Solo Roleplayer

The Collected Archives

Kenny Norris

Contents

Important Notes

This compendium PDF contains most, but not all, of the blog posts I published on SoloRoleplayer.com during 2015 and early 2016. The posts I haven't included are either not applicable to solo roleplaying or are housed in a better location (such as the Fate Solo rules).

Most of the comments have not been brought over unless they've enhanced, or clarified, the discussion of the post.

Also included are some emails which I believe are important but were never published on the blog.

Though most of the text is the same as was published originally throughout this work I've made a few tweaks to make this clearer or remove unimportant or non-needed text.

Kenny

Solo RPG Resources and Tools

This section contains tools that are useful for solo roleplaying. Any tools without a link can be found on RPG Now / Drive Thru RPG.

Solo Engines

Solo Engines are systems that takes some control away from us solo roleplayers. In some small way they emulate the power the GM has over players in a social game, this gives them their other name: GM Emulator.

- Mythic GM Emulator
  - o   Mythic Variants
- The Covetous Poet's Adventure Creator and Solo GM Guidebook
  - o   Mystery Genre Pack
    http://e3.kickstarter.com/mpss/c/2AA/6TYCAA/t.1k2/K0sfLNhBRuaotV_JvoQRFQ/h1/ROa-2FdlSnN-2FXnUB7Kis3fS4b5c4lY0NllXKDqGLDCUzQL-2Bfr1HYK1uhSDwCtxKqSsoMFmByVcLNFfu3I7dMIXczbloU3dsvuoLQNlIRqszmc-3D
  - o   Spy Genre Pack
    http://e3.kickstarter.com/mpss/c/2AA/6TYCAA/t.1k2/K0sfLNhBRuaotV_JvoQRFQ/h2/ROa-2FdlSnN-2FXnUB7Kis3fS4b5c4lY0NllXKDqGLDCUzRjmxu1k-2BjHhDAjKXrEwfX9S-2FNP-2BMN9wl1b21gKwiSU7srwC3CyaPv7NCDOPbZoh04-3D
  - o   Super Heroes Genre Pack
    http://e3.kickstarter.com/mpss/c/2AA/6TYCAA/t.1k2/K0sfLNhBRuaotV_JvoQRFQ/h3/ROa-2FdlSnN-2FXnUB7Kis3fS4b5c4lY0NllXKDqGLDCUzSLQKlx8e60w9R647ZE-2FJ1fxRHr-2BGi6SZmnNigBQla-2F8hZUMfHHsbMCKc8RphJYqPc-3D
- CRGE: Conjectural Roleplaying GM Emulator
- Fate Solo
- Solo Engine at Tiny Solitary Soldiers
  http://tinysolitarysoldiers.blogspot.de/2012/04/solo-rpg.html
- Epic d6 (rev)
  http://noonetoplay.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/epic-playtest-bird-of-wisdom-part-2.html

Drivers

These are optional rules add-ons that help create adventures.

- The Covetous Poet's Adventure Creator and Solo GM Guidebook
- Perilous Intersections
  http://noonetoplay.blogspot.de/2014/09/perilous-intersections-v-10.html

Generic Resources and Tools

These tools can be used in any genre or style of game.

- The Location Crafter
- BOLD – The Book of Legend and Deeds

NPC

Tools that aid in running and creating NPCs.

- Insta-NPCs Series
- UNE – Universal NPC Emulator
- Short Order Heroes
  http://shortorderheroes.com/index.html

Random Generators

Random Generators are tools that provide inspiration and help create new and interesting twists for your games. The following are 2 generic resources which can be useful to create adventures. Neither can be found on RPG Now / Drive Thru RPG, though there are lots of Random Content Generators available on RPG Now / Drive Thru RPG.

- Rory's Story Cubes
- Story Forge
  http://storyforgecards.com/

Fantasy Resources and Tools

These tools are aimed for fantasy roleplayers.

- Scarlet Heroes

Non-Roleplaying Software

These software tools are not designed for roleplaying but I find them useful for solo roleplaying.

- Scrivener
- Scapple
- PhraseExpander

The Top 5 Essential Tools for Solo RPG

One major problem facing us Solo RPGers is the need for quality tools.

I don't mean gamebooks or guided routes through an adventure. What I mean are tools that together create complete adventures of anything we desire.

It is hard to know what tools there are and what ones are any good. There are many different type of tools available both paid for and free out there.

It's hard to know where to start.

The best place to start is to know what type of tools there are:

- Rules
- Random Content Generators
- Source Material

Rules

Within the Rules category there are 3 types of tools:

1. Game Rules
2. Solo Engines
3. Drivers

For us soloists we *need* Game Rules and a Solo Engine.

Solo Engines help take total control away from us Player-GMs and hand it to a 3rd party. In this case its an extra rule system which emulates some input from a GM and from whence it gets its other name: GM Emulator.

Drivers are optional. They help frame adventures. Some players prefer non-Driver driven games. Try both and see what you prefer.

Random Generators

These work by providing random words or images for your brain to make new and interesting ideas with. Depending upon the generator, its output method, and its focus you'll have to interpret the results to a lesser or greater extent.

The main types of random generators are:

1. Lists: a dice (or more) is used to pick an item from a list
2. Charts: uses multiple dice, or a dice and a set condition, to pick an item from a table where 2 elements intersect
3. Dice: pictures, words, or location of dice picks an idea
4. Cards: pictures, words, type, or position of cards can be used to pick an idea

Source Material

Anything which tells you things about the setting. These could be books: RPG, art, fiction, or non-fiction. They could also be pictures, movies, TV series. It could also be a feeling or an idea or dream you had. As I said; it could be anything...

Making the List

To make this list as useful as possible I've added some restrictions.

The tools included on the list have to be:

- generic - so that they can be used for any game, genre, or rule-set.
- non-physical - so they're easier to get hold of.
- useful - if they're not useful then there's no point in using the tools.
- available for use away from a computer - not everyone wants to be tied to a computer when they play their campaigns.

It's time to start the countdown.

The 5th most useful tool is...

The Location Crafter

This tool is designed to create random locations in which adventures occur.

Location crafter is flexible enough that it can be used to create anything from a room to a galaxy and allow detailed exploration of them. The Location Crafter can also be modified to create interesting mysteries.

The Location Crafter In Use

Before using Location Crafter you need to populate 3 lists: Locations, Encounters, and Objects.

Let's take the example of a goblin infested cave.

