

## Ignorable Theme

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### Hit Points, et al

When it comes to disabling effects other than blunt force trauma, using Hit Points is probably not the best way to go. Being sick or poisoned will affect a character's performance but not in ways that truly parallel physical injuries. There are similarities between being beaten down to 0 hp and being bedridden with the flu, but I would rather handle these by description and roleplaying than by any method that required bookkeeping.

I like using Energy or Fatigue Points for magic and other powers. Not only do they provide a nice balancing mechanism, but they do so in a way that feels more natural than "magic points." I cannot remember a time when I felt the need for tracking fatigue for mundane activities. If it is reasonable that a character is fatigued, I can usually point this out to the players, they agree, and then they roleplay accordingly.

I do like systems that make some distinction between being battered and being truly injured. Some do this by differentiating between lethal and non-lethal damage. Typically, one recovers from non-lethal damage much more quickly and will not lead directly to the death. Some games (Castle Falkenstein) use the same pool for both types while others (Hero) have two separate pools. Another approach is to say any damage over some amount results in some negative effect, such as being stunned or taking a "wound." Critical hit tables are also a way to handle this, but I am not too fond of them.

D&D-style Hit Points, which increase to monstrous levels as PCs increase in power, works very well for D&D. After all, you do not want your legendary hero knocked off by a stray arrow. A 10<sup>th</sup>-level fighter might survive a 100 foot fall not because he could withstand the bone-crushing stop at the end but simply because he is a larger-than-life hero. The rate at which Hit Points increase (if at all) as the character gets more experienced is completely dependent upon the requirements of the genre, setting, etc.

Tracking Hit Points (and others) need not be disruptive to immersion. Given the multitude of things that can interfere with immersion (the dice, the miniatures, the tactical combat rules, the snack food, the clock on the wall, the way the chair squeaks when you move it, the character sheet itself, etc.), moderate bookkeeping is not really an issue for immersion. Using tokens may actually be more disruptive for me because I tend to fiddle with things like that and/or I accidentally knock them on the floor—I do this with dice all the time.

I do think it is desirable to have the bookkeeping be as easy and intuitive as possible. The requirements of LARPs will dictate how hp should be tracked for those games. The use of physical tokens is probably a better choice than numbers-on-paper, for example. When dealing with mass battles of hundreds of NPCs, any traditional "roll to hit" combat system will bog down and you have to transition something else, typically an (even more) abstracted system.

## Other Stuff

### Superhero Gaming

I have been playing a superhero campaign using unpublished 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the DC Heroes rules run by Phil Davis, an A&Eer from the "double-digit" days. When I ran SAS campaign, I found myself fighting the irrationality of the superhero genre. As a player, it is much easier for me to work inside the genre and I have been having a lot of fun. I think it is because I can follow the GM's capable lead rather than try to be the leader myself.

### DunDraCon

I finally have run a Fudge Bunnies and Burrows game, something I have threatened to do for years. I ran it on Friday night, and it was a great way to kick off the convention. The plot was quite linear, with each scene posing its own challenge, but I leave it completely up to the PCs on how to overcome the challenges and marvel at their ingenuity. It is amazing how a simple problem becomes great (and entertaining) challenges for bunnies. I may run it at GenCon, so I will not go into any plot details yet.

When I submitted the game, I indicated six players, but I ended up with concepts for eight PCs, so I created eight. In addition to featuring a bunny named Frost<sup>1</sup>, four of the eight PCs were based on characters from Firefly (but the reference was lost on all the players). On Friday evening before the game, I was deathly afraid that I would get no sign-ups. Not only did all eight PCs get used, but I had to turn one player away. I was stunned and amazed.

My other fear was that the players would take the genre seriously. B&B is not Toon. It can be silly and absurd, but then all games can be. I cannot run a game without laughter, and this was no exception. But the players played it (mostly) straight and took their roles (mostly) seriously, so the game really uplifted my spirits.

I also played in a fantasy adaptation of Feng Shui, a Space 1889 game, and D&D game that were not

<sup>1</sup> Though I did not create it as tightly based upon the original canonical character seen in A&E as I originally intended.

worth recounting here. The FS and D&D games were not bad, but just not terribly inspiring, though they did afford me the opportunity to play characters of mine that I had not played (at least in a face-to-face game) in over a year. When I run games, I always provide characters, but there is definitely something to be said for playing characters you know and love.

