

Thanks for all the feedback on racial balance.

I will be at DunDraCon 26 Feb 15-18. I will be running a supers game set in San Angelo using the BESM rules.

ignorable theme

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pulling the heartstrings

I have never used a PC's family or friends, but I do use children and romantic entanglements with NPCs. While they make for great emotional stuff, they have a tendency to backfire. One romance between a PC superheroine and an NPC villain worked very well as a subplot but also drove a wedge in the party and made the player uncomfortable during parts of the courtship. Once I put a PC's NPC beau in a coma as a means to get him out of my way, but the PC was too overwrought to be as involved in the plot as I would have liked.

comments

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spike y jones

I liked the Elemental Atoms. Does D&D3e have mechanics what would cause the type of magical mishap you present as the adventure seed?

Our measure of time also uses a decimal system of decades, centuries, millennia, and aeons.

What irks me about Daylight Saving Time is that people would not adjust their own personal and business schedules by an hour during the summer without such a global kludge as resetting the clocks.

Saying the odds of an American dying of anthrax is 1 in 500 million could mean any number of things. Maybe on average, 1 out of 500 million deaths are by anthrax. Maybe 1 out 500 million people die of anthrax per year, so in a population of 300 million, you would expect one death by anthrax every 1.4 years.

I am sure I said this before, but with matter/anti-matter annihilation, you only get twice the energy if your creation process creates pure anti-matter and not equal amounts of matter and anti-matter, until you want to create the science fiction to alter this.

I am sure the continued USAn support of Israel is primarily due to political influence of Jewish-American citizens. A similar situation, except in reverse, can be seen in USAn policy toward Cuba.

rene a louviere jr

At the risk of sounding adversarial, what would you say those who think flat Earth theory and creationism (especially under its current reincarnation as "intelligent design") have been given short shrift by the scientific community?

paul mason

Power to the People got me thinking. The following is not an attempt to refute what you say, but rather tries to build upon it even if we may not be heading in the same directions.

Your examples of assertions all seem to fall under the category of unopposed assertions. There is nothing to assume the assertion is either not correct or being opposed. The assertions may be wrong—"I swing at the ssu," "You can't, remember that you are tied up," but they do not really illustrate a struggle for power of assertion.

Traditionally, some types of assertions are left to the GM and others to the players. Some games attempt to break these roles, such as allowing players to make assertions traditionally left to the GM. Based on your model of assertions, I can envision three primary types of rules. Since I do not know what a ssu is, I will slightly change your examples.

GM Narrativist: "You swing at the beast and your blow connects, breaking its jaw."

Player Narrativist: "I swing at the beast, and the blow connects, breaking its jaw."

Traditional: "I swing at the beast. Do I hit it?"
<something happens> "Yes, and you break its jaw."

In the first case, the player may object to the GM's description of events. "I wanted to just talk to it!" This is what people fear most with diceless rpgs—railroading to the highest degree and a complete loss of player control of the character. If this is not an issue of power, I do not know what is.

The second case is just a reversal of the first case—players subsuming the role of GM. When others¹ try to reinvent roleplaying, they often come here.

In the third case, something happens that determines whether the blow hits. It could be rolling dice, consulting tarot cards, simple deduction, or

¹ And they know who they are. :)

whatever. The point is that the assertion of cause and effect are shared between the GM and players. For PC-World² interaction, the players provide the cause and the GM provides the effect. For World-PC action, the reverse is true.

An important element is *when* assertions are challenged. Traditionally, you do not want a player (or GM) making an assertion that assumes too much, such as assuming the character hits the beast. When invalid assertions are contradicted, it really disrupts the flow the game. By using a traditional cause-and-effect model, this is avoided. While the <something happens> may also be disruptive, it does not need to be and has to do with how fluid the <something> is in practice. The example below, with the player starting the narrative and the GM ending it, is no less fluid than the one-sided narrative approaches.

Traditional: "I swing at the beast..." <something happens> "... breaking its jaw."

I would frame the issue into three questions:

1. Who decides how PCs act and react to the world?
2. Who decides how the NPCs and world act and react to the PCs?
3. Who decides what effect these actions will have?

The answer to the first question may be simply, "the players," but the rules and how characters are constructed can also have an effect. Mechanics such as those found in Pendragon, Ars Magica, and Dying Earth may guide or even dictate how the characters act independent of the players inclination or desires. The rules for advancement, the structure of scenarios, genre conventions, and meta-game conventions can also influence how a character acts. In my opinion, the GM should only get involved when the PC's reactions are being manipulated, such as mind control, to enforce the rules dictating behavior, or when things are going to hell and the GM needs to nudge the PCs into more appropriate directions.³

Taking some decisions away from the players can enhance the roleplaying experience, by reinforcing genre and setting conventions, but it can also backfire and alienate the players. If too far removed from the decision-making process or too often trumped by the rules, players may fail to achieve any sort of character immersion (see my comments to Misiaszek, below). Players can really resent the loss of control and blame

power-hungry GMs and dictatorial game designers who prevent them from making their own decisions about how to make and play their characters.

