

X-Plorers Advanced Combat

By David Bezio © 2009



The most important part of an *X-plorers* mission is the story that is created jointly by the players and the referee. The most used rules are probably those used for combat. This is because every time those lasers come out there is a chance of a character dying.

The rules presented in the *X-plorers* core rule book are kept purposely simple. It is the author's opinion that they give you everything you need to run quick and descriptive combats and get back to the story part of the mission. An experienced referee should have no problem using his good judgment and the context of those rules to deal with situations that aren't specifically covered.

Still, there are going to be some who aren't satisfied with the guidelines as written. There are also going to be some referees who feel that they need more strict structure and consistent modifiers for situations that will come up time and time again.

What are presented here are totally optional rules classified as "Advanced Combat". It builds off of the core *X-plorers* combat system, but simply predefines things a referee would usually decide

himself (mostly modifiers), and provides some options for people who want more detailed combats.

Miniatures

It is assumed that people will play *X-plorers* without miniatures, but the rules for using them are included in the advanced combat system (although they are still optional). Both techniques have their advantages and disadvantages.

If the referee does opt to use miniatures, it is a good idea only to use them in important or complex scenes. It's not necessary to use them every time a drunk pulls out a gun or a Reaches Rat crawls out from under a cargo lifter. This will slow down the game and might break the dramatic tension that has been established.

Using Miniatures

Miniatures are small (most commonly 15 - 28mm) metal or plastic figures that are painted to look like the PCs, NPCs, or creatures in the game. There are several companies that make really neat looking science fiction miniatures that you can purchase. Alternately, you can use small stand-up cardboard

pieces or chits with a drawing of characters on them. Or, in a squeeze, you could simply use anything small you have lying around, like coins, gaming stones, or any other token.

You generally use miniatures on a large map marked off in 1 inch squares or hexagons with each one representing 2 meters. In this way you can simply count off "squares" when you move or need to know the range to a target. You can also draw the terrain or scenery on the map or, if you have them available, use 3-D representations of the scenery for a really impressive presentation.

Advantages of Using Miniatures

Miniatures can really help with visualization as you can actually see where everything and everyone involved with the battle actually is. There are no questions about what you can and can't do or who has cover or line of sight because all you have to do is look at the map, count the squares or hexes and you will know.

Disadvantages of Using Miniatures

Potential problems are that miniatures can be rather expensive and not everyone likes the hobby of collecting and painting them. Another possible disadvantage is that when you use miniatures, the dynamics of the game change. The focus often shifts more to the game mechanics and the tactical aspects of using them to your advantage. This can be a lot of fun, especially if the combat is large and convoluted, but remember that the main purpose of the combat is to add a dramatic scene to the story you are developing, not turning the story into a board game.

Narration vs. Mechanics

There are two important aspects of combat that should always be considered: Narration and Game Mechanics. Both are important, and neither should be neglected. However, sometimes it is easy to lose sight of the narrative aspects of combat, while putting too much focus on the mechanical side. Enjoying the "game" and tactical aspects of combat is certainly a lot of fun, but adding a bit of narration and role playing drama can really spice things up!

What is more exciting, "I jump behind the skimmer and slap my EU clip into my laser pistol, cursing at Lexus-R the whole time! Once it's loaded I poke my head over the skimmer and yell, '*Last chance to surrender, or my gunner brings in the heavy equipment!*'" ...and then moving the miniature (if using them) and rolling the dice, or "Hmmm, OK, I

move 6 squares this way on my turn, the skimmer should give me cover bonus of +2 to my AC. The next round I'm going to reload my laser pistol. The following round I shoot. I have a +2 basic hit bonus + 1 for my agility, lets see what the d20 rolls."

Of course, always play the way that is most fun for you, but consider trying this as a way to increase the excitement level of the game session. The more you do it, the more you may like it, and the more memorable the game session will be for everyone.

Initiative

If you are going to use the advanced combat system presented here, you should definitely use the optional individual initiative presented in the core rules. This is simply done by having each participant in combat roll 1d6 + BHB (the referee can still roll once for his entire side, to speed things up using the sides highest BHB). Since advanced combat is much more time consuming, it is probably a good idea to roll initiative only once, and keep this order for the entire combat.

Held Initiative

You can choose to act in a later initiative order than you have rolled. Perhaps you want to see what your enemy is going to do or want a friend to take an action first. This is called holding your initiative. Once you do decide you want to act, this becomes your new position in the initiative order until this combat encounter is over.

Hirelings Initiative

If the PCs are employing any hired help or other NPC followers, you should designate which PCs control which NPCs (dividing them as evenly as possible). Do not roll initiative for the NPCs, simply have them go on the same initiative turn as the PC controlling them.

