved Critical (Spiked Gauntlet).

Brawler 2 (Dragon 295) From 2nd level, this PrC is able to select Improved Critical (Improvised Weapons) (among other Weapon Focus-ish feats). So that means you don't qualify for Improved Critical in these weapons specifically until character level 9 given the prerequisite of BAB +7 and the fact the feat gives you no open fighter bonus feat slots.

Shen 4 (Snake Variant) (Dragon 319) At 4th level in this monk-ish PrC, a Shen of the Snake school gains Improved Critical (Unarmed Strike). If you're entering via monk this theoretically gives you the feat one level earlier than you could get it, since a monk only qualifies for Improved Critical at level 11 anyway and your next feat slot generally doesn't come up until level 12. A full-BAB class can qualify earlier, getting the Improved Critical roughly the same time as they would otherwise qualify for it in a fighter-ish build. If you can't get *Impact* to apply to your unarmed attacks – and you should absolutely be able to -- this at least is giving you an upgrade to your critical threat range for free.

Acolyte of the Fist 7 (Dragon 296) At 7th level, this PrC gets Improved Critical (Unarmed Strike). Again, assuming a monk entry, this gives you the feat at character level 11, i.e. generally one level earlier than you could get it with a default monk. The PrC demands a full 10 levels in it, though – not practically, that's the explicit RAW requirement. As with Shen, the main value of it is where you're short of options to otherwise expand your threat range.

Shark Cultist 8 (Dragon 315) At 8th level of this hilarious PrC out of Taladas in Dragonlance, a Shark Cultist gets Improved Critical (Sharktooth Gauntlet) and Improved Critical (Bite) where the bite comes from a natural attack or a natural attack accessed via Wild Shape or similar. Even for the presumed entry via cleric or druid, you get these Improved Critical feats one to two levels later than you could get them if you'd stuck with your base class. I guess the fact it's a full-BAB class is meant to make up for that.

Bowman Charger 7 (Dragon 325) In this mounted-archery based PrC, the character gains Improved Critical (Composite Shortbow). On one hand the Composite Shortbow isn't a bad choice for criticals since it allows you to add STR to damage. However, you pick up the feat very late even as a martial character with full BAB – at the earliest, level 13 assuming you qualify at the earliest point of level 6, i.e. a full 5 levels after a default fighter could qualify for

it. Worse still, the PrC's signature ability – the ability to make a moving full attack off the back of one's mount – is tied to melee weapons, not ranged.

Feats

Improved Critical (PHB): Double your critical threat range, doesn't stack with any other threat-range-enhancing effect on a weapon. It comes online relatively late: it takes a BAB of +8 and proficiency with the weapon involved; this may make certain Prestige Classes more attractive depending on when you pick up a class feature replicating it. That said – in 3.5 played by the RAW, Improved Critical is garbage.

Yes, I said garbage. As in, sub-Dodge-or-Mobility-level garbage. At least those feats give you *something*. Generally you're playing in settings where magic weaponry is commonly available – indeed 3.5 is basically broken without magic weaponry, the designers themselves have all but said so. As such, there is *no reason* to take Improved Critical. *Keen* is a +1 weapon quality, and *Keen edge* is a low-level spell. Improved Critical only applies to one weapon, just like *keen*, so if the DM sunders your weapon, *keen* or not, you are still kicked back to the natural 20s unless you happen to find another weapon to which your Improved Critical feat applies. (Sure, Warblade Weapon Aptitude might help since it applies to Improved Critical, but the uses for that are distinctly situational unless you have some desire to shuffle between 20, 19-20, and 18-20 threat range weapons.)

It's even harder to justify Improved Critical on a bludgeoning weapon, since they generally have rubbish critical threat ranges and *Impact* is a thing. Put simply: gold is theoretically unlimited, feat slots are not. If a DM forces you to choose between the two, then unless you have something insufferably clever in store, pick up *keen* on your weapon and go your way knowing that, on this one, WOTC cut off its own nose to spite its face. The only reason you would opt for Improved Critical over *keen* would be if you needed it as a prerequisite for something like Staggering Critical, absolutely had to get a better critical range, or your DM for some insane reason doesn't want martials to have *keen*, and you want to auto-confirm critical hits via *Bless Weapon* or similar. Or you're running a Vow of Poverty build, in which case you're building a character for the challenge or the masochism.

However, and more interestingly: per Complete Arcane, Improved Critical can be applied to a category of spells (ranged or touch spells.) Given the number of spells that (a) impose damage on touch or (b) rely on ranged touch attacks, this is about the most versatile that the feat gets. We're going to talk more about this further down.

Holy Potency (CChamp): We're interested in the Conduit of Death tactical maneuver here. If you attempt to rebuke undead, then make an attack with an inflict wounds – *or other negative energy spell* – against a living creature in the following round, then the damage of the spell is increased, and the critical threat range "of the attack" increases by 1. Of the attack – not the spell. This is handy for spell critical threats on its own, but it may also be useful if you're channelling via a weapon; the ruling may be that your weapon's attack roll has an enhanced critical threat range. It only requires you "attack with an inflict spell".

Elfhunter (Und): Drow only, but +1 to *melee* damage and *ranged attack* rolls against one elf subrace, and get Improved Critical for **any** weapon when attacking that subrace. Doesn't

stack with actual Improved Critical … but is silent about whether it stacks with *keen.* And note that since you're given the *benefit* of the feat, you don't have to be BAB +8 to pick it up.

Tall Mouther Hunter (SSth): +2 competence bonus on attack rolls only against aberrations, and Improved Critical for any weapon you're using in such attacks; doesn't stack with any other effect that expands critical threat range. Applies on melee and ranged attacks up to 30 feet away. Regional feat, though, for Halflings from Luiren, and therefore makes Improved Critical effectively available from first level.

Shifter Savagery (RoE) This feat doubles the threat range of all your natural weapons and increases your damage dice by two size categories. Unfortunately, it only functions if you are a Shifter (Were-Touched) and are *Raging* as the Barbarian ability, and doesn't stack with anything that increases your threat range or Improved Natural Attack. Comes online at BAB +6, but really the best improvement it offers is the increase in damage dice.

Favored Critical (MoTW) According to WOTC, this 3.0 feat was revised into Complete Warrior's Favored Power Attack, which is unrelated to critical hits. For completeness, though, the 3.0 version of Favored Critical said that when you make an attack roll against a favored enemy, the threat range of their weapon is doubled. This feat explicitly stacks with the *keen* weapon enchantment, but not the Improved Critical feat.

Power Critical (MoTW) Complete Warrior changed this to just give a +4 to confirm criticals for 1 weapon (but allows the feat to stack with itself, almost uniquely). The 3.0 version said that once per day, if the user of this feat has the Improved Critical feat, they may automatically declare a single attack to be a critical threat. It must still be confirmed however.

Spells, Soulmelds, and Vestiges

Keen edge (PHB) (Sor/Wiz 3): *Keen,* the spell. Just as restrictive, and doesn't stack with *keen* or anything else.

Weapon of Impact (SpC) (Brd 3, Cleric 3, Sor/Wiz 3) This spell functions as *keen edge* but for Bludgeoning weapons.

Weapon of the Deity (SpC) (Blk 4, Clr 4, Pal 4): This spell's utility for critfishing is wholly dependent on which weapon your god happens to like. It provides an enhancement bonus and a special ability which varies according to the god: for our purposes, some of these include *keen* and one or two effects that trigger on a critical hit, such as *thundering*. It's beyond the scope of this guide to go through each and every god, but bear in mind that other versions of the spell specific to settings – such as Forgotten Realms and Eberron – have different gods with different effects attached.

Razorfangs (SpC) (Sor/Wiz 2): Double the threat range of 1 natural weapon which does piercing or slashing damage. Doesn't stack with any other effects that increase a weapon's threat range.

Critical Strike (SpC) (Assn 1, Sor/Wiz 1) Not to be confused with the Complete Mage version, which was an Assassin-only spell that allowed you to ignore a target's concealment. The Spell Compendium version gives you a bonus 1d6 damage, double your weapon's

critical threat range (as *Keen edge*) and a +4 bonus to confirm critical hits. However, you have to either have flanked the enemy or denied its DEX bonus to AC, the conditions of which at least are mitigated by the swift action casting time. Not bad for a first level critfisher's spell.

Dolorous Blow (SpC) (Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 3) Doubles the threat range of any weapon affected by it and automatically confirms any critical hits rolled by the affected weapon. The increased threat range does not stack with any similar effects, and the automatic confirmation effect does not apply to any weapon that already has "a magical effect related to critical hits". This spell cannot be used on a natural weapon. So even Improved Critical is probably out, but if you can find something (Ex) or even plain natural that relates to critical hits, this works with it … for example, in the critical multiplier range, where enhancements to multipliers typically are not magical.

Jagged Tooth (SpC) (Rgr 2, Consecrated Harrier 2, Drd 3) This spell doubles the threat range of one natural weapon, selected by the caster. This spell does not stack with any other effect that increases critical threat range.

Hero's Blade (ECS) (Deathless 9, Revered Ancestor 9) Weapon deals additional damage against evil targets, critical hits deal +2d10 against evil creatures and +2d12 against evil outsiders and undead. (It doesn't make the undead vulnerable to critical hits, but the extra damage is dealt all the same). Also, on a critical hit, evil creatures must make a Will save or be blinded and deafened for 1d4 rounds, evil extraplanar creatures must make a will save or be banished for 24 hours. Its threat range doubles as if affected by a *keen edge* spell and this **explicitly stacks** with Improved Critical. Good spell, but comes damn late in the day.

Incarnum Weapon (MoI) (Clr 5, Inc 5) This manifests an independent weapon that attacks enemies independent of the caster and does 2d6 of damage on each hit. At first glance this doesn't look to be much more than a slightly more punchy *Spiritual Weapon* – however, each point of essentia that the user invests in the spell increases the threat range of the weapon by one (and increases the enhancement bonus by 1, which is handy for all critical hits).

Sakkratar's Triple Strike (LEoF) (Sor/Wiz 5) This spell grants the designated targets the ability to make two additional attacks on their full attack action for the duration of the spell. However, what we care about is that the weapons of anyone affected by this spell gains the *keen* and *flaming burst* properties for the duration of the spell.

Erythnul's Slaughter (Dragon 342) (Initiate of Erythnul 5) 30 ft radius, all melee weapons (including that of opponents) are affected by a *keen edge* spell while within the spell radius, and no living creature within the radius can stabilize normally, requiring magical healing or a heal check to stabilize when they fall into negative hit points.

Claws of the Wyrm (DMagic) (Soulmeld - Arms Chakra) The claws the soulmeld gives you have a threat range of 19-20 for the two claw attacks it grants (doesn't stack with any other range multipliers). Also notable is the Hands Chakra bind, which improves your claw damage by one step.

Mauling Gauntlets (MoI) (Soulmeld – Arms Chakra) This soulmeld doubles the threat range of any melee weapon wielded by the user. Does not stack with any other ability that increases critical threat range.

Andras, the Grey Knight (ToM) (Vestige) Andras' *Sure Blows* power grants you the benefit of the Improved Critical feat with any weapon that you can wield. If you already have the Improved Critical feat with a specific weapon, this ability gives you a +4 bonus to confirm the critical hit.

Ipos (ToM) (Vestige) Ipos explicitly grants you Cold Iron claw attacks, which can be useful if you're looking for a metal weapon to use with Disciple of Dispater.

Weapon, Armor, and Shield enhancements

Keen (PHB): Doubles a weapon's critical threat range, doesn't stack with Improved Critical or anything else that's fun.

Impact (MIC) This enchantment functions as the *keen* weapon enchantment, however it only affects bludgeoning weapons. For later reference: unarmed attacks do bludgeoning damage.

Bloodlust (FoW) This shield enchantment can cast *keen edge* on a single weapon you carry once per day. Dwarven Buckler-Axe, anyone?

Magic Items

Scabbard of *Keen* Edges (DMG): Casts *keen edge* on the piercing or slashing weapon put in it, three times a day.

Ring of Accuracy (Dragon 317) (Magic Item) Critical threat range of any weapon the wearer uses is doubled. Explicitly does not stack with Improved Critical, *keen edge, keen*, "or any similar effect".

Other Random Stuff

Precision Assault (FoW) (Teamwork Benefit) all members increase melee critical threat range by 1 against a target once at least 1 member successfully scores a critical hit against target. This benefit lasts until end of combat or any team member attacks another target, stacks with all other critical effects.

Weapon Enhancement (Su) (WoL, p. 195) This option assumes you are mad enough to use Legacy Weapons in your campaign, and even more mad to try and build one of your own. If you do, though, in Ability Menu D, we have this wonderful bit of text for this particular ability which can be added to a Legacy Weapon: "*The effective enhancement bonus of a weapon increases by 1, to a maximum of +3. You can instead choose any special ability*

whose market price is equivalent to a +1 bonus, such as flaming. This ability can be placed only on a weapon. You can select this option multiple times. Its effects stack." *Keen* is an effective +1 bonus. By RAW, this means you can stack iterations of *keen*, even if the RAI likely meant the option rather than the ability.

Wintervein Dwarves Affiliation (PHB 2) With an affiliation score of 30 or higher, a character automatically gains the Improved Critical feat for the Dwarven Waraxe and Dwarven Urgrosh as bonus feats.

Nimblewright (MM 2): Notable mainly because it has an impressive natural threat range of 12-20. *Polymorph Any Object* allows you to access its abilities. Cast *keen edge* on its natural weapons, and that's a 3-20 threat range. And while MM 2 was errata'ed, the threat range for this jolly little bit of clockwork was left gorgeously intact.

Blood Rock (terrain) (EE) any roll of a natural 19 or 20 threatens a critical hit while the attacker stands in a Blood Rock square, does not stack with any other effect, melee only

Ancestral Weapon (Dragon 317) (Minor Artifact) This was a sort of port-over from the D&D Heroes videogame, and even the article itself says it doesn't translate well. An ancestral weapon - as it's powered up with "soul shards" - gains the *keen* property, though it's not clear how you're supposed to get the thing to level 2 anyway.

Increasing Critical Multiplier

Prestige Classes

Hida Defender 1 (OA) The Hida Defender's Critical Focus ability increases the critical multiplier of a battleaxe, warhammer, or greatclub by 1. At least that was the likely RAI. However, by RAW a battleaxe made of kaorti resin, and accordingly a x4 weapon, would raise its multiplier to x5. There is also a potential RAW exploit where the PrC is combined with Warblade. The Critical Focus ability raises the critical multiplier of "*the weapon to which the Defender's Weapon Focus feat applies*". The Warblade's weapon aptitude class feature can change the designated weapon to which a Weapon Focus feat applies … and whilst the Warblade's ability says that this can't result in a *feat* lacking a Weapon Focus prerequisite, it says nothing about class features. That is: the Warblade changes the weapon to which the Weapon Focus feat applies, and Critical Focus then, per the RAW, increases that critical multiplier by 1 … no matter what the weapon then happens to be. The requirement of a battleaxe, warhammer, or greatclub only applies if you have two Weapon Focus feats. This is a clever bit of oversight, which has only one potential hole in it: the argument that if you lose Weapon Focus in battleaxe, warhammer, or greatclub, you also do not have the prerequisites for Hida Defender at all, and Critical Focus disappears. The argument in reply would be that you still have that feat – Warblade has just changed the weapon to which that feat's benefit applies, and Critical Focus then follows along with it. But even by RAI this is still very solid and possibly the easiest method by which to get an upgrade to your critical multiplier.

Thayan Gladiator 7 (CoR) At this level, the Thayan Gladiator's chosen natural weapon has an increase in its critical multiplier by 1. The main drawback is that it takes too many damn levels to get to Thayan Gladiator 7, meaning it's not easy to combine with other multiplier increases.

Initiate of the Draconic Mysteries 9 (Dmicon) The *Deadly Strike* ability increases the Initiate's critical multiplier with unarmed strikes to x3.

Reaper's Child 4 (Dragon 299): Lawful evil. Only 5 levels long. Class levels per day, once per round, if the character declares an unarmed strike as a Scythe Strike, and hits, and the opponent fails a Fort save (15 + PrC level + WIS, so DC 19 at least), the strike is automatically confirmed as a critical hit and has a x4 critical multiplier. As usual, if you're immune to criticals, you're immune to this as well. And it even allows monks to use scythes with their x4 critical multipliers, although there's one delightful RAW wording: "Furthermore, a reaper's child can use a scythe just as she can use a kama, nunchaku or siangham." This is 3.0 language for monks, i.e. it refers to monks and what weapons they can use in flurries. So again, the houserule might best be just that the scythe becomes a special monk weapon (or perhaps that it's a one-handed weapon like the kama, nunchaku, and siangham!) Lastly, note that it has an incoherent prerequisite: "Unarmed Base Attack Bonus: +4/+1," which doesn't exist under 3.5, but which is most likely to mean a +6/+1 in present day terms.

Zerth Cenobite 6 (Dragon 281) At level 6, if a Zerth Cenobite scores a critical hit while using a Discerning Attack, the damage is tripled ("as if it had a critical multiplier of x3"). Note this PrC is separate from, and therefore is probably obsolete as against, the Zerth Cenobite PrC

in *Complete Psionic* (even though the article it comes from is basically an advertisement for *Complete Psionic*). The C.Psi version does not include the above ability.

Bloodsister 9 (Dragon 298) At 9th level, the critical multipliers of any short sword or dagger wielded by a Bloodsister rise to x3. The prestige class is very pedestrian otherwise, and drow-specific.

Feats

Spirited Charge (PHB) It's an indirect increase in critical multiplier. When mounted and using the charge action, you do double damage with a melee weapon, triple damage with a lance. Whilst its not specifically raising the critical multiplier of the weapon as such, it does amount to an increase since a double of a double is a triple. Lances normally do x3 on a critical hit. If we have a Kaorti Resin lance, that critical damage is x4. If it's a *valorous* lance, the damage becomes x5. Add Spirited Charge, that becomes x7 on a critical hit.

Holy Potency (CChamp) This time we're interested in the Conduit of Life tactical maneuver: if you roll a natural 20 on attack roll when you've attempted to turn undead and then do positive energy damage against an undead target next round, and target fails its save, the spell deals double damage. In effect this is an increase in critical multiplier on a spell, because that same 20 is a critical threat … as well as getting around undead not being subject to critical hits. Additionally, there is also the Touch of Death tactical maneuver which does much the same thing to living targets, i.e. double damage from the spell.

Earth's Embrace (OA) Once again, Complete Warrior changed this. In its original form, when grappling, if you pin your opponent, you "*deal critical damage (double normal unarmed damage) each round that you maintain the pin."* The C.War version provides that you do 1d12 additional damage each round you maintain the pin instead.

Dragondoom (Dmicon) When a character with this feat makes an attack roll against a creature with the Dragon type, their critical multiplier increases as indicated on the relevant chart: x2 weapons increase to x3, x3 weapons to x5, x4 weapons to x7. Not to be confused with the dragondoom weapon property, which just allows you to smite dragons 3/day.

Great Bite *(*ECS*)* A Longtooth Shifter with this feat increases the critical multiplier of their natural bite attack to x3 instead of only x2. Shifter Savagery might be something to consider combining with this.

Weapon Qualities and Substances:

Kaorti Resin (Web) For the low cost of an Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat, this weapon special material increases your critical damage multiplier to x4 if your weapon deals piercing or slashing damage. A few notes on this specifically that might need to be cleared with your DM:

- Kaorti resin does not provide a flat increase of 2 to your weapon's critical multiplier; it merely raises the multiplier of a piercing or slashing weapon to x4. A kaorti resin scythe is not a x6 critical weapon, it's just a x4 kaorti resin scythe and the DM is

laughing at you because you spent an EWP and a lot of time and money getting a weapon that would provide you the same benefit as if you'd just bought Farmer Maggot's curved bit of steel.

- By RAW it can be applied to longbows or crossbows, since these weapons explicitly do piercing damage, and kaorti resin can be applied to a piercing or slashing weapon – ranged or melee. Not the ammunition, mind you, the bow itself … but the general ruling seems to be that whilst some *magical* qualities pass from bow to ammunition, weapon *material* qualities don't. So you're likely stuck with building kaorti resin arrows unless you have a very broad-minded DM.

- If you're planning to make a kaorti resin version of some exotic weapon, this is actually a saving on feats: you take EWP (kaorti resin elven lightblade) for example, and you have an 18-20/x4 weapon where it normally takes two feats to wield these weapons.

- Kaorti resin, by the fluff, is secreted by kaorti, i.e. the stuff is basically solidified sweat. While totally disgusting, this means kaorti resin is a substance that was once living, and therefore open to ab/using Unguent of Timelessness, making your spells on the resin weapon last for months rather than moments. It's also worth noting that there isn't a simple RAW way to make Kaorti Resin count as iron or steel, meaning you can't *prima facie* utilise Disciple of Dispater with it … but look a bit closer at the DoD section, because that might not be the end of the story.

Valorous (UE) This enchantment on a melee weapon allows the user to pull double damage on a charge attack. When we remember that a doubling of damage is in effect an increase in critical multiplier of +1, this is one of the more solid ways for martials to raise this stat.

Dragonhunter (MIC) This enchantment increases the critical multiplier of any projectile weapon affected by it by 1 when targeting a creature of the dragon type. Sadly the strength damage dealt by this weapon doesn't multiply, and doesn't stack with any other *magical* critical effects. (Again, Deepwood Sniper's Keen Arrows effect is (Ex) and therefore would stack … assuming you're planning on hunting dragons or kobolds.)

*Collision (*MIC): Special mention here, but for +2 on a weapon, you get a +5 on your weapon's damage. A simple +5 damage doesn't seem like a lot, but as a flat bonus, this enchantment is affected by your critical multiplier, which can rack up fast enough given the right multiplier. Put it this way, a flat 5 is greater than the statistically expected damage on a 1d8 and on par with the expected damage of a 1d10 weapon, and thus generally a bigger return than your average d6 bonus on a critical hit.

Plate Thinner (Dragon 344) (alchemical item): can be used as a thrown weapon, coats 1 medium sized target, requires multiple doses to coat larger targets. For 1 minute, this increases critical multipliers by 1 on any roll of a natural 20, affects only creatures of the dragon type or reptilian subtype with a natural armor bonus. Likely nonmagical. Way too situational to justify its usage, mainly because it's stuck on a natural 20.

Magic Items and Other Random Stuff

Claws of the Ripper (Dmicon) These enchanted scythe-like rings can be worn by any Dragon-type creature, and they resize to fit a Large size dragon or bigger. When worn, this magic ring increases the critical multiplier of the dragon's claws to x4. By RAW there *may* be an argument to say that Draconic Claw, a feat from Races of the Dragon that gives you claw attacks dealing damage "as if you were truly a dragon", and whose fluff text says you develop natural weapons "like those of your draconic ancestors", qualifies you to wear these things, since they're explicitly shaped to go over a dragon's claws. If not, then it's back to Dragonwrought Kobold to wear these.

Bow of the Mighty Dragonhunter (Dmicon) This +2 dragonbane composite longbow gains a x5 multiplier when used against a creature of the Dragon type. Again, composite longbow, so your STR is added to damage with it.

Riding Boots (DMG 2) If you are mounted and wielding a lance, and have Spirited Charge, these magical boots increase your critical multiplier to x4 instead of x3. Also grants you Ride-By Attack as well. Combine that with the fact that a mounted character does double damage in a charge, and you have a nice set of boots. Because the DMG 2 well and truly preceded WOTC's Web articles, there is no indication how these interact with a Kaorti Resin lance, but the argument to your DM would be that the Riding Boots just raise the critical multiplier by another +1.

Threesteel (DoFRN) (Sor/Wiz 3): This spell sort-of creates critical multipliers by default since it creates three duplicates of your weapon which then fly off and hit people as if you had wielded them in melee, specifically including the benefits of all your normal feats and effects around critical damage. Fairly powerful spell available from fairly low level and well worth a look.

Oathbow (SRD) 1/day, can declare one enemy as a target, increasing enhancement bonus to +5 and damage +2d6 against that target, and increasing critical multiplier by 1 (specifically x3 to x4). Only a masterwork weapon against all other targets. It's a composite longbow (+2) which isn't bad for our purposes, but expensive as always, and way too limited in uses.

Oath-Hammer (CoV) A warhammer version of the Oathbow. Normally a +2 warhammer, but if you swear a sacred vow according to the weapon's conditions, it becomes a +5 warhammer, deals +2d6 damage, and its critical multiplier rises to x4.

Dwarven Mauler Crossbow (AEG): Increases critical multiplier to x4 against giants and goblinoids only.

Born Under a Sign (Dragon 286) (Character Background - this was a feature from *Arcanum,* a 3rd party source, functions a bit like a half-trait.) Whenever you score a critical hit, roll 1d6. 1-3, the hit is resolved as a normal damage hit. 4-6, the critical hit multiplier is raised by 1.) A 50-50 of an increase by one statistically means a 0.5 increase in critical multiplier over the life of the game, which could be worse...

