

0.1 Big Six Alternative v1.0

0.1.1 Introduction

The “Big Six” are the magic items that “everyone” buys. They are: magic weapon, magic shield, magic armor, ring of protection, amulet of natural armor, cloak of resistance and a belt or headband to boost your primary ability score. (Yes, that’s actually seven items. Although wizards sometimes eschew the armor and shield. I guess six is an average...) Why do people “have” to buy them?

On the one hand, they’re extremely cost-effective, providing very good bonuses for (compared to WBL) reasonable prices. And on the other hand, because the difficulty of the game is scaled assuming the PCs have magical gear to make them tougher; particularly Big Six gear. You basically need a Cloak of Resistance to be able to make saving throws often enough to function at higher levels. A warrior needs magic weapons to penetrate DR and have his to-hit chances keep up with monster AC. (Monster AC is scaled assuming you have a magic weapon...) And you need a lot of AC-boosting items to not get squished. Wizards sometimes prefer Blur, Displacement or Mirror Image spells to use Miss Chance instead of AC, although at some level monsters often have True Seeing. Warriors have little alternative; those wizard spells tend to be self-only.

Now it’s not inherently bad for the game to make assumptions about how much gear a PC will have at a certain level, or to assume that by level X he’ll have acquired a bonus Y to Z. You have to base CR estimates on something after all. But the system also has a number of annoying side effects:

1. It makes it a lot harder to run campaigns with only rare magic items, because the game is built assuming PCs have them.
2. Monotony: all the PCs are walking around in Cloaks of Resistance, and all significant humanoid enemies they kill are also wearing them, making loot boring. Everyone might have their own idea of how their cool fantasy character should look, but somehow all casters end up wearing headbands. And everyone in the party is wearing the same ring.
3. Reliance on equipment: many classic tropes revolve around the heroes being captured, which of course includes disarmament. But as someone playing Shadowrun remarked: it’s better to have a PC die and make a new PC with normal wealth, than to have to start over from scratch. Equipment in Pathfinder (also: Shadowrun) is just that important.
4. It’s just not terribly heroic to be so gear-dependent. It also doesn’t jive well with some concepts, such as the loincloth-clad barbarian (who is now wearing a cloak and significant armor) or the monk who doesn’t believe in attachment to material things, except of course his magical ring, cloak, amulet of might fists, bracers of armor and so on.
5. Hassle for the GM: making humanoid enemies involves lots of equipment selection. Using a monster is a lot less work, but sometimes humanoid enemies are just more fitting to the plot...
6. Many other more fanciful magic items compete for the same magic item slots as the Big Six, but don’t get a lot of use because they’re just not as necessary.
7. Because feats like Weapon Focus and Weapon Specialization encourage specializing in a specific weapon, it’s often a bit tragic when a fighter finds a really neat magic weapon that’s not the weapon he’d specialized in.
8. Because the price for magic weapons is based on it’s equivalent enhancement bonus, weapons with just plain simple enhancement bonuses tend to be favored over more exciting effects like Flaming. This is exacerbated because you have to spend a Standard action to command such a sword to light on fire (and who has time for that?), and because only real (not equivalent) enhancement bonuses penetrate DR.
9. Because these items are so crucial, characters may feel pushed to become crafters just to get (cheap) access to them. Some people have calculated that having a Wondrous Item crafter in the party effectively gives the whole party a +1 to just about everything, due to having access to magic items above WBL. If there’s enough time to craft everything, this can get out of hand. Then again, if there’s not enough time, this leads to frustrated crafter-players or shenanigans with Rope Trick and Rings of Sustenance to maximize production time.
10. If a PC enters an Anti-Magic Field, he needs to suddenly recalculate a significant chunk of his character sheet. This doesn’t help speeding up combat...

So what can we do? If we turn to page 400 of the CRB, it lists the developers’ assumptions about PC wealth. These are that a character will spend about 25% of his wealth on magic weaponry, 25% on magic armor and

defensive items, 25% on other magic items, 15% on consumable items and 10% on coins and mundane gear. Certainly not more than 50% of his wealth on a single item. However, at lower level these numbers might be skewed.

