

The Joy Of "4"

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One of my main goals in life, aside from becoming incredibly rich and buying Canada, is to create a nice set of balanced Shadowrun rules. This usually has taken the form of little tweaks and twists here and there which have, over many years, added up to a system of gamemastering in which it is very rare that a PC, or NPC for that matter, enters into a situation in which they are certain to get their ass kicked. An element that has been instrumental in achieving this balance is the replacement of virtually all opposed success tests with the simple target of 4.

Take spell casting, for example. Under the traditional rule structure a mage tossing a powerbolt with a rating of 8 would be certain to waste anybody with a body of 5. I've been meaning to sit down and calculate the actual odds of success for each individual but I keep remembering that I possess no mathematical ability. In any case, anybody who's played knows the result. Just moments ago in order to test my theory I rolled some dice in order to play out the scenario and, using my fingers and toes, counted up a total of 13 success for the mage over the target after five contests. Then I did the same thing, instead using the unresisted target of 4 for both tests. After five contests the mage still came out on top, as would be expected, but this time he only achieved 7 net success over the target.

So what does this mean? It usually means the players will absolutely love the gamemaster for introducing the use of unresisted tests until such time as they become all powerful and want to more easily kick butt. Well, tough shit. In the beginning this rule helps protect the runners from NPCs and later in the game it helps protect NPCs from runners. A balance is achieved. And, most importantly, it makes the game much more fun. How many times, either as a player or a gamemaster, have you had to roll your four dice against a target of something like nine knowing full well that there's a better chance of the CEO of Renreku sending you a Christmas card than of achieving any hopeful amount of success? A target of four is actually reachable and although you probably won't get out of the situation unscathed you won't get out of it with a lone success and a monosword stuck through your head either.

Oh, yeah, all modifiers still apply.