Augmented Critical (SRD, Various MMs): Some monsters – notably including the Tarrasque -- are given an (Ex) special attack called Augmented Critical, which typically raises the critical multiplier of the monster's natural weapons (in the case of the Tarrasque, it's 18-20 *and* x3 by the look of it). Because this is an (Ex) special attack, the ability is granted when casting *Polymorph*. (By the same token, Wild Shape does not – at least by RAW). The reason this was *likely* selected was so that Augmented Critical couldn't be available as a feat for characters out-of-the-box, and normally a natural weapon only does x2 critical damage.

Dive Attack (MM) Per p. 312 of the MM, any creature that flies and has a talon or claw attack can perform what's known as a dive attack, which allows double damage to be inflicted on a successful attack. It's similar to a charge in all other respects, but if you've managed to pull a flight speed and some decent improvements to a talon or claw natural weapon, there's at least another +1 to your critical multiplier.

Get more damage dice on your weapon. This is an indirect but easier method of getting an effective increase in critical multiplier. The two simplest methods for this are the spells *Enlarge Weapon* from Races of the Dragon and *Mighty Wallop* from the Spell Compendium. Simply put, more damage dice mean there are more dice to be rolled again if you make a critical hit, without having to formally pick up a change in the critical multiplier. Any weapon that does 1d8 damage or more is the best focus for this work, since 1d8 damage dice at Medium size do 2d6 damage at Large; 1d10, 2d8; 1d12, 3d6; and 2d6, 3d6. From 1d8 upward, there is no increase in a weapon's size that doesn't bring with it an increase in the number of damage dice the weapon has. (Note here that for monks' unarmed damage, this increase in number of damage dice happens only once: when the monk rises from level 11 to 12. Regular unarmed attacks (as opposed to natural attacks) never get an increase in number of damage dice, absent them being somewhere above Colossal size.)

Increasing threat range AND multiplier

Prestige Classes

Master Thrower 1, 5 (CWar) The *Deadeye Shot* ability increases the critical multiplier of any thrown weapon you wield by 1, but does not stack with any similar effect that raises critical multipliers. By RAW a thrown weapon made of kaorti resin stacks with this; kaorti resin is a natural quality of the weapon, part of its base statistics, not an effect. At 5th level, you get the Improved Critical feat for any thrown weapon with which you have Weapon Focus.

Weapon Master (Kensei) 2, 7 (OA) From level 2, the Kensei Weapon Master can increase his critical multiplier by 1, up to 5 times per day (though it takes the full 10 levels to get that. Notice also that there is no time period specified for how long that critical multiplier lasts – RAI it's likely one hit, but it also doesn't specify precisely *when* that multiplier has to be declared as being used.) At 7th level, the Weapon Master gains Improved Critical as a bonus feat, and, if they already have the feat, they get a +2 bonus to their threat range (which is specifically stated to be applied last, i.e. after any doubling effects.) However, the PrC takes six feats to qualify, three of which might be useful, but the other three – Dodge, Mobility, and Whirlwind Attack – are useless. (Indeed if you include Whirlwind Attack's own prerequisites, it's seven). This particular PrC was not updated to 3.5 and stands as written.

Psychic Weapon Master 2, 7 (Web) At seventh level, the Psychic Weapon Master gains the Psionic Critical ability, which gives them the Improved Critical feat with their specified weapon for free. If the Psychic Weapon Master already has the Improved Critical feat, this ability instead increases their critical threat range by 2. Unlike the Weapon Master (Kensei), it **doesn't** specify where in that range you apply that extra 2. Obviously where we would prefer to put that 2 is in the base threat range, where an 18-20 weapon would become a 15-20 weapon, and thus a 10-20 weapon with Improved Critical. And it supplies an increased critical multiplier up to 5 times a day just like Weapon Master (Kensei). It won't stack with Disciple of Dispater, though, because this weapon master uses psicrystal weapons, not iron or steel.

Deepwood Sniper 1, 2, 7 (MoTW) Deepwood Snipers treat all fired projectiles as if they were *keen* weapons and increase all critical multipliers on projectile weapons by a total of 2. The ability does not stack with "any other *keen* effect," so given Improved Critical is not a *keen* effect, it arguably stacks. Leaving aside that this is a nice suite of options for the critfisher, there is one more bonus hiding down in the detail -- because the Deepwood Sniper's level 1 ability, *Keen* Arrows is an (Ex) ability. Spells like *Bless Weapon* that automatically confirm critical hits generally don't work with a weapon that has a **magical** effect related to critical hits … but (Ex) abilities are explicitly nonmagical. Deepwood Sniper was also not updated to 3.5 and therefore is still valid despite being from a 3.0 book.

Magic Items

Blade of the Wind (SavSpec) This is a +2 dancing short sword that allows the wielder to fly up to an hour per day. When a creature of the air subtype wields it, it sizes up and down with the wielder, remaining a light weapon, and it grants a +4 enhancement bonus to DEX. Finally, and of most interest to us, its critical threat range and multiplier increase to 17-20/x3 against earth subtype creatures.

Flint Basher (SavSpec) a +2 Greatclub that has a threat range and multiplier of 19-20/x3 versus air subtype creatures. Also gives a +4 enhancement bonus to CON, and allows you to cast *stone shape*.

Wave Piercer (SavSpec) +2 trident. If wielder is aquatic subtype, increased critical threat range and multiplier (19-20/x3) versus fire subtype, and gives its wielder *freedom of movement*.

Tiger Fang (ToB) (magic weapon, Legacy) At character level 14+, 17+, 20+, increase base critical from 18-20/x2 to 18-20/x3 at level 14, then to 18-20/x4 at level 20, gain +4 to confirm critical threats at level 17. Not bad. Not good. You suffer -12 hitpoint loss, at least a -4 to your Fort saves, and -3 to your attacks to have picked all those benefits up.

Reciprocal Bracers (MIC) 2/day, treat any successful attack as a critical threat -- if the target scored a successful critical hit or sneak attack upon you the previous round. Compare the Spear of Retribution. Handy if you have a high critical multiplier but low threat range.

Ring of Adamantine Touch (BoED, MIC): For a whopping 120,000 gp, your weapons and natural attacks now count as adamantine, allowing you to arguably utilise Disciple of Dispater with them as they're now iron/steel weapons. Leaving aside that the RAW of DoD possibly allows you to get around this restriction anyway since it doesn't actually force you wield or attack with an iron or steel weapon, the ring was updated in MIC and along with a massive cost decrease, now only makes your weapons adamantine for the purposes of bypassing DR.

Adamantine Mind Blade Gauntlets (MIC): Same story as the Ring of Adamantine Touch, except as applied to a mind blade. Applies only to DR and hardness.

Weapon Qualities

Masterslaying (BoVD): this weapon quality is absurdly good for inflicting critical hit damage. Unfortunately, the critical hit damage is inflicted on the weapon's wielder, not the wielder's opponent, which is completely ridiculous … but maybe not so ridiculous if you're using a thrown weapon and you've cast the EoE spell *Friendly Fire* on yourself, which might well result in an instant critical hit on another target within 30 feet.

Morphing (Und): can use a standard action to change weapon into any other of the same type, allowing wielder to pick and choose the right critical range/multiplier for an encounter.

Enhancing Critical Confirmation

Feats

Power Critical (CWar) Choose a weapon. Get a +4 on the roll to confirm a critical threat with that weapon. And get yourself ready to blink, because you can take the same feat multiple times and the benefits stack when applied to the same weapon. Depending how many feats you sacrifice on it, this can be a pretty potent bonus to critical confirmations.

Mark of Avernus (FC2) If you successfully hit as part of a readied action, you automatically confirm a critical threat and get a +4 untyped bonus to your attack and damage roll on that attack. This is particularly interesting for builds utilising Robilar's Gambit or similar, where you'll be waiting until the opponent has attacked before you strike.

Confound the Big Folk (RoTW) This one is built for halflings, and the tactical feat has one that's of interest to us: when the character moves into the square of an enemy at least 2 sizes larger, then on the following round that target is flatfooted and wielder gains +4 bonus to confirm a critical threat. These are marvellous bonuses for the stealthy types, and flatfooting a target is a pretty nice boost to getting the critical rolls over the target's AC.

Murderous Intent (EE): You automatically confirm critical hits against a favored enemy. You also can force it to suffer a sort-of *slow* effect as a full round action.

Instinctive Consummator (CPsi) Whenever you threaten a living opponent in melee with a critical hit, you can expend your psionic focus to automatically confirm the critical hit.

Victor's Luck (CSco) Can expend a luck reroll to reroll a critical confirmation.

Shards of Granite (ToB) This is a tactical feat and one of the weaker ones in ToB, but for critfishers it has one small benefit: if you hit a 1 target with 2 attacks in a round using a greatsword, greataxe. heavy mace, or unarmed strike, then on the following round you ignore penalties you took from Stone Power when confirming a critical hit. However, that requires that you use Stone Power, which only grants temporary hitpoints.

Cobalt Critical (MoI) 1/day, invest essentia, and gain an insight bonus on melee critical confirmation rolls and successful melee critical damage equal to invested essentia. The damage is specifically added *before* the multiplier kicks in.

Cobalt Precision (MoI) As Cobalt Critical, but with ranged weapons rather than melee.

Find Hole (Dragon 304) Add +2 to your critical confirmation roll. This was out of an adaptation of the game *Asheron's Call 2,* and it's probably too weak a feat to justify the slot.

Companion Guard Style (Dragon 315) A regional feat for Greyhawk, this provides +2 to confirm critical hit rolls for any attack made with a bow (also allows substitution of DEX for STR bonus when using longsword or longspear, which to be honest is probably the real reason to take this feat).

Giantkiller (Dragon 315) Specific to Greyhawk, +4 to confirm critical hits against giants.

Weapon Qualities and Substances

Solarian Truesteel (BoED) If a weapon is made of this, it provides a +1 to critical confirmation rolls. Adds 1,000 gp to the weapon price.

Abyssal Bloodiron (PlanHB) A weapon made of this substance counts as a cold iron weapon and grants an untyped +4 to confirm critical hits, but it'll cost you an additional 10,000 gp. … and any other enhancements cost another 2,000 gp on top of their normal prices!

Pitspawned (DMG 2) (weapon template) A parallel to good old feycraft weapons, a pitspawned weapon grants an untyped +2 to confirm critical hits. It also gives you a 10% discount on the cost to add *keen* to the weapon, which is better than a poke in the eye. Best of all, these weapons are explicitly made in the Abyss, i.e. it has a strong fluff reason to be made of Abyssal Bloodiron.

Blessed (BoED) (weapon quality) Your weapon is permanently affected by a Bless spell, automatically confirming critical hits against evil targets. However, this ability does not stack with any other magical effects related to critical hits, i.e. Deepwood Sniper is still open. However, the MIC version updated this and only allows it to work 3/day.

Xen'drik Magic Item (SoX) (weapon quality) 250 GP effect, wielder gains +1 morale bonus to confirm critical hits. Not much of a bonus, but not much of a price either.

Dissipater (XPH) (weapon quality) For a +1 bonus, against ectoplasmic targets, all successful hits are treated as critical hits, i.e. automatic confirmation.

Soulbound Weapon (MoI) (weapon quality) Tied to the Arms chakra, this affords a +2 insight bonus to confirm critical threats.

Bloodlust (FoW) (shield quality) wielder gains a +4 morale bonus on critical confirmation rolls, and shield allows use of a 1/day *keen edge* effect on a carried weapon.

Classes and Prestige Classes

Warblade 3 (ToB) (Class) Battle Ardor: Warblades gain an insight bonus to critical confirmation rolls equal to their INT bonus.

Marshal 1 (MinHB) (Class) minor aura, accurate strike: the Marshal and his allies within 60 feet gain a circumstance bonus to critical confirmation rolls equal to Marshal's Charisma bonus. For a Charisma-based type this isn't bad at all.

Battle Dancer 20 (DrCo) (Class) The capstone ability for the unarmed Battle Dancer is that if you make a DC 35 Tumble check against a target, you thereafter receive 2d6 bonus damage against the target and automatically confirm critical threats against it. Nice ability, shame it's a capstone and not accessible back when you could use such a thing.

Divine Mind 1, 10 (CPsi) (PrC) Conflict mantle +2 or +5 bonus to confirmation rolls given to you and your allies via the aura you take, at level 1 and level 10 respectively.

Fist of Raziel 3 (BoED) (PrC) Whenever a Fist of Raziel Smites Evil, all critical threats are automatically critical hits. Better still, this functions even if the weapon used has a magical effect related to critical hits, "unlike the similar effect of the bless weapon spell." That means your *keen* or impact weapons work with it. Sure, the number of smites per day are limited, but this is still pretty solid.

Deepwood Sniper 5 (MoTW) (PrC) Leaving aside everything else a Deepwood Sniper can do with projectile weapons, 1/day the sniper can reroll an attack roll just made with a projectile weapon. Usable up to 3 times per day once you've reached 10th level (albeit on different attack rolls), critical confirmation rolls are attack rolls by definition.

Blade Bravo 7 (RoS) (PrC) +4 bonus to confirm melee critical threats against targets larger than the character, but only with melee weapons. This PrC is explicitly written for gnomes, but the adaptation guidelines do allow it for halflings and small fey as well. Really only for the hit-and-run sneak attack types.

Menacing Brute 4 (RoD) (PrC) +4 to confirm critical threats at this level. The class is nice and short at 5 levels and full BAB, and even though it's only meant for half-orcs the adaptation notes indicate it can be used without alteration for Zhentarim (and the class's first level has a fear-hitting ability that could be useful with Zhentarim Fighter ACFs, for example.) On its own I doubt this is worth hanging around for.

Paragnostic Initiate 1 (CChamp) (PrC) Deadly Strike provides a +2 to confirm critical hits. Would be better if you could take the ability multiple times like other abilities given to the Initiate over the levels.

Squire of Legend 3 (CChamp) (PrC) Greater Squire's Burden: if your patron is Sunyarta, 1/day you can have one of your allies reroll an attack or critical confirmation roll. Not bad but also really a PrC for your cohort, not you.

Argent Fist 10 (FoE) (PrC) At the capstone of this PrC, you can spend 1 use of Turn Undead to enter limited duration state with benefits, including all critical threats automatically confirmed against Undead, Lycanthropes, and evil outsiders with unarmed strike or special monk weapons. It specifically allows you to score critical hits against undead within the effect.

Arboreal Guardian 5 (Gwalk) (PrC) 1/day, spend a standard action to make your first successful hit with a bow in the following round an automatic critical hit, no confirmation

necessary. It explicitly works like the (SpC version) of Hunter's Mercy spell but provokes no attack of opportunity, and unlike stuff like *Bless Weapon,* works with things like *keen.* It's an un-updated 3.0 option, though for 1 spell per day I can think of other stuff that might be better.

Incarnum Blade 2 (MoI) (PrC) +4 insight bonus to confirm critical hits made with a blademeld weapon.

Spells, Psionics, and Essentia

Bless Weapon (PHB) (Pal 1) Weapon automatically confirms critical hits against evil targets. Slightly different to Distort Weapon in that it has no effect on any weapon that already has a magical effect related to critical hits. That said, this wording leaves a couple of useful holes in it: (1) not everything in the critical hit space is a magical effect, and (2) a feat or PrC that provides a benefit to use of a weapon is not itself a weapon. Improved Critical, for example.

Corrupt Weapon (DMG) (Blk 1) Weapon automatically confirms critical hits against good targets, i.e. it's the evil version of Bless Weapon.

Distort Weapon (BoVD) (Blk 1) Automatically confirms critical hits against good targets, and harms good creatures with DR as if the weapon had a +1 enhancement bonus. Has no effect on any magic weapon that already has a special ability related to critical hits.

Hunter's Mercy (SpC) (Rgr 1) First **hit** with a bow (not crossbows, explicitly) in the next round is automatically a critical hit. It's worth noting the three historical versions of this spell have subtle but meaningful differences to them. The original Magic of Faerun version provided that your next **attack** with the bow hits and automatically threatens a critical hit … i.e. basically as if you rolled a natural 20, i.e. you still had to confirm the critical hit. The Ghostwalk version reversed this: your first **hit** with the bow automatically threatens a critical hit, i.e for all intents and purposes your threat range for your next successful bow shot is 2-20. And the Spell Compendium version is slightly different again: your first **hit** with the bow is automatically a critical hit – i.e. your threat range is effectively 2-20, and you automatically confirm the critical hit, but you still have to score a threat, since with no hit, i.e. no passing the AC, there is no threat.

Curse of Arrow Attraction (PHB 2) (Rgr 2, Clr 3, Sor/Wiz 3) Target takes -5 AC penalty against all ranged attacks, all critical threats from ranged attacks are automatically confirmed.

Zealot Pact (CDiv, MIC) (Clr 6, Pact 6, Competition 6) Automatically confirm critical hits against opponents with an alignment directly opposite that of your deity … or at least, that's what the Complete Divine version of the spell did, as well as doubling damage on your melee attacks. Sadly, the SpC version ripped out the automatic confirmation of criticals.

Exacting Shot (CAdv, MIC) (Rgr 2) automatically confirms critical threats against favored enemies, but cannot be cast on a weapon or projectile with any magical effect related to critical hits, i.e. Deepwood Sniper works with it. The Complete Adventurer version was a Ranger 1 spell.

Sense Weakness (MoE) (Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 2) target of the spell can discharge the spell anytime in its 24 hour duration to automatically confirm a critical threat, must be declared before confirmation roll. In combination with *Surge of Fortune,* it's a miniature critical threat and hit box. On its own, it's basically Persistent Spell (Confirm Critical Hit).

Surge of Fortune (CChamp) (Clr 5) provides +2 luck bonus to various rolls, can channel spell into one roll for an attack roll, saving throw, skill check, ability check, or spell penetration check, treating the roll as a natural 20. Since critical threats and confirmations are attack rolls, this is particularly good to generate critical threats if your weapon doesn't have a good threat range, since a natural 20 is always a hit and therefore is always a critical threat.

Spirit of War (CPsi) (Psionics) telepathy, Conflict 8, caster and allies within area can automatically confirm 1 critical threat during the duration of the power

Bloodwar Gauntlets (MoI) (essentia) chakra bind-hands, +4 to confirm critical threats

Necrocarnum Weapon (MoI) (essentia) chakra bind-hands, profane bonus equal to essentia investment on damage rolls and attack rolls to confirm a critical threat against a living enemy, gain temporary essentia equal to investment upon a successful critical hit.

Maneuvers

Bonecrusher (ToB) (Stone Dragon) (Crusader/Swordsage/Warblade 3), gain +4d6 damage and **+10** on attacks to confirm critical hits. The critical effect doesn't doesn't work against a target not subject to critical hits, but the extra damage still applies.

Claw at the Moon (ToB) (Tiger Claw) (Swordsage/Warblade 2) If your strike threatens a critical hit, you gain a +4 bonus to confirmation roll.

Magic Items and Other Random Stuff

Stalker's Bow (WoL) (Legacy Weapon) 3/day reroll a confirmation roll for a critical threat. This is only from 10th level with this weapon, which admittedly is a composite shortbow with – by RAW – no upper limit on the STR bonus usable with the weapon. And it's a Legacy Weapon, which means it's horrible.

Kamate (ToB) (Legacy Weapon) character level 9 onwards, gain a +4 bonus to confirm critical threats. Kamate is itself a bastard sword. In general the legacy weapons outside Weapons of Legacy aren't really bad, but the problem with all of them remains the obscene penalties you have to take for using them.

Blade of Righteous War *(*CChamp) It's a +1 longsword that allows you to expend a Turn attempt to gain +4 on a critical confirmation roll. The bonus is untyped and it adds even more utility to Turn Undead!

Flesh Ring of Scorn (MIC) 3/day, can automatically confirm a critical threat … but the wielder takes damage based on critical multiplier of weapon that scored the critical threat (2d6 – 4d6 for x2 to x4, respectively). Might be interesting for Crusaders or similar…

Restyn's Last Stand (PlanHB) (Planar Touchstone) higher order ability: 1/day automatically confirm a melee critical threat, 2 higher order uses before recharge. Useful if you have nothing like *Bless Weapon* available.

Critical Observation (Dragon 357) (skill trick) 1/day, wielder can make a Heal skill check with a -10 penalty in place of an attack roll for a critical confirmation roll, with a DC equal to the target's AC. Remembering that skill rolls scale a lot faster than attack rolls, especially under spells like *Guidance of the Avatar* or *Divine Insight,* this isn't bad at all.

Celestial Slayer (EoE) (Ranger ACF) +4 competence bonus on confirmation rolls against creatures of the good subtype. Also get spell resistance 10+class level against spells and spell-like effects with the good descriptor. Replaces wild empathy, animal companion, and woodland stride.

Dragonclaw Spirit (DMagic) (companion spirit) 5th tier benefit: each day, the team gains a number of automatic confirmations on threat rolls equal to number of team members, can by activated as an immediate action after a critical threat is rolled, usable 1/day per member.

Land of Honor (PHB 2) (affiliation) At affiliation score 23+, wielder gains +4 to confirm critical threats with a katana.

Bloodbound Crimson Champion (Strmreach) (affiliation) At affiliation score 23+, wielder gains a +4 bonus to confirm critical threats

Group Enmity (FoW) (teamwork benefit) all members gain +2 bonus to critical confirmation rolls against 1 creature type

Rules and Variant Rules

Sanctified Weapons Variant Rule (BoED, p. 33): It's left open to the DM to apply one of the two options below to all sanctified weapons, or any character with the Sanctified Weapon feat to add an extra rider effect for the blessing when casting *align weapon*:

- Certain creatures take a vulnerability to sanctified weapons. One of these may be that any hit dealt by a sanctified weapon is automatically a critical hit.
- A sanctified weapon might allow the wielder to score critical hits against undead creatures.

Profession (Executioner) (BoVD) (Skill)
On a successful Profession (Executioner) skill check, an executioner can cause instant death to the person they execute.

There are a number of methods BoVD sets out for execution, but the most significant one for us is beheading by a headsman's axe. BoVD indicates that a greataxe or greatsword "*when "specially sharpened and held with the proper technique*" also can be used to do the job. One would imagine the act of specially sharpening such weapons and holding them properly would be the subject of Profession (Executioner) checks themselves, though BoVD doesn't specify any. Or indeed one might be able to appeal to the DM that a *keen* weapon is -- quite literally -- specially sharpened.

The DC for causing instant death by this method is 18. However, if the check fails, the victim still suffers coup de grace damage, i.e. an automatic critical hit and possibly death anyway. So if you're looking to do critical hits just for the hell of it, just take 1 skill rank and be the lousiest executioner alive.

What are the prerequisites to trigger an execution?

The condemned "must first" be restrained and the neck vulnerable to the strike readied by the executioner. This restraint apparently can be achieved by tying the person in place, pinning them in a grapple, or successfully restraining them in a stationary execution device. The possibility of magical restraint – e.g. by spell – is contemplated; a victim can't use an Escape Artist check to get out of the device "unless magically held or otherwise helpless." This would add up at least by implication to the idea that a victim rendered helpless … or paralyzed … is therefore vulnerable to an executioner's check, particularly given someone pinned in a grapple isn't even helpless by RAW.

On top of that, "neck vulnerable to the strike" is not defined, nor "restrained in an execution device": sample devices are provided but not exhaustive. Admittedly it's a bit of a reach but it might be RAW argued that if you hit an enemy with a Hold Person - which imposes the paralysed condition, which in turn includes that the victim is helpless - then they're now restrained in an execution device for the purpose of the Headsman's Axe method of execution. All that has to happen is that the condemned is restrained and the neck is vulnerable to the strike readied by the executioner.

Maybe it takes a standard action or a move action to get round into a position where the neck can be said to be vulnerable, maybe he has to ready an action, but with *Guidance of the Avata*r (hideously word-appropriate) that's instadeath on the opposition. Or if you deliberately choose to botch the strike, coup de grace damage by definition, i.e. a critical hit.

Coup de Grace (PHB): As a full round action, you can use a melee or ranged weapon to perform a coup de grace to a helpless opponent. Helpless opponents are as follows:

- bound
- sleeping
- paralyzed (the special condition)
- unconscious
- otherwise at your mercy.

A coup de grace automatically scores a critical hit, and carries an additional rider on the critical hit: make a Fort save (DC 10 + damage dealt, which will be huge) or die. But a coup de grace can't be administered to a creature immune to critical hits; and it takes two full round actions to do it against a creature with total concealment.

Of these conditions, paralyzed is perhaps the one with the most options immediately

apparent. Mostly these will be via spells, but there are also some (Freezing the Lifeblood, Paralyzing Fists) that centre on unarmed attacks. The lowest-level option I've found for this purpose – and bear in mind we aren't being exhaustive on this subject – is the spell *Heartache* from Book of Vile Darkness, which leaves a target helpless for 1 round on a failed save. Quickened, this can be a pretty devastating one-round technique; extended, it can give you two rounds to administer the fatal blow instead.

