

From Mortal Combat, the Bola

(Cobwebbed Dragon)

For this foray into the inspiring pages of the Mortal Combat RPG, I decided to bring back a new weapon to Dragon Warriors, the bola.

What is a Bola?

A bola is a thrown weapon made of weights on the ends of interconnected cords. Typically, a bola has three balls, each attached to one end of a knotted Y-shaped cord. The two heavy balls at the front strike the target first and the third (typically lighter) ball attached to the long "stem" of the Y-shaped cord then wraps around the target, entangling them. There are, however, as many variations as there are cultures that use them - some with up to nine balls!



Why Include the Bola?

Dragon Warriors combat is mostly a case of resolving ATTACK vs DEFENCE until someone runs out of Health Points. The bola provides a new option for disabling an opponent without necessarily harming them. We could extend this with options for non-lethal melee damage, striking to stun, grappling, and other non-lethal attacks, and these may very well be the topic of a future article, but we have to start somewhere.



Who Can Use the Bola?

Drawing parallels with Earth, the bola would not commonly be found in Albion, so it may not be a familiar weapon to an Albish knight, for example. It is most likely to be found in the hands of the

barbarian and hunter professions and professions unique to the exotic lands whence this weapon comes (wherever that may be in your Legend).

The Mechanics

Bolas have the range of a javelin (15m/25m/35m) and do damage as a rock (d3, 2). However, the value of a bola is not in the damage that it causes but in its potential to debilitate.

Once struck, the target tests EVASION against the bola's SPEED of 15 to avoid becoming entangled. As with any EVASION test, the victim must be aware of the attack to be able to move to avoid the entangling effects of the weapon. If the target fails to evade (or is unable to evade), roll 1d6.

d6	Result	
1-2	Legs are caught and the victim falls over.	
3	Left arm is pinned to body.	The target must test Reflexes or drop anything held in the hand of a pinned arm.
4	Right arm is pinned to body.	
5	Both arms are pinned to body.	
6	Neck caught and damage is dealt to the head (d3 ABR vs. head armour, double damage). Target will start to suffocate after a number of rounds equal to their Strength score.	

To free themselves, the victim must test Reflexes each round. If an arm is pinned, Reflexes is tested with a -3 penalty (-4 if it is the target's dominant hand) or, if the neck is tangled, -1. If both arms are pinned, escape is not possible without assistance (at least, not within the timeframe of combat). After three successes, the target is free of the bola. If the target has a high Strength (16+), only two successes are required.

If the target is struck but not entangled, the bola might still cause damage (d3, 2) but will not entangle the target.

Some Final Notes

Why SPEED 15?

Mortal Combat uses saving throws to resist the entangling effects of the bola, and the save vs entanglement is 35% for a first-rank Mortal Combat character. A Rank 1 Dragon Warriors character typically starts with an EVASION in the range of 3-5. SPEED 15 vs EVASION 3 requires a 13+ to avoid on 2d10 (28%). For a character with EVASION 5, this is reduced to 11+ (45%).

Bola vs. Tangleroots

The bola is not the only way to entangle and disable a victim in Dragon Warriors, the second-level sorcerer spell Tangleroots achieves something similar (SPEED 14, immobilised for 2d4 rounds). Referees looking for a simpler mechanic when introducing the bola into their game can treat the bola, once it has successfully hit its target, as a *Tangleroots* spell.

Double Damage to the Head

Buried in the Bestiary, in the rules for the Grey Hood, it is noted that attacks that strike the head cause double damage, which seemed appropriate here.

This article first appeared in [Casket of Fays Issue 7](#).

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Last update: **2023/12/03 18:47**

