



Bullet Points

Questions to End the World

By Owen K.C. Stephens

Welcome to the latest installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm Owen K.C. Stephens, writer of a lot of material for the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** and the **d20 Modern** game, author of the recently announced *d20 Cyberscape* book, and co-author of the new *d20 Apocalypse* supplement. 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 the mailbox contains any unrelated but pressing questions, 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.

Questions to End the World

In this installment, we'll look at some questions about the new *d20 Apocalypse* supplement, which I co-authored. But before we begin, I'd like to point out that a postapocalyptic setting makes an ideal melting pot for elements of various **d20 Modern** books. Not only is a lot of material from the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game** and the *d20 Future* supplement appropriate for such a campaign, but *d20 Past* includes a lot of ideas for civilizations that are just beginning to rebuild. And even if your campaign was originally PL 7, the world might include a society that has reclaimed PL 3 or PL 4 technology. So if the idea of biplanes with salvaged laser rifles shooting at mutant dragons appeals to you, go for it!


Questions and Answers

Now without further ado, let's get down to the questions!


 **Why does the *d20 Apocalypse* book mention nine possible kinds of apocalypse, but detail only three example campaigns? What does a campaign using one of the other six options look like?**

It looks like whatever you want it to. The book simply wasn't big enough to offer a full sample campaign for every possible worldwide endgame. However, the three campaign settings provided include a lot of elements that you can mix and match to create your own unique postapocalypse campaign world. For example, you could use the barge fortress from **Earth Inherited**, plus the Evolutionary, the spanthi reaver, the Rip Van bunker, Adeptus Dei, the Kin, and Tyrannis from **Plague World**, and pretty much all the **Atomic Sunrise** material in an environmental cataclysm, asteroid strike, or rogue planet game.


The *d20 Apocalypse* book is a toolkit, not a prebuilt setting. In that respect, it follows the model set in the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game** by the **Agents of Psi** and **Urban Arcana** campaigns. In fact, one easy way to create a *d20 Apocalypse* setting is to start with a **d20 Modern** setting and just decide which kind of apocalypse destroyed it.

 **Can my hero use a Knowledge (physical sciences) check instead of a Survival check to avoid mishaps when moving around a damaged building? That particular Knowledge skill is supposed to include engineering, after all.**

No, he sure can't. The Knowledge skill represents a character's understanding of facts, not whether he can use his knowledge to avoid physical mishaps in a dangerous environment. However, the GM may, if it seems appropriate, grant a +2 synergy bonus on any Survival checks made to avoid mishaps for a character with 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (physical sciences).


 **The Trade Value rules say that the TUs given for consumables are per day and include meals. But the description of an MRE specifies that it provides two days' worth of food. Since the listed TU for an MRE is 6 per meal, is a single MRE actually TU 12, or is the price 6 TU for one MRE, even though it provides two days' worth of food?**

The price is per MRE, even though it provides enough food for two days. The important distinction here is that the value is 6 TU per individual MRE, not per case of MREs.


 **One day's worth of food for a single person in *d20 Apocalypse* is valued at TU 1. Since my hero can feed extra people with a Survival check, can she save the extra food and barter with it?**

She might be able to do so. It's certainly reasonable to use the 1 TU/day value when bartering your hunting skills to a group that can use them. For example, a small community might hire a hero as a hunter, providing her with shelter and spare parts equal to 1 TU per day's worth of food she brings in. As an area gets hunted out, however, the GM might start applying penalties to local Survival checks made to gather food.

The important consideration here is that food gathered via Survival checks isn't preserved. If you try to trade it away within 24 hours of obtaining it, you're likely to get about 1/2 TU per day's worth of food. Fresh food isn't as useful as preserved food to a society that fears starvation and wishes to hoard, but it's still edible. After a full day has passed, the food isn't worth much. A character with ranks in Craft (chemical) or Craft (pharmaceutical) can reasonably claim the ability to preserve food at a very low DC, but the specifics are up to your GM.

 **If my character is holding onto the outside of a vehicle and someone attempts the shake off stunt, wouldn't a Climb check be more appropriate than a Balance check to see if the character can keep his grip?**

If the GM decides that the vehicle offers enough gripping spaces to climb, and if the character has been following the Climb rules for movement (rather than just moving at half speed because he's on the outside of a vehicle), then he may try to resist a shake off with a Climb check. Use the same DCs as you would for Balance checks made to resist the stunt.

