
Voyages Crash-and-Burn

I ran a two-session Savage Worlds game using the Voyages setting I described a few months ago. It was a dry run to see if it fit this group. It didn't. The tone of the characters and their actions (not all, but some) was not what I thought I had indicated in the background information (the exact same background information I included in these pages).

The Captain was played as if modeled on Zap Brannigan. The Security Chief masturbated to training videos.¹ The Chief Engineer threatened the Captain and ship with a jury-rigged bomb and had to be taken out by security. The Executive Officer, who was a member of a frog-like race, liked to wear wigs.

The scenario I presented them with was opened with no preset resolution. Two alien cultures were in disagreement over who had domain over a new planet. The Surnise, an aggressive, lizard-like race, wanted the natural resources. The peaceful, religious people known as the Critalans wanted to study the ancient ruins. In the end, it didn't work so well. The PCs avoided military action, yet never really worked toward a diplomatic resolution. They never even got the leaders of the two sides to meet.

After the Chief Engineer was subdued by security near the end of the first session, I rationalized that the engineer had been infected by a virus he caught on board one of the vessels which had been carrying religious pilgrims. I thought this not only helped explain the player's insane behavior, but that it made for an adequate B plot and added a layer of suspicion to the peaceful aliens. But it didn't pan out. In my eyes, the PCs failed to be pro-active in resolving the situation. In their eyes, they were being distracted by the NPC actions.

The climax was an exercise in frustration. The beautiful Critalan leader had figured out how to use an ancient weapon and used it to vaporize the Surnise. The Captain's player had a clear mind of what he wanted to happen in a confrontation with the Critalan's leader.² But the game rules and the dice disagreed.³ He became very frustrated, and that really got on my nerves. The game has lost its wheels, but I didn't want to fiat the ending. The Captain managed to blow up the control panel of the weapon and bring a satisfactory close to the scenario, despite the very rocky road we had taken to get there.

I think I need a break from GMing.

-
- 1 I didn't see the character until the start of the session.
 - 2 Shoot her in the gut during an amorous embrace.
 - 3 Point-blank is not an automatic hit, and he rolled poorly, after blowing all his bennies on a failed attempt to intimidate the aggressive alien captain earlier in the game.

A Change of Pace

The Voyages fiasco has starting me thinking of diceless games. Back in the day, I liked not using dice, but found the experience overly taxing, mentally. I think it's time I revisit diceless roleplaying, but with a few changes from my Amber-inspired attempts a decade-and-a-half ago. Before, I would just take the character descriptions and wing it from there. But now, I want a few more mechanical tools to make the game easier to run.

I would use a (mostly) preset list of fairly broad abilities similar to the one used in Castle Falkenstein, Savage Worlds, or Spirit of the Century (to name three). Player-defined attributes (such as OTE or PDQ) are too squishy and increase my work load. Specialties would be allowed as an option.

Abilities would be rated on a scale no wider than 1-10. This allows for quick comparisons without splitting hairs.

The degrees of success (DoS) based on the difference between opposed abilities or an ability and a target difficulty are: Major Failure (under by a lot), Normal Failure (under by a bit), Marginal Result (tied), Normal Success (over by a bit), and Major Success (over by a lot). Players will have freedom to describe the outcome based on the DoS.

The interpretation of marginal results would greatly depend on circumstances. It could mean a draw, or success with a setback, or develop into an extended test which would rely on a different set of abilities (like an Amber fight shifting from Warfare to Endurance as it drags on).

Players would have a pool of points that can bump up results. Points are earned by invoking complications, which may be linked to specific abilities, character flaws, or just specifics of the scene. The GM can also impose complications on the PCs, but must give out points for doing so. Thus, GMs would not need to keep their own pool of points.

Combat (and other tests⁴) would be resolved based on the DoS, with weapons and armor taken into consideration. Wound levels would probably follow the same DoS scale, with Incapacitated following Major Wounds. If/when a PC dies depends greatly on the genre and setting rules. "Wounds" could mean tactical setbacks rather than injuries.

