



Bullet Points

Divergent Rules

By James Wyatt

Welcome to the latest installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm James Wyatt, designer of a lot of **D&D** books, plus one **d20 Modern** book that's coming out in 2005, though I can't tell you about that one just yet. It's my job to answer your questions about the game, offer advice on tricky issues, and give you a little peek into the minds of the designers (insofar as I can pry their minds open to wrest insight from them).

Every two weeks I'll 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 there's room and they can't wait for an appropriately themed column.


Divergent Rules

Sometimes it seems like the d20 System is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, having a common rules framework for different games is undeniably convenient because it allows us to move almost effortlessly among dozens of different games, such as **d20 Modern**, **Dungeons & Dragons**, **Star Wars**, *Wheel of Time*, and *Call of Cthulhu*. On the other hand, familiarity with the rules for one game can create a pitfall when working with another, as I quickly discovered when I started designing my first **d20 Modern** product. When you think you already know the rules, it's easy to miss those few that are actually different.

Thus, the topic for this installment is rules that are different in **d20 Modern** than they are in **D&D**, and the ways in which those differences can trip us up.

Questions and Answers


Now without further ado, let's get to those questions.

 **The typical range increment for a pistol is 30-40 feet. But in the *D&D Player's Handbook*, a longbow has a range increment of 100 feet. I realize that a bow and a pistol are different weapons, and that pistols can't accurately fire very far, but this difference means that a bow has a maximum range of 1,000 feet, while a gun can fire only 300 feet at most. What gives?**


On page 96 of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, it says that the range increment of a compound bow is only 40 feet, not 100 feet, as with a **D&D** longbow. The designers of the **d20 Modern** game felt that the range increments in **D&D** were too large (and I know some **D&D** designers who agree), so they reduced them across the board for the **d20 Modern** game.

 **Why were the drow's spell-like abilities eliminated? Is the drow's level adjustment still +2 without them?**

In a world in which even a 3rd-level character is lucky to be able to use 0-level spells (with the Magical Heritage feat), even the minor spell-like abilities that the **D&D** drow have would be out of place. A drow who takes the Magical Heritage feat can use *dancing lights* at least, and can also choose two other cantrips that seem to fit. And yes, the +2 level adjustment is correct. The drow's fantastic ability modifiers combined with her immunities and spell resistance make her significantly more powerful than other characters, even without the ability to use *darkness* once per day.


 **Maybe this isn't a good place for this question, but I wondered if the changes made in the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* are going to affect the d20 Modern system.**

At this point, we don't have any plans to revise the **d20 Modern** psionics rules to take the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* into account. The existing **d20 Modern** game is already quite different from the original **D&D** system -- so much so that it really can stand on its own.

 **In the description of the Concentration skill in the d20 Modern *Roleplaying Game*, the DC for making a Concentration check while grappled or pinned is given as 20. Later, in the section on grappling, the rules state that a hero who is grappled can do only one of the following: damage your opponent, pin, escape from grapple, escape from pin, break another's pin, draw a light weapon, or attack with a light weapon. These combat rules seem to conflict with those for Concentration. Which rules are correct -- or am I missing something?**

It sure doesn't seem that a hero would be likely to make a Concentration check while grappling, since unlike **D&D**, **d20 Modern** does not allow spellcasters to cast spells while grappling. However, in a campaign that features a lot of spellcasting or psionics use, you might want to consider adding a variant rule that would allow characters to cast spells or use psionics while grappling or pinned. A spell cast under such circumstances must have a casting time no longer than 1 attack action and require no somatic component, and the character must already have in hand any material components or focuses she might need. Any spell that requires precise and careful action would be impossible to cast while grappling or pinned. Furthermore, the character would have to make that Concentration check (DC 20 + spell level) or lose the spell.

In a few weird cases, I might let a character make a skill check while grappling, especially when using that skill is not an action. For example, if a constrictor snake dropped onto and grappled a character who was riding a horse, and the character wanted to make a Ride check to stay in the saddle when the horse reared, I might ask the player to make a DC 20 Concentration check first. If that succeeded, the hero could go ahead with the DC 5 Ride check. Using Spot as a reaction is a similar but slightly less off-the-wall example.

 **The Weapon Finesse feat strikes me as a bit funny. It says you can assign it to any light weapon (a Small or Tiny one, for all practical purposes) or a rapier. Why does it work like that? This rule excludes weapons such as tonfa or sword canes, which I think require a lot of finesse to use, but it does work for brass knuckles, meat cleavers, and the like. I'm certain that using those doesn't involve much finesse, and I consider the feat inappropriate for them. Furthermore, the fact that the game includes very few Small and Tiny melee weapons limits the use of the feat severely.**

The Weapon Finesse feat works the way it does primarily for simplicity of definition. It's easier to name a general category (such as light weapons) and add a small number of exceptions (such as rapier and chain) than it is to list all the weapons to which you can apply the feat individually.

