



## Bullet Points

### Gamemaster Calls

by Owen K.C. Stephens

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This installment of *Bullet Points* looks at questions that could all be answered with, "ask your GM." A bad GM call, however, can have a strong negative impact on a game, so the "official" answers are outlined here, along with some notes about why these are the right calls. With a little experience, GMs can make such calls themselves, keeping their game fast and exciting while also maintaining a good game balance.

**I don't like PCs having to constantly kill foes. Can't the GM decide that the opponent had enough and just passes out? Maybe the inevitable bruising, nose bleeds, etc. should damage Charisma? Why does all combat have to be to the death? Most people don't want to kill each other, shouldn't roleplaying reflect that? Is this totally within the realm of GM decision and house rules or has it never been a problem?**

A GM can decide to have foes drop early, take Charisma damage, or do anything else he wants in the interest of a good story. The only problem is that this can lead to an inconsistent world in which players reliably predict the consequences of their characters' actions. If you decide to have a thug fall unconscious one day but stay up until the heroes beat him to death on another, the players have every right to feel that the game has become less about playing within the rules and more a matter of your arbitrary decisions.

A GM has vast leeway and power in a game. Try to ensure you don't use that power to create an inconsistent world. Make radical changes to the rules only after carefully considering what the possible consequences are.

**In *Future Tech*, none of the armors are listed under a proficiency category (light, medium, etc.) but are instead listed as Tactical and Concealable. While such armors as the PAL are obviously for the Powered Armor proficiency, what are the others suited for?**

In general, you can tell what kind of armor a suit should be by looking at its penalties and bonuses and reading the description. When making this kind of ruling as a GM, consider who you want to be able to use the armor without penalty, and write down your decision to save time if it comes up again later.

Anything marked as a shield counts as a shield. (According to *Urban Arcana*, anyone proficient in both medium and heavy armor is proficient in shields.) All the other suits qualify as powered armor.

**Should a tangler gun attack be ranged touch instead of ranged? From the description, it certainly seems that way -- the small blob hardening into a layer of chitin -- but it doesn't say it is.**

As written, tanglers do not make touch attacks. While it's perfectly reasonable for a GM to change them to touch attacks, that does make them more powerful. If the item description bothers you as a regular attack, assume that the adhesive used by the expanding material works by imbedding microscopic hooks in whatever material it hits, and thus has difficulty attaching to surfaces that give an armor or natural armor bonus.

**For the Martial Artist advanced class, under the Living Weapon Talent, it states that you can make unarmed attacks even if your hands are full. How does this function if the character in question is utilizing, for example, a spear? Could they attack someone at that 10' reach and also make an unarmed attack versus someone next to them?**

Yes they could, as long as they can make multiple attacks per round (by attacking with an "off-hand" unarmed or having multiple attacks from a high base attack bonus). In general, when the rules tell you what you can or can't do while you are carrying something, they don't care if that item is a weapon or not.

**Neither I nor the players I GM for understand the wealth bonus system. It appears that you can buy an infinite amount of anything that is within you wealth bonus without difficulty and without losing any bonus. Isn't this unbalancing? For example, one of my players had some downtime, so he spent it buying hundreds of grenades, clips of ammunition, and (for some reason) 500,000 zip ties. I could find no rule to limit the purchases, and he ended up bringing down a small building in the next quest. Imagine if he could have gotten C4 and was a stealth specialist! I now use a money-based system instead, but still, what the heck balances the wealth system?**

First, let me recommend you go read one of the very early Bullet Point articles -- *The Wealth System* (<http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=d20modern/bp/20030304a>).

Second, to address the specific concern of buying hundreds of grenades, that must have been a really, really long downtime. It takes one hour per point of purchase DC to buy something and one hour per point of sale value to sell it. (GMs are welcome to ignore this rule for common items, but it should be enforced when a player is trying to blatantly play the system.) Even if you assume the character buys nothing but cheap DC 10 grenades, 100 of them would take 1,000 hours to buy. If the character did nothing but buy grenades for 16 hours a day, that would take a little more than two months. In other words, time is the limiting factor in this sort of excess.

Third, as a GM, if something seems unreasonable and likely to destroy a game, explain to your players why you're going to disallow it, then do so. You can discuss and debate the question with them after the session is over, to prevent it from slowing play.

**I am running a guerilla campaign, and I am trying to incorporate the commonly used soviet RPG-7, but it is not in the Weapons Locker. My idea was to take a normal fragmentation grenade 4d6 and make it 7d6 since it is moving and more powerful. Does that damage seem reasonable? What should I use for range and other stats?**

When creating stats for any new weapon, do your best to base it on an existing weapon. Even if you think the new weapon is better, try to resist giving it universally superior game stats. Equipment is one of the easiest ways to unbalance a *d20 Modern* game, and new equipment doubles that risk. Also, remember that a weapon has a max range of ten times its range increment, and that even a single additional die of damage represents a lot of additional damage. (For example, when you Double Tap, you use twice the attacks to add a single die of damage.)

The RPG-7 fires a number of different warheads ranging from 40mm to 105mm and including both anti-tank and anti-infantry rounds. As a result, it's tricky to pin down the damage it should do. In general, I recommend using the 40mm grenades from *d20 Weapon Locker* for all anti-infantry grenades. Anti-tank grenades deal 1d6 more damage, ignore half a target's hardness, but have only a 5-ft. blast radius. Add 1d6 to the total damage for grenades that are heavier than 40mm.

At a guess, I'd give the RPG-7 a range increment of 150 ft. for 40mm grenades and 70 ft. for heavier ones. Firing the weapon creates a long back-blast in a line 20 feet behind the rocket. Anyone in this area takes 2d6 fire damage (DC 15 Reflex for half). Loading an RPG-7 is a full-round action.

**The minions and side-kick feats in the *d20 Past* book do not describe whether they are ordinary NPCs or a hero class. Which is it?**

You could rule this either way, but in general you want to look at the intent behind the rules. Thus, minions are clearly more common and less versatile than a single sidekick. Minions are ordinary, sidekicks are heroes.

**In the *Future Tech* book, page 8, the "Chemical, Muscle Relaxant" has the following statement. "If this penetrates the target's DR, the dart injects the target with muscle relaxant." I've looked in the books but can't find what DR stands for. The closest I've seen is a reference to Damage Reduction -- is that what this refers to? If a person is in full armor, how can a dart hope to penetrate?**

Sometimes the rules of a game must be employed even if you're not sure they make sense, just to keep the game playable. Also, as a rule, the same term doesn't apply to more than one game rule.

The term DR does indeed refer to damage reduction. Full armor is rarely 'full' in that it leaves open spaces and weak spots. If a dart's attack roll hits the target's Defense, it either punched through the weaker layers of armor (often around joints) or found a place that was entirely unarmored. Keep in mind the dart has some force, and even a character in tactical armor may be vulnerable to a high-speed needle.

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 the **d20 Modern** website for *Bullet Point* updates.

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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 freelancer 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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