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Miscellany

The Case of the Misplaced Magician

Last issue, I promised to provide a write-up for the CoC adventure I ran at Kublacon. As of this moment (~3 hours before the deadline), I think I'll end up writing the adventure as a separate document, including maps and playtest notes. I got distracted by a couple of things.

Joys of Moving

I've been helping my parents move from their home of nearly 35 years. The actual move takes place in July, but there's lots of stuff to get done before that happens. The most arduous task was the garage sale, but it went off without a hitch and didn't have too much stuff to haul off.

Super System Omega

Last year, I put together a superhero game and ran it for my Friday night group. I started with system ideas that I have been noodling around with for years (and included in these pages) combined with concepts from Fudge to fill in some of the gaps.

The playtest demonstrated a few things:

1. The basic system was solid. There were a few warts that I wanted to revise, but no major complaints. I even included one element from Fudge, adding the attack's margin of success to the damage roll, thinking it was a bad idea, and proved myself right.
2. The flow, action, and length of fights was just about right. They never dragged and were not over too quickly.
3. NPC creation was hella fast. I'd often create them sitting in my car ten minutes before the game. And no balance issues ever came up.
4. PC creation was too convoluted. I tried to crib from Spirit of the Century, but the players really struggled with it.

Brian Roger's discussion of his "d20 V&V" has gotten me to go back to work on SSΩ.

I'm currently reworking how Toughness (and Willpower for mental attacks) works. I want it to be distinct from Armor or Force Field (or Mental Shield), without making convoluted rules or spoiling the pace of combat. Unfortunately, I have at least three different ideas on what to do. I obviously just need to pick one, playtesting, rinse, and repeat.

Ignorable Theme for Issue #406

Dropped Plot Threads

In my Monster Hunters campaign, I had a couple of plot threads that weren't picked up by the PCs. I can't say they were truly dropped, since they never took them up. There was a clear "plot this way" sign that they decided to ignore and go a different direction. Though I was a little surprised, it was not unexpected. In my introduction, I stated:

The campaign structure will follow a "monster of the week" format with clear objectives, but freedom and flexibility regarding which jobs to undertake and how you accomplish your goals.

So, I couldn't really complain when they didn't try to help a young noble with his gambling debt problems. Nor did they accept an offer from the merchant guild to discover the root cause of a recent attack on the marketplace by water elementals. In the former case, they decided it wasn't their specialty and if a crime boss was shaking him down, it was a problem of his own doing. In the latter case, they would also be expected to resolve the problem even if it meant killing the guild's rivals and they decided they weren't killers for hire.

In both cases, it resulted in a shorter-than-expected session, but I rolled with it as best I could. Improvising plots is one of my weaknesses as a GM. If I know what the plot is, I can improvise like crazy within it, but making up and running plots on the fly is too far outside my comfort zone.

When they returned to the town and visited the young lord, he informed them that he had resolved this problems, but they never learned exactly how. When they returned to the city after finishing another quest and being away for the winter, they discovered that a plot against the kingdom, involving black powder and summoning elementals, had been thwarted by their professional rivals, The Monster Killers. And yes, the two plots were related.

Thus, though the plots were dropped by the PCs, they were taken up by NPCs. This gave the illusion of a dynamic world that doesn't resolve around the PCs, without a metaplot to which the PCs are simply "witnesses to history."

I took a month-long hiatus to work on other things and when we returned to the game, I threw a number of plot seeds at the PCs, specifically to see which ones they would pick up. In one case, Andrew's PC (who has the Huntred hindrance), was informed by a legendary adventurer, The Red Swan, that she was wanted back at home. He welcomed her to travel back with him or return on her own, but if she did not return, others would be coming after her. Eventually, they decided to travel with The Red Swan, but when they were supposed to meet up with him, he failed to show. Inexplicably (to me), they decided to head out but when they failed to catch up with him (and after a semi-random encounter with some metallic vultures), they returned to the city the next day and took up the hunt for The Red Swan.

Comments on Issue #405

Myles Corcoran

Actually, this is a follow-up to my comments last issue. I have now read the first trade paperback of *Mouse Guard (Fall 1152)* and am unimpressed. There's nothing wrong with it, but I didn't find it particularly inspirational. I don't know what the fuss is.

