

Sinister Things

Patrick Riley

www.sinisterthings.com ♦ patrick@sinisterthings.com
101 Redding Rd. #C4 ♦ Campbell, CA ♦ 95008

Comments: Issue #360

Michael Cule

I agree with the sentiment you expressed regarding suicide bombers, but I think the self-sacrifice is more an issue of effectiveness than avoiding the consequences of the act. Contrast the suicide bomber with the gunman who shoots up an office or a market and then takes his own life when confronted by the police, or the white-collar criminal who kills himself waiting his sentence.

Lee Gold

I like your take on when dice should be used and what power they have. I do not know how much help the rule designer can be in coming up with interesting outcomes, but it certainly should be included in any section giving advice to the GM (and players).

Spike Y Jones

Security cameras only help against certain types of crime. The biggest, most expensive crimes are of the sort that cameras are useless to deter.

My father has been a high-school teacher and administrator for over 30 years. Growing up, I cannot recall a summer in which he was not working a summer-time job, such as teaching summer school, to make up for the salary shortfall of the profession. Many of his colleague and my own teachers had to take similar measures.

My wife specifically asked not to have a diamond ring, as she does not like diamonds. She wanted (and received) sapphire.

Joshua Kronengold

Wil Wheaton mentioned in an interview how important it was for people to not simply read those blogs with which you might agree and not restrict themselves to a single source of information and or slant of opinion.

Louis La Mancusa

GTA is not an rpg. Note its lack of roleplaying.

Jonathan Nicholas

I would count rpg supplements (like WW's splat-books and WotC's "Complete" series, not to mention all the non-WotC d20 material) as accessories and thus fall under your "Solution B." Strictly speaking, gamers do not need them, but they sure seem to want them.

A 2:1 ratio of military spending to economic power is not out of proportion? What level would be?

Lisa Padol

"What's at stake" depends on what level of magnification you want to use. Whether or not the monster gets loose is chrome. What's at stake is whether or not the character survives. But that is simply chrome too. What is at stake is whether anyone else can survive. More chrome. Why not just make one roll to determine if the threat is overcome? To borrow a term from Paul Mason, what's at stake is fractal. You just have to pick the level of magnification that matches your own tastes. Dictating "What's at stake" is simply another form of "One True Way-ism."

Brian Rogers

As you wrote, wonderment produces poor adventures. This is why rpg adventures tend to focus on other elements. Too often, a wonderment-based rpg session is nothing more than the GM describing scenery and the players listening. Rarely are there any meaningful decisions to be made. Rarely is there anything really for the PCs or players to do but to observe. This is bad gaming.

Every artist or craftsman must work with the strengths of the medium while acknowledging their limitations. Roleplaying is not a medium that is conducive to awe-inspiring visuals. Roleplaying is a medium of characters, of storytelling that derives from conflict,¹ not scenery-chewing. The system for a roleplaying game should focus on characters; wonderment should be left to another type of game. Wonder and awe can exist in a roleplaying game, but they are better as a garnish than a main course.

I feel that the influence from the gaming group generally override any of the game designer. Hero works perfectly for street-level games and SAS can do cosmic whimsy quite well if the gamers understand what they want. Can a more specialized system do better? Only marginally. The vital elements that make a genre come alive are generated by the gamers themselves, not the rules. The game author's goals are better served by providing descriptive guidelines that are not tied to prescriptive rules.

Back in the day, a single issue of a comic book used to tell several individual and independent stories. Now, a single story arc might take many months to complete. Even if each issue represents a week in the life of a superhero,² it takes over 4 years of publishing for that hero to have a birthday. The difference between game game and real time in rpgs is very similar and would fit the genre perfectly if gamers were not so obsessed and addicted to experience points.³ Remove the growth in character power from the equation, and rpgs fit the timescale of comic books perfectly.

I liked Promethea when the focus was on the characters. I stopped reading when Moore's exploration of mysticism failed to hold my interest, no matter how gimmicky they got with the format.

¹ Conflict can be, but is not limited to, fighting.

² And this is being generous. I could have easily stated one issue per day!

³ A topic I have discussed before and see no need to rehash it now.

