



# MODERN

## MONSTERS

### THAT TIME FORGOT



By JD Wiker

Converting Monsters for the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game

### CONVERTING MONSTERS

When I was asked to help write the *Menace Manual* for the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*, I was overjoyed to see so many monsters on the list from the *Dark•Matter Campaign Setting* for the *ALTERNITY Roleplaying Game*. After all, I'd had a great time writing *Xenofoms: Aliens, Demons, & Aberrations* with Rich Redman, and I was really looking forward to converting some of those creatures to the d20 MODERN rules.

Then reality sank in: Converting monsters from ALTERNITY to the d20 MODERN rules wouldn't be the same as converting monsters from DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, with its built-in d20 System compatibility. Heck, it was starting to look like *work*. So I put together a system for conversion, which I'll share with you now. We'll see how it works with the conversion of a pretty basic *Dark•Matter* creature, El Chupacabras (from *Xenofoms*).

#### The Original

El Chupacabras is a small creature with 2 Hit Dice that can climb, attacks with claws and bite, and has psionics and a blood drain attack. It gains its sustenance by sucking the blood from warm-blooded animals. So let's see how the conversion process works.

#### Size and Type

El Chupacabras fits nicely into the Small category for size. It resembles an animal in many ways, but its psionic powers make it a good candidate for magical beast.

#### Ability Scores

The first thing I needed to change *Dark•Matter* monsters into d20 MODERN creatures was a method of converting ability scores from ALTERNITY to the d20



System. The first part of that job was converting the ALTERNITY abilities themselves (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Will, and Personality) to the corresponding abilities in the d20 System.

Fortunately, that’s a pretty easy conversion: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, and Intelligence all have direct d20 equivalents, and Will and Personality are just different ways of describing Wisdom and Charisma, respectively. So I was off to a good start.

To make things even easier, page 243 of the *ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide* provides the following handy “ALTERNITY to AD&D” conversion table, which takes a lot of the guesswork out of the second part of the process (the numerical conversion).

ALTERNITY	AD&D
4	3–4
5	5–6
6	7
7	8
8	9–10
9	11–12
10	13–14
11	15
12	16
13	17
14	18
15	19
16	20

Now let’s see how this works for El Chupacabras. Using the table above and figuring that the AD&D column is accurate for d20 MODERN, the creature’s ability scores convert as follows.

XENOFORMS	D20 MODERN
Strength 7	Strength 8
Dexterity 13	Dexterity 17
Constitution 11	Constitution 15
Intelligence 5	Intelligence 6
Will 9	Wisdom 12
Personality 9	Charisma 12

## Attacks and Damage

El Chupacabras has only two claws and a bite for attacks, and those work fine in d20 MODERN, with the claws as primary attacks and the bite as secondary. The damage they deal is another issue.

Because damage works differently in ALTERNITY than it does in the d20 MODERN game, we can’t use the same damage figures, and even just converting them can produce some weird numbers. So the smart route is to consult Table 8–11: Magical Beasts, in the d20 MODERN rulebook, to get an idea of the base damage El Chupacabras’s claws and bite should deal. According to that table, the bite of a Small magical beast deals 1d4 points of damage, on average, while its claws deal 1d3 points of damage. But, since those numbers are only guidelines, and El Chupacabras is already taking a –1 penalty on damage rolls because of its low Strength, we’ll go ahead and nudge those damage figures up to 1d6 and 1d4, respectively.

## Defense

Considering that El Chupacabras has armor under the ALTERNITY rules, it only makes sense that we should give the d20 MODERN version either natural armor or damage reduction (but not both—it doesn’t have *that* much armor). Giving our creature natural armor would mean that it wouldn’t get hit as often, but it would take more damage when it does. Giving it damage reduction would mean that it would get hit more often but take a little less damage each time. Since El Chupacabras as described in *Xenoforms* should appear to be strangely bulletproof but not have enough DR to shrug off melee attacks, the logical step is to give it a few points of natural armor bonus, so that it takes damage slightly less often. A natural armor bonus of about +3 should do the trick.

