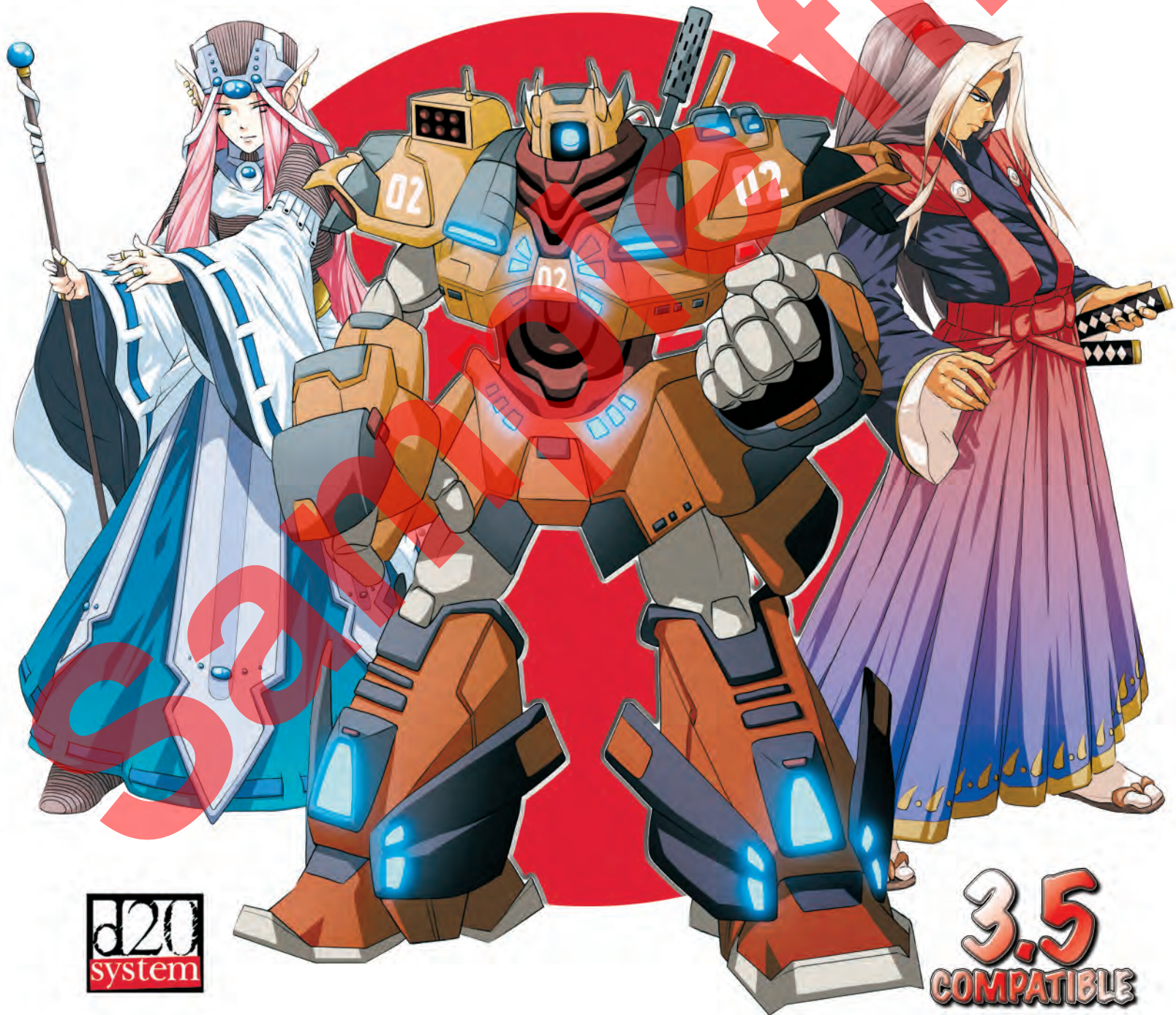


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bESM d20

anime role-player's handbook

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ROLE-PLAYING GAME MANIFESTO

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THERE ARE NO OFFICIAL ANSWERS, ONLY OFFICIAL OPINIONS.

WHEN DICE CONFLICT WITH THE STORY, THE STORY ALWAYS WINS.

MIN/MAXING AND MUNCHKINISM AREN'T PROBLEMS WITH THE GAME;
THEY'RE PROBLEMS WITH THE PLAYER.

