

Small, Sinister Things

Gear

My fantasy Savage Worlds campaign kicked off on April 1.¹ I ran into something that brings us back to the earliest days of gaming: equipment lists. I wanted something with more of a medieval feel to help capture the tone of the campaign. In particular, I wanted to go back to a silver standard rather than the gold-based model of D&D.

I lack the time or interest to go back to first sources, and my web searches were not entirely helpful, so I pulled out my copies of Harn and Pendragon and set about making an equipment list. The discrepancies in costs and weights between these games (and RQ3) were distressing. I was also paranoid that the players would want items (like torches and lanterns) that they were used to having in D&D and I had no basis for making something up.

I am very bad at making things up. My brain wants to fit things into nice, logical boxes and unless I have all the information, I get a mental block. How the fuck would I know what a pint of lantern oil should cost or weight? All my data sources are sketchy, unreliable, and/or contradictory. Does this make me one of those uncreative, slothful gamers that I have been known to complain about or does it just make me an uncreative, slothful game designer and GM?

Normally, I might have not worried about it. Most of the time, I treat equipment simply by what seems reasonable. But one of my goals with this campaign is to make decisions of things like equipment matter. I also wanted to use the load limit rules from Savage Worlds. I want the PCs to find themselves without light or have to hunt for food as a means of generating atmosphere or even entire adventures. I could have created an entire sub-system for wealth² and even resource management, but I wanted to keep the rule changes to a bare minimum.

Eventually, I just gave up and copied the d20 equipment list from the SRD. I multiplied the gold piece cost by 4 and said that was the silver piece cost of the item. I also gave up my goal of doing piece-meal armor and went with entire suits (of leather, mail, or plate), though I did list out helms separately.

Unfortunately, this problem with making equipment lists also applies to history, geography, and other elements of world design. I want it to feel right, yet lack the knowledge or ability to do it right. It is all very depressing and discouraging. So, I may just abandon my essays on Vhallan.

1 A rather auspicious date, as my players put it.

2 Like that from the recently released Blue Rose rpg.

Comments

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Robert A Dushay PhD

For me, rpgs mostly live in the moment. Very few recounts and writeups capture my interest and attention, even my own. I love talking about campaign events with the players who were there, and often obtain some insight about our characters, but describing campaigns to third-parties does not appeal to me.

Lee Gold

"Mainstream" for gamers is other gamers, especially those using standard rules. The desires and perspectives of PC do not enter into the coolness equation—it is entirely an issue of metagaming. Using non-standard races and classes, such as those normally reserved only for GM use, is what allows these gamers to make cool characters.

Joshua Kronengold

I liked your igtheme and shopping. Your distinction between Routine, Difficult, and Extraordinary *anything* is well stated.

Paul Mason

Your system is definitely fiddly and that there are lots of little things to keep track of. I definitely recommend playtesting with real players (rather than thought experiments) before you go any further.

Your comments made me realize that I had not hyphenated my last zine. It certainly helps.

I fully admit that my observations on coolness do not apply to all cultures (if they apply to any).

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

As an atheist who has voted Green in the past, I would be completely turned off from the party if they mixed spirituality and ecology.

Brian Rogers

Wow, an entire comments section devoted me me. <squeal> :)

Perhaps you are right about fixing the scale based on the limits of the superhero setting. But I tend to think in terms of universal laws (damn my physics degree) and so would want to make the scaling mechanism universal from the start.

Given how quickly comic fans are to argue over who is stronger/faster/smarter/better than whom, I would definitely not want to include "real-life" comic examples.

I need to absorb and digest your other excellent comments more before proceeding.

Right is right, but we don't agree on what's right. I firmly believe that democracy is something that should be grown, not forced.

Can I argue that Bush is both stupid and immoral? Let me at least say that I think his morals directly resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands and his lack of action in places like Darfur resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands more (and counting). If the deaths of over a thousand US soldiers (and injures to over 20 thousand) are in the name of such a lofty and noble ideal as democracy, then why are pictures of returning coffins and wounded banned by the Pentagon? Should we not be honoring these heroes of democracy and not hiding them?

If Bush's goal was democracy, then why was there so much wasted effort to prove that Saddam Hussein had WMDs, that he was linked to Al Qaeda, and that he posed an imminent threat to the United States? All of these accusations and excuses to go to war were dead wrong (and many of us knew they were). Bush sold the people a bill of goods.

While we promote freedom and democracy elsewhere, our own freedoms are being stripped away. The first amendment is eroding. The fourth is in serious jeopardy. We are already denying the fifth and sixth to non-citizens (though the bill of rights makes no such distinction). And don't even get me started on the 14th, 15th, and others. The very foundations of our own democracy are being torn to shreds and yet you think this acceptable.

I hope you remember all the people who have had their lives cut short because of your moral imperative. I hope you remember all the families that have been shattered. I hope you remember the hundreds that have been tortured and detained without trial. I hope you remember a time when people were allowed to speak out against tyranny and bloodshed. That, sir, is what it's all about.

I shall leave all future political comments to Mason and Jones. My blood pressure cannot handle it. Rather than spawn intellectual debate, you end up just pissing me off (and I take full responsibility for my short temper and impatience).

I can say with all certainty and confidence that I would not purposefully read other people's emails. And if I did discover I could, I would first let everyone know immediately and then get the problem fixed. Shame on you for not being able to say likewise.

I find your criticisms of the CS professors' lack of hands-on networking skills to be misguided. As your friend knows, installing, troubleshooting, and maintaining a fully-integrated network is more than a full time job. That is why people hire specialists, such as your friend, to do these tasks—so they can focus on their specialties.

Shifting responsibilities at work are kicking my ass. So as not to miss another month, I am cutting my comments short and will continue in June.

Lee Gold

As I have said, these are examples. The powers can be as variable or fixed as you want them to be.

Generally speaking, increased speed does not blur vision because speedsters also have faster perception—everything “slows down” for them. If the speed came from a vehicle, then there would be issues of perception and reaction time. DC Heroes, the rpg, deals with sonic booms.

A SF game that features the GM roleplaying the laws of chemistry, etc. would no longer be SF. Unless the F stands for Fantasy.

Joshua Kronengold

Cut coinage: I was just taking the simplistic view that cut coinage was used, as was the case of the English farthing and the colonial Spanish peso (worth 8 reales), for small change.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

The percentages were simply from the definition of *sterling* (which was also used in 13th century England and gave us the term “a pound sterling”).

Jonathan Nichols

What is acceptable criteria to refer to someone as immoral? That they *know* they are evil and corrupt?

Comparing the money spent on Florida hurricanes versus the southeast Asian tsunami. Please explain the discrepancy in moral terms.

Let me be very clear on this point: because wars are so expensive (in money, resources, and lives), we should avoid them at all costs. There are more constructive things we could be doing (such as improving the health care and social security systems).

Reduced services do not hurt people. But neither do they help. The point of health care is to intervene and prevent harm. When we have the power and ability to do good (and not wasting it on acts of dubious morality or wisdom), we should.

Lisa Padol

I will use whatever style of horror that feels right at the time. <> Farmers in Vhalla barter or use coins as is convenient.

Jim Vassilakos

Your view on AI demonstrates your mammalian bias. True AI will probably be something more alien than any of us can imagine.