Notes from the Bunker
We're Going to Need Bigger Guns
by Rich Redman

Welcome to your bunker. I'm Rich Redman, one of the designers of the **d20 Modern** *Roleplaying Game.* I may not be an expert, but I'm experienced and opinionated. Here in the bunker, I explore some corners of the *d20 Modern* rules, create rules variants, and offer suggestions based on my experience writing and running games.

This month's topic is firearms, in honor of Wizards of the Coast's February **d20 Modern** release, *d20 Weapons Locker*.

What, Again?

Yes, I know, I wrote a lot of columns about firearms last year (*Cover and Concealment*; *Snipers, Pro and Con*; *Roleplaying Your Favorite Gun; Cool Under Fire;* and *Quick-Draw Contests*). But new firearms are created all the time in real life, and many players and GMs want to include the latest versions in their campaigns. So let's take a look at how to translate new firearms into your game.

By the Numbers

The first thing you have to do is research the weapon you have in mind. As always, be wary of your sources. Periodicals live and die by advertising, so their editors don't want to offend the manufacturers who buy ad space. Manufacturers want to sell their products, so while they may not lie outright, they certainly work hard to minimize any shortcomings their products may have. So where do you go to get the straight dope? Some good sites to start with include the following.

- DefenseTech
- GlobalSecurity
- The rec.guns FAQ page
- SecurityArms
- TheGunSource
- Modern Firearms & Ammunition

Stop and Think

Next, consider *why* you need another weapon in the game. I wrote a column last year about the roleplaying significance of the firearms that heroes choose to carry, so if your new weapon falls into one of those categories, something else probably already fills that need. The two best reasons to create a new firearm are a hero's background and the special needs of GM characters.

A hero may have lived in a different corner of the world than the rest of the group and so might quite logically prefer the firearms she used there. For example, a hero from Russia might prefer Russian

weapons, so you might sant to stat out some Russian pistols for her to choose from.

In the same manner, GM characters may come from a place that uses weapons not covered in the **d20 Modern** game rules. For example, your GM characters might represent the Russian Internal Affairs Ministry Special Forces and therefore need to carry the Groza ("Thunder") OC-14 assault rifle/grenade launcher combination weapon. Alternatively, they may simply be Russian Army soldiers armed with AN-94 assault rifles rather than the older AK weapons.

The Process

The **d20 Modern** rules concerning firearms are very coarse -- that is, they don't reflect details that are relatively minor but nonetheless significant in the real world. But given a little basic information and the constants from Table 4-4: Ranged Weapons, you can develop statistics for any firearm very quickly and simply. I invite anyone with issues about the design philosophy behind firearms in the **d20 Modern** game to read Charles Ryan's Bullet Points column on the subject.

A vague memory from the movie *Red Heat* (Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jim Belushi, directed by Walter Hill, 1988) led me to search for the handgun that Arnold's character, Captain Danko, claims is the most powerful in the world. After about an hour, I dug up a reference to the "Podbyrin 9.2mm," but further research indicated that the weapon he used in the film was actually a modified Desert Eagle autoloader, and the Russian weapon didn't even exist. So much for using that one as an example!

Instead, let's look at an old World War II standby, the MP38/40 "Schmeisser" submachine gun. If you've ever watched a WWII movie, or the first Indiana Jones movie, the Schmeisser is the submachine gun carried by German soldiers of that era.

The Basics

We know the weapon's name; now we need to gather some facts about it. The Modern Firearms & Ammunition site provides us with its caliber (9x19mm Luger, or Parabellum), weight (4.7 kg loaded, or 10.36 pounds), magazine capacity (32 bullets), and effective range (ca. 100 meters, or 328.08 feet). With the stock open, it's 833mm (about 32.8 inches) long. The MP40 is a later model, adopted by the Wehrmacht in 1940. It operated only on full automatic and had a folding stock.

Constants

We can get the threat range (20) and the damage type (ballistic) out of the way immediately because they're the same for all firearms in the **d20 Modern** rules.

The Translation

From the basic information on the weapon, we know the rate of fire is A (for automatic), and that its magazine is 32 box. Because it's a fully automatic submachine gun, we know that its restriction is Restricted (+2). We also know from Table 4-4: Ranged Weapons that any weapon firing the 9x19mm cartridge (all the 9mm pistols and submachine guns on the table) deal 2d6 points of damage. We can round the weight that we got from the website down to 10 pounds. That's seven entries (eight, counting the name) that we've taken care of before even having to think.

