Bullet Points
Rules That Aren't in the D&D Game
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.

Rules That Aren't in the D&D Game

Recently, a number of questions have arisen about some **d20 Modern** rules that don't exist in the **Dungeons & Dragons** game. Several of these inquiries focused on starting occupations, action points, and Wealth bonuses, which have already been covered in previous columns, but a few topics are new. Before I address those, however, I'd like to bring up a point that bears repeating.

Because **D&D** and **d20 Modern** are different games, they address a number of concepts differently. Beyond the rules mentioned above, **d20 Modern** also presents systems for class-based Defense and nonlethal damage, plus the massive damage threshold and vehicle combat rules (which introduce the concept of facing into the game). Furthermore, the **d20 Modern** game generally gives character classes lower base attack bonuses than **D&D** does.

Hundreds of minor differences -- much like the differences between **D&D** v.3.0 and v.3.5 -- exist in addition to these major ones. Certain feats in the **D&D** game (such as Rapid Fire) don't exist in **d20 Modern**, and several **d20 Modern** feats (such as Defensive Martial Arts and Heroic Surge) don't exist in **D&D**. Other feats that the two games share work differently in one than they do in the other. The Craft skill works differently, and the Knowledge skills have different subcategories to reflect each game's particular needs. The Profession skill also works differently in **d20 Modern** because it's linked to the Wealth system. Finally, the **d20 Modern** combat rules are a mix of those in **D&D** v.3.0 and v.3.5. For example, cover and concealment in the **d20 Modern** game essentially work the same as they do in **D&D** v.3.0, while standing from prone provokes an attack of opportunity, just as it does in **D&D** v.3.5.

Though both games are essentially driven by the same engine, the exact cogs and gears are different enough to trip up someone who isn't aware of how they work. So try to skim the specific **d20 Modern** rules you plan to use before you assume that they work just like the corresponding ones in any similar roleplaying game. Adopting rules from other games is fine, but do look to see if the imported rule is going to create a weird game balance issue because another rule is handled differently.

Questions and Answers

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

What difference do allegiances really make? The GM can take them away with no warning, they provide a bonus only for groups the character already belongs to, and they're optional. Why would anybody bother with them?

Some gaming groups don't care about allegiances -- that's why the rule is optional. And frankly, complaining about an optional rule seems a bit odd. But let's examine the issue and see why this aspect of the rules might be useful.

Allegiances provide descriptive information about a character. Unlike height, weight, and other physical characteristics, however, allegiances describe your character not to the other players, but to you and the GM. For example, suppose your hero has the following allegiances: moral philosophy (good), belief system (democracy), and nation (America). The GM can easily see that the character is a patriot who believes in Our Great Nation but can't justify committing evil acts to protect it. Compare this character with one who takes nation (America), ethical philosophy (law), and personal (commanding officer) -- or even one who takes ethical philosophy (chaos), belief system (anarchy), and group (Green Brigade). Each of these sets of allegiances provides a quick snapshot of what's important to the character and thus acts as a guide to his likely behavior in various situations.

This kind of information can help a GM prepare games that are appropriate for the heroes, and it also helps to ensure that they can work together. If all members of a group have allegiances to the same or allied concepts, groups, or people, the GM can use those allegiances to get the characters involved in an adventure quickly and easily. For example, if every hero in a campaign has an allegiance to the moral philosophy of good, the GM can count on the group to step into an adventure for no other reason than the opportunity to help someone who needs and deserves assistance. By the same token, characters with allegiances to belief systems such as hedonism and pragmatism are likely to adventure primarily for personal benefit.

It's true that the GM can revoke an allegiance without warning, but doing so is rarely the best option. In most cases, the GM has plenty of opportunity to warn the player that his hero's actions have threatened a given allegiance before removal becomes necessary. If the hero takes a single, extreme action that is against her allegiance, the GM is certainly justified in removing it on the spot, but removal -- or even replacement -- of an allegiance is another useful form of communication. Such an action lets the player know not only how the GM views the hero's actions, but what kinds of GM characters should now be predisposed toward her. A player who is unhappy with an altered allegiance should have a conversation with the GM and find out what the hero must do to shift her allegiance back to what it was before.

As for the small game mechanical benefit of allegiance, don't discount it. Just because two characters have the same allegiance doesn't mean they'll always agree. A common story thread is the rogue or mistrusted agent trying to convince his superiors that some threat they have been ignoring is real. If the hero and his superiors share an allegiance to the same group or ideal, his chances of successfully playing the whistle-blower or delivering a timely warning become much higher. Similarly, matching allegiances can help him convince allies to take risks for him, believe his unsupported statements, or give him greater leeway in his missions. Such benefits aren't as useful as a combat-based bonus in most cases, but they're not insignificant, and they have no real downside.

My character has an extremely high Reputation bonus because she's taken the Renown feat twice. But her reputation never comes into play. Isn't my GM cheating me by ignoring the bonuses my hero ought to be getting?

First, let's talk about the Renown feat. Unlike the description of Toughness, the text for Renown doesn't state that a hero may take it more than once. So unless your GM has made a house rule to allow it, your character may take it only once. You might want to check with your GM about this issue before proceeding.

In fact, checking with your GM is a good idea in any case. He might be ignoring your hero's Reputation bonus out of forgetfulness, or because he doesn't like the rule. He may even have made a legitimate decision to ignore it because your hero is in a situation in which no GM character could possibly have heard of her.

Also keep in mind that a Reputation check is DC 25, and the GM rolls it, not you. So even if you have a +14 Reputation bonus, your reputation is going to have an effect only about half the time. Furthermore, your GM is under no obligation to tell you when he's making the check, and he can apply the +4/-4 modifier to subsequent checks for interactions without informing you.

It's even possible that your character is taking a penalty on Reputation checks without your knowledge. It's up to the GM to decide whether your reputation is a help or a hindrance with any given GM character. So you may want to ask your GM how he views your hero's reputation. If you think of your character as a famous action hero who helps people in distress, and the GM thinks of her as a troublemaking outlaw on the verge of arrest, you may be taking penalties when you think you ought to get bonuses.

If your GM just doesn't think about reputation very often, you can try any of several ways to make the topic stand out in his mind. First of all, try asking about the reputations of other characters -- including GM characters. Second, talk to your GM about how your hero gained her reputation and look for groups whose members will see her actions favorably. Third, try to work bits of reputation-based rhetoric into your hero's speech. Remarks such as "I'm better known back east," or "Do you know who you're talking to?" can remind everyone that the reputation rules exist. Don't overdo it, though, unless you want your character to get a reputation as a name-dropping glory hound.

The bottom line is that you can't assume that your GM is "cheating," no matter how often he seems not to apply your hero's Reputation bonus. But the only way you'll ever know what's going on is if you ask. Be polite with your questions, though. If it turns out that your GM doesn't plan to use the reputation rules as much as you'd like, you might want to find a different focus for your character.

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.