



Bullet Points

Combat

by Charles Ryan

Welcome to the thirtieth 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.

Combat

In this issue I'm covering questions related to combat. I've dealt with this topic a number of times, but combat is one of the trickiest elements of the game and one that has a direct impact on life and death for characters, so it generates no end of questions!

Questions and Answers

I have no general points to make on this subject, so we'll go straight to the questions. I'll handle a bunch of questions related to grapple checks first, then move on to a variety of other combat-related issues.



Can a Smart hero apply the bonus from his exploit weakness talent to grapple checks?

Absolutely.



Can a hero with the Unbalance Opponent feat deny her opponent his Strength bonus on grapple checks used to attack her?

Sure. Though a grapple check is not a melee attack per se, it works like any other attack in terms of how it interacts with character abilities or feats unless otherwise noted (see Power Attack question below for an exception).



What happens if a character attempts to achieve a particular result (such as dealing damage) with a grapple check and fails? Does the defender get a chance to escape or receive any other sort of benefit?

Nope.

How does spellcasting or manifesting psionic powers work while the caster or manifester is grappling?

Involvement in a grapple distracts the FX user and prevents the successful use of the FX ability. A distracted spellcaster or manifester can attempt a Concentration check (DC 20; see the table on page 53 of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*) to overcome the distraction and successfully use the spell or power. If the check succeeds, the FX ability works normally; if not, the FX ability fails, and the spell or power points are wasted.

If a hero pins an enemy, does he need to check to see whether he maintains the pin each round, or does he automatically maintain it until the subject breaks it?

Succeeding on a pin holds the opponent effectively immobile for 1 round. If your hero wants to continue to keep his opponent pinned, he must succeed on another pin attempt the next round. So yes, you do have to roll to "maintain" the pin each round. Furthermore, the opponent can attempt to break the pin on her turn each round, so you'll end up making a lot of rolls to keep someone pinned for a while.

The rules say that when a grappling character has more than one attack per round, she can use subsequent attacks to make additional grapple checks for dealing damage and the like. Are these checks opposed by the enemy's full grapple bonus or his own secondary attacks? What if he doesn't have secondary attacks? Does he merely take a -5 penalty on his grapple check?

Grapple checks are always opposed by the opponent's full grapple bonus. Opposing your character's check isn't the same as making an attack, so the number of attacks he has per round makes no difference.

Can a character use the Power Attack feat to take a penalty on a grapple check and receive a bonus on the damage roll?

No. A grapple check is different from a melee attack roll, and Power Attack applies only to the latter.

Suppose my Strong hero pins an NPC Fast hero. My friend (who is also a Fast hero) wants to put her gun up to the opponent's head and pull the trigger. What rules cover this situation? Aid another seems insignificant, and the grappling NPC is not helpless, so coup de grace isn't applicable.


You're correct -- a pinned opponent isn't helpless, so a coup de grace isn't appropriate. Nor could your Strong hero attempt to aid another in the attack; that's not one of the options allowed for grapplers. That doesn't mean the opponent is hard to hit, though. In addition to having no Dexterity bonus (because he's grappling), he takes a -4 penalty to his Defense for being pinned.

Your friend could still miss, since a pinned opponent isn't held completely motionless. He may not be able to take any offensive action, but he's still struggling and trying to defend himself. With all that movement, your friend can't simply step up and calmly execute him. That's life.


If a character makes a successful hit against Defense 10 using autofire, each opponent in the targeted squares gets only a Reflex save against it. While that save accounts for each target's Dexterity, shouldn't protection from armor or other sources also come into play?

In an absolutely realistic sense, probably yes. But in the d20 System (**D&D** as well as **d20 Modern**), armor isn't accounted for in reflexive reactions beyond the limitations it can put on a character's Dexterity bonus. Like many other elements of the rules, it's a tradeoff intended to keep the game quick and fun.


