

Alternative rules for base building and information gathering

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Introduction

As I was listening to the first episode of Bayou Beatdown – specifically the base creation part – it occurred to me that forcing characters to roll standard fudge dices regardless of the power tiers for investigating was arbitrary and some how unfair.

It also occurred to me that having several characters rolling dice versus an unknown tier difficulty was challenging if the GM did not want to disclose the difficult tier to keep the players in the dark whereas they succeeded or not.

So I set up to find a way to overcome this difficulty and came with the following rules. Those rules are also well suited for any kind of information research or more generally any test the GM does not want to disclose difficulty tier.

New base building rules

Those rules propose a difficulty scale that allows using investigation skills at their proper tier against a normal difficulty. It does not change the base building mechanism at all.

A few words on statistic

If you are not mathematically inclined, you can directly skip this part to “Setting appropriate difficulty level”.

The average dices value of each tier increases by 3.5.

At normal tier, 4 fudge dices will on average lead to 0 – easy to believe since you have as much chance to roll a +1 than a -1.

At Extraordinary tier, with 3 fudge dices and 1d6, the average jumps to 3.5 – again, easy to demonstrate. You remove one fudge dice with an average value of 0 and replace it with a d6, having an average value of 3.5.

It goes on like that for the rest of the tiers.

Which means that you can use that to calculate a difficulty from one tier to the next by adding or removing 3.5. My proposal is that between Mundane and Extraordinary level, subtracts or adds 3, and 4 between Extraordinary and Superhuman, and so on.

Example: A difficulty of 2 at Extraordinary tiers would equivalent to a difficulty of 5 at normal tiers, and -2 at Superhuman tier. Thus, it is impossible to succeed at normal tier without some solid skills or good aspects, but easy to reach at superhuman tier, even without any skill.

You can use the same tricks to compare the results of a dice roll, without communicating to the player the tier difficulty of his action.

Example: one PC is trying to picklock a seemingly ordinary house. Unbeknownst to him, it is the house of one super-villain grandmother, and his great-son set it up with the best security he could get without his grandma noticing it – Extraordinary 3.

The PC roll is 4 normal fudge dice (he has Burglary +2 at normal tier) and roll an apparently excellent total of 5. Which is the equivalent of 2 at Extraordinary tier. To the PC surprise, the door remains closed.

Obviously in this case the player will immediately get suspicious and understand that this is not an ordinary door. Keeping the tier difficulty hidden would have just been for the surprise effect.

However not disclosing difficulty tier becomes a much more interesting option when the players cannot immediately judge of the results of their actions. Typically, when they are looking for information. Are they getting genuine, useful intel about the defences system of the base they are about to raid or is it all garbage? Purchasing this very expensive hacking system (costing them some favours to be repaid later) looked like a good idea based on their intel, until the PCs sees the first glowing runes on the door...

How would it impact the base building rules ?

First off, the players can use their skills at the proper tier level – which is fair and remove an arbitrary limitation.

Second, the difficulty of the skill rolls needs to be adjusted.

Little segway about the meaning of difficulty and tiers:

At normal tier, a difficulty of 1 or 2 can be achieved even by people without skills but a little bit of perseverance (assuming failing does not lead to unpleasant consequences) – so the info will be known by many people with a little interest in the topics: student writing a paper, local journalist, snitch.

A difficulty of 3 or 4 can reasonably be overcome by people with some skills. It will be information known by people “working in the field”. It can be the local police or gang, a club of hobbyist, a retired teacher with too much time on his hands.

A difficulty of 5 or 6 can only be achieved by specialists and even them will not always succeed. It also corresponds to Extraordinary tier difficulty of 2-3. NSA, CIA and other 3 letters agencies, professors with years of practices in the field, otaku with far too free time for their own goods, occultist dabbling with the genuine stuff at beginner level, mafia boss with fingers in the right pie. Extraordinary tier skill will succeed most of time, but we are talking about a narrow fringe of the population outside super-characters. Regular people won't stumble on this piece of information accidentally: it is too well hidden, you not only need to be looking for it, but you need adequate skills.

