



Bullet Points

Basic Classes, Part 2

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 contributor to the recently announced *d20 Apocalypse* book, plus some other **d20 Modern** projects as yet unannounced. 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.

Basic Classes, Part 2

In this installment, we'll take a look at some questions about the last three basic character classes described in the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* -- namely, the Smart hero, the Dedicated hero, and the Charismatic hero.

Questions and Answers

And now, without further ado, let's get down to those questions!

 **Does the Smart hero's savant talent allow him to make a check with a skill in which he has no ranks, even if it cannot normally be used untrained? The description of the savant ability doesn't include the additional comment disallowing this use, like the descriptions of the Dedicated hero's skill emphasis talent and the Cautious feat do.**

No. Even though the description doesn't say so, the savant talent does not allow a Smart hero to make a check with a skill in which he has no ranks unless it can be used untrained. Never assume that a talent, spell, psionic ability, or piece of equipment is an exception to the normal rules just because the description doesn't specifically say otherwise.


 **When a Smart hero uses his plan talent, does his player actually have to come up with a plan? If the player thinks up a bad plan, do the characters still get the bonus allowed by the talent? If the other characters refuse to follow the Smart hero's plan, do they still get bonuses?**

The Smart hero's player need not come up with a specific plan in order for his character to do so, any more than he has to know how to shoot a firearm for his character to use one. If a player wishes to roleplay the development of a specific plan, that's fine, but the characters get the bonuses even if the plan so devised is a bad one. (Just assume that the bonuses stem from the fact that the sheer awfulness of the plan catches foes by surprise and forces allies to compensate with extra effort.)

In general, the other characters get the indicated bonus even if they don't follow the exact steps of the Smart hero's plan. However, a GM would certainly be justified in disallowing the bonuses for any character who specifically decides to ignore the plan and do her own thing. Denial of bonuses in such a situation is solely at the GM's discretion, and she could just as well decide to allow them anyway, on the grounds that the character's actions are more effective than they would be otherwise simply because she knows what everyone else is going to do.


 **Does the linguist ability allow a Smart hero to carry on at least some level of conversation in different languages? If not, how can he understand an unknown language but not speak it?**

The linguist ability allows a Smart hero to piece together the meaning of others' conversation from a basic understanding of root words and the ability to grasp context. But just because he knows that a particular foreign word evolved from a given root word that he recognizes doesn't mean he can reverse the process and guess enough words to communicate. If he wants to make himself understood in a foreign language, he must buy it as a skill, just like anyone else.

 **Why doesn't the trick talent work on animals? A target must have an Intelligence score of 3 or higher for this ability to work, and all animals have Int 2. Why can't a Smart hero try to confuse wolves or horses? For that matter, why can't he trick another player character?**

An animal -- or any other creature with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2 -- operates more on the basis of instinct than reason. While it might be possible to confuse such creatures, doing so requires different kinds of techniques than those utilized in the trick talent. Since the effect isn't supernatural, use of this talent is restricted to GM characters in order to prevent heroes from constantly tricking one another.

However, a GM could easily establish a house rule allowing PCs to use the trick talent on one another. In the same way, the GM could also create a new talent called animal trick for use in his own campaign. Such a talent would work just like trick, except that it would be usable only against a target with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2.

 **Just how much information is a character supposed to get from the intuition talent? The description offers very little guidance for GMs on how to adjudicate the use of the talent. Should a character with this talent be able to spot an imposter disguised as a friend? Should she know that a given location was the site of an evil ritual? Does the effect result from some kind of psychic ability, or a deduction based on evidence that's visible but seems unimportant? Should it be about as useful as a Smart hero's ability to plan (granting characters up to +3 bonuses for a few rounds), or more like the Dedicated hero's skill emphasis talent (which just adds +3 to checks with a single skill)?**

Intuition represents neither a psychic ability nor a Sherlock Holmes-style deduction. It's the kind of gut feeling that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up when danger is near or gives you a warm sensation when everything's fine. However, a GM could certainly adjust the logical basis of this talent to match either of the models mentioned above if both players and GM agree.

