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Brain Parasites

When it comes to gaming, I often suffer from what I've taken to calling brain parasites. An idea burrows its way into my mind and takes up residence, nibbling and clawing to the point of distraction. Until I get rid of it, I can't think of anything else.

One treatment plan is to find a bigger, hungrier parasite who will either drive off the original one (unlikely) or at mask the symptoms until I purge myself of the new one (typical).

The only lasting treatment is to give in. By capitulating to the parasite and doing what it wants, it becomes satiated. In gaming terms, this usually means running the game the parasite wants me to. A one-shot or micro-campaign is usually enough. Swollen with creative juices, the parasite falls away and takes away any and all compulsions to continue running the game.

The relief gained from feeding the parasite can be as satisfying as the gaming experience itself. As a GM, I (and I think most of us) get the most enjoyment by having the players enjoy themselves. But the game will feel hollow if the parasite is not appeased.

Sometimes the parasite is super-aggressive until I commit to running the game at a convention. And then, just when I need the energy and inspiration to prepare the game, it goes to sleep. It's still there and occasionally will twitch and scratch, but it isn't actively gnawing on my brain. Even if I might be able to ignore it, I've already have an obligation to run the game and have to force myself to prepare.

I think the brain parasite phenomena is common in creative types, though most wouldn't use the same imagery as I have. :) While I don't miss the parasite that leaves, I like having one fueling manic creativity. [I've never been diagnosed as being bipolar, but I recognize that I have cycles of mania and depression, as I think most people do.]

Now that DunDraCon is over and I expunged that particular parasite, I don't have any idea what I want to run next. Sure, I have the ongoing Monster Hunter campaign and I am still trying to plug away at my superhero system¹, but the parasites that started those projects are in sleep mode. I am still interested, but I don't have that creative drive that demands I do nothing else besides work on the game.

I want to run a game devoid of the paranormal, with PCs who do not have any special powers. Low fantasy would count, as would hard(-ish) science fiction. I think the supernatural is often used as a crutch and I want to see what I can do without it. But so far I'm stymied for a plot that I find interesting and which call pull six to eight PCs into cohesive adventuring group. I hope to have something for Kulacon in May.

1 Right now, I'm stumped for how to account for size differences in combat without using fiddly modifiers.

DunDraCon

I expected it to rain, but I didn't expect four days of near-constant precipitation. But I'm not complaining; we desperately need the rain. Actually, we desperately need a good snow pack.

But on Friday evening, in the middle of a downpour, and during the first game registration period, the hotel lost power. So did the Target next door, where we happened to be at the time, as well as several stores in the shopping center next door. We decided to drive to dinner and by the time we came back, the power was back on. And that's when the real troubles began.

Between the initial power outage and follow-up problems trying to get auxiliary power, the game registration system became corrupted. This had ripple effects for the entire weekend. On Saturday, I was not seated in any of my requested games, even though my second choice had four empty seats. On Sunday, I got into none of the games listed on my GM priority slip.

But I did manage to play in two games on Saturday. The first was a Mutants & Masterminds game. The PCs belonged to one of two superhero teams, one from LA and one from SF. We were searching for missing psychic children. The LA team avoided the expected superhero team rumble by having the wherewithal to call ahead to SF and let them know they were coming. There seemed to be a lot of potential, but anything proactive we tried was thwarted by The Plot and my attempts at roleplaying were overshadowed by out-of-character snarkiness.

The second game was a weird Tri-Stat dX game involving a young elemental and his tiny elemental mephit companions having to save the kidnapped princess and the world. The player running the naive hero did a very good job of staying out of the lime-light. Overall, it was good, cute fun.

I was shut out of games on Sunday, but made use of my time catching up with friends. I did far less wandering around than I usually do and didn't pick up anything at the dealers' room.

I ran my Savage Worlds space marine² game on Monday. While the first big battle against the Godless aliens went longer than I thought it would, it was tense and the system handled the load very well. I had 8 PCs. Each PC commanded 5 additional, generic marines. They were up against a dozen battle-armed GAs, two light tanks, and an airborne personnel carrier. After forcing the GAs into retreat, they attempted to infiltrate their base. By now, I decided that they didn't need another battle, so once the PCs sneaked up and began breaching the defenses, the GAs made another hasty retreat and scuttled their base. It was then a simple matter of going the native village, figuring out where the missing missionaries were, and finding them holed up in a cave nearby. I won't say it was a great game—it definitely wasn't a deep game—but it was good fun and the player's seemed to enjoy themselves.

