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### Miscellany

#### The Case of the Misplaced Magician

For my Friday Night Gaming Group, I had a test run of the Call of Cthulhu game I am running at Kublacon. Because it is a mystery involving a missing person, secret lives, and not a shred of the Mythos or anything else supernatural, I was worried about how it would play out. It went fairly well despite some errors on my part, more plot than I could fit “on screen” (and couldn't figure out how to clue in the PCs on what was happening behind their backs), and two one-shot PC kills. After the first PC was shot<sup>1</sup>, I gave the player a replacement PC, and that one ended up eaten by a crocodile. A&E's submission deadline comes before my Kublacon run, so I'll provide more details (if not the entire adventure) next month.

#### A Fantasy Campaign Too Far?

I am in the middle of taking a month off from my Savage Worlds Monster Hunters campaign. After a climatic adventure that concluded a particular story arc, I needed time away to recharge my batteries (and work on the CoC adventure). Andrew<sup>2</sup> is running a D&D 3.5 campaign in Forgotten Realms. PCs started at 9<sup>th</sup> level and we are just starting the Shadowdale adventure path. This campaign alternates weeks with mine, so that means each week, I will be involved with a fantasy campaign.

The D&D campaign is not clicking with me at all. The Forgotten Realms setting does absolutely nothing (positive) for me. The ratio of in-character and out-of-character discussion is much smaller than I would like. Two of the players/characters are bugging the piss out of me (and I fully accept that this is *my* problem, not theirs or the GM's). And worst of all, I'm afraid this campaign will negatively influence mine. I have to make sure that I don't let bad feelings from one filter into the other.

The setting is an interesting issue, because Monster Hunters doesn't have a strong setting. The main reason is because I don't care; I mold the setting to the plot, and everything is a work in progress. Forgotten Realms, to me, is the epitome of a gonzo fantasy setting, due in large part to its long history and the horde of writers who have filled in all the gaps over the decades. Compared to that, the setting of Monster Hunters is white-label generic, bland, unfinished, and boring. But dammit, I like it that way. I'm not sure how my players feel about it, so I'll have to ask them (not that they're great at giving constructive feedback).

- 1 Who wasn't actually killed because of rules-bending and lucky First Aid rolls, but at 1 HP, she wasn't in any condition to continue.
- 2 He's the troublesome player from the (N)TPK I described a couple months ago.

## Ignorable Theme for Issue #405

### Barbarians

Historically, a barbarian was just someone who spoke a different language than you, particularly if you were Greek (or later, Roman). So, what is barbarian culture like? Technically, it could be anything, but it is probably different than yours.

Somewhere along the line, barbarians in gaming became (most often) associated with hulking, berserking brutes—a cross between Conan and Erik the Red. Many years ago, I read an article (in *Dragon*, iirc) that made a good argument that the AD&D Barbarian class was a better match for Native Americans than Vikings. 'Tis a pity this notion never gained any traction in the gaming zeitgeist.

### Comments on Issue #404

#### Myles Corcoran

I had such a bad introduction to Burning Wheel, that it is doubtful that I will ever play it, or the lighter, Mouse Guard version. I'm much more likely to make my own Fudge conversion for Mouse Guard after reading the comics.<sup>3</sup>

#### Robert A Dushay

Under what circumstances *would* Martial Arts 4D have an advantage over Ninja 4D? A player could easily assume that a 4D Ninja can do everything a 4D Martial Artist could do *and more*. Even if the GM puts limits on what Ninja covers and/or expands what a Martial Artist can do, those distinctions must be integrated into the campaign.

#### Lee Gold

Your definition of “dazed” sounds good to me, regardless of what a specific game's rules say. The ability to react without rational (or even conscious) thought allows good fighters and soldiers to continue on even when dazed.

The conceptual problem I run into with “Above-Normal Skill always succeeds unless something extremely unusual happens,” is that it runs contrary to my observations of the natural world (ours, anyway). For example, the best basketball players in the world have free throw percentages of less than 100%, even when a game isn't on the line. “It always succeeds” would be appropriate for some games, but I have trouble making it a general, universal rule.

#### Spike Y Jones

You are correct about my misstating of the M&M rules. I was probably thinking of the Distract feat which does daze the opponent.<sup>4</sup> And, if we're talking about Savage Worlds, then intimidation can leave an opponent shaken, which is like being dazed in M&M (no action, but you can defend).

- 3 The first graphic novel, *Fall 1152*, sits unread on my overly-crowded bookshelf.
- 4 A recent M&M character of mine used this to great effect and is what got me started thinking about how game rules affect our choices as players and how rules expand to accommodate character actions.

