

Vhallan

Retooling

My development of Vhallan stalled because my thoughts were derailed after reading *Savage Worlds*. In particular, I wanted to run something that was closer to D&D, as in the Basic (Red) and Expert (Blue) sets. But this did not match the tone I originally had in mind for Vhallan. In particular, Vhallan has no demi-humans and no (or very few) monsters. There was also a major conflict between how I envisioned magic in Vhallan and how D&D treats it. I am still leery of D&D-style magic, but I think I have worked out a compromise. Divine magic, and specifically magical healing, still does not exist.

I also admitted to myself that I like horror and dark themes too much to try to exclude them and have decided instead to embrace them (though it may be a while before I write about them here). This also gives me an opportunity to add in supernatural threats, including undead and Things From Beyond™, that can serve the role of D&D monsters without upsetting the ecology of the world (or trying to justify how a random assortment of monsters sustain themselves in a dungeon). This does not mean I plan of having the PCs wade through zombie hordes, but the option is there if I need it.

When I started Vhallan, my idea was to create a world in which I could run a campaign. Now I am more focused on the campaign, since I already have the first 2½ scenarios outlined in my head. Usually, I focus so much on the adventure that the world becomes a generic, gray blur in the background. But this time I am picking out details that will hopefully make the world come to life.

Currency

The coinage used in Vhallan is based upon the ral, a sterling silver (92.5% silver, 7.5% copper) coin about 2 cm in diameter. For nearly a century, ral were the only coins in circulation, but cut coinage in half-, quarter- and even eighth-ral (also called a sliver) were commonly used. These were eventually replaced by a copper coin, equivalent in value to a sliver, called the ori. Cut coinage is no longer legal tender and only worth their bullion value, but one can still find them in circulation, typically in remote, rural areas. Later, the need for a larger denomination was required to ease in transactions and transport by wealthy merchants and houses. The ges is a gold coin that was originally set at 50 ral, but reduction in the purity of the coin has decreased over the generations and it is now worth 24 ral.

Most everyday commerce is done with ral and ori.

Colloquially, the ges, ral, and ori are called gold, silver, and copper pieces, respectively, though ori are still called slivers by some.

All the coins are circular, though ges have four notches that give it a squarish outline. While this makes the coin less susceptible to shaving, the notches facilitate cutting, and so half- and quarter-ges pieces are beginning to circulate.

Modern coins are hammered with the name of the mint and the year on the reverse side. Ral feature a crown, representing the monarch's authority, on the obverse side and the twin candles of Knowledge and Wisdom, the symbol of Sophia, on the reverse. Ori have a profile of Merik and a shield and sword on the obverse and reverse sides, respectively. A bust of Aurora framed by a rising sun appears on the obverse side of the ges with a stag on the reverse side.

Coins of other denominations, such as the double-ori or the triple-ral, have been minted over the years as successive monarchs have tried to place their lasting mark on the currency, but these coins rarely catch on and are usually taken out of circulation within a generation. These usually featured the bust or crest of the monarch.

The Vhalls

The Vhalls were the first peoples to settle the region and bring agriculture, bronze, and civilization to the region. Their arrival predates any written record and has been lost from any oral tradition. No one knows from where they originated. Their numbers were small by today's standard and they did not disturb the original inhabitants—the spirits and faeries of the region. Over the generations, the Vhall culture and religion evolved to live alongside the First Ones, as they were often called. Some scholars believe that since the Vhalls lacked iron tools and weapons, they were no threat to the fae. Being defenseless, the Vhalls has no choice but to capitulate to the demands and whims of the fae. This also limited their expansion and population.

The Vhalls were pastoral with no centralized government. Village rule was typically a form of direct democracy headed by a council of elders. Periodically, invasions and emigrations from the eastern Salandrans would bring more people into the region eventually slowly towns and cities were built. The entire region was brought under a unified rule by the Hran Empire from the south. Though the Empire retreated, the rulers and noble houses of Vhallan trace their lineage back to the Hranite governors and look down upon those of Vhall stock. Today, the Vhall people, language, and way of life has almost completely disappeared and can only be found in isolated villages.

Power Metrics

When describing a power, the player must include clearly defined metrics detailing the power's range, duration, etc.

The following examples represent only the most common ways powers are defined. Players and GMs can certainly create powers that do not fit within one of these categories and should define their own.

Action: How quickly and often the power can be used.

- None: The power acts automatically without thought or effort. The power works even if the character is unconscious. All other powers require that the character be conscious and able to act, or at least think.
- Free: The power acts with single thought and no real effort.
- Attack: The power is considered an attack action.
- Move: The power is considered a move action.
- Full: The power takes an entire round (or more) to use. The character can do nothing else.
- Reactive: The power only kicks in as a response to some other action or power. These are often treated as Free actions, though some require that the character keep an attack action on hold to be able to use the power.

Range: How close the target of the power must be.

