

# Psionics For Vulcans and Non-Vulcans

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Everyone who is familiar with *Star Trek* or *Star Trek: The Role Playing Game* knows that members of the Vulcan race have certain psionic (i.e., "extra-sensory") abilities. Some gamers enjoy playing Vulcans for just this reason, because psionics are different and they can be a lot of fun. Let's face it: player characters often relish opportunities to "implant suggestions" forcibly into the mind of a gamemaster's NPC. This is especially true when a gamemaster has lost his objectivity as moderator and begins actively plotting against his players.

However, what are the limitations of psionics? Do Vulcan player characters have other nifty psionic abilities that a clever player can take advantage of? What limits must gamemasters place on mental powers that players try to exploit? What, psionically, are other player character races capable of, if anything?

Let's first explore the psionic potential of the Vulcan. On page 11 in the *Cadet's Orientation Sourcebook* of the *Star Trek: The Role Playing Game* second edition rules set (hereafter referred to as "ST:RPG2"), Vulcans are described as a race "... capable of some amazing mental feats ... and most Vulcans can perform them to some degree." (italics author's) Presumably, **not even all Vulcans** possess psionic abilities. The gamemaster and the game system itself may be giving Vulcan player characters the benefit of the doubt when permitting psionics at all!

The next paragraph on the same page continues: "It is widely known that members of the Vulcan race are somewhat telepathic." The phrase "somewhat telepathic" does not mean a Vulcan can—or would—operate as the mental equivalent of a 20th-century telephone switchboard. For one thing, Vulcans are supposed to be private individuals, reserved in demeanor and action. If you were a Vulcan, how would you like to have somebody else's thoughts, even those of another Vulcan, cluttering up **your** mathematically perfect brainwaves? Besides, Vulcans do have very limited abilities, impressive by Human standards, but far from devastating. An entire starship crewed by Vulcans **might** be able to send a telepathic message some great distance when their ship is being eaten by a giant amoeba, as in "The Immunity Syndrome," but even then, only another Vulcan can receive it. (And by that time, who cares anymore?)

What about other Vulcan talents? After making a fairly thorough examination of ST:RPG2 and reviewing other select tomes of *Star Trek* lore, one fact seems to surface: there are no references to Vulcan psionic abilities outside the realm of telepathy, period. No telekinesis (moving objects by mental power), precognition (knowledge of events before they take place), pyrokinesis (the ability to start fires by sheer thought), or any other awe-inspiring (and scenario-unbalancing) powers.

The Vulcan racial trait of reducing amounts of pain felt might be loosely referred to as a psionic ability, because the power of the mind is being used. For practical purposes, however, it makes no difference how it is classified; it is an ability of dubious worth, anyway. Now having ruled out what Vulcans cannot do, this leaves us with mind contact, their one true psionic talent.

For game purposes, the field of the Vulcan mind contact is broken down into the mind touch, the mind fusion, and the mind meld. Players' guidelines appear on page 35 of the ST:RPG2 *Star Fleet Officer's Manual*, while the gamemaster's table of psionic modifiers appear on page 36 of the *Game Operations Manual*.

The entire concept of the Vulcan mind touch began as a brilliantly conceived plot device for the first season television episode "Dagger of the Mind." While examining the deranged Dr. Simon van Gelder, Mr. Spock tells Dr. McCoy that Vulcans have an ancient-yet-dangerous mind-opening technique which might prove useful. While McCoy coaxes, Spock demonstrates enormous reluctance to use the skill (for almost five seconds), then gives an ominous-sounding disclaimer regarding McCoy's safety, and proceeds.

It was used in the episode, for among other reasons, to make Vulcans seem more alien (green blood and pointed ears apparently were not adequate proof for some). Later during the same season, in "A Taste of Armageddon," Spock admits to Capt. Kirk that "limited telepathic abilities are inherent" in members of his race. He proves his statement by taking the mind contact ability one step further, when he places a telepathic suggestion in a guard's mind on Eminiar VII. After that, it became a commonly-used formula device to have Spock "strut his mental stuff" upon demand.

