

ironclaw

A full review and analysis of the Ironclaw rpg is on my web site, but I wanted to mention a few tidbits in the mechanics that may be of interest to specific A&Eers:

There is a Tactics skill that works as a teamwork skill, improving the combat initiative of everyone in the group. However, to use this, you also must have someone with the Leadership skill.

You can abstractly determine an individual character's survival and glory in a large battle using a warfare test. Your personal Speed and Dodge do not count, but your Leadership and Tactics do. You can even increase your chance for survival at a risk of less glory (and visa-versa).

There is a cloak skill for defending against attacks using a cloak as an alternative to a shield.

racial balance

When I was reading the Races chapter in Ironclaw, I noticed that some of the races did not have as many racial skills as others. Races cost points based on the number of gifts and flaws they have, but not racial skills. The result is some races are just better than others; the difference is not significant, but it is noticeable.

Several years ago, I had an email discussion with Michael Halse on his fantasy rpg. At the time, I argued that races should be equal for the sake of game balance. He brought up the very valid point that there is no reason why races should be balanced from the perspective of the game world.

My friend ran an Earthdawn campaign and complained that orcs were constantly given the shaft. They had fewer advantages and more disadvantages than all other races. There simply was no reason why a player would choose to play one compared to the other races. Then again, this was a very gamist¹ group.

In AD&D, there was little incentive to play humans—once you ignored racial level limits, that is. D&D3 has corrected this (assuming it was a problem) by giving humans some advantages to bring them on par with other races.

Should races be balanced? Should the game designer actively make each race equally appealing or capable? Should there be non-mechanical

(dis)advantages built into the setting to balance out mechanical benefits? In particular, I mean those races allowed for PCs. “NPC only” races are often unbalanced, being considerably weaker or stronger than standard PC races.

Game balance means less to me than it used to. I prefer interesting characters to balanced ones. Even so, I cannot help but notice when something is obviously out of balance—it makes my inner-gamist grind his teeth. As a player, I do not like being overshadowed by players who can do everything my PC can do, and better. As a GM, it annoys me when players ask, “Why should I play X when Y has all the same advantages and more?” and I do not have a good answer for them.

comments

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myles corcoran

That was perhaps the most enjoyable Fellowship to date. Then again, I am a bit of a romantic.

You are, of course, correct regarding the evolutionary advantage of sexual reproduction being increased gene combinations.

lee gold

I discovered that getting A&E by email makes it really easy to read at work.

I liked those passages from *Autobiography of God*.

I also think people act less mature when they are treated as children. This is not to say that treating them as adults will elicit sound decision-making, but their behavior will be less childish.

Over The Edge too quickly becomes farcical when I run it. There is a line between surreal and ludicrous that I tend to overshoot by three miles.

spike y jones

Do not forget all the Republican talk making it so Reagan could have more than two terms.

In a story on All Things Considered², it was pointed that that the small pox vaccine can cause “bad reactions” in 1 out of every 100 recipients and those with impaired immune systems can die from it. Also, no one is really sure how the virus would spread through our “virgin” population; the last outbreaks among populations which were largely immune.

¹ Pardon me for slipping into G/N/S terminology.

² *Smallpox Protection*, September 28, 2001

rene a louviere jr

What makes the Storyteller system best for “dark” roleplaying compared to other genres or other systems? The only things dark about Storyteller were the settings applied to it. The system itself, except for the tacked-on rules like Paradox, seems awfully generic to me.

Can you please give examples of ideas you think were given “short shrift” by the scientific community or of ideas that were not given a “fair chance at scientific proof?”

Yes, getting new ideas, especially radical ones, accepted in the scientific community is very difficult. It is supposed to be. Yes, the deck is stacked against revolutionary concepts. It takes years or decades for new ideas to become widely accepted and this is about the right pace. You get into trouble when you accept uncorroborated data as proof, untested notions as truth, and fad as fact.

If you want to be a cynic, imagine the number of scientists who would love to claim a revolutionary idea as their own. Think of the money that could be earned through grants, patents, and venture capital if a revolutionary idea was really true. In the publish-or-perish world of academic science, showing evidence corroborating and refining a radical idea goes a lot farther than evidence against it. Lastly, no one would ever describe the scientific community as “tight.” Even within a single discipline, there are personal rivalries, politics, and one-upmanship. All of this leads to a community that is constantly churning new, radical ideas.

In my experience in and around the scientific community, I have never seen the kind of personal religious backlash you seem to have experienced—and you are not even in the field. Religion and spirituality was never a negative issue—it did come up in conversation, but never disrespectfully. Carl Sagan was perhaps the most sincere, spiritual person inside or outside the scientific community. I am sorry your experiences have made you so distrustful of science and the scientific community.

paul mason

I see game rules as a mechanism for making decisions, based on character ability, the details of the scene, etc. with consideration given to gaming style, genre conventions, and other meta-game elements. Who makes the decisions and how they are made defines the distribution of power, if you will.

Roleplaying mechanics like those in Pendragon do not seem so bad to me now, in light of “they help you decide what your character does.”

brian misiaszek

Even if a pulp-based rpg has rules for magic, the game could make them completely optional and even recommend non-magical campaigns. Unfortunately, too many GMs do not know how to filter these kinds of things appropriately.

Galileo’s problems with the Church were entangled with politics and personality conflicts rather than the specifics of his ideas. In other words, do not write a demeaning caricature of the Pope, portraying him as a simpleton. His ideas were not necessarily heretical, but disobeying direct orders from the Vatican was.

<cough>Riley, not Brady</cough> :)³

I would not call your essay a waste of ink, but let us not fall into a debate over semantics involving “roleplaying,” “games,” or “roleplaying games.” Perhaps it is a personal peeve of mine, but I dislike debating around the dictionary.⁴

Costikyan’s essay is at www.crossover.com/~costik/nowords.html. My reaction to it was, “interesting, but not constructive.”

The games in which there was intra-party conflict all turned ugly and uncomfortable.

james d reichstadt

Welcome. Now that DunDraCon allows you to submit sign-up slips hours or days in advance, sign-up is not hectic at all. Finding out if you got into your game is still terribly hectic. Even so, ConQuest was even more hectic because several game sign-up results were blank!

robert rees

My list of classic rpgs would include xD&D (though I am unsure of which version), CoC, and Traveller. Vampire gets an honorable mention because of its impact on the rpg culture (both in design and theme), though I still think Nightlife is the better game. Amber also deserves mention somewhere. GURPS, while not a classic rpg, is a classic rpg franchise. From your list, I would disqualify Dark Sun for being a setting rather than a self-contained rpg.

eugene reynolds

I would not call “Big Trouble” underrated among gamers and fans of the genre. The mainstream reviews I read were not far off the mark, in my opinion.

³ No apologies necessary—it happens all the time.

⁴ And starting an argument with “Webster says,” is bad form.