Doesn't your email client save your emails when you send them? Of course, this doesn't solve the "I hit send to early," problem, but it saves re-typing.

*The Incredibles* is the origin story of The Incredibles (family of superheroes) rather than the origin story of Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl. This is part of what makes it so good—you get the see development and growth not only with each character, but also in their relationship with each other. But then, I wish superhero movies would skip origin and "coming out" stories.

I have heard that carrying the ever-increasing national debt is considered<sup>5</sup> to be ok so long as the economy grows at a faster rate. I don't know what is going to happen when that ceases to be the case.

### Joshua Kronengold

Not only does D&D 4E have powers that either need a to-hit roll or a saving throw (not both), but you sometimes get a minor effect even if the roll fails.

### Lisa Padol

Harmony is a great PC to have because she can be helpful (or the opposite of helpful) in fun, interesting ways while simultaneously being evil in small, amusing ways. There is freedom in being a support character.

### Brian Rogers

I enjoyed the history of Doctor Nostalgia more than the mechanical discussion. Your design aesthetic and mine are very different<sup>6</sup>, so I apologize if the following sounds overly critical.

Why do you call it V&V d20? There is little here I would recognize as the d20 system. Rather, it just seems a reworking of V&V into roll-and-add with fixed advancement, and some d20 terminology. You're not using the d20 abilities, there are no feats or skills, etc.

What race is Krypto the Superdog? Or a non-sentient monster from Dinosaur Island? Is it really necessary to have races?

If you're bothering to assign an official class of Adventurer, I'm surprised you don't have a number of classes based on archetypes: martial artist, gadgeteer, brick, etc. If you're only going to have a single class, I'd just go back to the original V&V advancement scheme. M&M's advancement is more similar to it than d20, actually, and works fine.

I believe that level advancement should fit the campaign story structure. In comics, the heroes (even the young ones) rarely add abilities between story lines. It has more to do with editorial and writer changes than anything a gamer would recognize. But the rate you propose sounds reasonable to me; so much so, in fact, that I would ditch handing out xp and just advance by GM fiat following the schedule you propose.

You and I must read different comics.<sup>7</sup> Your design decisions are actively discouraging heroes like Green Arrow, Hawkeye, Huntress, Punisher, and every martial artist and ninja in comic-dom who dares use an open hand or ranged weapon. And I don't like it one bit.

And I still don't understand your fascination with the different attack categories. I can't think of an instance in comics where it really mattered. And all I see are arguments. *Every* attack "messes with biological processes." Fire is Temperature (and I could argue it is Corrosive), but a heat ray (IR beam) is Electromagnetic? Mind Control is Psionic, but what if Zatanna does it? We need both Melee *and* Impact? If the Wasp gets slapped by Giant Man, which is it?<sup>8</sup> What is used against Entangle? Trip? Teleport? Telekinesis? The Hero system had Physical, Energy, Power, and Flash Defense, and that's about as specific as I ever want to get. If a character has a vulnerability to biological or corrosive attacks, then make it a special case/weakness for that character rather than forcing the distinction on everyone.

For Fatigue, rather than have rounds of combat cost Fatigue, I'd just add more uses for Fatigue such that it gets used up tactically. For example:

- *Seize Initiative*: Jump to the front of the "who acts when" line.
- *Shake it Off*: Recover X HP or remove a condition (such as a sensory overload attack).
- *All-out Attack*: Increase damage rating of attack for one attack (before you roll to hit).
- *Second Chance*: Re-roll the attack die.

Lastly, for Stunned, I would probably tie it to the damage suffered from a single attack. You might have X HP, but if you take Y all at once, you are Stunned and must make a save against being knocked out.

### Marco Subias

I was surprised that tissue from cadavers was an option when your own tissue was an option. I guess there isn't an issue of rejection.

### Stephan D Warble

I find the claim that "D&D 4E focuses on combat" amusing because the same could be said of D&D 1E and how the vast majority of gamers play any version of D&D. The economic issue is interesting because most gamers don't understand economics. Sure, the 4E economic system doesn't make any logical sense, but it's designed so that it doesn't make any logical sense for PCs to be craftsmen rather than adventurers. Ideally, you'd have a system by which your gross margins in crafting and selling items is high enough to encourage NPCs to undertake the task, but low enough so that PCs would rather go for high-risk, high-reward adventuring instead.

5 Not by everybody, of course. But then, some people still think leaving the gold standard was a bad idea.

6 I don't have the same deep fondness for V&V as you do, for example.

7 Though I also include superhero cartoons in how I define the superhero comic book genre.

8 And I'm well aware of how confusing that must be, depending where we are in Henry Pym's continuity.