



Bullet Points

Fight, Fight, Fight!

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 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.

Fight, Fight, Fight!

A lot of combat-related questions have come up recently, often in the form of debates between players and GMs. Although I reiterate this point at every opportunity, it's worth mentioning again here and now: A GM's interpretation of a rule is always correct for his own game. A GM who runs the game differently than I suggest in this column is not "wrong," and a player should not try to use a *Bullet Points* column as a means of forcing a different rules interpretation on a GM. The GM shoulders enough responsibility without having to deal with the opinions of a game writer sitting perhaps 3,000 miles away. So even if I state that a rule works differently from the way your GM runs it, my answer is not "absolute" and may not apply to your campaign.

For example, if your GM decides that NPCs always threaten on a 4 or better, that's the way the rules work in his game. A player can certainly ask politely whether she could present a different interpretation of the rules, but such debates should always be secondary to the action and the roleplaying at the game table. If possible, hold off on rules debates until the game session is over as a courtesy to the GM and the other players.

Many GMs want to run their games according to the official rules, and mentioning a *Bullet Points* column or a piece of errata that clears up a vaguely written rule is fine. But a player should never try to "win" a rules argument with a GM who holds another opinion. (And, by the same token, the GM should let his players know if he plans to run his game under a set of unofficial rules.) In general, GMs are interested in creating the best possible play experience for everyone. So treat your GM with courtesy, present different interpretations in appropriate ways, and accept his informed rulings with grace.

Questions and Answers

Now let's get down to brass tacks.

 **Does the maximum Dexterity bonus limitation for armor apply to a Field Scientist's smart defense ability? Smart defense lets the hero add his Intelligence bonus to his Defense score, but the description of the ability states that a situation that denies the character his Dexterity bonus also denies**


him his Intelligence bonus to Defense.

For example, suppose my Field Scientist has a +2 Dexterity bonus and a +3 Intelligence bonus. My GM says he that if he wears armor with a maximum Dexterity bonus of +2, he is denied his Intelligence bonus to Defense. His reasoning is that the ability adds his Dexterity and Intelligence bonuses together, and the armor limits this combined total to a maximum of +2. I just don't see why armor should limit how clever the wearer can be in combat.

Your GM's interpretation of the rules is always correct in his own game. In this case, however, he is using a nonstandard interpretation of the rule in question.

The intent of the rule is that the character may add both his Intelligence bonus and his Dexterity bonus to his Defense unless a special circumstance arises that would ordinarily deny him the latter. So whenever the Field Scientist is in a situation that prevents him from using his Dexterity modifier for Defense (such as when he is flat-footed), he may not use his Intelligence bonus for that purpose either. The maximum Dexterity bonus of his armor has no bearing on how much of his Intelligence bonus he may apply to his Defense.


However, a GM could easily decide that no matter how clever a character is, his options for using his brains to avoid taking hits in combat are reduced when he is wearing armor, since it restricts his movement options. Perhaps a good compromise in such a situation would be to apply the armor's maximum Dexterity bonus rating to the Intelligence bonus and the Dexterity bonus separately. So in the case you describe, the hero would get a +2 bonus to Defense for Dexterity and another +2 bonus for Intelligence.

 **Can you clarify an issue that has become a topic of debate between me and my GM? The Combat Martial Arts feat says a character is considered armed even when she is not carrying a weapon. Does this mean that she gets all the benefits of being armed? For example, do enemies in her threatened area provoke attacks of opportunity when striking her unarmed? Does she not provoke an attack of opportunity when attacking an armed opponent? Can she make a coup de grace attempt even though she doesn't have a weapon in her hand? In other words, is a character with Combat Martial Arts just as big a threat as someone wielding a dagger?**

Again, your GM's interpretation of the rules is correct for his game. In terms of the designers' intentions, however, you are correct on every point. Thinking of a character with Combat Martial Arts as always having a dagger in hand (assuming that she has a hand free) is an excellent way to determine what she can and can't do.

