

Super System Omega: The Dice

This is a detailed response to Robert A. Dushay's question to me last issue.

My first real playtest of the system used 4dF. One of the pieces of feedback I received was that the range was too narrow; it was too difficult to beat someone better than you. The next playtest will be with 2d6 because it's range is wider, the odds more forgiving (when against superior foes).

Below is a chart showing the chance of winning, losing, or tying with an opponent when you have an

advantage of +0 (no advantage) to +5 (the highest practical difference). You can use the same chart to determine the odds when you have a disadvantage simply by swapping the Win and Lose rows; i.e., the odds of winning with a -2 disadvantage when rolling 2d6 v. 2d6 is 23.92%. I show 2d6, 4dF, and 1d10 when using opposed rolls and when using a static target number (essentially saying that the opposed roll is the average). 1D10 v. 6 is the same system used for Cinematic Unisystem (Buffy, et al.).

Dice Scheme	Result	Advantage					
		+0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
4dF v. 4dF	Win	41.56%	58.44%	73.92%	85.87%	93.55%	97.61%
	Tie	16.87%	15.49%	11.95%	7.68%	4.05%	1.71%
	Lose	41.56%	26.08%	14.13%	6.45%	2.39%	0.69%
4dF v. 0	Win	38.27%	61.73%	81.48%	93.83%	98.77%	100.00%
	Tie	23.46%	19.75%	12.35%	4.94%	1.23%	0.00%
	Lose	38.27%	18.52%	6.17%	1.23%	0.00%	0.00%
2d6 v. 2d6	Win	44.37%	55.63%	66.44%	76.08%	84.10%	90.28%
	Tie	11.27%	10.80%	9.65%	8.02%	6.17%	4.32%
	Lose	44.37%	33.56%	23.92%	15.90%	9.72%	5.40%
2d6 v. 7	Win	41.67%	58.33%	72.22%	83.33%	91.67%	97.22%
	Tie	16.67%	13.89%	11.11%	8.33%	5.56%	2.78%
	Lose	41.67%	27.78%	16.67%	8.33%	2.78%	0.00%
1d10 v. 1d10	Win	45.00%	55.00%	64.00%	72.00%	79.00%	85.00%
	Tie	10.00%	9.00%	8.00%	7.00%	6.00%	5.00%
	Lose	45.00%	36.00%	28.00%	21.00%	15.00%	10.00%
1d10 v. 6	Win	40.00%	50.00%	60.00%	70.00%	80.00%	90.00%
	Tie	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%
	Lose	50.00%	40.00%	30.00%	20.00%	10.00%	0.00%

Because I definitely want a narrow range of +0 to +5, a +1 or +2 advantage should give a significant advantage. Unlike a more grounded genre, like semi-hard science fiction, I'm using the scale to cover a range of ability that spans from Jimmy Olsen to Superman. So even being one rank higher should give a significant advantage.

For example, a rifle might have a damage rank of 1, while The Hulk might have a toughness of +5. If you subscribe to the notion that the soldier with the rifle should have some chance of hurting the hero, then you need to decide what those odds are. Is 10% (as it is with 2d6 v. 2d6 or 1d10 vs. 6) too much? Is 3% (2d6 v. 7) too low? Or you could say that he's impervious to bullets and thus be at 0%.

Or suppose our soldier (with a Marksmanship of +1) is shooting at Spider-Man (whom we'll give an Evasion of +3). If we use 2d6 v. 7, Spidey will only be hit one-sixth of the time. Is that about right? Is the 30% from 1d10 v. 6 better?

Another element to consider is that superheroes should find creative solutions to problems. As much as

brute force is brought to bear, heroes often face enemies they cannot defeat in a straight-up fight. They have to find a weakness, set a trap, use another tactic, call upon teammates, etc. A harsh distribution like 2d6 vs. 7 supports this.

In general, I like the 2d6 v. 2d6 scheme. However, requiring opposed rolls all the time, especially for Toughness, can get tiresome. I'd like to include the option to "take 7", though this does favor the side with the advantage. And that brings us to the 2d6 v. 7 scheme, which is what I'd plan to try next, anyway.

When dealing with difficulty modifiers (such as shooting at Spider-Man when he's behind cover), I'd rather not. Fiddly modifiers are exactly the kind of thing that slows a game down and just doesn't fit well with the genre. This is the single biggest turn-off for me when it comes to Mutants & Masterminds. Instead, I'd like to use a simple bonus die system whereas you roll 3d6 or 4d6, taking the best 2.