 **Does the game offer any way to reduce the penalties for making ranged attacks while mounted? Surely a postapocalyptic society of raiders would be better at firing from horseback than people who have just jumped on horses for the first time.**

You make a good point. Since mounted combat is fairly rare in the **d20 Modern** game (and perhaps even more so in *d20 Future*), not much effort has been invested in letting characters excel at it. But for PA societies that fight regularly from horseback (or from the backs of any other reasonably similar steeds), consider making the following feats from the **D&D** game available: Mounted Archery (applicable to all ranged attacks), Mounted

Combat, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, and Trample.

 **Is the damage from acid rain considered weapon damage (and thus subject to DR), or acid damage (and thus subject to acid resistance), or neither?**

It's acid damage.

 **Do the bonuses from mutations stack with similar effects produced by psionics or technology?**

In most cases, the bonuses gained from mutations are specifically mutation bonuses, so they stack with any bonuses not of the same type. A GM may decide that the bonuses from some mutations (such as chameleon skin) shouldn't stack with those from similar technological items, but such a decision would be a house rule.

 **Can a hero ready an action to change the kind of damage reduction she gets from the adaptive body mutation?**

No. The mutation requires that the choice be made at the beginning of the character's turn. However, it's reasonable for the hero to retain the same type of DR until she changes it -- that is, you need not announce that your character is maintaining her adaptive body DR each round if she's not changing the type.

 **Can a character with the dual brains mutation take two psionic actions per round, or take a psionic action and a physical action?**


No. The mutation description specifies which bonuses this mutation gives. It doesn't do anything else.

 **Can a psionic talent mutation grant psionic powers from sources other than the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*?**

Not as it's currently written. If a GM wishes to allow other psionic powers, he's welcome to do so, but any other psionic power should be carefully scrutinized to ensure that it's balanced with those already available.

 **Is the ability of a viral deathspawn to create new viral deathspawn limited to members of its own species? In other words, if a wolf attacks a viral deathspawn human, and the undead kills the animal in self-defense, does the wolf become a viral deathspawn wolf and seek to feed on living wolves?**

As written, the viral death ability applies to any living creature that is killed by a deathspawn or that falls victim to the death virus. This set of limitations would lead to only occasional cross-contamination between species, since a viral deathspawn seeks to consume members of its original species and has no need to eat anything else. Once a new strain of viral deathspawn is formed, however, it might spread very quickly. But a GM could always decide that the viral deathspawn can infect only its own species if he wishes to do so for his campaign.

 **The standard rules for disease in the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* specify that they apply only to treatable diseases. Similarly, the *remove disease* spell works only on treatable diseases. Some of the superviruses in *d20 Apocalypse* are clearly real-world diseases that as yet have no treatment (such as ebola), yet they are handled exactly like normal diseases in terms of treatment and recovery. So is ebola a treatable disease in the game, and thus subject to *remove disease*, or not? And if not, how does a GM know which diseases cannot be cured?**

A disease with no cure is a death sentence for a character. Death by disease can be dramatic in a one-shot game, but it's not much fun in an ongoing campaign. Since the viruses in *d20 Apocalypse* are assumed to have already mutated, and it's a fair assumption that the state of medical technology may have advanced beyond today's level before the world collapsed, all these superviruses are assumed to be treatable (though still very dangerous), and thus subject to *remove disease*.

A GM who wants more of a threat can always decide that a particular supervirus can't be treated. In that case, a character who fails his initial Fortitude save never recovers. The best he can do is successfully resist the disease's effects every day. In this case, *remove disease* should put the disease into remission for 24 hours. While in remission, the disease deals no damage and the target isn't considered a carrier. A GM should be very careful about employing this tactic, however, for the same reasons mentioned in the Superviruses in Play sidebar in *d20 Apocalypse*.



What are the Defense and Reputation progressions for the Salvager? Does the character not have those attributes?

Those numbers were inadvertently left out of the final manuscript. The Salvager uses the same progression for Defense and Reputation as the Techie does (see page 178 of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying 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.
