

Jason's Guide to Armor

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The first practice when we come back from break is going to be an "unlimited" fight practice where you can use your armor and all the spells that you have learned at events. You will learn quickly how big a difference being armored makes and how it changes some of the basic strategies you have learned for group battles.

First, let's talk about armor a bit. This is a slight review from what is in the omnibus, but I think it is valuable to your understanding of armor types. There are two types of armor, 1-point and 2-point.

1-point armor is mostly worn by spell-casters since they give up the ability to wear 2-point in exchange for their spells. There is also a spell, 4th circle in the Sorcerer path, called 'Armored Cloak' which gives a less protective, but infinitely repairable type of armor to spell-casters. To wear armor as a spell-caster you have to give up the highest spell in each path you have, and for that reason it is uncommon for anything other than a 1-path caster to wear it. Only sacrificing one spell for armor is a good trade-off. Since most 1-paths are not sorcerers (in fact, by and large they are healers), they would have to use their 6th circle spell to get 'Armored Cloak'. This is the same spell slot that they would have to give up in order to get that 1-point armor. As such, the decision of which of these to do is very heavily debated by that type of character build. I believe that most decide to wear the armor, but I encourage you to talk to many spell-casters in the game to learn their opinions and explore the merits of both. The following are the two common materials 1-point armor is made from. The 2-point armor further down is also worn by spell-casters simply because they like the way it looks better, or because it is otherwise convenient for them to do so. They can still only call 1-point of it, however.

Padded armor: Padded, or quilted armor, is made of exactly what it sounds like, quilted fabric. That is fabric that has stuffing sewn to the inside of it, readily available from any fabric store. In order to make it armor worthy you will need two layers of it, such that the padding is sandwiched between the outside layers of cloth. Historically, padded armor was the domain of peasants. In many kingdoms, men were forced to join the army when they came of age or in times of warfare, but were not given any equipment to do so with. Leather and metal were too expensive for the common man to have, so he would take many layers of cloth and stuff more cloth inside it to give him some protection. A more refined kind of padded armor was worn under mail, to give some protection against trauma and shallow penetration.



Light Leather: Leather is measured in ounces, which is the average weight of a square-foot of any particular thickness. The leather in a pair of gloves is usually 1-2 oz, while the leather in a pair of work boots is commonly 7-8 oz. 1-point leather armor needs to be at least 4 or 5 oz. Anything less than that is considered 'garment weight' leather and is not allowed for armor use. Leather armor was extremely prolific in ancient history and was developed independently by almost all cultures in the world, from European to Asian to Native American. The concept for this simple leather, however, rarely lasted past the development of lamellar armor, making it more of a base for armor than armor itself. In the realms, however, light leather is very common amongst spell-casters, largely because the material allows for a very decorative (i.e. badass) look

2-point armor is what fighters wear, and I cannot adequately express to you the humongous difference that exists in that one extra point. You will no doubt learn it on your own. The general trade-off for 2-point armor is that it is in some way heavier or more cumbersome than 1-point. Modern developments in materials have closed that gap a bit, but have widened the gap for cost. With 2-point armor everything is a trade-off. You can have armor for \$30 if you want to make some chain for yourself, but it will be heavy. You can also have chain that is almost weightless but it will cost you \$400. Chain mail is easy to move in but it destroys your ability to be stealthy. Leather makes no noise at all, but always restricts your movement in some fashion. These are not universally true, but there will always be some sort of balance between weight, movement, aesthetics, noise, cost, durability, storage, how hot it keeps you in the summer, how cold it makes you in the winter... no armor has everything. Since 2-point armor tends to be heavier-weight by nature, a common concern with it is that it be light enough to feel weapon blows through. For that reason plate-type armor has never been highly regarded in the Realms, and it is uncommon to see people using it.

In the older days of Realms, it was a couple years before any newbie came upon their first suit of 2-point armor. You couldn't just buy armor online, and most people had to make simple chain mail themselves, even winding and cutting the wire on their own to make rings. Times have, of course, changed, and most people have 2-point, bought or made from cheap materials, within a couple months. That is the opportunity I have tried to give you with your studded leather, but it's not too early to start thinking about the other things you want. The following are common types of 2-point armor.

Chain Mail: This is the real meat-and-potatoes of realms armor. Essentially it is made of thousands of metal rings all interlinked in one of many patterns. Sometimes people use very large rings (over 1", for example) and refer to the armor as ring mail. Commonly, chain mail will have short sleeves and go down to mid-thigh, covering several hit locations. Sometimes people have chain mail with long sleeves or that goes down past their knees for even better coverage. By far, the most prolific head armor in the game is the chain mail coif. The most common materials that chain mail is made out of are steel and aluminum. Steel chain mail is heavy, and if you get normal steel it will rust pretty quickly. Galvanized steel prevents rusting for many years, but also leaves nickel residue on your garb so you have to wash it a lot. Stainless steel is a great material all around, but is very expensive. Aluminum is light, but the malleability of the metal often causes the rings to pull apart in the high-stress areas of a suit. Machine made chain mail made out of any of these materials often has welded or riveted links, which increase the durability of the suit tremendously, but also the cost. People still knit their own chain mail, and it is still a cheap, albeit time consuming method of getting armor, but it is becoming more and more common to buy it outright. You can get a shirt and coif on eBay for about \$100 for the set, and it is hard to beat a price like that for something you will use for years. Historically, chain mail was very common, especially in India where its construction was elevated to an art form. Chain shirts were commonly worn under suits of plate to provide protection to the articulated areas that plate could not cover well.