And I want add an optional rule to use Fudge dice for those players who feel the need for randomness. I'd even let them choose how many dice (1-4) to roll. They would choose whether or not to roll before I give the thumbs-up or -down on the outcome.

4 I refuse to use the term "social combat."

Comments on Issue #385

Ty Beard

Because you cannot tell the difference between the air strikes launched against Iraq by Clinton and the war that Bush started, it is clear that any further discussion on this, or any matter, is pointless.

Paul Cardwell

On there being no center, there may be something to that for many people, but it also defines what you mean by "conservative" or "liberal" on issues. For example, if someone favors strict gun laws on assault weapons but not handguns, or legalized abortion in the first trimester (only), where are they on the spectrum? If one is determined to draw lines between black-and-white, to ignore the grayness and reduce the world to binary decisions, one can eliminate the center. This also leads to bad policy.

Myles Corcoran

RAE your Ignorable Theme. "Watch your fellow players," is good advice.

I was in Pontyprid helping British Telecom with a training video on how to use the test equipment to turn-up their 21st Century Network (21CN) project. Of all the phone exchanges in the U.K., Pontyprid was the one with the right equipment and timing.

Lee Gold

I was imagining a hemp-like rope. I don't know how tough walrus skin is or how it is braided to make a rope. I certainly don't know enough to categorically deny that a hundred-pound otter would destroy it.

Han Blix's record, as quoted by our own Ty Beard, points to the lack of cooperation by Saddam Hussein that I noted from the news media at the time of the on-again-off-again inspections since before Bush took office. To disprove the U.S. accusations of WMDs, Saddam would have had to prove his own weaknesses to his neighbors. I never believed for one moment that he was a threat to the U.S. Claims of WMDs were a combination of wishful thinking by the hawks and paranoia by the rest. But then, I did not seem to be struck by the same irrational fears and blind nationalism that has blinded so many in this country since September 11, 2001.

I am a big fan of (sub)compact hatchbacks precisely because of the good mileage and cargo space. You'd be amazed at how much I can get into our tiny Scion xA. Most hatchbacks have good legroom for when you do need to fit 2 people into the backseat. Passing ability can be a challenge with small engines (my old Honda Civic was terrible on long hills), but the lighter body weight tends to

make them very peppy.

Louis La Mancusa

Did you know that all plea bargains must pass muster with a judge? Your wording on felon voting rights would give rights to those who plead innocent, knowing their guilt, and then purger themselves on the stand and waste the time and money of the court, rather than those who admit their guilt and pay their debt honestly? [This dovetails into my hatred for sentencing and parole guidelines that are stacked against the truly innocent who maintain their innocence.]

And if you're Dubya, you'd say (or say that Cheney would say), "that half-glass is full."

I find it odd that you did not discount the video, eye-witness, or physical evidence of the moon landings. As always, I refer you to badastronomy.com for all your "moon hoax" de-bunking needs.

One of the problems of quoting other people is that you can unburden yourself of having to defend the opinion. To whom should I send my comments (pointing out, for example, the misnomer that windmills "chops birds", a topic previous covered in these pages)? You or the originator of the text? Are you in a position to send along our comments? If not, I suggest you start writing your own opinions.

Lisa Padol

When faced with the task of describing a room, I'll usually give a cursory description, pointing out the obvious features. If the PCs start searching, I'll ask the players what they are looking for. If the object is reasonable (like a trashcan) or already known by me to be there (like a safe), I'll let them find it. If I am unsure, then I'll call for a die roll, based on a searching skill or even luck, depending.

Brian Rogers

I agree about dice and infrequent powers. Unfortunately, not all players can be trusted with regulating themselves, especially since so many don't truly understand the superhero genre. Depending on how the mechanics are stated, the dice could determine if the power has any *effect*, not necessary if it *works*. You can also restrict the use of infrequent powers through a resource management mechanism. The game Supercrew requires that you first use your least effective ability before you use your rare, powerful ability. See rpg.net for a review (not mine).

I note that in your examples of Versatility, the number of different applications tends to equal the point multiplier. You could just say for X applications, multiply your point total by X (not unlike M&M 1st edition). I would also allow applications to be created in play so long as they were already paid for (or paid for right then and there).