## Allegiances

We should also decide whether El Chupacabras has any kind of allegiances. “Alien” might be one choice if we assume that the monster is some kind of alien animal. But if we’re defining El Chupacabras simply as a strange creature, “none” is actually more appropriate.

## Action Points/Reputation

Besides special qualities, which we’ll get to later, all that’s left now are the Action Points and Reputation entries. But a magical beast doesn’t get either one unless it has levels in a character class. So at this point, El Chupacabras looks like this:

**El Chupacabras:** Small magical beast; HD 2d10+4; hp 15; Mas 15; Init +3; Spd 30 ft., climb 20 ft.; Defense 17, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural); BAB +2; Grap –3; Atk +2 melee (1d4–1, claw); Full Atk +2 melee (1d4–1, 2 claws) and –3 melee (1d6–1, bite) or +6 ranged; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ blood drain, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, psionics; AL none; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 8, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 12.

## Skills

A magical beast gets a number of skill points equal to 2 × Int score, plus 1 per Hit Die beyond 1. With an Int score of 6 and 2 Hit Dice, that works out to 13 skill points.

We already know from the ALTERNITY statistics what skills El Chupacabras has—but we have to remember that some of those are covered by d20 MODERN feats, the creature’s Base Attack Bonus, or even just its speeds. A few of its ALTERNITY skills don’t really fit with the d20 MODERN skills list, but those can be covered when we get to special qualities. So the only necessary skills we’re looking at are Climb and Jump (from Athletics), Hide and Move Silently (from Stealth), and maybe Listen or Spot (from Awareness).

We *could* spread out El Chupacabras’s skill points evenly, giving it 2 ranks in each of those six skills (plus 1 rank left over), but there are two good reasons not to do that. First, it’s usually a good idea to max out a creature’s ranks in whatever it’s best at. Second, all these skills can be used untrained, so the bonus from the appropriate ability score might actually cover the desired effect fairly well.



To call the process of assigning skills “calculating” might actually be giving it more credit than it’s worth—it’s more of a series of estimates than anything else. Essentially, this process involves subtracting the value of the broad skill from the total of the specialty skill in the ALTERNITY statistics. The logic here is that the value of the broad skill is derived from the ability score that governs it, and since the d20 System already takes that into account, we’re pretty safe just using the difference as our baseline “ranks.”

Using that rule, we get the following skill rank totals: Climb 2, Jump 5, Hide 5, Move Silently 3, and Listen/Spot 3.

Simply converting skill points on a one-for-one basis in this manner gives us more points than we have to spend—a total of 18 out of our available 13. So we need to get rid of 5 skill points somewhere.

Based on the above, El Chupacabras’s two most important skills are Jump and Hide, so those two should get the most skill points. Giving each of them the maximum of 5 skill points leaves us with only 3, and dividing those among the other skills gives them only 1 point each, with one (either Listen or Spot) losing out altogether. For the time being, we’ll make Listen the loser. Using this arrangement of skill points and adding in the relevant ability scores, the size modifier for Hide, and the +8 species modifier on Climb checks for having a climb speed gives El Chupacabras the following skill modifiers:

Climb: 1 rank  $-1$  Str  $+8$  species =  $+8$   
 Hide: 5 ranks  $+3$  Dex  $+4$  size =  $+12$   
 Jump: 5 ranks  $-1$  Str =  $+4$   
 Listen: 0 ranks  $+1$  Wis =  $+1$   
 Move Silently: 1 rank  $+3$  Dex =  $+4$   
 Spot: 1 rank  $+1$  Wis =  $+2$

As it stands, then, El Chupacabras is really good at hiding (which fits in well with its legend) and climbing. It’s also reasonably good at jumping and moving silently, but not so keen on listening or spotting. Now it’s time to get creative.

Since the ALTERNITY system didn’t have darkvision or low-light version per se, perhaps we can assume that part of El Chupacabras’s good Perception score was due to those abilities—both of which it gets for being a magical beast. That lets us skip putting that 1 skill point into Spot.

