

## Making PCs for Convention Games

I just had an epiphany of sorts. A few days ago while I was making the PCs for my Savage Worlds game I'm running at Celesticon over Labor Day, I was feeling burned out on Savage Worlds.<sup>1</sup> It occurred to me then that it is due in part to all the characters I have made for convention games; after so many iterations, the sameness of the system starts to bog me down. There is nothing new to discover about the system and everything feels like I've done it before.

It occurs to me now that this might have happened to me before, with BESM and Buffy/Angel. Now, because I have a preference for games that aren't too complex, I run out of "discovery" faster than if I was playing more complicated systems. If I ran D&D or WoD, I could build a 6 different PCs with 6 different supplements.

Making PCs for conventions is usually a pretty laborious process and almost always the first thing I focus on when preparing for the game. After all, even if I run the game from jumbled, half-finished, hand-written notes,<sup>2</sup> at least the players will have their characters ready. Having players create PCs for the game always takes too long for my liking. In some cases, it was a sign of an ill-prepared GM. As a player, I'd rather be handed a character than forced to make one up on the spot; for whatever reason, my off-the-cuff PCs feel more alien to me than PCs made by someone else.

One of the things that makes character creation take so long is balancing the 6+ PCs such that each has a niche that isn't overshadowed by another while at the same time allowing for redundancy in case not all of them end up in the game. I have an aversion to running (N)PCs; otherwise, I wouldn't worry about the latter so much.

The other time consuming part is writing the background. When I'm being ambitious and have very clear mental images of the characters, will write a page of background and "Here's what you think of the other PCs," assuming they aren't strangers, of course. (I find that a page of setting background and a page of PC background is about the limit that many players can take before they start getting information overload, though I know of GMs who give out a lot more.) Other times, I'll just give a paragraph of very general information or a description of what the character is like, to give players a hook as a starting point for roleplaying.

I never put that much work into NPCs and don't get burned out. Rarely do I create them as I would PCs; all I really need are the important abilities and some mental notes on personality, motivation, etc.

1 Although this is also tangled with the creative funk caused by the job hunt (which is still ongoing as I write this).

2 We'll all just pretend that I *never* do that... ::cough::

## Comments on Issue #431

### Myles Corcoran

In our D&D game, I haven't told anyone that my PC has a crush on the pseudo-PC cohort of another PC. Despite being a masterful scout responsible for the most kills in the party, he lacks the confidence to approach her and reveal his affection. I'm enjoying the roleplaying challenge of playing someone who acts smitten, but doesn't want to give anything away; I'm also enjoying seeing who picks up on it in-character. Yes, if I actively involved the players in this sub-plot, we could collaborate on the drama, but then we'd miss out on the surprises and spontaneous reactions.

Dominant Species is designed to be a long game, so there is a limit to how quickly it can play. 4-5 hours seems typical, despite the 3-hour limit on the box.

### Robert A Dushay

Re Narcissist & Continuum, so you tease us by stating you've been told What's Going On, but you don't share? :P

RYCT Lisa, SotC also has a skill list that can help give players ideas. It's (thankfully) much shorter than GURPS'. In FATE-ish games, I struggle to come up with good Aspects.

### Lee Gold

RYCT me, multigenerational games like yours certainly exist, but are hardly the norm. Most epic adventure stories are resolved well before the protagonists have to worry about the effects of old age.

RYCT Nathan, I read your paragraph on sexual stimulation and orgasm as a way to cope arthritis<sup>3</sup> to my wife and she just glared at me. :)

### Spike Y Jones

RYCT me, I'm pretty ignorant when it comes to silent movies. But wasn't the acting much more animated and exaggerated to convey emotion and meaning without relying on cards to tell the audience what the characters were thinking and feeling?

Every game designer has to decide where to draw the line between skill levels. Is a 5-step scale enough? Is 100 too many? And do you break up skills into discrete sub-skills? Of two Journeymen woodworkers, one might be better at carving, while the other excels at staining. Unless your rpg is about woodworking, these fine distinctions are probably meaningless.

When most people talk about the supernatural, they seem to attribute definite causes to distinct effects. That cold chill was caused by a ghost. My team won because I wore my lucky shirt. Those lights in the sky are caused by alien spacecraft. Indeed, they expect

3 She has rheumatoid arthritis.

these phenomena to be repeatable and predictable (and ignore evidence to the contrary).