And there are some options for improving the Coup De Grace in action economy terms:

Feats

Death Blow (CAdv): Character can perform a coup de grace as a standard action, albeit the prerequisites include Improved Initiative.

Harvester of Souls (EE): If you use a coup de grace on an enemy, the creature can't be restored to life without a *miracle* or *wish* spell. You also get 2 temporary hit points per HD of the slain creature for an hour.

Prestige Classes

Spellwarp Sniper 5 (CSco): At this level, the Sniper can coup de grace with a ray spell that deals hit point damage. Still have to be adjacent to the target to deliver it, but this again enhances the capabilities of casters interested in doing criticals, since casters are much more adept at rendering targets helpless.

Bane of Infidels (MotW): This is 3.0, but even according to WOTC has not yet been updated, and is therefore still valid. That said it's pretty limited: if you sacrifice a creature via coup de grace in your hearth, you gain bonuses to caster level escalating to a total of +4.

Gladiator 6 (S&F): Once again, a 3.0 class that by WOTC's own word hasn't been revised yet, and is still therefore valid. At 6th level, the Gladiator can administer a coup de grace as a standard action.

Black Blood Cultist 5 (CoR): Black Blood Cultist is at least interesting since it outright gives you claw (1d6 + STR) and bite (1d4 + 0.5xSTR) attacks where you previously had none, and then at level 5 allows you to administer a coup de grace as a move action with your bite attack. (Albeit your critical modifier is going to be 20/x2.)

Items

Executioner Hood (MIC): For 6,000 gp, this lets you coup de grace as a standard action as long as you're Chaotic Evil, Chaotic Neutral (!) or Neutral Evil. And speaking of executioners …

Overriding Critical Hit Immunity

Feats

Supernatural Blow (MoTW) This feat is 3.0, but it explicitly has not been revised or updated, and therefore continues to apply. Favoured enemy damage bonuses apply against a type of creature normally immune to precision damage, and on a critical hit deals 1d6 *per extra damage die the weapon would normally do.* By RAI they probably just meant to add a +1d6, but on a critical hit a weapon rolls loads and loads of extra damage dice if its multiplier is large. The biggest benefit is to those weapons with more than one damage dice, since necessarily it's one d6 for every dice in the weapon's base damage dice. For example: a humble scimitar made of kaorti resin, i.e. damage of 2d4/x4. If your favored enemy is undead, and you make a critical hit, the weapon's damage would be 2d4+6d6, since you roll a d6 for every bonus damage dice you'd otherwise roll on a critical hit.

Greater Manyshot (XPH) Manyshot allows you only to apply critical damage to one arrow fired using that feat. Greater Manyshot overcomes this stricture, i.e. you can impose critical hits on each arrow (if you *score* critical hits, of course). For ranged, attack-spamming builds this might well be worth thinking about.

Ghost Attack (Dragon 316) *[Psionic]* When you make a successful critical hit, whether ranged or melee, the attack is treated as if it had been made with a ghost touch weapon for the purpose of incorporeal creatures. The one on the SRD was significantly changed to making two rolls to check for miss chance against an incorporeal creature, and if one hits, the weapon is treated as a ghost touch weapon.

Greater Ghost Attack (Dragon 316) *[Psionic]* As Ghost Attack above, but you expend your psionic focus rather than maintain it.

Prestige Classes, Variant Classes, Alternative Class Features

Bane of the Clockwork (Dragon 351) (Monk ACF) Replaces slow fall and 6th level bonus feat, the character's unarmed strikes (but not special monk weapons) can deal critical hits to constructs. Monk can also use stunning fist and quivering palm against constructs.

Deadgrim 5 (MoE) (PrC) The character can deal critical damage to Undead by expending 1 turn attempt upon rolling a critical threat against an Undead target. If confirmation roll is successful, the Deadgrim deals critical damage and effects to the Undead target.

Ghost Slayer 2 (Gwalk) (PrC) all melee weapons including unarmed strikes are considered silver for the purposes of stunning ghosts via critical hits and sneak attacks. However, this capacity is very much setting specific as Ghostwalk is a bit … odd.

Anarch 2 (Dragon 310) (Variant Paladin): From 2nd level, the Anarch may inflict critical hits on constructs (and objects) a number of times per day equal to his Charisma modifier. He

makes this decision after a critical threat is rolled but before the critical confirmation roll is made.

Spells and Vestiges

Spark of Life (SpC) (Clr 3, Drd 4) Undead target loses immunities, including being not subject to extra damage from sneak attacks and critical hits.

Humanoid Essence (RoE) (Art 4, Clr 5) Removes many construct immunities including those to critical hits and precision damage.

Greater Humanoid Essence (RoE) (Art 6, Clr 7). The "I'm a real boy!" spell. Removes all construct immunities including those to critical hits and precision damage, removes fortification qualities of warforged.

Kas, the Bloodyhanded (Dragon 341) (vestige) Kas allows the binder to score critical hits against Undead, and inflict a blindness effect on Undead. A successful critical hit forces a Will save against permanent blindness generally.

Magic Items, Magic Weapons, and Locations

Pick of Iceparting (FBurn) (Magic Weapon) It can inflict critical hits on targets of the cold subtype even if normally immune to critical hits. On top of that it's cold bane and a heavy pick, which means it has a x4 critical multiplier and *keen edge* can be cast on it. Pretty handy for the icy settings Frostburn contemplates.

Mace of Smiting (DMG) (Magic Weapon) Any critical hit to a Construct destroys it, no save. And while we're at our hatred for animated objects and golems of all kinds, its critical multiplier is increased to x4 against outsiders too.

Greater Demolition Crystal (MIC) The weapon to which this crystal is attached can deal sneak attacks and critical hits to constructs. Weapon crystals generally are just gorgeous little items for their price, and these ones in particular convey fantastic benefits without having to jump through feats and Prestige Classes.

Greater Truedeath Crystal (MIC) Your weapon can deal sneak attacks and critical hits to Undead.

Deathstrike Bracers (MIC) 3/day, for 1 round the character can inflict critical hits and sneak attacks on Undead, Plants, Oozes, Constructs and Elementals. It's 5,000 gp, and the best argument here might be to use the Magic Item Crafting Rules to back-calculate what a set of custom bracers with this ability useable at-will would cost. It likely wouldn't be that much for what the thing would give you.

Temple of the First Dawn (CChamp) (location) any character within the Temple's boundary

can expend a Turn attempt to render all Undead within 60 feet susceptible to critical hits for 6 rounds.

Darsam-Tor-Ews (Dungeon 142) +4 axiomatic *ghost touch* adamantine greatclub, can inflict critical hits on constructs.

Weapon Qualities

Ghost Strike (MIC): +2 bonus, but Ghost Strike weapons can sneak attack and deliver critical hits to incorporeals as if they were not undead. Melee weapon only.

Truesilver (Gwalk) Weapon is treated as silver for the purposes of striking vulnerable targets, and weapon can score critical hits against ghosts.

Also take a look through the ‘Rider Effects’ section below; some - notably *Burst* weapons - function on targets that are otherwise immune to critical hits.

Rider Effects on Threats or Hits

Rules

Massive Damage. This rule isn't used a lot, but basically, if you do over 50 points of damage in a single attack and it doesn't kill the enemy outright, said enemy has to make a DC 15 Fort save or die regardless of its current hitpoint total. Critical hits are one of those areas where 50 points of damage aren't outside the realms of possibility, and as such it's the simplest rider effect on a successful critical hit. That said, if as a player you insist on this rule being used, then be prepared for it to be used against you: player characters suffer more damage over their lives than NPCs do, and depending on the effect it's not that hard to pull a 50 damage result. Those occasions, as we know, are when the dice just *love* to serve you a saving throw total of 14. So be warned.

More generally, damage-gating options like this are also exploitable under critical hits too, since obviously the general idea of a critical hit is to deal a big honking number in hitpoint damage.

In respect of that, there are:

> **Bowl Over** (Dragon 304): If you do more than 10 points of damage on a weapon throw, you get a trip attack as a free action against the target. This is well within the bounds of a critfishing type, let alone a melee attack.
>
> **Knock Down** (S&F): Do more than 10 points of damage in melee, get a trip attack as a free action against the same target.

Feats

Lightning Mace (CWar) Welcome to the wonderful world of infinite attacks and DM bansticks. Lightning Mace's considerable power derives from the feat's wording that anytime you roll a threat while wielding light maces in both hands, you get another attack at the same attack bonus. Not a critical hit – a threat. If you build a character with a large critical threat range, this means you have an escalating chance of picking up many, many additional attacks – because there's no maximum number of hits which can be generated using this feat. It makes critfishing a lot stronger and a lot more than just icing on the melee cake, to the point of brokenness if you lack sufficient self-restraint. If you combine it with the *Aptitude* weapon quality out of Tome of Battle, it's applicable to practically any weapon you choose to apply it to.

There's been a good amount of paper and bandwidth chewed up over the years on exactly what your threat range would need to be in order to generate infinite attacks via this feat. This is typically a pointless exercise, shut down by people pointing out that you still have to get over the opponent's AC for the feat to activate.

Me, I say the feat might not even have *that* control. Per the RAW, regardless of RAI, the wording is "anytime you roll a threat." What is rolling a threat? It's not *scoring* a critical threat, which is what the critical hit process under the SRD explicitly provides for, defines, and requires. If you treat the expression "roll a threat" as meaning the same thing as "rolling" a natural 20, i.e. your d20 dice turns up a number that's within your weapon's critical threat range, then you don't have to pass the opponent's AC. At all.

Sane DMs, of course, point to two things:

(1) The PHB defines critical hit rules a little differently to the SRD, and it's likely the PHB that the writers of the feat were working off:

> When you make an attack roll and get a natural 20 (the d20 shows 20) you hit regardless of your target's Armor Class, and you have scored a threat. The hit might be a critical hit (or "crit"). To find out if it's a critical hit, you immediately make a critical roll -- another attack roll with all the modifiers as the attack roll you just made. If the critical roll also results in a hit against the target's AC, your original hit is a critical hit (The critical roll just needs to hit to give you a crit. It doesn't need to come up 20 again.) If the critical roll is a miss, then your hit is just a regular hit.

Problem being: nowhere does it define what it means to "roll a threat".

(2) The Rules Compendium tries to clarify critical hits:

> Sometimes you can score a threat on a natural roll lower than 20. In such cases, you have an increased threat range. Longswords, for instance, give you a threat on a natural attack roll of 19 or 20 (the d20 shows 19 or 20). In such cases, a roll of lower than 20 isn't an automatic hit. Any attack roll that doesn't result in a hit isn't a threat.

Problem also being: *nowhere does it define what it means to "roll a threat".*

As said, the RAI was that they meant you had to score a critical threat to pick up an extra attack. By RAW, the feat completely breaks any balance of the number of attacks a character should be able to pull off. As to whether or not to use it that way, well, as the knight said in Last Crusade, choose wisely.

Roundabout Kick (CWar) If you make a successful critical hit with an unarmed attack, you can immediately make another unarmed attack against the same opponent. You use the same attack bonus that you used for the critical hit roll. What they probably meant was that you use the same attack bonus from the critical *threat* roll, but the RAW of the feat refers only to "attack bonus" and specifies the critical *hit* roll instead. Therefore you're entitled to utilise the total bonus added to your critical confirmation roll … since you do not score a critical hit without a second attack roll. That total bonus – by RAW -- includes the panoply of effects which provide bonuses to the critical confirmation roll. Even without that extension, it's still a solid feat choice. Can you *Aptitude* this one into your other weapons? Arguably not, because there's more than one type of unarmed attack: a regular unarmed attack at 1d3 … and a monk's unarmed strike where the damage scales up. Roundabout Kick applies to both, and consequently *Aptitude* doesn't apply since it's not a feat that applies to a single type of weapon.

Telling Blow (PHB 2) When the character inflicts a successful critical hit, skirmish/sneak attack damage is added in the roll, albeit only once. This is a very handy way for rogues to increase their damage output, particularly given the better weapon bases for critical threat range tend to be light melee weapons amenable to two-weapon fighting. Particularly important is one RAW clarification you should get from your DM: since you "deal" your sneak attack damage "in addition" to the damage from your critical hit, in circumstances where you're not necessarily *making* a sneak attack or a skirmish, it may be argued that a creature with immunity to precision damage is still vulnerable to the damage being delivered this way, i.e. "You're not vulnerable to precision, but a critical hit is a different type of damage".

Staggering Critical (DoTU) When you confirm a critical hit with a weapon for which you've got Improved Critical, the target is *slowed* for 1 round. NO SAVE. Requires BAB +12, but this is a pretty good feat to wait for, since by the time you're at this level, the game is more about the action economy - how many things a character can do in a round - than about inflicting damage as such. (Also, a lot of things are immune to stunning; nowhere near as many are immune to *slow.*)

Twist The Knife (EoE) With a melee critical hit with a weapon for which you have Improved Critical, you may forgo the extra damage to inflict a -3 penalty to attacks rolls, weapon damage rolls, ability checks, skill checks, and saving throws for a number of rounds equal to the critical multiplier as a pain effect.

Lolth's Meat (Und) if you kill a living creature with an INT of 3 or higher, you gain +1 morale bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws for the rest of the encounter. If you kill such an opponent with a coup de grace or a touch spell, you gain +2 bonus instead. (Coup de grace involves an automatic critical hit.) However, the character must be Drow.

Death Master (LibMort) Whenever you score a melee critical hit against a living foe, that foe is shaken for 1 minute, fear effect. NO SAVE. That said, you have to be undead yourself. Fear-blasting generally is beyond the scope of this guide, but unlike most things in 3.5, fear effects stack … i.e. successive critical hits push the opponent to frightened and eventually cowering.

Eviscerator (LibMort) Whenever you score a melee critical hit against a living foe, that creature's allies within 30 feet are shaken for 1 minute, fear effect. Again, no save. See above on fear effects.

Resounding Blow (BoED) When you deal a critical hit with a melee weapon, target must make a Will save (DC 10 + half character level + CHA) or cower for 1 round. Stronger than Death Master, but allows a saving throw.

Quell The Profane (BoED) When a character deals a critical hit to an evil creature, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + half character level + CHA) or take 1d4+1 Strength damage.

Staggering Blow (DrCo) Whenever a character confirms a critical hit with a melee attack that deals bludgeoning or nonlethal damage with a weapon for which the character has the Improved Critical feat, the target must make a Fortitude save (10 + half character level + STR) or be stunned for one round. Given unarmed attacks deal bludgeoning damage, it's at least a handy way for monks to pick up more stunning attacks than normal.

Construct Lock (RoE) Warforged only, but if you roll a critical threat against a construct, you can forego a confirmation roll in favour of another attack. If *that* attack hits and deals at least 1 point of damage, the target construct makes a Fort save or is immobile and helpless for one round. Also, if you use an action point on an attack roll against a construct, and hit, the roll is automatically a critical threat. (Notice that this feat not only overrides the normal Construct immunity to critical hits, but also arguably an object's immunity to any effect that requires a Fortitude save.)

Drow Scorpion Warrior (SoX) When your character inflicts a critical hit against a living creature with a drow long knife or drow scorpion chain, the character's next attack against that target within 1 turn gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals 1d4 Constitution damage.

Supremely Confident (Dragon 335) You can attempt to demoralize a foe as a free action whenever you score a critical hit. Requires 7 ranks in Perform (Act). An upside is that it can be taken as a fighter feat, and thus builds nicely onto a fear-blasting build.

Initiate of Erythnul (Dragon 342) Whenever your character outright kills a target with a critical hit (but not a coup de grace), they gain the benefits of a *Death Knell* spell. The character also picks up 3 unique spells, including Erythnul's Slaughter mentioned elsewhere in this guide.

Orcus's Bloodthirst Ritual (Dragon 315) - out of the Ghostwalk setting. Once per day you can declare a successful critical hit (before damage is rolled) to be a particularly painful area. This forces the character to take a Fort save (10 + Char. Level/2 + WIS mod) or be stunned for 1 round.

Prestige Classes and Class Features

Enlightened Fist 6 (CArc) (PrC) From 6th-level onwards, the *Fist of Energy* ability grants you the *flaming* or *shocking* burst abilities if you expend a stunning fist attempt.

Swashbuckler 14, 19 (CWar) (Class) Weakening critical, inflict 2 STR damage on a critical hit, wounding critical, inflict 2 CON damage on a critical hit. Pretty late in the piece to get these.

Disciple of Thrym 8 (FBurn) (PrC) Character can use a move action to grant the *Icy Burst* quality to a held greataxe.

Stormlord 8 (CDiv) (PrC) From 8th level in this prestige class onwards, any spear or javelin wielded by the Stormlord counts as a *shocking burst* weapon.

Thayan Gladiator 3, 5, 10 (CoR) (PrC) At third level, any time you make a successful critical hit with your chosen natural weapon, the enemy has to make a Fort Save (DC 15 + your STR) or be stunned for 1 round. At fifth level, your natural weapon can be made a *thundering* weapon. And at 10th level, you can add *flaming/icy/shocking burst* … but you don't want to do that, because you can also add the *speed* quality.

Cipher Adept 5 (PlanHB) (PrC) Combination attack ability: upon a successful melee critical hit the wielder can immediately attempt a disarm or sunder attack against that opponent.

Forest Master 6 (F&P) (PrC) Beginning at sixth level, this prestige class allows you to treat any maul wielded by the Forest Master as a +2 *Icy* or *Shocking Burst* weapon, determined by the wielder round by round.

Silverstar 9 (F&P) (PrC) Beginning at the 9th level of this prestige class, the Silverstar treats any heavy mace they wield as a +2 *Shocking Burst* weapon.

Ordinator 6 (Dragon 308) (PrC) 1/day, + 1/day every 3 further levels, when character scores a successful critical hit during a smite attempt, the smite damage is counted twice instead of once for the attack.

Imbued Staff (Dragon 338) (Wizard/Sorcerer ACF) Caster can forgo a familiar to imbue a staff with increasing portions of her power. At 15th to 16th level, the staff gains one of a number of special abilities, one of which is *thundering.* Unlike normal, this quality applies to both ends of the staff.

Encouraging Blow (Dragon 310) (Fencer Variant Fighter Class - replaces a Fighter bonus feat), Whenever the Fencer scores a critical **threat** against an opponent, the Fencer gains a +3 morale AC bonus against that opponent for a number of rounds equal to his CHA bonus. If they score a critical **hit**, the morale AC bonus is doubled to +6. However, it costs at least four levels in Fencer, so no dipping.

Relentless Smash (Dragon 349) (Barbarian ACF) Replaces Mighty Rage. When the character scores a successful critical hit or strikes the same target 3 or more times in 1 round, the target is stunned for 1d3 rounds, no save, and targets the same size or smaller than the character must make a Fortitude save or be knocked prone.

Dwarven Thane 4 (Dragon 299) (PrC) Dwarf-specific (though not so if you take Stoneblessed) at fourth level there is this wonderful bit of uncertain RAW: "…*any critical the thane scores immediately becomes a stunning attack* ***as well.****"* RAI, of course, it was meant to be a critical hit. By RAW, it's potentially a critical hit **and/or** a critical threat, i.e. two shots at a stunning attack out of the one critical process! The Dwarven Thane's requirement to have Weapon Focus in an axe is likely the best avenue for critical optimisation here.

Boge of Nomog-Geaya 5 (Dragon 315) (PrC) Hobgoblin-specific PrC, but at 5th level, the Boge can imbue his longsword and hand axe with the *flaming burst* property as a free action for a total of 10 rounds per day.

Keshen Blademaster 2, 3, 6, 10+ (Dungeon 97) (PrC) character gains 1d6 bonus damage on successful critical hits with a slashing weapon that includes a blade, increasing by 1d6 at level 6 and every 4 levels thereafter, at level 3 wielder also gains 1/day *keen edge* (Su) effect, held slashing weapon only

Holocaust Warrior 5 (Dungeon 100) (PrC) character can, 2/day at 5th level and +1/day every three levels thereafter, add the *Flaming Burst* quality to a held weapon for rounds/character level.

Weapons and Specific Magic Weapons

Scissors Sword (SavSpec): Mundane weapon. See above entry in the weapon section.

Scorpion Tail-Whip (SStorm) an exotic one-handed weapon, this weapon does nonlethal damage unless it's a critical hit. Here, it injects a small amount of monstrous scorpion venom at Fort DC 18. In one of WOTC's more hilarious misprints, the table records that the scorpion tail-whip's damage dice is **1d33** at Small size, and **1d43** at Medium!

Sword of Life Stealing (DMG) Deals 1 negative level on a critical hit, and wielder gains 1d6 temporary hit points.

Flame Reaver (SavSpec) It's a +1 *flaming* glaive, but if wielder is fire subtype, on a critical hit, target must make DC 15 Reflex save or catch fire.

Ice Scythe (SavSpec) +1 *frost* scythe. If wielder is cold subtype, on a critical hit, target must make DC 14 Will save or be affected by *Slow*, 5th level. This is in addition to normal critical damage.

Staff of the Glutton (SavSpec) On a critical hit, this +2/+2 quarterstaff staff bites target for additional 1d8 damage. Also allows the wielder to cast *acid fog* and *summon swarm*.

Staff of Ancient Penumbra (XPH) This artifact deals extra 5d6 fire damage on a critical hit, and sets target on fire.

Stormchaser's Cudgel (WoL) See further above about this weapon.

Bow of Elvenkind (CChamp) Provided you're a cleric of Corellion Larethian, any successful critical hit with this bow forces the target to make a Will save (DC 14) or be shaken for 5 rounds. At least it's a composite longbow that adjusts its STR rating to that of the character wielding it.

Spear of the Wild (CChamp) If the wielder is a Cleric, Druid or Ranger with the Animal domain, weapon 3/day automatically casts *Baleful Polymorph* on target on a successful critical hit (Fort save of DC 15 + WIS modifier negates).

Rod of the Recluse (CDiv, MIC) Acts as a +3 light mace that inflicts no hitpoint damage, but rather 2d6 STR ability damage with a melee touch attack (via poison). If it's a critical hit, it's ability *drain* instead (Fort DC 20 negates). Requires wielder to be a worshipper of Lolth, 11 HD and possess True Believer feat. Now, what's interesting is that the text says that **instead** of the weapon inflicting hitpoint damage, it's ability damage that's done instead. As such, it can be said that the 2d6 STR damage is the weapon's normal damage; critical hits don't just apply to hitpoint damage, as the rules for criticals on spells remind us. So if you score a critical hit, you're not doing 2d6 ability drain, you're doing 4d6 ability drain, which has a pretty damn good chance of knocking an opponent out of the fight. And it's a light mace, which means Lightning Mace works with it by flat-out RAW. Of course, the MIC nerfed it … or at least produced a relic item that was meant to nerf it. The MIC version makes it a +2 light mace and only allows you to use the above power 5 times per day, and – it would appear – turns the power back into something that is just a rider on what would otherwise constitute a normal critical hit, i.e. can't double the STR damage as suggested above.

Flayer (CPsi) It's a +2 heavy flail. After rolling a natural 20, a confirmed critical hit against a living creature with a brain kills the target outright and extracts the brain, albeit the weapon doesn't work against creatures with no brains (insert standard joke here about lawyers having immunity). The problem being that this is essentially a *Vorpal* weapon (brains vs. heads being the main difference), but it costs almost double what a *Vorpal* weapon would cost, the only difference being that a Flailyer can kill anything with a brain while a *Vorpal* weapon can only kill something with a head.

Quietus Stiletto (CPsi) It's a *keen* kukri, which is a good start since it gives you a 15-20 threat range. On a successful critical hit against Undead, mindless Undead are automatically destroyed and intelligent Undead must make a DC 20 Will save or be destroyed. You don't do any critical damage against the undead, but you have to confirm the hit to see if the power activates. 50,000 gp market price, though…

Flamelance (UE) A *flaming burst* lance that can be wielded on foot as a longspear with no penalty, can also cast *Aganazzar's Scorcher*. *Flaming burst* isn't exactly the greatest of crit-triggered abilities.

Storm Star (LoD) (Artifact) +3 *shocking burst* morningstar, can also cast *Call Lightning* and *Lightning Bolt*. *Shocking burst* also isn't the greatest.

Bonebreaker Hammer (AEG) +2 warhammer. Deals 1d6 Dexterity damage on a critical hit in addition to normal critical damage.

Brutal Axe (AEG) +1 *keen* battleaxe; the wielder can make a free trip attempt against the target upon a successful critical hit. On this attempt, if the weapon is used in both hands, the wielder can apply x1.5 STR bonus to the trip attempt!

Grasping Dagger (AEG) +3 *keen* punching dagger. The wielder can make a free, special grapple attempt against the target upon a successful critical hit, and attack with weapon normally during the grapple.

Havoc Blade (AEG) +3 *keen anarchic* greataxe. Casts *confusion*, 5th level, on target upon a successful critical hit (DC 19 Will save).

Kukri of Crippling (AEG) +2 kukri. Upon successful critical hit, target halves one randomly determined movement rate for 1 day or until receiving magical healing or a DC 15 heal check.