The Combat Round

The combat round is a segment of time that lasts 3 seconds. In a single combat round, every participant in the battle gets a chance to take a turn. On a combatant's turn he can move and perform one other action that is resolved immediately. All of these actions are assumed to be taking place within a split second of each other. Once everyone has taken their turn a new combat round begins using the same initiative order. Combat continues in this manner until the fight is over and one side is defeated, has run away, or surrenders.

On your turn

On their initiative turn a combatant can move and perform one action. While any action that can be performed in about 3 seconds can be attempted, the list below gives the most common ones. Some actions or skill throws may take longer than a single round to perform. These options are covered in the rules that follow.

- Do Nothing
- Hold Initiative
- Special Move
- Draw a Weapon
- Make a Melee Attack
- Make a Ranged Attack
- Attempt a saving/skill throw
- Load an Ammo Clip
- Aim
- Attempt a Miscellaneous Action
- Perform a Free Action

Movement

On a combatant's Initiative turn he can choose to move a distance equal to, or less than, his move (4 meters + agility bonus, for most humans). If adjacent to a foe (in melee combat) the only move options are a *Fighting Withdrawal* or to *Run Away* (Both of which are described below).

Running or Dodging

A combatant who takes no other action his turn other than to move as fast as he can is considered to be running. A running human can move three times as fast as normal. A running target is harder to hit than a stationary one. From the time of their initiative when they start running, until their turn the following round, the runner gains a +2 to AC. If a combatant wants to stay in one place, and avoid getting hit by ranged weapons, he can choose to dodge. Dodging also grants a +2 AC bonus. If a combatant chooses to run and dodge simultaneously they only move 2 times their movement rate, but are granted a +3 AC bonus.

Charge

If an attacker wants to charge quickly into combat and deliver a reckless melee blow in the same round he can do so. The total movement can be twice that normally allowed. The attack itself is wild and the attacker suffers a -2 modifier to his "to hit" roll.

Fighting Withdrawal

If a combatant is adjacent to an opponent (engaged in melee combat) and wants to move without opening himself up, he can perform a

fighting withdrawal. During a fighting withdrawal you back away from your target, but can only move 2 meters.

Run Away!

Sometimes a fight goes bad. If a combatant decides to turn and run (any movement other than a fighting withdrawal) while engaged in melee combat his opponent *immediately* gets one free attack at his backside. This attack is made at a +2 bonus "to hit" and damage. This attack is worked out immediately and does not count as the attacker's action for the round.

Attacking

The most common action in a fight is going to be attacking your opponent. There are two types of attacks: melee and ranged.

Cumulative Modifiers

In the following sections you will find rules for modifiers that are added to or subtracted from AC or the "to hit" roll. These are all cumulative. For example, a combatant running gains a +2 to his AC. If the same combatant was also running through a wooded area which grants cover for a +2 to his AC, he would have a total bonus of +4 to his AC.

Melee Attacks

Anyone who is adjacent to a foe may attack with a melee weapon or natural weapons such as a bite or claws (or unarmed attacks using fists or feet). What follow are some special rules and modifiers that can be applied to melee attacks. Some of these rules will apply to unarmed combat while some apply to melee weapons and some to both.



Drawing a Weapon: It takes one round to pull out, draw, or to ready a melee weapon.

Improvised Weapons: Most Improvised weapons (something not detailed on the weapons list) will count as a club or a knife, depending on if they have a sharp edge or are blunt. Referees must determine the details of other Improvised weapons as needed by looking at the weapons, determining what the improvised weapon is most like, and basing the damage off of those weapons. As a rule of thumb improvised weapons are things that a PC or NPC can pick up and swing or hurl. Things like a broken bottle, hammer, chair leg, steak knife, large wrench, pistol or rifle butt generally cause 1d3 points of damage, while things like a chair, small crate, fire poker, chopping axe, or pointed flagpole might cause 1d6-1.

Unarmed/Unaware opponent: There will be times when one opponent will be armed with a melee weapon while his opponent is unarmed, or the opponent hasn't had time to prepare to defend himself. In this case, the attacker has a +2 modifier "to hit". If the unarmed defender has the martial arts skill, this bonus is negated.

Advantageous Position: A combatant fighting from any tactically advantageous position gains a +1 bonus to his "to hit" and to his AC. An advantageous position is an elevated area such as a hill, mounted, or defending from behind fortified position (like a wall). The referee must determine if a position is important enough to warrant an advantageous position bonus.

Ganging Up: When attackers gang up on a lone opponent they gain a definite advantage. The lone defender is much easier to hit as he must split his defenses among multiple attackers. When two or more combatants are attacking the same target each gains a +1 bonus "to hit" for each additional attacker. There really isn't enough room for more than 4 humans to effectively gang up on one, thus a +3 maximum bonus. Small or tiny creatures can gain a bonus of up to +7 (one in each square surrounding the victim if using miniatures and a map).

