

## Miscellany

Last month, my zine decided to hide from Lee until after she had compiled the issue. I apologize that my comments, especially to Michael Cule, last month were a tad stale.

I find myself at the deadline for this month with the complete inability to write coherently yet with a half-page (and then some) to fill. I discovered I could make this half-page disappear simply by using a single column instead of two, which really illustrates how formatting affects (at least the quantity of) content. I prefer reading double-column zines because I can fold the issue in half and read down each column. Spreading the text across the entire page is cumbersome to read, I find. Killing a half-page is cheating, like increasing the font size, so I'll just ramble on a bit.

Kublacon came and went over Memorial Day Weekend and the one group that was supposed to reboot after that date has yet to meet. Scheduling is an issue. So is motivation. So is the lack of a critical mass of players. All these factors circle around each other as they collectively send the group down the drain. And here I am rearranging the columns of my zine as if they were deck chairs.

I find myself in a rut of sorts, re-hashing topics and thoughts that I have had for the past fifteen years. Crazy-cool indie games bore me. We played a couple sessions of *Dogs in the Vineyard* and I found the system clunky and, distracting, and detrimental to roleplaying. The mechanics seem to have been made so that gamers could justify their huge dice bags. I still like the theme of the game, but I found the roleplaying was undermined by its focus on abstract conflict resolution.

Part of my malaise is due, I am sure, to the poor reception my *Call of Cthulhu* game received at Kublacon. None of the players were happy with having to share a room with another game.<sup>1</sup> It absolutely killed the atmosphere, hindered the communication and character interaction, and make for an overall sucky game. I failed to notice this effect and thus did not take the appropriate counter-measures. I wish someone had suggested at the first break to find another room.

My next convention is GenCon, and I am running four *Savage Worlds* games. The noise and distractions will be even worse, but the scenarios are classic fantasy adventures that should fare better in the cacophony of the game rooms. The *Call of Cthulhu* game was rather high concept, with PCs representing the seven vices trapped in a midwest town modeled after Lake Geneva, Wisconsin melded with Dante's Inferno, which was the construct of a Miskatonic University professor whose mind was being torn apart by the insanity caused when the truth of a certain "maritime culture" was revealed to her in a text from the ancient city of Byblos. But the *Savage Worlds* games are taken from my fantasy campaign and would also work as *D&D* scenarios. While not scripted, they are highly linear and much more directed than the open-ended *Cthulhu* game was.

<sup>1</sup> This is the last time I'll be nice and not volunteer to share a room.

## Comments on Issue #369

### Myles Corcoran

My campaign met every two weeks and played for around 4 hours.<sup>2</sup> 40 sessions, with an average xp award of 2 per session would have brought the PCs from novices up to legendary ranks, based on the *Savage Worlds* system, and was planned to last two years (80 weeks, skipping holidays and accounting for scheduling conflicts). As it turns out, scheduling was my bugbear, which I can accept. At least it was not my running out of steam.

Games which are heavily *world-based* can often last a very long time. Players can come and go, PCs can change, but the world continues. *Plot-based* campaigns typically last as long as the plot, but may pick up with a new plot once the first is finished. *Character-based* campaigns break down when players leave and PCs change. Most campaigns are mixture of the three, of course, but I tend to run plot- and character-based games.

Long-term campaigns need to have a group that is both stable and interested in long-term world exploration, plots, and character development. Since world exploration is not my thing, and finding a stable group has always been a difficulty, the campaigns I run are less likely to be long-term.

### Michael Cule

Sir, your fame precedes and outlives the Daily Illuminator.

### Lee Gold

I really tend to dislike "squishy jargon." If I apply a name to something it should be very clearly defined and with minimal ambiguity (if any). This is one of the reasons I rebel against terms like "simulationist" or even "post-modern."

### Spike Y Jones

RAE Ostraca; I'll never use it, but it was interesting.

