



Bullet Points

Clever Combat Tricks

by Charles Ryan

Welcome to the ninth installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm Charles Ryan, one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**. I'm here to answer your questions about the game, offer advice on tricky issues, and give you a little peek into the minds of the designers. You'll be hearing from me every couple of weeks.

If you've checked out the earlier installments of *Bullet Points*, you know the format. Every two weeks I pick an issue that's provoked a lot of questions or comments, begin with a general discussion of the topic, and then answer specific questions related to it. If there are any unrelated but pressing questions in my mailbox, I might tackle them at the end of the column, but only if there's room and they can't wait for an appropriately themed column.

Clever Combat Tricks

I've received numerous questions recently about unusual or interesting game situations. Some have described issues not dealt with in the rules, while others have requested clarifications. I have a bunch of them, so let's get right to it!

Questions and Answers



A bad guy is hiding behind a hostage. If I shoot at the bad guy, how do I determine whether the attack hits the hostage instead?

Any time a good guy is in the way of your ranged attack against a bad guy, two modifiers always come into play -- specifically, those for cover and shooting into melee.

The modifier for shooting into melee is a straight -4 penalty on your attack roll. It applies any time a good guy is in the same square as or a square adjacent to a bad guy. It applies even if the good guy is completely out of the way (on the far side of the bad guy, for example). This penalty represents the extra care you have to take to avoid having a stray shot hit your friend. If you have the Precise Shot feat, you don't take this penalty.

The cover modifier for a target hiding behind another character (including a hostage) works like any other cover situation: The GM determines how much cover the bad guy gets from the people between him and the attacker. Generally, standing behind a creature of the same size category gives the target one-half cover, which imposes a -4 penalty on any attack roll to hit him. However, the amount of cover a creature provides is subject to GM adjudication, so the GM can decide that the bad guy gets more or less cover than this depending on the situation.

To determine whether an attack that misses the target hits the cover (in this case, the hostage), simply

determine whether it would have hit if the cover hadn't been there. If so, it hits the cover; if not, it hits nothing at all. For example, suppose the bad guy's Defense is 17. You have the Precise Shot feat, which negates the penalty for shooting into melee, so only the -4 penalty for cover applies to your attack roll. That means you would need an attack roll result of 21 to hit him. If you get a 19 for your attack, you miss the bad guy but hit the cover, since a 19 would have hit the bad guy if the hostage hadn't been there.

The two penalty sources stack, so if you don't have Precise Shot and you're shooting at a bad guy who has one-half cover from a hostage, you have a total penalty of -8 on your attack roll. But for the purpose of determining whether a missed attack hits the hostage, the above guidelines apply only to the cover penalty, not to the shooting into melee penalty.

Let's look at the above example again when both penalties apply. With the bad guy's Defense of 17, a -4 penalty for shooting into melee, and a -4 penalty for one-half cover, you need a result of 25 to hit him. It's most logical to assume that the cover penalty is the one that applies last. Thus, any result below 21 misses completely; any result from 21 to 24 hits the cover, and any result of 25 or higher hits the bad guy. In other words, only those misses resulting from the cover penalty hit the hostage. So in this situation, the attack roll of 19 would not hit the hostage; it would miss completely.

How does being underwater protect you from attacks?

Water provides both concealment and DR. Clear water provides one-half concealment to a creature that's barely submerged, three-quarters concealment to one that's submerged below 5 feet, and nine-tenths concealment to one that's below 10 feet. Murky water increases the concealment by one category (to three-quarters for a creature that's barely submerged, for example). Water also provides 1 point of DR per foot of depth. Thus, someone swimming at a depth of 5 feet in clear water benefits from a miss chance of 30% and gains DR 5.

The rules for disarm attempts make it clear that the reactionary disarm arising from a failed disarm attempt does not provoke an attack of opportunity. However, the rules for trip attempts don't include the same notation. Does the reactionary trip attack provoke an attack of opportunity?

When you make a trip attack, you begin by making an unarmed touch attack, and this is what provokes the attack of opportunity. You then go on to make an opposed Strength check. If you lose, the target gets to make an opposed Strength check to trip you, but no unarmed touch attack is required. Thus, the opponent does not provoke an attack of opportunity from you.

If a character takes the Weapon Focus feat for his rifle, does its bonus apply to all forms of attack with the rifle, including rifle butt or fixed bayonet melee attacks?

No. If two functions of a weapon require separate proficiency feats, a single Weapon Focus feat does not cover both. In this case, shooting a rifle requires the Personal Firearms Proficiency feat, clubbing someone with the rifle butt requires the Simple Weapons Proficiency feat, and using a fixed bayonet requires the Archaic Weapons Proficiency feat.

