

**IGNORABLE THEME ISSUE #375:
NUMBER OF PLAYERS****ON SPACE SPENDING**

This one was cut from last issue due to space.

I like to have four to six players. Having only one or two players tend to put too much pressure and limelight on the player(s). Part of the fun of roleplaying is being the audience to your fellow players, after all. Three players is better, but having one player miss a game really kills it. Four players, or better five, creates a group with good opportunities for character interaction and limelight sharing and able to weather a missing player. Beyond six players and I begin to feel stretched thin as a GM; as a player, I start to get antsy because the limelight is so dilute. I always create convention games for six players because accommodating fewer paying players than that seems unjust. I have made room for seven or eight players based on what made sense for the scenario. For example, I ran a superhero game in which there were two four-member rival superhero groups. For the CoC game in which each of the characters represented each of the deadly sins, I advertised the game for six even though I expected (and received) seven players.

Very early in my roleplaying experience, I decided I disliked playing more than one character. A can only achieve the desired depth of immersion if I focus on one character; others may be able to do it, but I cannot. As a GM, I do not allow players to have multiple characters (and no one has ever asked). One exception might be a superhero and sidekick played by the same person (as they are in *Truth & Justice* and my Generation Zeta campaign).

Michael Cule astutely mentioned that the physical play space can have an impact as well, which I had not considered. The room we use for Generation Zeta has too few chairs to seat all the players and we have to supplement with furniture from the patio. I would not want to bring more players into this bad seating arrangement.

As a GM, I have a difficult enough time roleplaying occasional NPCs; having them tag along with the PCs is something I avoid. As Michael Cule mentioned last issue, keeping that many personae straight in my head at once is too tasking. But then, one of my weaknesses as a GM is my inability to roleplay my NPCs well. As a player, all I care about is that the NPCs do not take up PC-level limelight except in brief flashes.

Lastly, I like encounters to be tailored to the PCs. Having to call in NPCs to fill out fighting ranks and empty niches does not appeal to me, no matter how reasonable that plan of action might be. One of the challenges of Generation Zeta is to get the teenagers to take the initiative in being heroes and fighting the bad guys without deferring to the adults.

This is an expansion of my previous comments.

Space (and even military) spending has brought about technological innovation that might not have otherwise been accomplished through normal capitalism and market forces. I support the space program for the direct benefits to science, and not the indirect trickle-effect on technology (thought that is also a benefit). Yes, people do sink a lot of money into space. Paul Allen spent \$20-30 million to help win the \$10 million Ansari X Prize. But I think a close accounting of where the rich spend their charitable dollars will clearly show a trend toward education, medicine, poverty, etc. After all, these programs simply make better public relations and if you want a cure for cancer, \$1 billion given to cancer research is more effective than giving the same amount to creating a reusable launch vehicle.

To the general public, I am afraid that spending money on space is seen as wasteful. A \$16B NASA budget sounds huge until they realize how much money has been (and will be) spent in Iraq. Given the choice of giving \$16 billion to schools, hospitals, or "faith based initiatives," versus space exploration and science, there is no contest.

I do not subscribe to the notion that private investment is always preferable to government-run programs, but I do believe that NASA should be run more efficiently and cohesively. The first step is to de-politicize the budgeting process. Remove executive mandates that are not funded. The second is to let missions be driven by science, not earmarks and pork barrels.

Space exploration is high cost and high risk and draws from too large an array of technical and scientific disciplines for most single private entities to tackle. And those who can have better, safer ways to make money. One way to mitigate the risk is to let the government be the innovators, to take the risk and spend the capital to get things going. Let NASA work out the kinks of how to put satellites into space before you try to do the same on your own dollar. Or better, have NASA pay you to figure it out and do not front the capital yourself. Let them build a base on the moon and prove that mining operations can work before you offer to take over operations with your private contracting firm. Take away the deep pockets of government, you take away space exploration. And take away any secondary and tertiary technological advances.

There are two ways to pay for private space missions: capital investment and charity. There is no money to be made from SOHO, Spirit and Opportunity rovers, Cassini, or even Hubble. No capitalist would touch these, and there simply is not enough charity to support these missions. That leaves the government (and taxes) to pay for space exploration and science.

Currently, the profit model for space travel is the same *failed* model as the Concorde. Virgin Galactic expects to earn a profit by selling sub-orbital flights to the rich? I want science and discovery, not capitalistic wishful thinking on "space tourism." I want sufficient public funding with good oversight and management.