Certain weapons could certainly be added to the list if desired. The argument that a sword cane is basically a

rapier seems sound, so I'd allow a character to take Weapon Finesse with it. I have not used a tonfa, so I'm won't try to speak authoritatively about whether that might be a finesse weapon, but if you know something about it and the issue bugs you, go ahead and allow it.

By the same kind of argument, certain weapons could also be excluded, though I would give considerable thought to each. I think brass knuckles are OK simply because a character can also use Weapon Finesse with an unarmed strike. A cleaver used with Weapon Finesse is a weird concept, I grant you, but the point is that any small, light weapon can benefit from a character's high Dexterity. If your hero's Dex is higher than his Strength, he's probably not swinging the cleaver overhead in a brutal assault. Instead, he's trying to slip it past his opponent's defenses to slash with the blade, as if it were a knife. This difference in tactics is reflected in the hero's (relatively) low Strength bonus to damage, compared with a stronger character who's not using Weapon Finesse.

 **Does mastercraft armor add to the armor's regular Defense bonus, or does it work the same as masterwork armor in the D&D game? If it does add to the Defense bonus, what's the point of having magic armor?**

In general, mastercraft armor increases the armor's equipment bonus to Defense. You could special-order (or make) mastercraft armor that applied its bonus to a different characteristic of the armor, thereby reducing its armor penalty (as in **D&D**), or even increasing its maximum Dexterity bonus, if you wish. However, the Defense bonus is what really matters to most characters.

A mastercraft undercover vest has a purchase DC of 17, compared to 22 for a +1 *undercover vest*. So why go with magic? First of all, magic armor reduces the armor penalty of the armor by 1. Second, magic armor can sometimes have special qualities beyond the enhancement bonus it provides, such as those described in the core rulebook and in *Urban Arcana*. I sort of wish there were more reasons to have magic armor, but I can't think of any.

The rules for mastercraft armor are there to ensure that you can run a fun and exciting **d20 Modern** campaign with no magic at all. In a campaign dripping with magic, characters should have magic armor simply because it's more in keeping with the spirit of the campaign -- and more likely to be what they find while adventuring. In a nonmagical techno-thriller campaign, the most experienced agents should get +2 or +3 mastercraft armor because that's what the quartermaster gives them.

 **In my opinion, the Encounter Level system breaks down at the extremes. As an example, let's look at a typical 1st-level party in two different scenarios.**

1. A group of three heroes squares off against six kobolds that have no special bonuses. The hero who goes first kills the kobolds with an autofire weapon (an automatic pistol would do). Maybe someone else then finishes off any remaining opponents. The EL for this encounter is 6 (1/6 rounds down to 0, plus 6 for six obstacles).

2. The same group goes up against two 4th-level toughs. Let's assume once again that the dude with the automatic pistol goes first and peppers the two toughs for 2d6 points of damage each. Then another hero does the same thing. The toughs are mildly annoyed, so they eat the characters for brunch. The EL for this encounter is also 6 (average CR 4, +2 for two obstacles).

I would never use the second example encounter against my group -- I am not THAT mean. But both are

EL 6, and I don't think characters facing them should reap the same rewards. If I wanted to make the kobolds threatening (say, by letting them ambush the party with HKMP5s), then the special circumstances would raise the EL even higher.

A key rule that's missing from the **d20 Modern** book explains what fractional CRs do to encounter levels. Using the system as written, which you did to the letter, results in no difference between a CR of 1/2 (for a 1st-level ordinary) and a CR of 1/6 (for a kobold), since both CRs round down to 0. Here's the rule you need to make sense of this situation.

When using Table 7-6: CR Adjustment, if the obstacles have a CR below 1, multiply the CR adjustment from the table by the obstacle's actual CR.

Thus, in your first example scenario, you would multiply the +6 modifier for six kobolds by a kobold's pathetic CR of 1/6 to give +1, which makes the EL for this encounter 1. In the case of six 1st-level ordinaries (CR 1/2 each), just multiply that +6 modifier by 1/2 to get +3, which gives an EL of 3.

Do you have a rules question about the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game? Send it to 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!

About the Author

James Wyatt is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. His design credits include *The Speaker in Dreams*, *Defenders of the Faith*, *Oriental Adventures*, *Deities and Demigods*, *Fiend Folio*, *Draconomicon*, and the *Book of Exalted Deeds*. He wrote the Origins award-winning adventure *City of the Spider Queen* and is one of the designers of the new Eberron campaign setting, which is due out in June 2004. James lives in Kent, Washington with his wife Amy and son Carter.