Regarding your comment to Spike, the Wikipedia definition of familial generation seems screwed if a mother never has a daughter. I'd think a more generic approach, such as "half the difference in ages between a person and his/her oldest grandchild" would work better. In my wife's family, it would be less than 20 years.

Michael Cule

Games that use cards use a d52 (or d54) only if they shuffle after every draw and do not give players hands of cards. *Castle Falkenstein*, *Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game*, *Dust Devils*, and many others could not be considered to use a d52. And I don't consider them diceless, which is why I said they were "diceless."¹ Everway is a weird edge case since it uses cards, and therefore not deterministic, but the card system is interpretive rather than definitive.

RAE *Refugees of The Seven Hills*.

Robert A. Dushay

If in Fudge, "there's little excitement in the rolls," please describe a game in which there is excitement in the rolls? As someone who generally finds die rolling rather dull,² I want to understand what makes it exciting for others. Is it the physical act of rolling? Pre-roll selection of dice based on character abilities and other factors? Post-roll dice manipulation/counting (aka the Stolze factor)?

I generally don't buy many supplements. Looking to my left, I see I have the *Angel* core rulebook and *The Magic Box*, which I bought for a campaign I was running. I got the GM screen because it was on sale. And the *Monster Smackdown* and *Slayer's Handbook* for a convention game I was running (prompted by a brain parasite) and they were on sale. And I think those are the most supplements for a game I own. So, the supplements I like are a) tied to something specific I'm running and b) on sale.

Joshua Kronengold

I've soured on cooperative games because they feel too much like my day job. Even though we each have our own roles in *Pandemic*, for example, everyone's action is still decided by committee and mutual agreement. I'd like to try *Battlestar Galactica*, but I'm developed a distaste for FFG's fiddly rules and excessive game length. In particular, I had bad experiences with *Arkham Horror* and *Doom*.

When it comes to comic book adaptations, there is a danger of stripping away the elements that make superhero stories compelling. Both *Superman Returns* and *Birds of Prey (tv)* missed their marks and would have been better off being more faithful to the original comics. And then there are the insulting changes that make no sense, such as Jim Gordon's son(?!!?) in *The Dark Knight*.

Paul Mason

When I read the Fudge mailing list, I was amazed at how the bulk of the conversations seemed to be around how to make the game more complicated and fiddly. Granted, there's not much room to make it *less* complicated, but I didn't like moving away from the "just fudge it," philosophy. But I too have found myself adding too much stuff to a game, trying to anticipate situations that I or others might encounter and describe rules to cover it. I'm desperately trying not to do that with SSΩ.

Lisa Padol

I find that if you allow PCs' conversations to be overheard (and they know it), they become paranoid and take excessive precautions against it. These are terribly boring and only serve to suck up game time.

Now that Terri is a personal trainer, she hones her observational skills by telling me what's wrong with people she sees walking past: "His lats are tight," "She needs to work on her glutes," Etc.

Your definition of "contemporary" sounds familiar, but it leaves open the possibility that two people separated by a century are "contemporaries." All you need is one long-lived "Y." It's not a very satisfactory, definition, in my opinion.

Harmony, though an evil vampire, is simply never perceived as a true threat. She has an ability (conscious or not) to convince the good guys that she's harmless and/or useful to have around. No one takes her seriously. Like many of the "good" (or at least "not so bad") demons we meet on *Angel*, Harmony seems to show that a few vampires are not all that bad. So long as she's not acting like a bloodthirsty demon who kills innocent people, the tone of the show is to let her live.

Jerry Stratton

You make good points regarding "the problem with stunning in a game." This is something I've been struggling with in SSΩ. I've been happy with the Shaken rules in *Savage Worlds*, even though it does add an additional die roll.

1 I refer you to one of my earliest zines, 15 years ago, in which I discuss and encourage diceless roleplaying.

2 Except yesterday, during the D&D3.5 game in which my d20 came to rest on the very edge of my cardstock character sheet, itself hanging over the edge of the table by a half-inch. And it was a natural 20.