Lance of Mangling (AEG) +2 heavy lance. Destroys target's shield upon a successful critical hit, in addition to the attack's normal effect, i.e. normal critical damage.

Spear of Impaling (AEG) +2 longspear. Successful critical hit allows wielder to initiate grapple against target, and use weapon in grapple.

Thirsting Blade (AEG) +4 longsword. Upon successful critical hit, weapon deals 1d6 subdual damage that cannot be healed without first imbibing a quart of water, target is fatigued as long as it suffers from this damage, does not work on Outsiders or anything immune to critical hits.

Wave (AEG) Upon successful critical hit, casts *horrid wilting* on an enemy that opposes its purpose; it's a sentient weapon.

Galeb Duhr Hammer (MIC) Upon successful critical hit against a target standing on the ground, target's speed is reduced to 5 feet for 5 rounds and takes a -2 penalty to attacks and AC.

Rod of Enervating Strike (MIC) Functions as a +1 heavy mace, but also casts *inflict serious wounds* spell effect upon the target of a successful critical hit (and *inflict light wounds* on normal melee hits!)

Spear of Retribution (MIC) +1 *returning* spear, but if an enemy scores a critical hit against the wielder, in following round the spear gains a *keen* effect. Wielder must be a worshiper of Gruumsh and have the True Believer feat.

Spear of the Desert Winds (SoX) On a successful critical hit, any entity possessing the target must make a DC 20 Will save or be expelled, effect not subject to SR.

Ettin Axe of Uruth (Waterdeep), Orc Double Axe, *icy burst/fiery burst* weapon. Intelligent with two sentiences, Ur and Krypt in either end.

Gurt's Greataxe (Waterdeep), Large +1 human *bane*, *thundering* greataxe. Sheds light, can chill metal.

Muiral's Decapitator (Waterdeep), Large +3 adamantine *vorpal* greatsword. Magic items touched with the blade glow with a pale radiance briefly.

Heartcleaver (PGtF), Large +2 *vorpal* battleaxe, renders any injury it makes very hard to heal by magic (DC 20 CL check)

Elqillar (PGtF), +1 scimitar that can on command turn into a scimitar, kukri, dagger, or sword of any kind sized for a Small, Medium, or Large wielder. Has other associated disguise powers.

Shazzellim (PGtF), +1 *keen* scimitar, intelligent weapon with a special purpose to kill Harpers.

Dragontooth of Lareth (DoFRN), +1 *flaming burst* dragonfang dagger. Can cast *guidance* as a swift action.

Greater Dragonlance (DlanceCS) deals 1 point of Constitution drain when striking an evil dragon, on a critical hit the weapon instead deals Constitution drain equal to the wielder's character level, **no save**.

Lash of Torment (DrCo) on a critical hit, the lash forces a DC 18 Fortitude save or suffer a -2 penalty to Dexterity and -4 penalty to attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks for 1d10 minutes

Hammer of Skill (Dragon 324) +2 *thundering* cold iron warhammer. If you fail an attack roll, you get a -1 penalty on your next attack roll. Fail 10, and the warhammer abandons you permanently. Conversely, if you succeed on an attack roll, get a +1 on your next damage roll

(and no upper limit is specified here.)

Ashram (Dragon 277) +2 scimitar, on a successful critical hit weapon deals an additional 1d10 fire damage and a humanoid target must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d4 rounds

Malagar (Dragon 277) +2 *keen* falchion, on critical hit target must make DC 18 Fortitude save or suffer bleeding wounds for 3 rounds, dealing 2d6 fire damage each round. Does not function against targets without blood or resistance/immunity to fire.

Fiendrender (Dragon 292) Sentient weapon. In the hands of a good Cleric, becomes a +2 adamantine, *dancing, bane* against lawful outsiders, *bane* against evil outsiders, on a critical hit an outsider must make a DC 14 Fortitude save or be blinded for 1 round.

Fang of Turaglas (Dragon 312) On a critical hit, this item drains 1 level from the victim. Has a number of other drawbacks to using it.

Gauntlet of the Vortex (Web): +1 *shocking burst* gauntlet, but on a critical hit, unleashes a hurricane force wind against the struck creature – manifests even if the creature is normally immune to critical hits. Also can create a whirlwind 1/day.

Trident of Red Brine (Web): +2 *keen bane* vs. aquatic creatures trident. On a successful critical hit, causes an additional 2d6 points of dessication damage. A creature that suffers this additional damage must also make a successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 14) or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds. Creatures that are immune to critical hits do not suffer this additional desiccation damage.

Poacher's Blade (Web): +1 *bane* versus animals *keen* longsword. In addition, if the user successfully inflicts a critical hit on a creature that has a natural attack, the strike inflicts normal critical damage and renders one of the creature's natural attacks (at random) useless until all the damage from the critical hit is somehow healed.

Scimitar of Stonestriking (Web) +3 *keen* scimitar. If it scores a critical hit (threat range of 15-20) on a living creature, Fort saving throw (DC 19) or turn the target to stone. If the creature resists, it still suffers the critical damage. If a petrified creature is struck with a scimitar of stonestriking, the creature shatters into a thousand pieces and is slain.

Griffonlance of Goring (Web) +1 *thundering* heavy lance (NB "heavy lance" is a 3.0 term, it's just a lance) grants its wielder the ability to use the Spirited Charge feat. In addition, it grants the wielder a +10 circumstance bonus on Ride (griffon) checks.

Sword of Answering (Dungeon 106) Minor artefact. It's +3 *keen* bastard sword; on a successful critical hit the enhancement bonus is treated as +2 higher and the weapon deals an additional 2d6 damage, wielder can use weapon in a free attack of opportunity to strike an opponent who successfully damages the wielder with a weapon.

Whip of Red Shadows (Dungeon 112) Minor artefact. +4 *Brilliant Energy Shocking Burst* whip, on successful critical hit weapon tears away target's shadow, giving weapon a +2 bonus on attack and damage rolls against target and inflicting 2 points of Wisdom drain with each successful strike, torn shadow can only be healed with 8 hours of uninterrupted rest or casting of *Greater Restoration, Miracle,* or *Wish*

Turiew's Spear (Dungeon 83) (magic weapon, Major Artifact) On a successful critical hit, weapon permanently disenchants any magic armor worn by target, no saving throw

Demogorgon's Tooth (Dungeon 95) +2 Vile Scimitar, casts DC 14 Contagion on any Good target struck, deals additional 2 points of Vile Damage on a critical hit, wielder can speak and understand Abyssal

Jotur the Imprint Maker (Dungeon 123) +1 warhammer, on a critical hit, in addition to other effects weapon head animates and leaves a bite impression on target, each such bite can be removed from target and assembled as the pieces to a map leading to a tomb filled with treasure. Yeah, it's that sort of thing.

Sword of Aaqa (Dungeon 129) +2 axiomatic mithril longsword, on a successful critical hit weapon creates a blast of wind, forcing target to make a DC 18 Fortitude save or be knocked down or blown backwards and knocked down, depending on target size

Other Magic Items

Greater Fiendslayer Crystal (MIC) A successful critical hit against an evil outsider prevents the target from using teleportation abilities or spells for 1 round

Bracers of Great Collision (MIC) 2/day, +2d6 bonus on damage when scoring a successful critical hit using a bludgeoning weapon. Unless you're using a greathammer, you're not using a bludgeoning melee weapon for critical hits, and if you're using a greathammer, there's a lot better stuff you could spend your money on than this, like, I dunno, Collision.

Devastation Gauntlets (MIC) 3 charges, can expend them upon a critical threat for extra damage if threat is successfully confirmed. Not bad, but I'd rather spend the arm slot on something that can raise my damage-dealing stat instead.

Scepter of Karrnath (FoW) (magic item, set) when wielder scores a critical hit, target must make a DC 16 Will save or fall prone.

Fanged Ring (DMagic) wielder deals 1 Constitution damage on an unarmed critical hit. Not bad for the unarmed builds, and for once it isn't hidden behind a damn Fort save or similar.

Quiver of Elvenkind (CChamp) if wielder is an Elf or worshipper of Corellon Larenthian, non-magical arrows drawn from this quiver force a Fortitude save against permanent blindness on a critical hit.

Gharyn's Monastic Array (MIC) When wearing 3 items from this set, when scoring a successful critical hit with a scorpion kama, the wearer can expend a use of stunning fist to make that critical a stunning attack.

Extractor Globe (Dragon 308): This magic item is explicitly a +1 *returning* "weapon,"which means it is eligible for Improved Critical to be applied to it. It's a thrown weapon with 1d8 damage and a range increment of 30 feet. This means it's also therefore a ranged weapon to which something like Sniper can be applied. On a critical hit, it immediately extracts the

opponent's brain, which kills most creatures instantly. This is superior to Vorpal or Flayer weapons in every way.

Spells, Psionics and Vestiges

Weapon of Energy (SpC) (Clr 3, Sor/Wiz 3) This spell gives a weapon one of the elemental burst abilities (fire/cold/acid/electricity) which stacks with any pre-existing versions of the enchantment what might be already present, assuming that the elements match.

Flame of Faith (SpC) (Clr 3, Pal 2) This 3rd level spell adds the *flaming burst* enchantment to any **non-magical** weapon that the caster uses it on.

Burning Sword (SpC) (Sor/Wiz 2) A weapon that has this spell cast on it becomes a *flaming burst* weapon for the duration, in effect. Applies to any weapon, not just non-magical ones.

Sakkratar's Triple Strike (LEoF) (Sor/Wiz 5) This spell grants the designated targets the ability to make two additional attacks on their full attack action for the duration of the spell. However, what we care about is that the weapons of anyone affected by this spell gains the *keen* and *flaming burst* properties for the duration of the spell.

Withering Palm (CArc, SpC) (Clr 7) Inflict ability drain instead of damage on critical hit – 1 point STR and CON per 2 caster levels to a maximum of 10 each. Effect isn't doubled. The Complete Arcane version of the spell had this as a 7th level Wu Jen spell as well.

Sword of Deception (CArc) (Sor/Wiz 5, Wu Jen 5) Creates a remote-controlled sword akin to the cleric's *Spiritual Weapon* that does 1d4 damage and has a critical threat range of 19-20. However, on a critical hit it imposes a -2 on the opponent's next saving throw.

Sword of Darkness (CArc) (Sor/Wiz 7): As Sword of Deception, but on a critical hit against living targets it imposes 2 negative levels on the target (rather than the standard 1). Same threat range.

Flesh Ripper (BoVD) (Clr 3, Mortal Hunter 3) Ranged touch attack deals damage (1d8 per caster level, max 10d8), on critical hit, in addition to double damage, the target begins bleeding for 1 damage per round until receiving magical healing. Not to be confused with the ToB maneuver of the same name.

Handfang (SrpKgdms) (Clr 3, Sor/Wiz 3) Deal 1d8 damage with a touch attack, can start a free grapple upon a critical hit and if it succeeds, the target takes 1d6 damage each round.

Hero's Blade (ECS) (Deathless 9, Revered Ancestor 9), weapon deals additional damage against evil targets, critical hits deal even more damage against such targets including Undead, and on critical hit evil creatures must make a Will save or be blinded and deafened for 1d4 rounds, evil extraplanar creatures must make a Will save or be banished for 24 hours, and weapon threat range is doubled in identical fashion to a *keen edge* spell.

Black Blade of Disaster (MoF, SpC) *(Sor/Wiz 9)* Creates a sword-shaped planar rift that is basically a Spiritual Weapon on steroids. The MoF version threatens a critical hit on an 18-20 and does 2d12 damage, but it can't really be wielded as such. The SpC version is

basically a Sphere of Annihilation in blade form, but in theory at least - since it requires a ranged touch attack and does points of damage - you can still make critical hits with it.

Decastave (UE): (Sor/Wiz 2) Creates quarterstaff made of force, strikes with melee touch attack, has the *thundering* weapon quality, also forces someone dealt a critical hit to save vs Fort or be permanently deafened.

Claws of Energy (XPH) 4th level power, Psychic Warrior, add energy burst effect to claw attack.

Kas, the Bloodyhanded (Dragon 341) (Vestige) a successful critical hit forces a Will save against permanent blindness, wielder can score critical hits against Undead, and inflict blindness effect on Undead.

Weapon Qualities and Special Substances

Note: Some of these qualities have a type of [Synergy], i.e. you can't install them on a weapon unless it already has some prerequisite weapon quality on it. Some DMs overlook [Synergy] as a requirement either out of ignorance or because it makes the qualities suck even more than they do, but either way, be mindful of that when considering the relative cost.

Vorpal (DMG) +5 effective bonus. Weapon severs head of target on a confirmed critical hit roll of a natural 20. And remember, something like *Bless Weapon* won't work with this because it's an effect related to critical hits. Just way too expensive and situational to ever justify taking it unless you really just want the thrill of very occasionally lopping someone's head off. More feasible if you plan on spamming *Surge of Fortune* and *Sense Weakness* to make natural 20s happen a lot, but that also tends to be the time in every game when suddenly critical-immune monsters, or indeed monsters without heads, start showing up as well.

Sending (LEoF) +4 effective bonus. On a natural 20 followed by a critical confirmation, this weapon quality transports the creature struck to a place of the wielder's choosing that the wielder has personally visited or seen, on the same plane. So you can't send someone off to the Nine Hells, but you can send them to the Sun. Or the Moon. Or any other place you've seen from an incredible distance. It might be just as useless as Vorpal, but at least it has more potential for lols.

Tentacle (Und) +4 bonus. A critical hit extracts the target's brain and kills it instantly, unless the target has multiple heads or is a Construct, Elemental, Ooze, Plant, or Undead, DC 21 Fortitude negates. At least it doesn't require a natural 20 roll, making it superior to *Vorpal* or *Sending* weapons. Still too expensive and too limited in use to be worth it.

Flaming Burst, Icy Burst, Shocking Burst, Acidic Burst (DMG, MIC) +1 bonus in all cases. For all intents and purposes, these abilities are all the same thing, with the only difference being the damage type: fire, cold, electricity or acid. In essence, on a critical hit, you do extra d10s of damage depending on your weapon's critical multiplier: 1d10 for x2, 2d10 for x3, 3d10 for x4 … and presumably so on if your multiplier is higher still. It's worth noting that for this that the FAQ and the DMG are in conflict: the DMG holds that a creature can be

immune to critical hits, but it won't be immune to this sort of effect unless the feature's entry says otherwise.

Psychokinetic Burst (XPH, MIC) +2 bonus under XPH, +1 bonus under MIC. Deal extra psionic energy damage (ie force damage, to which DR doesn't apply) on a critical hit: +1d6 for x2, +2d6 for x3, +3d6 for x4. So it's a slightly weaker form of Energy Burst, albeit it's a rarer form and therefore harder to mitigate via DR and similar immunities. At least the MIC made it cheaper...but also made it a [Synergy] quality

Heavenly Burst (BoED, MIC) +2 bonus under BoED, +1 under MIC. On critical hit against evil target, deals +3d6 bonus damage and forced DC 14 Fortitude save to avoid being blinded for 1 round, deals 1d2 Strength damage to wielder on critical hit. The MiC version removed the STR damage but left the rest intact.

Paralytic Burst (MinHB, MIC) +2 bonus in both books. The MinHB version allows a successful critical hit to afflict the target with *Hold Monster* (DC 17 Fortitude save). MIC version nerfs it down to Paralysis for 1 round, Will DC 17 negates. Both versions allow it to function against targets not normally subject to extra damage from critical hits. Fantastic for coup de grace'ing people, and laughs at the *Coup De Grace* weapon quality as a result.

Prismatic Burst (MinHB, MIC) Flat +30,000 gp cost to weapon under the MIC version; it's a +3 bonus at the MinHB. Otherwise they're identical: a successful critical hit inflicts a *prismatic spray* spell upon the target, and functions against targets immune to critical hit damage.

Screaming Burst (MIC) +1 bonus. [Synergy] quality. Successful critical hit inflicts sonic damage based on multiplier; damage activates even if the target is not normally subject to critical hits. The extra damage ramps up the same way it does for Elemental Burst and Psychokinetic Burst weapons, but it's extra d8s rather than d6s or d10s.

Slow Burst (MIC) Flat +5,000 gp to weapon cost. Successful critical hit inflicts forces DC 14 Will save or target suffers slow effect for 3 rounds, functions against targets immune to critical hit damage. Much more reasonably priced and useful than many burst weapons.

Desiccating Burst (SStorm, MIC) +3 bonus under SStorm, +1 bonus under MIC plus good old [Synergy] quality. Desiccation energy burst effect on your weapon. Otherwise operates as other energy burst weapons do, but there's a difference in the damage dice: for SStorm it's 1d10, MIC it's d8s. However, this might be made up for in the MIC version by the fact the struck creature is fatigued for 8 hours, which isn't a bad debuff on the opposition.

Profane Burst (LibMort, MIC) +1 bonus in both books, but a [Synergy] quality. On a critical hit, the weapon does 1d4 CON damage to a living wielder. It adds negative energy burst property to a weapon, which is identical to an Energy Burst weapon except the damage type is, well, negative. The MIC is identical but emphasises the effect works on creatures immune to critical hits.

Sacred Burst (LibMort, MIC) The flip side to *Profane Burst*; this time, the energy is positive instead. The LibMort version was +2, the MIC version is +1 plus a [Synergy] quality.

Consumptive Burst (PlanHB) +3 bonus. Inflicts 1 negative level upon a successful critical hit, no saving throw. While *Consumptive* was updated in the MIC, this one was not.

Fear Burst (MinHB) +1 bonus. On a successful critical hit, the target is forced to make a DC 11 Will save or be affected by the *cause fear* spell. This wasn't updated to anything in MIC.

Doomburst (MIC) +2 bonus. A critical hit causes the target to become shaken for 5 rounds, fear effect, no saving throw. Possibly *Fear Burst* was meant to be updated to this, but in absence of anything specific, it stands separate.

Thundering (DMG) +1 bonus, the weapon deals sonic damage on a critical hit. The extra damage ramps up identical to *Screaming Burst*, but it also compels the target to make a DC 14 Fort check or be deafened permanently.

Soulbreaker (XPH, MIC) +3 bonus under XPH, +1 under MIC and [Synergy] quality. Inflicts 1 negative level on a critical hit. Probably a misprint at play here since Soulbreaker is a more permanent Enervating effect, but Enervating weapons are +2 and Soulbreaker is +1. Either way – it's a much cheaper and more sustained *Enervating* ability, dig it.

Souldrinking (BoVD, MIC) +4 bonus under BoVD, +1 bonus under MIC plus a [Synergy] quality. The BoVD version of the weapon quality inflicts 2 negative levels on a critical hit, and the wielder gains 1d8 temporary hitpoints and a +2 enhancement bonus to Strength for 1 hour. The MIC version nerfs it down to an *Enervating* effect – i.e. 1 negative level lost -- reduces the time you have the temporary enhancements, and cuts the amount of temporary hitpoints as well.

Bodyfeeder (XPH, MIC) +3 bonus. Gain temporary hit points on a critical hit equal to the total damage you did on a successful critical hit, which last for 10 minutes, and on a subsequent critical hit, it doesn't stack; you get the better of either your current temporary hitpoints or a new influx of temporary hitpoints. As usual the MIC version ruins our fun by saying the hitpoints only last 1 minute, and halves the amount of temporary hitpoints you can gain. It's an interesting ability, particularly for x4 or x5 weapons, but also priced godawfully high as with most weapon qualities.

Coup de Grace (XPH) +5 bonus. DC 27 fortitude save against 1 turn paralysis on a critical hit. Works on creatures immune to extra damage from critical hits. Really not worth it unless you have absolutely no other way to impose the helpless condition on an opponent for the coup de grace. One that wasn't nerfed by MIC, but there wasn't any need to, since the MIC contains options that do much the same thing for a much lower price.

Mindfeeder (XPH, MIC) +3 bonus under the XPH version, +1 under MIC. Gain temporary power points on a critical hit, in a similar manner to the XPH version of the Bodyfeeder ability, but this one doesn't work on constructs or undead. MIC version nerfed the number of power points gained to 1 temporary power point for every 5 points of damage in the critical hit, i.e. made it an even worse ratio than MIC Bodyfeeder.

Fiercebane (MIC) +1 bonus. [Synergy] weapon. Remember *Sting* from Lord of the Rings? It had this enchantment on it. A weapon with this enchantment glows when an enemy of the specified *bane* type comes within 60 ft of the wielder, even without line of sight, and will deal additional damage based on your critical damage multiplier identical to an Energy Burst weapon.

Enfeebling (BoED) +1 bonus. Weapon deals 1d6+2 Strength damage on a critical hit. Spell resistance applies, but not saving throws.

Roaring (BoED) +3 bonus. This weapon forces a DC 22 Will save or the evil target is shaken. It also deals +2d6 sonic damage on critical hit, incompatible with the Thundering weapon quality.

Cursespewing (BoVD) +1 bonus. On a critical hit, target is afflicted with a curse for 1 minute, inflicting -4 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, ability checks and skill checks; Will save DC 15 negates this effect.

Paralyzing (BoED, SSth, MIC): +2 bonus in SSth and BoED, +1 in MIC. The original Book of Exalted Deeds version provided that on any hit, any living creature was rendered immobile for a maximum of 10 rounds, DC 17 Will save ends paralysis. The Shining South version required this to happen only on a critical hit. Finally, the MIC version nerfed this even further by allowing it to happen only on a critical hit, and only once per day.

Nervewrack (Dungeon 105) +1 bonus. On a successful critical hit, target takes a -2 penalty on AC, attack rolls, weapon damage rolls and Reflex saves, and must make a DC 15 Concentration check to cast spells. The condition lasts for 1d4 rounds, pain effect.

Stalactite (Und) +3 bonus. A critical hit petrifies the target, DC 19 Fortitude to negate.

Enervating (MIC) +2 bonus. A critical hit inflicts 1 negative level upon a living target, only lasts 1 hour. No saving throw.

Maiming (MinHB, MIC) +1 bonus in both books. The MIC version deals additional and piddling untyped damage upon a successful critical hit based on critical multiplier. The earlier MinHB version was a little more interesting in that it made your critical multiplier variable on a dice roll when you scored a critical threat, but statistically came down to about a +0.5 increase on your weapon's normal critical multiplier (here's a bit of a discussion about these two weapon qualities.)

Stunning (AEG, MIC) +1 bonus in the MIC, +2 bonus in the AEG. Updated slightly since the AEG, this now functions as a *screaming* weapon that forces a DC 17 Fortitude save or target is stunned for 1 round upon successful critical hit.

Weakening (MIC) +1 bonus. Upon successful critical hit, target takes a -4 penalty to its STR score for 10 minutes, minimum Strength of 1, not cumulative with itself. No save required.

Dementia (Dungeon 116) +2 bonus. On a successful critical hit, target must make a DC 16 Will save or be affected by the effects of the *Confusion* spell for 7 rounds.

Serrated (Dragon 358): Non-magical weapon quality. On a successful critical hit, target bleeds for 1 additional damage for 1d4 rounds.

Maneuvers and stances

Blood in the Water (TOB) (Tiger Claw) (Swordsage/Warblade 1) Gain +1 to all attacks and damage with every critical hit you make while in this stance - which helps with confirmations and with damage on critical hits!

Flesh Ripper (TOB) (Tiger Claw) (Swordsage/Warblade 3) If strike hits, target receives a -4 penalty to attacks and AC for 1 round; if a critical hit is scored, penalty persists for a number of rounds equal to the weapon's critical multiplier. Doesn't work against critical hit immunity.

Epic Level Options

I have included these for completeness more than anything else; for the most part, the epic level options in this area just carry on the same rubbish-y options they're derived from at below-level-20 play.

Divine Abilities

Divine Monk (F&P) If you somehow ascend to godhood, this ability grants your Monk character the *keen*, *lawful*, and *vorpal* qualities in addition to a few other abilities.

Divine Weapon Mastery (F&P) A character with this particular divine ability gains the benefits of Weapon Focus, Weapon Specialization, and Improved Critical with any simple and martial weapons that they wield.

Feats

Death of Enemies (Epic) when wielder scores a critical hit against a favored enemy, the target must make a Fortitude save or die

Devastating Critical (Epic) when wielder scores a critical hit with a weapon for which they have selected the Epic, the target must make a fortitude save or die

***Keen* Strike** (Epic) wielder's unarmed strike becomes a slashing *keen* weapon, increasing critical threat range to 19-20

Overwhelming Critical (Epic) selected weapon deals additional damage on a critical hit, based on multiplier

Vorpal Strike (Epic) wielder can treat unarmed strike as a vorpal weapon

Weapon Qualities

Acidic Blast (Epic) weapon deals acid damage, and bonus damage on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Fiery Blast (Epic) weapon deals fire damage, and bonus damage on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Icy Blast (Epic) weapon deals cold damage, and bonus damage on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Lightning Blast (Epic) weapon deals Electricity damage, and bonus damage on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Sonic Blast (Epic) weapon deals Sonic damage, and bonus damage on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Anarchic Power (Epic) weapon deals chaotic damage and 1 negative level to lawful targets, and bonus damage and additional negative levels on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Holy Power (Epic) weapon deals holy damage and 1 negative level to evil targets, and bonus damage and additional negative levels on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Axiomatic Power (Epic) weapon deals lawful damage and 1 negative level to chaotic targets, and bonus damage and additional negative levels on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Unholy Power (Epic) weapon deals evil damage and 1 negative level to lawful targets, and bonus damage and additional negative levels on a critical hit based on critical multiplier

Dread (Epic) weapon deals bonus damage to a creature type, and on a critical hit forces such a target to make a DC 27 Fortitude save or be destroyed, functions against targets immune to critical hits and death magic.

