

Kublacon

In addition to running my BESM fantasy game, I played in four rpgs: two on Saturday, one each on Sunday and Monday morning.

The first was a Shrek-like romp through the land of Disney fairy tales as the seven dwarves using the CoC rules. We started in an insane asylum where we and Snow White now resided. Distraught at the loss of her Prince Charming and afraid to go outside because of all the animals that followed her everywhere, we took it upon ourselves to track down the wayward prince. After escaping from the asylum, we met Aladdin (with his obsessive-compulsive lamp rubbing), Puss in Boots (a prime candidate for the padded room if there ever was one), and other characters. Along the way we discovered that the Prince had wooed and abandoned several fairy tale maidens including Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel. We eventually tracked down the Prince shackled up with another Disney character and we threatened them both with physical violence (involving axes and perhaps termites) until the Prince returned with us and did right by all these women. There were too many cute, humorous elements to relate, but not a shred of the mythos except when Sleepy (my character) saw his nemesis: a peculiar fellow in yellow robes and a crown.

The next game I played was Burning Wheel, a fantasy game that has been getting some good buzz and won some accolade from Ken Hite. After starting late because of tardy players and a rules description that went on much too long, we muddled through, but never finished, an adventure involving shifting time perspective and giant spider spirits. The system is a basic d6 dice pool with a lot of details far too numerous to describe. The 3-second combat rounds are divided into 3 1-second volleys during which characters can typically perform 1 or 2 actions. But the actions, including speech at 2 syllables per volley, must be scripted out at the beginning of the round. During the combat, the GM did not seem to use a script, but I do not know if this is standard practice to save time and headaches or this GM's method. While this method provides some interesting tactical elements, and a natural way to time spell casting (by the syllable) and missile fire, I cannot see myself playing this game again.

The only Unknown Armies game was run by Todd Furler and it started with the classic rpg setup of waking up not knowing where or you are. It felt much more like an episode of *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits* than a typical UA game (no 'mancers, no one trying to ascend, and no weirdness except for the

setup). I cannot spoil the surprises, but if you have a chance to play Remembrance, I recommend it.

The last game of the con was a very low-key *Mutants and Masterminds* game that featured superheroes sitting around the diner retelling the events of the week fighting their arch nemeses. The GM, my friend Merwin, realized that at eight o'clock on Monday morning was not the time to have a game that required a lot of concentration. He brought coffee, donuts, and bagels, and we sat around and told storied and shifted shamelessly in and out of character. There was a plot involving shifting and resetting timelines (ala *Groundhog Day*) that we noticed when our stories started changing. There was not really a villain, but merely a puzzle to figure out, or rather stumble across and barrel through. It was an interesting experiment that would have worked just as well freeform or with an overt "narrative" game system like Donjon.

My fantasy BESM game went well, as in everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, but I definitely know that I could not sustain a campaign based on it. I just did not find the combat interesting enough to do a lot of it and by the end of the game I was getting bored. The middle section had opportunity for roleplaying and investigation, but the players did not seem to really grasp hold of this element of the adventure.

Unlike most of my other convention games, I did not provide any character background or description for the players. For some reason, I have not been motivated to create the details I normally do. Part of me feels like I am forcing something upon the players and not giving them the freedom they should have. Part of me realizes that such details are often ignored anyway. I do not know if this contributed to the lack of roleplaying or if it was the nature of the game. What I know for sure is that I did not enjoy running the game as much as I have enjoyed running other games.

Despite my claims of being a fraud in xenonzone #100, one of my ex-Angel players reassured me that I run investigations well. I do enjoy running investigations, so I think this is where I will focus. These types of scenarios have enough interaction with NPCs to have good roleplaying and there are usually only a few scenes with combat.

Last month I presented the background for this adventure. This month I start into the specifics of running the scenario. It is designed to be a very linear journey with specific problems to be solved along the way. However, there are no set solutions to the problems and the players should be rewarded for creative thinking and staying within the rabbit world view.

I have been trying to force myself to pre-script my description of scenes or NPC speeches. Otherwise, I have been known to forget certain facts or nuances if I make it up on the fly in the heat of the game. The text in boxes is intended to be read aloud to the players.

Under Attack!

The warren is under siege by coyotes (or similarity sized, regionally appropriate predator), one per three PCs.

An outpost with two exits to the surface is connected to the main warren by a long tunnel. A sudden rainstorm has caused the bunnies to scurry into the outpost, but the rain is also causing the tunnel to collapse, trapping a group of does in the outpost. Meanwhile, the coyotes are digging at the outpost to get to the panicking does.

Depending on the number of PCs, they may be in different locations and have different options in dealing with the problem. There is no predetermined method for getting rid of the coyote(s). Here are some options that come to mind, but there certainly can be others. The theme throughout the adventure is to present a problem to the PCs and have them find their own solution.

