



Bullet Points

Powers, Qualities, and Feats

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.

Powers, Qualities, and Feats

In this installment, we'll look at a number of questions about how special qualities, powers and feats work, especially in conjunction with one another.

Questions and Answers

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

 **Are overt moreaus supposed to have low-light vision? The last line of the description for moderate and covert moreaus specifically states that they have low-light vision, but I don't see it for overt moreaus.**


That omission is an oversight. Overt moreaus do have low-light vision.

 **If a *shield* spell creates a disk of force that hovers in front of the caster, why does he get the bonus to Defense against attacks from any direction? Also, does the bonus gained from a *shield* spell stack with those from armor or real shields?**

The *shield* spell protects against attacks from any direction because the **d20 Modern** game does not use the concept of facing. If the Defense bonus granted was directional, you would have to keep track of what direction a character with the spell was facing.


As written, armor gives an equipment bonus to Defense, while the *shield* spell gives an unnamed bonus to Defense. Thus, the two bonuses stack. A normal shield grants a shield bonus to Defense, as defined in the **Urban Arcana Campaign Setting**. Technically, that means the bonus from a physical shield and the one from the *shield* spell should stack. But that seems rather silly, and the shield bonus type wasn't in use when the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game** was written -- it was introduced to the game in **Urban Arcana**. Therefore, I would

rule that the *shield* spell grants a +4 shield bonus to Defense, rather than an unnamed bonus. That change allows its bonus to stack with the equipment bonus from armor, but not with the shield bonus from other shields.

 **Psi powers require line of effect, which is blocked by any solid barrier. Does this rule apply to the inborn psionic talents of certain monsters, such as the mind flayer's telepathy? That is, if my heroes stick an illithid in a cell behind a glass wall, can it still speak to them telepathically? If the answer is yes, can it use *suggestion* to get them to open the cell door?**

Because an illithid's telepathy is a supernatural ability, it doesn't necessarily follow the same rules as other psionic abilities. While this aspect of its effect isn't clearly spelled out, I would rule that an illithid can use its telepathy on any target it can see, even if its line of effect is blocked by some material such as glass. As GM, however, you would be within your rights to rule otherwise.

An illithid's *suggestion* ability, on the other hand, is spell-like, so it clearly follows the rules for spells, including line of effect. Therefore, an illithid cannot use *suggestion* on creatures beyond a barrier, even if it can communicate with them through telepathy.

 **The core rulebook states that nonlethal damage does not affect the target's hit points. So am I right in thinking that my 5th-level Battle Mind, who has a 20 Strength and the 1st-level biofeedback power, would treat the first 5 points from every attack (or the first 10, with improved biofeedback) as nonlethal and not subtract it from her hit point total?**

Yes, you are correct. But be sure to use the whole amount of damage dealt when determining whether your character's massive damage threshold has been exceeded.


Also, note that this ability is useless against nonlethal attacks, since a portion of the damage equal to the character's Constitution bonus is converted from nonlethal to nonlethal -- that is, nothing changes.

 **A coup de grace can be performed only with a melee weapon. Does the Combat Martial Arts feat allow an unarmed strike to count as a melee weapon for this purpose?**


Yes, it does. The restriction that requires the attacker to have a melee weapon really means that a coup de grace can't happen unless the attacker is right next to the target and able to deal lethal damage. In fact, even if the attacker has a ranged weapon, she can do a coup de grace if she is adjacent to her target (effectively pressing a pistol against the target's temple).

 **Does the extra Defense gained from Combat Expertise apply to both melee and ranged attacks? Doesn't it make more sense for it to apply only to melee attacks, since a character must be in melee to use it?**

The extra Defense gained from Combat Expertise is a dodge bonus, so not only does it apply to ranged attacks made against the user, but it also stacks with other dodge bonuses. You might want to think of Combat Expertise as moving in a defensive manner, which certainly can make a character harder to hit at range. Furthermore, a character using this feat can take an attack action to make a melee attack at no target in order to gain the Combat Expertise benefit while running and not engaged in melee. When the feat description says that a character can use it only in melee, it really means that he can't gain the benefit of Combat Expertise while making a ranged attack -- presumably because he can't aim properly while ducking and weaving.

 **Can a character simultaneously use the Double Tap and Dead Aim feats to get +1 die on her damage at no cost?**


Absolutely. The character must use a full round for a single ranged attack and must be using a semiautomatic firearm with at least two bullets in it, since such an attack uses two rounds of ammunition. The attack roll has no modifier, and a successful attack deals +1 die of damage. The attack still requires a full round and two bullets, but the character does get an extra die of damage with no penalty on the attack roll.

 **I have several questions about Heroic Surge. Can a character with this feat take a full-round action, then use Heroic Surge to get an extra action and use it to ready an attack? If he readies an attack during his normal round of action, can he use Heroic Surge to ready again? If he readies during a normal round, can he take his readied action and then Heroic Surge, since it can be used after his regular actions?**

Wow, I sense a debate here. A character can certainly take a full round of action and then use Heroic Surge to take another action, which he can use to ready. The normal ready rules apply to this situation; the character is just readying after he takes a full-round action.

He can't use Heroic Surge to take another action right after his readied action goes off because a readied action is a special move, not a regular move. The rules don't offer much to support that ruling other than game balance and logic, but it just doesn't make sense otherwise. After all, how could a character who is tensed to respond to one and only one situation suddenly be able to do whatever he wants after it happens?

A character can ready an action during his normal round, then use Heroic Surge to ready another action. But in that case, he gets to perform only one of his readied actions, not both. In essence, he is now readied to perform two different actions under two different circumstances. But once he takes either readied action, his turn ends and his initiative changes. Thus, his other readied action is lost.

 **I have a Tough Hero 3/Thrasher 3 with robust and stamina as his Tough hero talents. I'm considering taking the Improved Natural Healing feat for his 6th-level feat and was wondering how its benefits would stack with those provided by stamina.**

Treat the combination as a normal multiplier increase. In other words, since both stamina and Improved Natural Healing increase the rate at which your character heals by x1, both together increase the rate by x2, giving a total of three times the normal healing rate. Thus, your character would recover 3 hit points per character level per evening of rest and 3 points of ability damage per night of rest. If the character takes a day of total bed rest, those numbers actually double, to 6 hit points and 6 points of ability damage.

Since Improved Natural Healing has no impact on how quickly a character recover from being knocked out, he still does so in just half the normal time because of his stamina.

 **Can a character use Power Attack to deal extra damage while making a coup de grace? A coup de grace doesn't require an attack roll, but the text doesn't specify one way or the other.**

Power Attack allows a character to subtract some desired amount from all her attack rolls in a round and add it to all her damage rolls. Nowhere does it specify that the character must actually make an attack roll to gain this benefit -- automatically hitting the target does not invalidate the Power Attack. Since a character deals maximum damage with a coup de grace and can use it only against a helpless target, I see no reason that she couldn't use

Power Attack. (Indeed, it seems likely that headsman do exactly that for executions.) Yes, this ruling makes a coup de grace more dangerous, but unusual peril is the harsh reality of being helpless before foes.

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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