It's strange that people often comment on this issue when thinking about autofire, but they don't seem bothered by it in relation to other forms of damage. Damage from grenades, dynamite, car accidents, *fireballs*, and many other kinds of attacks should, in a perfectly realistic simulation, be mitigated somewhat by armor. For some reason, it doesn't seem to bother people that armor isn't accounted for in those Reflex saves, but autofire is a different matter.

 **Since a coup de grace is a full-round action, would it be reasonable to allow characters with multiple attacks to make multiple coup de grace attempts?**

No. A coup de grace is not an attack; it's a different type of action that takes a character's full turn to perform. In other words, the character can do a coup de grace (and take a 5-foot step, if desired) on his turn, but nothing else -- just as with any other full-round action. No matter how many attacks the character is entitled to in a full attack action, performing a coup de grace against a single helpless opponent is still a full-round action.

 **Can a character voluntarily fail saving throws? I have a snake-blooded GM character with a +2 Fortitude saving throw bonus (+4 against poison). As a member of the Infinite Serpents, he wears coils of the faithful. He would rather die than allow himself to be captured and questioned by my heroes, but the DC to resist the small viper's poison is only 11. Can he reliably commit suicide, or does he have to attempt a save, which he's going to succeed on half the time?**


You can always choose to have a character fail a saving throw. So in this case, your GM character can commit suicide rather than be captured, without having to worry that he might accidentally save against the poison.

 **What are the penalties for shooting at multiple targets with ranged weapons? Let's say my hero is fighting with two pistols (Beretta 92Fs, which are light weapons) and has the Two-Weapon Fighting feat. She takes no additional penalties (other than those associated with using two weapons) if she fires both weapons at the same target. But what if she makes the two attacks against two different targets? Does it matter if they're far apart? What if they're flanking her on opposite sides?**


Your character chooses the target of each attack independently of her other attacks, whether they occur during different rounds, during the same round (because her high base attack bonus gives her multiple attacks), or because she's attacking with multiple weapons. She takes no special penalties for choosing a separate target for her second attack.

 **When fired upon with autofire from an automatic weapon, a character in the targeted 10-foot-by-10-foot area must make a DC 15 Reflex save. Does success mean that character takes half the damage from the attack, or none at all?**

He takes none at all. When an attack deals half damage on a failed save, the rules usually make that clear. If the rules say, "save or take damage," that means that if he saves, he doesn't take any damage.

 **What happens to a character who succeeds on the Reflex save against autofire because of cover? Say someone fires on autofire at my character. She gets a bonus on her Reflex save due to the cover provided by an object outside the targeted area. What happens to the object? Does it take damage? What if a person is giving her cover?**

Nothing happens to the object (or person, if that's the source of the cover). Your character was fortunate enough to dodge the incoming autofire, and the cover added to her good fortune. But that doesn't mean the covering object (or person) took a bullet for her.

 **Recently my GM and I had a disagreement about the Burst Fire feat. I was under the impression that the advantage of burst fire was that it allowed an autofire attack against a single target, but my GM said that burst fire was a normal attack. I understand his position, but I still feel that the phrasing in the feat description leads to some confusion. Which interpretation is correct?**

The Burst Fire feat works exactly as written. Your character makes an attack against the target with a -4 penalty. If successful, the attack deals +2 dice of damage. That's it -- it's not related to the autofire rules. (If we'd been as careful as we should have, the opening line of the feat description would have said "When using a firearm with the *automatic* setting. . . ," and the word "autofire" would have been left out of the feat description altogether.)

Do you have a rules question about the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game? Send it to bulletpoints@wizards.com. For the quickest possible answer, please put the topic of your question in the subject line and keep the question as succinct as possible. If you have more than one question, feel free to send two or more emails -- but for best results please include only one question per email unless your questions are very closely related to one another. Please don't expect a direct answer by email. Check back here every other week for the latest batch of answers!

About the Author

Charles Ryan was one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**. He has been designing and editing games for more than twelve years. His other credits include such diverse titles as the *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, two rats, and a dog. He works for Wizards of the Coast, Inc.



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