# TO SAVE OR NOT TO SAVE 



> Variant Save Rules and Task Resolution in Villains and Vigilantes By James Bishop

# VARIANT RULES: <br> TASK \& SAVE RESOLUTION 

In the adventure Final Fight with the Furies, GMs may notice a different expression for saving throws against various effects. It is structured around the likelihood of failure based on raw lethality or difficulty contrasted against the character's attributes. Since the adventure is intended for high level, it is presumed there most characters will likely have multiple attributes above 20.
Rather than trying to resolve tasks with a dice whose range eliminates the value of attribute pips above 20 in the case of a d20, or producing artificial replacement attributes by inflating the attribute with a multiples and then rolling versus percentage (skewing the fairly proportioned chances even further), the character's attribute is weighed against the difficulty in the first place in a simple formula, and then modified by level and expertise.
This rules variant does not invalidate any other saving throw or task resolution mechanic offered in any $\mathrm{V} \& \mathrm{~V}$ resource thus far, but seeks to address more crisply the broad range of character's attributes and also present a bias for experience level. A smooth percentage system is introduced here that allows an even scaling based on large attributes contrasted against level-based challenges.
Villains and Vigilantes is a game that works best when there is a trust level that the GM rules fairly. The game has several open mechanics that are left to the GM's rulings. It is obvious to this writer that having all characters not created equal is something that surely has been and could become a bone of contention for players at an RPG table. In V\&V, character generation with random methods or even deliberate ones produces a certain degree of that disparity and the game certainly places a lot of responsibility on the GM to carry balance. Sometimes in gameplay, the disparities produced in random generation become exposed. One place this becomes apparent is when characters are subject to a save using a d20.

## For example:

In the course of exploring a deep, dark passage that opens into a cavern with a large Buddha-like idol. The GM has all the players roll a Detect Danger roll per the rules. They get no modifiers to this roll because the GM rules that no one has an appropriate sense other than a gut feeling. Moments later, everyone has failed the roll. The GM says, "Because you failed to detect anything was amiss, a trap is sprung! Everyone has to make an Agility save versus d20 or fall into the crevasse which has crumbled open beneath your feet." Fire Giant has an Agility of 8. He's rather worried about the roll. He has a $60 \%$ real chance of failure.

Sidearm, the Mercenary, has an Agility of 17. He's not so worried about the roll. He has just a $15 \%$ real chance of failure.
White Mink has an Agility of 20. She's not so worried about the roll either, having just a $5 \%$ real chance of failure, and is just praying a natural 20 doesn't come up...
Captain Patriot has an Agility of 24. He's not worried about the roll at all, and like White Mink, hopes not to see a natural 20. Captain Patriot has a $5 \%$ imposed chance of failure, and the extra 4 points of Agility are not any extra benefit.
Then there's Lightspeed... He has an Agility of 44 and also has a 5\% imposed chance of failure. He also hopes he won't see a natural 20. No benefit for the other twenty-four points of his Agility is represented. The points that have lost value account for more than half his ability score.

As can be seen, not all save mechanics apply fairly, in fact hardly any based on a character's ability scores will in a consistent way. Characters will nearly always save if their corresponding attribute is 20 or above. Those below value will actually be competing based on a true ratio. In addition, those above the saving dice threshold who truly have different values in more extreme ranges will have been effectively neutralized to the same opportunity and all the 'extra' points of attribute have become inconsequential to the roll.
Some writers have in the past have introduced attribute multiples and/or extra save dice to address these types of gaps between attributes and also to present varying degrees of difficulty; this too can create a disparity in fairness of ratios when dealing with individual players during gameplay. At the GM's discretion, as all rules in V\&V ultimately come down to the GM's decision, these rolls may be modified by degrees of difficulty after the fact, with scaling bonuses directly to the save roll.
This is easily negotiated for experienced GMs who have an idea of what best works for them, but really leaves a new GM who has no experience with the game nothing in the way of consistent measurements or ideas to draw from, no baseline to start from when distinguishing complexities, nor does the previous method have a consistent means to reflect a character's experience or training.
The V\&V Revised Edition allows always for a 5\% automatic failure or success at either end of the range regardless of the save dice type and assumes all saves are rolled against an attribute. It is recommended when using these variant rules that this principal should be considered in the leniency of a failure.