Heavy Leather: Heavy leather is at least 10 oz in weight. It should be noted that anything thicker than 15 oz would be unsuitable, because it would be difficult to feel shots through it. People love heavy leather because it is possible to create some very aesthetically beautiful suits of armor. Even if people wear some other type of torso armor, such as chain mail, people will often still have leather bracers, as they are a pretty accessible item, buyable at almost any renaissance faire. Thick leather, however, is not cheap, and professionally made suits of leather armor are one of the most expensive things you could ever buy. For that reason almost all leather armor in the Realms is hand-made by the player wearing it, some of it excellently crafted and amazingly complex. Because the material is expensive, and the tools it requires are many and diverse, making suits of heavy leather are generally not the domain of beginners, though something simple like bracers certainly can be. Another way to make heavy armor is to take a slightly lighter grade of leather (say 6-8oz) and harden it by melting wax into it or boiling it. These are advanced leatherworking techniques which were more common back when the only way you could have 2-point leather armor was by hardening it. The rule has relaxed a bit so you don't have to be an expert crafter to have the armor you want. Just like light leather, heavy leather was very common in ancient history, but gave way to lamellar armor soon afterwards (see below). Stylized kinds of leather armor that look like suits of gothic plate are a complete anachronism, only existing in the world of fantasy. Luckily, that's what we play in, so they're really cool.

Lamellar Armor: Lamellar armor (from the Latin: Lmella, meaning a small thin plate) is a catch-all term which means any type of leather that has other components attached to it. As expected, when you attach other, more rigid components to the base suit, it increases both the trauma-reducing and the penetration-stopping properties of the armor. For the purposes of Realms, lamellar armor also includes attaching rigid components to padded armor or heavy cloth. The rule in Realms that allows lamellar armor to count as two-point is that the rigid components have to be within one inch of one another. Studded leather is a popular type of lamellar armor, and is both inexpensive and relatively quick to make, so is heartily recommended for a newbie's first armor. Brigandine armor (from old French, meaning armor for a skirmisher, or brigand) is made by attaching small plates to the base cloth or leather and can also be cheap to make, however does require a lot of sewing or similar leatherworking techniques as leather armor. Other types of Realms lamellar have included attaching large rings to a suit or very thick leather plates riveted to a thinner leather under-armor. "Scale" armor is typically made from metal, plastic, or thick-leather scales stitched or riveted to a thin suit of leather or cloth. Samurai Armor that has been used in the realms has been made of plastic plates that are woven together with string/cord and may not have had any backing to it at all. Historically, lamellar armor dominated the rank-and-file portion of the battlefield for centuries, well after the invention of chain mail and plate, largely because all-metal armors were simply unaffordable to the non-professional soldier.



The above are the most basic armor types in the game, but it is only the briefest display of diversity. Players have made some very impressive suits of armor by combining the above types, experimenting with new materials, and refining the various crafting skills involved. If you have some new ideas that you would like to try, I would be happy to talk to you about them, and help you experiment with ways to make them work. Some of the best innovations in the game have come from new players with new ideas, so don't be timid about stepping up.

One of the sources of pride for a Realms player is in crating his/her own suit of armor. However many people have decided to take advantage of the modern convenience of armor purchasable over the internet. Following, I attempt to give you some advice on buying the latter, and supplies for the former.

Buying armor on eBay is a great idea. There is a ton of stuff available, bracers and chain mail coifs being especially prolific. Search using the terms "larp armor" "leather armor" or "chain mail" and see what you get. The following are pictures of stuff up there are the time of this composition. All of the following are currently going for about \$100.



Remember, with eBay you should always take note of the shipping price. It is very common for armor coming out of Asia to have a \$2 bid and a \$300 shipping price. Also, a lot of the armor up there is for SCA, meaning that it is specifically designed to protect against blows, and therefore render light weapons contact like ours undetectable. This and the plate armor that is often on eBay are unsuitable for Realms.

The following are some well-known websites to purchase new armor from. This stuff looks excellent but is rarely inexpensive. Many of these sites have a turn-around time on getting you your armor, because they produce it to order after you purchase it.

[Wolfgaard Armory](#) – Some incredible looking professional leather armor.

[Wholesale Armor](#) – Good prices on standard chain mail pieces.

