
Ignorable Theme for Issue #387

What makes a character larger than life?

When in doubt, fall back to the dictionary. Someone who is larger than life is “very impressive or imposing,” which tends to apply to the vast majority of PCs and quite a few (named or important) NPCs. PCs may not start out larger than life, but they eventually grow into it, like a D&D character advancing from 1st level on up. Of course, “larger than life” is in reference to most ordinary people, and not the other larger than life characters they may encounter. A 5th level D&D character is larger than life to the average 0th level commoner, but not a Type VI demon.

What risks should characters encounter?

The risks they should encounter should be on par with their abilities. If the risks are too difficult, then the larger than life sheen wears away. Some risks should be too easy for the characters (but still quite difficult for the commoner) to reinforce their impressiveness. But too many of these softball challenges become dull.

Should they be immune to random meaningless death?

Dying a random, meaningless death is not very impressive. If someone so imposing can be offed so easily, it detracts from the notion of being larger than life. This is not to say that larger than life characters should not die, but rather that their deaths should be “very impressive” or against “imposing” opposition. Death with meaning is generally preferable to the alternatives in roleplaying games and the larger than life stories they tell. In wargames and tragedies, random, meaningless deaths are appropriate, but these genres don’t have larger than life characters.

The Joys of Public Transportation

I have been taking the light rail to work, which has afforded me time to catch up on some reading. I’m actually surprised that the motion sickness I typically get while reading in a moving vehicle has (mostly) stayed away. I’ve just started reading *World War Z*, recommended by Dr. Menace last issue, which I had actually received as a birthday present back in September. Before that, I read a number of trade paperbacks including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Long Way Home*, *Powers: Cosmic Vol. 10*, and *Strangers in Paradise Vol. 1* (I’m now waiting to get my hands on Vol. 2 before proceeding to Vol. 3). *Continued on next page...*

Comments on Issue #386

Robert Dushay

Your Design Halfbakery on wizards who drop their ST to 0 is inspired, but I cannot see any wizard ever actually doing that unless they were going to die anyway. Or maybe they all do it and becoming a wraith is standard practice. Maybe the effect is only temporary; when you’re young and vigorous, you can come back easily, but as you grow older, crossing back over becomes harder and harder until you eventually can’t. Ultimately, I think you need to answer the question, why would a wizard want to push to 0 ST rather than push to 1 ST and not risk becoming a wraith?

Savage Worlds can do Hyborean Age roleplaying very well. Whether it does it “better than D&D” depends on what you think of D&D. Savage Worlds is an order of magnitude faster in play, especially when dealing with a few heroes facing off against an evil horde. The magic system is more adaptable to the setting, I think. And you can probably run a Conan game with just the main rulebook (though there is a Conan conversion with racial templates, etc. at www.savageheroes.com).

Lee Gold

Regarding toothpaste, I was told by one hygienist that flossing was more important than brushing in actually preventing tooth decay (versus tartar buildup).

I generally have good players who can separate player and character knowledge. So when I said “remove slavery” it meant “slavery does not exist in this setting” and there was no confusion. For players who cannot compartmentalize different types of information, my only advice to them is to pay attention; I have very little patience for these individuals.

While other forms of stories and drama certainly exist in the world of rpgs, I would wager that 90% would be considered “action adventure.” The percentage of LARPs is different, but what fraction of rpgs games played are LARPs?

Regarding other people’s characters, I don’t like hearing about their abilities, classes, races, builds, adventures, successes, failures, loves, enemies, sex life, weapons, magic items, or wardrobes—doubly so when I haven’t solicited this information. I might read about their characters if written in an entertaining way, but I don’t want to hear it. I’m sure there are people who can narrate the stories of the characters in a manner I might enjoy, but unless they have the storytelling chops of Kevin Smith, I just assume they shut the hell up.