- Lead them away from the warren. This is the single best option, but not without risk. Plus, the coyotes are intelligent and will not be easily distracted or baited.
- Drive them off with tooth, claw, and nasty herbs. This method is particularly risky unless the bunny has very good combat skills.
- Make a break for it, running to a different entrance. Outrunning the coyote to another entrance requires a Good Speed roll unless there is some distraction. If multiple bunnies make a break for it, the slowest members will be overtaken.
- Create a trap for the coyote and get it stuck underground.

Which setup/description is used depends on where the PCs are at the start of the scene. With multiple PCs (I ran this scenario with 8) split them up into different locations, two or three PCs per.

Everyone:

The rains came without warning. A fearsome crack of thunder and a flash of light and the entire sky opened up. While everyone was scurrying to the safety of the burrows, a coyote appeared and started chasing after a group of does caught in the rain. They were able to make it inside an outpost that connects to the warren, but something as gone horribly wrong.

Outside:

You see the coyote frantically digging at the entrance to the outpost. The rain-soaked soil gives way easily and soon he will be able to get inside.

The Tunnel:

The tunnel that connects the outpost to the rest of the warren is collapsing. Water is seeping in from above and below. Panicked does are screaming to get through. The tunnel is filling with water. The walls are turning to mud and collapsing around you. The whole structure could go at any moment.

Preventing the tunnel from collapsing requires a Good Strength roll with a Great Architecture roll.

Inside the Outpost:

You can hear the scraping of the coyote's claws and his yips and growls as he continues to inch ever closer. The tunnel back to the warren is clogged with rabbits. There is another exit to the surface, but do you dare make a break for it or do you make your stand here and now?

Wanted: GenCon Roommate

As I mentioned on the A&E e-mail list, my planed roommate for GenCon bailed on me and I am in search for someone to share my room with. I already have a reservation at the Hyatt for Wednesday through Saturday night (I am leaving on Sunday after the convention). So if you have signed up for GenCon, but need a room or if you have a room and are looking for a roommate, drop me a line.

Non-paid advertisement

The Gathering

The next morning, the rabbits are about their daily business when they are approached by Nibble, a polite and efficient functionary. She comes up to the PCs in turn and tells them the king has ordered their presence in the king's chamber.

Once all the bunnies have gathered in the royal antechamber, escorted by Owsla, the king will enter.

King Black Paw, who is all white except for his left paw, lumbers in. He is fatigued, perhaps because of his great girth, and breathes heavily. He is also clearly annoyed as he dismisses the Owsla who lead you to the chamber.

"The Queen has been nagging me incessantly about her poor lost sister, Holly. Good riddance, I say. She was fat, lazy, and rude." <breathe>

"A quarter moon ago, I sent her with two Owsla to Blueberry Valley. You see, we used to trade with Blueberry Valley, and Holly loved her blueberries. But the past few moons, we have not heard from them. Not our problem, I thought." <breathe>

"I thought wrong. Holly would not be denied her precious blueberries. So I sent her with two Owsla. Personally, I don't care if she ever comes back. Maybe she found a buck there. She has rejected all the bucks in the warren who would have her—none of them met her royal standards. Hraka. I'm the king and she's just the sister to my mate. She should have been happy. But not our Princess Holly." <cough>

"Anyway, that doesn't matter. The Queen wants her back and is convinced that you—based on your heroics of yesterday—are just the rabbits for the task. Me? I say don't bother, but if I ever hope to get a good night's sleep again, I had better do something about it." <cough>

<Pause for comments or questions>

The king turns to leave and then pauses to pull something out of his fur. "Here are two truffles from the royal treasury. Use them however you like to get the job done. Whatever's left is yours to keep. But if you do not return with Princess Holly, I will have your ears." With that, his majesty leaves and Nibble comes in to escort you out.

"The rendezvous point is a day's journey, in the woods on the far side of the stream." He draws a crude map with a stick. "From there, head south until you come the valley. So I have heard. It has been a long time since any rabbit from this warren was there. While you are there, see if you can bring back some blueberries or sprigs. The truffles will be more than enough to cover two basket's worth."

"My Frith watch over your journey."

Myles Corcoran

Here is another one: "Experience" is not in the Angel index. And yes, Angel does call them Experience Points. Why bother making an index if it is going to be so shoddy?

Robert Dushay

The issue of deteriorating skills comes up every so often on RPGnet. I have never been in a campaign long enough or in which characters aged to the point where ability loss due was or should have been a factor. I could handle it in a freeform game, but formal game rules for thing kind of thing would drive me batty.

Lee Gold

What do you do when the GM repeatedly offers to flex the rules and the player refuses?

Spike Y Jones

On the other hand, I often hear of convention games that bust because no one showed up. My friend's Spaceship Zero was one example. Last year, my SAS game would have been a bust except for the efforts of a very dedicated player in recruiting others.

