



Bullet Points Conversions

by Charles Ryan

Welcome to the fourth 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.

If you've checked out the earlier installments of *Bullet Points*, you know the format. Every two weeks I 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.

Conversions between d20 Modern and Other d20 Games

In this installment, I want to talk a bit about conversions between the **d20 Modern** game and **D&D**, as well as conversions to and from other d20 games. If your campaign is set in a realistic version of the modern world that incorporates no elements of the supernatural at all, this column might be of only limited interest to you. But most of us like to add a little bit of the supernatural to our **d20 Modern** games -- be it a touch of X-Files-style creepiness or full-on, over-the-top *Urban Arcana*-style wackiness. And that's one of the biggest advantages of the **d20 Modern** game: Not only does the rulebook present a wide assortment of supernatural creatures, but the system's broad compatibility with other d20 games also gives you access to hundreds -- maybe even thousands -- of additional creatures.

Designing for Compatibility

In fact, compatibility with the **D&D** game and the overall d20 system was a strong consideration in the design of the game. For example, if you read *Polyhedron* Newszine, you probably saw the *Shadow Chasers* minigame featured in its pages about a year ago. That game used the vitality point/wound point system introduced in the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** instead of the hit point system that now appears in **d20 Modern**. That's because, back when *Shadow Chasers* was written (a good year before the release of **d20 Modern**), we were planning to use the vitality point/wound point system for it. We felt that it gave the game a slightly grittier, more realistic feel than **D&D**'s hit point system. But we ultimately ditched vitality points in favor of the hit point system. Though we modified that system somewhat, it's still very close to the one used in **D&D**. This particular decision mystified quite a few gamers when we started talking about the game a couple of months before its release.

Why the change? Well, there were several reasons. Among them was the issue of instant compatibility with the rest of the d20 system (the **Star Wars** game excluded). Converting creatures to vitality points wasn't too tough -- except for undead, constructs, and a few other creature types that don't have Constitution scores. Even in those cases, we could (and did) come up with fairly simple conversion rules. But if we adopted the hit point system, no conversion would be needed at all. In my own campaign, I found out pretty quickly how much more flexibility I had when I could grab a creature right out of the *Monster Manual*, even

on the fly in the middle of an adventure. And the ease of conversion issue doesn't just apply to monsters. It comes into play when you're dealing with spells, feats, special abilities -- you name it. Running games is just easier all around when you can use d20 system components right off the shelf.

The ultimate test came during an adventure I ran last fall at a gathering in the home of fellow WotC designers Andy Collins and Gwendolyn Kestrel. I grabbed an essentially random section of *Return to The Temple of Elemental Evil* and plopped six **d20 Modern** characters into it. (There was no particular rhyme or reason for this choice -- it was just an excuse to see what would happen when characters from the modern world went up against a host of **D&D** baddies.) For four hours, the SWAT team (6th-level **d20 Modern** characters with no arcane or supernatural abilities) battled umber hulks, trolls, fungi, and a half-demon half-ogre wizard. I didn't do one iota of conversion work -- I simply ran the adventure as presented in *Return to The Temple of Elemental Evil* using the **d20 Modern** rules. It went off without a hitch.

Questions and Answers

Now that we've had a look at how and why the game was structured for maximum compatibility, let's have a look at some questions about converting materials from other d20 games for use in **d20 Modern**.



I'm using monsters from the *D&D* game, and it seems like they're really tough for *d20 Modern* heroes. Should I change the monsters' CRs when I use them in *d20 Modern*?

Probably. The answer depends on the nature of your campaign and the types of monsters you're bringing in.

If you're running a campaign in which the heroes have no access to magic but their opponents do (an *X-Files*-style game, for example), you should probably increase the CR of any creature that has significant supernatural abilities by +1. If the creature is very difficult to kill without magic (for example, if it has a high DR, or supernatural abilities that **D&D** characters would normally use spells to suppress), increase the CR by +3 instead.