Overall, I had fun as usual, though I much more free time than I usually have, but I was able to spend time with friends with whom I have not played in a long time, so it all worked out.

### GenCon

My wife Terri has not been home to see her family in Louisville for several years now due to her unwillingness to fly. She wanted to drive back instead, and I was able to convince to her plan the trip for August. Indianapolis is only a 2-hour drive north of Louisville, so she gets to see her family, and not only do I get to go to GenCon two years in a row, but also I get a reprieve from in-laws for a few glorious days. :)

As of today, I am still dithering whether or not to run an official game at GenCon. Part of me wants to run my B&B game and maybe a few of the scenarios from my Angel campaign. But I am not so sure it is worth the headaches. I still have a two weeks to decide before the April 2<sup>nd</sup> submission deadline.

### BESM Fantasy

My next convention is Kublacon in May. I am scheduled to run a BESM fantasy game using the Uresia setting. Late last year, I got into the mood to play or run a classic frpg game like D&D, but not D&D. I like BESM, so I picked up *BESM Dungeon* and *Uresia* with my Barnes & Noble gift certificate and purchased the PDF of *BESM Fantasy Bestiary* from RPG Now. I was planning on doing a review of all three of these, but that project got bogged down. Maybe in the next month or two I will find the inspiration. Even so, I am not sure how many of you would be interested in a review and part of me dreads the thought of posting a review on RPGnet.

However, let me summarize:

Uresia is good, but short. S. John Ross describes the world from the perspective of an observer—there are no meta-plots and big secrets are left completely open for GMs. The yahoo group dedicated to Uresia has open membership and good discussion about fine points of the setting that did not make it into the book (and that S. John Ross is probably making up as the questions get asked).

*Fantasy Bestiary* is exactly what you would expect—a list of stats for creatures that you could have created yourself but now you do not have to. Each creature type is presented in a lower- and higher-powered form as well as a template for creating NPCs or combining forms (like a vampire elf, or whatever).

Oops, out of room. :)

### Paul Mason

I do not think ending by consensus is disruptive to this thing you keep calling “the narrative.” The players are very much aware of “the narrative” and the consensus will seek a point that fits in “the narrative.” If the game is enjoyable, players will want more and continue coming back no matter how or when the session ends.

### Brian Misiaszek

The “screw up 5% of the time” problem you discuss relates to something I wrote about not too long ago. We have to define what failures (and fumbles) mean in the context of the game. A surgeon or pilot may make a miscue 5% of the time, but that does not mean the mistake was catastrophic or that they cannot easily recover. Routine flights or surgeries only end in disaster after a number of cascading and irrecoverable mistakes are made.

Randomless rpgs have been around for years. Grab yourself a copy of *Amber*, or failing that, *Everway*. These games use “GM fiat” as a resolution mechanism rather than something designed to be “narrative” but GMs are encouraged to look at the story implications for deciding the outcome.

### Jonathan Nicholas

Columbia Games recently released *Harn 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* as a free PDF download and I managed to get myself a copy, but the offer has now ended.

### Simon Reeve

The real question is what size of gravity well would adversely affect Traveller FTL drives. For example, an adjacent (or pursuing!) starship probably would have a greater gravitational effect than a remote planet.

### Marco Subias

The revised BESM 2<sup>nd</sup> edition includes random damage. In my experience running SAS, I cannot say I care for this implementation. They effectively halved the damage of all attacks while not doing the same for defenses or making any other adjustments to the system.

Stats cost one point per level in BESM, but twice that in dX. However, they use the same skill costs. I do not know which you will find more “unbalanced.” Just bear in mind that Tri-Stat is stat-based, no skill-based (like BRP or other generic systems).

While I like some of the additions of Tri-Stat dX, I much prefer the feel and heart of BESM. Beware that while “dX” is supposed to be scalable by die type, the combat modifiers are scaled to d10. GOO just announced BESM 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition for late in the year and I worry how much like dX it will be.