In locations I'll add:

1. rubbish tip
2. food storage
3. kitchen
4. sleeping area
5. nursery
6. cave in
7. well
8. chamber

In Encounters I'll add:

1. goblins
2. rats
3. goblin chief
4. goblin warrior
5. traps

In Objects I'll add:

1. rubbish

2. treasure
3. rusted armour
4. damaged knives
5. water bucket

Alongside these items The Location Crafter also has other standard elements: expected, none, special, random, and complete.

Using the words provided you create 3 lists putting those closer to the entrance of the location at the beginning. To start you roll a d6 on each of the lists. Whatever the result is what you find in that location.

When entering the goblin infested cave I rolled (location / encounter / object): rubbish tip / none / water bucket. When the hero enters the cave the first thing they see is a rubbish tip, complete with rubbish, but no one around. Right in the middle of the entrance way, away from the main rubbish tip, is an empty water bucket laying on its side.

With each roll you add 1 to the progress points. This helps move you further along the list and deeper into the location.

So the next roll I add 1 to the result and get: none / rat / random (helpful rare). In a tunnel behind the rubbish dump the hero sees a statue carved into the wall. While he's examining it a rat darts out from behind the statue and attacks the hero. The object being helpful rare is a statue is a rare thing in a cave and it's helpful to the goblins because it houses a rat... Though of course other helpful rare results can occur...

The Location Crafter's Wrap Up

The reason it's 5 on the list is it's downside. You have to put in work before you start using the product. However the effort is worth it and your old lists can make it easier for you to create future lists.

The next two tools introduce story and NPCs. Both are important to creating an interesting and fulfilling game.

Tool 4: Perilous Intersections

This tool is a driver. In fact it's one of the best I know. As I mentioned in the first email drivers help frame stories, though, not everyone likes using them. Even if you don't use it as a driver the adventure creation method is worth getting the product for by itself.

Perilous Intersections In Use

The first step is to create a list of Seeds. Seeds are ideas created by you or are created by idea generators (which I call randomisers and are a kind of random generators).

Once you have created the Seeds the hero now needs a goal. I'll work through this step to show how useful this adventure generator can be.

Step 1 is to create some new results from an idea generator (I'm using a chart found in The Location Crafter). I rolled: Guide Friendship and Guide Possessions.

Now I have to figure out what's occurring between these 2 ideas. In this example someone has to help a friend make a choice about something they own.

The next step is to discover why the PC is needed. Rolling on the list provided I discover the PC is an Escort. The PC is secondary to achieving the goal but they're needed so that the goal can be achieved. The friend and the item are not in the PCs control. Continuing the idea of the goblin cave I discover that the friend has been taken by the goblins.

I now have to figure out if this is a reactive or active story. I want the PC to do something so it'll be an active story.

Step 5, the final step, is where I figure out the goal for the PC. As I want the PC to be active and the friend has been taken by the goblins the PC has to rescue the friend and the item. Once rescued he's got to deliver both safe to the 2nd friend.

The rest of Perilous Intersections is about framing scenes of the adventure, using the prepared Seeds, to provide a framework in which the story, which in our case is a rescue, can occur.

Each scene is set to answer a question. There is a mechanic which makes these questions harder to answer as things get harder for the PC. As there are a finite amount of questions there is a maximum length of scenes for the adventure.

Perilous Intersections Wrap Up

Why has Perilous Intersections only reached 4th place?

There are 2 reasons:

1. though the system works well the written description is a bit clunky and it may take a while to discover the full benefits of the system.
2. not everyone likes drivers

Then again: this is a free product so you can't really go wrong in trying it out.

http://noonetoplay.blogspot.com/2014/09/perilous-intersections-v-10.html?m=0

Tool 3: UNE: The Universal NPC Emulator Revised

UNE is formed of 2 parts:

1. it's an NPC creator
2. it's an NPC interaction emulator

UNE In Use

UNE's NPC Creator is split into 5 parts:

1. noting down all known facts about the NPC
2. what the NPC is to the PC
3. an optional step to discover how powerful the NPC is compared to the PC
4. getting the NPC's motivations
5. combining all the details from above into a single NPC

Building on from the gobin cave example I'll create the friend who's been kidnapped by the goblins.

What I know is that he has an item that he wants to deliver to a friend.

The NPC is a Solemn Serf. This description should colour all NPC/PC interactions.

I'm going to ignore the power level as he's much weaker than the PC.

The next step is to find 3 motivations that twist the NPC/PC interactions:

1. Record Industry
2. Manage Myths
3. Conceive the World

This leads me to the conclusion that the friend is a knowledgeable farmer who is in the pursuit of knowledge about farming. Sorting out the fact from the fiction and is trying to find new ways to farm that are more efficient.

The other part of UNE is the NPC Interaction Emulator.

This contains 2 parts:

1. the NPC conversation mood
2. what the NPC wants to talk about

Using the 2 different parts together I've come up with: the PC saves the NPC from the goblin cave. At first the NPC (NPC Relationship: Peaceful) is guarded in his conversations with the PC. After a while the NPC opens up and talks (telling experience) to the PC about what happened in the cave.

UNE Wrap Up

I'm not a fan of UNE's NPC creation method thinking it can produce, at times, results that are strange. When it works well it can produce interesting and multi-layered NPCs as this example shows. There is a NPC creator that I prefer and that beats UNE down into 3rd place.

The reason UNE reaches number 3 on the list is its NPC Interaction Emulator. Though short it can produce interesting NPC interactions within a game. In the example above the rolls from the emulator helped to create a depth of story that might've been lost if I'd not been using UNE.

This product is PWYW.

Here's the top 2 products in creating interesting solo RPG adventures. I've included another NPC tool and a tool which makes Solo roleplaying possible.

Tool 2: Insta-NPCs

Okay, maybe I've cheated a bit on this as it's a series rather than a single product.

What makes the series good is both its generalness and specificness. The first couple of products are general but other products focus upon specific topics. Look through the list of products available and pick which ones you need and then use them.

As a start I would recommend titles 0-3

0. A Simple Plan
1. Motivation, Attitude, and Appearance
2. Quirks and Madness
3. Scum and Villainy, Inc.

Insta-NPCs In Use

I've already created the friend that needs to be rescued so this time I'll create the goblin chief. This'll allow me to show all 4 recommended Insta-NPCs titles in action.

Using A Simple Plan I discovered the goblin chief is stubborn.