THE GAME MASTER HAS FULL DISCRETIONARY POWER OVER THE GAME.

THE GAME MASTER ALWAYS WORKS WITH, NOT AGAINST, THE PLAYERS.

A GAME THAT IS NOT FUN IS NO LONGER A GAME — IT'S A CHORE.

THIS BOOK CONTAINS THE ANSWERS TO ALL THINGS.

WHEN THE ABOVE DOES NOT APPLY, MAKE IT UP.

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WHAT IS ANIME?

"Anime" is the accepted term for animation from Japan. It has garnered much more respect in its native country than North American cartoons have in Canada and the United States. One reason for the popularity of anime is its diverse subject matter, ranging from fantasy and science fiction to romantic comedy and horror. While North American cartoons tend to be written for younger audiences (with a few exceptions), anime includes many shows aimed explicitly at teenagers or older viewers, and this in turn permits more sophisticated story lines and a wider array of genres.

Another factor in the appeal of anime is the ongoing multi-episode story arcs that are a common feature of many live-action TV dramas. A show can tell a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end rather than simply present a series of disconnected episodes that lurch onward until cancellation.

Science fiction and fantasy fare very well in anime. Freed from the budgetary constraints imposed by the high cost of live-action special effects, coupled with a willingness to tackle stories that appeal to older viewers, many shows bring fantastic visions to vivid life. Alien invasions, world-shaking sorcery, transforming robots, super-powered heroes, demonic monsters, obsessively detailed military hardware, and realistic depictions of life in space are all a part of anime. Characters in these shows are often larger than life: angst-ridden, utterly clueless, burning for revenge, or hopelessly in love.

ANIME ORIGINS

The first anime series produced in Japan was *Tetsuwan Atom* (1963), created by Osamu Tezuka and his animation studio, Mushi Productions. Later, this series became popular in the West as *Astro Boy*. From the 1980s through the 1990s, anime has improved in both sophistication and quality, with series like *Space Battleship Yamato* (1975, space opera), *Urusei Yatsura* (1981, alien girlfriend comedy), *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979, military drama), *Macross* (1983, science fiction soap opera), *Sailor Moon* (1992, magical girl drama) and *Ranma 1/2* (1994, martial arts comedy) exemplifying particular genres. A major breakthrough came in the early 1980s, when direct-to-video (OAV; Original Animation Video) anime releases caught on, allowing production studios to produce shows aimed at smaller niche audiences or older viewers in a much greater diversity of genres. The legacy of this "OAV boom" (and the rise of speciality cable TV) was a renaissance in original television anime in the late 1990s, of which the most influential series were the mecha-conspiracy saga, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), and monster gladiator kids' show, *Pokemon* (1999).

In North America, relatively few anime-derived series were translated and adapted for television in the 1970s and 1980s. Most of those that did appear were heavily altered, often losing those Japanese elements (such as a continuing story arc) that made them interesting in the first place. Notable exceptions were *Star Blazers* (1979, the U.S. version of *Space Battleship Yamato*) and *Robotech* (1985, a compilation of *Macross* and two other anime shows), whose adaptations left their story arcs largely intact. The fandom that developed around these shows was sustained by various comics, books, and fan activities and helped fuel the first anime-inspired giant robot board games and RPGs. In 1986 and 1987 the first American anime magazines appeared. More and more Westerners became active in the distribution of Japanese language or fan-subtitled tapes, as fans became aware of the "OAV boom" taking place in Japan. Successful comic book translations of high quality Japanese *manga* (such as *Akira*, *Lone Wolf and Cub*, *Nausicaa* and *Appleseed*) and the theatrical release of the *Akira* motion picture captured new fans.

In the late 1980s, a number of American companies began releasing quality subtitled and dubbed translations of anime releases, including some of the best of the then-new science fiction OAV series like *Gunbuster* (1988) and *Bubblegum Crisis* (1988). In the 1990s, the growing popularity of anime allowed companies to release longer TV series

(notably *Ranma 1/2*, one of the first successful non-mecha series in America) direct to video. In 1995, the "impossible" happened when the magical girl show, *Sailor Moon*, began appearing on North American television, the first *shojo* (young girl) anime to do so. Its success has added a new generation of young female (and male) fans.