A difficulty of 7 or 8 start to be out of reach from the mundane tier without the right aspect: even with a skill of 5, you only have 6% chance of success. Statistically doable, but unlikely. It is the equivalent of Extraordinary tier difficulty of 4-5. Even for Extraordinary skill, it starts to become challenging without the right aspect. Underground expert, special division of the NSA, or super-character starting his career.

A difficulty of 9-10 is out of reach for mundane skill, unless several aspects can be stacked (with a skill of 4 and two aspects, chance of success are 18.5% for a difficulty of 10). Realistically, only people with Extraordinary skill will have a shot (difficulty equivalent or 6-7) but even then, only with a good aspect the success can be guaranteed.

Above 10, it realistically becomes the area of Superhuman level, with an equivalent difficulty of 3. Out of reach for organisation without superhuman to assist them. 3 letters agencies won't have enough super-experts in this field to reasonably have the answer at hand, they will need time to commission the right guy for the problem. Corporations specialised in the relevant field might have a very-high paid super working for them (unless he is running the corporation himself).

Setting appropriate difficulty level

Now let's apply that to base creation rules.

Difficulty of 4 or less

Any information of difficulty 4 or less can be accessed, retrieved or is known easily by 3 letters agencies, mafia boss and other groups with adequate resources. Does it mean that the base is discovered and stripped to the bone? Not necessarily, there are many reasons why such groups would not have acted on the information: missing key elements (they have a good idea of the security details, but location is missing), wrong filing (accidentally or on purpose, hidden by somebody), lack of time, lack of interest (chance of valuable loot assessed as weak), lack of resources (expert baseraiders mafia goons involve in gang war for example). It means that those groups can be contacted (or tricked) to share the information. Obviously, they will be expecting something in return, unless the info is stolen from them.

Alternatively those groups might have placed a sleeping agent in the vicinity keeping an eye on the target, preferring to shadow a group of baseraiders instead of sending assets themselves.

Outside those groups with large resources, individuals with interests in the field will have the right info, or at least part of it. Locals will have the info as well, probably enhanced by colourful rumours.

A difficulty of 4 or less is suitable for any of the following situation:

- Lack of time or interest by the owner to hide this information
- Lack of skills by the owner, lack of associate to improve the situation or reluctance to have anybody assistance
- Information already leaked – through past investigation or publication before Ragnarok
- Status of urban legend
- Direct information can be find after some research (land register, taxes declaration, shipment manifest)

It is very likely that the players might not be the first one to know about this base element.

Difficulty from 5 to 8

Information difficulty between 5 and 8 means that the owner of the base or the current host took some care to hide the info. Dedicated effort is needed to uncover and group clues together to have reliable information.

It is suitable for the following information:

- Minor secondary base (safehouse, hideout) for a hero of Super or Ascendant level
- Main base for a hero of Extraordinary or Super level
- Mostly indirect information can be found, yet it can be considered as direct evidence: paper trail leading to some shell company, information in associate's diary or kept by surviving assistant

Difficulty above 8

Above a difficulty of 8, some aspects of the base remain a mystery as superhuman means were used to conceal it. As much dedication than luck is required to uncover usable pieces of information. For a lot of illegal operations or for supers with enough resources, this is the minimum level of security they would like to have to protect efficiently their base. Unless they are overly confident, have loose lips, have been betrayed or are setting up a trap...

It is suitable for the following information:

- Well established main base for any recent NPC with super or above relevant abilities pertaining to concealing some elements of the base
- Base for any Super prior to Ragnarok with some time/resources/friends to assist in the base installation – realistically anything less would mean open door for their enemies.

Difficulty meaning for each element

Lets look at the 7 elements of a base – and I will use Bayou Beatdown and Silver Dollar Steve base to illustrate every element.

Rule proposal: The closer an investigation roll dice is from the value the more accurate is the information, but if the results is more than 3 points away from the difficulty, nothing valuable was collected.

Location:

A low value means that the location is not really a secret. Maybe there was even interview run in the vicinity of the base. Or it was the location of a famous fight. It could be risky to go to such location, since if the base has not been looted, unsavoury people might be counting on the celebrity of the location to have baseraiders do the dirty job for them.

