



## Bullet Points

# Firearms in the d20 Modern Game

by Charles Ryan

Welcome to the first installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm Charles Ryan, one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**. I'm here to answer your questions about the game, offer advice on tricky issues, and give you a little peek into the minds of the designers. You'll be hearing from me every couple of weeks.

I could present *Bullet Points* as a straight question-and-answer column, simply answering the questions that have come in during any given 2-week period. But for now, I'm going to start off by addressing a different topic in each column. I'll pick an issue that's provoked a lot of questions or comments, begin with a general discussion of the topic, and then answer specific questions related to it. If there are any unrelated but pressing questions in my 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.

That's my plan, anyway. But as we all know, no plan survives contact with the enemy!

## Firearms

Today's topic is firearms in the **d20 Modern** game. I'll lead off with some remarks about the design philosophy for weapon statistics and the special three-round burst setting that some weapons have, then answer a few specific questions.

### Weapon Statistics

Some people have complained that there isn't enough difference in damage potential between one firearm and another in the **d20 Modern** game. If all midcaliber handguns deal the same damage, the reasoning goes, there must be no difference between them. Hence the game statistics are broken or, at best, dull. Actually, the opposite is true -- there may be only five "flavors" of firearm damage (2d4, 2d6, 2d8, 2d10, and 2d12), but this fact actually *increases* the variety of firearms that PCs and NPCs have to choose from.

To see why, let's take a look at what happens when every firearm in the game deals different damage. Suppose that at the low end, a Saturday night special peashooter deals 1d4 points of damage. At the high end, the Mongo Magnum deals 2d12+5 points of damage. In between are weapons that deal all sorts of different amounts of damage. Now that's variety!

Actually, it isn't. If one weapon is clearly superior to all others, there is no reason for anyone to use anything else. Every single character and NPC in the game carries a Mongo Magnum -- if they don't, they're fools. The game may offer statistics for fifty other weapons, but if nobody ever uses them, they're just so many wasted lines on the weapons table. Talk about a broken -- or at least dull -- set of stats!

The insightful gamer will realize that damage is not the only important statistic for a firearm in **d20 Modern**. Range increment can make a pretty big difference for characters who need the ability to shoot from a distance. Magazine capacity is also a game-relevant concern, as is the mastercraft bonus that some

weapons have. Size affects concealability (a very important factor in some types of campaigns, but less so in others), and even price can be a significant concern.

The insightful gamer will go on to notice that if anything other than damage matters to you, the decision about which weapon to pick usually isn't easy. You might have to sacrifice magazine capacity in order to get the concealable weapon you want. You might want a greater range increment but not be able to pony up the price.

The more varied your adventures, the more varied your weapon choices will be. In a pure hack-and-slash game, maybe damage really is the only thing that matters. (You might also be attracted to a weapon with a mastercraft bonus, though.) In an investigative adventure, small size (maximum concealability) may be critical. In a military campaign, melee-range encounters may be rare, so high range increments would be vital. In a John Woo sort of game, you absolutely have to have a large magazine capacity. The firearms described in the *d20 Modern* game give you good choices for meeting any of these widely varying needs.

### The Three-Round Burst Setting

Now let's talk a bit about the Burst Fire feat and weapons that have three-round burst settings. A lot of people figure that a hero who picks up such a weapon ought to get the benefit of the Burst Fire feat, even if he or she doesn't have that feat. But that's not the case, and here's why.


There are a lot of misconceptions about what a three-round burst setting on a weapon does for the user. Many people think the setting is designed to allow more accurate use of autofire, presumably by limiting the recoil of the weapon. It would seem to make sense, then, that the user should get the benefit of the Burst Fire feat when using such a setting. The truth, however, is that the three-round burst setting is simply a limiter designed to prevent waste of ammunition.

Real-world weapons designers discovered some time ago that even the best-trained shooters could hit the intended target with only the first few rounds from a burst of automatic fire. Weapons fired on automatic simply shake too much to stay on target; after the first couple of bullets have left the weapon, the others invariably fly wide and wild. Some people think this tendency has to do with the power of the recoil, but that's not true. Even weapons with very light recoil can't be kept on target while on autofire. As a result, military forces train their soldiers to use autofire only in short, controlled bursts. Even then, however, most shooters fire off six or eight shots in a burst, most of which are wasted. (We were generous in the game design and specified that a burst uses five bullets.)

To address this situation, the designers created the three-round burst setting to limit the burst of autofire to three bullets -- the only three that have any reliable chance of hitting. This feature doesn't make the weapon any more accurate in autofire mode. All it does is prevent the user from wasting ammo.

### Questions and Answers

Now that we have those issues cleared up, let's look at some questions.

 **What happens if you're using autofire and your targeted 10-foot-by-10-foot area straddles two range increments? For example, suppose the weapon has a 30-foot range increment, and the 10-foot area begins 25 feet away.**

You count the range to the 5-foot square of the target area that's closest to you, just as you do when attacking a creature that takes up more than one square.

 **I'm attacking a 10-foot-by-10-foot area with autofire. A car takes up two of the 5-foot squares. Does the car take double damage, since it occupies two squares?**

No. Autofire affects an area. As with all such effects, every creature and object, regardless of size, that is within the area takes the prescribed damage (unless it saves). It helps if you remember that autofire works exactly the same way as grenades and *fireballs* do. If you cast a *fireball* at a Gargantuan dragon, the dragon takes 10d6 points of damage -- not 10d6 points per 5-foot square it occupies. The same principle applies to autofire.

 **Why are the range increments in the *d20 Modern* game so low? Can't modern sniping rifles hit targets as far away as a mile or two?**

A weapon's range increment is not merely "the longest range we've ever heard rumors of this weapon being used at divided by 10." The formula we used when designing the game is roughly 2/3 of the weapon's maximum effective range divided by 10. This calculation provides a base maximum range unaffected by feats or special equipment; the actual effective range can be attained (or exceeded) by adding such elements as the Far Shot feat or special sighting devices.

 **I have the Double Tap feat, and I get extra attacks due to my high base attack bonus. Can I use Double Tap on every attack? How about Burst Fire? How about standard autofire?**

Yes to all. You can use the Double Tap feat, Burst Fire feat, or standard autofire on any attack. There is no restriction on the number of times you can use these abilities per round, or on the type of action you take. If you can make an attack roll with a firearm, you can use these feats (or autofire) in conjunction with that roll - assuming, of course, that you meet the conditions of the feat, such as having enough ammo in the weapon.

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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) , and then check back here every other week  
for the latest batch of answers!

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## About the Author

Charles Ryan has designed and written games for more than twelve years. His credits include such diverse titles as the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, *The Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game*, *Deadlands*, *Millennium's End*, *The Last Crusade*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Dune: Chronicles of the Imperium*, and *Star Trek: Red Alert!*, to name just a few. Charles served as Chairman of the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design, the professional organization of the games industry, from 1996 through 2001. He lives in Kent, Washington with his lovely wife Tammie, three cats, and a dog. He works for Wizards of the Coast, Inc.



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