- Personal: The power only affects the user and cannot be extended.
- Touch: The power must touch the target.
- Normal: The base range is specified in the power description. Beyond this range, the power suffers penalties to hit and/or to effect. The range will probably use an exponential scale much like I described last time.
- Sight: The user need only see the target; distance is not a factor. The GM and player must agree on whether or not the power can affect a target seen through clairvoyance, video monitors, telescopes, etc. Alternatively, other senses can be substituted for sight.

Area: How wide of an effect the power has.

Most powers only affect a single target or individual. However, some powers can be defined to affect a large area, often defined as a radius or cone, or a specific number of individuals (mental powers tend to care more about number of targets rather than their physical proximity). There are no categories for area; instead, simply specify what the area is. However, I may end up using a scale much like I described last time.

Another important detail is if everyone within the area is affected by the power if the user can select who is or is not effected.

Duration: Defines for how long the power can be maintained.

- Instant: The power happens in a single moment, though the effects may linger. The power cannot be maintained round-to-round. This is the default duration for all attack powers.
- Concentration: The power lasts for as long as the character concentrates and takes an attack action to maintain it. This normally means the character cannot use another attack action while maintaining the power.
- Sustained: The power lasts for as long as the character can take a free action to maintain it.
- Lingering: The power takes no actions to maintain, but may be stopped through external means. One could define a fire started by a flame bolt as a lingering effect of an instant power, for example. Blinding fog that is summoned but can be blown away naturally is another example.
- Fixed: The power lasts a fixed duration, defined either when the power is created or when it is used. Once started, it cannot normally be stopped without some specific action.
- Permanent: The power is always on and cannot be turned off and can be a detriment to the user.
- Semi-Permanent: The power is almost always on and requires no action to maintain, but does cease when the character is knocked unconscious.

Resistance: What opposes the power.

- None: The power either cannot be used against someone (like regeneration) or cannot be directly resisted (like placing a force bubble around the target). Beneficial powers, like healing or boost, are also not resisted.
- Toughness: The is most common resistance for physical attacks. Toughness includes armor, force fields, grit, etc.
- Health/Fortitude: This is appropriate for powers that affect the character's health and wellbeing directly such as dizziness, nausea, suffocation, poison, disease, and draining of the life force.
- Agility/Reflexes: This is appropriate for powers which might cause the target to trip or slip. Blinding or deafening powers might also be appropriate here since victims might be able to cover their eyes or ears to reduce the effect.
- Willpower: Most powers that work directly on the mind are resisted with willpower. Mental screens also work here.
- Strength: The power can be opposed by the target's strength. This is appropriate for entangling powers and certain types of telekinesis.

Myles Corcoran

I have the Errata printed yet I always forget to look at it. <> Pringle is a smartass. I like him.

Jim Vassilakos

I see no reason why power progression should not be taken out of most rpgs. There are some types of campaigns that benefit from it, but few really need it, except to keep gamers (not necessarily roleplayers) happy. In fact, I think some campaigns are hurt by it.

How would this affect heroism? For true heroes, not at all. I think heroism is best demonstrated when personal power is not progressing. Heroes overcome diversity and limitations with bravery and determination, not with power-ups.

Can you be a star of your own story without power progression? Of course. Two examples: Han Solo and Harvey Pekar. They both underwent life changes, but neither really progressed in power, not as gamers understand the term.

Lee Gold

How telekinesis works is based completely on how it is defined *by the player*. For example, some heroes may have a mystical link with stone and earth and can lift huge amounts of the stuff but cannot lift a person. Others may be able to create raging tornadoes that perhaps move slowly enough for targets to tie themselves down. Others may use an anti-gravity beam that works inversely proportional to mass (heavier things exerting a higher upward force than lighter ones). In none of these examples, would it make sense for someone resist TK with willpower, though there is no reason why it should not be defined that way.

The whole point of SSΩ is that I, the game designer, am not going to tell the players or GM how the powers work. They have to define it based on what they think makes sense. If they want to avoid a "common but horrible mistake" then it is their right and responsibility. Then again, that phrase comes across as sanctimonious and close-minded. There is as much wrong in basing psychic powers on physical laws as there is in not basing them on physical laws.

Spike Y Jones

I do not understand where you get the number 7250 xp. Four 1st level characters require only 1000 xp each (4000 xp total) to go from 1st to 2nd level. My last D&D campaign only had 3 PCs, which skews things. But otherwise, I think I was confusing encounter versus adventure, as you suggest.

Joshua Kronengold

You make an interesting point about power/control. Most superhero rpgs base control (finding a specific thought, making the target perform a specific act) on how well one overcomes the resistance, and I had been assuming the same.

Elongation applied to a finger, for example, could be quite thin. But if you stretch out the entire body as far as it could go, the widest point (probably around the shoulders or hips) would only as *wide* as someone with (the same level of) shrinking is *tall*. That is my rule, anyway. Shrinking actually uses a range of heights (like 3" to 6"), and I purposely chose the higher end.

Louis La Mancusa

- 1) Do Not keep your observations to a minimum. Semi-incoherent rambling is encouraged. :)
- 2) Welcome!