[Azon Butcher Mail](#) – This is extremely light machined chain mail made for butchers.

[Museum Replicas](#) – They have some high-quality, inexpensive items.

[Schmitthenner Armory](#) – All types of armor, professionally made, but not cheap.

[Knight's Edge](#) – Well made chain mail at average prices. Riveted mail is available.

For those of you who would like to try your hand at making your own armor, the following are links to some materials sites that you should really take a look at. If you are interested in armor construction, I recommend that you contact me with your ideas so I can give you some tips and provide you with any instruction that you might require. The skills involved in making armor are not hard to acquire, fun to practice, and will be useful for your entire career in the game... perhaps even beyond.

Chain Mail: Although you can make your own links by buying wire, wrapping it around a metal dowel, and cutting the rings by hand or with a power tool, most people these days tend to buy pre-cut rings. There are countless metals available to make chain-mail out of. Remember to read up on the properties of whatever metal you choose. It's oxidation (rusting) properties have a direct impact on the longevity of what you make. The malleability of the metal used will impact the durability. Never get steel that isn't galvanized or stainless, nor use aluminum that is any thinner than 16 gauge (higher numbers are thinner).

[The Ring Lord](#) – A great site for machine-cut rings in various materials.

Leather and Lamellar Armor: Leather and the tools involved to work it can be very expensive, but it is also very easy to find good deals. Although the below links point to [Tandy Leather](#) to show you examples of what you need, you can often find cheaper versions on eBay or in person at craft stores.

Rivets are the basic component of attaching leather (and other things) to leather. They are composed of two halves, one which compresses inside the other when hit with a hammer. Basic tools for using rivets are a rivet-setter and an anvil. There are also special hole-punches for making the holes in the leather the rivets will go through.

[Rivets and Setters](#); [Mini Anvil](#); [Hole Punches](#)

Of course, the armor you make is going to have to be secured to your body some how. Two very common methods of doing this are with buckles or by lacing them up. With buckles, you create something of a mini belt which secures one side of the leather to the other. Laces work just like they do in a shoe. Grommets/eyelets are used with a special setter to create holes for the lacing.

[Buckles](#); [Grommets, Eyelets, and Setter](#)

If you are going to make lamellar armor then you might be looking for studs. A principle concern with studs is that they should not be pointed sharply enough to cause damage to weapons (or people). There are different kinds of studs as far as how they attach to the leather, but the simplest kind has two tabs coming off of the back which you can push (or cut slits for) through the leather and fold over on the other side.

[Studs and Spikes](#) – A site with very good prices on the fold-over studs. [This](#) is the model we used for the SMAC armor making workshop.

Another way you can make lamellar armor is by using plastic or metal plates. The common brigandine in the realms uses 2" wide plastic squares sewed into cloth or riveted into leather. Any rigid plastic will work for this purpose, but for the efficient cutting of 2" squares I usually purchase strips of plastic that are 2" wide, chop them off at 2" intervals and round the corners with a pair of scissors. 1" squares are often useful for the jointed parts of the armor that require extra articulation.

[McMaster-Carr Industrial Materials](#) – This is a great place to get all sorts of bulk materials, including plastics. For the 2” strip materials I recommend, search for part number 8782K31, a cheap polypropylene which works very well. You can also use the index on the front page to find whatever other plastic or metal you want to use. The raw materials section is on the bottom right on the front page.

[Plastic Lamellar](#) – Here is a new site that I think is very impressive. They specialize in making plastic plates that are supposed to be strung together to make simple lamellar armor. These plates can be strung on shoelace without any backing or can be riveted or stitched to leather or cloth. The prices are very reasonable, and they are large enough plates that putting it all together should be relatively quick. Check out their gallery to see how the plates can be used.

Of course, the main component to leather armor is leather. The best leather for our purposes is cow shoulders and butts. For 1-point armor, thick suede from pigs is also suitable. As I specified above, 2-point armor should be 8-10 oz, and 1-point should be 4-5 oz. When you buy leather, you often have a choice between vegetable tanned or oil tanned. Vegetable tanned leather uses the natural tannin in plant matter; while oil (or chrome or brain) tanned uses chrome salts and natural oils (yes, from brains). The oil tanned leather is generally better because it is suppler to work with and is more resistant to the weather, something your armor will be seeing a lot of.

[Garlin Neumann Leathers](#) – This site has some of the best deals in leather on the web. They do not have a web order form, so you have to call them up and describe what you want, but they have it for a fraction of the cost of other sites. They also have a [handy guide](#) to leather measurements and terms.

And that is a whole lot of information for you in one document. You now know the bulk of everything there is to know about armor in the Realms. If you have any questions before you buy something, want to bounce around ideas as you design something to make yourself, or want to learn the crafting skills involved in the various disciplines of armor-crafting, I can always make time to talk or teach.

Good luck everyone, see you on the field.

Jason