Rather than attempting to build on the d20 mechanic for a save versus a limited range or changing composition of the dice to address changing difficulty levels, the optional mechanic that follows is designed to offer a stable range to accurately portray chance.
Since other methods often require the assessment of difficulty or lethality at some point to modify a character's chances, this system makes the difficulty the constant rather than the variable. Philosophically, this variant contends the difficulty of the task or obstacle doesn't actually change, so shouldn't be treated as a variable after the fact. The tree in the woods that has no one to hear it isn't going to fall any louder when someone is there to listen. What is would be a considerable modifier for the listener would be the ambient noise right around the listener, any physical limitation or handicap, and any active listening skills or training the character themselves has undergone.
The GM is still in control of determining the difficulty of the task or obstacle and should be cautious when setting the difficulty of each save or task. Of course those characters with high or even superior attributes will still have a real advantage, they still retain a realistic relative chance of failure no matter how small.
If the total established difficulty or lethality of a task is divided by the relevant attribute, it will be equal to a ratio of possible failure or success expressed as a percentage. After the difficulty level is established, any modifiers relevant to the character's training or experience with the issue can be applied to modify the percentage and preserve the logical process.
This mechanic levels the playing field and makes each point of a character's attributes relevant before applying a modifier. The basic mechanic goes like this:

## Difficulty/Attribute= \% to Fail.

For example:
Metallon was just poisoned by Lethalisa, who delivered a successful carrier attack with her claws. It was one of two claws in a sweeping attack and after the proper rolls, it also nicked and innocent bystander, whom Metallon was protecting.
In addition to the real damage she rolled in hand-to-hand, her poison may kill its victims if they don't get medical attention. Lethalisa's character sheet specifies the poison first causes unconsciousness and a loss of all their hit points, and then the affected character will take 1d6 points of power damage until they expire unless medical attention is received. It's very powerful and can only be used once. The poison is a cyanide-based neurotoxin, and the GM rules that it could kill an average man if ingested, so he rules it has a lethality rated at 10.
Fortunately, Metallon has a 25 Endurance, so he likes his chances of survival. He has a 10 in 25 chance of the poison have the effect Lethalisa desires, or $40 \%$. This is the chance of failure for Metallon relative to his success or surviving the dose. If Metallon rolls under this percentage on d100, he fails and will suffer the consequences. Fortunately, he rolls a 61 and is spared, only suffering the 6 points of damage from Lethalisa's claws.
The innocent bystander may not be so fortunate. Lethalisa's poison against his frail body has a great chance of having effect. The bystander is actually more healthy than the average person (he works out) and has an Endurance of 12. This gives bystander has an $83 \%$ of the poison taking effect. Obviously, Lethalisa has tailored her poison against to be effective against superhuman foes. Luckily for the bystander, the GM rolls a 92 and the bystander is does not succumb to the poison either.

A table has been provided below for up to difficulty of up to Level 20, bearing in mind that 20 is a superior measurement even for a hero, let alone a normal human.
A poison with Lethality (Difficulty) of 20 according to the expressed terms of its description against a character with an Endurance score of 20 will kill or injure that character $100 \%$ of the time. If the character does not have the Attribute to at least equal the Difficulty, the chance
of failure is in fact at the GM's discretion and is reflected on the table by the initials "GM".
GMs should acknowledge the impossible in some rare circumstances, but even this shouldn't negate gameplay or roleplaying opportunities. If a character can save another who has just ingested a lethal poison by absorbing it into their own body, the character knowingly may die, but this is the action of a hero and the GM may reward the role play in some way. Perhaps the effects are not instantaneous and allow the character to make a few more heroic actions before they expire or perhaps other factors will be introduced to mitigate the effect. Great drama and gameplay can be gained in the GM's discretion altering the chances of survival for the heroic chap that dives in front of that bullet.
GMs can also use this versatile table to resolve skill checks based on knowledge areas. For a character performing a task that would be considered an 'every man' skill, a Difficulty of 1 or 2 is suggested depending upon the complexity. Performance of a competency in a background skill area one is familiar with would be a Difficulty of 1 or 2, while unfamiliar tasks which require certain knowledge would be a Difficulty of 4 in the same vein that most constructs in V\&V operate at level 4 by default. These examples are suggested as base ranges and may change depending on circumstances.
A GM should feel free to gauge any added ease or difficulty and adjust accordingly. If a skill is being tested by a character, it is likely the GM can slide the Difficulty up or down on the table as is reasonable and if applicable apply Heightened Expertise or Training, whereas each +1 of Heightened Expertise or Training would modify the roll $5 \%$ in the character's favor. Note that Heightened Expertise is by standard definition in the V\&V Revised Edition specified as applicable for weapons and weapon groups, but in the same spirit for purposes of enhancement in the resolution of skills could represent specific expertise with other items, tools or tool groups.