The start of the new century is seeing an explosion in anime with TV series being translated and released on video within months of their appearance in Japan, and anime returning to mainstream American television. Over the last few years, shows such as *Card Captor Sakura*, *Cowboy Bebop*, *Dragonball Z*, *Digimon*, *Escaflowne*, *Gundam Wing*, *Hamtaro*, *Monster Rancher*, *Pokemon*, *Tenchi Muyo!*, *Trigun*, and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* have begun broadcasting on television. It's a good time to be an anime fan!

ANIME GENRES

Anime is often, though not exclusively, based on a published manga (Japanese comic). The Japanese comics industry is among the most prolific and vibrant in the world. Japanese manga (published almost exclusively in black and white) are even more diverse than anime, and widely accepted as a legitimate literary and artistic form. Manga serve as inspiration for television series, direct-to-video releases, and theatrical movies. Recently, manga has also influenced the drawing style of comic titles from Marvel and DC.

Anime includes familiar genres such as space opera, cyberpunk, cops-and-robbers shows, high-school soap operas, and more. Some of the more exotic sub-genres are outlined here. It is very common for shows to combine elements from several genres.

MECHA

This is the Japanese term for a machine that appears in anime. Mecha shows are anime that feature such machines in action, often giant, human-piloted robots, spaceships, submarines, fighter planes, or suits of form-fitting powered armour. Among the first mecha anime series were "hero" shows, in which teenage champions fought evil masterminds from inside super powered cars, subs, or giant robots. The niftiest robots, like *Mazinger Z*, could transform into different shapes or combine into even bigger robots (which also sold lots of cool toys). Then came series like *Mobile Suit Gundam*, which treated giant robots or space battleships as "real" military hardware used by governments or corporations to fight wars or combat terrorism. Instead of comic book heroes and villains, the characters were often young and talented soldiers facing combat and death for the first time, fighting opponents much like themselves. If you suspend disbelief in the robots or spaceships themselves, the mecha anime genre offers quality space opera or cyberpunk drama (with a dash of soap opera) that often matches or exceeds the best of Western cinematic science fiction television. Be sure to check out Guardians Of Order's d20 mecha creation system supplement, *d20 Mecha* (Product #02-601), and the far-future hard SF setting, *Centauri Knights d20* (Product # 02-602), if you plan to add mecha to your games.

MAGICAL GIRL

If the mecha show is the classic *shonen* (young boy) anime series, the magical girl show epitomises *shojo* anime. These series usually feature an elementary or high school-aged girl who is granted the power to transform into a costumed magical superheroine to fight evil. Often the magical girl will discover other magical girls who become her allies. Common elements in these anime are cute talking animal companions, mysterious male allies, evil monsters bent on world domination (a different set each season), high school romance, and the value of friendship. Many magical girl anime also include strong dramatic elements with characters encountering heartbreak, tragedy, and occasionally death in their struggle to win love for themselves and protect the world from evil.

HERO TEAM (SENTAI)

A more generic cousin to the magical girl show, *Sentai* team shows features groups of characters who battle evil, often in tight-fitting technological or magical armour. These often draw inspiration from live-action hero team shows such as *Ultra Man* or *Power Rangers*. An occasionally popular sub-genre is the “boys in armour” series, featuring a team of buff, angst-ridden teenage boys whose pretty boy features are designed to appeal to female fans while the action typically draws male viewers.

MARTIAL ARTS

Featuring battles inspired by *manga*, video games, and Hong Kong *wuxia* (“wire fu”) movies, anime martial artist shows regularly transcend the limitations of reality to produce incredibly *ki*-powered special attacks such as fireballs or geysers of energy. Characters in martial arts anime are often obsessed with proving themselves and discovering new techniques, much like fantasy RPG characters want to “go up in level.” Martial arts stories may be set in the real world or in exotic landscapes such as post-apocalyptic wastelands or medieval China. Often the martial arts genre crosses over with the supernatural as heroes battle magicians or labour under strange curses.

SPORTS ANIME

The characters may be tennis pros, baseball or basketball players, tag-team wrestlers, race car drivers, or some other type of athlete. Some sports anime are even set in the future, with science fiction sports that do not exist today. The plots in sports anime focus as much on their characters’ emotional development as on the actual training, matches, or tournaments. The hero often starts out lacking self-confidence and skill, but with the help of a best friend or coach pulls through, wins the respect of fellow team members, and leads them to victory in the final competition. Sequels often feature greater challenges or travel (“on to the Olympics!”). The mix of intense rivalry and close friendship between the different team members is important, as is the relationship with their manager/coach/sensei. This genre can cross over with the martial arts or even mecha genres, depending on the kind of sports involved.

