



Bullet Points

Gear and Equipment

by Charles Ryan

Welcome to the twenty-ninth 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.

Gear and Equipment

In this installment, we're going to look at questions relating to gear and equipment. The last installment ran a little shorter than usual, so I'll make up the lost ground this time, as promised.

Before we get to the questions, though, let's take just a moment to cover an equipment-related issue that recently came up in conversation -- the katana. Is it overpowered? Some people think so because it's virtually the same as the longsword, only better. So why would anyone ever use a longsword when the katana is clearly better -- and perhaps better than all other melee weapons as well?

I don't think I can provide a definitive answer to that question, since it's by nature rather subjective. Instead, let me give you a little insight into the thinking of the design team. Then you can make your own decision with that information in mind.

Let's start with a little comparison. When wielded by a proficient user, the longsword and the katana are nearly identical in effect -- except that the katana deals 2.5 points more damage per hit, on average. (A katana deals an average of 7 points of damage and the longsword deals an average of 4.5 points.)

The following factors offset that edge in damage-dealing capability.

- A slightly lower price for the longsword.
- A slightly lower weight for the longsword.
- The longsword is more easily concealed.
- The longsword requires the Archaic Weapon Proficiency feat instead of the Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat.

The first three points are probably minor elements in most games, though concealment might be a significant factor in some. The last item is pretty major. Not only does the Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat apply only to the chosen weapon and no others, but it also is not available as a bonus feat for any starting occupation. In other words, a character could become proficient with a longsword for free, without giving up

a feat slot. And however he got that proficiency, it makes him proficient with all other archaic weapons as well. But to become proficient with the katana, a character must spend a feat slot, and he does not gain proficiency with any other weapon for doing so.

If a hero doesn't choose a starting occupation that gives him Archaic Weapon Proficiency as a bonus feat, then he has to spend a feat slot to become proficient with either weapon. In that case, assuming that all your character cares about is being good with a single melee weapon, go with the katana rather than the longsword. Under those circumstances, it's simply the best choice. (And the design team is okay with that, since the katana is much more iconic in modern settings than the longsword is.)

But if you want a character who is good with more than just one melee weapon, taking the Archaic Weapon Proficiency feat and choosing the longsword will give you more bang for your buck. The character will be proficient with a wide array of alternate weapons, should he ever need them. In addition, he'll save a few bucks, free up a couple pounds of carrying capacity, and have a weapon that he can more easily tuck under his trenchcoat. And if his starting occupation is adventurer or athlete, he can even save a feat slot.

As always, the design team tried to ensure that the choice between one weapon and another offers pros and cons on both sides. Overall, I think that's the case with the katana and the longsword. But if the unique circumstances of your game make katanas more common than longswords, there's nothing wrong with that. If the katana's better statistics bother you in that case, a house rule that changes them may be appropriate.

Questions and Answers

Now that we have the issue of katanas versus longswords all cleared up, let's look at some questions.



What exactly is a range pack? Is it a type of backpack, or is it more like a sports bag that is carried in one hand?

It's like the latter. A range pack is carried by handles and does not have shoulder straps. It often features padding that makes it a bit stiffer than a sports bag, but it's otherwise pretty similar.



I can't find the description of the surgery kit in the rulebook. Am I missing something? What does it do?

I've answered this one before, but it comes up often enough that the answer is worth repeating. The description of the surgery kit was inadvertently left out of the book. Here's what it should say.

Surgery Kit


About the size of a small backpack, this kit contains the instruments needed for rudimentary emergency field surgery. A surgery kit is used when performing surgery (see the Treat Injury skill, page 74). A character performing surgery without a surgery kit takes a -4 penalty on the Treat Injury check. (This penalty is in addition to the -4 penalty that applies if the character does not have the Surgery feat.)




If someone throws an entire belt of fragmentation grenades but pulls the pin off only one, what would the resulting damage be if there were, say, seven grenades in all on the belt?

The damage would be 4d6 points (the damage from the one that had its pin pulled). The explosion would just destroy the other six grenades.

In general, an explosive does not detonate just because it's in the burst radius of another explosive. If it did, few people would ever use grenades -- after all, you'd be in great danger if you were carrying a few grenades when someone threw one at you! Just because the six extra grenades in this example happened to be very close to the detonating one does not mean they'd be any more likely to go off than a grenade carried by a character who took damage from an enemy grenade.

 **One of my characters has developed a new favorite trick: He throws a whole bunch of grenades, dynamite, and other explosives into a day pack, along with a block of C4 and a detonator, and then blows the whole thing up. Figuring out the damage -- not to mention the burst radius -- is a huge mess. What should I do?**

This situation is virtually the same as the one described in the question above. The C4 detonates and deals the appropriate damage. If the character wires several blocks of C4 together (and succeeds in the appropriate Demolitions check), the damage and burst radius increase accordingly. But the other items in the bag, including other forms of explosives, are simply damaged or destroyed in the blast -- they do not go off. Hopefully that answer clears up a few GMing headaches for you!