If you're running a game in which the heroes do have access to magic (a *Shadow Chasers* or *Urban Arcana* campaign, for example), increase the CR for any creature that's hard to kill without magic by +2, but don't change it for any other sort of creature. This adjustment reflects the fact that even though magic and magic items exist in your game, they're much rarer than they are in **D&D**, and they're often accessible only by higher-level heroes.



I'm thinking of bringing some characters from my *D&D* campaign into my *d20 Modern* game. How do I convert them? Do they keep their *D&D* classes, or do they have to be remade using the *d20 Modern* classes?


If you're talking about a one-shot adventure (that is, your **D&D** group is transported into the modern world, has one adventure, and then goes home), you really don't need to convert them at all. Your magic-using characters will be somewhat more powerful than their modern-day equivalents, but that inequity should be balanced out by the fact that the combat-loving characters won't have the proficiency feats needed to operate powerful modern-day weapons.

The rule of thumb for long-term (or permanent) migration from **D&D** into **d20 Modern** is that you should

convert any character who goes up in level while in the modern world to the **d20 Modern** classes. Some guidelines for managing such conversions are slated to appear in the *Urban Arcana* book, but generally they boil down to taking the classes, skills, feats, and so forth that most closely match your character's existing abilities.

A character who doesn't go up in level should be converted after spending a year and a day of game time in the modern world. (This rule is mostly for NPCs who might somehow be sucked into the modern world but not do a lot of adventuring once they get there.)

The rationale behind this delayed conversion concept is that, in passing through the veil of Shadow, a character slowly loses her connection to her original realm and develops a connection to the modern world instead. In theory, she will begin to forget about her old life as she fully integrates into her new reality.

 **I want to run a science fiction game using the *d20 Modern* rules, and I thought I could use the blaster weapons from the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. How do I convert *Star Wars* weapons, which use the vitality point/wound point system, to the *d20 Modern* system?**

Conveniently, the energy weapons in the *Star Wars* game always deal 3 dice worth of damage. (A blaster pistol, for example, deals 3d6 points of damage.) You've probably noticed that **d20 Modern** firearms deal 2 dice of damage. So to convert a *Star Wars* blaster to a **d20 Modern** weapon, simply drop 1 damage die. I would also recommend setting the threat range at 20.

This conversion means that *Star Wars* weapons typically deal damage comparable to that of modern firearms -- an arrangement that strikes some people as wrong. After all, shouldn't those high-tech weapons deal a lot more damage than our primitive slugthrowers? Well, maybe, but that's not what we see in the movies. The damage typically dealt by a blaster shot in a *Star Wars* movie seems pretty consistent with the damage from real-world firearms. Where blasters shine, comparatively, is in their very large magazines (50 to 100 shots per power pack).

 **I want to convert *d20 Modern* to the metric system. Can I just use the rules from the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*?**

I recommend that you let each square represent 2 meters. That said, however, don't use the *Star Wars* game as a guide. Instead, divide all **d20 Modern** distances by 5 to get the number of squares, and then multiply by 2 to get the number of meters. For example, a normal human's speed is 30 feet. To convert that value to the metric system, first divide by 5 to get the number of 5-foot squares (six, in this case). Then multiply the number of squares by 2 to get the number of meters. Thus, 30 feet would convert to six 2-meter squares, or 12 meters.

This conversion will result in many quantities that differ from those in the *Star Wars* game. For example, the range for the Point Blank Shot feat will work out to 12 meters instead of 10. Such inconsistencies don't mean that *Star Wars* is "wrong" -- it's just a different game. In the *Star Wars* game, you don't have to worry about compatibility of spell effects and other elements that are part of the **d20 Modern** game, and its numbers work just fine within its own system. But in **d20 Modern**, your metric conversions will work better if you use the more accurate system outlined above.

Do you have a rules question about the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**?
Send it to bulletpoints@wizards.com, and then check back here every
other week for the latest batch of answers!

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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