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**G**rappling is one of the oldest forms of combat on the planet. It is used by animals when hunting, and is something that both children and animals (and the children of animals) do for play.

And yet, grappling rules, by and large, have not found favor with players. They certainly haven't led to the importance or emphasis that led a noted late 16th century gentleman to say:

*“Of the single rapier fight between valiant men, having both skill, he that is the best wrestler, or if neither of them can wrestle, the strongest man most commonly kills the other, or leaves him at his mercy.”*

— George Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*

## MAKE IT INTERESTING

Grappling an equal foe should neither be pointless nor an “I win!” button. It has to be as compelling in its place as bashing a guy with a sword or shooting him with an arrow in terms of fight-ending ability, and yet not be a magical nuclear weapon (“I’ve got him in a tentacle lock! The Kraken is so toast!”)

Striking damage rolls are variable; it is not a stretch to have grappling provide a variable effect as well. Not all grapples are created equal, and using dice to provide variability is as old as roleplaying. Even better if you can use the same die roll to put injury and restraint on the same scale.

What outcomes should be available when you slap a quality grapple on a foe?

**THEY’RE EASIER TO HIT.** Their defense target number should get worse as they get grappled more. This is part and parcel with . . .

**THEY’RE CLUMSIER AND RESTRAINED.** When trying to make attacks, the more grappled they are, the higher penalty they should take when swinging weapons and fists.

**THEIR MOVEMENT IS CONSTRAINED.** As they are grappled more and more tightly, they should find it harder and harder to move in a direction they wish to go. As your foe gets you more under his control, he can also move you around against your will.



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**THEY’RE OPEN TO INJURY.** Being grappled invites techniques that translate restraint into actual injury. This gets back to putting injury points and control points on the same basis.

## GRAPPLING IS FOR MONSTERS

Even more than the players, grappling needs to be seen as a useful tool for the GM to make the players’ lives a tetch more interesting than they’d generally like.

Being grabbed by a giant scorpion should be *scary*. A well-crafted set of grappling rules will make for better stories, and will frankly make for more engrossing encounters. A crocodile is *worrisome* because of its bite, of course. But they are terrifying because they bite with more than three tons of force, dragging prey underwater to disorient and drown them with a “death roll.” A lion bites the neck to suffocate its meal, not to make it bleed to death. Cats will strike with their claws, but they will also grapple, wrapping their front paws around their foe and raking with their powerful hind legs—effectively guaranteeing hits without having to make the real-world equivalent of an attack roll. Constrictor snakes are perhaps the archetype for monsters that basically do nothing else *but* grapple until the foe is dead.



Grappling is a great tool for the GM to make giant monsters appropriately fear inducing, and something you don't walk up to casually so that you can start swatting at it with axes. It will ensure an emergent behavior where the very last thing you want to do is be grabbed by a monster built around grappling, and it will shape the encounter behavior in entertaining ways.

*“Enkidu blocked the gate with his foot, not letting Gilgamesh in. Gilgamesh and Enkidu wrestled with one another, locked like bulls; they shattered the doorpost and the wall shook. Gilgamesh bent his knee and with his foot planted on the ground and with a turn Enkidu was thrown. Then immediately his fury died.”*

— *Gilgamesh and Enkidu*  
(Unknown, ~2000 BC)



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*“The lion leaped. Mandorallen flung his steel-cased arms wide and stepped forward to meet the cat’s charge. They came together with a resounding crash, and Mandorallen locked his arms around the beast’s body . . . Mandorallen tightened his deadly embrace. . . With a superhuman effort, Mandorallen jerked his arms together. Ce’Nedra heard the cracking of bones with a sickening clarity, and an enormous fountain of blood erupted from that cat’s mouth. . . Mandorallen unclenched his locked hands, and the dead beast slid limply from his grasp to the ground at his feet.*

*“Mandorallen!” She sang his name. “You are my knight!”*

— *Magician’s Gambit*  
(David Eddings, 1983)

## GRIPPING STORIES

The point of more nuanced grappling rules is to make the stories better. The introduction of valid grappling options for combat increase both player enjoyment and the stories a GM can tell.

The grappling system presented here gives a few simple options if one is playing a retroclone or rules-light system. There should be no impediments to further options if desired, allowing extension to explicit rules for locks and other special moves. More recent game designs, with omnipresent creature statistics and more available native mechanics, are also further expanded.

Grappling rules do not have to suck the fun out of a game. The key is to take rules that are usually well developed and understood, and not fight the base mechanical system when it’s time to grapple. All of this is in service to the story, contributing to a sense of action, excitement, and danger. If the rules get in the way, or if the mechanics do not produce interesting outcomes, then why bother?

Some of the most epic tales ever told—*Beowulf*, *The Broken Sword*, *The Odyssey* and *Iliad*—feature grappling matches at their core. Gripping moments in cinema and fiction frequently revolve around the struggle for control over the only accessible weapon in the room. The first epic story *ever told*, the tale of *Gilgamesh*, saw the titular hero and his rival Enkidu, become friends and co-adventurers after they engaged in a suitably epic grappling match.

**DUNGEON GRAPPLING** gives you tools with which to tell similar stories, whether they be from 2016 BC, or 2016 AD.



**RESTRAINED (PINNED)**

A pinned creature is tightly bound and can take *very* few actions—restrained (pinned) is a more severe version of grappled, and their effects do not stack. A pinned creature . . .

- ♥ cannot move and is denied its Dexterity bonus.
- ♥ takes an additional -4 penalty to his Armor Class.

The *only* actions a pinned creature may usually attempt are:

- ♥ It can always attempt to free itself, usually through a combat maneuver check or Escape Artist check
- ♥ It *can* take verbal and mental actions

**CASTING SPELLS WHILE PINNED.** Casting a spell while you have the grappled or pinned condition is difficult and requires a concentration check (DC 10 + the grappler's CMB + the level of the spell you're casting), or the spell is lost. Pinned creatures can only cast spells that do not have somatic or material components.



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