COMMENTS ON ISSUE #375

MYLES CORCORAN

Based on their over-emphasis on player control, I have often proposed that many indie games were a reaction against bad, railroading GMs.

Terri and I enjoy *Heroes* very much, she more so than I, perhaps because I keep waiting for the writers to jerk some deus ex retcon out of their... um.. pockets.

When I try to run a game that is not owned by the majority of my players (as I did with *Savage Worlds*, *BESM*, and *Truth & Justice*), I always tell them that they need not buy their own copies. But most end up buying them anyway.

I think that the heavier the rules set, the more players tend to feel like they have to know all the rules and they can only achieve that by studying them on their own. If one of the player goals is to create optimal character builds within the system, they need their own copy of the rules to achieve that. Lighter games tend to avoid that. There really is no need for everyone to own a copy of *Everway* or *Call of Cthulhu*, for example.

Many smaller games are self-contained within a single book, including "GM only" material and so the players *shouldn't* own their own copies. In D&D, where having a copy of the Monster Manual gives you a tactical edge, a GM cannot stop the players from getting their own book. But for a game like *Little Fears*, it is easy for the GM to tell the players not to buy the book without any grousing.

I still feel that the best way to handle points for disadvantages is to use them as the basis for xp instead of points up-front. This automatically self-corrects for frequency.

The "failing infrastructure" I referred to was the U.S. healthcare system. While there may be advances in medical technology, it is getting harder and harder to find new non-resistant antibiotics, for example. And the average person on earth still dies from curable illnesses because they can't get the medicines they need. According to the WHO,¹ the Average Annual Change (Percent) in Age-Standardized Death Rate will be -0.8% for men and -1.1% for women from 2002 to 2020. Since Scourge technology brought no medical technology, I stand by my statement that "the average human condition on Earth has only improved marginally" in my version of 2024.

Many of the Scourge devices had no moving parts, no obvious power source, and no interface. Without a psychic to activate them, most of the devices are effectively inert. Imagine Thomas Edison reverse-engineering a Pentium. Some say that government scientists cracked the Scourge-tech within a few years but kept it to themselves longer than they are admitting.

MICHAEL CULE

One form of modern isolationism is an effort to filter the Internet in places like China, Iran, and the U.S. public library system. It's dumb and ultimately will fail. But by then, the leaders who put in such filters will be gone.

¹ www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/bodprojections2030/en/index.html

LEE GOLD

My comment to you in issue #374 was not truncated, but it was overly terse. When writing about D&D game mechanics, I think it is safe to refer to your personal knowledge of the rules and any discrepancies between what you write and what the rules are unlikely to be noticed by the readership.²

When I run, I mentally "go around the table," but the exact order of player input and character actions may not necessarily follow a linear progression based on their physical position. The actual order I follow depends on the scene, who did what first, who needs more (or less) attention, who needs more (or less) time to decide on an action, etc.

SPIKE Y JONES

The issues you identified with illusions, saves, and PC control are there because too many gamers are terrible roleplayers or storytellers who see their PCs as nothing more than complex playing pieces in game rather than living, breathing, fictional characters. While I generally dislike mechanics that force my characters to feel or act a certain way, I can definitely see a need for them in cases like these. In D&D terms, failing a Will save against an illusionary fire might just mean the character lacks conviction and cannot put his hand through it, rather than getting burned by it.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD

A bullet split in two by a blade would lose considerable momentum and energy due to the impact with the blade and friction.

I have not played *Clue* since my early teens. Maybe it is time to try it (or a variant) again.

Yes, *Generation Zeta* is based on the 4-game origin campaign I ran two years ago. The setup prevents me from bringing in elements found in other comics. There is no magic, no undead, no space aliens, no (backwards) time travel, no mole men, no giant monsters, and very few high-tech villains and heroes (which generally means no giant robots). I like these constraints. I do not want to have every comic book cliché make an appearance. I do reserve the option to use invaders from alternate realities, obviously, but I keep those to a minimum.

PUM

Welcome back, which I neglected to mention last time.

For radiokinesis controlling "radioactive particles," do you mean alpha particles (ejected helium ions), beta particles (ejected nuclear electrons/positrons), or gamma particles (high energy photons)? Or maybe free neutrons? And what business do I have asking about such things in an essentially fantasy game, anyway?

BRIAN ROGERS

See "*On Space Spending*," above.

² Assuming that was the comment you thought was truncated.