



## Bullet Points

# Covering the Basics

By Owen K.C. Stephens

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Welcome to the latest installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm Owen K.C. Stephens, writer of a lot of **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** material and a contributor to the recently announced *d20 Apocalypse* book. It's my job to answer your questions about the game, offer advice on tricky rules issues, and give you a little peek into the design philosophy of the game.

Every two weeks I pick an issue that's provoked a lot of questions or comments, begin with a general discussion of the topic where applicable, and then answer specific questions related to it. If there are any unrelated but pressing questions in the mailbox, I might tackle them at the end of the column, but only if I have room and they can't wait for an appropriately themed column.


## Covering the Basics

A lot of *Bullet Points* columns are geared to answering the more esoteric questions that can come up during game play. Recently, however, I've gotten a lot of questions about the more basic aspects of **d20 Modern** game rules. Those of you who are already masters of the game may not find this material terribly exciting, but it's surprising how often you can find a nugget of information in what you thought you already knew. Besides, the newcomers to our wonderful system should get some support too. We'll get back into the complicated stuff again with the next column, so if you have a question about how a particular feat and class ability affect one another, write it up and send it in.

If you're making the transition from some other d20 System game to **d20 Modern**, read through the rules as you use them -- don't just assume that all aspects of the system work exactly the same as they do elsewhere. Nonlethal damage, action points, advanced classes, action types, wealth, and the exact mechanics of various feats and spells may all be different than a player accustomed to another game (such as **Dungeons and Dragons**) might expect. The basics remain consistent, and most players find they can leap right into the game, but checking the rules from time to time is a good idea while you're getting used to the system.

## Questions and Answers


Now let's take a look at some of the specific questions I've received.

 **I have a question about how action points accrue. Are they accumulated from level to level? If so, high-level characters would logically end up with dozens of action points. Or are they just replenished at every level? If that's the case, a character should try to make use of his action points constantly, since they would refill when he attains the next level.**

Action points accumulate from level to level. Each character begins play with 5 action points. With each new character level, he gains a number of action points determined by his class. So a 5th-level Strong hero who has never spent a single action point would have 33 of them, and he gains 8 more upon attaining 6th level.

However, a character who never spends any action points is gaining no benefit from them. Typically, a character can afford to spend an action point once every few encounters, but some prefer to save them up for a rainy day.

Once a character spends an action point, it's gone forever. He can get more upon attaining a new level, so action points represent a very limited resource.

 **I recently ran a really tough encounter, and the heroes blew right through it because they burned a lot of action points. How much should I penalize them on experience points for making the encounter so much easier?**

Action points are a resource, and like any other resource, the heroes must decide when and how to use them. Since they have a limited number of action points available, spending a lot of them in a single encounter is a self-correcting behavior -- if they spend too many, they'll simply run out. Therefore, you shouldn't penalize them on experience for using action points to overcome an encounter, any more than you should penalize them for lucky die rolls, good teamwork, or clever tactics.

However, your GM characters may have action points too, and they should use them just as freely as heroes do. As a rule of thumb, a GM character with heroic class levels has a number of action points equal to one-half her total character level. (It's assumed that the rest were used earlier in her career.) When you bring her into play, she spends action points normally and gains more when she attains another level, just like a hero.

 **The game doesn't seem to have any rules about modifying the CR of a pilot based on the kind of plane he's flying. Surely a guy in an F-16 is more dangerous than one in a hang glider. How do I figure out what the heroes can handle at their level?**


Variants on this question come up a lot. ("What's the CR of a mecha? What's the EL of a fleet of dreadnoughts? How many tanks can a 12th-level hero take on?") The answer to all of them is both simple and fairly loose. All vehicles count as equipment. Equipment does not change the CR of an opponent, but it certainly can impact the EL of an encounter. The GM must determine how much effect it has, based on what equipment each side possesses.

Characters facing an opponent who has considerably better equipment than they do are at a disadvantage, which should be represented in the EL. For example, two 12th-level pilots may seem like an even match, but if one of them is flying an F-16 and the other is operating a hang glider, the EL of the encounter for the hang-glider pilot should definitely increase. (In fact, such a match is so unbalanced that it should occur only if the heroes have messed up badly. The GM shouldn't intentionally set up so unfair a situation.)

General guidelines for how to shift an encounter's EL are provided in the Encounter Circumstances section on page 207 of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*. If the heroes' opponent has a distinct advantage, modify the EL upward by a factor of 1/3. If the opponent has a distinct disadvantage, modify the EL downward by the same factor. Thus, if a 12th-level pilot in a WWII Mustang attacks a group of heroes in hang gliders, you can treat the match as an EL 15 encounter. By the same token, a group of heroes in heavy mecha facing a 12th-level guard with light armor and hand weapons is facing only an EL 8 encounter.


Obviously, these guidelines don't cover all situations. In some cases, a piece of equipment that seems quite impressive may not be worth much of an EL shift. For example, a mastermind foe might have a battleship, but unless he can use it directly against the heroes, it doesn't count for much in any given encounter. The heroes

may well end up fighting aboard the battleship, but the EL of such an encounter is based on the troops they face, not on the scenery. If the heroes end up attacking the battleship from a yacht, then the vehicles do affect the overall EL -- and unless the heroes have a really cunning plan, they deserve what they get.

