

Getting Creative with Villains & Vigilantes

In this installment I thought I would delve into a treacherous topic filled with pitfalls and certain to have people strongly disagreeing with me.

SAVING THROWS

Saving throws are normally made when something has gone wrong, or when the character is attempting some difficult task. In V&V saving throws are typically made using either 1d20 or 1d%. On a d20, a 1 is always a success, and a 20 is always a failure. This translates to a 5% chance of success even when things are really bad, and a 5% chance of a failure when things are going very well. This is replicated on d% with 01-05 being an automatic success, and 95-100% being an automatic failure.

Most saving throws are also modified somewhat, with a negative modifier making success less likely. Simple saves are not normally needed. Walking down a sidewalk would not normally require a save of any kind. Walking along the same sidewalk during a strong earthquake, however, may require a save versus Agility. Doing the same thing at night may require a modified saving throw versus Agility (perhaps 1d20 versus Agility-4). The more difficult the task, the larger the negative modifier to the roll. This system of adjusting the target value of the saving throw is a simple and effective method for creating reasonable results using dice, until the character's basic characteristic values reach a point of diminished reward. This mechanic also allows characters with very high Basic Characteristic scores to have a reasonable chance at doing something that is nearly impossible for normal pedestrians. An example might be finding an antidote for a new, virulent disease. The GM might make that a save vs Int-22. This makes the effort nearly impossible for most characters, but not for "El Cerebro Gigante" (who has an Intelligence of 60; meaning he would have to roll 38 or less on 1d20 to succeed).

Obviously, there are more benefits from high basic characteristics than just making saving throws easier. They also add to the character's carrying capacity, power, movement rates, damage, accuracy, inventing points, inventing percent, percent to detect hidden objects, percent to detect danger, hit points, and even reactions from other characters. But when it comes to saving throws, there is an upper limit to a characteristic's usefulness. Once a Characteristic reaches 20, the character has a 5% chance of failing no matter what. A character with a stat of 116 also has a 5% chance of failure just like a character with a stat of 19. The question then becomes, what is a GM to do about this built in 5% failure? The simplest method for dealing with the Über-character with a stat of 120*, is for the GM to get creative.

**In order to achieve this level of Agility, a Character would have to take Heightened Agility B at least 4 times. A GM worth his dice would probably try to talk the player out of making*

such a one-dimensional character because he would become a very dull character in short order.

V&V is not a game with "Critical Failures", a character either succeeds or he doesn't. When he fails, he just fails. The rules do not state that he does not fail more spectacularly just because a 20 was rolled, or he succeeded more amazingly because he rolled a 1.

The normal example for this is an agility save vs a fall, wherein a character is walking along a log, and has to make a save to keep from falling off. For the normal guy with an Agility of 10, there is a 50% chance of success. For an acrobatic character with an agility of 19, there is a 95% chance of success. Lastly, the hyper-agile ninja character, with an agility of 120 also has a 95% chance of success. If the normal guy rolls a 20 on 1d20 vs Agility, he just falls off. Likewise for the acrobat if she rolls 20. It's bad luck, but it makes sense. But what if the Ninjoid rolls a 20? This is where the GM should get creative. As I have stated in the past, V&V is one of those games that requires a really good GM.

Dale: Oh, Dude! I rolled a 20!

GM: Way to go, Dale. Okay, Normal Guy and Acrobat, you are in the river looking up at Ninjoid crossing the log to get to the other side. Suddenly a gust of wind hits Ninjoid! He stumbles! As he tries regain his balance, the log rolls and Ninjoid falls!

Dale, what does Ninjoid do? I mean he's got a freaky high agility, he's not going to just fall off a log.

Dale: uhm... he uses his grappling hook.

GM: Sounds good. Roll and agility save. And that's another action so pay 2 power points.

Dale: [rolls d20] I gotta 5, Whew!

GM: Okay, Ninjoid's grappling hook sticks into the log and he is dangling precariously over the icy cold river at the end of the rope.

In the next phase, Ninjoid climbs the rope, and makes it to the opposite end of the log bridge (after making an Agility save).

While some may argue that Ninjoid should never have failed against agility in the first place, it should be pointed out that without the chance of failure, the adventure is not as

enjoyable for the participants. Further, this failure was an opportunity for Dale to do a bit of Role Playing.

Let's look at the same example, but with a different outcome

Dale: Oh, Dude! I rolled a 20!

GM: Way to go, Dale. Okay, Normal Guy and Acrobat, you are in the river looking up at Ninjoid crossing the log to get to the other side. Suddenly a gust of wind hits Ninjoid! He stumbles! As he tries regain his balance, the log rolls and Ninjoid falls!

Dale, what does Ninjoid do? I mean he's got a freaky high agility, he's not going to just fall off a log.

Dale: uhm... he screams!

GM: That's just awesome, Dale... [Rubbing his head and taking a drink from his mighty-gulp soda]. Alright, Ninjoid screams as he falls into the icy cold water. He is swept downstream by the current, past Normal Guy and Acrobat

Brian: I try to catch him

GM: Roll versus Agility. Uhm... no modifiers.

Brian: [rolls 1d20] a nine.

GM: Cool. Ninjoid has just been saved by the clumsiest member of the team.

Dale: Thanks, Guy!

Brian: You owe me one.

In this example there is some role-play and some quick thinking on the part of Normal Guy who manages to prevent Ninjoid from being swept further downstream. In this case Ninjoid's missed save creates an opportunity for another member of the party, and adds to the dynamic between Ninjoid and Normal Guy, making their gaming sessions a bit more interesting.

