



Bullet Points

Looking into the d20 Future

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 few **d20 Modern** products that haven't been announced yet. 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.

Looking into the d20 Future

In this installment, we'll look at some comments and queries about the *d20 Future* supplement. This book has raised a lot of questions, many of them centering on which rules are appropriate for each of the campaign settings presented in the book. For example, several people wanted to know whether mecha would be appropriate for a Bughunters campaign, or whether cybernetics should be included in a Genetech game. The simple answer is that anything the GM wants to include is appropriate, but nothing is mandatory.

The *d20 Future* book is a toolkit that provides GMs with the information they need to play futuristic games using the *d20 Modern* rules. The sample settings provided are just sketches of the kinds of campaigns you might want to run, not a definitive list of every possible *d20 Future* campaign. In this regard, *d20 Future* is more like the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game** than **Dungeons & Dragons** or the **Urban Arcana Campaign Setting**. Face it -- no one book could cover all the possible futuristic settings. So rather than focus on one possibility, and thus provide nothing for GMs interested in a different type of campaign, *d20 Future* provides rules and options applicable to a wide variety of settings.

The GM must pick and choose what to include in his particular campaign. Even GMs using settings with high Progress Levels are under no obligation to include cybernetics, mutation, mecha, time travel, or any other elements they don't like. The rules presented in the *d20 Future* book are there to provide a framework for futuristic games, not to force unwanted elements into everyone's campaign.

Questions and Answers


Now let's take a look at some of the specific questions I've received about this supplement.

 **How do you use the "class plus" feats, such as Fast Plus? Can a Fast hero use the Strong Plus feat? Or can these feats be used only by characters with the appropriate class? And if that's the case, how does multiclassing work?**

The feats in question (Charismatic Plus, Dedicated Plus, Fast Plus, Smart Plus, Strong Plus, and Tough Plus) are essentially ways for characters to continue advancing along a talent tree after leaving a basic class -- though a character can certainly use them to gain talents more quickly while still advancing in the appropriate basic class. The feats work exactly as written -- upon taking the feat, a character may take two of the talents its description lists (no more than one off a given talent tree) for which she meets all the prerequisites.

That last bit is what most people miss. For example, if your character takes Smart Plus, she can select one talent off the research talent tree and one off the strategy talent tree. However, she can't take a talent off the strategy tree if she doesn't already have one from the research tree. Thus, if she doesn't have at least one level of Smart hero (thus gaining one Smart hero talent), she can't use the Smart Plus feat to gain a research talent. A character with no levels in Smart hero could take savant, but it does her no good. The only benefit Smart Plus offers a character with no Smart hero levels is linguist, which has additional prerequisites and doesn't help a character with no Smart hero levels to add to the Intelligence check it grants.


Similarly, a character with no Strong hero levels doesn't qualify for any of the talents that Strong Plus grants. But a character with a few levels of Strong hero and a level of Fast hero is free to take Strong Plus to gain any additional Strong hero talents she qualifies for.

 **How do I calculate how many experience points a character gains for winning a fight with a mecha? And how what level increase should I assume for a character using a mecha in order to calculate the party's level?**

Mecha are handled just like any other piece of equipment or vehicle. They don't add levels or CR to either heroes or NPCs. They can, however, significantly alter encounter circumstances, as outlined on page 207 of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*.

If you set up an encounter with a mecha pilot, the base EL is equal to the pilot's CR. This assessment is reasonable, since in the hands of a 1st-level pilot, even the most powerful mecha in the world isn't much threat to 10th-level heroes. If all the characters involved -- NPCs and heroes both -- have equipment that can deal with mecha (including mecha of their own, or other vehicles, or even big enough guns or specialty gear designed to take down mecha) then you can figure the EL off the CR and levels alone. If the heroes don't have their own mecha or similar gear, and the environment doesn't neutralize the benefits of a mecha, the EL should increase by about 1/3.

For example, suppose four 6th-level heroes are facing off against a 6th-level pilot in a scourge. If the heroes are in myrmidons, there's no need to adjust the base EL of 6. If the heroes are in tempests and paragons, they have an advantage, so the EL should be reduced by 1/3 (to EL 4). If the heroes aren't in mecha and don't have heavy weapons or similar gear to make up the loss, the EL should increase by 1/3 (to 8).

 **Page 171 of the *d20 Future* book gives the benefit of the Mecha Fling feat as "Your mecha can make a grapple check at a -20 penalty. . . ." Is this statement a typo, or is it really THAT difficult to fling an SUV (as in the picture on the page next to it)?**

The rule you mention is not a typo. It's based on an improved grab rule from the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* that says a creature with improved grab can use just part of its body for a grapple and take a -20 penalty on its grapple check. A creature that uses this option is not considered "grappled" while grappling with a foe, so it retains its Dexterity bonus and the ability to threaten.

Though Mecha Fling rule isn't exactly the same, it's similar. If a mecha can successfully win a grapple check at a -20 penalty, it need use only part of its body for the grapple and can lift and throw its target. Otherwise, the mecha doesn't have enough control to lob another vehicle around.

A big mecha can get a considerable grapple bonus based on its size -- look how big the mecha throwing the truck is! Also, it would not be unreasonable for a GM to give a vehicle with no limbs (such as a truck) a grapple penalty because of its limited ability to fight back.



Both gray death and resillite seem way too dangerous to allow into any campaign. A character injured by a weapon carrying these nanoviruses has very little chance to survive, and it seems that no one can do much about an infection.

Nanotechnology is frightening stuff under the best of circumstances, and GMs who are uncomfortable with the impact it could have on their campaigns shouldn't use it. However, even those nanoviruses may not be as bad as you think.

First, a character can't be infected with a nanovirus through simple injury. Nanite-laced weapons or bullets just don't carry enough of the tiny attackers to reliably overtake a character's body. Nanoviruses can be effectively delivered only with a syringe or similar medical delivery system; thus, only captured characters are likely to be exposed to a nanovirus. Even if someone did invent a nanovirus-bearing weapon, anyone hit would get an initial Fortitude save (around DC 15 or so) to fight off the infection before it became widespread enough to have any effect.

Second, a nanovirus-infected character can be aided in several ways. For every nanovirus known to a given society, a nanohunter has been specifically designed to combat it, as mentioned in the sidebar on page 95. If nanoviruses are common, any well-equipped hospital probably has nanohunters specific to them on hand. Field medics -- especially medical doctors -- might even carry some in their kits.

Even without nanohunters, an infected character can be saved. A body can only carry two internal nanocolonies, and any colony introduced in excess of that limit destroys one of the existing ones. Thus, if a character infected with resillite and gray death is exposed to a brain boost nanoaugmentor, the brain boost replaces one of the two nanoviruses. On that basis, societies might well develop "generic" internal nanocolonies that do nothing at all, so as to have something with which to replace existing colonies in an infected creature. Such nanocolonies aren't a sure thing like nanohunters are, but they represent a possible cure for any nanovirus.

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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