 **Can a character with both the Double Tap and the Two-Weapon Fighting feats use the former when attacking with two pistols? Is doing so a full-round action?**

Yes and yes. Any time a character with Double Tap makes an attack with an appropriate ranged weapon that has at least two bullets, he can use the feat. Any time a character can make multiple attacks in a round (whether that ability stems from a high base attack bonus or from fighting with two weapons), doing so requires a full-round action. So a character with two appropriate ranged weapons can take a full-round action to make two attacks with Double Tap, using a total of four bullets.

 **In our *d20 Future* game, I play a psionic character with the *electronic fog* power from the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting*. Recently, some guys in mecha suits ambushed our party, and I used *electronic fog* to blind them, since the suits didn't have windows. The GM said that mecha suits are extensions of the pilots' bodies and shouldn't be affected by the power, but he allowed it anyway in this**

case.

How would powers such as *electronic fog* affect characters with cybereyes and people in suits or vehicles piloted with the aid of cameras and sensor suites?

This question is an especially good example of a situation in which a GM must make a ruling on the spot. Since the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting* predates the *d20 Future* supplement, the authors of the former book obviously weren't thinking in terms of cyborgs and mecha suits when they wrote the rules for *electronic fog*. In a case such as this one, whatever ruling your GM makes is correct and appropriate for his game.

If it were my game, I would rule that *electronic fog* works normally on mecha suits, but that all mecha have windows to allow normal vision unless the description specifies otherwise. Cybernetic sensors are affected only if the target fails a Will save. This ruling would constitute a change to the description of the *electronic fog* power, and the power would then have a Saving Throw entry of Special.



What happens when an energy weapon's magazine is depleted? Can it be recharged, or does it have to be replaced entirely?

Most energy weapon magazines are not designed for recharging. Once used, they can be recycled for raw materials, but that's about it. Rechargeable versions of most energy weapon magazines do exist, but the purchase DC of such an item is 3 higher than that of a typical version. The purchase DC for recharging such a magazine is 3 lower than the DC for buying a new one, and the process requires 10 minutes and an appropriate power source.



The equipment section of the *d20 Future* supplement states that high-frequency swords and beam swords are simple weapons, but I don't understand why they wouldn't require a feat to use. It seems to me that aside from their superior cutting ability, they function just like their normal counterparts. If so, using one of these weapons should require the Archaic Weapons Proficiency.

In use, the beam sword is much more similar to a club than a sword. Because the weapon has no "cutting edge," contact with it at any angle is dangerous. A user should have at least minimal combat competence before picking one up so as to avoid hurting herself with the "blade," but the same can be said of many other simple weapons as well.

The high-frequency sword is a much better candidate for the Archaic Weapons Proficiency feat, and a GM would be well within her rights to require it. However, she could also assume that the weapon, though wielded like a sword, is in fact much easier to use. Even though it is a Large weapon (and therefore two-handed for a Medium-size character), it weighs only 2 pounds. The majority of its cutting power comes from its vibrations, rather than the exact angle of and power behind a hit. These two factors make the weapon much simpler to use than a 15-pound greatsword. In fact, if the high-frequency sword were not a simple weapon, it would have almost no advantage over the greatsword (as defined in the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting*), and it would be a much less attractive weapon choice.



While my friend and I were making *d20 Future* characters the other day, we came across a mean infinite loop involving the cybernetic device called a feat plexus. The problem lies in the Windfall and Cybertaker feats.

Windfall and Cybertaker cannot be incorporated into a feat plexus. Conceptually speaking, a feat plexus is a

cybernetic implant that allows a character to add new information, skills, reflexes, and maneuvers -- in other words, benefits that could reasonably be learned or gained through training. Thus, the GM should disallow any feat that doesn't match this concept in a feat plexus. In general, if you spot a combination that looks like an unreasonable loophole in the rules, assume you can't use it.

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.