Motivation, Attitude, and Appearance is where you discover why Insta-NPCs is different from other random generators. Instead of rolling on a list for a single result you roll on multiple lists and the results, put together, detail who the character is.

So for Motivation, Attitude, and Appearance I got:

- *Motivation:* Amusement
- *Attitude:* Cowardly
- *Appearance:* Shaggy

From this I get the idea of a goblin chief who is either bored or wants to keep his tribe from getting bored. He wants to do this so they'll stop going out into the wide world where there are dangers and things that kill goblins with ease and to stop the killers following the goblins back to the cave. The chief is also dishevelled, maybe more so than the other goblins. I get the image of the chief muttering and pacing not paying much attention to himself.

Quirks and Madness has 2 simple lists. From this title I'm rolling only on the quirks and I got: personality changes after dark.

This works well with the picture I've got of the goblin chief. During the day he's worried about killers finding the cave. At night his natural fearlessness comes back. It's during the night that the friend was taken from his campfire to act as a bit of diversion for the goblins in the cave.

Scum and Villainy, inc. uses the multi-list format of Insta-NPCs. This title provides a detailed method to understand why a villain is a villain and what they want to do.

- *Origin:* Strange discovery
- *Goal:* Overwhelming riches
- *Methodology:* Gather army
- *Role:* Competitor
- *Core Emotion:* Hate

The goblin chief first started becoming a villain when he discovered that the people in fancy clothes managed escaped because not-so-fancy clothed people stayed behind to allow them to get away. With some research he discovered that they were money rich and people were willing protect them with their lives.

That led the goblin chief to build up an army of goblins so he could become rich so he'll be safe. He wants the friend not so much as diversion, though he'll allow the friend to be used as such, but rather to get someone to ransom him.

Insta-NPCs Wrap Up

What I like about Insta-NPCs is that you can build layer upon layer when you need it.

When I first meeting the goblin chief I'll use A Simple Plan and Motivation, Attitude, and Appearance. Then later I'll roll on Quirks and Madness and Scum and Villainy, Inc. adding more depth.

The goblin chief makes a nice reoccurring low-level villain, If he manages to get his goal he'll turn into a major villain or a piece of the world who is respected if not feared.

Why didn't Insta-NPCs get to the top position, well, that's easy. You need the next tool to have a solo game.

Check out the publisher's website to see what other titles are available: http://blog2.moebiusadventures.com/insta-npcs/

Tool 1: Mythic Game Master Emulator

Mythic GME (or just Mythic but that can get confused with the RPG Word Mill publishes) is the single most important tool in running a solo RPG. It's also the tool which opened my eyes to solo gaming.

Mythic GME In Use

Mythic GME is based around 4 elements:

1. The Fate Chart
2. Scenes
3. Character Lists
4. Plot Threads

Of the 4 elements the most important is the Fate Chart.

To use the Fate Chart ask a question that can be answered Yes or No. Roll on the chart cross referencing between the Odds and the current Chaos Rank.

The odds alter the chance of certain answers. Higher Chaos Ranks increases the odds of random events occurring. There are 3 lists that give a clue as to what the random event is.

In the example of the goblin cave the PC finds the serf in a chamber. Unsure of the exact circumstance I ask the Fate Chart: *Is the NPC chained to the wall?*

With the Chaos Rank at 5 and the odds at: A Sure Thing. A roll of 51 gives the answer: Yes.

As this is a goblin cave a follow up question could be: *is the chain damaged?*

With the Chaos Rank at 5 and the odds at: Likely. A roll of 11 gives the answer as an Exceptional Yes. As I rolled a double below the Chaos Rank there is also a Random Event too.

The Random Event is: NPC Negative: Bestow a Burden

We now know that the serf is chained to the wall. The chain is damaged yet the serf, picked non-randomly, doesn't want to go anywhere. Maybe he escaped, re-captured, and beaten. Now he's frightened of the goblins and thinks if he stays chained up they'll leave him alone. The result could also mean that the goblin chief could come in just as the PC is freeing the serf.

Scenes can be altered, the odds of which depend upon the Chaos Rank. There are rules and guidelines within Mythic GME to help run scenes. Scenes are the building block of a Mythic GME adventure.

The previous Mythic GME scene saw us find, free, and persuade the NPC to come along. In the new Mythic GME scene it would makes sense that the PC and serf get out of the goblin cave. A roll to check if the scene is changed indicates that there is no change.

So the PC has to get an unwilling NPC out of a cave crawling with goblins. Easier said then done...

The 2 lists, Character and Threads, may not seem importance but they are. One of the random generators in the Fate Chart makes references to both lists. Beyond this they're useful as they help keep track of what's going on in the adventure.

In this example I have created 3 NPCs:

1. The serf
2. The friend
3. The goblin chief

Threads are story lines that can interact with the goal of the adventure. The adventure is to get the serf to his friend. New threads could come into play as new story ideas are introduced though play or as a result of a Random Event.

Mythic GME Wrap Up

Mythic GME is not as simple as other solo engines. The depth and complexity adds to the game and makes adventures more interesting and easier to follow.

Best of the Rest

Having the right tools is important but knowing how to use them is better still. The Guide to Playing Alone introduces solo roleplaying and helps you to take the first steps in the hobby.

As there are quite a few useful tools in the Best of the Rest list I'll give you a brief description of the tools but not show them in action.

Physical Products

⟩ Story Forge: a deck of cards that have keywords and a brief description. Can be used in creating characters, adding plot twists, or building a plot. (http://storyforgecards.com/)

⟩ Short Order Heroes: a deck of cards that have keywords and a related image. Designed to help create characters. (http://shortorderheroes.com/)

⟩ Rory's Story Cubes: dice with images. Can be used as a random content generator. Just roll the dice, see what image comes up, and use that as a keyword. They have released many different sets. This is a popular tool for solo roleplayers for good reason. When you try them you'll see why too. (https://www.storycubes.com/)

Solo Engines

Mythic GME is not the only solo engine. Here are 3 more options to try.

⟩ The Covetous Poet's Adventure Creator and Solo GM Guidebook: is a mouthful and often called CP or Cov. Poet for short. It's a solo engine and a driver in a single product. CP is a divisive product: some people love CP while others dislike it. The lists within the product are extensive and are almost worth the cost of the product alone.

⟩ CRGE is a solo engine from the creators of UNE. It's easier to use than Mythic GME but hasn't got variable odds on the questions. It has interesting features that make it a fun and robust system to use.