I ran the numbers on this, investigating how it skews the 2d6 v. 7 scheme. Because the distribution is no longer symmetrical, the odds of winning when

you are up +1 are not the same as the odds of losing when you are down -1. For 3d6 v. 7, those are 80% and 32%, respectively (compared to 58% for both on 2d6 v. 7). The advantage of adding that bonus die is very roughly like getting a +2 advantage, depending on where you started.

I can crunch and analyze numbers all day. And some days I have. Ultimately, however, it comes down to perception during play. Do the superheroes feel heroic? Are the players frustrated because their characters aren't as competent as they should be? Or are they bored from a lack of tension? And how much of this is set by the choice of dice versus other aspects of the system (such as Hero Points)?

Ignorable Theme for #409: PC Safety

A few times in recent years, I have found myself playing cautious professionals. These are people who don't take unnecessary risks, are neither impulsive nor overconfident, and are more practical than adventurous. Typically, these are ordinary people who are thrust into extraordinary circumstances and try to deal with the situation rationally and deliberately.

My favorite example is Dr. Soo Sun, the planetologist on an ill-fated survey expedition. She went out of her way to stay focused on the mission—cross the planet to the beacon and send a message back to Earth—rather than be distracted by the politics of the local inhabitants (as fascinating as they were biologically). As the head of the science team, I think she helped persuade the expedition away from several “adventures” and minimized “button pushing.” The commander of the space marines shared her cautious approach; fearing that our superior weapons were not a long-term solution, she preferred diplomacy (backed by threat of force) over fighting with the locals.

On the other hand, I've had plenty of characters who craved adventure and excitement. Charlie, my 1920's Eshu who ended up the queen of the San Francisco fey community, had very little concern for her own personal safety. Yet, she had great fear about

And this isn't even the only dice system I have floating in my head. I like working with “roll and add” systems because they are intuitive, easy to calculate, and scalable. A +4 beats a +5 just as often as a +3 beats a +4, etc. This is not true of dice pools, for example. Dice pools are nice because translating higher ranks into rolling more dice is intuitive and fun. But the statistics are much trickier and the act of rolling and counting dice is slower. My other idea is to use increasing dice size, ala Savage Worlds or Ironclaw. There are some nifty tricks you can bring to bear with such a system, but it has the same scaling problem as dice pools. And for me, there is always the siren call of a fully diceless option, which is a completely different nut to crack.

the safety of the kingdom she was ruling. This conflict, exacerbated by her own inexperience (she was only 14), was a source of angst (in a good way) for both her and I. In that same campaign, there was a Sidhe crafter, a shell-shocked veteran of The Great War, who would much rather tinker away in his freehold than come out and engage the world. This caused all kinds of problems for the GM and the other players who tried to drag him out.

Tolkien's hobbits are a good example of PCs who might crave safety, yet have adventure called upon them. These type of characters are part of the fantasy adventure canon. So long as their sense of duty is great enough, the personal motivation compelling enough, the story moves forward, even if they have to be dragged along at times.

Players have to realize that while playing characters who want to be safe is perfectly natural, actual safety can be very boring. And they must find ways to overcome the instinct to turtle and find reasons to become active participants in the adventure and in the game as a whole. GMs have to find plots that will draw the character out (easier said than done with some) and not positively reinforce the turtleing instinct by smacking them when they do stick their necks out.

Comments on Issue #408

Paul Cardwell

I wouldn't say that “all puzzles are easy once learned,” but it does depend on what you mean by *learned*. I have solved the same solitaire peg puzzle a few times, but I soon forget the solution. I know how to solve Soduko puzzles, but that doesn't mean some aren't really difficult to complete. And what of jigsaw puzzles? Is it really easier the second time you attempt to assemble the same puzzle?

Michael Cule

I share your sentiments about “conflict resolution” versus “task resolution.” The former feels contrived while the latter more immersive and visceral: “in the moment,” as you say. Even so, I do think that social interactions that might involve die rolling, could be

served well by rolling early and then roleplaying it out.

Robert A Dushay

I have the 2d6 distribution tattooed on my brain. Yes, a +1 or +2 advantage can skew the curve, but that forces alternative tactics. In comics, heroes are often faced with opponents and situations above their ability and they must find alternative solutions, including teamwork.

You know the kind of players who say, “Don't give the GM ideas” and truly mean it? I can't stand them. I briefly ran into one at a convention CoC game; luckily, I wasn't playing. My players aren't that bad, but they sometimes venture into “let's see if I can slip this by the GM” mode.