Paul Mason

I agree completely with your comments on Farscape and Science Friction. I think you need to take your "Blasters shoot" thinking and apply it to the social status of Water Margin. Reputation and renown are not true currency because they are not truly spent for goods and services. Do characters A and B each know character C? Since this has as much to do with the winds of fate as plot convenience, resolving this with a die roll does not seem unfitting.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

For a card-based character sheet, see Dragon Storm. TSR's SAGA system used cards for random character creation and task resolution, but the character sheet was traditional paper.

LOL at your comment to Paul Cardwell. You probably read it in A&E... in my zine! :)

I cranked down on my crankiness at the last moment because I tend to launch into personal insults and excessive cursing (definitely not appropriate!) if I truly let myself go.

Jonathan Nicholas

Honesty should be promoted and rewarded. Salary can be an important part of this. For example, you need to pay police officers enough so that they are not forced to supplement their income with graft and corruption. However, when salaries are six, seven, eight digits, should this be necessary? There are other ways of rewarding good executives (such as long-term profit- and performance-based incentives) without having to bribe the incompetent, dishonest, greedy ones. There is also the stick: dishonesty should be discouraged and punished. Instead, it is rewarded with golden parachutes and by landing another top executive job at another company.

through the corporate (and often political) good ol' boy network. And it is that network (and ideological idiocy) that leads to the profiteering.

If you are on the board of a company and/or are receiving salary (even if in trust) from that company, then you should not use your current political position to give no-bid contracts to that company. This is a conflict of interest of the most basic, patently obvious form. You do not even have to be the direct recipient of war booty to be guilty of collusion. The only reason certain high-ranking executive officers have jobs is because of corporate and family connections. The administration is currently paying these connections back for their support.

The war on Iraq was started on a foundation of lies (at best, willful ignorance) and hubris. Thousands of innocent people—far more than were killed on September 11, 2001—have died as a direct result of it. Hundreds of thousands of people have died because of the tsunami and yet the US monetary support for the victims is a pittance of that slated for Iraq. Hell, it was a pittance of the money spent in Florida to recover from recent hurricanes. Why? Is this malice or incompetence? Evil, corrupt bastards or inept, immoral bastards, take your pick.

Ted Shelton

Welcome back, though your original presence far predates mine. I also was introduced to A&E at a DunDraCon.

Allow me to nitpick and point out that Fudge is not an acronym; the acronym was added on later. See <http://www.panix.com/~sos/fudfaq.html>

Post-Rapture leaves me cold, but I like the setup for the Circlestone campaign. It seems odd to me that a smith would be such a skilled outdoorsman, but the premise is marvelous. Keep us updated.

Jim Vassilakos

The alternative to engaging China economically is to isolate it—a policy guaranteed to make matters worse. A minority of US Senators from both parties have argued against normalized trade with China on both humanitarian and economic grounds. Normal Trade Relations has to be approved each year for China (unlike most NTR countries) because there are not enough votes to either make it permanent or remove it. I believe we should use economic engagement as a bridge between our cultures, wield it as both a carrot and a stick, and work to improve human rights everywhere.

I believe you have misinterpreted China's intentions, though I agree their actions are despicable. The suppression and persecution of Falun Dafa (like the pre-Communist Boxer Rebellion) has nothing to do with religion and everything to do with politics. As you say, religion is a cancer. Most

importantly, it threatens the status quo (until it becomes the status quo). Instability of any sort, religious, economic, or otherwise, is perhaps China's greatest fear (along with foreign influence). This is true not only of her rulers, but of her people as well. Religion is tolerated (and profited upon) so long as it is not perceived as a threat.

Likewise, the persecution of Christians in Rome (just like the crucifixion itself) was politically motivated. Persecutions only served to legitimize and strengthen the movement. We shall see if the same happens in China.

Some atheists would never support religion and never make or sell religious items. Others are happy to make money off of believers. Some might even be quite cynical about it and do all they can to milk the poor, deluded suckers.

The gospels that we know today (and which differ between Catholic, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox teachings) are no miracle. They are a product of strong editorial control over which gospels to include and which to exclude. Once accepted as unquestionably true, they will survive for as long as there are true believers.

Your use of "we" to describe the religions actions of this country is curious (and insulting if not intended to be ironic). How inclusive did you intend your comments to be?

I agree that we have to choose our fights. Iraq is not a fight we chose, but one we made. Even so, why did Bush choose Iraq over the others: malice or incompetence? And in this battle, who are the free peoples and who are the oppressors? Would both sides agree? That the presence of insurgents and anti-American sentiment was either ignored or not foreseen is just another fuck up in a long line of administration fuck ups. And we the people fucked up again by electing them despite (or because of!) the fuck ups.

There is no debate on Crossfire and similar shows. They do not present two sides of a story; they offer only half-truths and name calling. The misinformation the spout is actively harmful to rational debate, consensus building, and creating an informed electorate. The country is better off without them.

The single most important goal of education is to develop critical thinking—to question, critique, research, and debate ideas. Crossfire and its ilk are the antithesis of this. Our 5th-8th graders deserve better.

Jonathan D. Woolley

If armor has no factor in AC, then what effect does armor have in your system? Your change to hit points mirrors my own house rule, should I ever run a D&D game (as if *that* is ever going to happen).