High value means good likelihood that the base is untouched, full of loot and with all its defence mechanisms in pristine order...

The closer the PCs are from the real location the lower the difficulty becomes as rumors and clues should be more abundant.

Considering that Silver Dollar Steve is setting a very illegal operation, the reason enforcement agencies or Underground have not shut him down yet is because it is hidden well enough. His reputation of alchemist moonshiner allows a rough location, but local investigation is required to pinpoint an accurate location with mundane skills.

Difficulty of 7 from anywhere in the US, dropping to 6 in Louisiana and to 5 in Paradise.

Builder/Owner:

Useful information to infer the type of defences to be expected but also the content of the base. A low value means that the builder bragged about it ("My masterpiece" ! or "the first prototype of my low footprint base"), or he might have received many friends or trapped enemies which leaked the information about who was the real inhabitant of the place ("I have been locked 6 months by the Twin Shadows until I managed to escape!").

A high value means that the builder was killed once he completed the task by the owner, or that the owner wanted to hide something even from his friends so he did not want them to find out that he had this other base.

Here, more than being close to the location, it is asking the right group of people (or looking in the right type of archives) which can decrease the difficulty. Asking spirits about information (using the Arcana skill) on a Scientific Genius is probably not the most successful way to do it.

Silver Dollar Steve moved into the Council of David Bowie mansion. People from the jet-set or the entertainment business might have heard rumours or even been invited in the mansion. Obviously, the Council did not keep the existence of the mansion a secret, neither its owner. However, that it is a Council of Bowie instead a single David Bowie is a big secret.

Difficulty 4 for Bowie, but at least 8 for the Council of Bowie.

Purpose:

A low difficulty means an obvious purpose for the base – either because knowing the owner does not let much doubt about what he is up to or maybe because pictures or even drawings of the inside of the base were found.

A high value will often go hand-in-hand with a mysterious owner. Maybe a super-hero build a prison to keep enemies that he really wanted to keep close to him, or super-villain build a base to protect his family so they could not be used against him. Or the base is old and has been repurposed several times and her original function has been long forgotten (as well as some prototype or dangerous prisoner).

The most likely ways to find clues on what's the purpose of the base is to look at what goods and furniture are delivered. Is it only food? And in which quantity? Why does he

need arcadian wild berries? Here using Research or Network in the right fields (arcana, technology, science or even survival) is the most efficient way.

For anybody knowing Silver Dollar Steve, it is obvious that he is setting a drug factory (difficulty 4). To discover that at the same time, he is experimenting on some hillbillies to have super-powered goons, is already more tricky, he does not leak this info (difficulty 7), he definitely does not want his enemy to know he has an ace up his sleeve. However, to discover that it was previously a base for the construction of Elemental-powered submarine towards the end of the Secession war, it is a piece of knowledge, which is long lost (difficulty 10).

Inhabitants:

A low difficulty means that based on the current owner or the initial builder, it is easy to guess what kind of servants is protecting the base. Alternatively, the inhabitants are not very discreet and the nearby neighbours have seen strange footprints, floating lights or others clues indicating who or what lives there.

A high difficulty is characteristics of inhabitants having discreet ways of travelling around, following clear order of not stepping out... or taking care of any witnesses, leaving a trail of mysterious disappearance.

The crew of Silver Dollar Steve is neither bright nor subtle and like booze. However, they are not really known outside the county. Hence as long as PCs are doing "long-distance" research, the difficulty is relatively high (6). However, if they send somebody on site (assuming they have a fair idea of the location) or call in favour from local informants, it will be much easier to find out the real info (difficulty 4). Rumours of giant alligators are also easy to find (3), however PCs might overlooked it since there are rumours of giants alligators frequently in Louisiana.

But Mama Bear has been much more discreet about her alliance with Silver Dollar Steve (difficulty 7). And finding out which prisoners are locked into the mansion basement is very difficult since Silver Dollar Steve was careful of abducting only creatures which will not be missed by their peers (difficulty 9).