2 Think Dark Heresy toned down to *Starship Troopers* level with a sprinkle or two of *Alien 2* and *Predator*.

Comments on Issue #401

Myles Corcoran

LOL @ Table of Random Polearms.

Players may create characters who are immune to a particular kind of plot because they don't want those kinds of plots. For example, creating a hidden and/or impenetrable fortress so as do not have to deal with villains attacking them at their home base. But maybe the players want to tackle those plots head-on and kick ass. Sure, the telepath could breeze through many mysteries, but if you never give the character a mystery to solve, you may have a disappointed player on your hands. The GM cannot simply look at the character sheets and make assumptions on what types of plots are desired or not.

Lee Gold

I meant, as Josh suggested, using a phone as a weapon, where he placed it at the end of his ascending list of effective weapons.

Of the movies you listed (*Apollo 13*, et al), I don't consider them action/adventure or science fiction. But let's not go down the rabbit hole of trying to define what is or isn't science fiction.

RAE the Chinese restaurant story. Clearly, the witnesses to this event were not PCs. :)

Scott K. Jamison

RAE the Anime descriptions, but I'm confused on your criteria for being "suitable for a campaign." *Moyashimon* is not suitable because it lacks special abilities, but neither does *Black Lagoon* which you say has "very high potential." Is it just because *Black Lagoon* has action while *Moyashimon* is more understated? Must an rpg campaign always have action and/or PCs with special abilities?³

Spike Y Jones

Wedding plans described in *Fighter* might be interesting! I imagine this is how Klingon ceremonies are planned. :)

I heard that Democratic Party tried to recruit Eisenhower for their ticket, but he had already sided with the Republicans.

Joshua Kronengold

California is very "purple" politically, with a mix of liberal urban and conservative rural area. It has strong ties to both environmentalism and the defense industry. While mocked as the state of "fruits and nuts," a slim majority still voted against access to public services by illegal immigrant and same-sex marriage rights. But at least the weather is nice. :)

You have a point about some types of skills requiring one to "unlearn" ingrained habits. Holding onto bad techniques (whether fencing, programming, or cooking) can prevent someone from progressing. Not only do you have to learn new and better techniques,

you have to remember not to use the old ones, even if they seem expedient.

The tip of a bullwhip does break the sound barrier, but does not necessarily transfer that energy, which is concentrated into a very low mass string, to a target. I'd like to see a video of someone cutting through the equivalent of leather or metal armor.⁴

One of my gaming group was bitching how D&D 4E "didn't have an economic system." When I pointed out that it was probably done that way to prevent abuse, he admitted to seriously abusing the 3.5E economic system. There certainly is room for WotC to develop a supplement with revised/viable system for making money using the game economy.

Lisa Padol

Twice now in my Monster Hunters campaign, I have thrown plots to the PCs only to have them pass.

Savage Worlds encourages GMs to not follow the PC-creation rules when making NPCs, saying, "Just give them what you think they ought to have in their various skills and attributes and move on." This doesn't mean that every "normal" NPC is able to kick the PCs' butts.

The example of Sheridan cheating the government doesn't sound so onerous to me. By now demanding rent, the government was in effect giving him a pay cut. One could easily say that empires fall when the government decides its entitled to cheat its people in small, petty ways.

Steven D Warble

I would agree with your "smartest, most qualified" suggestion, but there is too much disagreement on who those people are. This is especially true when applied to economics and other social sciences.

I believe that bad superhero movies are a result of poor translation from one medium (comics) to another (film). Story elements that work well in one doesn't work well in the other, especially the dialog and visuals. I prefer the animated *Batman* shows to any of the live action films for this reason.

The typical non-superhero action/adventure movie has no character development—certainly no more than your average superhero movie. Even across franchises, like *James Bond*, *Die Hard*, and *Lethal Weapon*, the appeal has very little with the character development. The *Bourne* movies are one possible exception, but this is character development as the central mystery, so it's almost a cheat.

Basic D&D distinguished between concealed and secret doors, at least in their mapping symbols. :)

Jim Vassilakos

A&E is like a family. Families are full of people who run off at the mouth and wouldn't be welcome in the house if they weren't "family." There is a point when you have to tell your argumentative cousin or in-law that he's full of shit (or just dull) and to shut up.

3 This is somewhat rhetorical and relates to an exchange Lee and I had not that long ago.

4 I did find one video where a whip split a shaken aluminum can of root beer, but that's hardly the same.