 **The rules for damaging inanimate, immobile objects seem a little uneven with respect to ranged weapons. Suppose a low-level character with a ranged attack bonus of +3 wants to shoot a chain that controls a door, a bridge, or some other vital entry point. I would say that the chain is a diminutive item (base Defense 9). The character is 60 feet away (-2 penalty for range with the handgun), but he takes a whole round to line up the shot (gaining a +5 modifier against an inanimate, immobile object). Thus, he needs to roll a 3 on a d20 to make what would seem to be a very difficult shot. Am I interpreting the rules correctly?**

The **d20 Modern** rules are specifically designed to allow for this kind of heroic action, and you've taken very logical steps in adjudicating those rules. That said, however, the shot could be more difficult. First, you have to decide whether the chain is really the size of a paperback (diminutive), or whether it qualifies as smaller. It's obviously thicker than a pencil, but you could reasonably rule that its base defense is 11 rather than 9. Second, is the chain truly immobile? If it's hanging free, it probably sways -- especially if fighting has already broken out. That motion would negate the +5 bonus for taking a full round to line up a shot, bringing the needed roll up to a 10 (which is still pretty easy).

However, even hitting the chain with a bullet doesn't mean it breaks. A chain has hardness 10 and 5 hit points. A handgun probably deals 2d6 points of damage, so a single shot isn't likely to harm the chain at all, and it won't break with fewer than three hits. Even if the character manages to bring the damage per shot up to 3d6 (by using Double Tap, for example), the chain is likely to stand up to multiple hits.

 **I tried finding the answer to this question on the website, but to no avail. I do not understand exactly how the advanced classes and prestige classes progress in terms of multiple attacks. From what I can see, none of them ever gain multiple attacks. Does taking levels in such a class mean that you give those up?**

**For example, a 6th-level Strong hero gets two attacks. If she takes a level in Martial Artist, I would assume that the +1 given on the advancement table for that class applies to both attacks. However, if the character progresses only in Martial Artist from that point, does she ever get a third or fourth attack, or does she forfeit those to progress in the advanced class? Any clarification on this point would be greatly appreciated.**

The reason the tables for advanced classes and prestige classes never show multiple attacks is that a character automatically becomes multiclassed upon taking levels in them. Therefore, it's impossible to tell what a particular character's base attack bonus is when she starts the class, and by the same token, what it would be at any given level in the class. Thus, only the amount that the advanced class adds to the character's existing base attack bonus is given in the advanced class and prestige class tables.

The number of attacks a character may take with a full attack action is based on her total base attack bonus (BAB), regardless of its source. To find that number, add the number given for the second class's base attack bonus to the first base attack number for her original class. So if a 6th-level Strong hero (whose base attack bonus is given as +6/+1) adds a level of Martial Artist, you add the +1 for the Martial Artist level to the +6 from the Strong hero levels to get +7 for her total base attack bonus. Likewise, a Strong hero 6/Martial Artist 6 has a +6 base attack bonus for her Strong hero levels and a +6 base attack bonus for her Martial Artist levels. Adding these together gives the character a total base attack bonus of +12.

Now that you have the total base attack bonus, you can use it to figure out how many attacks the character gets with a full attack action. If you can subtract 5 from the character's BAB and still get a positive number, she gains another attack at that lower bonus. So let's look at the Strong hero 6/Martial Artist 1 with a BAB of +7. Subtracting 5 from that value gives +2, so she gets a second attack at a +2 bonus. So with a full attack action, she gets two attacks at +7/+2. If you subtract 5 from the +12 BAB for the Strong hero 6/Martial Artist 6, you get +7, so the character gets a second attack at +7. Repeating the process with the +7 value gives a third attack at +2, so with a full attack action, she gets three attacks at +12/+7/+2. On the other hand, a character with a +10 BAB gets only two attacks per round (+10/+5), since subtracting 5 from +5 does not result in a positive number.

Only the character's base attack bonus is important for this calculation, not any other modifiers to the attack roll (such as those gained from high ability scores, feats, or equipment bonuses). A character with a +6 base attack bonus and a 6 Strength ends up with two melee attacks at +4/+1, while a character with a +5 base attack bonus and an 18 Strength has a higher total melee attack bonus (+9) but still merits only one attack.

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Do you have a rules question about the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game? Send it to [bulletpoints@wizards.com](mailto: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!

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## About the Author

Owen Kirker Clifford Stephens was born in 1970 in Norman, Oklahoma. He attended the TSR Writer's Workshop held at the Wizards of the Coast Game Center in 1997 and moved to the Seattle area in 2000, after accepting a job as a Game Designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Fourteen months later, he returned to Oklahoma with his wife and three cats to pick up his freelance writer/developer career. He has author and co-author credits on numerous **Star Wars** and *EverQuest* projects, as well as *Bastards and Bloodlines* from Green Ronin. He also has producer credits for various IDA products, including the Stand-Ins printable figures.

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