



Notes from the Bunker

Cinematic Maneuvers

by Rich Redman

Happy Holidays and welcome to my bunker. As one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**, and a veteran of real-world modern combat (having served as a tank platoon leader in Operation: Desert Storm), I'm in a unique position to offer insights into the game.

Holidays can leave people feeling pretty stressed out. Separation from family and loved ones, the pressures of holiday obligations (including decorating, cooking, and gift buying), travel, and close encounters with relatives you may not particularly like can all make you feel like hitting someone. So let's talk about doing just that with our old friend, [Biff Hardslab](#).

Example:

GM: A guard runs past you. . . .

Player 1: Biff Hardslab takes his attack of opportunity and clotheslines the guy.

Player 2: You can't do that. We're not in combat.

Player 1: Fine, Biff does it during the surprise round.

GM: Okay, the guy is flat-footed. Roll for your unarmed strike. Biff's got Brawl, right?

Player 1: No, he's got Combat Martial Arts. Biff gets a 17, which should hit a flat-footed guard. He deals 7 points of damage.

GM: Great. The guard looks shocked at the sudden attack, but hardly spares Biff a glance as he sprints. . . .

Player 1: Wait, wait, wait! Biff *clotheslined* the guy - smacked him right in the neck with his outstretched arm! If he hit, the guard should be flat on his back with a crushed trachea!

Player 2: Biff is only 6th level, bro. You can't expect him to kill with one hit!

Player 1: Sure he can! That's what a clothesline is all about!

*While they argue, Biff's long-suffering GM furiously flips through the Combat chapter of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game** looking for a way to adjudicate this situation.*

Cinematic Maneuvers

You don't need a book of rules on martial arts to liven up your combat encounters. The rules you need to handle many of the moves you see on TV and in the movies are right there in the pages of the **d20 Modern** game. The examples that follow are meant to excite your imagination as a player and guide GMs in adjudicating special maneuvers.

Training

For the most part, these maneuvers require training or combat experience, represented by feats such as Brawl and Combat Martial Arts. An untrained character can attempt them but should take a -4 penalty on the appropriate roll when doing so.

The Clothesline

Biff's GM eventually realized that the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* already contains all the rules needed to simulate this kind of attack. They can be found in the description of Overrun in the Special Attacks section of Chapter Five: Combat. The rules in the Trip section govern whether the attack knocks down either the attacker or defender.

After a bit of study, the GM ruled that a character with the Brawl or Combat Martial Arts feat could attempt a clothesline as long as either the attacker or the defender moved at least 10 feet. (Normally, the attacker would be required to move at least 10 feet.) The GM also told Biff's player that the maneuver could be used only in a surprise round or as an attack of opportunity. In my own campaign, I would also rule that the attacker cannot combine a clothesline with fighting defensively or total defense.

The Haymaker

For a haymaker, the attacker reaches way back for a big windup, and then delivers a tremendous blow. In reality, no one ever uses this maneuver because it's too slow and leaves the attacker wide open. However, **d20 Modern** is a game, not reality.

Anyone with the Power Attack feat and either the Brawl or the Combat Martial Arts feat can attempt this maneuver as a full-round action that provokes attacks of opportunity. To simulate a haymaker blow, the attacker subtracts some amount from his Defense (maximum equals his total class bonus to Defense). He then applies that same number as a bonus on the damage roll for his next melee attack. The attacker must declare that he is using this attack before making the attack roll and before he has provoked any attacks of opportunity for making an unarmed strike. The penalty to Defense lasts until the attacker's next action. The attacker may combine this maneuver with Power Attack or use it separately, but he may not combine it with fighting defensively or total defense. A haymaker is an all-out attack!

Hockey Shirt

At least once in every game of hockey, a player throws off his gloves and pulls an opponent's jersey over his head before pummeling him. This maneuver, known as hockey shirt, works only if the defender is wearing a piece of substantial clothing, such as a shirt or jacket, on his upper body.