Joshua Kronengold

In addition to "If nobody stops her," there can also be cases where a player may mean, "unless something happens that makes her change her mind."

There is a difference between "inspired by" and "ripped off from." The difference is in the details, execution, attitude, and intentions.

To generate the type of "anything goes" fight that I wanted, I think you either have to step back and treat combat more loosely, descriptively, and narratively, as OTE and other games do, or you have to go deeper and break down the tactical options to a degree that will probably bog down the fight.

Rene A Louviere Jr

Of course "the new rules can work both ways." I think people will bring to it what they want to bring to it. Just like the munchkins who play WoD so they can play k3wl d00dz with m4d ski||z and 4ws0m3 p0w3rz. Well, maybe not that bad, but you know the type.

The kind of customization seen in D&D3 has been around in other games for over 20 years. What makes D&D so special in this regard?

Paul Mason

On RPG.net, someone might ask a simple question like “how does Silver Age Sentinels compare to Hero?” and someone will invariably post “Use Mutants & Masterminds.” Most gamers, like most people, are idiots.

I agree that immersion is fragile. Where we differ, I think, is what we do about it. We can try to hold on to it and shield it from intrusions, but if you hold on too tightly, you end up cracking it like an egg. Immersion takes a lighter touch, I think. It takes responsibility and maturity by the players with little direct influence from the game designer. Accept the fact that immersion can easily be broken and focus on ways to work with it, such as slipping in and out of immersion effortlessly so that you never have to worry about it. This is why I am favor of the “crystal goblet” metaphor for rpg systems that you advocated way back when. I want rules that do not draw attention to themselves and know when to get out of the way.

For me roleplaying is fun when you have interesting characters doing interesting things. I think you call the latter 'story,' which is a much better (i.e., looser) definition than 'the plot I am going to force feed you' that some people use. I find references to the 'story' as in “we are all in a collaborative exercise creating a story that exists at a layer higher than those experienced by the characters themselves” distracting to the goals of roleplaying.

The problems you experienced with character immersion had nothing to do with the rules, but the players. 100% immersion 100% of the time is silly. I think the game rules can do little to enforce appropriate roleplaying; the best they can do is suggest and illustrate. Ultimately, the responsibility rests on the collective shoulders of the group.

People read all kinds of things into writing that was never (consciously) intended by the author. Many writers come across as elitist or snobbish because they appear to believe their position is more enlightened or educated than others. Sometimes the charge is made by the “it's just a game” or “just have fun” crowd who think that if you dislike their popular entertainment, you must be elitist. As Brian Misiaszek mentioned, the use of jargon can exclude outsiders and thus foster an appearance of elitism by those who use it. Sometimes it is because they refer to most gamers, like most people, as idiots. ;)

Brian Misiaszek

I come from a background of solid definitions. A wormhole may be a very odd thing, but it can be defined and described mathematically, visually, and verbally. Even very slippery terms like entropy and temperature are definite and not open to interpretation. Terms like *post-modern*, *narrative*, and *pulp* are inherently squishy because their concepts behind them are squishy. I find this to be utterly

frustrating to the point of being counter-productive. What is the point of having a “common language” if the lexicon is so indefinite? This is also why I do not worry about whether or not Sedna or Pluto are planets—the word is just a label but does not change the nature of the thing.

I agree whole-heartedly that genre emulation is probably best left to the players and not the game designer or the rule system. In my DCHeroes campaign, I am slapped down probably once a session for thinking in scientific and not comic book terms.

Unless you use the Dynamic Sorcery attribute (which is essentially free form), you might find BESM's method of creating spells limiting and fairly generic. This is generally not a problem in campaigns where the most important spell is Magic Missile anyway, but it does lack the built-in flavor of long fantasy spell lists. However, the bookkeeping is very straightforward—you simply track Energy Points based on the power level of the spell.

Lisa Padol

I played in Todd's Angel game at last GenCon. He always uses canon characters and I prefer not to play canon characters (because my roleplaying cannot live up to them). I always think he spends too much time on UA mechanics—especially things that never come into play during the actual game.

Simon Reeve

Not only does GURPS have a plateau effect, but the cost is exponentially increasing as the effects are becoming less.

As some leaders need to be told, being good means being good **all the time**, not just when it is convenient. To do evil is to be evil and it takes a lot more than half-assed excuses and finger-pointing to make up for it.

Eugene Reynolds

Do what you have to do to get your mojo back. You will be missed.

Brian Rogers

More often than not, I find myself not wanting to spend XP I earn or have my characters gain levels or abilities. For me, the truly interesting things happen between characters, not on the character sheet. This is not to say that characters cannot grow and evolve, but I prefer it to be driven by the story (what the characters accomplish) rather than the game system.

Jonathan Woolley

Characters without the Homebody feat (in other words, the vast majority of PCs) cannot have children without magical assistance? Is this part of D&D/d20?