Joshua Stronghold

Observation is ingrained into every human activity, such as noticing the difference between two objects on an IQ test, the leak in the water pump, or the dip of an opposing fencer's elbow. One cannot learn if one cannot observe. Every skill in an rpg has an observational component that can be assumed to be wrapped up in the overall skill rating. To add a separate perception roll to combat would be redundant, unless you do it with all skills. We only need a separate perception skill (or skills) for those situations where no other skill applies.

When you turned down the management track to continue coding (the offer illustrates that your employer *gets it*, unlike many firms), did you also turn down potential long-term salary bonuses?

Louis La Mancusa

Thanks for the Cornell link. I note that your terms *entertainment*, *enjoyment*, or *edification* appear nowhere in the fair use doctrine. Also, please note the clause, "the amount and substantially of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole." You were not making long quotes; you were copying entire essays/articles. Your quote of Prof. Fears was more in line with what I would label as fair use.

In Ergodika #24 (A&E #384) you stated, "I did not state President Clinton is a sociopath," and then included the quote from a previous issue in which you said he showed "some of the defining characteristics." I called you on it in the following issue (A&E #385). Because, after all, my saying "Bush has some of the defining characteristics of an amoral tyrant" is the same as my calling him an amoral tyrant, except with the added shield of semantics that allow me to then say I never actually called him that. I am reminded of those bullshit passive apologizes the people give ("I'm sorry if people were offended by my statements"). So, your rebuttal to me with an example involving the rain is misplaced.

Say what you mean and mean what you say. If you believe someone is a sociopath or an amoral tyrant, say it. If you believe it's possible someone is a sociopath or an amoral tyrant, say that. In either case, explain why. You can quote others in making your argument for or against, but stand-up for what you believe and state it plainly.

Your "merely buy a home/property" comment to Joshua was satirical gold. Actually, with the right capital investment, I think I could purchase an acre and then sell it off a square inch at a time for a few bucks to anyone who can't afford to buy a home yet still wanted to vote. Or better yet, rather than individually own the land, we could all just put our money into one pot and own the land collectively under an

umbrella agency. Oh wait, we already do—it's called the federal government and the money we pay is called taxes. As a tax-paying citizen, I am a partial owner of all public lands (which are managed by the government), and therefore I have the right to vote even though I am not a "landowner" in the traditional sense.

Brian Rogers

Superheroes do tend to be reactive. If there is a villain in town they can actively pursue, that's great, but even while "patrolling," a superhero has to react to a crime in process. Superheroes are like firefighters, responding to a given crisis. If there is no crisis, what do you want your superheroes actively doing? Yes, there can be subplots involving the personal and public lives of the characters, but that's true of all genres.

There has always been a fundamental difference between what games say and what players do. Even if the DMG lists prestige classes as "optional," players will whine for them and DMs will say yes. Not all, but enough to throw the idea of "optional" out the window. It seems the surest way to make players want to play a class or race is to make it "NPC only" (though it doesn't help that they are usually powerful, unbalanced, and/or "cool").

Marco Subias

During a recent Wild Talents playtest, in which everyone (including the GM) was struggling to figure out how to run a simple combat, the GM noted my frustration with the game. I responded, "The game's fine; I just want to cockpunch Greg Stolze."¹ For example, the process to perform two actions is much more involved, confusing, and fiddly than the "roll each action, at a -2 penalty on each" that Savage Worlds uses. There isn't always a clear connection between what I want the character to do and how to do that using the system.

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I started walking the mile+ from my home to the station, but after two weeks my plantar fasciitis has flared up again. The five minute trek from the end station to my workplace has not been a problem, though. Also, there were a few mechanical issues this past week with switches not working or a stalled car on the tracks that required a hike to bypass two stations. But overall, the experience has been positive. My car gets enough gas mileage that I'm actually paying more by taking the light rail (\$1.75 each way, 4 days a week), but so far, it's been a very nice change of pace.

¹ I say this in jest, but I simply have not seen the advantages of ORE over a simpler, less "elegant" system.