

Since the 9-pt Verdana did not look too small on the printed page, I will stick with it for a while.

DunDraCon came and went. I started with Buffy, Hellboy, and Call of Cthulhu (sense a theme?) through Saturday night. It was the first time I had played the former two and I would definitely play again given the chance. The Buffy scenario failed to capture the comedic and character depth of the television series; it felt more like a typical monster hunt. A group of nerds had allied with a vampire to enthrall cheerleaders on Valentine's Day. All we had to do is follow the nerds, avoid or subdue the cheerleaders, and defeat the 3(!) vampires. The Hellboy scenario was also monster hunt, this time with ghouls, but I did not expect it to be anything else. However, there was more investigation leading up to the big confrontation, and therefore held my interest more than Buffy did. An ancient, ghoulish-controlling artifact in the hands of vampire LARPer is a bad thing.

I think either would work well for the premise of an ongoing campaign of monster hunting, but such campaigns can also be done with any number of systems. The only real question is what premise you want to incorporate. I have no great desire to buy the Buffy rpg (I already own Hellboy), but if I were to run a Buffy-based campaign, I would get it just to have the canon background material. As a player, I have no need for it.

All three games suffered slightly, I think, from having too many players which lead to characters either stealing each other's thunder or simply not having much to do. Four PCs instead of six to nine would have made for tighter interaction and investigation, but this is not practical for convention games. In Buffy, there were plenty of enemies to go around and we were able to split up to do parallel investigations in Hellboy, so I think we got all the players involved as much as possible.

Buffy and CoC were both hampered by one problem player. Attacking mind-controlled cheerleaders with a chainsaw is not a good idea and hardly in line with Buffy. In CoC, the undercover reporter just did not want to be a team player, doing B while the rest of us did A, and visa-versa, and then had the nerve to get defensive when none of the PCs wanted to deal with him. You know, typical convention crap.

The SAS game I ran on Sunday morning, The One With Aliens, went well. It was interesting to see how this group of players tackled different lines of investigation compared to the first time I ran it. Part of this was my conscious restructuring to add more clues in that direction and the player of the precog not following up on the cryptic clues that lead down

the other path. After two runs, all the information has been revealed—just no single group got all of it.

Sunday night was a Castle Falkenstein game using alternative, dice-based mechanics in a scenario that more resembled a 1920's pulp-action-combat rpg than CF. One of the players, a veteran CF GM, experienced what I would call "expectation mismatch" throughout the game. Playing a "mad scientist in training" did not help matters. I managed to have fun by playing a rather loud, extroverted, arctic explorer who was accustomed to facing death and overcoming insurmountable odds.

The GM showed up twenty minutes late, which was particularly annoying to me as I rushed to finish my game, pack up my supplies, and get to the CF game. All the pre-registered players were there and two people wanted to crash. The GM said he only had "six character sheets" but that the other two were welcome to stay if they wanted to write up characters on a blank sheet of paper. Because adventures made for six pre-generated characters (as was advertised on the game book) do not work well with two extra players, they decided to leave. After an explanation of his homebrew rules, the GM revealed that we would have to make our own characters and the six sheets he had were blank.

Two of the other players, a married couple, received a call on their cell phone and had to leave. I have played with them several times before, including last year's CF game at DunDraCon, and they are very good players. I suspect they simply decided the game was not for them.

After making characters using a progressive point-build system, we started. Among the elements not usually found in a CF game, there were sword wielding martial artists, a biplane attack of a passenger airship that was equipped with four (unmanned) machine guns, a car chase through Paris, and a climatic fight against a Chinese dragon and Fu-Man Chu in the middle of a monastery populated by members of the White Lodge. For the airship encounter, the PCs were handed a script by an agent of a precognitive NPC. At such-and-such time, do this; at this other time, do this other thing. The concept was internally consistent with the rest of plot, but ultimately unsatisfying to play.

Overall, it was a good convention, though I know of others who suffered no-show GMs (without any compensation from the convention) and one GM who did not receive his priority game pass. I have never had a problem with DunDraCon, but I think it is starting to lose gamers to Kublacon, which runs over Memorial Day weekend.