Likewise, the answer to question number two is typically, "The GM," with caveats for reaction rolls, morale checks, weather tables, and other rules. The GM may hand over some of these decisions to players, especially when it directly ties into the character's background or party structure. The troupe-play of grogs in *Ars Magica* is one example. I have tried in vain to get my players to become partners in the world-creation process, particularly how it applies to their characters.

Traditional roleplaying games generally have very similar divisions of decision-making power between players and GM. While games may differ in minor areas,⁴ there are only a few games that specifically⁵ attempt to break the mold and create non-traditional, very narrativist form of roleplaying. I do not want to slam this new style of games, but I happen to prefer traditional rpgs and so will focus on them. But in the end, I do not think these new style games offer anything fundamentally new.

For the most part, players decide what their players will do and the GM decides what the NPCs will do. What happens when the actions of two characters are in conflict? I do not mean if a player's assertion contradicts the assertions of the GM or another player. I mean in the game world, what is the result of the conflict and who decides what that result is? The most common technique is to fall back to rolling dice and consulting the rules of the game, though other techniques are perfectly valid and often quite valuable.

The big complaint about diceless games is the concentration of power in the GM's hands. Rolling dice prevents either the players or the GM from having too much narrative power. It also has the effect, for better or worse, of creating unpredicted results. As often as dice can create a dramatically satisfying result, they can also create a result that is dramatically unsatisfying. Everway's cards are a way to induce variation and a degree of unpredictability yet keeps the decision making process firmly in the hands of the GM. Fudging dice is a way to have unpredictability tempered by GM adjudication.

I am sure I will write more along this vein in the future.

² Here I include NPCs, as well as the cultural and physical aspects of the world.

³ This last option being one of last resort.

⁴ I include the choice of dice versus cards versus fiat as minor.

⁵ ...and sometimes pretentiously...

brian misiaszek

WotC, not Chaosium, is doing the d20 version of CoC. This is different than other games being translated into d20 “solely for marketing reasons.” Chaosium is working on a 1930’s Pulp Cthulhu supplement for the d20 game.⁶ Even so, Chaosium remains dedicated to BRP. Though Chaosium did publish a Melnibone sourcebook for d20, the latest edition of Stormbringer is solidly BRP.

Your discussion of immersion and flow focused on sense of wonder and immersion into the setting or secondary world and neglected the immersion into the *character*. While related and interdependent, they are distinct. You have presented what I would call the GM side of the equation, but not the player side.

lisa padol

Yes, I am a Nightlife fan, but not of the splatter-punk tone or of the particulars of their world setting. I like their approach to the kin abilities, especially werewolves. While much better than WW’s approach, I find bits of it odd, like werewolves feeding on fear. I have been thinking of doing a Nightlife conversion to Fudge, but I am not sure what the point would be.

nick parenti

How do Islamic and Arab passersby react to your sons referring to them as Bin Laden or their headwear as diapers? Now would be a great time to teach them about Islamic and Arab peoples and culture and not to characterize them as poopy diaper heads.

robert rees

It was my understanding that mainstream publications use advertising as its revenue stream and use the cover cost to pay for publication and distribution. Gaming magazines may operate the other way around. In the case of a house organ like Dragon, the budget is really part of the company’s advertising cost rather than an independent revenue-generating product (though it may actually make money once second-party advertising come into play). Someone (Jonathan, Spike?) please correct me if I am wrong.

simon reeve

I would define a moon as a satellite to a planet. To be considered a twin-planet, the center of gravity between the two objects cannot be within the diameter of the larger object. In the case of the Moon-Earth system, the center of gravity is inside the Earth.⁷ If it were between the Earth and Moon, I would call it a twin-planet system.

To carry this definition one step further, a planet is a satellite to a star. Asteroids and comets are exceptions to the planet rule based on size, shape, orbit characteristics, and composition. With these definitions, Pluto and Mercury are still planets (being more planet-like than asteroid-like) and Ganymede is still a moon.

Given the laughably lax requirements to get a patent in the U.S., did Australia feel left behind?

Progressive taxation is not an attempt to punish the rich, but rather to tax those who can afford it.⁸ Besides, 1k of taxation to a person making 10k a year hurts a lot more than 10k to a person making 100k a year. There is a point of diminishing returns, when progressive taxation becomes counter-productive, but a totally flat tax without some form adjustment for lower income brackets is equally inadvisable.

eugene reynolds

Is it a good thing if a player who spent beaucoup points on a non-game-essential skill tries to shoehorn that skill into every adventure? If you spend tons of points on “weapon: hammer” every problem starts looking like a nail.

brian rogers

“The GM has balanced everything in advance,” is an awfully big assumption, even with encounter-balancing rules and guidelines in place. Add “lack of player cunning,” which kills as many scenarios as dice and player cunning, as a random element.

jonathan tweet

Based on your explanation, I now understand and more appreciate what you are trying to accomplish with your campaign and the role of dice.

⁶ See The R’lyeh Report Volume 5, Number 9 December 4, 2001

⁷ <http://stommel.tamu.edu/~baum/reid/book1/book/node35.html>

⁸ Without getting into the concept of redistribution of wealth.