EXOTIC GIRLFRIEND

These shows are situation comedies or comedy-drama where a seemingly ordinary boy finds himself in a relationship with one or more exotic girls that fall madly in love with him. The guy may be an ordinary teenager, or he may be more than he seems. The girls are aliens, goddesses, martial artists, robots, fighter pilots, etc., and all jealously compete for the hero’s affection. Often the hero would like nothing more than to dump the lot of them and just date a “normal” girl next door, but the plot (alien invaders, the world needs saving, etc.) gets in the way. Since the girls have special powers or big guns, this offers a combination of love triangle and action-comedy that appeals to both boys and girls. The genre has spun off into “Dating Simulation” console games, many of which spawn their own anime. There are rare variations that feature a bunch of guys and one girl.

INTERDIMENSIONAL EXILES

Cousins to *Through the Looking Glass*, *John Carter of Mars* or *The Wizard of Oz*, these science fantasy anime begin with one or more characters in modern Japan. Something weird happens, and the characters are magically summoned or otherwise sucked into another dimension — a fantasy world where magic, alien races or lost super technologies exist, and an epic battle rages between rival forces. In this world, the exiled Earthlings often possess special abilities, allowing them to become mecha pilots, magicians, leaders, or warriors in the earth-shaking struggle taking place — if they pick the right side with which to join. Often the battle lines are not so clear cut, and the group of castaways ends up split between both sides.



SUPERNATURAL ACTION

These shows are superficially “horror” series in that they feature demons, spirits, ghosts, vampires, out-of-control psionic teenagers, or other terrors that are menacing the world. The big difference is that instead of being ineffectual, the heroes often have access to high technology, cybernetics, martial arts, magical powers, or supernatural abilities of their own and can battle the monsters on an even basis. Thus, these anime are really action-adventure shows with a supernatural twist. Sometimes the horror is purely supernatural, or it may have a science-fiction rationale with psychic powers or sinister parasitic or shape-shifting aliens. Magical girls can be considered one unique sub-set of this genre, as are the “naughty tentacle” shows where the horrific demons are interested in more than just their victim’s blood and souls.

SAMURAI OR NINJA ACTION

These historical anime take place in ancient or medieval Japan, a world of *katana*-wielding samurai warriors, ninja assassins, magical Buddhist monks, warring clans, and blood-soaked revenge. A heroic samurai or ninja can dispatch a dozen enemies with his blade, and a ninja’s bag of tricks range from explosive bombs to literal invisibility. These shows are generally “historical fantasies” playing fast and loose with Japanese history in the same way that westerns do with the Old West. Variations are shows that take place in pseudo-historical China or India.

SWORDS AND SORCERY

These Western-style anime shows draw most of their inspiration from computer and console RPGs and fantasy role-playing games, but add their own unique twist. This includes visual elements (anime elves often have huge ears), insanely destructive magical spells (mostly powered-up variations of fireballs) and often a blend of magic and technology. The latter consists of techno-magical robots, androids, or flying ships, and the relics of ancient civilisations whose secrets are now lost.

WEIRD CONSPIRACY

These anime usually focus on government plots or secret corporate experiments. Often an innocent school boy or girl is a pawn in some sinister project to create or control a super weapon designed to fight a hidden enemy, or discovers a clue (like a mecha suit) that leads him or her into its midst. Neither side is what it seems, and there are wheels within wheels, and even the character’s own identity may be a lie. This sort of show often crosses over with the supernatural action or mecha genres, with artificial intelligence, psychic powers, or advanced mecha as part of the experiment.

PET MONSTER

Inspired by virtual pets and console games, these insanely popular kids anime feature wandering children who collect or train “pet monsters” either as gladiators or as partners in a battle against evil. They are the most recent anime genre, and amongst the most popular (and profitable) in North America.

WHAT IS A ROLE-PLAYING GAME?

For many people, a role-playing game (RPG) is the “mature” version of the games we used to play as children: “House,” “Cops and Robbers,” and “Superheroes.” A rule system assists in settling conflicts and resolving actions, often with the use of a random generator (usually dice) to add an unpredictable element to the game. A game requires a handful of players and one person to act as the Game Master (GM) or referee. The players

tell the GM what their anime alter-egos would like to do, and the GM describes the results of their actions. The GM is also responsible for creating the plot and the setting for the game adventures and works closely with the players to keep the game interesting and fun for all.