 **Two sticks of dynamite can be wired together to produce either +50% damage or +50% burst radius. Does the damage (or the burst radius) increase by 50% for each additional stick of dynamite, or is the maximum increase 50% regardless of the amount of dynamite used? Can multiple sticks of dynamite be wired together to increase both the burst radius and the damage? For example, if my hero wired four sticks together, could he increase the damage to 4d6 and the burst radius to 10 feet?**

In short, yes. Each stick you add to the bundle increases either the damage by 50% (adding 1d6 points of damage) or the burst radius by 50% (adding 2-1/2 feet). Essentially, two sticks must be added to increase the radius by a total of 5 feet; otherwise the increase won't have any effect. In your example, the DC for the Demolitions check would be 14 (10 plus 1 per stick).

 **I don't understand why a weapon with a burst setting doesn't give the user the benefit of the Burst Fire feat. Can you explain it again?**

I must not have been as clear as I'd have liked in my past explanations. I'll try again (briefly).

Any automatic weapon is capable of firing a burst. In real life, if you try to fire a burst with a weapon that doesn't have a burst setting, you typically shoot off somewhere between three and ten bullets, depending on the weapon's rate of fire. For example, the U.S. army teaches M-60 gunners to fire three- to five-round bursts. The M-60 has a pretty low rate of fire, and I was able to master that technique pretty quickly when I was in basic training. When I trained with the German army and fired their MG3 (a close equivalent to the M-60), my bursts tended to be seven to nine rounds. Since the MG3's rate of fire is much higher, it's harder to fire just a few rounds.


For the sake of simplicity, the **d20 Modern** rules specify that whenever a character tries to fire a burst from any automatic weapon without a burst setting, five bullets are used.

A burst setting on an automatic weapon is simply a limiter that sets the number of bullets fired in a burst to three. That limit is useful because in real life, any bullets beyond the first three typically fly wild and don't have any chance of hitting the target, no matter how well trained the user is. So, when I fired a four- or five-round burst from my M-60 in the army, one or two of those bullets were basically wasted. When I fired the MG3, I wasted four to six bullets with each pull of the trigger.

Such a limiter in no way makes the weapon more accurate. It does not help the user make the best use of the extra bullets beyond the first. It simply prevents her from wasting ammo. And if she uses less ammo, she has less to carry and reloads less often. That's the only benefit of a burst setting. Period.

To make the attack more effective, the user must be trained to compensate for the automatic fire and keep the weapon on target. That training is what the Burst Fire feat represents. Because the amount of ammo expended (or saved) does not affect these aspects, a character doesn't get the benefit of the feat simply because she saved a little ammo.

Whew. Okay, that wasn't as brief as I'd hoped, but with any luck it explains why the burst setting doesn't give you the benefits of the feat.

 **I have used both bows and .22-caliber handguns, and I want to know if the creators of this system have ever shot either one. You've given the bow a range increment of 40 feet, when a .22 has only a 20-foot range increment. Are you people crazy?**

A weapon's range increment is a reflection of both its short-to-medium range accuracy (the point at which it begins to accumulate range penalties) and its overall range (the range increment times 10).

For simplicity's sake, a single number is used to represent both factors. The linear effect of range penalties (in other words, the fact that they accumulate evenly over distance rather than exponentially or by some other mathematical formula) is also an issue of simplicity. If we were to model just how a given weapon's accuracy falls off throughout its maximum range, the mechanics would not only be much more complicated, but also probably different for each type of weapon.

The result of this abstraction is that sometimes a game effect doesn't precisely match your expectations of reality. For example, a .22-caliber pistol may be more accurate than a bow at 30 feet in real life, but in the game the pistol has taken its first range penalty while the bow hasn't. In both real life and the game, however, the bow turns out to be much more accurate at 200 feet.

All that said, I'm somewhat surprised that you find a standard, non-match-grade .22-caliber pistol more accurate than a compound bow beyond a very short range. We each have our different experiences in life, I guess.

 **Is there an armor proficiency feat that covers just archaic armor? Or is archaic armor considered light, medium, or heavy based on Table 4-9: Armor?**

The latter version is correct. The term "archaic" is just descriptive; it doesn't have any real meaning in terms of game mechanics. The only factor that matters when determining the proficiency feat that covers a given type of armor is whether it is light, medium, or heavy.

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

Charles Ryan was one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**. He has been designing and editing games for more than twelve years. His other credits include such diverse titles as the *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, two rats, and a dog. He works for Wizards of the Coast, Inc.



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