

I found it difficult to write anything constructive this month. Instead, I just have comments on issue #332.

Mike Kubit: Welcome! ■ I consider “What they would do if they were there” as the default form of roleplaying. Now, “What they would do if they were the people they are trying to portray” is a different matter. ■ Whether or not a GM should modify the outcome of events based on story or keeping the player in the game, or other factors is a very large discussion. In general, you have to do what works best for your group. To some, fudging for the sake of story ruins the game.

Paul Mason: Something has been bothering me with the notions of assertions and I have discovered that it is actually three things. ■ First is the concept of sharing power, though this does not apply to your discussion so much as what I have seen from others.¹ The notion that any player—namely, the GM—has too much power and that the power of assertion should be spread among the other players seems unjustified. It reminds me of players who had particularly bad experiences with power-mongering GMs, especially in diceless games. For me, it is never an issue of power to me—it is an issue of politeness. I accept the notion that different players have different responsibilities, but nothing ticks me off like gamers who do not know how to share. ■ The second something is subtler. If my character has the advantage in combat, it is perfectly reasonable for me to describe what happens. After all, the fighter with the advantage is in control and the person who controls that fighter controls what happens. The power of assertion does not come from the rules saying I do but from my character. I prefer a bottom-up instead of top-down approach, if you will. ■ You already touched on the third something. Even if you determine *who* has the power to make assertions, you still have not put into place a mechanism for deciding *what* those assertions should be. Boring patterns in combat arise because most of us are not personally familiar with combat and cannot describe it well. Giving narrative control to the player does not mean the narrative is any better or more interesting than when someone else describes what happens. I want rules to help make good decisions and I am not concerned with who describes them. ■ I like the concept of “advantage” that you mentioned because it is natural to frame combat in those terms. Decisions based on relative ability feel very natural to me (and what I have been advocating). But coming up with the rules to determine who has the

¹ In particular, Vincent Baker’s design notes for OtherKind (highlighted by Parenti last issue) are completely off base from my own roleplaying experiences. But then, he is an unabashed Narrativist, and I am not.

advantage (and thus who has the power of assertion) is trickier than it sounds. Any goober (like me) can create a task resolution system, but combat is the acid test for game designers.

Jonathan Nicholas: Rather than classify an assault or vandalism as a hate crime, why not just base sentencing on the likelihood of recidivism? Otherwise, you are saying that crimes against a specific class of people deserve harsher treatment, which goes against the whole concept of “equal protection.” On the other hand, the classes targeted for hate crimes are not protected equally by our justice system; I would prefer to see this problem addressed directly with better enforcement and investigation rather than defining “crimes of hate.”

Lisa Padol: “Taking 10” in d20 parlance is to substitute a die roll with a 10. This represents the character being cautious, playing it safe, and hedging against disaster (rolling a 1). The character can still fail if 10 + skill rank is less than the target number. It is possible to fail at a task by taking 10 when rolling might have been successful; sometimes to succeed, you have to risk failure. Taking 10 works best when the odds of success are better than half. ■ “Taking 20” means “taking as long as it takes” or “I will keep trying until I roll a 20” without the hassle of rolling the dice. Instead of rolling, just compare 20 + skill to the target number. Of course, the character can still fail. You can only “take 20” on tasks which involve no risk (nothing bad happens if you fail and you can keep trying) and are simply a matter of time, like finding a secret door. While you can take 10 to cross an unstable bridge, you cannot take 20. You cannot take 10/20 in combat. ■ I like these rules because they are a natural extension of why we roll dice in the first place. I find the d20 skill system overall quite elegant except where it interfaces with the class/level system (like only rogues can search for traps or track being a feat or a wizard paying double for spot or...). I occasionally think about taking the d20 skill system and building a new character creation/definition and combat system for it.

Eugene Reynolds: When you roleplay, you create the script without rehearsals, retakes, or rewrites (most of the time). Theatrical scripts and movies involve a very different (though related) artistic process. For me, roleplaying is all about process, not product. The art is in the doing—what results may or may not be interesting to an outside party and really I do not care. In fact, if I start caring, I might lose what the other players find interesting.

Jim Vassilakos: A great sin of rpgs is when players fail to roleplay their character’s injuries. Hit locations help even if there are no other rules attached and they are just there for color.