



## Bullet Points

# Unearthed Urban Arcana

By Owen K.C. Stephens

Welcome to the latest installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm Owen K.C. Stephens, the writer of quite a bit 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 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.

## Unearthed Urban Arcana

In this installment, we'll take a look at some questions about the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* that have built up over the past few weeks.

## Questions and Answers

 The starting occupations given in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* don't really fit my character concept. Can't I just name my occupation, specify three class skills and one bonus feat, and take a wealth bonus of +2? Those seem to be the benefits for most of the starting occupations anyway.

First of all, the benefits of starting occupations can vary widely. Some grant only one class skill; others grant two or three. Some grant bonus feats and others don't. Check the list of starting occupations in the *d20 Modern Core Rulebook* as well as in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* to see what kinds of options are available.

Second, a player shouldn't be allowed to design a starting occupation from scratch any more than he should be able to design classes or races from scratch. The reasons for these restrictions range from game balance to ensuring fair choices for all players. Even realism can be a factor -- after all, very few of us learn exactly what we want to from our first career choices. The most important reason, however, is that the **d20 Modern** game is about making do with the options available. Sometimes none of the choices available seem quite right, but seeing what you can make with what you have is part of the game. If you could design everything to your own specifications from the start, the game would lose much of its challenge.

However, a player could certainly ask his GM whether any other starting occupations might be available in her campaign, or even whether she would be willing to write up a new occupation to fit a particular character's background. The GM, after all, has the power to offer new options, and she's generally better equipped than any player is to balance them with other available options. If the GM agrees to create a new occupation, however, the player can't dictate the results -- he can only tell the GM what he envisions in broad terms. For example, if the player suggests slacker as a starting occupation and the GM agrees to design it, the player still has to live with

whatever benefits the GM decides that occupation should grant -- even if it doesn't turn out the way the player would have designed it.

 **Can a character have more than one initial feat? For example, could a human character take two initial feats at 1st level? If a campaign starts at 6th level, could a human take four initial feats, since the character is a higher level before play begins?**

The description of initial feats on page 11 of the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* states that these feats cannot be taken after play has begun. Since a 1st-level human character has two feat slots, he can certainly take two initial feats at 1st level. Under the current system, however, he could not take four such feats, even if play was slated to begin at a higher level. The reason is simple -- all three of the feats described in that section must be taken at 1st level, and a beginning human character just doesn't have that many feat slots. However, if the GM decides to add some initial feats that lack this particular limitation to her campaign, a character built at a higher level probably could begin play with more than two.

 **Does a character with the Eschew Materials feat have to prepare all her spells with it?**

No, she doesn't. Under normal circumstances, she may as well prepare all her spells with Eschew Materials, since it doesn't boost the spell level, but she certainly isn't required to do so. However, unless the player keeps track of which spells the character prepares with that feat (which is a good idea in any case), assume that she has used it to prepare all the spells that it could affect unless the player specifically says otherwise beforehand.


 **Isn't the Spellslinger feat horribly overpowered? It grants a character multiple bonus spells at all spell levels, including his highest. The comparable D&D feats grant only a single additional spell.**

In a **D&D** game, the Spellslinger feat would be horribly overpowered. In an **Urban Arcana** game, however, it isn't.


First, no class grants spells at 1st level in an **Urban Arcana** campaign. A character has to qualify for an advanced class to gain any spell ability at all, which means he has less spell power than a **D&D** character of comparable character level. Additionally, because an **Urban Arcana** character's spellcasting ability tops out well short of 9th-level spells, a character with the Spellslinger feat can't get as many bonus spells as a comparable **D&D** character would, even at high levels.


Second, magic (including psionics) is not the sole source of extraordinary abilities in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting*. Normal characters who can't cast spells still have access to nightvision goggles, guns, explosives, helicopters, computers, and other high-tech devices. Since a character can throw several tiny missiles at a foe, blow up objects, see in the dark, or even fly without casting any spells, extra spells don't provide as much of a boost to his power as they would in a **D&D** game.

Spellslinger is an excellent example of a feat that is balanced only in the game for which it's designed. If used in a more magic-heavy/technology-light game, it would indeed be far too powerful.

 **Can a character take Vehicle Specialization more than once? The description doesn't say it can be taken multiple times, but I imagine it would work fine if the character had to pick a different vehicle type each time she took it.**

You've made a good point. As an official change to the rules, add the following line to the end of the Vehicle Specialization description.

 **Special:** You may take this feat multiple times. Each time you take it, the benefit applies to a new vehicle type.


 **If a gnoll character receives a +1 species bonus on attack rolls, why does the basic gnoll on page 238 of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* have a +3 attack bonus in melee (+1 BAB, +2 Str) instead of +4?**

Assume that the gnolls described on page 238 of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* are a slightly different breed than those presented as PCs in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting*. The only difference between the two breeds is that the one in the earlier book lacks the +1 species bonus on attack rolls.

 **Conceptually, what's the difference between advanced classes and prestige classes? Does a character have to take levels in an advanced class before taking a prestige class?**

A prestige class represents a stronger focus on a specific idea or concept than an advanced class does. Most advanced classes represent greater focus than the base classes do, but each still covers a wide range of character concepts. For example, the Soldier could be an army ranger, a mercenary, a member of a SWAT team, or a marine grunt. Thus, the Soldier is more focused than the Strong Hero is, but still quite broad. A prestige class, on the other hand, focuses on just one aspect of a character. So while the Soldier is an advanced class, a Navy SEAL would be a prestige class (conceptually speaking, that is, since no official Navy SEAL prestige class currently exists).

Though prestige classes don't require a character to take levels in specific advanced classes, their prerequisites are almost impossible to meet without taking at least a few levels of an advanced class. For example, all the prestige classes described in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* require some level of spellcasting ability. Technically, a character could eventually become an Archmage just by taking the Arcane Skills and Magical Heritage feats, but doing so wouldn't do him much good.

 **Can a character cast *clown car* on vehicles other than cars? Does it work on a bus, boat, airplane, or helicopter? Can more than one *clown car* spell be cast on the same vehicle?**

A character can cast *clown car* on any vehicle, as long as it has an enclosed passenger compartment. For example, a character couldn't cast *clown car* on a rowboat because the passenger area isn't enclosed, but she could cast it on a yacht.

The same vehicle can have multiple *clown car* spells active on it, but each needs its own 5-foot space to occupy. So a jumbo jet could accommodate several of these spells, but perhaps only one could exist on a compact car.

 **Does the illusion created by a *trunk of masking* work only when the trunk is open? If a character crawls into the trunk, closes it, and looks around with a flashlight, does he see what's really inside?**

Yes on both counts.



**The *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* states that the psionic power called *steadfast perception* is available to Psychic Warriors. Does a Psychic Warrior class exist? Is it another name for a Battle Mind? If not, what class grants access to this power?**

In the right-hand column of the table on page 280, *steadfast perception* is given as a 4th-level power for Psionic Agents. Only members of this class have access to it.

Psychic warrior is a psionic class from the **D&D** game. Clearly, some psionic powers originally intended for the **D&D** game have been adapted for use with the **d20 Modern** game. If you are unsure which classes have access to a given power based on its description, check the powers lists for the classes to see which ones get it.

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Do you have a rules question about the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game? Send it to [bulletpoints@wizards.com](mailto: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!

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## 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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