



Bullet Points

Modern Magic Mysteries

By Owen K.C. Stephens

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 Cyberscape* book, as well as some **d20 Modern** projects as yet unannounced. 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.

Modern Magic Mysteries

In this installment, we're going to look at some questions about magic and the ways in which it blends with technology, especially in **Urban Arcana** games. A number of modern spells, advanced magic-using classes, and magic items from that book can be used in a wide variety of mystic **d20 Modern** settings, and much of the advice it provides on combining magic and the modern world is useful in other settings as well.

Questions and Answers

A lot of these answers refer to passages in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* because any campaign that includes a strong magical element can benefit from this book -- whether or not any actual elements of the setting are incorporated. Now let's take a look at some of the specific questions I've received.


 **The *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* suggests that Mages can store spells on computers or even PDAs. That's a neat idea, but what does it actually mean? Can a Mage then copy his computerized spellbook, or the computerized spellbook of another Mage, with the ease of copying a disk? Can he store his spells on a site that's available through the Internet? Could a hacker break into a Mage's spellfiles and make changes? If so, what are the chances that the Mage would notice? Could the hacker change the spells in such a way that the Mage would hurt himself by using them? What kinds of spells exist to protect a Mage's files?**

The answers to some of these questions are provided in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting*. In particular, see the new spells *dataread*, *degauss*, *electromagnetic pulse*, *haywire*, and *shutdown*, as well as the Techno Mage advanced class in that book. As far as the rest of the questions are concerned, the GM must decide exactly how to handle the various situations that Mage characters might encounter. In general, spells stored in computers should be no more or less vulnerable than those in a typical spellbook, except as dictated by the limitations of the storage device.

A Mage cannot copy the spellfiles of another Mage any more easily than he can copy spells from a traditional ink-

and-paper spellbook, and the time and effort involved are the same -- only the equipment changes. A Mage can make a copy of his own spellfiles with ease, or even store them in an Internet-accessible database. This benefit is the payoff for storing spells in a format that can be hacked, corrupted, or even erased with electromagnetic devices.


The spellfiles of a Mage are no more durable than any other electronic data, and the computer or PDA used to store them is just as vulnerable to hacking, viruses, and corruption as a normal computer is. However, any such alteration of spellfiles is just as obvious to the Mage as a page of a spellbook with crayon scribbles all over it would be. Therefore, he shouldn't be fooled into trying to use an altered spell that might have a deleterious effect on him.

 **Why is it that only slashing weapons can have the keen weapon quality? With a +1 purchase DC modifier, this quality is extremely useful for its cost -- so useful, in fact, that my *Urban Arcana* campaign is now overrun with keen slashing weapons. I'd like to balance this overabundance of keen weapons by making a similar special quality available for ballistic or bludgeoning weapons, but I haven't seen one. Is game balance the reason why slashing weapons can double their threat range and other weapon types can't?**

No inherent balance issue prevents weapons that deal bludgeoning, piercing, or ballistic damage from having a special quality similar to *keen*, but making one available does have an impact on the flavor of a campaign. Swords and similar slashing weapons are iconic in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* because they're weapons that both Shadow creatures and normal people understand. In addition, the concept has been around a long time -- a +1 *keen machete* may not be any older than a *slingshot of distance*, but a +1 *short sword* could date back hundreds of thousands of years.


Furthermore, making different qualities available for different weapon types helps to keep the campaign interesting. Only melee weapons can have the defending, disruption, and wounding abilities, and only slashing weapons can be keen. Such distinctions force characters who want these abilities to forgo the convenience of firearms. This kind of choice helps to differentiate the characters in a campaign, driving some to carry greatswords while others use magic pistols. The more qualities you make available across the board, the more likely it is that most or all of the characters will carry the same kind of equipment.

On the other hand, you could certainly add special abilities similar to keen that work for other damage types. Such abilities should have the same effect (double the weapon's threat range) and the same purchase DC modifier. Each special ability should work for only one type of weapon damage.

 **I want to let some *Dungeons & Dragons* characters from an old campaign of mine enter a *d20 Modern* game. How do I handle this? Obviously a 12th-level wizard is more powerful than any 12-level spellcaster in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* should be. Should I apply a level adjustment for converting characters from D&D to *d20 Modern*?**

While it's true that a 12th-level **D&D** wizard is a much more powerful spellcaster than a 12th-level **d20 Modern** character who has taken the Mage advanced class, it does not necessarily follow that the wizard is a more powerful character overall. In addition to having fewer hit points than the Mage, the wizard has no action points, no class defense bonus, no reputation bonus, and no proficiency with any modern weapon or armor type. Thus, he may not have much of an advantage against, say, a Smart hero 6/Mage 6 with a +1 *acidic Colt M1911* and the Heroic Surge feat. For single encounters or short adventures, you can mostly just use the **D&D** characters as written.

However, even **D&D** characters are subject to the rules of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game** once they enter a **d20 Modern** campaign. The **d20 Modern** rules covering how specific races, feats, and skills function, how massive damage thresholds are determined, and how spells work supercede the **D&D** rules under which the character was built. If you're planning to have the **D&D** characters stick around for a while, it's best to convert them fully to the **d20 Modern** rules. Guidelines for this process (and a lot of other questions that are likely to come up when you combine the **D&D** and **d20 Modern** games) can be found in Chapter 9 of the **Urban Arcana Campaign Setting**.

 My current high-level **Urban Arcana** campaign includes a **Shadow Slayer** hero. Since she has been in play, I have noticed that the 10th-level *word of slaying* ability seems to be out of balance. It immobilizes all shadow foes and bypasses all defenses, whether the creature of Shadow is immune to the effect or not. No other class has an ability on a par with this one.

Is *word of slaying* considered a supernatural (Su) ability, or is it spell-like (Sp) and therefore subject to spell resistance? Have I missed some errata or modifications to this ability that could solve my problem? Any suggestions on toning down this power for future campaigns would be greatly appreciated.

Word of slaying is a spell-like ability. For the purpose of its use, the **Shadow Slayer's** caster level equals all her **Shadow Slayer** levels plus all her levels in any spellcasting classes and half her levels in any other classes.

As far as the balance issue is concerned, each use of *word of slaying* requires the expenditure of an action point. A character gets only a set number of those, and once they're gone, the power can't be used at all. In addition, it affects only creatures of Shadow within 15 feet of the **Shadow Slayer**, and it only dazes a creature that has 12 or more HD. Since most of the foes that a 10th-level **Shadow Slayer** encounters fall into this category, the power doesn't seem too unbalanced.

However, if you're still having trouble with it after ensuring that its use follows all the rules, you could try any of the following solutions.

- Restrict its use to once a day.
- Increase its cost to two action points.
- Remove its action point cost altogether, restrict its use to once per day, and apply a Will save.
- Disallow the class entirely, since the **Shadow Slayer** is geared specifically for a **Shadow Chasers** setting rather than a more mainstream **Urban Arcana** campaign.
- Require the **Shadow Slayer** to specify only one type of Shadow creature (such as aberrations, giants, or undead) against which her *word of slaying* will be effective in your **Urban Arcana** game.

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

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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