⟩ Fate Solo is my solo engine. It's designed for use with Fate and requires only the standard Fate dice to use.

Other Tools

⟩ Little Spaces and Open Spaces, from the creator of Insta-NPCs, are 2 series of products that help detail scenes or encounters. They use the same multi-list features that are found in Insta-NPCs.

⟩ Scarlet Heroes: this game that contains a solo engine, a driver, and NPC tools, in fact everything needed to play a solo game within a single product. The reason it wasn't on the list is that it's a fantasy game. If you like Old School fantasy games it's worth a look at.

Tucked away at the end is a final group of important tools. These are Passion Building Resources.

I cannot give you a list because anything can be a passion building resource: a picture, a TV series, a novel, a book of pictures, a RPG world-book, a dream, a passion statement, or even a feeling. It depends upon you.

PhraseExpander: Speeding Up Play and Life
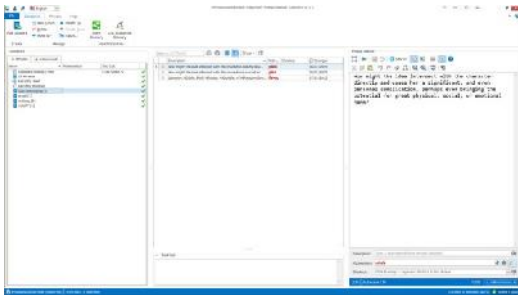
I spend lots of time on my computer, some of it on this blog, other parts dealing with social media, forums, and emails, and other parts I spend solo roleplaying. Knowing that in the forseeable future I'll have less time to work and roleplay I decided that I need to find ways to speed up my computer use. One way to do that is to have phases that I use commonly appear without having to type them out.

1 method of doing this is to have a list and copy and paste from said list: complicated and for short phases a time waster. Another way would be to use the autocorrect feature in word processors.

I decided on neither of these but on another program, one which seems aimed at doctors, but works well for what I need it for.

The program is PhraseExpander.

What it does it does well, fast, and effectively. It takes a few letters that you've typed in and then expands it either automatically or with a bit of input.

Setting Up PhraseExpander

Some of these programs come with sample phases to try. This PhraseExpander does too, if you open it up. I didn't try the samples I went in and set up a phase that I use all the time in my solo roleplaying.

Keyword:

Question:

Odds:

Result: 0000 = 0

You can create multi-line phases (as this one is) just by placing lines into the Phase Details box.

I also put in other phases that I use all the time such as html code, links, and other solo roleplaying phases that I use in Mythic GME and Perilous Intersections.

PhraseExpander In Use

A bonus of just typing in a code is that I'm not forced to remember all the steps when asking Mythic GME questions because the code brings up the steps needed and their proper order.

Another good thing is that the database can be save on OneDrive so I can link the phases on my laptop and main computer.

PhraseExpander is not the cheapest program of its kind (there are free ones) but it is easy to use, links to cloud storage, and is quick. There are more features, that I have not yet used, which makes this program a genuine time saver for me, for Solo Roleplayer, and for my solo roleplaying.

Comments

Michael: I was confused with Phrase in headlines and Phase in body text.

I'm guessing it's Phrases you're on about.

can you export the DB and import it in other writing programs? If say... i'm using Scrievener.

Kenny: Michael, PhraseExpander is the name of the program.

What it does is take text you're typing and either suggest phases based upon that text snippet or automatically put in a phase.

I'll give you an example: I use PhraseExpander for my signature I use to sign off my emails. All I do is type in *.sig* and this...

Kenny the Solo Roleplaying Sage

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Roleplaying for Renegades

...comes up where ever I've typed those 4 keys.

As for using Scrivener it works within that. That's the program I use to do most of my writing, not only for the blog, but my solo RPG campaigns too.

Todd: That's an interesting bit of technology, especially if your gaming/writing style is free form versus something more structured like a spreadsheet.

Kenny: I agree with you Todd, that they are an interesting bit of technology.

When I first heard about these types of software I was really interested. Now that I use PhraseExpander all the time I'm finding it hard to live without. It is an essential part of my day-to-day toolbox.

3 Elements of a Great Solo RPG Adventure

Picture: Creative Commons: Yuma Hori

With all that goes on in our lives it's so easy and so natural to allow our solo roleplaying to be ignored. Sometimes we can realise that months have gone past without us even picking up a dice. Then we play a few games, maybe an entire adventure, and the cycle starts again. A reason for this could be that we're reliant on no one but ourselves and so forget about it. Another reason is that we're just not enjoying roleplaying as much as we could.

There are ways we can get to roleplay more.

We can make our adventures so fun that we want to come back to them.

We can also make our adventures so easy that we can come back to them without any problem.

Before we do this we need to explore 3 elements:

1. Passion
2. Time
3. Story

Passion for Adventure

For me a game didn't make me want to play.

Nor a genre.

I never had a favourite roleplaying character: one that made me turn up to play week after week.

I cannot remember too many adventures I played in.

What I remember are the times when I could explore worlds. There was one world I wanted to play in more; the world was an exploration of a dead isle with all structures turned to stone.

Knowing my passion that makes sense.

Wise Use of Time

We have so little time to do what we want to do. Between my family, my jobs, and sleep I don't get much time to myself or my hobbies. Most of our lives we do what we have to do. When we get a few moments to ourselves we need spend the time well.

Story

Alongside roleplaying I've spent much time learning about, and writing, fiction. I learnt that the most important part of fiction is story. It is story that drives us to carry on reading books until long past our lights out. (Sorry, Darling!)

Story, in its most simple form, is the change that happens within the characters. Edge-of-our-seat plots might wow us but if we don't care about the characters we soon forget about it.

Combining the 3 Elements

These 3 elements combine to drive a great roleplaying adventure.

Each of these elements are so important they each get their own post.

I will also show you how you can use these elements to make your roleplaying adventures great.

There is something you can do right now: I want you to start thinking about what drives your passion towards solo roleplaying.

To help you answer these questions and see where the answers lead you:

- What is it that made you first try solo roleplaying?
- What is it that keeps you coming back?
- What do you want out of your ideal solo RPG session?
- What is your favourite Book / TV Series / Film?
- What do they have in common?

Once you've answered the questions narrow them down until you get a short sentence.