And yes, it rained.

Robert Dushay, PhD: When doing research I often enter the library with the mindset that I will stay there until I either find the information or convince myself it is not there. Most game mechanics do not handle the latter case well, except perhaps on a critical failure. See also my comments to Nicholas. ■ Short-term loans for medical expenses would not be available for the critically ill or elderly because they are a bad investment for the lender. And how would loans address expensive emergency care? ■ In a SF superhero setting, anti-gravity belts or similar devices would be appropriate. You can still require a starship for intersystem or interstellar travel.

Lee Gold: The text box of my contact information covered my 1st footnote. It was simply the link <http://www.opengamingfoundation.org/srd.html> ■ The only real hiccup in using Toon as-is is the Chutzpah attribute, which controls the skills of Fast Talk, Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods, Sleight of Hand, and Sneak. Some people may have an issue grouping these skills and instead would place the first two under Smarts and the second two under Zip. Otherwise, the only thing you really have to do is change the names of the attributes and some skills. For genre-specific rules, see the Tooniversal Tour Guide. ■ Cinder blocks are those “hollow rectangular building block made of cement and coal cinders¹” and we in California use them in foundations and retaining walls. We use plywood for sheathing (nailed to the outside of the studs, especially for two-story houses), roofing, and flooring. The major framing elements are made of solid wood, mostly Douglas fir. Of course, most cabinets, etc. are made of particleboard and other manufactured materials. So says my wife, who has a residential contractors license.

Jonathan Nicholas: How do you distinguish between “PC jobs” and “NPC jobs” and what prevents the PCs from subcontracting out their jobs? A GM should discourage this practice because of the risks and complications of using subcontractors and not because they are “PCs.” ■ I assume that when my character is performing a lengthy task that it effectively removes me, as a player, from the action. As far as “giving up,” this should be a decision of the character based on information my character has, usually reflected by the mechanics. An alternative is simply to ask, “How long does my character think this is going to take?” rather than have the GM corner me into a decision based on a subject of which I personally may have no knowledge or experience.

Simon Reeve: Next time you are online, do a search on checkers and you will find comments like it “is equal to chess as far as depth, beauty and complexity concerns.”² If different gaming skills are important to the campaign, you can make distinct and independent skills for each game; otherwise, why bother? GURPS has one skill for “Physics” and you want to worry about board games?? ■ What you described sounds like the annual cheese rolling races down Cooper’s Hill, though I would not be surprised if there were several other similar races. People injure themselves by chasing after the cheese down the steep gradient. I recently saw it on a television show called “Maximum Extreme” and followed it up by googling on “cheese race hillside.”

Eugene Reynolds: You compare literary analysis to *decoding* where I compare it to *interpretation*. We cannot say what a work “means” without bringing in our own (for lack of a better word) baggage. No literary analysis is done “all alone”—there are always at least two people involved and they may disagree. I do not think we are far apart on this. ■ I do not believe that all fiction describes what the author thinks should happen. Just as “comprehending is not condoning,” describing or imagining is not condoning. Authors do not necessarily condone the (implied or inferred) morality of their work. Surely some authors do advocate the morality of the story and characters they created, but that does not mean that all or even most do. The way I see it, a work in which a murderer “gets away with it” is not promoting murder unless the reader chooses to interpret it that way. Even if a story creates a moral portrait of its own world (not necessarily our world), that does not mean a moral should be drawn from it. ■ Let us address what everyone is really concerned about. Suppose someone writes a very immoral story, (perhaps based on true events, perhaps not), and some reader takes it to heart and acts in a manner consistent with the writing. To what degree is the author accountable for these acts? Should the author be called to answer for the work and the acts it inspired? What actions, if any, should be taken against the author? What actions, if any, should be done to prevent such immoral work from influencing people?

Brian Rogers: This is one of the cool elements of the Storyteller system, though requiring extra successes is not that different from setting a minimum total skill level to succeed.

¹ www.m-w.com

² www.acfcheckers.com/origin.html