Sometimes weapons have more than one function, but all of them are covered under a single proficiency feat. In such cases, the Weapon Focus feat for the weapon's primary use applies to all uses.

 **My character doesn't have any ranks in Sleight of Hand, but his buddy does. I want to carry a concealed weapon. Can his friend conceal the weapon for him?**

A character cannot use Sleight of Hand to conceal other characters' weapons for them. The skill involves not just hiding the weapon, but also moving and wearing the weapon in a way that prevents other people from noticing it.


For characters who don't have ranks in Sleight of Hand, I recommend stacking up lots of bonuses -- carry Tiny weapons, wear loose or bulky clothing, use a concealed carry holster, and so forth.

 **I want to plant some evidence on a bad guy. How do I do that?**

You can use Sleight of Hand to plant an item on another character. Your opponent makes a Spot check to detect the attempt.

You get a modifier based on the size of the object (see Table 4-3: Concealing Weapons and Objects). To successfully plant the object, you must get a check result of 20 or higher. The opponent detects the attempt if her Spot check result beats your Sleight of Hand check result, regardless of whether you successfully plant the object.


A planted object is concealed (see Concealed Weapons and Objects). If you don't care about concealing the object (for example, if you're planting a "kick me" sign on the target's back, or slipping a gun into the target's coat pocket where others will be able to see it), you gain a +5 bonus on your Sleight of Hand check. This bonus stacks with the modifier for the object's size.

 **Are guns considered melee weapons or ranged weapons for disarming purposes? Does the answer change depending on whether the weapon was last positioned for a melee attack (pistol whip) or ranged attack (shooting)?**

You have the right idea. The default answer is that a firearm is a ranged weapon; therefore you would normally use the rules for disarming opponents with ranged weapons. However, if the opponent last used the weapon for a melee attack (that is, a pistol whip, rifle butt, or fixed bayonet attack), you would treat the firearm as a melee weapon.

 **Do you use your Strength or Dexterity modifier when throwing a weapon?**

You use your Dexterity modifier for the attack roll. In this regard, thrown weapons are no different from any other ranged attack. But you add your Strength modifier to the damage roll.

 **"Start/complete full-round action" is a move action. Does this mean I can attack and then use a move action to start a full attack? If so, when do I get to make my attack rolls for it -- during the first round, or in the second round, when I finish my full round action?**

First of all, "start/complete a full-round action" should be designated as an attack action, not a move action. Secondly, the text isn't quite clear. It should specify that when you split up a full-round action, the results don't take effect until the completion round.

That said, the answer to your first question is no. Certain types of actions can't be split up over 2 rounds, even using the "start/complete full-round action" option. You can't run, make a full attack, withdraw, or make a charge over 2 rounds.

 **Do attacks with brass knuckles provoke attacks of opportunity, even though they deal lethal damage? When used with the Brawl feat, brass knuckles increase the base damage dealt by +1 -- so is that 1d6+1 or 1d3+1 points of lethal damage? Do brass knuckles have any effect on the Improved Brawl or the Combat Martial Arts feats?**

Attacks made with brass knuckles are unarmed attacks. Thus, they provoke attacks of opportunity, and you cannot make attacks of opportunity while fighting with brass knuckles.

When used with the Brawl feat, brass knuckles deal 1d3+1 points of lethal damage (not including Strength bonus). You gain no additional benefit from brass knuckles for having the Improved Brawl feat, and there is no benefit to using them with the Combat Martial Arts feat.

 **A Barrett Light 50 and a machine gun are Huge. The rules say that this means a bipod is necessary to use them. What rules are there for this?**

A bipod must rest on something. That means the weapon must be fired either from a prone position, or from a position (say, in a window ledge or on a wall) where the bipod can be rested at shoulder height. As noted in the rules, dropping to prone is a free action, but standing up is a move action.

Do you have a rules question about the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*?
Send it to bulletpoints@wizards.com , and then check back here every
other week for the latest batch of answers!

About the Author

Charles Ryan has been designing and editing games for more than twelve years. His credits include such diverse titles as the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, *The Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game*, *Deadlands*, *Millennium's End*, *The Last Crusade*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Dune: Chronicles of the Imperium*, and *Star Trek: Red Alert!*, to name just a few. Charles served as Chairman of the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design, the professional organization of the games industry, from 1996 through 2001. He lives in Kent, Washington with his lovely wife Tammie, three cats, and a dog. He works for Wizards of the Coast, Inc.



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