How to Respark Your Missing Roleplaying Passion

Creative Commons: Chris Lasher

Most people have hobbies. It doesn't matter if you're making chairs in the garage, making model train sets, or rolling bits of plastic on a table: all hobbies are a form of escapism that you're passionate about. They're a way to breakaway from the world and into a world of your own. A way of making you feel more alive.

At times our hobbies, especially those that do not spark the most interest, get ignored and sometimes forgotten. Solo roleplaying is apt to fail at this task. We get discouraged when we don't achieve what comes so effortlessly in social roleplaying. Other easier hobbies take its time.

It's happened to me more than once.

This is because solo roleplaying isn't the easiest hobby out there. There is so much needed to be done it is easier to get discouraged, give up, and hit the power button on the X-Box, pick up that book, or turn on Netflix.

There is a way to change this.

Not make it easier, but make us make that extra effort.

It's not simple, it takes time, but it'll help you fall in love with solo roleplaying again.

The Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement

A passion statement answers the question: why do you do what you do?

It's a sentence or paragraph that defines why we do what we do. It is not oft talked about in hobby circles, it's a business tool. A way to keep you on track and focused upon your dreams.

Creating a Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement helps us solo roleplayers as it focuses our desires upon why we solo roleplay.

Crafting the Passion Statement

Crafting a passion statement takes time. It's worth the effort as it has so many uses within solo roleplaying.

A passion statement helps:

- keep you focused upon why you love and want to solo roleplay,
- create adventures that you'll enjoy,
- create campaigns you can't wait to get back to play, and
- create characters you want to spend time with.

Step 1 – Getting to the Truth

The 1st step of step 1 is to get a blank sheet of paper, a new Word document, or something similar.

At the top write down this sentence: Looking back at my roleplaying days I enjoyed...

Now finish the sentence.

Once you've finished the sentence keep on writing for 10 to 15 mins.

Don't correct errors, spelling mistakes, or partial sentences. What you write doesn't have to make sense. Keep going and allow the words to flow onto the page.

If you get stuck think about the characters you've played and write about them. If you get stuck again look at TV shows / books / films you like and write about them.

Step 2 – Finding the Gold

The page of text will contain many important revelations. The problem is that it's too long, may not make much sense, and you'll never read it again. It is from this text that you'll find nuggets of inspiration to help you create your passion statement.

Read what you've written and when you come across a word or a phrase that makes you feel something copy it into a list. If, when writing out these words and phrases, new ones come to your mind add them to the list.

Feel free to reword phrases if it makes the point clearer. It is the emotion and feeling behind the phrases that is important not the exact words used. Make sure that you make everything mean as much as possible.

Once you've got the list look at it. Do any of the phrases, or words, surprise you? If so complete step 1 for that phrase.

Number the words and phrases between 1 and 5. A 5 means the phrase invokes very strong feelings in you whilst a 1 means you don't feel much about it.

Sort the list into high to low. With them in order pick a few phrases that evoke the strongest emotions.

Once you've selected these phrases use them as a basis to write your Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement.

There is not much advice on how to get these phases into a passion statement. What I can say is that the statement needs to fire you up. Makes you want to get those dice and play. If your statement doesn't do that then you need to make it more powerful.

If that fail add words that excite you.

Words such as:

- Conquer,
- Kill,
- Destroy,
- Discover,
- Daring,
- Fantastic,
- Magical,
- Mysterious,
- Distinguished,
- and so on.

Now that you have your passion statement it's time to use it.

Using your new Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement is beyond the scope of this article.

How to Respark your Missing Roleplaying Passion: An Example

Creating a passion statement is important yet can be difficult. To help you in creating your Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement I'll show you how I created mine.

Getting to the Truth

The 1st step was to write for 15 minutes using this sentence as a start: Looking back at my roleplaying days I enjoyed...

My first paragraph was:

Looking back at my roleplaying days I enjoyed the times around the tables iwth my mates and looking at new worlds and trying new things out. I also enjoyed making things up and exploring new regions. I enjoyed creating things. I loved doing things well and hated when my charcters failed at something they should've been able to to do so well and easy.

I managed the 15 minutes with ease and could've gone on for longer. When I felt hesitation I went onto characters and then to TV series and books I enjoy.

So few people loved the games I loved it was annoying. I didn't want to be trapped by levels and classes. I like d being open and free do choose what character I wanted to do and be. I wanted to play characters who were good and great at what they werew. I used to focus on a couple of key skills. I wanted the team to rely on my for in what I was an expert at. As long as I was allowed to shine then I was happy. I was an expert player. The best at what ther was not just within the game but also the world. It was always ther same. I wanted to be useful and important. To be valued. Outside of that I loved learning new things and exploring new and different worlds. 2 games stuck out to me 1 was about Japan and I loved thes games over and over again. Anotehr was on an isle on which we were shipwrecked and Iwe could explore and there was a mystery there. I also liked mysteries but there did not happen all the time. Which was a shame as I think I could've enjoyed them if I had played in more of them but they are hard to do and people evoid ed them.

I liked season 2 onwards of Bablyon 5 because it was all about the discovery of what's out there.

DS9 got great when the war started and they started having a mission.

House is good because he cares, want to make a splashi on the world and is damned good.

Castle is fun because he's an outsider helping others.

Mentalist is good because he's damned good at what he is and does and makes no appoligies.

He is also unique and cares in his own way. He is also a bit of a show off.

Death in Paradise is good becuase the character is a bit ofdd and unique, a bit silly and slapstick but good.

Farscape is good because the main character is and feels lost.

Honor Harrington is good because she is good, wants to do right, and cares.

The spelling is bad, things go from one topic to another without much warning. Though upon rereading I found many nuggets of pure gold.

Finding the Gold

I went though and copied into Excel every phrase that made me feel something. I put them into alphabetical order so I could see related concepts next to each other.

Here are my first 20:

1. allowed to shine
2. being different
3. being relied upon
4. being self
5. being with mates
6. bit of a show off
7. care and help others
8. cares
9. cares
10. cares
11. creating adventures
12. creating worlds
13. damn good characters
14. damned good
15. desire to understand
16. discovery of what's out there
17. do remarkable things
18. doing things well
19. eccentric
20. expert

I went through the list and numbered each phrase between 1 and 5. Once I numbered the phrases I reordered the list with the 5s at the top.