Obviously, if Spock had not broken his characteristic Vulcan restraint and revealed his secret little talent, it would have remained a secret (apparently, no one ever tells Star Fleet anything), and the audience would never have known. Despite this, a correctly-played ST:RPG2 Vulcan player character would **never** offer to initiate any form of mind

contact. Even when asked, the PC might be entitled to decline if sufficient reason is not given, unless directly ordered to. Incidentally, ranking player characters should be equally reluctant to order a Vulcan subordinate (PC or NPC) to conduct any form of mind contact.

Now that we know about Vulcans and their potent, but still limited, psionic skills, what about other races? Vulcans are certainly the most psionically advanced player character race, and quite probably the most advanced member race in the Federation. This raises the possibility of having non-Vulcans trained in various Vulcan mental disciplines.

Fortunately, it can be done, much as Dr. Miranda Jones (herself a born telepath) related doing in the episode "Is There In Truth No Beauty?" A specially-gifted Human (or another exceptional Humanoid candidate) might, at invitation, devote several years of study on Vulcan to learn the mind touch and related subjects. Of course, the Vulcan Science Academy makes any and all selections, and they naturally are not subject to bribery, influence, or any other deceptive practices.

A good rule of thumb for the gamemaster would be to permit any non-Vulcan with a PSI score of 65 or more one Saving Roll against LUC. If the LUC roll is successful, the lucky individual is invited at some point by the Vulcans, and may (at his option) live on Vulcan and attend classes which will last a total of  $2D10+2$  years. The candidate may accept the offer at any time during his life. As an added benefit, the character would also receive an increase of  $3D10$  skill points in each of the following subjects: **Language, Vulcan, Psychology, Vulcan, and Racial Culture/History, Vulcan.**

Unfortunately, this opportunity only exists for player characters who are **not** on active duty with Star Fleet Command. Though the service does promote inter-species relations and such, it seems highly unlikely that an officer or enlisted man would be allowed to take off for "a decade or two," to learn the ways of the Vulcan mystic. This effectively limits Vulcan-trained player-character candidates to retired Star Fleet officers, merchants, or any other Federation civilians who find first-hand exposure with the concept of IDIC (Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations) irresistible.

Incidentally, it must be pointed out that numerous inaccuracies appear in the Tech/Soc Indices contained in worldlogs and racial descriptions published in FASA's **Star Trek IV Sourcebook** and **The Federation**. Most worlds and/or races should possess a lesser rating for their Psionics Index, to reflect more accurately their culture's lack of psionic knowledge or formal training. (After all, if Terra really had a Psionics Index of 9, what would justify the fascination, even in **Star Trek's** time, with Vulcan psionic abilities?)

Regardless of race, every player character (and almost every non-player character) has a percentile PSI score generated, which is then modified accordingly. What is it good for? What options for psionic activity are the non-Vulcan player characters left with? When was the last time an ST:RPG2 gamemaster asked for or secretly attempted a Saving Roll against PSI? Why do non-Vulcans even bother to generate a PSI score anyway?

According to page 6 of the **Star Trek Officer's Manual**, Star Fleet tests all its personnel for psionic potential, but has little facility for developing any discovered talent. (Another point in the same section also deserves repeating: "... a character with a high PSI score will not necessarily have psionic abilities in evidence.") Even page 28 of the **Game Operations Manual** sheds little light on the matter, when it describes the use of non-Vulcan PSI Saving Rolls as a passive, defensive action to resist psionic intrusion or attack.

That's a perfectly acceptable use, but is that all? Couldn't some other use be developed for the PSI attribute? Perhaps. Let's broaden the definition of psionics—just slightly—to include the concept of, well, intuition.

Humans (and presumably, other Humanoid races) occasionally experience a semi-intellectual, semi-emotional feeling known as a "hunch." At best, it could be thought of as a



form of inductive mental reasoning by which a person is able to make a rational judgment without sufficient facts: a kind of leap in thought. At worst, it can make the most rational person seem positively hare-brained, leading him down paths of false and irrational behavior. In either case, intuition is hardly scientific, and cannot be measured or examined, yet hunches do seem to occur; in some people frequently.