When passing out information gained from an intuition check, the GM should stick to simple and useful tidbits. The most basic information that can be gleaned is whether or not a given location (or scene, or meeting, or the like) is calm and safe. While the answer is obvious in many cases -- after all, a gang hangout is never calm or safe -- it may not be so clear in other circumstances. For example, intuition can tell a Dedicated hero whether a spooky, abandoned house is just a fixer-upper, or the site of some hidden threat. Mostly, intuition tells a

character whether the situation is as it seems or not. This knowledge can be particularly useful when dealing with truces (for anticipating a sneak attack during negotiations), mysteries (for deciding whether the old man nearby is really a psycho killer), and supernatural investigations.

Once a GM is comfortable with such a basic use of the talent, he can get a little more creative if desired. For example, a use of intuition might reveal a looming threat rather than an immediate danger, or give the character a sense of great loss, as though something terrible had once happened in a particular spot. At its core, however, the talent is nothing more than a gauge for determining whether a situation embodies some danger that's not obvious on the surface.



Does the benefit of the Dedicated hero's skill emphasis talent stack with that of the Skill Focus feat? They're both unnamed bonuses, right?

The standard **d20 Modern** rules do not include the Skill Focus feat, though it does appear in the D&D game and numerous other d20 System games. And I don't recommend adding it for exactly the reason you state -- it would reduce the effectiveness of the skill emphasis talent. If you do decide to allow the feat as a house rule, its benefit should certainly stack with that of the skill emphasis talent. The bonus provided by skill emphasis does stack with bonuses gained from other feats, such as Acrobatic and Cautious.



Why can't a Charismatic hero take the charm talent twice -- once for each gender? And what difference does it make whether a lion he's trying to charm is male or female, since he could just as well use the Charisma-based Handle Animal skill to influence an animal's behavior?

The simple answer is that most people are more charming to one gender than the other. A character with a high Charisma score and lots of Charisma-based skills may seem universally suave, but most likely either men or women have a particularly strong reaction to him. However, allowing Charismatic heroes to take the charm talent twice (once for each gender) as a house rule shouldn't unbalance the game.

As for the Handle Animal skill, the same principle applies. A Dedicated hero with ranks in Handle Animal is simply more effective with one gender of animals than the other, though the skill still works normally with animals of both genders. After all, being attractive to one gender doesn't automatically make a hero unattractive to the other.



Do the bonuses from the charm and fast-talk talents stack? That is, does a 10th-level Charismatic hero really get a +20 bonus on Diplomacy checks made to persuade one gender?

Yes and no. Since the bonuses are unnamed, they stack whenever both would apply. The tricky part of this answer is determining when that happens.

Neither talent gives the Charismatic hero a skill bonus all the time. Charm works only when the Charismatic hero is trying to influence a GM character of the selected gender, and fast-talk applies only when the hero is lying or bending the truth. Thus, a Charismatic hero trying to negotiate openly and honestly might get the charm bonus on Diplomacy checks, but not the one from fast-talk. By the same token, a character trying to cheat on a Gamble check isn't influencing anyone, so he gets the bonus from fast-talk but not the one from charm. But the young rogue (whom most men find likable because he reminds them of their little brothers) gets both bonuses when he's trying to convince a male cop (via Bluff) that he's on an errand for his mother when in truth he's running away.

 **When a Charismatic hero is using the inspiration or greater inspiration talent, can a character listening to and observing him do anything else in that round? Is the listener restricted to a move action?**

Characters can do whatever they want while being inspired. The notes about hearing and observing the Charismatic hero are meant only to prevent him from inspiring people who can't properly absorb the force of his personality. As long as an ally can see and hear the Charismatic hero, the bonuses automatically begin 1 round later without any action on the ally's part.

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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