Here are my top 20:

1. being relied upon – 5
2. being self – 5
3. being with mates – 5
4. free – 5
5. generic systems – 5
6. good and great at what are – 5
7. good at what does – 5
8. growth – 5
9. having a mission – 5
10. helping others – 5
11. making things – 5

12. not going along with crowd – 5
13. splash on world – 5
14. stand up for what believe – 5
15. useful and important – 5
16. wants to do right – 5
17. allowed to shine – 4
18. being different – 4
19. care and help others – 4
20. cares – 4

From this list I went through all the 5s putting related phases together. I also deleted phases that weren't relevant to solo roleplaying.

1. being relied upon,
2. being self, not going along with crowd, stand up for what believe
3. being with mates
4. free
5. generic systems
6. good and great at what are, good at what does
7. growth
8. having a mission
9. helping others, wants to do right
10. making things
11. splash on world
12. useful and important

Crafting the Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement

From the 10 remaining phases I picked 5 phrases that were too important to ignore.

1. being self, not going along with crowd, stand up for what believe
2. good and great at what are, good at what does
3. having a mission
4. helping others, wants to do right
5. splash on world

Using these 5 phases I put them into an order that made sense to me.

⎰ being self, not going along with crowd, stand up for what believe
⎰ having a mission
⎰ helping others, wants to do right
⎰ splash on world
⎰ good and great at what are, good at what does

With the phrases in a good order I wrote the first draft of my passion statement.

I solo roleplay so that I can be myself. So that I can reinforce what I enjoy and tell the stories that I desire. That I can have characters who care, who look after others, and who will make a splash on the world. I want characters who are great at what they do and are driven to fulfil their own purpose. They always rally against the world and stand up for they want even if it means they're outsiders.

I felt this but the writer in me didn't like the sentences starting in a similar manner.

Also note that I put in a sentences that are personal to me and did not appear in the list.

I wrote a second draft meshing sentences together and removing words that didn't anything to the passion statement.

After rewriting I came up with:

I solo roleplay so that I can be myself. So that I can do what I enjoy, tell the stories I desire, about characters whom I care about. Characters who look after others, who'll make a splash on the world, who are great at what they do, and who are driven to fulfil their own purpose. Characters who hold fast to what they believe even if it means they're outsiders.

This is not the end. This Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement will be rewritten, added to, and altered over time. As I change so will the passion statement and as you change so should yours.

4 Simple Steps to Start Solo Roleplaying

Picture: Creative Commons: Ben Tesch

From the outside solo roleplaying seems simple. There are people who play solo games, myself included, the games we play seem so fun, enjoyable, and effortless. You get your stuff together and try.

Your game is so bland. Hard and bland.

You feel like a failure.

You give up.

You spend time wishing you could roleplay watching from afar yet never trying.

If only you knew you were meant to do.

All of us solo roleplayers know what we're doing and why we do it. We've just not passed on our knowledge. It's like GMing without first being taught to GM. It might work. With help it's much easier.

I've broken down how to start solo roleplaying into 4 simple steps.

These 4 steps are:

1. pick a solo engine and ruleset,
2. choose a campaign,
3. get the story out of your head, and
4. share your story.

Step 1 – Solo Engine and Ruleset

The first step is to pick up a solo engine and your choice of ruleset.

The ruleset is a personal choice:

⟩ pick your favourite,
⟩ a system someones recommended,
⟩ a system you've always wanted to try, or
⟩ that new system everyone's talking about.

There are 3 things to think about:

1. learning solo roleplaying is easier if you keep things simple.
2. in response to above, it's best not to start out roleplaying a whole party.
3. narrative rulesets might need tweaking to make them work well with solo play. Once sorted, however, they're quicker than other rulesets.

Try different solo engines to find the one that works best for you. There's a list of them in the Resources and Tools section.

Step 2 – Choice of Campaign

A good step in figuring out what you want out of a campaign is to know what you're passionate about. Discover what makes you passionate about roleplaying here. There is also a follow up post in which I show you how I made my passion statement.

There are other methods you can use to discover what you want in a campaign. In this post I'll introduce you to a powerful, yet simple, method.

Cluster Maps

Cluster maps show links between keywords.

The idea is to get keywords that are important to you, write them down, and draw links between them.

Getting the Keywords

The first step is writing a long list of keywords that you'll be interested in seeing in your campaign. Start off with the keywords you got creating your Solo Roleplaying Passion Statement.

Once you've done that think about:

- stories you love (TV, films, books, graphic novels)
- characters you love

Write down as many keywords as you can.

Taking those stories and characters. Break them down into:

- elements you love
- elements you could live with
- elements you could live without
- elements you hate

This example is The Originals TV series. At first I loved it. Then it stopped working for me. I took it apart into the elements and I came up with the following:

Elements I love:

- *Bad 'boy' trying to do good*
- *Family is important*
- *Fatherhood changes things*

Elements I could live with:

- *Inter-family disputes*
- *People distrusting bad 'boy' when he has the best at heart*
- *Finding a home*

Elements I could live without:

- *Romance*
- *Backstabbing*
- *No trust*

Elements I hate:

- *Too many conflicts*
- *Flipping focus too often*
- *Little focus in middle / late season*
- *Just pick a 'meta' villain already*

I never did finish watching season 1 of The Originals. It's the same as Stargate Universe, it too held much promise but the backstabbing soon wore on me. That and the lack of focus upon Destiny.