In *Big Eyes, Small Mouth d20* (BESM d20), players assume the role of an anime character suitable to the time period and setting of the adventure the GM will be using. The game system helps players assign some strengths and weaknesses to their characters using numbers to indicate relative ability. The remaining elements of a character’s background, family, hobbies, and interests are not covered by the rules and are described by each player according to his or her choice of character personality.

As a player, you control your character’s actions in the game. He or she can be likened to one of the major characters in an anime movie, working through the unexpected twists and turns of the plot with the help of other major characters. Your character’s actions can greatly affect the outcome of the adventure, but you must keep in mind that every action has a consequence that could return to haunt your character in a future session. Role-playing is a group effort, however, and positive interactions between your character and those of the other players are vital to everyone’s enjoyment of the game.

As a GM, your contribution will be much greater than that from any one player. You must establish the genre, setting, conflicts, and plot of the adventure as well as all the non-player characters (NPCs) your group of players will meet during the game. NPCs are similar to the background characters in a movie — few are given quality screen time with the major characters unless they are good buddies, or central to the plot. Additionally, you must be able to project your imagination to the players by describing in vivid detail the world in which they live. Then, after all that, your game plot must remain sufficiently flexible to allow the characters’ actions to make a definite impact on the adventure. A plot that is too rigid may leave players feeling their characters have lost the free will to affect their own destiny. Should you assume the role of GM, you must possess creativity, good judgement, and the ability to improvise in unexpected situations. It takes extra time and effort, but the reward of a well-played adventure can be almost euphoric.

Each role-playing adventure or episode will require one or two sessions, each several hours in length. A number of episodes using the same characters can be linked together to form an anime campaign. Campaigns require more commitment from everyone involved, but watching the characters grow as the greater plot unfolds makes the extra effort worthwhile. The most engaging campaigns can last upwards of 5-10 years, but keeping a campaign running for 8 months to a few years is considered tremendously successful. More advice on choosing an anime genre and on Game Mastering in general can be found in Chapter 13: Role-Playing.

PLAYING BESM d20

BESM d20 is a multi-genre anime game that accommodates nearly any setting or time period. The rules are simple to use and thus do not afford a high level of detail, although the resolution system and combat system have been designed to capture the fast-moving nature of anime action. This element is one of the central strengths of the game, making *BESM d20* ideal for either the novice or experienced role-player. Nevertheless, the role-playing interactions between the GM and the players, as well as between the players themselves, is the primary focus of *Big Eyes, Small Mouth: d20 System RPG*, and, to this end, the core mechanisms of the game have remained straightforward.



BESM d20 — FOR FREE!

BESM d20 is part of an unstoppable force known as Open Source Gaming, which generates a plethora of d20 System game rules and text that can be distributed freely with very few restrictions. GUARDIANS OF ORDER supports this movement and has made a System Reference Document (SRD) containing all primary Open Game Content from BESM d20 available on our website to everyone — free of charge!

Download the BESM d20 SRD at:

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CHARACTER CREATION BASICS

The design of a new character for *BESM d20* should involve a thoughtful collaboration between the player and the GM. Your objective is to create a character who is fun to play, has plenty of reason to adventure, and who fits into the GM's campaign. In *BESM d20*, you can choose to spend as little as ten minutes designing a character or upwards of an hour. The difference lies in the amount of detail and individuality given to your character. At no time during an RPG campaign do you have more control over the destiny of your character than during the creation process. If you have any questions about game mechanics or specific character abilities, talk to the GM before you begin character creation.

DICE AND NOTATIONS

Like all d20 System games, *BESM d20* uses polyhedral (multi-sided) dice at various points in the game. This typically includes dice with the following number of sides: 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 20. When a random number needs to be generated through a dice roll, the exact dice to be rolled will be indicated by the formula $XdY+Z$, where:

- X is the number of dice rolled
- d represents the word "dice"
- Y is the type of die rolled (number of sides)
- Z is a fixed value added to the roll (omitted for a zero)

For example, $2d8+4$ indicates you should roll two eight-sided dice and add 4 to the generated value. Similarly, $5d6$ indicates a roll of five six-sided dice, while $2d10-2$ means roll two 10-sided dice and subtract two from the result.