This mechanic allows for the crazy and unexpected to happen – which is part of what makes RPG's and Comic Books so attractive in the first place, and allows the GM to have fun creating small hurdles for their players to overcome while attempting to accomplish the overall goal of the scenario.

The V&V rules state that it is very important for a GM to read comic books, and that cannot be overstated. During a comic book story arc, the heroes will have numerous minor and major setbacks no matter how powerful or capable they are. That same aspect of good story-telling should also find its way into V&V sessions. The built-in 5% chance of failure serves as a way to kick a complacent GM in the back-side and make him get creative, and therefore make the gaming experience more enjoyable for his players.

This same dynamic allows for a 5% chance of succeeding, regardless of odds (although a good GM will simply state that some things are just not possible). Such rolls allow less-powerful characters the opportunity to succeed when failure seems almost unavoidable. It may not be a perfect mechanic, but it does allow for a more enjoyable game experience.

OTHER METHODS

There are of course other ways to go about making a saving throw. My methods are a little different than those used by other GM's. Basically if the roll is 21 or less vs 1d20, I don't bother unless a failure could result in added story-telling/adventure benefit. There are times when a roll is needed, and there are times when it is not. If you roll a die for everything that happens in an adventure, you are not "ROLE" playing, you're "ROLL" playing. One is fun, one is kinda dull.

Even so, there are some alternate mechanics out there for saves versus a really high Basic Characteristic. In "The **Secret in the Swamp**" Mr. Weick uses a roll of 1d100 vs (Basic Characteristic x 3). And others have also brought up similar ideas. Basically a roll on 1d20 is 5% - so an 18 or less is a 90% chance of success, while a 3 or less is a 15% chance of success. So a save of 1d20 vs Agility (15), would be 75%. Then the same could be said of 1d% vs (Agility x 5). Using this mechanic the GM varies the relative difficulty of a task by changing the multiplier. A very easy save would be 1d% vs (Agility x 10) and a very difficult save would be 1d% vs (Agility x 1), and the normal base save would be 1d% vs (Agility x 5). This is a nice mechanic, and it works, but it still leaves the GM to make a decision about the relative difficulty of the save. Another question the GM has to answer is the rule governing the 5% success/fail on any save.

Another method is described in great detail in the free downloadable document "[TO SAVE OR NOT TO SAVE](#)" by James Bishop which can be found on the FGU website. I'll not go into it here simply because the document is quite well written and stands on its own merits very well. Just go read it and see if it applies to your way of playing V&V. If it does... problem solved.

Uber-Powered Characters:

When I was in college, I played quite a bit of V&V since the winters in Northern Michigan promote indoor activities. One of my players created what I could only describe as a GOD using several instances of Bionics plus Armor B (with 4 additional abilities). "Mechanus" was pretty impressive; heightened everything, a huge ADR, sonic and vibratory attacks. No doubt, this character was BAD @\$\$! He was also amazingly dull. He was nearly unstoppable, rarely missed in combat, and only failed a save on a "20". After one adventure Terry (the player) proclaimed that the character "sucked". He was actually jealous of my buddy Lyle's much less-powerful shotgun-toting magician (I think his name was "Rem-Lock" or something...). Lyle's character fell down, missed shots in combat, got knocked out a few times, and Lyle had a blast!

Terry and I hammered out what powers "Mechanus" really should have, and in the next adventure he lost most of his

abilities (yeah... I used Magneto... don't judge me), and became a pseudo-IronMan. His character was much less powerful, and he ended up having a great deal more fun playing him.

What's the point of this divergence? Well, nothing in V&V can be looked at on its own. The argument that characters with really high stats are punished by being forced to accept a 5% chance of failure is actually valid, but it's only part of the problem. Another part is that a player may have created a character that is far too powerful, probably to the point of being one-dimensional and not terribly interesting. The third issue is that if a player has a character with freakishly high basic characteristics, he really has no room to whine when he fails a save (1 in 20 times), after all, he is getting a lot of other benefits from that high BC (see attached table).

Try to keep in mind that the goal of a session of V&V is not to "win", but to have a good time. With a little creativity, a GM can turn the apparent disaster of an unexpected failed save into a great opportunity for role play, adventure, story-telling, and a memorable gaming session.

universe where all kinds of insane things happen before you even finish your first cup of coffee. The dice do not issue commands; they make suggestions (granted they are rather strong suggestions). If the dice say something should happen when it clearly should not, ignore the dice, or figure a more likely outcome in the event of a failed save. I have always thought of a failed save as an opportunity for even better storytelling, and as a GM, that's a big part of my job (that and bringing the chips and dip). So when in doubt, get creative; you'll have a lot more fun than if you just become a slave to the dice.

As always, this is all just my opinion. I'm not suggesting any house rules or anything. So take it for what it is; the fevered ramblings of a V&V fanboy.

ROLE play vs ROLL play:

V&V is not a game about rolling dice. It is a game about super-powered heroes battling the forces of evil. The dice do not run the game, the GM and players do. The dice are just there to simulate the randomness of life in a comic book

Basic Char	Effects:							
Strength	Hit mod	Power	Movement	Carry Capy	HtH Dmg*	Throw Dist*		
Endurance	Hit mod	Power	Movement	Carry Capy	HtH Dmg*	Heal Rate	Throw Dist*	
Agility	Hit mod	Power	Movement	Dmg Mod	Acc Mod	Initiative	Weap Rng	Throw Rng**
Intelligence	Hit mod	Power	Dmg mod	% Det hid	% Det Dan	Inv %	Inv Points	
Charisma	Reacts							

* - Indirect, based upon Carry Capacity

** - Maximum ACCURATE throwing distance, total distance is (Carry Capy-Item Wt)/10"