Thinking

The most important statistic we have to consider is range increment. We know that ranged weapons have a maximum range of 10 range increments (*d20 Modern* Roleplaying Game, page 95). But the number we have from the website is its *effective* range (about 328 feet), which is considerably lower than the maximum range at which an expert marksman could hit a target under ideal circumstances. It seems reasonable, given the information we do have, to set the range increment at 50 feet.

The MP 40 is longer than an HK MP5. Even with the stock folded, it's longer (at 630mm, or 24.8 inches) than an MP5K, so it's certainly a Large weapon.

Now all that's left is price. We can't really set an accurate price for a weapon that's currently a collector's item. Its 1940s price would be hopelessly out of date, thanks to inflation. As a wild guess, let's set the purchase DC at 25, though you could almost certainly find a replica weapon for much less.

Making It Significant

So now we have a 9mm submachine gun that's more expensive than a sniper rifle. The two additional rounds of ammunition it carries compared to other submachine guns don't really account for that extra expense. So why use this weapon? Possibilities include the following.

- Your game is set in WWII Europe, and you need a common submachine gun.
- Your hero is a firearms collector or history buff.
- Your session occurs in a museum, and the Schmeisser is the only weapon available. (Just pretend that museums actually display completely functional firearms, like Stan! did in a **d20 Modern adventure** last year.)
- Your hero is a WWII veteran who brought one home as a souvenir. (Just use the modifiers from Table 1-9: Aging Effects for your hero.)
- Your GM characters are the animated skeletons of Nazi soldiers, still wearing scraps of their old uniforms and using their old weapons. (That's right, skeletons specifically keep weapon proficiency feats.)

Another issue to consider is optional rules. There are several very good firearms supplements for the *d20 Modern*Roleplaying Game, including *Ultramodern Firearms*from Green Ronin and *Big Bang: The Mostly Illustrated Guide to Firearms* from Alternate Realities Publications. Both books contain optional rules that further individualize weapons.

In the case of the MP40, you almost certainly want to customize rules for the folding stock. Considering that this feature reduces the weapon's length by almost a third, folding the stock should grant a +2 circumstance bonus on Sleight of Hand checks made to conceal the MP40. Firing the weapon with the stock folded, however, imposes a -1 penalty on attack rolls. Folding or unfolding a stock is a move action, but a hero with a base attack bonus of +1 or higher can fold or unfold a folding stock as a free action while moving.

Other items that you probably want to create statistics for are the weapon's standard accessories, such as sights, illuminators, laser sights, and the like.

Parting "Shots"

Here's a summary of how to stat out weapons, plus a few words of advice.

- You don't need to be a firearms expert to do create weapon statistics.
- Make sure you have a good reason to add another firearm to your game.
- Remember the design philosophy: Your goal is to design a firearm that works within the framework of the **d20 Modern** game, not to design a weapon that's superior to any firearm already in the rules.
- Don't buy the hype. Manufacturers have to sell their products, so they make them look and sound as exciting as possible in advertisements. Hollywood wants to sell movie tickets, so it exaggerates the performance of weapons. Do the research and look at the numbers to get a realistic idea of the weapon's performance.
- Looks aren't everything. Few firearms perform as well as we imagine they do, or as well as they look like they should. Do the research and make the comparisons.
- Start with the basics. Collect real-world information about name, caliber, range, rate of fire, magazine, length, weight, and (if possible) price.
- Remember the basic game constants -- threat range is always 20, and damage type is always ballistic.
- Translate the numbers. Find a weapon of the same or similar caliber in the rules and use its damage rating. Then use the numbers you've researched to set the rate of fire, the weight, and the restriction.
- Compare range numbers and set the range increment. Compare sizes and set the size category, then use Table 7-1: Purchase DCs to set the price.
- Accessorize! Make sure you provide details for any standard accessories typically used with the weapon.

About the Author

Before Rich Redman came to the RPG R&D department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.'s Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer who has worked on the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the *d20 Modern* Roleplaying Game, the **Marvel Super Heroes** Adventure Game, and **Dark*Matter**. When he's not working as vice president of The Game Mechanics, a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat.