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Diceless Hero

by Bob Greenwade

One of the best things about the *HERO System* is that characters don't result from random rolls of dice. Proponents of game systems with random character generation sometimes like to claim their method is "more realistic," but they miss a very important point: *games simply aren't about real life*. They're about *drama and storytelling and adventure*. When you sit down to play a role-playing game, whether it's using the *HERO System* or another system, the typical goal is to emulate your favorite fiction — in the case of *Champions*, superhero comic books (and movies, and television shows).

Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster didn't roll dice to see if Superman was strong; Bob Kane didn't get Batman's brilliance from the roll of dice; Spider-Man isn't super-agile because Stan Lee got a lucky roll on the dice. These characteristics all resulted from their creators' concepts, and gamers expect to do the same with the characters they play. That's why Immobilon is both strong and intelligent, Vroom is fast, and Bombshell is incredibly good-looking but not very bright (to say the least). It's also why Captain Photon flies and shoots energy blasts, Captain Glory knows five different martial arts styles, The Creature has four arms and blue fur, and Phantoma can walk through walls. These things were beyond the characters' control (except for Captain Glory's martial arts; he learned those) — but you, as their creator, have control over it all.

There's one other matter in fiction games don't match. When Batman takes a swing at the Joker, or when Wolverine tries to slice up Sabretooth, whether the hero hits or misses doesn't depend on a roll of dice any more than his agility did to begin with — it depends on the writer's plot decisions. Shouldn't combat in a game designed to emulate the comics follow the same principle?

Well, yes and no. If the player (speaking for his character) says, "I swing at him," the GM shouldn't just decide whether the character hits or misses based merely on whim. Characteristics, Powers, and Skills are there on the character sheet for a reason. Besides, players should have some sense of achievement from beating the bad guys. But having the plot depend on dice rolls can be just as frustrating, especially when the rolls happen to go the way the GM doesn't want them to — never mind the drama-killing time and effort it often takes to tally up rolls, figure BODY, and so forth. A diceless combat system for the *HERO System*, while probably not everyone's cup of tea, can solve some of these problems.

If you adopt (or adapt) this system for use in your games, you probably shouldn't use it in every situation. For example, if two hero teams decide to play softball, you should probably roll dice to evaluate the quality of the pitching and hitting. Still, for cases of good guys versus bad guys, diceless combat and task resolution offers some intriguing advantages.

THE BASIC SYSTEM

Diceless Hero depends on the accompanying *Diceless Combat Table*, which you should use to resolve most combat situations. Here's how you use it.

First, take the attacker's OCV and defender's DCV and calculate the roll the attacker would need to make to hit the target in normal *HERO System* combat. This becomes the *Hit Result* (see the first column in the table). Treat a Hit Result of less than 3 as a 3, and a Hit Result of more than 18 as an 18 (though the GM may decide to simply extend the chart to a more preferred limit, or impose no limit).

From the Hit Result column, read across to the other columns to determine how much damage (if any) the defender takes. If the result is "0," the attack missed altogether (or otherwise had no effect). If the result is a number, multiply the Damage Classes in the attack by that number.

The "Normal STUN" and "Normal BODY" columns are for determining the STUN and BODY caused by Normal Damage attacks. Similarly, the "Killing BODY" and "Killing STUN×" are for determining the BODY and STUN caused by a Killing Damage attack (multiply the BODY by the listed STUN×; the actual minimum is 1, as always, though the numbers in brackets are the base numbers for applying the *Increased STUN Multiple Advantage*).

For special attacks — such as Adjustment Powers, Mental Attacks, AVLDS, NNDs, and so forth — use the Normal STUN column. Flashes, Entangles, and other Powers for which you count the BODY should use the Normal BODY column.

Optionally, Hit Results of 4 and 5 may give penalties to the character's DCV for the remainder of that character's Phase. A Result of 5 gives a -1 penalty; a Result of 4 gives a -2 penalty. (This rule is recommended only if the GM uses critical hit/failure rules.)

Hit Results of 8 or 9 are considered glancing blows.

The Dragons of China

by Michael Surbrook

In Europe, the dragon was a huge scaly beast with fiery, noxious breath, bat-like wings, and an appetite for cows, elephants, and young maidens. The Catholic Church quickly adopted the dragon as a symbol of evil, and made it a stand-in for Satan in sermons, stories, and religious art. It was a creature to be reviled and feared, and never, ever, worshiped.

