



Bullet Points

Question Roundup, Part 3

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 3

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 now, no matter which book they relate to.


Questions and Answers

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

 **Could a character use Knowledge (behavioral science) or Diplomacy instead of Sense Motive to oppose Bluff in certain situations, such as gambling, facing down a gunman, or trying to stop a madman from jumping off a bridge?**

No, those skills can't be used to oppose a Bluff check, though your GM could allow them to grant synergy bonuses on Sense Motive checks made to oppose a Bluff check under certain circumstances. For example, if a character has ranks in Knowledge (behavioral science) and has spent some time studying a mentally unbalanced GM character, it might be appropriate to grant her a +2 synergy bonus on her Sense Motive check. But that decision would be entirely up to the GM.

On the other hand, if a character is trying to talk someone out of jumping off a building, Diplomacy is the appropriate skill. Diplomacy won't help the character figure out whether the jumper is serious about suicide -- that would still take a Sense Motive check. For convincing him that jumping is a bad idea, however, a Diplomacy check would certainly be appropriate.

 **I want to create a PC who is addicted to drugs but gains bonuses on his skill checks, attack rolls, and so forth because of those same drugs. Does one of the d20 Modern rulebooks provide game effects for cocaine, heroine, marijuana, and other illegal drugs? Do the rules give any kind of system or formula I can use to create my own enhancing drugs? How many uses does it take to become addicted**


to a specific drug? And how should I handle the after-effects of these drugs and the long-term effects of addiction to them?

First of all, none of the drugs you mention would grant bonuses on any skill checks or attack rolls. Drugs can deaden pain, but in most cases, that effect simply encourages a character to pursue dangerous courses of action without considering the consequences to his body -- and no game mechanics are needed to govern that kind of player decision.


Secondly, drug abuse and addiction are serious matters. Run properly, this situation would eventually result in a character being taken from a player -- either to be run by the GM as an addict, or removed from the game entirely for some form of rehabilitation. Such an outcome isn't a lot of fun, so it's not something the game is going to encourage. Yes, drug-addicted characters exist in many good fiction sources that the **d20 Modern** game tries to emulate. But those stories feature cowards too, and we don't have a game mechanic for mundane (nonmagical) cowardice.




Put another way, some aspects of fiction and even reality are unlikely ever to be modeled by official rules because the designers don't suggest they should be part of a typical **d20 Modern** game. If you want these kinds of rules, you and your GM must come up with some that the two of you are happy with. Only so much room is available in the rulebooks as it is, and that space is reserved for material that the designers believe will provide the most fun for the most players. Drug abuse, addiction, and similar serious, real-world issues and problems just don't qualify. You can do whatever you want in your own games, but you have to cover issues such as this one in a way that makes you happy. I recommend looking at the rules for poisons and allegiances as a start. In the long run, however, it's up to you to work out some rules in a way that satisfies both you and your GM.

 **Are the DCs for "tumble past" and "tumble through" really the same (20)? All the other d20 variants I know give them separate values, although not all give them the same ones.**

Official rules change. The check to tumble past is DC 15, and the one to tumble through is DC 20.


 **We're new to the d20 Modern game, and the massive damage rules have confused us a bit. The rules state that if damage taken "from a single hit" is higher than the character's Constitution score, then the character must make his Fortitude save or drop to -1 hp. We're confused on what would qualify as a "single hit." A single shot would surely qualify, but what about damage spread out over an area, such as an explosion or red dragon fire? Would an attack made with Double Tap qualify as a single hit?**

Any damage dealt in a single damage roll qualifies as a single hit for the purpose of the massive damage threshold. So yes, explosives damage, a *fireball*, a dragon's breath, or even damage from a Double Tap would qualify as a single hit under this rule.


 **A character with ranks in Craft (mechanical) can build car engines or even jet engines. A character with ranks in Repair can fix mechanical devices, including cars. Could a character (or group of characters) with ranks in both skills build a powerful engine and install it to give a vehicle a higher top speed, or to alter any of its other stats?**



Yes, if the GM wants to allow it; otherwise no. As a general rule, characters can't use these skills to achieve results that are not normally possible in the real world. If the GM feels that an engine is operating below its maximum possible efficiency, it's certainly reasonable to let heroes with the right skills increase that efficiency. But a state-of-the-art machine that's designed for the maximum possible output probably can't be improved much.

 **The rules for dynamite say that a character can strap several sticks together to make a larger bang using the Demolitions skill. Each stick adds more damage or more range, (player's choice). The player has to total up all the sticks that the character has wired together and add 10 to get the DC for the Demolition check. The rules also state that if one stick of dynamite goes off near another one, they both blow up, and the result is effectively the same. So why would a character need to take the risk of blowing himself up when he could just put ten sticks in a gym bag, throw in one stick set with a radio detonator, and fire them all off at the same time?**

You've missed the point of the skill check. Each additional stick that goes off just because it's nearby adds +1d6 damage and +5 feet to the radius of the explosion (to a maximum of 10d6 points of damage and a 20-foot radius). With a successful Demolitions check (DC 10 +1 per stick), a character may increase the total damage, or the total radius, by 50%. Thus, a character who throws nine sticks of dynamite in a bag and sets them off with another gets a 10d6 explosion with a 20-foot radius. If that character takes the trouble to wire them together with a DC 19 Demolitions check, he can have either a 15d6 explosion with a 20-foot radius, or a 10d6 explosion with a 30-foot radius.

 **Can a character who uses Craft (chemical) to make homemade explosives wire similar types together to add to the overall effect? For example, can he make several "improvised" explosives, each of which takes only 1 round to make and has a Purchase DC of only 6, then wire them together using the Demolitions skill? For example, if a character wired ten bombs together, what effect would they have if they went off together? What if the bombs were different -- say one bomb that deals 4d6 points of damage, and another that deals only 1d6 points. What would the overall damage be then? What if a character wants to combine "manufactured" explosives, such as dynamite or C4, with homemade bombs?**

Maybe. No. 4d6. Depends.

Improvised explosives can't ever be improved. They're improvised. If your character wants explosives that can be tweaked, she's going to have to spend the time and effort to make better ones.

The Demolitions skill does not allow a character to wire just any two explosives together to get a bigger explosion. That option is available only for certain explosives, and the rules for it are covered in the descriptions of those explosives. And since you can use Craft (chemical) to make those specific explosives, no rules are needed for other explosives that are similar.

For the purpose of wiring explosives together, assume that all simple explosives act like either dynamite or det cord, and that all moderate explosives act like C4. Using that logic, homemade simple explosives can be wired together with dynamite, using the rules for dynamite (including the cap on extra damage and radius).

For any other combination, treat the explosions as separate, even if they go off at once. A character can certainly wire two powerful homemade explosives together with a Demolitions check so that they detonate at once. This option produces two separate 8d8 explosions, each with a 20-foot radius.

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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