I like True20 as a streamlined alternative to d20. I would never run the latter, but could run the former. I do not have enough experience with True20 to critique or review it. What I like the most is that gaining levels is not based on xp, but on when the GM thinks is appropriate.<sup>3</sup> I still found character creation cumbersome, but no as bad as d20. I like the lack of hit points and the other bits first developed in M&M.

### Joshua Kronengold

The U.S. criminal justice system is designed to determine guilt *beyond a reasonable doubt*. Truth, as in "what really happened," rarely enters into it.

<sup>2</sup> The other campaigns I play in are also bi-weekly, but meet for 6 hours.

<sup>3</sup> But then I'm the freak who doesn't like mechanical character advancement and *leveling up*.

*Lisa Padol*

I agree, "...other things matter more."

I will be at GenCon this year. I'm not really into any fandom, and I have never been to an SF convention, much less Worldcon (even when it was local).

*Simon Reeve*

If you are going to be adjusting the (solar-based) calendar anyway, why not officially line up the new year with the winter solstice?

*Brian Rogers*

I am finding myself turned off more and more by the competitiveness of board games. I also find competitiveness in roleplaying games, such as one might find in an adversarial LARP or game with "best roleplaying" prize, is also displeasing.

*Marco Subias*

Some claim that there is no right to privacy and use it as an excuse to violate privacy. Normally, I argue that privacy is protected under the 9<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, but I can also point to my state Constitution, which explicitly protects privacy. Even if it has no practical benefit, it gives me bragging rights.

Much of the bloat in government-sponsored education is simply because of the way it is funded. A private school can pick and choose its students and programs. Public schools generally cannot. Administration of public enterprise, such as schools and the post office, is traditionally very poor and something should be done to make it better. But when it really comes down to it, I simply do not trust private schools to serve the public interest. I expect them to serve the interest of their shareholders.

## Comments on Issue #370

*Paul Cardwell*

I had never even heard of the Robinson-Patman Act.<sup>4</sup> Wow. I can see why it is never enforced by the pro-capitalist, pro-merger government. Attempts to repeal it would only draw attention to it.

*Robert Dushay*

I hate to leave areas unexplored and often ask "What's down/over there?" when I am sightseeing. Unfortunately, this also means that tend not to linger or soak in the scenery because there is almost always a place I have not yet seen. And especially if I have paid or traveled greatly to see something, I always want to see it all and leave no corner unexplored.

*Lee Gold*

One of the annoyances of my DC Heroes campaign is that superspeedsters have to worry about breaking mundane objects (and people!) at super-speeds due to sonic booms, friction, ram pressure, etc. This is often in direct contradiction to the source material.

*Joshua Kronengold*

I was going to suggest that perhaps Ron Edwards is the Trotsky of the Indie Revolution, but the analogy doesn't fit all that well and I am not scholarly enough to think of a better one.

What I dislike about the concept of "flags" and other mechanical representation of roleplaying "tradition," is that bypass direct player-GM discussions. I am all for giving advice for players to sit down with their GMs and discuss what plot hooks they want and how they want their characters challenged and how they want to be challenged as players. Encoding such things into rules and short-circuiting the discussion is *harmful* to successful and satisfying roleplaying.

*Jonathan Nicholas*

Tossing aside GNS theory, not knowing (or caring about) your character's name and history is just bad roleplaying.<sup>5</sup> Of course, I realize that a lot of gamers do not care about roleplaying or define roleplaying games differently than I do.

*Simon Reeve*

I like the idea of using a calibrated chronometer as a maguffin for an adventure. I can imagine the final scene where the PCs deliver the mysterious package, for which they survived untold peril and hardship, only to have the recipient open it and set his pocket watch.

*Brian Rogers*

If you are using the Hero system, capping the dice is fine, but I would avoid any specific system tinkering, such as changing any point costs or making new types of frameworks. To give "the system a decent shot," you should play the system as-is. Hero is quite fragile and even innocuous rule changes can easily cause unforeseen problems and balance issues.

<sup>4</sup> You called it "Robertson-" but the internet seems to think it is "Robinson."

<sup>5</sup> Unless your character has amnesia, which may be either brilliant or hackneyed roleplaying. : )