

Angel's End

The two primary players in my Angel game decided to quit. I was told, "The games were fun during play, the characters were interesting, the scenarios were well-put-together, but the system can be frustrating, the scheduling is bad, and fundamentally, the enthusiasm is just not there for either of us." My biggest frustration is that they could not articulate exactly why they were not enthused and what could have been done differently or better.

In an attempt to revitalize the game and create more character interaction, my two players suggested back in January to bring in new players. So we did a search and got one new player in addition to Terri, my wife, to join. There was another recruit who had to miss the game because of a broken ankle. I ran one-shot scenario set in 1946 and used pregenerated characters to introduce my two new players to the game and the system. I then ran a second game in the proper continuity with characters of their own creation. It was after that game that the other two decided to quit.

I was then told one of the two starting players was not that enthused with the game in the first place. I also believe she was never happy with the compromises character creation forced upon her character. With Telepathy and Telekinesis and the Willpower to drive them, there was not much room left for increasing Life Points or pumping combat skills. Yet she continuously took on more than she could chew and got frustrated when she went down.

Running combat in Angel never felt right. For starters, I am not good at combat even as a player, and I find it very difficult to roleplay and speak in-character during combat. While I do not think the combats in the campaign were bad, I do think they were dull. My players were also unable to capture the cinematic tone that Angel combat should have.

Damage is skewed such that a single strong blow with an edged weapon or demon claw can send even hearty investigators to the hospital. I was never able to find the right balance between "too easy" and "oops, I guess you're down." In my defense, the players never changed their tactics to compensate and instead seemed stuck in an "I roll to hit, I roll to dodge" mindset.

The combat system uses a vast number of maneuvers with different modifiers, damage, and other effects. There is a punch, a kick, a jump kick, a spin kick, a sweep kick, etc. On one hand, they help make combat more interesting and allow some players to better visualize and describe their attacks. On the other hand, it adds to the "crunchiness" of the

rules and some players are not up to the task of choosing which maneuver to use.

I found the rulebook very poorly designed as a reference guide. Even simple questions like "how long is a Turn?" (important when effects like regeneration and spells are measured in minutes) take far too long to look up (the woefully inadequate two-page index has no section for "T"). I was not too fond of the overly casual, often flippant tone of the writing (so much so that I have not read the thing cover-to-cover). In general, they provide plenty of examples, except in those vague areas of supernatural power use where you actually need good examples.

I am disappointed how it turned out, but Terri was a little heartbroken. She was really enthused about her character. I would be willing to give Angel another chance, perhaps as an unapologetic high-powered bug-hunt ala Hellboy, but that will have to be some other time.

Miscellany

DC Heroes Campaign

As I mentioned last time, I joined a DC Heroes group run by Phil Davis. I was invited by a gaming friend who thought I would be interested in the campaign. He himself had only recently joined the group.

Phil's method for choosing members of the group sounds somewhat draconian, but I appreciated the upfront honesty. I was welcome to play in three sessions which would serve to determine if we were compatible. After the third session, they would hold a secret ballot and let me know if I could stay, or if I did not like them, I could leave without apologies or excuses. The mild awkwardness of this formal process is much better than the major awkwardness that can occur when a group is saddled with someone they do not like (or visa-versa).

I have very mixed reactions to the system. Everyone else in the group seems to think it is the best system for superheros, but I wonder how much is due to the system and how much is due to Phil's skill and the mindset of the group.

I think I gave DC Heroes a generally positive review in A&E back in the early nineties, but now I am not so sure. The rules themselves can get rather fiddly (every session thus far has featured at least a small discussion, disagreement, or misunderstanding of the pushing rules). I would prefer a more flexible approach to powers and I dislike some of their categorizations (Energy Blast is a physical power but Heat Vision (essentially the same thing) is a mental power), but it is functional.

First Doctor

Sure, we remember our first Doctor (mine was Tom Baker), but what what about your first companion? Mine was Sarah Jane Smith (Elisabeth Sladen) <sigh>

Hellboy: The Movie

Hellboy is a very fun movie that does a good job intermixing action with character-driven moments. It neither takes itself too seriously nor not seriously enough. I have read many negative comments about *Hellboy*, but the movie worked for me and I do not have any complaints.

Comments

#343

Robert A Dushay, PhD

If "I don't want to learn a new system" really means "I don't want to play a different character in a different setting," why don't people just say that? And what's the excuse after a campaign ends?

I do agree that appeal of gaining levels is all the new kewl stuff you get to do. The same thing is true with non-level systems, but the effect is much more gradual and you do not get the "new toy" effect that you do with gaining a level.

Lee Gold

The reason I grouped weapon-based and weapon-less hand-to-hand attacks together into one ability was because I wanted people to grapple or kick during a sword fight and that that requiring players to purchase two (or more) separate abilities would discourage this. See my question to Josh, below.

Spike Y Jones

I daresay that WindZone sounds dreadful. 3d10-1d10 (a range of -7 to 29) is very different than 2d10 (2 to 20), but does their chart reflect that difference?

Joshua Kronengold

Using different abilities for different actions to achieve differentiation makes sense, but if every combat action uses perception (as one early example did), then the differentiation is lost.

The vast majority of systems encourage PCs to be good at one particular thing and gives no reason to deviate from a given type of attack. Is there a system that encourages me to throw a punch or step on someone's instep at an opportune moment in the middle of a sword fight as I see in so many choreographed fights on the screen?

Rene A Louviere Jr

I see D&D 3e as a glorious revival of hack n' slash. Sure you can customize your character, but 90% of the customizations are combat-oriented so

that fighter A and fighter B can kill things differently before taking their stuff. Furthermore, the combat system has been counter-streamlined for tactical, miniatures-based gaming, specifically set inside a dungeon.

"Advanced roleplaying" lies not really with the GM and the setting, but the players. A GM and adventures that emphasize roleplaying helps,¹ but the players have to take responsibility for their own roleplaying. For every "advanced roleplayer" who played in the WoD, you had another who just wanted kewl powers and/or to kill things.

I agree on your observations that LG is somehow "better" than NG or CG and that CN is grossly misinterpreted. "True" neutral is also often misinterpreted to mean "I have been acting pretty good lately, so I had better do something evil to balance it out."

Since alignments do not map well into actual human behavior or belief systems and there is such varied differences of opinion on what they mean and how they should be used, why have them?

Paul Mason

Personally, I have always been fascinated by the history of science. The manner in which physics (at least) is taught often follows the historical development and refinement of the science and its concepts.

Brian Misiaszek

As a follow-up to my comment last month, the d20 method of "take 10" (or 20) avoids the problem of fumbling 5% of the time.

Lisa Padol

Malcolm Devereaux was born born in 1900 in St Louis as Creighton Tolliver. Early in his career as an occult investigator, he quickly learned that saying he was Malcolm Devereaux from New Orleans carried a lot more weight, so that is what he put on his business cards. In 1946, he ran a modest mystical curio shop near Chinatown where he had a selection of both mystical and replica artifacts.

Devereaux is an avid card player and won his immortality in a no-limit² poker tournament, hosted by Wolfram & Hart, held on Walpurgisnacht. With the cash money he also won, he bought the building where his curio shop was, turned it into a bookshop, and started the detective agency. He now spends his time traveling the world, but no one (including myself) knows what exactly he does on his trips.

1 And I often read very unflattering comments about WoD adventures.

2 In the true mystical sense of the term "no-limit."