

Patrick Riley

www.sinisterthings.com <> patrick@sinisterthings.com  
101 Redding Rd. #C4 <> Campbell, CA <> 95008

---

## Ignorable Theme for Issue #369

---

### Roleplaying A Leader

In my early rpg experience, the leader was a thankless job and the other players made it their goal to make the leader's life miserable. Or at least it seemed that way.

In an early MechWarrior game, I was the head of the company in charge of the other PCs. The other players, teenagers like me, were only interested in sneaking off base, stealing stuff, getting into bar fights, and other such hijinks and displays of youthful exuberance. Meanwhile, I was reprimanded by my NPC commanders for not keeping them in line even though the GM enabled their behavior. (Hello! Where are the MPs?!?) At one point, my character had spent 36 hours without sleep dealing with their shit in between outside invasions.

At DunDraCon, I was once placed in charge of leading a group through the Tomb of Horrors module. Half of them were halflings of the "let's do random shit and make trouble because that's what we do" variety. Those players had fun. I didn't.

The biggest problem with being "party leader" is that it assumes that the other PCs (and their players) will accept being lead. This can be a sharp contrast to the cooperative, quasi-democratic spirit of rpgs or the notion that players should be free to do whatever they want. This (almost) inevitably leads to a conflict between players. Even delegation of responsibilities and handing out tasks to teammates can result in harsh disagreements and clashes of personalities. You have to manage things on both a character and a player level; this is what I find most challenging.<sup>1</sup>

In my DC Heroes campaign, I am playing the duly elected leader of the group. Having a leader is necessary to keep the team focused and to be the public spokesperson. My character, Arc, is the only one with military training and the Leadership advantage (which allows him to give other PCs Hero Points for actions). He is also one of the newest members of the group and is still feeling out how to manage and lead these civilian heroes, two of whom are teenagers. This is the first time Arc himself does not have a superior from whom he takes orders and is not used to making strategic decisions. One annoyance is that I have to include the entire group in situations where I do not feel the entire group is neither necessary nor desired. Two of the PCs are in high school, which makes scheduling difficult.

In my Changeling campaign, I am playing the 15 year-old queen, Charlie, who is not much of a leader. Everyone accepts her as the queen, but few NPCs like

it and most are openly passive-aggressive or hostile about it. She is out of place in the politics of the court, as am I.<sup>2</sup> She has the charisma to be a leader, but does not like making decisions for people. She tries to keep the Seelie and Unseelie court working together as best she can while wishing it were someone else's job. She assumed the position in a time of crisis, and had assured people it was only temporary; with the crisis almost completely over, it is time for her to make a decision. Thankfully, she is not the *party* leader. The campaign is fairly freeform and does not require that everyone act as a unified group. Thank God.

In my D&D campaign, there is no leader, but we are supposed to be unified. Forced into service but not given any specific tasks, there is little focus within the group and no one wants to step forward to be leader. I fear it may fall upon me simply by default. I am not happy at that prospect not only because of my position in the other two campaigns (same players in all three campaigns), but also because I'm playing a chaotic good introverted healer.<sup>3</sup>

Should a group have a leader? Some should, others not so much. It certainly is not an absolute requirement.

What is the player playing the leader responsible for doing? Playing the leader. The leader character can have many responsibilities such as maintaining focus, setting goals, mediating conflict, coordinating tactics, etc.

What is a good leader like? Different people respond well to different types of leadership and different situations require different types of leadership. It was said here recently that a good leader in wartime may not be a good leader in peacetime.

What is a bad leader like? Any played by me. : )

---

## Comments on Issue #368

---

### Myles Corcoran

I am not very good at coming up with cultural backgrounds. I am not very good at coming with game worlds in general. ...

It occurs to me that I find most game settings boring. The more rich and detailed a setting is, the more I am turned-off by it. This is especially true when the place is chock full of races, clans, tribes, houses, etc. There is no setting, published as an RPG or not, which calls to me creatively. And this is certainly reflected in the worlds I create, which never feel inspired and never make it past the "here is the basic idea" stage. My muse is silent.

Rather, I think my strengths lie elsewhere. I am good with characters, I think. And I am good at creating specific scenarios and premises that work well for a convention game of four to eight hours or a brief campaign. If I feel a connection with a character, I can create interesting situations for that character, morphing the background as needed. But I have little sustained in-

---

<sup>1</sup> And not a fun kind of challenging, but a "why do I keep putting myself through this every week" kind.

<sup>2</sup> See my website/blog about Changeling Politics.