Using Two Weapons: Fighting with 2 melee weapons (one in each hand) in one round is allowed, but you suffer a -2 penalty "to hit" for the first attack and a -4 penalty to the second.

Defensive Fighting: A combatant can choose to fight defensively. This means that he is not trying to attack, but simply fend off the attackers blow. A

combatant that chooses to fight defensively gives up his action that combat round and gains a +4 modifier to his AC until his next combat turn.

Blind Fighting: If you can't see the opponent that is attacking you because your vision is impaired by darkness or for some other reason, you are blind fighting. If you have a basic idea of where attacks are coming from you can still attack the opponent, but at a -4 modifier "to hit".

Ranged Attacks

Ranged attacks include anything using a gun, bow and arrow, cannon, or any other projected weapon including thrown items such as grenades. What follow are some special rules and modifiers that can be applied to ranged attacks.

Drawing a Gun: It takes one round to pull out, draw, or to ready a ranged weapon.

Load an Ammo Clip: Shooters must keep careful track of how many shots have been fired during a combat. When the weapon has run out of ammunition a round must be spent to reload or to draw another weapon. You do not have to take a round to "reload" a bow.

Line of Sight: The shooter must have a line of site to his target to shoot at it. This simply means the shooter must be able to see what they are shooting at. This is easy enough to determine if using miniatures. If you can draw a straight line from the shooter to the target, without running into any other interposing figures or terrain features, you have line of sight. Don't forget that a shooter in an elevated position can see over some obstructing terrain or people. If you aren't using miniature figures, the referee will inform you if you have line of site or not. Some interposing terrain doesn't block line of site, but does grant cover (see below).

Aim: If a shooter does not take any other action during his turn and isn't being attacked by another opponent, he can choose to spend his action taking careful aim at his target. On his turn the next round he gains a +2 bonus "to hit".

Called Shot: To hit a specific location on a target requires more precision than a normal attack. A called shot incurs a -4 modifier "to hit". The benefits of called shots vary. Some benefits may be effects, such as shooting a weapon out of someone's hand, or hitting and disabling a doors control panel. Hitting a vulnerable area with a called shot adds +2 to damage.

Range: The Ranged Weapon Table in the equipment chapter of the *X-plorers* core rule book lists the ranges of all ranged weapons. This number indicates two things. First, the number indicates the short range of the weapon, or number of meters a target must be within to be shot at with no penalty. Secondly, two times the range number is the weapons long range, or maximum effective range. If the target lies beyond the short range but within the maximum range, it is considered long range and accrues a -2 penalty "to hit".

Cover: A target that manages to hide behind some solid object when being shot at is considered to have cover. There are three types of cover: soft, hard, and total.

Soft Cover: Soft cover is anything that only partially hides the target or is of a substance that isn't totally impenetrable. A turned over table, a small tree, a cargo crate, and lying prone in tall grass are all examples of soft cover. A target hiding behind soft cover receives a +2 bonus to his AC.

Hard Cover: Hard cover is anything that is "bullet proof" and covers most of the targets body. Tall stone walls, buildings, rocks, a space ship, or any large solid object are all hard cover. Taking refuge behind hard cover grants a +4 AC bonus.

Total Cover: If a target is hidden totally behind something that is bullet proof and doesn't pop any part of their body out to take any other actions in a round, they have total cover and can't be targeted with a ranged weapon (not including grenades, of course).

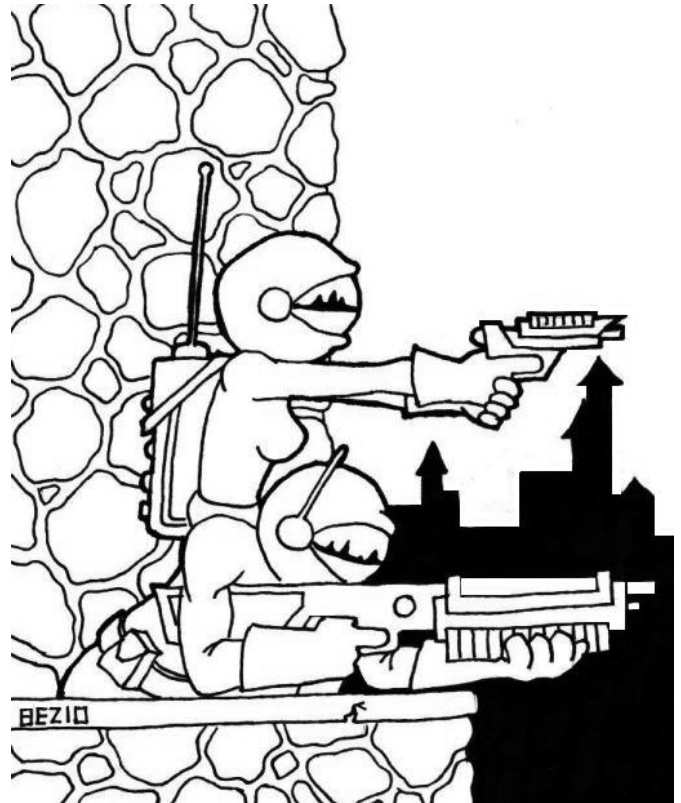
Combined Fire: Multiple shooters who can communicate freely with each other can agree to fire at the same target as combined fire. Combined fire makes it extremely hard for the defender not to be hit by at least one attack. The shooter with the highest "to hit" rank is the primary attacker and makes the attack roll. The primary attacker receives a +1 modifier "to hit" for each additional shooter. If the roll is a hit, the primary attacker determines damage using his weapons normal damage +1 for each additional shooter.