Contents:

Contents is usually the main motivations for Baseraiders to venture in a base and risk their lives.

If the owner and the purpose are known, solid hypothesis can be made on what can be found in the base.

A low difficulty means that the base does not contain any surprise but instead what the PC can logically expect: a scientific genius base will have prototypes, drawings, a sorcerer base dusty scrolls, bound entities, etc.

A downside of a low difficulty contents means that pretty much everybody knows what's inside. Thus those looking for said items might track or even ambush the successful baseraiders if those one are not careful and discreet about their raid. It can also lead to

interesting business proposal: one sorcerer is looking for the Ring of the City of Brass and knew it was hold in the base just raided by the PC. He might be willing to trade high value item for it, possibly offering opportunity to have a 7 to 10 or maybe even a 10 to 10 loot ratio.

A high difficulty means unexpected items stored, highly unstable components, powerful secret prototypes or dirty secret. There is a risk of disappointment if the content assessment is wrong or the raiders might not be well prepared to handle the loot hidden in the base (very bulky items, unstable components needing special containment units).

Silver Dollar Steve is known to be an alchemist, so various magical potions, an athanor and some old books can logically been expected to be found (difficulty 4). However the Elemental-powered submarine prototype is completely unlikely (difficulty 9) to be identified.

Defences:

Overlooking to gather information on this element could be lethal for the baseraiders.

A low difficulty does not mean that the defences are easy to overcome, it just means that it is pretty obvious what is protecting the base. It could mean that some other groups tried their luck and leaked what they found (or their bodies were found and autopsy revealed which weapons were used).

Usually, base owner will never gloat about their defences – it is a bit like handing the key of their base - so low difficulties are less likely to occur than with any other elements.

High difficulty can mean mixed defences systems like a squad of deathbots supported by a few bound natural spirits.

The mansion had natural defences set by the Council of Bowie, a veil of treachery, leading away people who never went to the mansion with a guide. However, there were so many guests, that it is well-known (difficulty 4). But the secret entrance, the illusions, the haunting spirits can hardly be known by people who have not been their since with most of them were put in place by Silver Dollar Steve and his crew.

History:

Possibly, the element that base raiders may overlook. After all, if they know who is the current owner and what is happening, why bother with the past? Well, maybe to be aware that it was built on a nexus of leylines creating a natural gate to the Dreamland. Or that it was sealed because an experiment went pear-shaped.

A low difficulty reduces the risk of any surprise. It can be a base built just a few years prior to Ragnarok and which was not repurposed or not much used.

A high difficulty hides a long history. The location could have been used as a sacred place for an old deity's worship, centuries or millennium ago and the ground is still infused by the power of old, bloody rituals.

The Mansion is known to have housed many parties from Bowie (difficulty 2), some people

might remember that when Bowie purchased this house was because he was interested by the history of old spirits haunting the place (difficulty 5). However nobody remember that it was a secret base for some strange steampunk submarines construction (difficulty 10).

What about higher tier base and higher difficulty?

It is fair to assume that the more powerful a super is, the more powerful are his enemies, the more careful he will be about protecting his base. So it is unlikely that beginner baseraiders will have enough skills to gather meaningful element on main bases from super like Pangloss. Possibly they can spot secondary base like a minor safe house or a hideout, but definitely not Pangloss Vault before they start having abilities in the Ascendant tier.

So the scale keeps going up with difficulty of 12, 15 or more. Obviously at this stage, people with mundane skills trying to gather information will at best get nothing, but at worst could be spotted or set up some pre-warning system, increasing the difficulty to overcome the defences.

Investigation skills of Super or above tier involve means which are not accessible to mundane people: invocation of demons, magical scrying, talking to dead people, alien sensors, ultra-advanced analytical algorithms, mind-reading... Hence to prevent against this type of research, appropriate counter-measures had to be set up: pact with one of Hell's Duke, quantum protection field, world-wide hacking and cleansing, location in another pocket dimension.

That's all, folks !

I hope this proposal will make GM's work easier by putting meaning behind difficulty level.