In the case of opposed checks, the level of the opposing character's actions or skill would certainly be a factor. For each level of difference, the difficulty should advance 1 factor up or down one column accordingly on the table.
For example: An electromechanical lock guards a villain base. A level 8 villain has actively encrypted the electromechanical lock with the appropriate training. A 4th level character with an Intelligence of 12 and the appropriate skill or background attempts to decrypt/deactivate/pick the same lock. Since he has the appropriate skill the GM rules the base difficulty for the task is level 2 and since he is 4 levels below the level of the person who set up the lock, he will be at +4 Difficulty on the table. The hero has a final difficulty of 6 on the table and his Intelligence of 12 affords him a $50 \%$ chance to fail to decrypt and open the lock. Had the villain not opposed the hero's action, there would only be a $17 \%$ chance of failure. If the hero possessed and applied the aforementioned Heightened Expertise to his roll, the hero would then have only a $30 \%$ chance to fail.
An opposed skill check against a weaker level individual yields a reciprocal advantage making the task easier as against a more skilled foe makes the task more difficult. But there may be cases where new technology or developments may not be known by a journeyman who has been performing the skill for years, likewise there may be situations that the actual process of a task is still complex enough that level might not be a factor.
If a character fails on a task they may, given time and circumstance, make a subsequent attempt. For each subsequent attempt, add $5 \%$ to the failure rate. If the attempt chance reaches $100 \%$ or more, the character may not make another attempt!
A secondary consideration may be if a roll fails to succeed versus the required difficulty, but the result on the dice succeeds at a lesser difficulty, a diminished capacity or effect may occur. While not always producing a desirable outcome, the result may still be beneficial to the character in some form and thus present the GM and player another role-playing opportunity!