RYCT Lisa, if a convention scheduling system was such that you didn't have to strategize and you could always get the games you want, then it is probably under-attended.

RYCT Steven, "objective and measurable" existence of gods might not have changed the history depicted in the Old Testament, but that text isn't exactly objective and much of it lacks measurable evidence.

RYCT Nathan, I've heard that landing a plane is the hardest part of flying. If true, there could definitely be a threshold of skill wherein one could take off and fly a plane, but not land it. But again, do we care about those sub-skills?

### **Lisa Padol**

LOL @ "He's <THUNK> Good!"

RYCT Brian, the breakdown in communication and keeping quiet until a breaking point was reached is exactly that happened with Andrew and our gaming group. OTOH, the sudden break was probably less painful in the long run than hearing his rants. He suffers from conservative male martyrdom.

Re Igtheme, good point about including a Judaism analog if a setting has Christianity and Islam analogs.

### **Brian Rogers**

RAE Mechs & Matrimony. Though I have neither read or seen the Austin source material, I liked the design choices you made for character creation. Will there be stats for suitors, measuring how suitable they are? I need some examples of the dice mechanics in play before I fully understand them. In an opposed test, would it be possible to deliberately tank your roll such that you lose, but scandalize your opponent?

### **Nathan Wagner**

Because I can imagine someone who is quite skilled at a particular activity or profession, yet be otherwise average, such as a mechanic with 20 years of experience, I do not like putting a hard limit on skill levels based on their associated attributes.

In BRP-based games, the game awards players who find a use for all their skills by allowing them a chance to advance them every session. This can lead to "golf bag of weapons" syndrome and other silliness. In *Interstellar*, you could run into a situation in which to advance one skill, they'd be forced to reduce another that they used that very session.

Rolemaster (and Spacemaster) had players roll their attribute scores (which could increase each level) as well as their maximum attribute scores (which was often at or near the value they started at).

If you invite me over for a roleplaying game session and there's some sort of interactive story-telling activity going on, I'm going to be confused and disap-

pointed **not** because you aren't playing a *game*, but because you aren't *roleplaying*.

I distinguish movies from games not because movies lack *competition*, but because they lack *play*. With very few exceptions, movies are passive, non-interactive activities.

What you don't want in a roleplaying campaign seems to include a lot of roleplaying. How much in-character social interaction with PCs and NPCs do you want? And what kind?

I do not think that Amber DRPG breaks if you use some other character creation method (namely, the attribute auction). You can have single blind bids (just put points in what you want), fixed rungs on the ladder (say, every 5 points), and/or completely GM-created, amnesiac PCs that the players have to discover in play (just like Corwin).

I think that if a lifepath-based character creation system yields N skill points per year, the campaign should have the same rate of progression.

What is your opinion of *Mongoose Traveller*? How does *Interstellar* improve upon it or do what *Traveller* cannot?

RYCT Lisa, I think there are some types of GURPS characters that you cannot create using OTE. Because you lose so much specificity going from GURPS to OTE, several abilities, skills, etc. simply get lost in the translation. By that same token, it can be very difficult to capture all the implied abilities of an OTE character with GURPS.

You say that most games separate character creation from the *rest of the rules*. But I think the key is that the rules for character creation are *rules*, whether you put them in the front of the book, in the middle of the setting chapters, or as an appendix. Or if you have 3+ different sets of character creation rules to follow. Your previous statements had made it sound as if you didn't consider character creation to be rules at all.

RYCT Robert, one of the goals of immersion-focused roleplayers is to blur the line between the PC and the player such that the dialog does come from (or has the illusion of coming from) the character.

### **Steven D Warble**

Creating a Holy Avenger as a bastard sword is just cruel, since the party paladin will have to spend a feat to use it without an exotic weapon penalty. Unless there isn't a paladin the group. :P

RYCT Robert, you make a good point about D&D—the setting is emergent from the rules rather than the other way around. Occasionally, a new setting like *Eberron* or *Dark Sun* will add or twiddle rules, but its still very much D&D.

So far, I have avoided kickstarters for much the same reason as I don't pre-order games—I'm cheap and don't want to buy something sight-unseen that will undoubtedly disappoint me.