<sup>3</sup> He's a gnome. He's a witch. He's a gnomewich....

terest or talent creating the world in the absence of PCs because it is the characters, not the setting, that holds my interest.

When I do connect with a setting, it is usually with the thought of playing a character there, which is not very useful to me as a GM.

... Because all the races are scattered across the world, there is local variation in culture. But then again, the world itself would probably have a fairly homogeneous culture.

A 50-year copyright is long, but much shorter than they are now. I do not think we will ever see legislation to set copyrights that last for less than 50 years.

The Friday night game I run lasts 4 to 5 hours. The weekend campaigns I play in last 6 hours.

The original Castle Falkenstein rules state that characters begin with 1 Great ability, 4 Good abilities, and 1 ability rated as Poor. In *Comme Il Faut*, the author explains, "This was to foil min/maxers and force them to roleplay, not just build supercharacters." The supplement then goes on to present a way for players to take additional Poores to pay for better abilities as "An alternate, Number Cruncher's Variation." The example is someone adding 2 Poores to increase an ability from Good to Exceptional. I stand by original statement that having 12 abilities rated at Poor is against the spirit of the rules. Should the rules explicitly forbid such behavior? Probably. But it is a matter of scale. Another player had taken 5 Poores and felt guilty.

## Michael Cule

I see your Gregorian Calendar observation about Yrth was noticed by SJ Games. and it has legs. See the April 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Daily Illuminator.

## Robert A. Dushay

Because the fantasy races I outlined are closer to elementals than traditional Tolkien-esque races, I wanted to avoid any term which carried too much fantasy rpg baggage. *Dwarf* is a perfect example of a name that would be wholly inappropriate. Since we have a set of terms from a 16<sup>th</sup>-century alchemist, I used those by default, even though they carry their own baggage. The use of *gnoll* came about because I used the term 15 years ago to refer to a similarly designed race.

I think it would be thematically appropriate if gnomes had to incorporate some small amount material (like a seed) from their own bodies into their children.

The issue of souls and the afterlife is in a bit of crisis right now as I am struggling with two contrary notions, as it applies to the human religions. I think the elementals believe (truthfully) that they are all part of a greater force/power/energy to which they return upon death. Gnomes return to the earth, sylphs the sky, etc.

Our DC Heroes campaign suffers from the problem of distractions you described to Lee. So many things are happening in the background that we were getting distracted very single session. A discussion allowed us to reach an understanding with the GM that the PCs need not involve themselves in every background detail/plot/crisis simply because they came across it.

## Sinister Things

These background plots tend to move forward at a pace so high it threatens to exceed my threshold of disbelief while simultaneously slowing game time to a crawl.

## Louis La Mancusa

Get thee to [www.badastronomy.com](http://www.badastronomy.com).

You don't think the Powerball is faked? Relatively speaking, it would be **so easy** to do, much more so than a moon landing.

## Brian Christopher Misiaszek

Your presentation sounded interesting. Ending on time (or even early) is one of the keys to success. The lifestyle problems and dangers you witnessed seem to indicate a need for regular visits by someone, not necessarily an M.D., to monitor such things.

I have the good fortune to live in an area that has a robust selection of game stores. There are 5 that I consider within reasonable driving distance (< 30 minutes) and many more within the greater Bay Area. I do not go to game stores to socialize or to play games, and my gaming needs would be equally serviced by a good online retailer or purchasing from publishers directly, so I do not really represent the target customer for game stores.

## Lisa Padol

Like you, I prefer practical results to terminology. And the results I want are to play an interesting character, doing interesting things, and interacting with other interesting characters. This is why, by the way, other players' uninteresting (or offensive) characters can reduce my enjoyment of the game. But I accept that what is interesting to me is not interesting to most. But then, I like dunking french fries into milk shakes.

To me, "creating stories" is a side-effect and not my primary goal. I find most stories told through roleplaying far less interesting than the roleplaying itself. Character creation does not stop when the game starts. It is an ongoing process with characters evolving and developing over time. I like seeing how things change over the course of the game. I like exploring elements of the character while I am making them, to find myself walking down paths and directions I had not anticipated. How is this not a creative agenda?

Because it has a bank, from which players can gain money without taking it from another player, Monopoly is not purely zero sum. Granted, it can be generalized to an  $n+1$  zero sum game by including the bank, but the bank cannot win the game (unlike real life).

## Brian Rogers

I believe the term is *punctuated* equilibrium.

The only edition of Gamma World I have is the 3<sup>rd</sup>, so I do not have much to add to your system discussion. Nor do I remember anything from the setting except the gonzo random power list. Like V&V, it was fun to roll up random powers, but I never managed to actually play the game.