LETHALITY RATING (Poisons/Toxins/Virus/Disease/Etc.)/

|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1 | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 2 | 50\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 3 | 33\% | 67\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 4 | 25\% | 50\% | 75\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 5 | 20\% | 40\% | 60\% | 80\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 6 | 17\% | 33\% | 50\% | 67\% | 83\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 7 | 14\% | 29\% | 43\% | 57\% | 71\% | 86\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 8 | 13\% | 25\% | 38\% | 50\% | 63\% | 75\% | 88\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 9 | 11\% | 22\% | 33\% | 44\% | 56\% | 67\% | 78\% | 89\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 10 | 10\% | 20\% | 30\% | 40\% | 50\% | 60\% | 70\% | 80\% | 90\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 11 | 9\% | 18\% | 27\% | 36\% | 45\% | 55\% | 64\% | 73\% | 82\% | 91\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 12 | 8\% | 17\% | 25\% | 33\% | 42\% | 50\% | 58\% | 67\% | 75\% | 83\% | 92\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 13 | 8\% | 15\% | 23\% | 31\% | 38\% | 46\% | 54\% | 62\% | 69\% | 77\% | 85\% | 92\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 14 | 7\% | 14\% | 21\% | 29\% | 36\% | 43\% | 50\% | 57\% | 64\% | 71\% | 79\% | 86\% | 93\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 15 | 7\% | 13\% | 20\% | 27\% | 33\% | 40\% | 47\% | 53\% | 60\% | 67\% | 73\% | 80\% | 87\% | 93\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 16 | 6\% | 13\% | 19\% | 25\% | 31\% | 38\% | 44\% | 50\% | 56\% | 63\% | 69\% | 75\% | 81\% | 88\% | 94\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM | GM |
| 17 | 6\% | 12\% | 18\% | 24\% | 29\% | 35\% | 41\% | 47\% | 53\% | 59\% | 65\% | 71\% | 76\% | 82\% | 88\% | 94\% | 99\% | GM | GM | GM |
| 18 | 6\% | 11\% | 17\% | 22\% | 28\% | 33\% | 39\% | 44\% | 50\% | 56\% | 61\% | 67\% | 72\% | 78\% | 83\% | 89\% | 94\% | 99\% | GM | GM |
| 19 | 5\% | 11\% | 16\% | 21\% | 26\% | 32\% | 37\% | 42\% | 47\% | 53\% | 58\% | 63\% | 68\% | 74\% | 79\% | 84\% | 89\% | 95\% | 99\% | GM |
| 20 | 5\% | 10\% | 15\% | 20\% | 25\% | 30\% | 35\% | 40\% | 45\% | 50\% | 55\% | 60\% | 65\% | 70\% | 75\% | 80\% | 85\% | 90\% | 95\% | 99\% |
| 21 | 5\% | 10\% | 14\% | 19\% | 24\% | 29\% | 33\% | 38\% | 43\% | 48\% | 52\% | 57\% | 62\% | 67\% | 71\% | 76\% | 81\% | 86\% | 90\% | 95\% |
| 22 | 5\% | 9\% | 14\% | 18\% | 23\% | 27\% | 32\% | 36\% | 41\% | 45\% | 50\% | 55\% | 59\% | 64\% | 68\% | 73\% | 77\% | 82\% | 86\% | 91\% |
| 23 | 4\% | 9\% | 13\% | 17\% | 22\% | 26\% | 30\% | 35\% | 39\% | 43\% | 48\% | 52\% | 57\% | 61\% | 65\% | 70\% | 74\% | 78\% | 83\% | 87\% |
| 24 | 4\% | 8\% | 13\% | 17\% | 21\% | 25\% | 29\% | 33\% | 38\% | 42\% | 46\% | 50\% | 54\% | 58\% | 63\% | 67\% | 71\% | 75\% | 79\% | 83\% |
| 25 | 4\% | 8\% | 12\% | 16\% | 20\% | 24\% | 28\% | 32\% | 36\% | 40\% | 44\% | 48\% | 52\% | 56\% | 60\% | 64\% | 68\% | 72\% | 76\% | 80\% |
| 26 | 4\% | 8\% | 12\% | 15\% | 19\% | 23\% | 27\% | 31\% | 35\% | 38\% | 42\% | 46\% | 50\% | 54\% | 58\% | 62\% | 65\% | 69\% | 73\% | 77\% |
| 27 | 4\% | 7\% | 11\% | 15\% | 19\% | 22\% | 26\% | 30\% | 33\% | 37\% | 41\% | 44\% | 48\% | 52\% | 56\% | 59\% | 63\% | 67\% | 70\% | $74 \%$ |