Other Random Stuff

Gripsoul (Epic) Magic weapon. On any successful critical hit, or an attack that kills a foe or knocks them unconscious, wielder can force the target to make a DC 30 Will save or become trapped via a 16th level Binding spell within the sword, weapon does no additional damage on a critical hit.

Mace of Ruin (Epic) Magic weapon that deals critical hits to constructs and objects as if living creatures.

Gaia. Soul of the Land (Dragon 363) (Epic Vestige) wielder gains ability to inflict sneak attacks, critical hits, and all other forms of precision damage against Aberrations, Contructs, Oozes, and Undead and automatically confirms critical hits, among other benefits.

Blade of Ragnarok levels 24, 30 (Dragon 363) (Epic Destiny) at level 24, 2/day swift action, wielder can gain +20 luck bonus on attack rolls for 1 turn, doubling critical threat range, suffer no miss chance on attack rolls and wielder can reroll any 1's for attack and damage rolls, at level 30, 3/day (Su), declare use before making an attack roll, can suppress one defensive ability for 3 rounds, including one immunity of wielder's choice.

Builds

Build Philosophy

My intent with these builds, which are my own work unless otherwise indicated, is to provide a fairly simple skeleton for people to adapt and build from. These are more teaching exercises than fully-tricked-out, fully-built characters, because fully-built-out characters are useless to a player who doesn't understand what's going on with the build. As such, unless noted, specific equipment and specific stats are not included, and I have used a lot of classes which are probably not optimal in other contexts. Getting very powerful results out of critical hits already rests on having access to a wide range of options, so rather than overly complicate the builds I have tried to illustrate the sort of basic hoops you're going to have to jump through to get a seriously good critical threat range and/or multiplier. (If you have no idea what I'm talking about with critical threat range and multiplier, head back to the rules section and then come back. If you're going to optimise critical hits you'd better know how they work first.)

So please: before you message me saying "WaI u NOt MaKE BarBARian wiTH FERoCiTY n FisT OF teH FoREst" … or "WAi U nOT pLAY CasTER INsteAD" … consider the context first, hey?

That aside, these builds also come with extensive notes. Those notes may or may not make sense without reading the handbook further. I've also included a quick 'vital statistics' note on each to give you an idea of how these builds do in the critical hit space.

I am also happy to receive proposed builds for inclusion, beyond these basic items. If I deem it should be included, you will be appropriately credited within the handbook. But if you're going to make a build for these purposes, please ensure it adheres to RAW as close as possible, and clearly identify where the RAW is dodgy or at least arguable in the build, so any future readers here can be forearmed to meet objections.

Melee Builds

Disciple of Dispater

The DoD is the go-to for critical-optimised builds from the Book of Vile Darkness. It is not a loved Prestige Class partially because it's 3.0, but also because the class is distastefully evil, requiring the sacrifice of a sentient being to even qualify for it. The Weapon Master (Kensei) prestige class comes from Oriental Adventures.

Either way, the basic chassis for a crit-optimised build based around the DoD is as follows:

Fighter 6/ Disciple of Dispater 8/Weapon Master (Kensei) 6

This requires 2 flaws and a human to run. The level by level progression is as follows:

ECL	Class	HD	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Feats	Class Abilities
1	Fighter 1	D10	+1	+2	+0	+0	Weapon Focus (Scimitar), Dodge, Mobility, Combat Reflexes	
2	Fighter 2	D10	+2	+3	+0	+0	Combat Expertise	
3	Fighter 3	D10	+3	+3	+1	+1	Spring Attack	
4	Fighter 4	D10	+4	+4	+1	+1	Power Attack	
5	Fighter 5	D10	+5	+4	+1	+1		
6	Fighter 6	D10	+6/+1	+5	+2	+2	Disciple of Darkness, Whirlwind Attack	
7	Disciple of Dispater 1	D10	+7/+2	+7	+4	+5		Device Lore
8	Disciple of Dispater 2	D10	+8/+3	+8	+5	+6		Iron Hews
9	Disciple of Dispater 3	D10	+9/+4	+8	+5	+6	Improved Critical(Scimitar)	Rusting Grasp
10	Disciple of Dispater 4	D10	+10/+5	+9	+6	+7		Iron Power +1
11	Disciple of Dispater 5	D10	+11/+6/+1	+9	+6	+7		Summon Erinyes
12	Disciple of Dispater 6	D10	+12/+7/+2	+10	+7	+8	Two Weapon Fighting	Greater Iron Hews

13	Disciple of Dispater 7	D10	+13/+8/+3	+10	+7	+8		Ironskin
14	Disciple of Dispater 8	D10	+14/+9/+4	+11	+8	+9		Iron Power +2
15	Weapon Master (Kensei) 1	D10	+15/+10/+5	+11	+10	+9		Weapon of Choice, Ki Damage
16	Weapon Master (Kensei) 2	D10	+16/+11/+6/+1	+11	+11	+9	Weapon Focus: Light Mace	Increased Multiplier 1/day
17	Weapon Master (Kensei) 3	D10	+17/+12/+7/+2	+12	+11	+10		Superior Weapon Focus
18	Weapon Master (Kensei) 4	D10	+18/+13/+8/+3	+12	+12	+10		Increased Multiplier 2/day
19	Weapon Master (Kensei) 5	D10	+19/+14/+9/+4	+12	+12	+10	Lightning Mace	Superior Combat Reflexes
20	Weapon Master (Kensei) 6	D10	+20/+15/+10/+5	+13	+13	+11		Increased Multiplier 3/day

Vital Statistics at Level 20:
Critical Threat Range: 9-20
Frequency: All day long
Critical Multiplier: x3
Frequency: 3/day.
Riders on Scoring Critical Threats: An additional attack (Lightning Mace)
Riders on Scoring Critical Hits: None

Notes on the build

- Two-Weapon Fighting with scimitars, Iron Power +2 triples your threat range, bringing your threat range to 12-20 (before Improved Critical, which stacks). Improved Critical brings that to at least 9-20. Just one more level of Weapon Master (Kensei) would have given you an additional 2 points to the threat range (specifically applied after other modifiers) bringing the threat range to a whopping 7-20 … except you can't qualify that early; too many feats and not enough BAB I'm afraid. Instead, it's 9-20. First round, do not power attack; each critical threat confirmation will be 20 (BAB) + Str +5(Weapon) +2(Iron Power) -4 (Two Weapon Fighting) = around 25-30, dependent on starting Str and magical items to boost it. Then Lightning Mace gives you additional attacks.

- Oh, and on top of that, all those levels in Weapon Master (Kensei) also give you limited chances to up your critical multiplier by 1 as well.

- At character level 14 it's pretty much over. Your threat range is 9-20. At level 18, it's even more over. Lightning Mace comes in and anything over a 9 is a free swing with the chance of more free swings.

- For full disclosure, I took most of this build from here.

  I had to rework it heavily because it breaks basic rules of level progression. Psychic Warrior doesn't give you full BAB, which means you can't get into Weapon Master (Kensei) at level 6. The build in the link also tries to pick up a prerequisite feat for Weapon Master on the same level that you qualify and enter for the Prestige Class. Per PHB's level progression rules, feats get selected last, after class and Prestige Class selection has happened, i.e. literally putting the cart before the horse.

  Lastly, that build cannot legally include Lightning Mace. You''re one feat short to get it any earlier in the build. Weapon Focus (scimitar) doesn't qualify as Weapon Focus (Light Mace) for Lightning Mace just because of the *aptitude* weapon quality; *Aptitude* doesn't change one weapon into another, it merely provides that if you have a single-weapon feat, that feat can be applied to a weapon with the *aptitude* quality. Lightning Mace takes Weapon Focus (Light Mace) to qualify for. There are methods to pick up extra feats – the Dark Chaos Shuffle, retraining feats, and/or visiting feat-granting locations like the Otyugh Hole from Complete Mage – but I'm putting this build up without recourse to those.

  "But I can choose the Light Mace as my weapon of choice for Weapon Master, can't I then use *Aptitude* to wield a scimitar and pick up the benefits for my scimitars that way?" No, because *Aptitude* only allows you to apply the effects of weapon-specific feats; the explicit RAW both in the description and the benefit of the weapon quality makes it clear. Weapon Master's relevant abilities are all (Ex) class abilities, not feats.

  All this is hair-tearingly frustrating because it means (unless someone has any better ideas) we have to take 6 levels in Fighter to pick up all the minimal-use feats required to qualify for Weapon Master. It also edges out the otherwise great 7th level in Weapon Master which would have extended our critical threat range by a further 2.

  And no, a level in Warblade doesn't fix this because all the Warblade's ability can do in effect is change Weapon Focus (Light Mace) to Weapon Focus (Scimitar), which doesn't help us at all because having one or the other turns off Lightning Mace or Weapon Master respectively (or so your DM is likely to rule). Not to mention that there's nowhere to put the Warblade level since it doesn't get any bonus feats to help us qualify for either of those classes. So unfortunately we have to pick up Weapon Focus in both, and then use *aptitude* scimitars so we can use Lightning Mace (and also pick up the +1 from Weapon Focus in Light Mace, too.)

- This build doesn't do much other than critical. There's not much really happening here but pure TWF damage. Indeed the most obvious suggestion for adaptation is to swap all the TWF for more interesting things like two-handed weapons or even exotic

weaponry and you'd probably gain a couple more tricks *and* do more damage in pure numbers anyway. And its sweet spot is in the teens onward.

- It takes two 3.0 Prestige Classes: Disciple of Dispater and the Weapon Master (Kensei) from Oriental Adventures were not updated for 3.5 and they're both still valid as a result.

- The Psychic Weapon Master looks very similar to the Weapon Master (Kensei), and you might think it's an easy substitute. Unfortunately, no: the Psychic Weapon Master doesn't come online until at least 7th level because it takes 3rd level powers. And it may not work with Disciple of Dispater anyway since the weapon master wields a psicrystal weapon, not iron or steel.

- The Power Critical mentioned in the link is the Complete Warrior one, not the 3.0 version. But save yourself the feat slot – and we had to, in order to get Lightning Mace -- make sure you're wielding a Pitspawned, Abyssal Bloodiron weapon (perfectly on theme for the DoD) to pick up a +6 to critical confirmation rolls. Use Magic Device combined with a wand of *Corrupt Weapon* does better: it automatically confirms critical hits against good opposition (i.e. your likely opposition as a DoD.) This build doesn't actually use *keen* at all and *Corrupt Weapon* only shuts down if you have a magical effect related to critical hits on your weapon.

Arcane Duelist

Arcane Duelist is a web-only prestige class referred to here.

The build is as follows:

Paladin 4/Fencer 2/Arcane Duelist 3/Legacy Champion 5/Fencer +2/Warblade 4.

Human, 2 flaw feats.

ECL	BAB	HD	Class	Fort	Ref	Will	Feats	Abilities
1	+1	d10	Paladin 1	+2	+0	+0	(Human - Power Attack) (Starting Character - EWP: Great Falchion) (Flaw: Improved Sunder) (Flaw: Combat Reflexes)	Aura of Good, Detect evil, smite evil 1/day
2	+2	D10	Paladin 2	+3	+0	+0		Divine Grace, lay on hands
3	+3	D10	Paladin 3	+3	+1	+1	(Improved Bull Rush)	Aura of Courage, Angel's Sight
4	+4	D10	Paladin 4	+4	+1	+1		Domain Power – Magic (use wands etc as Wizard of half Paladin level)

5	+5	D10	Fencer 1 (Variant Fighter)	+6	+1	+1	(Fighter Bonus Feat - Dodge)	Tumble as class skill
6	+6/+1	D10	Fencer (Variant Fighter) 2	+7	+1	+1	(Character feat - Sword of the Arcane Order) (Fighter Bonus Feat - Mobility)	
7	+6/+1	D8	Arcane Duelist 1	+7	+2	+2		Chosen Weapon, Enchant chosen weapon +1
8	+7/+2	D8	Arcane Duelist 2	+7	+3	+3		Apparent defense (CHA to AC)
9	+7/+2	D8	Arcane Duelist 3	+8	+3	+3	(Character feat - Combat Brute)	Dexterous Attack (sacrifice damage to attack rolls)
10	+7/+2	D8	Legacy Champion 1	+8	+3	+5		
11	+8/+3	D8	Legacy Champion 2	+8	+3	+6		(Arcane Duelist: Enchant chosen weapon +2) Replace Least Legacy
12	+9/+4	D8	Legacy Champion 3	+9	+4	+6	(Character feat - Improved Critical – Great Falchion)	(Arcane Duelist: *Blur)* Extra Legacy Ability Use
13	+10/+5	D8	Legacy Champion 4	+9	+4	+7		(Arcane Duelist: Enchant chosen weapon +3) Bonus Legacy Feat
14	+10/+5	D8	Legacy Champion 5	+9	+4	+7		(Arcane Duelist: False *keen*ness) Replace Lesser Legacy
15	+11/+6/+1	D10	Fencer (Variant Fighter) 3	+9	+5	+8	(Character feat - Shock Trooper)	
16	+12/+7/+2	D10	Fencer (Variant Fighter) 4	+10	+5	+8	(Bonus fighter feat – Encouraging Blow)	
17	+13/+8/+3	D12	Warblade 1	+12	+5	+8		Battle Clarity (Reflex saves), weapon aptitude
18	+14/+9/+4	D12	Warblade 2	+13	+5	+8	(Character feat - Stand Still)	Uncanny Dodge
19	+15/+10/+5	D12	Warblade 3	+13	+6	+9		Battle Ardor (Critical Confirmation)
20	+16/+11/+6/+1	D12	Warblade 4	+14	+6	+9		

Vital Statistics at Level 20:
Critical Threat Range: 12-20 at least
Frequency: 7/day, for 7 rounds each
Critical Multiplier: x4, assuming Kaorti Resin weapon. If not, x2.
Frequency: All day long.
Riders on Critical Threats: +3 dodge bonus to AC
Riders on Critical Hits: +6 dodge bonus to AC, +1 to attack and damage (Blood in the Water)

Notes on the Build

- Arcane Duelist requires a little DM interpretation about whether it allows the class's False *Keen*ness, *keen*, and Improved Critical to all stack together. If it does, then False *Keen*ness leads to very satisfactory returns: a Great Falchion, our weapon of choice here, is an 18-20 weapon already. Under False *Keen*ness, its range becomes 15-20 for a -3 to attack accuracy. If Improved Critical and *keen* stack, that then becomes a threat range of 9-20, matching the Disciple of Dispater. But even then, just with Improved Critical and an 18-20 weapon, False *Keen*ness permits us a respectable 12-20 threat range. And remember, if you're willing to suck up 9 damage on the critical hit, you don't suffer any attack penalisation, and Power Attack allows you to quite literally get that damage back. Lastly, if you have a DM who is willing to rule that a *keen* weapon's critical threat range is 15-20, which False *Keen*ness then expands down to 9-20, then take that ruling and run with it.

- Fencer is a variant Fighter from Dragon 310. It's in there for two reasons. First, Arcane Duelist requires five ranks in Tumble. The Fencer has Tumble as one of its class skills, making qualification just that little bit easier and leaving us only with Perform to worry about in cross-class skills. Second, Encouraging Blow allows us to pick up a +3 dodge bonus to AC if we score a critical threat, and +6 if we score a critical hit, which we kinda hope is going to happen a lot given the build is all about critical hits. Unfortunately you can't get this benefit until Fencer 4.

- The Paladin levels serve three purposes. First, they feed our BAB to qualify for Arcane Duelist. Second, the Paladin gets *Bless Weapon*, which is invaluable for critfishing builds because it auto-confirms critical hits against evil targets where we score a critical threat. And third, thanks to Sword of the Arcane Order (from Champions of Valor), we gain access to arcane spellcasting … and thus Arcane Duelist. (Hexblade is an alternative, but critical confirmations are then an issue. Duskblade has similar issues and also suffers from a limited spell list.) That said, I would strongly suggest just performing Paladin casting mainly via wands or similar. A single wand of *Bless Weapon* will set you back about 750 gp, can be put in a wand chamber on your weapon's hilt, and with 50 charges will last a very decent number of fights. Don't push the WIS score higher than 11 – we need the *ability* to cast our own spells, but with all the other stats we have to keep high, we're never going to really be able to cast out of the single 1st level slot we have.

- Legacy Champion, for those of you wondering, is a prestige class and also the sole redeeming feature of the Weapons of Legacy sourcebook. That's because it advances the class features of any class you were in before entering the prestige class ... but also superimposes its 8/10 BAB progression. This is a net gain on the Arcane Duelist's horrible, horrible 5/10 BAB. It's not a complete solution; your BAB stops dead for a looooong three levels at 8-10, and your ability to pull damage to fuel attack accuracy is gated by your BAB, just like Power Attack.

- Warblade levels come late, and the first stance on your list should be Blood in the Water, which is great as it grants +1 to attack and damage per critical hit while you're in that stance.

- Dragon 328 (p. 90) gives us what are called "Paladin domains", which really are just alternative class features you switch out for Divine Health. The one of interest to us is the Magic domain, which allows us to use spell trigger *or* spell completion devices as a wizard of half our paladin level. So now we can freely use wands of handy crit-enhancing spells like Dolorous Blow in the (wand chambered) hilt of our Great Falchion … or even *keen edge* if we don't want to spend money on a *keen* weapon. This is very thematic with Sword of the Arcane Order.

- I appreciate this build is markedly different to any of those suggested under the minmax forums' Arcane Duelist handbook. The reason for that is because we are focused here on optimising critical hits and orthodox two-handed melee more than anything else; hence the four levels in Paladin and four levels in Fencer. This does make the build fairly MAD (STR > CON > CHA > INT > WIS 11 > DEX), but in my defence, many of the suggested builds in the handbook also confess that weakness … and I managed to pull a better native BAB by level 20 than any set out in that handbook. The build was meant to try and make it effective on critical hits as soon as possible.

- Legacy Feats are listed for completeness, but they're so useless they're only relevant if you build your own legacy weapon.

- Angel's Sight is an alternative class feature for Paladins from Dragon 349 (p. 93). In essence, lose Divine Health, gain darkvision out to 60 feet and low-light vision. Not essential to this build.

- Arcane Duelist in general is not the greatest of classes, it has to be said. The simplest houserule fix for it would be to make it full BAB and add some partial casting to it, say 7/10 or so. To make it the sort of class you can calibrate, I also would have preferred to be able to increase or decrease the penalty you could take on attack accuracy/damage to increase a weapon's critical hit range rather than just be a flat double of the base range, but that is what it is. Arcane Duelist works best as written with an 18-20 weapon.

- **"I don't need no dodge bonus to AC."** Okay, replace Fencer 3-4 with Warblade. Or indeed you could make all the Fencer levels Warblade, using flaw feats to pick up Dodge and Mobility and swap the Improved Bull Rush with Improved Sunder so you can still qualify for Combat Brute. You'd likely pick up Stormguard Warrior at the end of the build. If you can handle another point of BAB loss, there is a weak alternative: Mythic Exemplar from Complete Champion, which at level 2 allows you to add 1 point

of threat range to a weapon you wield, i.e. less need to nerf your attack or your damage rolls. Considerably beneficial since it's absolutely 3.5 and it explicitly stacks with effects like Improved Critical or *keen*, i.e. you have a strong argument to apply it to the *base* threat range of your weapon and not at the end. Would be better if you could apply it for more than 2 damn rounds per day.

- **"I don't want some rinky-dink variant Fighter just to pick up Tumble as a class skill, and I don't want to waste skill points on cross-class ranks."** All right; there are two options to consider, one reasonably natural, the other a lot more dodgy. Skilled City Dweller from Cityscape replaces Ride with Tumble, making it a class skill for the Paladin. Perform can be picked up via Ruby Rose Knight, a substitution level from Champions of Valor, but has two issues: first, its HD is d8 rather than d10, i.e. more squishy … and second, to take this substitution level, Sune has to be your patron, while Sword of the Arcane Order one level later is explicitly "paladin 4th of Mystra."*Maybe* you can switch from one god to another without losing the substitution level, or maybe both can be taken since a "patron" isn't necessarily the same as one's deity.

- **"Why dintcha use Swashbuckler instead of Fencer?"** Because Swashbuckler doesn't get the Fencer's Encouraging Blow that's fuelled by critical threats or hits, and it doesn't have two handy feat slots to pick up Dodge and Mobility. If you can live with losing dodge AC, then by all means switch the Fencer levels to Swashbuckler, pick up an elven courtblade instead and have fun. Swashbuckler even has the matching d10 hit dice and Tumble as a class skill. Or even sillier, keep the first 2 Fencer levels and use Swashbuckler after Legacy Champion is over and done.

- **"Not much in the way of critical multipliers here."** Then go to battleaxe and suck up the smaller threat range. Get your battleaxe made as a Kaorti Resin weapon, take EWP in it, and dip two classes: Hida Defender 1 and Exotic Weapon Master 1, taking Uncanny Blow. In addition to the critical threat range coming from Arcane Duelist (making it a 17-20 weapon all up if *keen* and Improved Critical stack – if they don't, it's 18-20 instead), your weapon is now doing x5 on critical hits and pulls x2 STR bonus when wielded in two hands. If you want extra parmigiana, make it a Heavy weapon (Magic of Faerun) and raise the weapon's damage dice past the d8 -- assuming the DM doesn't object to kaorti resin and alchemical platinum or gold being mixed together.

- **"I really don't want to take any spellcasting levels, is there some way around it?"** There are theoretical methods to make a spellcaster out of a non-spellcaster; these typically centre around a combination of Magical Training + something that heightens spellcasting and arguably/therefore makes those 0-level cantrips count as first level spells. The most concise of these is Magical Training + Improved Sigil (Krau), but whatever method you choose carries a high chance of head injury via a thrown DMG. That aside, to get first level casting without dipping a spellcasting class, you are stuck with blowing a few feat slots, albeit if you spammed a lot of Fighter levels you could probably get some of those back.

- One alternative which requires a lot less cheese than the Magical Training gambits above: Mystic Ranger, out of Dragon 336. This variant ranger gets its spellcasting much earlier, on par with a wizard or sorcerer's progression. DM interpretation is

required whether a Mystic Ranger 4 technically qualifies as a “ranger 4th" for the purposes of Sword of the Arcane Order. If it doesn’t, look for something else. However, if it does, then as at level 6 in Mystic Ranger you have third level arcane spellcasting via Sword of the Arcane Order in a full-BAB class. Like the Paladin, it doesn’t get Perform or Tumble as class skills, but it does get a lot more skill points, meaning you at least can invest in a little more than just somersaults and singing. In addition, the Mystic Ranger still gets the ranger’s Combat Style. Enter Strong-Arm Style from Dragon 341, a variant Combat Style which gives us Power Attack and Improved Sunder for free … i.e. the foundations of Combat Brute and also very useful damage multipliers for critical work with Arcane Duelist. Not to mention that Mystic Ranger, having access to the ranger spell list, has some fairly nice spells in the critical confirmation area.

- **“Do I have to be an arcane spellcaster?”** Nope. Cleric qualification can work because of *Divine Power*. Go with the Spell domain, use Anyspell as your qualification for casting first level arcane spells. However, you’re going to have to wait a while before Arcane Duelist goes online.

- **“Where’s the Lightning Mace?”** Lightning Mace can be just as easily applied here too, albeit you waste a feat on TWF and Weapon Focus which you’re not actually going to be using. Warblade Weapon Aptitude doesn’t actually help with this, since the moment you shift that Weapon Focus from Light Mace to another weapon, Lightning Mace is switched off. An *Aptitude* weapon is the only real way to make this work.

- **“Can this work with ranged weapons?”** Likely nope. Arcane Duelist requires a melee weapon. Yuan-Ti serpent bows and elvencraft bows can be freely and interchangeably used as melee and ranged weapons, but good luck getting that to fly with your DM. We’ll talk about ranged critical builds in a moment.

- **“How about with unarmed?”** Yep. Arcane Duelist requires a melee weapon, and even if your DM argues this should mean a manufactured weapon, a monk’s unarmed strike is explicitly considered to be a manufactured and natural weapon for the purposes of spells and effects that enhance both. If going down this line I’d go dwarven and find Hammer Fist if I was just using this chassis.