We could add that point to Climb, which has only 1 rank and a Strength penalty to boot, but that +8 species bonus on Climb checks for having a climb speed makes it quite unnecessary. We could also add that skill point to Move Silently, since El Chupacabras is known for its ability to come and go without detection. But what good is a high Hide modifier if you don’t notice intruders before you have a chance to vanish into the trees? So let’s put that extra skill point into Listen.

That arrangement still gives El Chupacabras a Listen modifier of only +2, which is almost not worth the effort. So to balance it out a bit more, let’s take that 1 skill point out of Climb (which still leaves El Chupacabras with a +7 Climb modifier) and put it into Listen. That gives us the following skill breakdown.

Climb: 0 ranks  $-1$  Str  $+8$  species =  $+7$   
 Hide: 5 ranks  $+3$  Dex  $+4$  size =  $+12$   
 Jump: 5 ranks  $-1$  Str =  $+4$   
 Listen: 2 ranks  $+1$  Wis =  $+3$   
 Move Silently: 1 rank  $+3$  Dex =  $+4$   
 Spot: 0 ranks  $+1$  Wis =  $+1$

## Feats

Next, we need to decide what feats El Chupacabras has. A quick perusal of the information on magical beasts in the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game* reveals that El Chupacabras, with only 2 HD and Intelligence 6, gets one feat. According to the formula for calculating feats for magical beasts (see Chapter 8: Friends and Foes in the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*) an Intelligence score of 6 gives El Chupacabras a total of 1 feat (1 + Int modifier [minimum 0], plus 1 feat per 4 HD beyond 1 HD). That comes to 1 (base) + 0 (Int modifier) + 0 (extra Hit Dice), or one feat. Since we were concerned about his Listen ability before and actually removed a skill point from Spot, let’s go ahead and give him Alertness to boost those skills. Now the stat block for El Chupacabras looks like this.

**El Chupacabras:** Small magical beast; HD 2d10+4; hp 15; Mas 15; Init +3; Spd 30 ft., climb 20 ft.; Defense 17, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural); BAB +2; Grap  $-3$ ; Atk +2 melee (1d4–1, claw); Full Atk +2 melee (1d4–1, 2 claws) and  $-3$  melee (1d6–1, bite) or +6 ranged; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ blood drain, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, psionics; AL none; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 8, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 12.

**Skills:** Climb +7, Hide +12, Jump +4, Listen +5, Move Silently +4, Spot +3.

**Feats:** Alertness.

## Special Qualities

Now we’re ready to give El Chupacabras the special qualities that make it so fearsome: psionics and blood drain.

Let’s start with blood drain because, even though it’s not one of the special qualities described in either the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game* or the *d20 MODERN Menace Manual*, it’s in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS because stirges have it. The ability is pretty specific to stirges—in fact, its description references their attach special ability. So we need to reword it a bit and get rid of the references that don’t apply. We also need to assign a condition under which El Chupacabras can use this ability, so we’ll say that it has to begin its turn each round grappling its victim. Now, the goat-sucker isn’t really good at grappling, but maybe the next special ability can fix that.

The ability to deal Constitution damage is fairly impressive, but clearly, few animals are just going to sit around while a horrible monster sinks its fangs into their soft flesh and starts gulping down hemoglobin. And El Chupacabras isn’t strong enough to grapple most creatures long enough to get the job done. So it needs another way to get its victims to hold still.

In its *Dark•Matter* incarnation, El Chupacabras accomplished this task with psionics. In that game, telepathy—*suggest* is a potent power with which to convince the average farm animal to sleep through an exsanguination. But the ALTERNITY *suggest* skill works a bit differently than d20 MODERN telepathy powers; in particular, *suggestion* in d20 MODERN requires that the user communicate the suggestion. So a different power will have to suffice.

A few different powers, namely *brain lock*, *charm person*, *false sensory input*, and perhaps even *lesser domination*, look like they could do the same basic job. Let’s look at each of them in turn. *Charm person* sounds pretty good on the surface, but even a *charmed* goat isn’t likely to sit still for being bitten and blood-drained. *Brain lock* might work—what

with the “standing still and taking no actions” part—but the affected creature can still defend itself, which means that El Chupacabras would still have to maintain a grapple. *False sensory input* doesn't actually convince the target to stand still, so it's not as useful as it would appear. And *lesser domination*, while it sounds promising, doesn't work if the user and the target don't share a language. (*Domination* might work, though, so we'll put that one aside as a “maybe.”)