Anyone with the Brawl feat can attempt this maneuver. To do so, the attacker makes an unarmed melee touch attack against the defender, just as if she were attempting a grab to start a grapple. If the attack

succeeds, the attacker and defender make opposed grapple checks. If the attacker wins, she pulls the defender's garment up so that it covers his arms and head.

At that point, the defender is treated as entangled (see the Condition Summary sidebar in Chapter Five: Combat of **d20 Modern**). While he is so entangled, anyone he attacks has one-quarter concealment (10% miss chance) against him. If the attacker releases the garment after entangling the defender, the latter can take a move action to completely remove it or to wear it normally (no check necessary).

The attacker can, however, continue to hold onto the garment by making an opposed grapple check each round. As long as the attacker wins the check, the opponent is treated as grappled. He can, however, attempt an Escape Artist check (DC 10 + attacker's grapple modifier) as an attack action each round to slip out of the entangling garment.

Jacket Pin

This maneuver is the reverse of hockey shirt. An open garment, such as a jacket or unbuttoned shirt, is pulled down behind the defender's back so that it pins her arms. This maneuver works only if the defender is wearing clothing that is not fastened (or is fastened insecurely) on her upper body. Clothing that is zipped up, held closed with Velcro, or secured by multiple zippers, buckles, or other fasteners is not subject to this maneuver. (Note that some forms of body armor have Velcro closures.) The GM and players must decide how their characters wear their clothing, preferably prior to any attempts to use this maneuver.

Any character who has the Brawl feat can attempt a jacket pin. To do so, the attacker makes an unarmed melee touch attack against the defender, just as if he were attempting a grab to start a grapple. If the attack succeeds, the attacker and defender make opposed grapple checks. If the attacker wins, he pulls the defender's garment down so that it pins her arms.

At that point, the defender is treated as grappled, except that she does not lose any Dexterity bonus to Defense. If the attacker releases his hold on the garment, the defender can take a move action to completely remove it or to wear it normally (no check necessary).

The attacker can, however, continue to hold onto the garment by making an opposed grapple check each round. As long as the attacker wins the check, both opponents are treated as grappled. The defender can break the grapple normally.

Rope Swing

Heroes and villains in the movies are always grabbing onto hanging ropes or vines and swinging from one place to another. This maneuver is known as the rope swing.

All that's necessary to manage this trick is a successful Climb check (DC 10 if using two hands to hold onto the rope or DC 15 if using one). Thus, even an untrained character can attempt a rope swing.

When an attacker swings on a rope or other flexible object, she moves in a straight line. The midpoint of the swing is the spot where the rope is affixed, and the endpoint is double the distance from the start of the swing to the midpoint. The character's path passes under the midpoint and then rises again to a height level with her starting point, assuming that the motion doesn't bring her into contact with the ground or some large object. The character can continue swinging back and forth as long as she keeps making Climb

checks, but the distance swung in each direction drops by 5 feet each round until the rope simply stops.

A swinging character who fails a Climb check by 5 or more loses her grip on the rope at some point during the swing. If she is near an object, or if the rope is long enough to catch at some lower point, she can attempt a DC 15 Reflex save to catch the object or rope and negate the fall.

A failure by less than 5 results in the character landing prone at her destination. She can choose to release the rope at any point in the swing and fall the appropriate distance, taking damage normally. The distance covered with a swing counts toward the distance the character can move during a round, just as the distance of a jump does.

If a character attacks an opponent while swinging on a rope, her movement stops at that point. On the following round, she may opt to continue the swing, making another Climb check to determine her success at holding the rope. If she has the Shot on the Run or Spring Attack feat, she can swing, attack, and then continue with her swing, assuming that she has enough movement left to do so. She provokes attacks of opportunity normally when swinging on a rope, but she can use the Tumble skill to avoid such attacks.