Unarmed Builds

Thayan Gladiator and Arcane Duelist

Thayan Gladiator is a prestige class from *Champions of Ruin,* keyed mainly to making better natural attacks. The build here:

Duskblade 1/Skarn Martial Monk 2/Fighter 2/Duskblade +1/Thayan Gladiator 7/Arcane Duelist 7

Skarn race. 2 flaw feats.

ECL	BAB	Class	HD	Fort	Ref	Will	Feats	Special Abilities
1	+1	Duskblade	D8	+2	+0	+2	(Starting Character: Power Attack) (Flaw Feat: Intuitive Attack) (Flaw Feat: Law Devotion)	Arcane Attunement, Armored Mage (Light)
2	+1	Skarn Martial Monk	D8	+4	+2	+4		Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist, Spine Strike
3	+2	Martial Monk	D8	+5	+3	+5	(Character: Weapon Focus: Spine)	Improved Trip
4	+3	Fighter	D10	+7	+3	+5		Fighter Bonus Feat: Dodge
5	+4	Fighter	D10	+8	+3	+5		Fighter Bonus Feat: Mobility
6	+5	Duskblade	D8	+9	+3	+6	(Character: Toughness)	Combat Casting
7	+6/+1	Thayan Gladiator	D12	+11	+3	+6		Improved Natural Attack (Spine), Study Opponent (bonuses to attack and AC ahead of combat)
8	+7/+2	Thayan Gladiator	D12	+12	+3	+6		Improved Critical (Spine),

								Natural Armor +1
9	+8/+3	Thayan Gladiator	D12	+12	+4	+7	(Character: Superior Unarmed Strike)	Stunning Critical, Silver Strike
10	+9/+4	Thayan Gladiator	D12	+13	+4	+7		Additional strike at -5 with natural weapon in full attack
11	+10/+5	Thayan Gladiator	D12	+13	+4	+7		Imbue Spine attack: thundering, Natural Armor +2
12	+11/+6/+1	Thayan Gladiator	D12	+14	+5	+8	(Character: Roundabout Kick)	Spine Attack is Adamantine
13	+12/+7/+2	Thayan Gladiator	D12	+14	+5	+8		Critical Multiplier Spine attack increases by 1.
14	+12/+7/+2	Arcane Duelist	D8	+14	+5	+8		Chosen Weapon (Spine), Enchant Spine +1
15	+13/+8/+3	Arcane Duelist	D8	+14	+6	+9	(Character: Snap Kick)	Apparent defense
16	+13/+8/+3	Arcane Duelist	D8	+15	+6	+9		Dexterous Attack
17	+14/+8/+4	Arcane Duelist	D8	+15	+7	+10		Enchant Spine +2
18	+14/+8/+4	Arcane Duelist	D8	+16	+8	+11	(Character: Staggering Blow)	*Blur*
19	+15/+10/+5	Arcane Duelist	D8	+16	+8	+11		Enchant Spine +3
20	+15/+10/+5	Arcane Duelist	D8	+16	+9	+12		False *Keen*ness

Vital Statistics at Level 20:
Critical Threat Range: 17-20 at least
Frequency: 7/day, for 7 rounds each
Critical Multiplier: x3.
Frequency: All day long.
Riders on Critical Threats: None
Riders on Critical Hits: Additional attack (Roundabout Kick), *thundering* save, two saves against stuns.

Notes on the build

- Important equipment for this build include a Monk's Belt (SRD) and a Monk's Tattoo (MoF). Together with the levels in Martial Monk and Superior Unarmed Strike, this takes on a Monk 15's unarmed damage, i.e. 2d6. Improved Natural Attack raises it to 3d6.

- Necklace of Natural Attacks is the next most important thing, though note always that a monk's unarmed strike is a valid target for spells and effects that enhance manufactured weapons or natural weapons. This makes it trivially easy, especially with something like a Ward Cestus, to pick up loads and loads of magical effects on a monk's fists.

- In this case we're not so much worried about generating damage on the critical hit as generating rider effects. As such, not much in the way of multipliers in here; a natural attack damage starts at a x2 and Thayan Gladiator only gets that to x3. But since that then gives you at least 9d6 damage on a critical hit, maybe you don't care about that.

- I'm going to take a second to talk a bit about monks and natural weapons, because it explains some elements of the build. Basically, there is a question mark over whether a monk's unarmed strike **is** a natural weapon. Now, most of the superficial commentary out there on the Interwebs is "Of course it is you ignorant loser", followed by pointing to the section in the PHB/SRD which tells us that a monk's unarmed strike counts as both a natural weapon and a manufactured weapon for spells and effects that apply to both. Which is fine and dandy but still doesn't explain whether it applies the other way: does a monk **have** a natural weapon in his unarmed strike, or does it just **count** as a natural weapon for Improved Natural Attack as an exception to the rule?

  Conservatively by RAW, he doesn't. An unarmed strike is said (in Skip Williams' Rules of the Game) to *not* be a natural weapon as such, because blows with fists and such apparently don't count. Intuitively it doesn't take much of a leap to say it does (especially as monks generally suck), but I have built this on the assumption that a monk's unarmed strike is not a natural weapon, at least not for the purposes of qualifying for a prestige class. And that being the case, a monk couldn't qualify for Thayan Gladiator normally, because that PrC specifically requires that you have a natural weapon. And even if you did, Thayan Gladiator's features apply to the natural weapon … not to the unarmed strike.

- So how did I get round it? Via a Racial Substitution Level for the Skarn Monk. Skarn are from Magic of Incarnum, and get a +2 to STR which is handy, as well as one frequently-overlooked feature … their arm spines, which are explicitly a natural weapon with a 1d6 damage dice. A Skarn Monk (MoI, p. 47) gets to deem and use his spine strike as his monk unarmed strike. And the Skarn Monk's unarmed damage with that strike increases at the same rate as a monk's does, i.e. to 1d10. So we finally can lock it all together: the Skarn's unarmed strike *is* a natural weapon, so he qualifies for Thayan Gladiator. Which then means his monk's unarmed strike becomes a silver, adamantine weapon with a critical multiplier of 19-20/x3 and a damage of 3d6. It's not the biggest range or multiplier, but it does get interesting once you combine it with Arcane Duelist.

- As we know, False *Keen*ness from Arcane Duelist allows us to expand the critical threat range by deducting damage, without sacrificing attack accuracy. This isn't so much of a problem mainly because of the rider effects we can get to kick in on scoring a critical hit: namely, a stun attempt at DC 15 + STR, another stun attempt at DC 20 + STR (Staggering Blow) a *thundering* saving throw, critical damage … and

whatever else, another attack via Roundabout Kick, which triggers on a successful critical hit.

- Let's assume a STR of 20, i.e. +5, based on an 18 STR and the +2 that the Skarn gets as a racial bonus. Let's also assume a +3 to WIS. At level 20, your attack roll becomes 15 [BAB] + 5 [STR] +3 [WIS via Intuitive Attack] +3 [Chosen Weapon] +1 [Weapon Focus] +7 [Law Devotion] = +34. So our total attack sequence becomes +34/+29/+24/+29. Wait where did we get another attack? From our Thayan Gladiator 4 feature, add another attack with the natural weapon at -5 in a full attack sequence. We could pick up another from Snap Kick, but let's not just for amusement's sake.

  Let's say we took 2 rounds to stay out of the enemy's way and size him up. Now our attack rolls are +36/+31/+26/+31, pursuant to Thayan Gladiator 1.

  Our damage on those attacks would be 3d6 +5 [STR] +3 [Chosen Weapon] = 3d6+8. So 9d6+24 on a critical hit.

  But! We use False *Keen*ness to sacrifice 1 off the damage, bringing it down to 3d6+7. This damage will also come off the critical damage multipliers, but that's sort of okay given it's a maximum of 3. Our threat range is now 17-20 under Improved Critical, 15-20 if we enchant our unarmed strike with *Keen* (assuming that Arcane Duelist allows all of them to stack together).

  We roll a critical, and suddenly the enemy has to save against stun at about DC 20, save against thundering, and take 9d6+9 damage. No Stunning Fist per-day limits on these attempts, if our character crits, he forces a stun roll. Oh, and then the opponent has to suck up another free attack via Roundabout Kick.

  All of these just get stronger the moment you start adding *Magic Weapon* … yes you can, it might be a natural attack, but it's also a monk's unarmed strike and therefore qualifies … and get beyond a +5 enhancement bonus on the attack and damage, thanks to Arcane Duelist's rule that the duelist's Chosen Weapon can be pushed beyond +5. Or anything else you can think to add in.

  And we haven't even touched on the fact you can compensate for lost damage by trading out to Power Attack. He can also pull trips and cast the odd Duskblade spell or two.

- In terms of alternatives, I did try to put together an Enlightened Fist using a Sorcerer as the base, entering into Thayan Gladiator by getting Draconic Heritage and Draconic Claws at the first Sorcerer level. He thereby would be gaining a natural attack which could be combined with Beast Strike (Dragon 355) to add to the monk's unarmed attack (and add a couple of attacks by still going Skarn and not opting for the racial substitution level). I would also have begged the DM under those circumstances to have let me have the Claws of the Ripper which would have taken the critical multiplier to x4 for that natural attack, at least arguably. Sadly, it didn't work out mainly because of the BAB issue: horribly low at level 20 once you combine it with Arcane Duelist, though I'm open to suggestions.

- Toothed Blow from Stormwrack. It makes your unarmed strike count as piercing as well as bludgeoning … but only underwater, unless you have some cool method like

keeping a water elemental wrapped around your hand. By RAW makes your unarmed strike therefore eligible to be made of kaorti resin, raising the critical multiplier to x4.

- Finally, if your DM is cool with removing alignment restrictions, I'd definitely rebuild with Barbarian levels in mind. It's not hard to create a decent unarmed barbarian, especially combined with monk, and there are one or two critical options specifically for barbarians in the handbook.

Reaper's Child

Reaper's Child comes from Dragon 299. It's a Prestige Class of five levels. The build is:

Warblade 6/Reaper's Child 5/Legacy Champion 6/Warblade +3

Human, 2 flaw feats.

ECL	BAB	HD	Class	Fort	Ref	Will	Feats	Abilities
1	+1	D12	Warblade 1	+2	+0	+0	(Dodge) (Improved Unarmed Strike) (Flaw Feat: Combat Reflexes) (Flaw feat: Power Attack)	Battle Clarity (Reflex saves), Weapon Aptitude
2	+2	D12	Warblade 2	+3	+0	+0		Uncanny Dodge
3	+3	D12	Warblade 3	+3	+1	+1	(Deflect Arrows)	Battle ardour (critical confirmation)
4	+4	D12	Warblade 4	+4	+1	+1		
5	+5	D12	Warblade 5	+4	+1	+1		Bonus Feat: Ironheart Aura
6	+6/+1	D12	Warblade 6	+5	+2	+2	(Roundabout Kick)	Improved Uncanny Dodge
7	+6/+1	D8	Reaper's Child 1	+7	+4	+4		Monk abilities, Whisper of Nerull
8	+7+2	D8	Reaper's Child 2	+8	+5	+5		Reaper's Reinforcement
9	+8/+3	D8	Reaper's Child 3	+8	+5	+5	(Superior Unarmed Strike)	Oathgiver
10	+9/+4	D8	Reaper's Child 4	+9	+6	+6		Scythe Strike
11	+9/+4	D8	Reaper's Child 5	+9	+6	+6		Reaper of Flesh
12	+9/+4	D8	Legacy Champion 1	+9	+6	+8	(Stormguard Warrior)	
13	+10/+5	D8	Legacy Champion 2	+9	+6	+9		(Reaper's Child +1)
14	+11/+6/+1	D8	Legacy Champion 3	+10	+7	+9		(Reaper's Child +1)
15	+12/+7/+2	D8	Legacy Champion 4	+10	+7	+10	(Improved Natural Attack (Unarmed Strike))	(Reaper's Child +1)
16	+12/+7/+2	D8	Legacy Champion 5	+10	+7	+10		(Reaper's Child +1)
17	+13/+8/+3	D8	Legacy Champion 6	+11	+8	+11		(Reaper's Child +1)

18	+14/+9/+4	D12	Warblade 7	+11	+8	+11	(Staggering Blow)	Battle Cunning (Damage)
19	+15/+10/+5	D12	Warblade 8	+12	+8	+11		
20	+16/+11/+6/+1	D12	Warblade 9	+12	+9	+12		Bonus Feat: Improved Initiative

Vital Statistics at Level 20:
Critical Threat Range: 2-20 on Scythe Strike, 20 normally
Frequency: 10/day.
Critical Multiplier: x4 on Scythe Strike, x2 otherwise.
Frequency: 10/day.
Riders on Critical Threats: None
Riders on Critical Hits: Stun save (Staggering Blow), additional attack (Roundabout Kick), +1 to attack and damage (Blood in the Water)

Notes on the Build

- Again we do need some gear for this build, but if we go with Monk's Belt (+5 monk levels) and Monk's Tattoo (+4 monk levels), then with Superior Unarmed Strike (+4 levels) we actually get a monk's unarmed damage of a level 23 monk at level 17. That is, 2d10; a monk's unarmed strike damage caps out at level 20. The reason for this is because Reaper's Child treats us as though we were a monk with as many levels as we have Reaper's Child levels. Thanks to Legacy Champion, we're therefore actually a Monk 10 for unarmed damage and other purposes, to which Superior Unarmed Strike, Monk's Belt, and Monk's Tattoo add another 13 effective levels. On top of that then comes Improved Natural Attack, which moves us onto the Large Monk damage progression in effect, leaving us doing 4d8 unarmed strike damage at level 17 and onward.

- Why did we do all this, and why did we include Reaper's Child? It doesn't do a lot, but the one thing it does, it does nicely. Legacy Champion allows us to keep advancing its class abilities past its 5 level stop point, of which two are significant: Reaper of Flesh which is a slightly better Quivering Palm … and Scythe Strike, which allows us, from level 17, to call an unarmed strike a scythe strike 10 times per day. If it hits, the target then takes a Fort (DC 25 + WIS) check or the attack *is treated as though it's an automatically confirmed critical with a multiplier of x4.* The strike doesn't work on certain creatures, generally those already immune to critical hits … but it would appear to work, as it turns out, those with *Fortification* armour, since that's not an immunity that's conferred and not called out as specifically immune in the PrC. That means damage of 16d8 + STRx4 damage on that strike at least, and two rider effects: Staggering Blow which forces a save against stunning, and Roundabout Kick for another free unarmed attack on the victim along with the rest of our attack sequence. The save is that high because Legacy Champion keeps advancing Reaper's Child, and Scythe Strike is keyed to class levels in Reaper's Child. For comparison, a Balor at CR 20 has a Fort +22 modifier; pit fiends, Fort +19. There's no extended threat range, of course, but Scythe Strike has the really nice feature of basically turning the confirmation roll into a Fort save which scales nicely. That is, your "threat range" sort of becomes your WIS modifier, so the key would be to boost your WIS first chance you get. 10 times per day covers about 2 or more critical hits per fight, and if you can't kill it with 32d8 + 8xSTR, well, leave it to the clerics and the mages.

- The unarmed aspect is complemented by Warblade. This build allows the Warblade to pick 8th level maneuvers at the far end, having acquired about 6 maneuvers and 2 stances back by level 6. Blood in the Water is a must for this. Of particular interest is Stormguard Warrior which potentially boosts the damage for the critical hit in the subsequent round with a series of touch attacks and/or foregoing attacks of opportunity, which rather fits if we think of it in a Five Point Exploding Palm Technique, i.e. do a bunch of melee touch attacks which do no damage and then follow up next round with a strike that kills the target. Reaper's Child also picks up immunity to mind-affecting effects of all kinds, and has a weak-ish Dominate Person spell as well. It's firmly Team Evil, though at least you're not sacrificing innocents and since it's Lawful Evil, you can play Lord Vetinari if you want.

- Basic prioritisation of stats: STR > WIS > CON > INT > DEX > CHA. I would have taken Intuitive Attack if I could have fitted it in, but given it's an Exalted feat I probably couldn't have had it anyway since the character is evil. If that was on the table, I would definitely swap out Staggering Blow. Again, the above attacks and damage are completely bare of magic, and given we explicitly have a monk's unarmed strike by virtue of Reaper's Child, we can enchant all sorts of extremities with magic effects. The above also doesn't even touch on Power Attack or similar.

- "HaHa, YoU MaDE a mONk, hE Can'T fLy, L@m3." Of course he can't fly, he's a monk. And yes, it's not one of the strongest characters out there, perhaps, but the point is more to do with his critical hit capacity and the damage he does when those conditions are met. Martials have to survive with equipment; no difference with this guy. At least he can't be disarmed and he can walk around punching everything into sweet Tome of Battle oblivion, since most maneuvers in Tome of Battle relate to melee attacks.

Ranged Builds

Deepwood Sniper and Targetteer

On their own dips into these classes are really good for archery generally, but it's when you combine them that things get interesting. Targetteer is another variant Fighter from Dragon 310, and Deepwood Sniper is a 3.0 prestige class from *Masters of the Wild.*

Targetteer 2/Ranger 2/Warblade 1/Deepwood Sniper 2/Peerless Archer 3/Targetteer +10

Human, 2 flaw feats.

ECL	BAB	HD	Class	Fort	Ref	Will	Feats	Abilities
1	+1	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+2	+0	+0	(Combat Expertise) (Point Blank Shot) (Far Shot) (Weapon Focus – Composite Greatbow)	2 ranged EWP proficiencies (Composite Greatbow, Harpoon) (Hit and Run Tactics ACF (DoTU)) - +2 to initiative, DEX bonus added when attacking flat-footed target within 30 feet as competence bonus.)* (Bonus Fighter Feat: Vital Aim)
2	+2	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+3	+0	+0		(Bonus Fighter Feat: Sniper)
3	+3	D8	Ranger	+5	+2	+0	(Precise Shot)	Arcane Hunter (CM) Track, Wild Empathy
4	+4	D8	Ranger	+6	+3	+0		Combat Style: Rapid Shot
5	+5	D12	Warblade	+8	+3	+0		Battle Clarity (INT to Reflex saves), Weapon Aptitude; Concentration as class skill
6	+6/+1	D8	Deepwood Sniper	+8	+5	+0	(Quick Draw)	*Keen* Arrows, +10 feet to range increment per level
7	+7/+2	D8	Deepwood Sniper	+8	+6	+0		Concealment reduction, *magic weapon,* +1 to critical multipliers

8	+8/+3	D10	Peerless Archer	+10	+6	+0		Expert bowyer, Ranged Sneak Attack +1d6
9	+9/+4	D10	Peerless Archer	+11	+6	+0	(Sense Weakness)	Sharp Shooting 1, fletching +1
10	+10/+5	D10	Peerless Archer	+12	+6	+0		Power Shot
11	+11/+6/+1	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+12	+7	+1		
12	+12/+7/+2	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+13	+7	+1	(Manyshot)	(Fighter Bonus Feat: Arrow Swarm)
13	+13/+8/+3	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+13	+7	+1		
14	+14/+9/+4	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+14	+8	+2		(Fighter Bonus Feat: Improved Rapid Shot)
15	+15/+10/+5	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+14	+8	+2	(Weapon Specialisation)	
16	+16/+11/+6/+1	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+15	+8	+2		(Fighter Bonus Feat: Greater Weapon Focus)
17	+17/+11/+7/+2	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+15	+9	+3		
18	+18/+12/+8/+3	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+16	+9	+3	(Ranged Weapon Mastery)	(Fighter Bonus Feat: Improved Precise Shot)
19	+19/+13/+9/+4	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+16	+9	+3		
20	+20/+14/+10/+5	D10	Fighter (Targetteer)	+17	+10	+4		(Fighter Bonus Feat: Greater Weapon Specialisation)

Vital Statistics at Level 20:
Critical Threat Range: 7-20 on full attack, 19-20 all other times
Frequency: Any time a full attack action is taken
Critical Multiplier: x5
Frequency: All day long.
Riders on Critical Threats: None
Riders on Critical Hits: +1 to attack and damage (Blood in the Water)

Notes on the build

- This is centred on full attack sequences, since these are the only conditions under which Sniper and Arrow Swarm from Targetteer operate. It is not designed as a sneak attack or precision damage archer since those typically require you to get within 30 feet, which isn't the best idea. That said, it nonetheless gets better on damage at ranges less than 30 feet, for reasons set out further down.

  Assume our DEX is 20 and thus a +5. Also assume our Composite Greatbow (with a threat range of 20, and a x4 multiplier thanks to the kaorti resin arrows in it) is a +5 STR rated bow, just because, with no other enchantments on it.

  Either way: with Improved Rapid Shot and Arrow Swarm, we have 3 extra attacks per round on top of BAB, albeit all the attacks take a -5 to the attack roll. So at level 20,

we have a total of 7 attacks, 6 of which can fuel Sniper. With those 6 sacrificed attacks, Sniper extends the threat range from 20 down to 14-20, which *Keen* Arrows then doubles to a threat range of 7-20.

Our attack roll with that shot is +20 [BAB] -5 [Arrow Swarm] +1 [Weapon Focus] +1 [Greater Weapon Focus] +2 [Ranged Weapon Mastery] +5 [DEX] +1 [Fletching +1 or *Magic Weapon]* = +25, and threatens a critical on 7-20.

The damage with that shot is: 2d8+5 [DEX for STR, from Vital Aim] +1 [Fletching +1] +2 [Ranged Weapon Mastery] +2 [Weapon Specialisation] +2 [Greater Weapon Specialisation] = 2d8+12. Not much, maybe … until you remember that Kaorti Resin arrows have a x4 multiplier. (Kaorti Resin can be applied to any weapon – melee or ranged --that does piercing damage, which a composite greatbow does.) Deepwood Sniper 2 raises that multiplier to x5. As said, the critical range is 7-20, and the attack bonus at level 20 is +25. Assuming you confirm the critical hit, on that one shot that's damage of 10d8+60.

Or say we don't use Arrow Swarm and forego the extra two attacks it grants for a -5 on all attack rolls. At level 20, we have 5 attacks, 4 of which we sacrifice to fuel Sniper. The threat range on the Composite Greatbow becomes 16-20, *Keen* Arrows doubles that – and our attack bonus becomes +30, with a threat range of 10-20, i.e. flip a coin for a possible critical threat … and the damage remaining at 10d8+60 if the critical hit passes.

That's the damage outside 30 feet range.

Within 30 feet range against a flatfooted opponent, the attack roll is +26: +20 [BAB] -5 [Arrow Swarm] +1 [Weapon Focus] +1 [Greater Weapon Focus] +2 [Ranged Weapon Mastery] +5 [DEX] +1 [Fletching +1 or *Magic Weapon]* +1 [Point Blank Shot] = +26. This threatens a critical on 7-20. As with above, if you forego Arrow Swarm's two shots, it becomes an attack bonus of +31 and a threat range of 10-20.

The critical damage with that shot is 10d8+90(+1d6 sneak attack). It's 2d8+5 [DEX to STR substituted, via Vital Aim] +1 [Fletching +1 or *Magic Weapon*] +2 [Ranged Weapon Mastery] +2 [Weapon Specialisation] +2 [Greater Weapon Specialisation] +1 [Point Blank Shot] +5 [DEX again, from Hit and Run Fighter, flat added] +1d6 [Sneak Attack]= 2d8+18 +1d6 sneak attack damage. Everything in that except the sneak attack is multiplied by 5 due to the critical hit.

If the opponent isn't flatfooted but still within 30 feet, the damage is 2d8+13, or 10d8+65 on a critical hit.

And none of those calculations take into account the following additional features:

- Power Shot from Peerless Archer: subtract from your attack roll, add to your damage, one for one. Take 5 off the attack roll; your attack roll becomes a +20, threatens a crit on 7-20, and on a critical hit does another 25 damage because it multiplies along with everything else.

- After that first critical hit, you have +1 to attack and damage from Blood in the Water. Which, leaving aside the obvious benefits, makes critical hits more

likely, and increases the damage by 5 on any other unfortunate sufferer of a critical hit. And which ramps up the more critical hits are made.

- If it's an arcanist or creature that has spell-like abilities, add +2 damage from Arcane Hunter.

- No DR applies, thanks to Sense Weakness.

- Improved Precise Shot removes all but total cover or total concealment.

- And by the way, its range increment is 150 feet: 130 base plus 20 from Deepwood Sniper. Not much chance you'll be seriously fighting stuff at ranges outside that, and if you do, there are methods to spot and sight targets at that range.

The moment we start adding stuff to the bow or casting magic, it gets even better. Five basic additions:

- *Splitting* enhancement, from *Champions of Ruin.* Costs a +3, but splits the arrow in flight to make a separate attack roll using the same attack bonus. This delightfully gets around the one-shot limit for Sniper, uses the same attack roll and the same critical threat range, i.e. how about 20d8+120 damage on the one target?