Making the Cluster Map
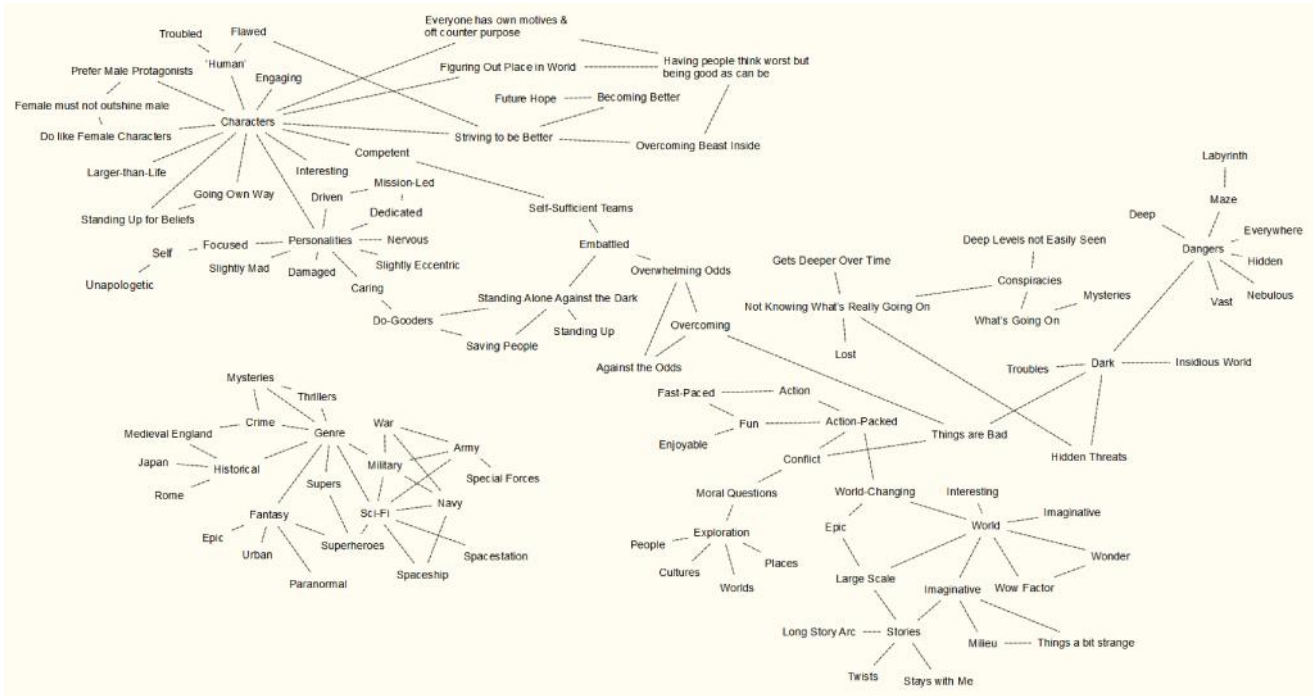
That is my cluster map (created with Scapple) of what I like in a story.

A cluster map needs a singular focus. I could do another cluster map of what I dislike in a story, it's best not to do the 2 in the same map unless the focus is a single story.

Each keyword is linked to other keywords in location and lines. If something is distantly related then there'll be a long line between the 2 keywords. If something is similar but not related then they'll be close together on the map but not linked with a line. Of course if something is similar and related they'll be a short line connecting the 2 together.

The reason I recommend Scapple is that you can change links and relationships without having to create a whole new map. That and you can change, edit, grow, and move things around the more you understand what you like in stories.

Step 3 – Telling the Story

There are 6 methods how we can tell the story of an adventure:

1. verbal
2. keeping it inside your head

3. written
4. brief notes
5. illustrated
6. hybrid

With social roleplaying we 'get it out' by vocalising in person. This might be an option for you if you are happy talking to yourself.

Keeping the story in your head is another technique. This could be ideal if you solo roleplay on the train or bus.

There's a couple of different ways of writing:

- writing as if it's a novel: this is the most common method and my preferred option.
- journaling: less minute-by-minute focus and more day-by-day. This covers styles such as Captain's Logs and Diaries.

Some roleplayers don't want to go into full detail but want to get something down: they take brief notes as they go along. I've heard that Excel works well for note taking.

If you like doodling, drawing, or taking photos of models then creating a pictures, or an animated story, of you adventure might be right for you.

Hybrid methods link 2, or more, journaling methods together. Illustrating and note taking can work together by making notes and then expanding the notes with the pictures. This would allow for faster game play and still allow the fun in drawing out the adventure.

Step 4 – Sharing

Once you have got your story down share it!

Yes you may have done it for yourself but others might enjoy reading your story. Post it on forums, on your blog, or as a podcast. Be generous to the world and others: don't keep your masterpiece to yourself.

There are also another benefits to this:

- it allows other roleplayers to see, and understand, that solo roleplaying is fun and worthwhile pursuing.
- it allows other solo roleplayers to learn from you and your methods of doing things.
- it shows that solo roleplaying is larger and more popular than expected allowing more solo roleplaying tools to be created.
- It also allows for 'social pressure' 'forcing' you to carry on solo roleplaying when you've not done it in a while so others, who are following your play reports, can enjoy your campaign.

Starting Small

Solo roleplaying shares so much in common with its social cousin that it's tempting to link the 2 together. This has its benefits and downsides.

The benefits are that we know what we want and we have a foundation from which to build up our solo roleplaying skills. This familiarity also makes us jump in to the depth of games we played during our social roleplaying days.

This is a mistake.

To move beyond the basics and get the best out of solo roleplaying you'll need to take small steps. Think of all those computer games which lead you though simple guides teaching you how to use certain commands before you get to the gamey goodness.

That is what you need to do with solo roleplaying.

We need to start small, learn the skills needed for solo roleplaying, before we start with epic games. Games that make Robert Jordan or George R. R. Martin proud, if not weep with envy.

The Ultimate Guide to Starting an E.P.I.C. Campaign

We've all had games that started out great but died all too quick.

Things started so well and we enjoyed the thrill of the new game.

Then the game fizzled out.

So we start again, or get disheartened and turn on our X-Box.

Most the time the games die from a lack of planning: boring but true.

Next time don't rush to start your campaign, take your time, and go big: go E.P.I.C..

The E.P.I.C. Campaign Starter is a framework which takes simple ideas, puts them together, and guides you toward creating a fulfilling campaign.

Exploring the E.P.I.C. Campaign Starter

At the heart of E.P.I.C. are 4 pillars which elevate the your campaign from okay to great.

The 4 pillars of the E.P.I.C. Campaign Starter are:

1. E – External Factors
2. P – Place
3. I – Intrigue
4. C – Character

Some solo roleplayers enjoy dungeon delving or sandbox games. E.P.I.C. Campaign Starter can be used with these campaign types. For dungeon delving it helps provide reasons as to why you're dungeon delving helping to tie each dungeon together and provide details about the dungeons that are being explored. Sandbox gamers will find the list of conflicts, interplays, and stories helpful as they explore the world.

There is no set order to work though the phases. You can jump between the phases or work though the phases in the E.P.I.C. order.

You don't even need to complete every step in every phase. You could even do some steps in a phase and come back later to do more. Remember this is to help you create a campaign so do what you want to. The idea is to build a foundation for your adventures before you start playing. You can add more details during game play.

External Factors

External Factors are the out-of-game choices that go into setting up the campaign. Though the phases can be done in any order I recommend that some of the External Factors phase is done before you start working though the rest of the phases.