Shooter is unstable: If a shooter is on an unstable surface while shooting, such as a shooting from a vehicle or is mounted on a creature, he suffers a -2 penalty "to hit".

Shooting 2 Guns: If a shooter has a gun in each hand he may shoot them both in one round. The shooter suffers a -2 modifier "to hit" with the first shot, and a -4 modifier to the second.

Multiple Shots: A shooter may choose to quickly pop off up to 2 shots in a single round, but he sacrifices accuracy to do so. The attacker's Shooting Skill suffers a -3 penalty "to hit" for both of the shots.

Blind Fighting: If you can't see the opponent that is attacking you because your vision is impaired by darkness or for some other reason, you are blind fighting. If you have a basic idea of where attacks are coming from (due to shot flashes or laser beams) you can still attack the opponent, but at a -4 modifier "to hit".



Grenades

If you are using miniatures and a grid for combat, it suddenly becomes very important to know exactly where a grenade lands. These rules should only be used when employing miniatures.

Bounce: If the combatant "hits" with a grenade, it lands where they want it to and everyone within the blast area is affected. If the attack "misses", subtract the number rolled on the d20 from the AC of the opponent targeted (If targeting an empty square the effective AC is 16). This is the number of meters the throw misses by (divide this number by 2 to find out how many squares this is). Next, roll 1d20 and only read the ones column (this generates a number from 1-10, a 20 is a 10). Use this number to determine the direction of

the bounce on the Grenade Bounce Diagram below.

Grenade Bounce Diagram

9	3,4	10
7	*	8
5	1,2	6

Blast Area: Look at the Grenade Blast Diagram below. A smoke grenade fills the entire blast area with smoke (they are now blind fighting). A Fragmentation grenade throws shrapnel in the same area. Everyone within the white area takes 5d6 points of damage. Everyone in the dark gray area takes 3d6 points of damage, and everyone within the light gray area takes 1d6 points of damage. If someone in the blast area makes an agility saving throw they leap out of the way and move to the next lower damage area (those leaping from the light gray area take no damage).

Grenade Blast Diagram

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Saving/Skill Throws & Miscellaneous Actions

Not all actions that are going to be attempted during combat are directly involved with movement or attacks. Sometimes PCs are going to want to throw an item to their friend, untie the faithful sidekick, or open the cargo bay and throw out some contraband. The referee must rule if specified actions can be performed in a single 3 second round (or if they will take several rounds)

and determines any skill or saving throws that need to be made.

Skill & Saving Throws

If the referee thinks an action requires a skill or saving throw, he will have to determine what attribute or skill comes into play just like any other time an action needs to be resolved. The referee may also add penalties to these rolls if the PCs are under any particular stress, like being shot at while trying to accomplish something.

Tricking an Opponent

Combatants will undoubtedly try and come up with unique ways to gain an advantage in combat. Things like throwing a bucket of water in the opponents face to distract him or pretending a giant slobbering alien is standing behind an opponent.

Any trick must be considered by the referee. If he thinks it may be effective the trick counts as the attacker's action that round. The referee must then determine any saving or skill throws that must be rolled by the attacker or the defender. If the trick is successful, the victim suffers a -2 penalty to any die rolls he makes his next combat turn.

Free Actions

Minor actions like dropping an item, shouting to a friend, changing the EU setting on your laser weapon, or any taunting of villains are considered free actions. Free actions can take place at any time and don't take any significant time. In other words, you can take a free action or two and still be able to move and attack or take a miscellaneous action. This promotes lots of banter between heroes and villains during combats and can be quite fun.

Dramatic Effect

There are going to be times (many times in fact) that PCs will want to do things in combat for some sort of dramatic effect. For example, a PC may want to push or kick someone off a moving skimmer instead of simply attacking them. It is these times that the referee is going to have to use his wits to resolve the actions consistently and satisfactorily.

Fortunately saving throws are designed for just such instances and all it takes is a little imagination and common sense on the part of the referee to come up with quick solutions to these situations. Remember that NPCs can, and will, try the same types of actions against the PCs.

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