Myles Corcoran

If people seem smarter today than they were one-hundred thousand years ago, it is only because of the iterative effects of knowledge and tool-use,⁴ not because the species has evolved genetically. Not having to re-invent the wheel makes it seem we are so very clever, but I do not think we are. There has been no evolutionary pressure on the Homo sapiens brain. Our genes have not changed. For people to get truly smarter (not simply benefit from the body of knowledge accumulated by others), we will have to develop tools that bypass the biological, genetically encoded limitations of our brains.

You asked Brian Rogers about Truth & Justice, but I will throw my two-cents in. One of my design goals of SSΩ, mentioned in A&E even before SSΩ was called that, was to have a mechanical distinction between heroes who are hard to hit and those who are hard to damage. Truth & Justice does not and makes some other design choices that I do not like. But I think it has a good heart and the non-mechanical aspects of the book sound good.

Kat Miller (I think that is her name—Josh and Lisa can correct me and fill in more details) made a superhero version of Everway, complete with cards. If you like Everway, it works fine for supers. Personally, I find the cards distracting rather than inspiring.

Michael Cule

Teachers were (and presumably still are) given the option of a ten- or twelve-month payment schedule. A large number of administration and operations staff also only worked during the school year.

Robert A. Dushay, PhD

When rolling eleven d12s, the chance of not rolling a single 12 is 38% $[(11/12)^{11}]$, which is hardly ridiculous. You would have to roll fifty-three dice before the odds against you dipped below one percent.

If I were a scholar, I would have set the campaign in an alternative version of medieval Europe and I would have used historical Roma or Sinti rather than concoct the Nishendi. I feel guilty about the conceit, especially since I lambaste 7th Sea for similar offenses (except on a grander scale).

Being intangible may make something invisible to touch (I am lumping together temperature, pressure, pain, etc.), but then again, an intangible object may feel cold, hot, gooey, breezy, gritty or even eerie, depending on the nature of the intangibility. I submit that being invisible to touch does not make one intangible. After all, if your hand goes numb and you can no longer feel the things you touch with it, it does not make those things intangible. Having only the ability of invisibility to touch without being intangible is goofy and probably not that useful, but who am I to say no?

⁴ Culture and “modes of thought” are tools.

Lee Gold

Invisibility is simply the most common and popular example of a class of similar sense-based powers. Rather than list every conceivable power, superhero rpgs tend to group similar powers together with a note of how to customize them.

Flying cars also need a failsafe in the case of a catastrophic failure. If you run out of gas, it should not plummet to the earth.

Considering how poorly people drive while on the cell phone, I do not have hope of us being able to multi-task with a permanent mental link to the net with visual overlays and not run into walls.

Spike Y Jones

I am in favor of punitive damages. I just think they should go to someone other than the plaintiff, who should only be entitled to damages, court costs, etc. Punitive damages should punish the defendant, not reward the plaintiff. Rather, the punitive damages would go to the state or a non-profit. I want to avoid a situation where damages are low enough so that it is cheaper to pay damages than do the right thing (such as fixing a safety problem). I want to give a definite disincentive for improper behavior without punishing those (through higher insurance or what have you) who play by the rules and without rewarding ambulance chasers, frauds, and idiots.

Lisa Padol

You always say the nicest things to me. :)

I never watched enough Babylon 5 or Blake's 7 to get a feel for the crew.

Miscellany

Web Update

My web site has a new, blog-based front page. I hope this will help keep my site updated and revitalize my interest in maintaining it. I do not plan on doing much actual blogging, but we shall see.

ConQuest

ConQuest SF was a complete bust this year. I only had one player for my Friday night game, and three for my Monday game (and one of them had to leave early). I know these are odd time slots, but they were the most convenient for me. The problem was a lack of roleplayers at the convention and my choice to run Savage Worlds. Even with a good time slot, I only got four players at Kublacon..

I did not show up at ConQuest on Saturday, since it corresponded to the day I help Terri with her flea market booth, and Sunday was spent with my DC Heroes group. From what I heard, I did not miss much. The convention is under new management, and I fear they are shifting their focus and energy away from rpgs and more to board games and miniatures. If things do not improve next year, I will probably stop going.