



## Bullet Points

# Question Roundup, 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 material for the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** and the **d20 Modern** game, author of the recently released *d20 Cyberscape* book, and co-author of the *d20 Apocalypse* supplement. 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.

## Question Roundup, Part 2

In the course of examining various issues from specific books in the **d20 Modern** game line, I've encountered some questions that don't really fit into any of my themed installments. Just to catch up, I want to grab some leftover questions and answer them in the next few installments, regardless of which book they relate to.

## Questions and Answers

Now without further ado, let's get down to the questions!

 **When playing a Small character with the Brawl, Combat Martial Arts, Improved Brawl, and/or Streetfighting feats, do you use the amount of lethal or nonlethal damage indicated in the feat description, or would you reduce it by one die type (to 1d4 with Brawl, 1d3 with Combat Martial Arts, 1d6 with Improved Brawl, and +1d3 with Streetfighting)? After all, Small characters in other d20 products deal 1d2 points of damage with a successful unarmed strike, assuming they have no additional feats that modify unarmed damage. The same question also applies in reverse to Large characters.**


To keep the game simple, the GM can certainly decide to leave the damage dealt via such feats alone. Logically, however, the damage should scale up and down based on the size of the character. Use the table below to determine the new damage rating, based on the damage dealt by a Medium-size character taking the same feat. You can use the same conversions if a character is using an unusually small (or large) version of a melee weapon -- such as a greatsword scaled up for use by ogres.

### Damage Ratings by Size

**Medium-Size Small Large**

1d2	1	1d3
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1d3	1d2	1d4
1d4	1d3	1d6
1d6	1d4	1d8
1d8	1d6	1d10
1d10	1d8	1d12
1d12	1d10	3d6

 A recent *Bullet Points* article contained two questions about the "Ability Plus" feats from the *d20 Future* supplement, and in both cases the players made an error that was missed in the response. In each question, the character took an Ability Plus feat at 1st level -- but they can't be taken at 1st level. These feats cannot be used to take two talents in the same tree, and (with one exception) they cannot be used to take the initial talent in a tree. Therefore, a character must be at least 3rd level to take an Ability Plus feat. The *d20 Future* book unfortunately does not state the second rule directly, but the list of talents that can be taken with these feats makes it clear. Specifically, fast-talk, charm, and coordinate are not on the list. The one exception is the Smart hero -- because of the odd setup of his talent trees, Smart Plus can in fact be taken at level 1.

Your analysis is correct.

 If a Shadowlayer has both the shadow immunity ability and damage reduction from the Tough hero base class, how do those two class features interact? Do their benefits overlap or stack?

Normally, damage reduction ratings obtained from different sources do not stack. The character simply has both DR values and uses whichever one is better in any given circumstance. However, a GM is well within his rights to let them to stack in some way, if he feels it's appropriate.

 Because I'm a big fan of old Westerns, I was inspired to create a new starting occupation called drover. However, I'd like to know if it is properly balanced. I'd appreciate any help or advice you can offer.

### Drover

You have spent a good portion of your life learning how to handle animals and break trails.

**Prerequisite:** Age 18+.


**Skills:** Choose two of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill you select is already a class skill, you receive a +1 competence bonus on checks made with it.

Concentration (Con), Gamble (Wis), Handle Animal (Cha), Hide (Dex), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Navigate (Int), Ride (Dex), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Treat Injury (Wis).


**Bonus Feat:** Select either Animal Affinity or Guide.

**Wealth Bonus Increase: +1.**


Adding customized starting occupations to suit your home game is a great way to add some flavor to your campaign. My only concern with your drover occupation is that it has a wide selection of class skills for an occupation that also offers a feat choice. Specifically, it has eleven class skills, compared to nine for law enforcement or ten for military. Furthermore, many of these skills seem a little far from the core concept. That fact isn't necessarily unbalancing (it's no worse than adventurer, for example), but it can mean that the occupation is much less focused. Personally, I would get rid of Concentration, Move Silently, and Treat Injury. I would also add rustler and dentist occupations designed for other traditional Old West roles.

 **After purchasing the *d20 Future* supplement, my GM and I discovered that we couldn't agree on one mecha feature -- the space skin (page 166). The description says, "Space skin colloquially refers to a series of environmental stabilizers that allow the mecha operator (and other living creatures aboard the mecha) to ignore the effects of vacuum, thus enabling the mecha to operate in space." My GM thinks this means that the character doesn't need a life support system if the mecha is equipped with a space skin. I believe you still need a life support system, even after examining the equipment list provided. The sample mecha (the Paragon, page 168) is the only one with a space skin, and it also has a life support system, supporting my theory. So is a life support system required on a mecha that is to be equipped with a space skin?**

Yes and no. The two systems have slightly different functions. The life support system allows the mecha to have an internal air supply (for 24 hours) and operate underwater, but it can't operate in space. A space skin allows the suit to generate its own air and ignore the rigors of vacuum. Thus, its air supply is effectively unlimited, but it can't operate underwater. Different types of seals and bracing are needed for the two environments -- the space shuttle leaks if submerged, and submarines leak if subjected to a vacuum. If you really wanted to, you could design a water skin that acts like a space skin and works only underwater. Otherwise, however, you need to buy both systems if you want the mecha to operate both underwater and in space.

 **How does a character get the Wild Talent feat that qualifies him for the Telepath and Battle Mind advanced classes? The feat description doesn't list any prerequisites, but surely it's not available to just anyone who wants to take it.**

The Wild Talent feat is available only if the GM has decided to add psionics to her campaign. Beyond that limitation, it has no prerequisites, so any character can take it. If the GM is running a game in which only certain characters can access some small level of psionic ability, the feat can be limited to a particular group. If desired, the GM could even create a psychic starting occupation that includes Wild Talent as a bonus feat, and not allow characters with other occupations to take it.

 **I understand that when feats conflict, their benefits don't stack, as in the case of Brawl and Combat Martial Arts. But what about other feats derived from those? For instance, how do Advanced Combat Martial Arts and Improved Knockout Punch interact? Where both feats apply, each improves a character's critical multiplier by 1. If they stack, this interaction should result in a Knockout Punch with a x4 multiplier, as I understand the critical stacking rules. A friend suggests that, as written, each triples damage, so both taken together should result in a knockout punch with a x5 multiplier (x3 + x3). Which is correct according to the rules as written? Which is fairer?**

Actually, you've posed three separate questions here: Do the benefits of feats normally stack unless the descriptions say otherwise? Do the benefits of Advanced Combat Martial Arts and Improved Knockout Punch stack? And finally, how do critical multipliers stack?

It's clear from previous *Bullet Points* installments that Brawl and Combat Martial Arts are meant to be exclusive of one another. Therefore, my official answer is that the feats derived from them (Advanced Combat Martial Arts and Improved Knockout Punch) are also exclusive. Thus, a character doesn't get to use both multipliers, even if she's doing a Knockout Punch and happens to have both feats.

As it happens, that answer doesn't match my personal style of play. As an entirely unofficial house rule, I allow the benefits from Brawl and Combat Martial Arts to stack in my own games, and therefore those from Advanced Combat Martial Arts and Improved Knockout Punch would stack as well.

The normal rule for critical multipliers is that you add together the extra multiples above x2 (in other words, treat x3 as a +1 to the normal x2). Thus, two x3 effects are really both +1 to the standard x2, resulting in a x4 multiplier, as you suggested.

So, to recap, the benefits of these feats don't stack at all officially. But if you want to make them stack as a house rule, the critical multiplier should be x4 when both feats apply.

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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.