To illustrate the intuitive process, a simplified comparison can be drawn. A Vulcan's normal mental processes move quickly in a linear pattern, from a figurative point A to point B to point C. On the other hand, an intuitive Human might go from point A to point B, get a "hunch," and jump on to point D or E. Of course, there may be no point D or E, leading to erroneous conclusions, or even disaster.

In game terms, PSI (as intuition) could be thought of roughly as a cross (though not necessarily an average) between a character's thinking, reasoning, intelligence (INT attribute) and the personal, unique, uncontrollable element of chance (LUC attribute).

How can intuition be gamemastered? Theoretically, the gamemaster knows approximately when certain major, serious, or significant events will befall player characters. For instance, if when a door is opened a powerful antimatter charge is set off as a direct result, opening that door could be deemed a significant event. Intuition could be helpful for providing some subtle warning or guidance before any such event.

For example, if an engineer is attempting to dismantle a device of which he has absolutely no knowledge or experience, sheer intuition might be the only tool at hand. When contacting a race so alien that methods of communication have not even been established (universal translators only work to a point), intuition again might be a sole alternative. Also, it is a convenient way (if not used to excess) to pass certain impressions from gamemaster to players, without making the group

feel as if they were being fed information, and without giving clues by specifying a particular skill or other area of expertise.

In any situation where the gamemaster wants to offer a chance of intuitive insight, he might permit player characters (particularly if they are senior officers) a Saving Roll against PSI to "have a feeling" about something they were just about to do (or not do). The sensation obtained from a successful roll does not have to be very specific ("a kind of gnawing feeling"), and should never contain concrete facts, or detailed visual or telepathic impressions. Remember, this is **not** telepathy!

Even so, a hunch, if played right, can be quite valuable—especially in situations that are life-threatening or vitally important to the adventure if one course of action is (or is not) selected over another. In more than one television episode, Capt. Kirk mentioned having "a little red alert going off in my head," or some equivalent analogy. Clearly, some 23rd-century Humans do have—and follow—their intuition.

There are situations where the gamemaster must use discretion, however. When a starship-commanding player character's vessel is reassigned to the Klingon border, his "hunch" about impending danger should not be misused, to encourage him to violate or misinterpret instructions. During a firefight, a character should not have any chance to: 1) make a successful Saving Roll against his PSI score; 2) have a hunch about being struck by a particular burst of disruptor fire; and, 3) evade the burst **just as it was being fired**. That's not intuition, that's utter fantasy. (If fantasy is what you are looking for, try some other game.)

Intuition is clearly a useful attribute. Nevertheless, even intuition is not perfect—far from it. The gamemaster is perfectly justified in creating false intuitive impressions, particularly if the "intuition roll" (the Saving Roll against PSI) fails miserably. At other times, no impression at all will be ob-

tained, and that's perfectly acceptable as well.

A good rule of thumb would be to attempt the "intuition roll," using these guidelines: If the Saving Roll is successful and the number rolled is at least 20 less than the character's PSI score, an accurate (but not detailed) hunch is obtained. If the Saving Roll is not successful and the number rolled is at least 20 more than the character's PSI score, a false impression is obtained. Any other result creates no impression.

For example, a Human character has a PSI of 57 (which is quite high, by Human standards). Any results of 37 or less will yield an accurate impression, any results of 77 or more will yield a false impression, and anything between 38 and 76 leaves the character right where he started. The gamemaster, at his discretion, can employ additional bonus and penalty modifiers, as necessary.

In fact, it would probably be best if the gamemaster secretly conducted all such "intuition rolls." The players should not even know that their characters are being checked for flashes of insight, because even knowing the gamemaster is checking can make a group edgy (and this completely defeats the purpose for intuition in the game).

Vulcans, however, would never receive "intuition rolls," because, curiously enough, belief in such an unprovable subject goes against a Vulcan's basically analytical thinking process. There is a certain irony that the only psionic player character race does not believe in, nor follows the advice of, "hunches." In any event, gamemastered intuition can be a helpful addition to any ST:RPG2 adventure or campaign, no matter how the gamemaster includes it. Intuition can give players a little more respect for the PSI attributes of their non-Vulcan player characters, and it provides the gamemaster with one more tool for keeping play interesting.