

## news and such

I have a new weekly face-to-face roleplaying group. Our goal is to play many different games and genres in short campaigns with rotating GMs. So far, there are only four of us, though another may be joining soon.

To kick things off, I ran my Silver Age Sentinels convention game. Next up is a one-shot Feng Shui adventure. Despite my very bad reaction to it when it first came out (and I warned the group that I may have some irrational distaste for it), I am looking forward to the game. D&D3 is after that, I think.

Due to billing issues, my website was down and I did not get notified. I am not very happy with them. On my website, now that you can get there, I have rules and such for Esper Road, my new online, chat-based campaign with Matt, Avis, and Josh.

## why kill someone if you can stun them?<sup>1</sup>

- ?? They might recover and kill you later.
- ?? Killing is easier or safer (to you) with the methods you have available.
- ?? You want the body; you might turn it into a zombie, send it as a warning, harvest the organs, mount it on a wall, eat it, etc.
- ?? The desired end is to send their spirit to the next stage of existence, whatever that may be (the next life, Valhalla, etc.).
- ?? They deserve it, or at least you or the law says they do.
- ?? They ask you to kill them for their own reasons (euthanasia, insurance, etc.).

## on mechanics

I cut my GMing teeth on a diceless campaign. I was strongly influenced by the Amber Diceless RPG and it probably makes my approach to rpgs a bit skewed from the mainstream. I use a lot of diceless techniques in my GMing and I would be amiss if I did not include them in my discussion. However, I do like having dice and so they mix into the equation as well.

<sup>1</sup> The suggestions do not reflect the opinions, ethics, or taste of the author.

In basketball, a free throw is never a gimme. Every shot has a chance to miss and every shot has a chance to go through the hoop. Most rpg systems model free throws very well; you roll the dice, adjust for difficulty, and determine if you made the shot. Or sank the put, or scored the goal, or picked up the spare, or make the field goal, or hit the bull's-eye. If you miss, you try again. There is usually no need to know how well you made it or how poorly you missed it, but knowing these things does help describe the scene is not unwelcome in a rpg provided it is easy to interpret from the roll.

These kind of simple, instantaneous actions are the most difficult for me running diceless games. The inherent randomness of the action makes a non-random resolution seem inappropriate. A character flips a coin, is it heads or tails? How can I say? If the character has a free throw percentage of 82%, how do I know if this time is a miss? The diceless GM must look to other factors, such as "story" and meta-game factors (like Amber's Good/Bad Stuff), to determine the outcome. The trust between players and GM has to be strongest in these instances.

Complex, prolonged actions are much easier to resolve without dice. If a character tosses a hundred coins or free throws, I can safely rule that about 50 coins will be heads and that 82 balls will go in—the exactly number is rarely important. However, these types of actions do not always work well with dice.

Whether fixing a car, doing research, performing surgery, picking a lock, or writing a program, there is an expectation of success or failure based on the character's skill and the difficulty of the task. When dice rolls defy these expectations, players can become dissatisfied with the system.

This very issue was the focus of much discussion on the Fudge mailing list. I left the list (again) when it became apparent that the ones complaining about the system not meeting their expectations could not articulate what their expectations were (or at least ignored my inquiries).

If your character has an 80% free throw skill (or rather your system says there is an 80% chance of success, whether using dice pools or other rolling method), you would expect to make 4 out of 5 shots. This is straightforward enough.

But if your character has the same level in car repair, programming, or lock picking, what does that really mean? Hopefully, this will be the topic for next time.

## comments

#326

### lee gold

Sometimes fights are just two opponents exchanging blows with each other until both are bloodied and beaten and the one with greater strength, stamina, or determination remains (barely) standing at the end.

D&D (and many other games) do this kind of slugfest well. And because of the classic scenario structure of fighting a series of monsters, D&D must have rapid, magical healing to restore the bloodied and beaten PCs back to full health to take on the next opponent. If combats were decided with a single stroke after rounds of jockeying and waiting for an opening, PCs would survive combats (assuming they survived) in much better health and I think the need for magical healing would be less or at least take on a different form than it does now. Simply adding critical hits to D&D does not work so well because they completely ignore defensive ability and are too random in practice.

An Ignorable Theme on this topic would not be out of order.

### peter c hildreth

As I have been running superhero games lately, I have taken to using d6s not for monsters, but for innocent bystanders. I just randomly scatter them across the scene.

### richard iorio 2

You state *Dark Continent* has rules that are “very well thought out, and really do a good job capturing the feel for exploration,” but then you conclude by saying it has “uninspired rules.”

### brian misiaszek

Roleplaying is an active process. Immersing oneself into a roleplaying character means (at least to me) to think and act like that character. Writing a story or playing a part is also active and so character immersion of writers and actors is very similar to that of roleplayers.

Watching a movie or reading a book is passive. Immersing oneself into a film or novel

means to empathize with the characters and become engrossed in their lives and the world in which they live. This can also happen in a roleplaying game, but when gamers restrict themselves to this level of immersion, they are not fully exploiting the strengths of the medium. What makes roleplaying such a unique and fun (for me) experience is that you can be the actor, writer, and passive audience simultaneously.

### spike y jones

GOO continues the money grabbing by announcing d20 BESM. I could see a reason for “d20 Anime,” but that is different than shoving the BESM system into d20 as they did with d20 SAS. When SJG did GURPS Vampire or GURPS B&B, there was at least a setting that went along with it. BESM is just mechanics and has no setting.

I detested kits because they substituted rules and crunchy-bits for actual roleplaying. I thought everyone else detested kits because they were “must have” add-ons that bloated the system.

### victor raymond

Welcome back.

### eugene reynolds

LOL at “If we’d have invented neon, I would have turned Rome to Las Vegas.” The LARP sounded like a blast.

### brian rogers

I do not mind and even like “uneven” PCs if the GM and players support it and do not allow PCs to be habitually shoved aside. Competence is matter of context and two 200-point characters are never truly equal. Point systems help the GM eyeball relative effectiveness, just like levels do. Point systems fail when the players and GMs do not use them properly.

### matt stevens

Do you want us all to start calling you Doc? Is A&E big enough for more than one? : )

RAE (but I am not sure why) Random Restaurants. What about restaurants that *only* take reservations? And is there a way to check for the earliest next reservation based on the size of the party? Yes, I’m being mostly silly. I also enjoyed “An RPG that Sold Out.”