This immediately becomes obvious if we consider the price of a suit of Full Plate +1, not a strange investment for a fighter. The Masterwork Full Plate alone will cost him 1650gp, which is likely to be a lot more than 50% of his WBL for the first few levels. Full Plate is a bit of an extreme case perhaps, but even other builds tend to start by saving up for one single expensive item, such as a +1 weapon (2000gp enchantment, 300gp masterwork and the weapon's price), which many characters will be trying hard to have by level 4–5.

A wizard on the other hand has little use for magic weapons or even magic armor. He'll probably trust in his Dexterity, Mage Armor and especially in not standing on the front line in combat. He's probably saving up for a wand, pearl of power, or particularly a Headband of Vast Intelligence +2 (4000gp), which he might be able to afford by level 4.

The solution to the Big Six dilemma offered here is to do the following:

1. Halve WBL, and give players a budget of *Built-In Points (BIP)* instead.
2. With BIPs, players can buy the bonuses normally given by the B6, as innate nonmagical abilities. Sort of like feats. The price scheme of the B6 is maintained, so it's still more cost-effective to go broad rather than deep.
3. B6 items are no longer available for purchase, crafting or loot.
4. Any published NPC with B6 items is assumed to have built-in bonuses doing the same thing as their listed B6 gear; just use the same stats, but ignore them when analyzing loot.

How exactly this is implemented is described in more detail in the following sections.

0.1.2 Built-In Points (BIP)

Characters that go up levels gain a budget of BIP to spend on certain bonuses that are built into them. Wealth by level expectations are reduced accordingly:

Table 1: *BIP* and wealth by level

level	BIP	wealth
1	—	~150
2	—	1000
3	2	1500
4	6	3000
5	11	5250
6	16	8000
7	24	11750
8	33	16500
9	45	22500
10	62	31000
11	82	41000
12	108	54000
13	140	70000
14	185	92500
15	240	120000
16	315	157500
17	410	205000
18	530	265000
19	685	342500
20	880	440000

Players do not have to spend BIP immediately; they can save them up to buy something big and expensive.

0.1.3 Built-In Bonuses BIB

Players can decide what to spend BIP on, though once made, this choice is essentially locked. BIBs can't be traded, but they also can't be lost, stolen or disarmed, because they're not equipment; they're inherent properties of the character. If retraining is allowed, then a BIP investment is roughly as retrainable as a feat. BIBs are nonmagical; they cannot be dispelled, cancelled by an Anti-Magic Field or detected by a Detect Magic-like spell. BIBs don't use magic item slots.

First off, there are four different BIB to increase AC. The deflection bonus granted by the classic Ring of Protection has been changed to a Dodge bonus here, and its price has been adjusted downwards a bit accordingly. The oother three are enhancement bonuses to armor, shield and natural armor. To enjoy an enhancement bonus to armor or shield, the character must be wearing armor or shield that he's proficient with. Any armor or shield the character wears and that he is proficient with gets the bonus. No such restriction applies to the Natural Armor enhancement bonus. [Making the Deflection bonus a cheaper Dodge bonus somewhat favors Conan-esque barbarians, who don't wear a lot of clothing but have Uncanny Dodge so that they can really rely on Dodge bonuses to AC.](#)

Table 2: *BIP* cost of defensive options

AC bonus	armor	shield	natural armor	Dodge
+1	2	2	4	2
+2	8	8	16	8
+3	18	18	36	18
+4	32	32	64	21
+5	50	50	100	50

Next we have the old resistance bonus to saving throws, replacing the Cloak of Resistance.

Table 3: *BIP* cost of saving throw bonuses

resistance bonus	cost
+1	2
+2	8
+3	18
+4	32
+5	50

Then we have built-in enhancements to weaponry. There are two options available for purchase: a bonus to the character's main weapon, or to all of his weapon.