- Wand of *Hunter's Mercy,* which a ranger can cast from even if he doesn't yet have any spellcasting ability: your next hit is automatically confirmed as a critical hit, no matter what your threat range happens to be. Ideally you can argue to your DM that the *Splitting* enhancement means that split-shot is a critical hit too.

- Wand of *Curse of Arrow Attraction*: target's AC is nerfed by 5 against ranged attacks – so an indirect +5 to our attack roll – and all critical threats are automatically confirmed.

- *Greater Magic Weapon*: apply a +5 to attack and damage rolls. Now your attack roll is something akin to +30-35 at level 20, when the highest AC in the default Monster Manual is 40 or so.

- Got a stat-enhancer? Gets even better. Another +3 to the attack rolls, +3 to damage thanks to Vital Aim, i.e. another 15 damage on a critical at a minimum.

Mind you, that's just assuming you want to take a full attack action and push out the critical range as far as it goes for that one shot. I like the feel of this, as if you're sighting up for one brutal shot. Added to this feel is that this expanded critical range doesn't apply on the second or subsequent shots in the full attack. That is, you can retain an extra shot or two if you're willing to sacrifice further extensions on the critical range.

And remember, even without the Sniper shot, you have iterative attacks with a threat range of 15-20 and damage of 10d8+60 on a critical hit. Arrow Swarm can be taken on its own and adds two more attacks for a -5 to all attack rolls, which *Curse of Arrow Attraction* or better magic weapons can negate, directly or otherwise. Alternatively, if you have to move and shoot, Manyshot gives you 2 attacks as a standard action with all these critical threat ranges and damage still intact.

How do you prioritise your stats? DEX > CON > STR > INT > WIS > CHA. Dexterity is going to be fuelling most of your attack and damage, with STR mostly if not entirely swapped out. Wear the lightest armour you can while preserving your DEX bonus; most of your AC is going to be coming from DEX anyway if you do this right.

- "**HaHa, YoU UseD MoRE THan 4 FIghTer LeVeLS"**: Yep. For simplicity. If you want more versatility and/or less BAB, be my guest; pick up Exotic Weapon Master or similar, or just go Tome of Battle, or otherwise go find some casting classes. This is basically the lower end of what you can do with critical ranged attacks. In particular, if you really want to cheese this up, just waste a couple of feats and pick up Lightning Mace; two levels in Psychic Warrior somewhere in here will give you those feats, at the cost of a BAB that you likely don't care about. Then make your bow an *Aptitude* weapon. Of course, every opponent you then encounter will have *Wind Wall* cast on them, but enjoy it for the remaining 20 minutes of your game.

- **"Okay, but how come you've got fighter feats in non-fighter feat slots?"** Because of Targetteer, which by RAW doesn't allow free use of those slots. On the article's explicit wording, the bonus fighter feat slots can only be occupied by one of the feats listed in the Targetteer's article. Things like Woodland Archer and, most significantly, Ranged Weapon Mastery are not on that list … and therefore by RAW cannot be taken in a Targetteer's bonus fighter feat slots. And if your first instinct was to say "Well, just multiclass some default fighter levels, then" – well, the same article prohibits you from multiclassing out of or into default fighter, i.e. it's Targetteer for all your fighter levels or none. A level or two in Psychic Warrior *might* allow you to alleviate this since those feat slots can explicitly be used for general or 'bonus fighter feats', but that's a matter for DM interpretation – and you lose 1 BAB by that route. Maybe you could argue that the RAI was that you could take any bonus fighter feat in that slot, but I don't like your chances.

- **"Can't you get x6 in critical multipliers if you take 7 levels in Deepwood Sniper rather than all this fighter-y crap?"** Sure - at the cost of five fighter levels, two bonus fighter feat slots, and therefore any capability to qualify for Greater Weapon Specialisation and Ranged Weapon Mastery (on lack of slots and the fact you haven't got enough fighter levels). This is a bigger implication mathematically than you might think. It causes a loss of 4 points on your base damage rolls, i.e. your non-critical damage becomes 2d8+8 rather than 2d8+12. And that actually results in you doing less average damage on criticals, even with a higher critical multiplier.

  Doubt me? Let's do the math, as Jason Bourne once said. Just to restate, the comparison is x6 on 2d8+8 (= 12d8+48), versus x5 on 2d8+12 (= 10d8+60). Statistically, the expected, average result from rolling 10d8 is 45 (maximum result on a single damage dice plus one, divide by 2, multiply by the number of dice you're rolling). At x5, then, you can expect to do 45 + 60 = 105 damage on a critical hit. The expected average result from 12d8 is 54. So at x6 you can expect to do 54 + 48

= 102 damage. Yep: on average, you're actually doing less damage with a x6 weapon than a x5, due to the loss of flat damage bonuses … and because the more dice you roll, the more it pushes results towards the midrange of what's possible. This is also why your 2d6 dice never seem to give you a total of 12 but your 1d12 does. This is yet another reason to add flat bonuses to your damage dice in preference to more damage dice where you can.

Do Deepwood Sniper's other features make up for it? Not particularly, not if your priority is just amping damage. At Deepwood Sniper 5, once per day, you can reroll a failed attack roll. Critical hits by definition require two attack rolls, so a chance to reroll one is handy … but it doesn't markedly affect the number of times you'll get a critical hit given it's once a day. "Oh, but I can use Power Shot from Peerless Archer to make up the difference!" Sure – but at a cost of about 4 in attack accuracy for every time you have to make the shot.

Of course, the easiest way around these problems is to just pick up Knowledge Devotion and be the Newt Scamander of the party who spams *Lore of the Gods* every morning and uses the *Collector of Stories* skill trick in every encounter for a +1 to +5 to attack and damage. And hey, if you believe that justifies less reliable accuracy and/or damage, all power to you. Not to mention that without being a Cloistered Cleric intent on taking a level in badboy once you get Divine Power, you're likely stuck picking up Education as well, and then figuring out how to increase all those skills to get you reliably above +2 or so against the full range of creatures in the game, when most of the classes you're taking are 2+INT skill point meatheads.

If you really want to raise your multiplier, dip Hida Defender and use Warblade weapon aptitude to boost it by 1 more. Don't waste 3 or 4 levels on Deepwood Sniper, it's good, but not *that* good.

- **"What, no Improved Critical?"** Yep. It's a trash feat under 3.5 RAW, for reasons I get into in the handbook. You have an (Ex) ability that makes your arrows act as if they were *keen* combined with a feature that allows you to add to the arrows' base threat range. There's no need for Improved Critical in this build, especially if it keeps your DM happier. That said, if you *can* convince him to make it stack with *keen*, then as with Arcane Duelist, you barely need to forego any attacks under Sniper and the build just gets stronger.

- **"Wai U nOt uSe Hank's Energy Bow?"** For a start, the Energy Bow does less damage than the Composite Greatbow, 2d6 damage dice rather than 2d8. You can still shoot regular Kaorti Resin arrows with it, but your force shots won't get a x4 effect easily. Don't get me wrong, the Energy Bow has a ranged Power Attack ability that obviates Peerless Archer, and which is just sheer awesome for archery. It's also going to be handy as hell once the DM figures out your game and starts throwing opponents at you with incorporeality or *Wind Wall*, but for critfishing purposes it's suboptimal.

- **"Why does Hit and Run Fighter have an asterisk against it?"** Because it's a Drow Fighter ACF (from Drow of the Underdark), albeit I've commonly seen it permitted to apply to anyone. Lose heavy armour proficiency, pick up this excellent piece of work

for ranged attacks. If your DM isn't going to let that fly, either on race or because your DM says you have to be a default Fighter and not a Targetteer, then skip it.

- **"Where's the Favored Enemy?"** Arcane Hunter is a Ranger ACF from Complete Mage that allows you to choose Favored Enemy: Arcanist. Anything with arcane spellcasting abilities now draws Favored Enemy bonuses.

- **"Sense Weakness?"** It's a feat from Draconomicon (p. 106). You ignore DR 5 on your target, thus dealing with one of the volley archer's royal pains in the posterior given their low-ish damage and also generally saving you from having to obtain weird and wonderful weapon materials from which to make your arrows. It requires Combat Expertise which is otherwise pretty much useless to an archer. It's not to be confused with the Clr/Sor/Wiz 2 spell *Sense Weakness* which allows you to automatically confirm a single critical threat in the next 24 hours (and which is also handy in its own right, it must be said…)

- **"Ugh, Warblade. I hate Tome of Battle."** You're entitled to your emotions and opinions, no matter how misguided they are. Warblade is in there mainly to pick up Moment of Perfect Mind to boost the Will save, because it's appallingly low until much later on. It also gives us Blood in the Water which is legit good for critfishing builds. Seriously, the Will save on this thing otherwise is so low I'd actually contemplate picking up Iron Will, blasphemous thought though it is. If you don't want it, take another level in Fighter, or something that gives you a feat slot or two.

- **"Laaaaame, no Woodland Archeeerrrr…"** Woodland Archer doesn't terribly synergise with what's in the build, and the only place to really put it is around the end. Improved Precise Shot has a bit of overlap with Deepwood Sniper's outdated sharp-shooting ability that negates a certain amount of cover, but at the higher levels it's miss chances and concealment you have to worry about more than AC.

- **"The heck is a Harpoon doing in there?"** Yeah, this is the Stormwrack version, mostly because it's a fun backup. Hit someone with a harpoon and their movement speed is dropped by half, they can't charge or run, and they literally do as much damage pulling out the harpoon as it did on the way in. Would be fun to optimise this with critical hits, but that's not the main purpose here. Main reason it's in there is because it's an exotic ranged weapon, and a Targeteer gets two EWP (ranged only) for free at first level.

- **"I don't wanna kill arcanists, I wanna kill undead. Or something else immune to critical hits."** Then pick your annoying critical-immune enemy as your first favoured enemy for Ranger, and grab the feat Supernatural Blow from Masters of the Wild (possibly replacing Sense Weakness). Now your critical shots do 2d8+12+8d6, since you get a d6 for every bonus *damage dice* you otherwise would have thrown on the critical hit, and we get to throw 8 bonus damage dice because our weapon does 2d8 damage and has a x5 critical multiplier. Gets even better if you pick the Elf Ranger ACF, which boosts the favoured enemy bonus to +3 instead. Otherwise, go pick up weapon crystals of Truedeath and similar out of the MIC.

- **"Huh, I want more Tome of Battle goodness."** Then replace the last 10 levels with Eternal Blade. Qualifies right on schedule at level 10 without a human bonus feat, though you forego Sense Weakness. Just make sure you pick two maneuvers out of

Diamond Mind at Warblade (Sapphire Nightmare Blade, Moment of Perfect Mind which you're going to need given how bad your Will save is), Wolf Fang Strike to qualify for Blood in the Water as your stance, and you're golden. Island in Time works appallingly well with the Targetteer's ability to forego shots on a full attack. Eternal Blade allows you to pick from the Diamond Mind, Devoted Spirit, Iron Heart, and White Raven disciplines for further maneuvers and stances; classes that aren't Warblades, Crusaders, or Swordsages count as half initiator levels. Therefore, with five maneuvers in ten levels, on a quick glance these could be: Leading the Charge (White Raven) --> White Raven Tactics (White Raven) **or** Lion's Roar (White Raven); Moment of Alacrity (Diamond Mind); and Wall of Blades (Iron Heart) --> **Iron! Heart! SURGE!** And the stances you can pick up aren't bad either: Press the Advantage to take a 10 foot step, Hearing the Air to pick up Blindsense, Pearl of Black Doubt for more AC.

- Originally I tried to build this with a crossbow. Had a vision of a crit-blasting crossbow sniper shooting away with both hands. I failed, mainly because good grief, if you thought it was hard to make a TWF build work, try doing it with crossbows and doing any sort of significant damage without cheesemongery involving Quick Draw and Gloves of Storing, on top of the critfishing tactics here. The reloading times for heavy crossbows are just too long, getting lots of iterative attacks is just too damn hard without epic-level feats. That said, if you want to impress people, take a Great Crossbow with its 18-20 damage and then make sure you have a wand of *Ghostly Reload* (Sor/Wiz 1, *must be caster level 10* for reasons below). Assuming you use Targetteer's Sniper ability and *Keen* Arrows, you get a threat range of 6-20, but only one shot per round – mainly because Ghostly Reload will give you a maximum of five free reloads with a heavy crossbow. Ergo, with five reloads, there's a maximum of 6 attacks. Targetteer then allows you to forego 5 of those attacks to extend your crossbow's critical threat range, which brings it from 18-20 down to 13-20. *Keen* Arrows then doubles that threat range to 6-20. Which only applies to one shot, for x2 damage plus one piddling iteration of DEX if you take Crossbow Sniper. No, you can't use Vital Aim from Targetteer; that only allows you to *swap* STR for DEX to damage, and crossbows don't allow you to add STR to damage. No, you can't use an *Aptitude* weapon quality and Shadow Blade, because Shadow Blade applies to multiple weapons, not one. Anyway: if you have to venture down this trail of tears, don't forget Shatter Bolts from the Dragon Compendium, which have an 18-20/x3 critical hit stat.

The Art of Spell Criticals

While the subject of critical hits is overwhelmingly a martial topic, it's often overlooked that spells can also be the subject of critical hits. If a spell requires an attack roll and deals damage, by default it gets the same chance for a critical hit on a natural 20 as any other weapon blow does.

Improved Critical and spells

Pages 72-73 and 85-86 of *Complete Arcane* create a category of spells known as "weaponlike spells", made up of two subcategories: ranged spells and touch spells.

Ranged spells include:

- those spells that require ranged touch attack rolls, such as rays or hurled missile effects (e.g. *Melf's acid arrow* and *Lesser Orb of Acid*)

- those spells that generate **effects** that act as ranged weapons and require ranged attack rolls (e.g. *fire shuriken.*)

Touch spells include:

- "any damage-dealing spells with a range of touch."

The RAI definition of touch spells for these purposes was probably just meant to include those spells where the only method of getting the spell to fire is to make a melee attack roll, i.e. literally the ones where you reach out and touch someone and fry them or freeze them or whatever. However, the definition isn't quite so tight by RAW. All it takes is a spell that has a range of touch and deals damage of some kind. That's a somewhat wider category of spells depending on how carefully you read your spell entries.

Either way, per Complete Arcane, you can pick one of these two categories of spell as the subject of Improved Critical. When you use a spell of that category, its threat range is doubled, i.e. from 20 to 19-20 if nothing else is specified. Only damage that the spell deals in the round it strikes is increased by a critical hit, i.e. ongoing damage can't be applied to it. And damage-dealing does not mean it must deal hitpoint damage; ability damage is a thing too. Saves against a critical hit still reduce the damage, but are applied *after* the critical damage is known.

Complete Arcane also speculates that a Warlock's eldritch blast or even Spell-like abilities may be able to benefit from the same feats, without saying anything more. And finally, critical spells also implicitly bypass damage-dealing spells' damage cap (e.g. a spell that prescribes a 5d6 maximum.) Critical damage is not concerned with the maximum damage a weapon can do, it is simply a case of "roll your damage twice (or more)".

Added to that, we have Skip Williams' articles on the Rules of the Game.

> **Spells:** Any spell that requires you to make a ranged attack roll to aim the spell is subject to all the rules that govern ranged attacks, including most feats that improve ranged attacks.

If your DM agrees that Improved Critical is a feat that improves ranged attacks – it adds to the critical threat range of any weapon, including ranged weapons -- this would seem to expand out the categories of spells beyond those in Complete Arcane.

What about channelling?

There are a few classes that can channel spells through weapons – Duskblade, Spellsword, Raumathari Battlemage, Ordained Champion, Enlightened Fist – but let's start with the Duskblade and take *Chill Touch,* on the Duskblade list. It's a spell that deals damage and is a Range: Touch spell – and therefore a weaponlike spell within the Complete Arcane definition of the term.

Our Duskblade rolls a natural 20 on a melee attack where he is channelling the spell. Does he pick up critical threats just on his melee weapon, or on the spell as well?

There's been a lot of debate on this subject over the years, and some deeply held views about it, marked by in-depth dives and long arguments in favour and against.

Insofar as WOTC has anything to say about it, the FAQ for D&D 3.5 gives a shrug and a guess:

> ***If a duskblade scores a critical hit when channeling a spell through a melee attack, is the spell's damage multiplied just like the weapon's?***
> *The rules aren't as clear as they could be, but the Sage is inclined to say no. Here's the key sentence, from the PHB II, page 20: "If the attack is successful, the attack deals damage normally; then the effect of the spell is resolved." If you score a critical hit, the attack deals the normal (critical) damage. Then the spell resolves normally, but it's just a rider effect applied due to the successful attack roll—you're not actually using the spell in the normal manner, so it can't score a critical hit.*

It's traditional to mention that opinions on the reliability of the FAQ and Sage Advice are divided. Sometimes they're right, sometimes they're glaringly wrong. They are not to be taken as rulings, only advice.

Ultimately the argument against is: when you channel, the spell loses its own attack roll, and therefore there's nothing for a critical hit to act on, since a critical hit requires an attack roll. This is a nice, reasonable, and entirely too neat explanation in my view. Duskblade Arcane Channeling explicitly says you cast the spell and deliver it through your weapon; if there's no attack roll in the spell, how can it be said that you have cast it? And if there is an attack roll, is it not reasonable that the roll should be that of the Duskblade as he swings his weapon? And then there's the issue of whether the spell's effect becomes part of the weapon's base damage or just an extra dice on top, i.e. doesn't double on a critical hit?

The safest thing to say about it is: it's not certain by RAW, it can be argued both ways, and it takes a DM to rule on it. And doing so, I will insert my own subjective and editorial point: if you're in favour of the idea that the spell picks up a critical, at best/worst all you're doing is giving melee gishes a Nice Thing™. Ideally, you're letting two criticals fire off at once, but it's

not like the wizard or cleric are going to be the least bit threatened by a dirty martial getting a bit of extra bang for his buck here.

As for the other channelling classes, it comes down to having a really close look at what each class's ability allows; if they're not using the same wording, then the question becomes whether they're doing something different.

- In **Enlightened Fist**'s case, the wording is that the character may "*spend one of her daily stunning attempts to cast and deliver a touch spell as part of an unarmed full attack action. She can choose to deliver the touch spell with any single unarmed strike attack she makes during the action*." This is similar enough wording to the Duskblade that it's probably safe to assume that whatever the ruling around Duskblades also applies to Enlightened Fist channelling, just with reference to unarmed attacks. Also note that at 7th level, we have the Enlightened Fist's capability to explicitly alter ray spells to touch spells and channel them the same way, albeit if they're ray spells doing damage they would qualify for Improved Critical as weaponlike spells anyway.

- For **Spellsword** and **Ordained Champion**, there probably isn't much room to maneuver. Their channelling features are worded identically, and distinct from Duskblade and Enlightened Fist. In these cases, the spell is explicitly cast into the melee weapon rather than on an opponent. The spell then affects the next target that's successfully attacked with his weapon. In other words, while it's still up for interpretation, the argument is going to be that the spell is being altered by being channelled or at best is already cast and done when it goes into your weapon; it therefore is no longer a spell to which Improved Critical applies, it's just along for the ride.

- However, and more hopefully, the **Raumathari Battlemage** is different once again: *"As a free action, a Raumathari battlemage can cast a spell through his melee weapon (usually his sword) as he attacks with it … A channeled spell targets the creature hit by the battlemage's weapon, which still gets a saving throw if the spell allows one. Even if a spell can target more than one creature, channeling it through the weapon limits its effect to the single opponent attacked. If the weapon attack misses, the channeled spell is wasted. The spell to be channeled must have a range of touch, be a ray effect (in which case the ray affects only the creature attacked), or specify a creature as the target."* Of all the channelling features, this one likely most supports a proposition that the spell doesn't lose its attack roll and consequently still can access critical damage. The spell is cast as the Battlemage attacks, is cast through the weapon as a free action, and targets the creature hit by the battlemage's weapon. Different wording = different function = different result. But again, it still takes DM interpretation to get through.

- In the feat space, there's **Smiting Spell**, from PHB 2: *"You can alter a spell with a range of touch to transfer its energy from your hand to a weapon that you hold. The next time you strike an opponent with that weapon, the spell discharges. The target takes the normal damage and effects of a successful attack in addition to the spell's effect."* This one likely doesn't allow you to add criticals to it since you alter the spell somewhat in order to make it a smiting spell, but again, ask your DM for a view.

- More interestingly, there's also the alternative class feature **Warforged Artificer 5** from Races of Eberron, which gives the warforged a weapon familiar. The creator can share infusions: "If a weapon familiar is held by its creator at the time the creator imbues an infusion with a range of touch, the creator can then deliver the infusion by touching a target with the weapon familiar (either as a melee touch attack or as a normal melee attack.)" So the infusion can be delivered by touch "as a normal melee attack." This might suggest a critical applies to it.

- I also looked to see if the **Imbued Staff** from Dragon 338, which also allows delivery of touch spells, permits this effect. No dice, quite literally; the entry itself indicates on a critical hit the spell's damage is not doubled.

Ranged Weapon Spells

A related question: if the spell *produces* an item or projectile with a threat range greater than 20, does my Improved Critical apply to that greater range?

The answer is almost certainly 'yes' absent the most parsimonious DM. You can apply Improved Critical to a spell that generates an **effect** that acts as a ranged weapon and requires ranged attack rolls. One of the example spells Complete Arcane points to is *fire shuriken.* The spell produces, well, fiery shuriken that do 3d6 damage and have a critical threat range of 19-20. Improved Critical applied to that spell would seem extremely likely to increase the shurikens' own threat range, thus resulting in a threat range of 17-20. That's pretty good compared with normal shuriken let alone the rest of the mundane melee or ranged armory, especially with 3d6 damage dice attached to it.

There is a very small group of spells that produce ranged effects or weapons with threat ranges greater than 20, or critical multipliers greater than 20, and thus are most exploitable under these rules:

- ***Fire Shuriken*** *(SpC) (Assn 2)*. Complete Arcane also makes it a Wu Jen 2 spell. As discussed, the products of this spell deal 3d6 damage, 19-20/x2. Improved Critical applied to this weaponlike spell renders them 17-20/x2. This level of damage and threat range is superior to pretty much every exotic melee weapon you can put in your hands.

- ***Splinterbolt*** (SpC, Web) (Drd 2, Sor/Wiz 2). This spell produces a bolt that does 4d6 damage, has a critical threat range of 18-20 and a critical multiplier of x3. With Improved Critical, that becomes 15-20/x3 on 4d6 damage dice. Even scarier is that if your DM rules this as a projectile weapon, it would therefore qualify for various effects out of Deepwood Sniper. But even if it didn't, that threat range and damage dice is meatier than any exotic melee weapon mentioned above. The Web version of the spell is even more powerful: it provides an extra +4 of damage *and* makes the bolt count as a cold iron weapon in forested terrain, in which case it qualifies for Disciple of Dispater too. (And note that the Acorn of Far Travel, in the very same Web article, allows you to deem yourself as being in forested terrain specifically.)

- ***Cloud of Knives*** (PHB 2) (Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 2): You create a bunch of floating knives that – as free actions – you can use ranged attacks to fire at any target within 30 feet.

They do 1d6+1 per 3 caster levels, and have a 19-20/x2 critical hit range. Once again, Improved Critical makes these 17-20/x2 weapons.

- ***Laeral's Silver Lance*** (Waterdeep) (Sor/Wiz 3): Although this spell does not use the magic words "ranged attack roll" anywhere in its spell entry, you might be able to argue to a DM that it qualifies anyway. The spell creates a lancelike column of force, equivalent to a Large Lance, which flies toward a single creature while you (quite literally) pantomime throwing it at them. The weapon's attack bonus is your caster level+INT or CHA with a +3 enhancement bonus and +2 for charging. It deals 4d6+3 points of force damage, has a threat range of 20 and a critical multiplier of x3. Although it grants a bonus for charging, nowhere does it say that the weapon attacks in melee as such, and you literally appear to be throwing it. If your DM agrees this is a ranged attack roll, then Improved Critical can apply to it, making it a 19-20/x3 weapon with a 4d6 damage dice.

- ***Nature's Purity*** *(LoM) (Drd 3):* This is a ray spell that spanks most lifeforms, but the most significant part for our purposes is that against aberrations it does 5d6 force damage and threatens a critical hit on a roll of 19-20 when it does. Once again, Improved Critical expands this to 17-20, albeit this is really for a specific campaign.

Spells for Improved Critical

Obviously the full spell list for 3.5 is massive, but I have managed to take a reasonably complete look of those spells which fit the criteria (either via touch or via ranged spells) for having Improved Critical apply to them according to Complete Arcane's rules. A number of the spells mentioned crop up in direct-damage builds such as The Mailman and therefore have some utility to that build as well.

For all that, this is my rough survey only and incorporates touch range spells that deal damage, ranged touch attack spells, and spells that produce effects that require ranged attacks (other than those mentioned above); if you can find something that isn't mentioned in this list, let me know and I will add it. What I've deliberately excluded from these lists are those spells that *only* cause penalties or impose conditions, since these don't cause damage as such. (However, I have included spells that both do damage and impose conditions – indeed these are quite handy!)