Lee Gold

Terri and I enjoyed watching *Being Human* on BBCA. I really liked the mythology of the show and think it might make for a good convention game or short campaign.

Gaming out a fight with a speedster is not unlike any other type of character if you maintain a few concepts. The speedster should not get more screen time (or panel space) than any other character. Multiple actions and attacks are not played out individually, but rather summarized. When a speedster punches someone 100 times in one panel (and you a blur of pounding fists), it's one attack, not 100.

Typically, speedsters are hard to hit, but go down quickly once they are hit. This is exactly the opposite of bricks. While speedsters and bricks may last just as long (miss-miss-miss-K.O. versus nickle-dime-nickle-K.O.), the dynamics of the fight is very different.

Spike Y Jones

RAE comments to Lee about "bludgeoning" weapons. What was your AD&D group's opinion of the notion that clerics weren't allowed to draw blood and thus had to use blunt weapons? My response to this ridiculous rule/rationale was, "give me a baseball bat and we'll see if I can't make you bleed."

LOL at Limbo being downgraded to "theological hypothesis." Because some made-up stuff is more made-up than other made-up stuff?

Since bards are proficient in whip (thanks to Josh for pointing this out), perhaps Jesus was a bard with Perform (Oratory).

LOL at your current employer going to the "goth girl" to reference your references. Listing RPGs on a resume for editing, writing, or art credits is completely appropriate. Mentioning them as personal hobbies or examples of creativity, public speaking, leadership, or whatever, isn't.

Joshua Kronengold

Does a superhero system truly "need to provide at least one reason why all character's aren't packing weapons?" Is it truly the system's responsibility to reinforce conventions. We talk about GM-player trust, but what about trust between game designers and players? Of course, I ask this I light of my recent comments about frustrating players who can't be trusted with player-defined traits.

Brian Misiaszek

My usual rationale for "dodging" gunfire, lasers, etc. is that you don't dodge the bullet or the beam, but the aim of the shooter. You're better off moving just before they pull the trigger than afterward.

Lisa Padol

Thank you. "The entire group must be interested in the character" reiterated a problem I often face in gaming. That is, I don't often like other players' characters, finding them boring and/or distasteful. Some of this is the character design itself; some is the lazy ro-

leplaying. As a GM, this leaves me uninspired. As a player, I feel it drags down my own roleplaying and enjoyment of the game.

I think there is a long tradition in serialized fiction of heroes "allowing" villains to run around. Or "letting" them get away. This can actually cause problems in superhero or pulp games when players don't buy into these conventions. And since Buffy has often been compared with a superhero, I can accept that Spike, Drusilla, et al, are running around. We've all noted how important a good villain is to the story, so why hunt them down?

My preferred method of handling dodge/parry is the Savage Worlds system I described. For SSΩ, there are actually three ways to Dodge. The Evasion talent can be used against any attack (and is equivalent to the Defense trait in Mutants and Masterminds). Fighting can be used against any attack in melee range (either to block or side-step the attack). Athletics or movement powers can be used against ranged attacks to "dive for cover" (and is used where M&M would use a Reflex Save).

I remember scenes, but cannot remember titles, of heroes not attacking in favor of blocking, backing up, or taking cover. I've certainly seen Batman do it against bruisers and opponents swinging large weapons; basically, he backs up and/or ducks until he finds an opening. And what shootout scene would be complete without people pinned down behind cover and exchanging quips and potshots?

For a tactical game, I like the idea that a fighter could be "kept on the defensive" until they find an opening and take the initiative (not to be confused with the traditional rpg use of the term initiative). In BRP, for example, you could say that a successful Dodge/Parry roll stops the attack, but the defender cannot attack until either a) the attack roll fails (and Dodge/Parry becomes unnecessary) or b) a Special Success is rolled for the Dodge/Parry (assuming the attack wasn't a Special). And of course, what works for one-on-one duel, may really bog down for a melee with multiple combatants.

Brian Rogers

The adventure from *Rolemaster: Arabian Nights* may be designed to hose the players, but it seems reflective of the kinds of stories told in the tales. What do you think of the *Tales of the Arabian Nights* board game (recently revised by Z-Man Games)? I ask, because several of those tales really hose the players.

Jerry Stratton

I really enjoyed *1408* with John Cusack. It's almost a one-man, one-room play. The things the character does to fight the room, especially at the end, are exactly the kinds of things I can see PCs doing.

Per your recommendation, I read *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. I thought it did a good job conveying a sense of dread. It also illustrated the type of magical thinking and "village psychosis" seen in her short story, *The Lottery*, a favorite of mine.