In China, the dragon's status was almost the complete opposite. Legend has it Emperor Yao, one of the nine mythical emperors of China, was descended from a dragon, while in 3000 B.C. a dragon presented Emperor Pa Kwa with the eight celestial trigrams of the I-Ching. Benevolent beings, dragons were responsible for the weather and, as lords of water, were revered as bringers of rain. The Emperor sat on the Dragon Throne while dressed in the Dragon Robes, and upon death might become a dragon himself, to better watch over his people.

The dragon was one of the four Celestial Beings, a group that includes the Chi'Lin (also known as the Ki-Lin or Kirin, a deer-like animal said to live for a thousand years or more), the Feng Hwang (the Chinese phoenix), and the tortoise. In addition, it was one of the four animals linked to the five directions, each animal having a color, a season, and a specific element associated with it. The Green Dragon represented the east, springtime, and wood; the White Tiger was west, autumn, and metal; the Red Phoenix was south, summer, and fire; while a tortoise-like creature named Dark Warrior represented the north, winter, and water. The fifth direction was the center, which was China itself. It was associated with the color yellow and the element of earth.

Appearance: Physically, the Chinese dragon is the largest of all scaled creatures, a group that includes snakes and fish. It is best described through the "nine resemblance's" which are as follows: "its horns resemble a stag's, its head resembles a camel's, its eyes resemble a demon's (or a rabbit's), its neck resembles a snake's, its belly resembles a clam's, its scales resemble a carp's, its claws resemble an eagle's, its soles resemble a tiger's, its ears resemble a cow's." The end result is a long, thin, four-legged lizard-like creature with a narrow head and a bearded face. On top of the head is an organ known as the *chi'ih muh*, which allows flight. In addition, male dragons have a large pearl under the chin or in the throat. When they speak, dragons are said to have a voice like a great gong (or "jangling copper pans"). Their coloration varies greatly, and dragons may be black, blue, green, red, or yellow. Of these, yellow dragons are held in high

esteem, and are considered superior to all other forms of dragonkind.

A dragon's scales number either 81 or 117, with different reports offering different values. The confusion is due to attempts to balance the dragon's yin and yang. Yin is female, associated with the moon, darkness, wetness, cold, negative energy, and the number six. Yang is male, associated with the sun, light, dryness, heat, positive energy, and the number nine. A tiger is yin; a dragon is yang. Nine times nine equal 81 scales, while six times six equals 36 scales, leading to the idea that the dragon has 81 yang scales and 36 yin scales (for a total of 117). Normally, a dragon is a benevolent being, controlled by its yang essence, but it may allow its yin nature to take over, causing the dragon to become a malevolent destroyer.

Numbers govern more than just a dragon's scales. They may have from three to five claws on their feet, and five-clawed dragons are the province of the Emperor, and only he, or those of his court, may bear the image of a five-clawed dragon on their clothing.

Ecology: A dragon is a very long-lived creature, virtually immortal. They are hatched from eggs, and these eggs (which resemble precious stones) are normally laid in water, where they may remain for upwards of one thousand years. Water seeping from a dragon's egg indicates it is ready to hatch, and the arrival of a newborn dragon is often heralded by darkness, thunder, lightning, and rain.

A newly hatched dragon looks much like a small water snake. After five hundred years, it grows the head of a carp, and is now known as a *kiao*. Over the next thousand years, it grows scales, a long tail, four legs ending in four-clawed feet, and a bearded face. It is now known as a *kiao-lung* or simply *lung*, meaning "deaf," as the dragon has ears but cannot hear. Over the next five hundred years, the *lung* grows horns (apparently allowing it to hear), becoming a *kioh-lung*, or "horned dragon." After another one thousand years the *kioh-lung* grows wings, becoming a *ying-lung*, or "winged dragon."

Dragons are creatures of the water, and tend to live among the clouds of the sky, in the sea, or in deep lakes, pools, and rivers. Those dragons that live in the sea are thought to dwell in magnificent palaces under the water. They love precious stones, and will gladly eat copper, jade, and pearls with relish. In addition, dragons absolutely *adore* the flesh of the swallow, and those people who have recently eaten roasted swallows are advised to not travel across water soon after.