I have also excluded those damage-dealing spells that require melee touch attacks or melee attacks (e.g. *Spiritual Weapon*) because they might make touch attacks, but they are not Range: touch as Complete Arcane requires, and they don't produce ranged effects that require ranged attack rolls.

Player's Handbook

Disintegrate
Fireball (applies if it's fired through a slot – put a slot in your tower shield)
Melf's Acid Arrow
Meteor Swarm
Produce Flame
Ray of Frost

Scorching Ray
Searing Light

Player's Handbook 2

Melf's Unicorn Arrow
Seeking Ray – particularly good as it makes you better with rays against the same target.

Complete Arcane

Hail of Stone
Lightning Blade (Wu Jen only, but can decide how many dice to apply on each roll).
Sphere of Ultimate Destruction

Complete Mage

Toxic Tongue (does CON damage).

Complete Champion

Darts of Life (only against undead)

Oriental Adventures

Blood of Fire

Frostburn

Cometstrike
*Shivering Touch (*murderous enough at 3d6 DEX damage, critical hits make this a near-guaranteed knockout on the enemy*)*
Shivering Touch, Lesser

Spell Compendium

Arrow of Bone
Awaken Sin
Backlash
Bite of the King
Blackfire
Blast of Force
Bolt of Glory
Chill of the Grave
Combust (NO SAVE)
Corrosive Grasp
Darkbolt
Darkfire
Defenestrating Sphere
Electric Jolt
Emerald Flame Fist
Entangling Staff

Fell the Greatest Foe
Ghoul Gauntlet
Hamatula Barbs
Hailstones
Healing Sting
Ice Dagger
Ice Knife
Icelance
Infestation of Maggots (Does 1d4 CON damage).
Langour
Life Bolt
Light of Lunia
Light of Mercuria
Light of Venya
Lucent Lance
Mind Poison (Does 1d10 WIS damage!)
Moonbow
Night's Caress
Nimbus of Light
Orb of X
Orb of X, Lesser
Quillfire
Rainbow Beam
Ray of Deanimation
Ray of Flame
Ray of Ice
Ray of Stupidity
Rust Ray, ROFLMAO
Saltray
Slashing Darkness
Spider Poison
Stormrage

Planar Handbook

Touchstone Lightning – debatably.

Sharn City of Towers

Force Hammer (nonlethal)

Races of Eberron

*Irian's Light (*only against undead)

Dragonmarked

Ray of Retaliation

Champions of Ruin

Shadow Arrow – particularly interesting because it's arguably a projectile weapon and thus arguably benefits from something like Deepwood Sniper.
Slime Hurl – arguably. Green Slime does damage to whatever it hits.

Champions of Valor

Stars of Arvandor

Unapproachable East

Snilloc's Snowball

Lords of Darkness

Mortal Wound
Mystic Lash

(Mystic Lash is interesting because it straddles the line between melee weapons and spells. You create a whip *and wield it* 'as if' it were an actual whip and you were proficient with it, so the question arises whether an Improved Critical (whip) feat would apply to it *as well as* the Improved Critical (ranged spells) feat that applies given you have to make ranged touch attacks with it to strike a target. Reason being that Improved Critical doesn't stack with any other effect that extends the threat range of a **weapon.** But Mystic Lash is a spell, not a weapon; the spell merely indicates that you can wield it 'as if' it were a whip and you were proficient with said whip. Most DMs will probably say they don't stack and there's a pretty solid RAI basis for that, but still, it's a possibility.)

Shining South

Sun Bolt
Circlet of Enervation

Useful Character Options

Spellwarp Sniper 1 (CSco) (PrC): While the Sniper's Sudden Raystrike abilities won't work on creatures immune to critical hit damage, the Sniper has one good feature for someone who's really determined to do critical hit damage with spells: the capability to change any spell with an instantaneous duration and a range greater than touch into a ray spell. So long as it deals damage, such a spell unquestionably then qualifies for Improved Critical under Complete Arcane's rules. At fifth level the Sniper can even coup de grace with ray spells.

Potent Dweomercraft (Dragon 351) (Tactical Feat): One of three benefits the feat grants is to double the threat range of the next melee touch attack spell you cast in the same round you expend your arcane focus. Unlike most feats, this one *doesn't* include the standard wording that it doesn't stack with other effects. And therefore it's here that we get to speculate a cute little RAW interpretation. See, when you look at Complete Arcane and weaponlike spells, the text does not say that a weaponlike spell is actually considered a weapon for the purposes of Improved Critical. All it says that a category of spells can be

chosen for Improved Critical, in effect, to apply to it. It does not turn the spell into a weapon; even Complete Arcane says a weaponlike spell is only like a weapon in some respects. The significance of this is that Improved Critical doesn't stack with anything that improves the critical threat range of a **weapon** … but doesn't say anything about whether it stacks with something that improves the critical threat range of a spell**.** This, combined with the fact Potent Dweomercraft does not contain the otherwise common exclusion of feat stacking with Improved Critical, suggests that both feats can stack on one another. If so, your melee touch attack spells that deal damage can pick up an 18-20 threat range. The other two benefits of the feat aren't bad for damage or critical enhancement either.

Ranged Spell Specialization (ranged touch attack spells) (CArc) (feat): adds a +2 on damage they deal. Frankly stuff like Warmade Edge is better than this.

Touch Spell Specialization (touch spells) (CArc) (feat): +2 on damage this type of spell deals. See above on this.

Maximise Spell (PHB) (feat): No, don't. Critical hits require you to roll damage, if you remove all variability from the roll it arguably means the spell is no longer able to take advantage of critical hits.

Split Ray (CArc) (feat): No, don't take it, even if it seems obvious. All this does is create another ray spell with its own extra ranged touch attack to hit. **Twin Spell** does this as well and outright duplicates the spell's effect with no extra rolling required. About the only really, really big reach of RAW might be to somehow argue to a DM that a Split Ray when channelled produces two rays – one of which is channelled, the other is fired as a ranged touch attack of its own.

Gloves of Deadly Casting *(*FoW*)* (Magic Item): Improved Critical for weaponlike spells in a can! These gloves double the threat range of **any** ray and touch spells that the user casts. Explicitly does not stack with the Improved Critical feat. … but might stack with the Potent Dweomercraft feat mentioned further up.

Pathfinder Critical Options

I decided to make a special section for some of the stuff that Pathfinder does in the critical hit space (we're obviously talking 1e here.) Pathfinder, published by the same Paizo that gave us the *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines, regularly touts itself as being backward-compatible with 3.5, meaning it's more likely than most sources to be accepted (reluctantly or otherwise) at a table.

Don't get me wrong, Pathfinder doesn't do a lot to fix critical hits in 3.5. Its Improved Critical and *keen* still don't stack; corpses and random shrubbery are still immune to dying any faster. But it does offer one or two things in the critical hit space that you'd have to jump through hoops to get under 3.5, and at least the whole of Pathfinder with all options is up there and searchable online. Good grief, **here.**

These options are usually available only at relatively high BAB, consistent with Improved Critical's qualification BAB of +8. I am sticking as best I can to the feats from the Pathfinder core. Notably, Pathfinder has one 3rd party source – *The Genius Guide to Feats of Critical Combat* – with a plethora of critical-specific feats, but Pathfinder's own website doesn't call these feats official, meaning they're close to third party at best, and I have accordingly omitted them.

Anyway, a brief survey of Paizo-Pathfinder critical options:

Accursed Critical -- if you confirm a critical hit with a spell or spell-like ability, can cast *bestow curse* as an immediate action (albeit it has to be prepared or available to cast).

Anatomical Savant -- creatures immune to critical hits now only have a 75% chance of being immune. Creatures with a partial immunity (e.g. fortification) have their immunity reduced by 25%.

A Shining Beacon (Trait) -- Do your weapon's "critical hit modifier" in additional damage against demons. I presume they meant the critical *multiplier*. The damage is not doubled by the multiplier and added only after the damage is totalled.

Banishing Critical -- Confirm a critical hit against a target, banish it back to its home plane per the *Dismissal* spell.

Bashing Finish -- Score a critical hit, get a free action shield bash attack.

Bloody Fist (Ex) – Barbarian 12. While raging, you can attempt to *punch through an opponent's flesh and rip out one of their vital organs* if you confirm a critical hit with a natural attack or unarmed strike. Unfortunately, all it actually does is normal critical damage + 1d4 CON damage.

Boar's Charge (Ex) -- Barbarian 12. While raging, when you hit with a gore attack as part of a charge, you automatically score a critical threat, but still have to score a critical hit.

Bull Rush Strike -- When you score a critical hit, can push an opponent back as by a bull rush.

Destroy Identity -- Confirm a critical hit, maim the target for 2 CHA damage and stagger it for 1 round. Nah, I don't get it either.

Disarming Strike When you score a critical hit, make a disarm attempt.

Dispelling Critical -- If you've got a *Dispel Magic* available to cast, use a swift action to cast it on an opponent against whom you've scored a critical hit.

Divine Fighting Technique (Way of the Mace) -- Threaten a critical hit with a light mace or heavy mace, that foe becomes sickened for 1 round, and 2 if you confirm the hit. Because light maces need even more powerful options than Lightning Mace, amiright? Can pull a dirty trick, but we're getting well into Pathfinder-specific features here.

Flaying Critical -- Score a critical hit, do -1 to a creature's natural armor bonus (cumulative on subsequent hits).

Impaling Critical -- With a piercing melee weapon, on a critical hit, you can impale the opponent, i.e. deal damage equal to the weapon's damage dice plus any extra damage dice from the weapon's property in subsequent rounds. Some conditions about how you stay with the opponent.

Impact Critical Shot -- If you make a critical hit with a ranged attack, push opponent back as with a bull rush or knock him down as if from a trip!

Improved Devastating Strike -- bonus on attack rolls to confirm a critical hit equal to those from Devastating Strike. Probably too many feats to make this worth it.

Improved Low Blow -- confirmation rolls on critical hits increase by +2 if the opponent is larger than yourself, and 1/day, reroll a failed critical hit confirmation roll.

Liberating Critical -- BAB 9. Score a critical hit, use a swift action to cast *Dispel Magic* that only targets mind-affecting effects currently on the opponent, i.e. take out beneficial mind-affecting effects or remove a domination effect. At least you'll have been able to free the opponent's mind while his blood drains out of him.

Repositioning Strike -- score a critical hit, reposition your opponent. This is pretty specific to Pathfinder.

Sin-Sharing Critical -- if you confirm a critical hit against the target, pass a curse on you onto him.

Sickening Critical -- Score a critical hit, opponent is sickened for 1 minute.

Sundering Strike -- Sunder the opponent's weapon on a critical hit.

Sun Striker -- character level 7, needs Weapon Focus (scimitar) – confirm a critical hit against an undead creature, and you bypass DR, deal full damage, and get *flaming burst* on it.

Tripping Strike -- when you make a critical hit, you can trip your opponent.

Second Party Sources

It's My Party And I'll Cry if I Want To: a short guide to D&D sourcebooks.
For those who came in late, WOTC published a decent chunk of third edition D&D's rules under the Open Game Licence (OGL), i.e. said decent chunk was made more or less freely available for other publishers to utilise (the most notable form of this generosity being the current online SRD). Consequently, people published any number of sourcebooks whose contents were said to be compatible with WOTC's D&D. However these OGL-compatible sourcebooks haven't been subject to any playtesting or balance with WOTC's products, at least not by WOTC.

These products by independent publishers are often referred to as **third party**. And it's often seen as *gauche* to use material from these sources in character builds; the argument is that because they haven't been subject to WOTC's (wonky) game balance and (wonkier) QA, they frequently do Stupid Things™ to the game and Are Not Allowed™.

Either way, because there's a massive number of third party books, I won't be referring to them in this guide beyond Pathfinder, which is a special case. If you find something out there in the third party wilds – Alderac Entertainment Group's book *Mercenaries* has a couple of options relating to weapon qualities, specifically, *Serrated* and *Laminated* weapon qualities – then by all means see if you can convince your DM/your players to use it, but I haven't made any judgements on it.

Then there's **first party** books: those published by WOTC itself and carrying the D&D logo. A large number of these are listed in the list of abbreviations at the start of this handbook. This category often includes the magazines published by Paizo under direct licence from WOTC, i.e. *Dragon* and *Dungeon*. Some DMs are a bit leery of these magazines, partially because they're not always balanced, and partially because the magazines themselves aren't simple to come by cheaply and legally. (Making things even more confusing is WOTC's publication of the Dragon Compendium, which pulled a swag of features from Dragon magazine and declared them official D&D 3.5.) If there is any debate about why I'm including those magazines as first party, the fault is mine, not to be taken as a general view of the community necessarily.

And finally, there's **second party** books. These were published under licence from WOTC, carrying an 'official D&D' seal. Typically they relate to some of the more well-known D&D campaign settings. However, they were not explicitly WOTC products and therefore may or may not have been subject to playtest or balance against the rest of the system. In the case of Dragonlance and Oriental Adventures, the lead book detailing the campaign setting was published by WOTC and thus falls into the realm of first party, while pretty much everything else came from an independent publisher (Sovereign Press and Alderac Entertainment Group, respectively). In the case of Ravenloft, Sword and Sorcery Studios published most of the 3.5 Ravenloft materials, with *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* being about the only one that WOTC actually produced. Most amusingly, in the case of the Kingdoms of Kalamar, WOTC was literally *forced* to stamp the 'Official D&D' seal on Kenzer and Company's sourcebooks from 2001 – 2007 in order to settle a lawsuit about WOTC republishing certain comic strips from Dragon magazine without Kenzer's permission.

So second party books fall in a midground: they're usually part of a well-known D&D or licensed setting, but nonetheless were created by other publishers. This group of books I included mainly because, carrying a WOTC imprimatur and being about a recognisable setting, they're a little more likely to be permitted than a random independent publisher's book. However, for that same reason, I have not given them a thorough look-over or consideration about what use can be made of them.

I also have to give specific kudos to **vipermagnum357,** who *did* do the hard yards of actually trawling through each of the below books and without whose labour this material would not be with you. Providing the below notes that I have published verbatim with his permission. As always, if you feel I have not given consideration to an item or missed something, the error is mine, not his.

So, turning to the books as described:

Dragonlance

Dragons of Krynn

Dragonbane (spell) 3rd, 4th level, Sorcerer/Wizard, Cleric/Mystic/Paladin, weapon targeted bypasses all damage reduction of a dragon, including natural DR, magical effects, and magic items, weapon increases critical multiplier by 1 against dragons, and weapon ignores Draconian death throes

Greater Mounted Dragonlance (magic weapon) drains 1 point of constitution when striking an evil dragon, no save, or 2 points of constitution if wielder is mounted, on a critical hit against an evil dragon the weapon drains constitution equal to wielder's character level, if wielder is mounted on a true dragon the weapon drains constitution equal the the wielder's character level +1 point per age category of the mount

Dragonlance of Huma (magic weapon, major artifact) drains 2 point of constitution upon striking an evil dragon, no save, on a critical hit against an evil dragon, weapon drains constitution equal to 5 + the wielder's character level + wielder's Charisma modifier

Dragonlance-War of the Lance

Minotaur Marauder 2, 5 (PRC) wielder gains +2 bonus to confirm critical hits at level 2, increasing to +4 at level 5, minotaur only

Age of Mortals

Greater Abyssal Lance (magic weapon) when striking good dragons, weapon permanently drains 1 point of constitution, no save, on a critical hit against a good dragon the weapon permanently drains constitution equal to the wielder's character level, no save

Holy Orders of the Stars

Huma's Legacy (spell) 9th level, Cleric, weapon targeted deals bonus damage against evil targets, which is increased on a critical hit, deals 2 points of constitution drain against evil dragons, or 4 points on a critical hit, if cast on a dragonlance, the constitution drain stacks and is improved another 2 points, weapon also receives a *keen edge* effect that doubles critical threat range. Stacks with improved critical but not *keen.*

Knightly Orders of Ansalon

Giantsmiter (magic weapon) wielder deals additional damage equal to character level against a target of the giant type on a critical hit

Vision Partisan 1 (PRC) wielder has a doom score, compared against initiative rolls to determine a doom influenced combat, in such a combat all critical threats made by and against the wielder are automatically confirmed, and all critical multipliers for and against wielder are increased by 1

Races of Ansalon

Demolition Strike (feat) wielder may ignore 1/2 an object's hardness during a sunder attempt, and ignore a construct's immunity to critical hits, Dwarf only

Crook Blade (weapon) 18-20/x2 critical

Dragonlance: Key of Destiny

Shard of Light (magic weapon, Minor Artifact) +2 Shortsword, deals double damage against Undead and creatures native to the Negative Energy Plane, explicitly stacks with critical multiplier

Staff of Bones (magic quarterstaff, stave, Minor Artifact) on a successful critical hit, weapon deals an additional 2d6 Cold damage to a living target.

Kingdoms of Kalamar

Kingdoms of Kalamar Player's Guide to the Sovereign Lands

Gladiator 10 (base class) critical focus, when facing a single opponent, critical threat range is doubled and critical multiplier increases by 1 for all attacks.

Alliance Merchant 4 (PRC) soft strike, 1/day announce on a successful critical hit, target must make Fortitude save with DC of 10 + damage rolled or fall unconscious for 10 minutes instead of taking damage, if save is successful all damage dealt from attack is subdual

Bounty Hunter 5 (PRC) soft strike, 1/day announce on a successful critical hit, target must make Fortitude save with DC of 10 + damage rolled or fall unconscious for 10 minutes instead of taking damage, if save is successful all damage dealt from attack is subdual

Critical Spell Strike (feat) when wielder inflicts a critical hit with a touch spell, the spell's save DC is increased by 4.

Finding the Secrets (feat) choose a creature type normally immune to critical hits, wielder can now inflict critical hits against that type and gain favored enemy damage bonuses, sneak attack at 1/2 normal damage, may be taken more than once

Knock Prone (feat) when wielder inflicts a critical hit, target must make a Fortitude save or be knocked prone

Targeted Attack (feat) when wielder scores a successful critical hit, wielder may forgo bonus damage and injure a specific body part, as listed in the variant rules of the DMG I, page 27

Blinding (weapon enchantment) on a successful critical hit, target must make a DC 13 Fortitude save or be permanently blinded

Stinger (weapon enchantment) weapon inflicts poison on a successful critical hit, DC 13, primary 1d3 Strength damage, secondary 1d3 Constitution damage

Ravenloft

Ravenloft Campaign Setting

Parthian Rapier (weapon) exotic one handed weapon modeled on rapier, 18-20/x2 critical, finessable, mounts a single shot pistol that can be used in conjunction with a successful attack as a free action

Champions of Darkness

Scourge 1 (PRC) Pinpoint Agony ability, any successful critical hit with an unarmed strike stuns the target for 1 round as the Stunning Fist feat, no save, RAW/RAI conflict-by RAW the ability works on any opponent, RAI has PRC fluff and ability description only mentioning Humanoid targets, likely DM fiat

Target Vulnerable Spot (feat) on a successful critical hit against a creature with a specific vulnerability, while using that vulnerability, such as a silvered weapon versus DR/Silver or a wooden stake against a vampire, the wielder's critical multiplier is increased by 1 and automatically counts as having targeted any specific vulnerable points, such as driving a wooden stake into a vampire's heart

Legacy of the Blood

Finding Weakness (feat) Fighter bonus feat, wielder can take a standard action to make an opposed Intelligence check against an opponent with both adding their respective BAB, if successful wielder increases their melee critical multipliers by 1 against that opponent for the rest of the encounter

Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide

Gray Matter Blade (magic weapon) *Keen* Longsword with modified 18-20 -> 15-20 critical threat range against targets with a head and brain, and critical multiplier increases to x4, on a successful critical hit sword will attach itself to target's head and consumes brain in 1d6 rounds

Carrion Blade (magic weapon) +1 Guisarme attaches itself to target on a successful critical hit, and continues attacking on its own for 4 rounds, similar to Fleshgrinding property from BoVD

Fang of the Nosferatu (magic item, Cursed, Artifact) deals 1d4 Constitution damage on a successful critical hit and heals wielder of a like amount of damage, blade must be sated regularly or it permanently drains Hit Points from wielder until slaked

Ravenloft Gazetteer Volume 1

Herald of Dawn 2, 4 (PRC) Strike of the Rosy Dawn, wielder can inflict critical hits normally against Vampires and Vampire Spawn, and the critical threat range and multiplier of any shortspear wielded against a Vampire or Vampire Spawn are increased by 1

Ravenloft Gazetteer Volume 4

Baron's Arm (magic weapon) exotic double weapon, heavy mace and light flail, a successful critical hit increases target's OR by +1 for each 10 points of damage inflicted

Van Richten's Arsenal Volume 1 *(Including Web Enhancement)*

Rapier Sword Cane (weapon) standard rapier concealed inside a can, requiring a DC 20 Search check to find

Rheumatism (spell) 1st/2nd level, Bard, Druid/Ranger, Sorcerer, Wizard, Ray spell strikes randomized location for a penalty that last 2 rounds/level, on a critical hit caster can choose a specific target

Heartseeker (weapon enchantment) piercing weapon only, on a successful critical hit, opponent's heart is pierced, possibly slaying them instantly unless they are Undead, Constructs, Plants, or Oozes, no save unless targeting an Outsider which can negate the

death effect with a DC 15 Fortitude save, Vampire struck counts as staked until weapon is removed

Wheel of Time

Wheel of Time RPG

Trolloc Scythesword (weapon) exotic 2 hander, 18-20/x2 critical, slashing

Blademaster 2, 6, 10 (PRC) wielder can increase critical multiplier on a successful critical hit 1/2/3 times per day, must be declared before rolling damage dice

Diablo II

Diablo II: Diablerie *(Note all weapon herein are subject to proprietary durability damage rules, reducing weapon hit points when dealing significant damage)*

Light Falchion (weapon) identical to scimitar, 18-20/x2 critical, 1d6 slashing

Military Pick (weapon) identical to heavy pick, 20/x4 critical and 1d6 piercing

Crystal Sword (weapon) one handed martial slashing weapon, 1d8 and 18-20/x3 critical

War Scythe (weapon) 2 handed martial piercing, 2d6 and 20/x4 critical

Poleaxe (weapon) 2 handed martial slashing, 2d4 and 19-20/x3 critical, reach weapon

Short War Bow (weapon) martial bow with 70 ft range increment, 1d6 and 20/x4 critical, permanent +2 Strength bonus as composite bow

Long War Bow (weapon) martial bow with 110 ft range increment, 1d8 and 20/x4 critical, permanent +2 Strength bonus as composite bow

Prefix and Suffix enchantments (weapon enchantments) proprietary magic system separate from usual 3.X systems, Deadly, Heavy, Massive, Sharp, Warrior's, Knight's, Lord's, King's and Savage increase critical threat range by 1, Ruthless, Fine, Soldier's, Master's, Champion's and Merciless increase critical threat range by 2.

Final Words and Bibliography

This tale grew in the telling, as someone once said. It certainly could not have been achieved without a large amount of the groundwork done by **vipermagnum357** in this thread and done by PhantasyPen in his original critfishing handbook here:

That said, there are many others who have indirectly contributed to this handbook over time, and who I have doubtless left out unintentionally. I apologise for that.

In terms of the bibliography, I looked at the following threads significantly when putting this handbook together. Trawl through as you will.

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?569020-Fishing-Ideas-for-the-Crit-Fishing-Handbook

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?569192-D-amp-D-3-5e-For-Massive-Damage!-A-Critical-Hit-Handbook

http://minmaxforum.com/index.php?topic=653.msg3281#msg3281

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?284283-Piggy-Knowles-Archer-Build-Thread

http://minmaxforum.com/index.php?topic=7080.0

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?161065-5-20-crit-range-with-Disciple-of-Dispater-(3-5)

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?219050-Fighter-with-level-9-spells

https://www.dandwiki.com/wiki/9%E2%88%9220_Crit_Specialist_(3.5e_Optimized_Character_Build)

http://bg-archive.minmaxforum.com/index.php?topic=9907.0

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?532019-3-5-Arcane-Duelist-Build&p=22249270&viewfull=1#post22249270

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https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?563557-Non-Caster-Entry-Arcane-Duelist&highlight=Arcane+Duelist

http://bg-archive.minmaxforum.com/index.php?topic=8164.25 -- on builds

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?420449-3-5-Updated-Crossbow-Build

http://dictummortuum.blogspot.com/2018/01/the-archery-handbook-completed.html

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?312980-3-5-Unarmed-Handbook

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?496997-New-to-3-5-Help-with-a-natural-weapon-character&highlight=Thayan+Gladiator

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?127026-3-X-Person-Man-s-Guide-to-Melee-Combos&p=7044122#post7044122

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?447435-quot-The-Mailman-A-Direct-Damage-Sorcerer-quot-(from-Wizards-forums)

https://forums.giantitp.com/showthread.php?369995-The-Duskblade-and-Arcane-Channeling

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