Main weapon here means whatever weapon the character is currently using; if he's making a two-handed attack, that's his main weapon. If he's two-weapon fighting, the weapon he's using as main-hand weapon is the main weapon. If he's carrying out a full attack and switches weapons halfway, both of them count as main weapons, one after the other. If he's attacking with primary natural weapons, one of them is his main weapon. This option can be used by a monk making a single unarmed strike, but not for a flurry of blows made with unarmed strikes.

All weapons means precisely that: all weapons the character is using an attack routine. This means both weapons used in a two-weapon strike, all of the character's manufactured and (secondary) natural weapons in a combined full attack routine, or all five attacks made by a rake-pouncing druid in Dire Tiger form. Note: monks must select this option in order to enhance their unarmed strikes during a flurry. [Under standard rules, a monk would also have to use an Amulet of Mighty Fists that costs twice as much as a normal magic weapon in order to enhance his flurry. So the cost doesn't change.](#)

Note that these weapon enhancement bonuses do not apply to alchemical/splash weapons or spells, only to manufactured weapons, natural weapons and unarmed strikes.

Table 4: *BIP* cost of offensive options

enhancement to weapon	cost for main weapon	cost for all weapons
+1	4	8
+2	16	32
+3	36	72
+4	64	128
+5	100	200

Finally, we have ability enhancement. Here a difference with the standard rules shows up: normally if you want a belt or headband that enhances more than one ability, you pay a +50% charge for each additional ability (because you're jamming additional functionality into a magic item slot). This surcharge is not present in this system, making it friendlier to MAD classes.

Table 5: *BIP* cost of enhancing abilities

enhancement to ability score	cost
+2	8
+4	32
+6	72

0.1.4 Changes to magic items

Naturally, making the functionality of B6 items available as non-items and reducing WBL will have some other consequences as well.

1. The classic B6 items are no longer for sale, nor can they be crafted or found as loot. Other magic items closely based off them (such as a Headband of Aerial Agility, based off mental-stat boosting headbands) should be reviewed by the GM. For each item, one of the following should be done:
 - Remove the B6 element from the item and adjust its price accordingly.
 - If the B6-like bonus is quite small, allow it, but strictly enforce that it cannot be increased with the procedures given for creating custom magic items.

Certainly, no new B6-like items should be introduced.

2. Magic weapons and armor no longer need to have a +1 or better enhancement bonus before any other powers can be added to them. In fact, they can't have ordinary enhancement bonuses on them. *It's now pretty affordable to have a golf bag of +1 equivalent magic weapons with different properties. For example, since most incorporeal creatures are immune to critical hits, having a Ghost Touch as well as a Keen weapon costs only $2 \times 2000\text{gp}$, and you use your full BIB (let's say +2) on both of them. Whereas previously you'd be looking at a 32000gp price tag. Somewhat situational enchantments become more viable now, because you always enjoy your full enhancement bonus.*
3. Any weapon with at least one magical power attached to it penetrates DR/Magic.
4. The Built-In enhancement bonus to weaponry doesn't penetrate DR types at all. However, because the bonus applies to any weapon(s) used, warriors are encouraged to invest in a golf bag.
5. Weapon properties like Flaming no longer need to be activated as a standard action; this is now a free action. *At this point, using a Flaming Freezing Shocking sword might be a real way to get past DR.*
6. If a magic weapon property uses the weapon's enhancement bonus as a variable, use the BIB enhancement bonus of the wielder.
7. If a magic weapon property increases the weapon's enhancement bonus under some circumstances (like Bane), that bonus stacks with the wielder's BIB enhancement for the weapon. *(For example: a raging barbarian with BIB+2 using an adamantite Furious Devilbane sword against a devil would enjoy a +6 bonus. However, that still doesn't penetrate the devil's DR/silver because enhancement bonuses just don't do that anymore.)*

0.1.5 Animal Companions, cohorts, familiars etc.

The rule for all of these is the same: they don't get independent *BIP*. However, their patron can spend some of his own BIP to buy options for them. If the companion/cohort/familiar etc. is lost somehow, the BIP are returned to his pool of unspent points.

0.1.6 Explanation

0.1.7 Version history

This is the first version.