A character is treated as climbing while swinging on a rope (any opponent gains a +2 bonus on attack rolls against her, she does not get her Dexterity bonus to Defense, and she must succeed on a Climb check when damaged or lose her grip on the rope).

The Rug Trick

Lots of heroic combats feature an attacker pulling a rug (or some other flat object that the defenders are standing on) out from under them. This trick is so simple that even an untrained character can attempt it.

The rug trick is a full-round action that must be performed on the attacker's turn. Thus, the attacker can do nothing else that round other than take a free 5-foot step. To perform the rug trick, the attacker must make a successful Strength check (DC 15 + the number of defenders). A Strong hero can use talents from the Extreme Effort tree in conjunction with this maneuver.

A successful Strength check using this maneuver counts as the unarmed melee touch attack that initiates a trip attempt. The attacker must then follow up with a Strength check opposed separately by each defender's Dexterity check (always use Dexterity in this case, even if an opponent's Strength modifier is higher). Size modifiers apply as per the trip rules. Any defender against whom the attacker's Strength check fails does not fall prone, but that failure has no effect on any of the other defenders. No matter how many times the attacker's Strength check fails, the defenders cannot immediately react and try to trip the attacker.

Grappling and Guns

Lots of action movies feature scenes in which two characters wrestle for control of a single firearm. Sometimes one character manages to aim and fire the weapon even though he's technically not the one holding it.

As soon as I started thinking about this concept, I knew a number of problematical issues would arise, so I consulted with Charles Ryan. We agreed that the grappling rules actually refer to light *melee* weapons, and

that characters should not be able to use firearms when grappling. This column, however, is all about options, so let's talk about some of the repercussions of using firearms in grapples.

Firing into a Grapple

If a character wishes to shoot a grappled opponent, everyone who is grappled is treated as having three-quarters cover (+7 bonus to Defense). Unless the attacker has the Precise Shot feat, he takes a -4 penalty on his attack roll for firing into melee -- even if he's part of the grapple. If he is part of it, every opponent in the grapple gets an attack of opportunity against him, even though grappled characters normally do not threaten any squares. If he isn't involved in the grapple, he can stand right next to the square containing the grappling characters and fire without provoking attacks of opportunity.

If the ranged attack hits, the attacker successfully shoots the desired grappler. Otherwise, see Striking the Cover Instead of a Missed Target in Chapter Five: Combat of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* for rules on adjudicating the miss. If the attacker is involved in the grapple, it is possible that he could end up shooting himself.

Firing out of a Grapple

If a grappled character uses a firearm to make a ranged attack on an opponent who is not part of the grapple, then every opponent in the grapple gets an attack of opportunity against him, even though grappled characters normally do not threaten any squares. As with normal ranged combat, the attacker provokes attacks of opportunity from all opponents capable of making melee attacks against him.

Using an Opponent's Weapon

Sometimes, a character has the chance to pull off that really cool action movie stunt in which she grapples an opponent and uses that person's firearm to shoot another target. If the defender is holding a firearm that counts as a light weapon and the attacker is not pinned, she can use that weapon to attack the defender (see Firing into a Grapple, above) or someone else. To execute this maneuver, the attacker makes an opposed grapple check in place of an attack. If she wins, she immediately makes an attack roll with the weapon at a -4 penalty as part of the same action. Success indicates that she hits the desired target, though this maneuver does not grant her possession of the weapon.

Afterword

As always, the GM is control of what he allows in his campaign. So before you have your hero try the maneuvers discussed above, ask your GM if they're allowed. I hope these tricky tactics inspire you to come up with some of your own.

Again, Happy Holidays!

About the Author

Before [Rich Redman](#) came to the RPG R&D department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., he had been an

Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.'s Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer who has worked on the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**, the **Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game**, and **Dark*Matter**. When he's not working as vice president of [The Game Mechanics](#), a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat.

©1995-2005 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Wizards is headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.