Awesome VHS Adventures

Awesome VHS Adventures celebrates the strange movies that lurked on video store shelves or that your friends recorded off of basic cable in the 1980s. You can use it to create any sort of low-budget off-kilter adventure movie you want.

Stars

B-movie stars have three traits: name, campiness, and a trademark. The star’s name can either be the name of the character within the movie or the stage name of the star—fans recognize both and tend to use them pretty much interchangeably.

Campiness measures your character’s ability to get through a scene in the most memorable and bizarre way possible. Your star starts with a campiness level of one; the greatest legends of the straight-to-video world have campiness levels of nine or ten. The host will give you one token for each campiness point your star has.

A trademark is a phrase, item, gesture, or feature that makes the star stand above other B-movie stars. Of course, new stars are still building a fan base. If you like you can hold off on naming your star’s trademark and decide during the game what it will be. Maybe an odd turn of phrase grabs the attention of the other players or you run across a chainsaw crossbow at just the right time and know that you’ve found your destiny.

The Host

The host is sort of like the game master in a traditional roleplaying game. In addition to crafting the story and playing the nonplayer characters, though, the host needs to create a persona. Each host needs a kitschy name and a cheesy costume—whatever you can scavenge from dollar stores, thrift shops, and party supply outlets—and appears in character at the table. The host also comes up with the title of each movie based on the plot elements created during preproduction.

Actions

When the outcome of a star’s action is in doubt the player rolls one die for each level of campiness. Even numbers count as successes, and the player gets to reroll even dice and keep adding successes as long as possible. Crom Johnson, for example, rolls three, four, five, and eighteen. He counts two successes, then picks up the four and eighteen and rolls them again for an eight and an eleven. He has three successes now, and picks up the eight for another roll.

In fights or other competitions with characters in the movie, the player compares the star’s total successes with the successes the host has rolled for the opponent. The star wins if the player’s total is equal to or greater than the nonplayer character’s. The star faces some sort of setback if the NPC has more successes.
For other actions the host sets a difficulty level from one to six that the star must tie or beat. Missing the roll doesn’t necessarily mean failure, just that some complication has emerged.

Action rolls play a part in advancing a star’s career. If a star rolls at least twice as high as his or her current campiness the score increases by one point. The host should give the player another token each time the star’s campiness increases.

**Trademarks**

Trademarks give the star a fighting chance in dire circumstances and make the character more memorable to fans. Whenever the player decides to use a trademark he or she gives the host one token and rolls three additional dice during an action, which add and reroll just like campiness dice.

The player describes how the star’s trademark appears on the screen. For example, Luxia Raven has “big hair” as her trademark. She uses her bonus to intimidate her opponent during a game of scorpion backgammon. The player describes how the scene opens with Luxia seated at the table, lights from the rear highlighting her hair and turning it into a glowing teased halo that stands out in the darkness.

Stars can still use trademark items during normal tasks, but using the trademark bonus draws special attention to the object. Dramatic synthesizer music plays when a car weaves around an obstacle, for example, or the camera zooms in as the hero pumps his trusty shotgun.

**Choppy Editing**

Sometimes the story doesn’t make it to the screen exactly as the director intended. Flubs can happen during editing, the production company may slash scenes to get wider distribution, and cable networks gut movies to avoid sex and blood and make room for more commercials. These sloppy cuts can confuse audiences watching in their parents’ basement at two in the morning, but they can be lifesavers for stars.

Spending one token lets a player announce a choppy edit and take control of the narration for a moment, describing how the scene jumps and setting up the next, possibly unrelated, piece of action.

**Preproduction**

The stars and the host work together to create the movie. Everyone sits down and writes adjectives or short descriptive phrases on a pile of notecards, along with a handful of objects, places, and creatures, people, or professions. You should end up with a mix like this:

- Adjectives: 12+ cards
- Objects: 6+ cards
- Places: 6+ cards
- People/Creatures: 6+ cards
The host shuffles the stacks and draws cards to create story elements.

Villain: two adjectives, one person/creature (Canadian drug lord from beyond the grave)
Minion(s): one adjective, one person/creature (feline ninja)
Setting: one adjective, one place (hellish high school)
Innocent bystander: one adjective, one person/creature (sexy poet)
Gimmick: one adjective, one object. (bionic mullet)

The host keeps these combinations secret until they appear in the story.

In addition to sparking the story, the gimmick plays another role. Once per story, each star can use it to get a bonus of three dice (just like a trademark).

You can save unused cards and mix them with the new sets created for future movies to make things more surreal and chaotic.

Icons

Icons are stars whose careers span more than one movie. Icons have the campiness rating that the star had at the end of the last movie. They also have the same trademarks if they are phrases, gestures, or physical traits. Trademark objects only carry over if the new movie is more or less the same genre or if you can find a reasonable substitute (e.g., Obsidian Vance loses his gore blade at the end of a fantasy movie, but picks up a laser sword in a science fiction flick).

© 2014 by Shae Davidson
shaespantry.wordpress.com/
shae.davidson@gmail.com