Hmm. None of these really seems to fit the bill precisely, so let's take a second look at the psionic powers list and see if something couldn't work just as well as *suggest*. *Daze* looks promising, but it works for only 1 round at a time. However, the 3rd-level psionic power *mental blast* has the same basic mechanics (a Will save) but stuns the target for 3d4 rounds. *Mental blast* it is, then! But since it's a 3rd-level power and El Chupacabras is only a 2-HD creature, we'll put a restriction on it. Let's say that El Chupacabras can use *mental blast* a limited number of times per day (two or three should be plenty).

Now let's address El Chupacabras's Biokinesis—*control metabolism* and *rejuvenate* skills. *Control metabolism* allows El Chupacabras to survive in hostile environments or appear dead. That's not a terribly important ability for our magical beast, so let's just go ahead and skip it for a moment. The other skill, *rejuvenate*, allows the user to regain stun or fatigue points quickly. Looking over our list of d20 MODERN psionic powers, *lesser body adjustment* looks pretty tempting. In fact, since it can also give the user a +1 bonus on a Fortitude save against disease or poison, it might actually cover *control metabolism* reasonably well too. No other psionic power in the d20 MODERN game covers both so neatly, so we'll just go with that and say that El Chupacabras can use it three times a day.

## Challenge Rating

Despite a couple of decent special abilities, El Chupacabras is still only a 2-HD creature with a low attack bonus. As such, it's likely to drain about 25% of the resources of a group of four 3rd-level heroes. Thus, CR 3 is a good guess.

## FINAL STATISTICS

Now that we have El Chupacabras's d20 MODERN stat block completely filled out, it's all down to the wording of the special qualities. Here's the final version.

**El Chupacabras:** Small magical beast; CR 3; HD 2d10+4; hp 15; Mas 15; Init +3; Spd 30 ft., climb 20 ft.; Defense 17, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural); BAB +2; Grap -3; Atk +2 melee (1d4-1, claw); Full Atk +2 melee (1d4-1, 2 claws) and -3 melee (1d6-1, bite) or +6 ranged; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ blood drain, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, psionics; AL none; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 8, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 12.

**Skills:** Climb +7, Hide +12, Jump +4, Listen +5, Move Silently +4, Spot +3.

**Feats:** Alertness.

**Blood Drain (Ex):** El Chupacabras drains blood from a target that has previously been wounded, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage in any round when it begins its turn grappling a victim. El Chupacabras continues to feed until its victim either escapes or dies.

**Psionics (Sp):** 3/day—*lesser body adjustment*, *mental blast*. Manifest level 5th (Telepath); save DC 10 + key ability modifier + power level.

## Additional Notes

So there's El Chupacabras! Despite the fact that much of the “conversion” process involves making guesses and fudging numbers, these steps work for just about any *Dark•Matter* creature. You might have to redefine the background and even the nature of the creature, but if that's what it takes to get some use out of your old *Dark•Matter* sourcebooks, it's really a small price to pay.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JD Wiker worked in Wizards of the Coast's RPG R&D department on the ALTERNITY line, including the *Dark•Matter* campaign setting, before joining the fledgling *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* design team. Some of JD's *Star Wars* titles include the core rulebook, *The Dark Side Sourcebook*, *The New Jedi Order Sourcebook*, and the *Power of the Jedi Sourcebook*. JD is currently freelancing while working as president of The Game Mechanics, a d20 design studio.

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This d20™ System game uses mechanics developed for the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, and Peter Adkison. This game also uses mechanics developed for the *Psionics Handbook* by Bruce R. Cordell, the *Call of Cthulhu® Roleplaying Game* by Monte Cook and John Tynes, and the *Star Wars® Roleplaying Game* by Bill Slavicsek, Andy Collins, and JD Wiker.

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