| 28 | 4\% | 7\% | 11\% | 14\% | 18\% | 21\% | 25\% | 29\% | 32\% | 36\% | 39\% | 43\% | 46\% | 50\% | 54\% | 57\% | 61\% | 64\% | 68\% | 71\% |
| 29 | 3\% | 7\% | 10\% | 14\% | 17\% | 21\% | 24\% | 28\% | 31\% | 34\% | 38\% | 41\% | 45\% | 48\% | 52\% | 55\% | 59\% | 62\% | 66\% | 69\% |
| 30 | 3\% | 7\% | 10\% | 13\% | 17\% | 20\% | 23\% | 27\% | 30\% | 33\% | 37\% | 40\% | 43\% | 47\% | 50\% | 53\% | 57\% | 60\% | 63\% | 67\% |
| 31 | 3\% | 6\% | 10\% | 13\% | 16\% | 19\% | 23\% | 26\% | 29\% | 32\% | 35\% | 39\% | 42\% | 45\% | 48\% | 52\% | 55\% | 58\% | 61\% | 65\% |
| 32 | 3\% | 6\% | 9\% | 13\% | 16\% | 19\% | 22\% | 25\% | 28\% | 31\% | 34\% | 38\% | 41\% | 44\% | 47\% | 50\% | 53\% | 56\% | 59\% | 63\% |
| 33 | 3\% | 6\% | 9\% | 12\% | 15\% | 18\% | 21\% | 24\% | 27\% | 30\% | 33\% | 36\% | 39\% | 42\% | 45\% | 48\% | 52\% | 55\% | 58\% | 61\% |
| 34 | 3\% | 6\% | 9\% | 12\% | 15\% | 18\% | 21\% | 24\% | 26\% | 29\% | 32\% | 35\% | 38\% | 41\% | 44\% | 47\% | 50\% | 53\% | 56\% | 59\% |
| 35 | 3\% | 6\% | 9\% | 11\% | 14\% | 17\% | 20\% | 23\% | 26\% | 29\% | 31\% | 34\% | 37\% | 40\% | 43\% | 46\% | 49\% | 51\% | 54\% | 57\% |
| 36 | 3\% | 6\% | 8\% | 11\% | 14\% | 17\% | 19\% | 22\% | 25\% | 28\% | 31\% | 33\% | 36\% | 39\% | 42\% | 44\% | 47\% | 50\% | 53\% | 56\% |
| 37 | 3\% | 5\% | 8\% | 11\% | 14\% | 16\% | 19\% | 22\% | 24\% | 27\% | 30\% | 32\% | 35\% | 38\% | 41\% | 43\% | 46\% | 49\% | 51\% | 54\% |
| 38 | 3\% | 5\% | 8\% | 11\% | 13\% | 16\% | 18\% | 21\% | 24\% | 26\% | 29\% | 32\% | 34\% | 37\% | 39\% | 42\% | 45\% | 47\% | 50\% | 53\% |
| 39 | 3\% | 5\% | 8\% | 10\% | 13\% | 15\% | 18\% | 21\% | 23\% | 26\% | 28\% | 31\% | 33\% | 36\% | 38\% | 41\% | 44\% | 46\% | 49\% | 51\% |
| 40 | 3\% | 5\% | 8\% | 10\% | 13\% | 15\% | 18\% | 20\% | 23\% | 25\% | 28\% | 30\% | 33\% | 35\% | 38\% | 40\% | 43\% | 45\% | 48\% | 50\% |
| 41 | 2\% | 5\% | 7\% | 10\% | 12\% | 15\% | 17\% | 20\% | 22\% | 24\% | 27\% | 29\% | 32\% | 34\% | 37\% | 39\% | 41\% | 44\% | 46\% | 49\% |
| 42 | 2\% | 5\% | 7\% | 10\% | 12\% | 14\% | 17\% | 19\% | 21\% | 24\% | 26\% | 29\% | 31\% | 33\% | 36\% | 38\% | 40\% | 43\% | 45\% | 48\% |
| 43 | 2\% | 5\% | 7\% | 9\% | 12\% | 14\% | 16\% | 19\% | 21\% | 23\% | 26\% | 28\% | 30\% | 33\% | 35\% | 37\% | 40\% | 42\% | 44\% | 47\% |
| 44 | 2\% | 5\% | 7\% | 9\% | 11\% | 14\% | 16\% | 18\% | 20\% | 23\% | 25\% | 27\% | 30\% | 32\% | 34\% | 36\% | 39\% | 41\% | 43\% | 45\% |
| 45 | 2\% | 4\% | 7\% | 9\% | 11\% | 13\% | 16\% | 18\% | 20\% | 22\% | 24\% | 27\% | 29\% | 31\% | 33\% | 36\% | 38\% | 40\% | 42\% | 44\% |
| 46 | 2\% | 4\% | 7\% | 9\% | 11\% | 13\% | 15\% | 17\% | 20\% | 22\% | 24\% | 26\% | 28\% | 30\% | 33\% | 35\% | 37\% | 39\% | 41\% | 43\% |
| 47 | 2\% | 4\% | 6\% | 9\% | 11\% | 13\% | 15\% | 17\% | 19\% | 21\% | 23\% | 26\% | 28\% | 30\% | 32\% | 34\% | 36\% | 38\% | 40\% | 43\% |
| 48 | 2\% | 4\% | 6\% | 8\% | 10\% | 13\% | 15\% | 17\% | 19\% | 21\% | 23\% | 25\% | 27\% | 29\% | 31\% | 33\% | 35\% | 38\% | 40\% | 42\% |
| 49 | 2\% | 4\% | 6\% | 8\% | 10\% | 12\% | 14\% | 16\% | 18\% | 20\% | 22\% | 24\% | 27\% | 29\% | 31\% | 33\% | 35\% | 37\% | 39\% | 41\% |
| 50 | 2\% | 4\% | 6\% | 8\% | 10\% | $12 \%$ | 14\% | 16\% | 18\% | 20\% | 22\% | 24\% | 26\% | 28\% | 30\% | 32\% | 34\% | 36\% | 38\% | 40\% |
| 51 | 2\% | 4\% | 6\% | 8\% | 10\% | 12\% | 14\% | 16\% | 18\% | 20\% | 22\% | 24\% | 25\% | 27\% | 29\% | 31\% | 33\% | 35\% | 37\% | 39\% |

## ATTRIBUTE <br> SCORE