The reason for this is that it'll help give some structure, guidelines, and ideas as to what you're going to be building elsewhere.

The External Factors are split amongst 4 categories:

1. Inspiration
2. Emotional
3. Story
4. Mechanical

Inspiration

Inspirations could be anything or come from anywhere. All it has to do is be stuck inside your head and wants out. It could be that awesome film you saw, an unputdownable book you read, something you saw on the 'net, something someone said, or that vivid dream you had.

Put all your inspirations in a list. When writing them down write down what about the inspiration makes it inspirational to you.

Emotional

It's a fact that emotions rather than logic drive our decisions. Logic may then pop its head up afterwards and justify our choices but it's emotion who makes us leap.

To help us solo roleplay more we need to discover why we want to solo roleplay. Then we stack these factors into our games. From the discovery inherent in dungeon crawls, the mysteries of Lovecraftian horror, and the over-the-top action of space opera sci-fi.

Story

In the story category we pick some solid boundaries that shape your game.

These boundaries are:

- Genre
- Mood
- Pitch
- Campaign Name

Here are 4 warriors, all expert swordsmen, the differences between genre and mood make them all very different; as is shown by the pitch.

1. Samurai (Genre: Historical; Mood: Fatalistic): set during the Meiji Restoration the Samurai struggles to find a place in the new Japan when all he's known is falling apart around him.
2. Knight Templar (Genre: Historical Fantasy; Mood: Dark): set in England during the persecutions of his order the knight has to fulfil his mission to protect people from the horrors of the night all the while running from those who want to burn him for being a heretic like they did his grand master.
3. Barbarian (Genre: Fantasy; Mood: Heroic): set in the wilds once home to a mighty, yet fallen, empire the barbarian soon makes a name for himself as he tries to find his place in the world.
4. Scavenger (Genre: Sci-Fi; Mood: Fight for Survival): set in the aftermath of a war-torn galaxy the outsider PC tries to survive and make a living by risking his life searching for valuable artifacts and equipment within the multitude of wrecks that litter space always looking for that big score that'll change his life for ever.

A pitch, is a sentence, or two, which outlines the core idea of the campaign. It could also give an idea of what could happen in the campaign.

To make a pitch jot down the starting point of the campaign, the inspiration behind the campaign, and any other major ideas you have. From your notes pick the most important points. 3 is a good maximum number of points to start off with. Once you have these points craft them into 1 or 2 sentences.

A campaign name helps you identify your campaign and gives it a special meaning to you. The name can also set the tone and direction of the campaign. If you're in doubt look over titles for TV shows and you'll see the name helps to set the tone.

Mechanical

The Mechanical category is where you decide upon the game system and solo engine for your campaign.

Beyond that Mechanical is where you pick your random content generators, supplements, and other tools you want to use in your campaign. Knowing them upfront allows you to craft your world around the tools you've got and want to use. Coming back at the end allows you to pick tools that enhance the world you've decided to play in.

This is also where you pick the power level of the campaign. Is your PC an everyone who struggles to survive a zombie apocalypse, are they highly respected influencing everything around them, or can they go head-to-head with the greatest supervillains (or heroes) and come out ahead?

Place

Place is the setting the campaign takes place in. The size of the setting could be anything from multiple galaxies to a border fort standing protecting the civilised world from the chaos without.

If you're working through the phases in order the External Factors could've given you ideas about the setting. If you focus on Place first the choices here will help define what External Factors are needed for the campaign.

Worldbuilding is a vast topic. Much too vast to even think about covering in too much detail here. Place breaks down worldbuilding into smaller building blocks that'll aid in playing a campaign. Everyday life issues aren't included because while they can colour a world and make it much more interesting most roleplayers don't worry about such details.

Each building block has been picked because they're important elements of worldbuilding that add depth and interest to a campaign without adding needless overhead.

The 5 building blocks that make up Place are:

1. World Hook
2. Setting Specific Details
3. Locations
4. Groups
5. NPCs

Any details created within the setting will either be:

⌡ visible / known by the character
⌡ invisible / hidden to the character (or world at large)

If you want a campaign of exploration and discovery then make as few as possible, if any, invisible details.

World Hook

A World Hook is a short description about what's unique about your gameworld. Your World Hook might be built from your pitch or your World Hook might be different.

The World Hook is important because it'll give you somewhere to start building the rest of the world from.

To create a World Hook:

1. Look over your inspirations, pitch, genre, mood, and campaign power level
2. Brainstorm or freewrite about your setting keeping everything important in mind.
3. Pick the most important elements.
4. Put the chosen elements into a sentence or short paragraph

Sample World Hooks:

⟩ A border fort standing protecting the civilised world from the chaos without.
⟩ AIs turned on their creators forcing humans into refuges. When humanity dared to reach into space again they found the hyperweb changed and other dangers waiting for them.
⟩ The wilds are no place for civilised people only the strong, ruthless, and unhesitating survive.
⟩ After a protracted and devastating galactic war humanity and its allies have retreated to the New Core. There are those who pay for war and pre-war artifacts and technology and where people pay people go. Only the outcasts and downtrodden dare to leave the core to find the desired artifacts all the while trying to escape from the rigid constraints of the New Galactic Union.

Setting Specific Details

Setting Specific Details is where all the non-standard details about the game world that you'll be adventuring in are constructed.

These could be influenced by your rule set, supplements, or the power level of your campaign.

In this building block you could work on details such as:

⟩ Technology
⟩ Magic
⟩ Artefacts
⟩ Supernatural
⟩ Non-Human Races
⟩ Horrors

If you don't need to know the details, or want to discover them in play, all you need to do is note down what exists.

⟩ Using the example of the galactic war survivors I know the following:
⟩ FTL
⟩ No FTL communications: there was once but now no longer
⟩ Psionics
⟩ Alien races: at least 1 maybe many more
⟩ Ruined hulks in space

Locations

This building block is where you build the locations where the action in your campaign takes place.

A location can be anything and range in size from a solar system to a room in a dungeon.

Locations for the galactic war survivors campaign are:

- New Core
- Old Core Worlds
- Danger Space
- Trading Post 496A (Trading Post Four-Niner-Six-Alpha) (PC's home base)
- HL0024 (Hotel-Lima Zero-Zero-Two-Four) (PC's ship)

Groups

The group building block is where important factions within your campaign world are, at least, named.

You can go into any depth you like. As a basis I would recommend the following:

1. Name
2. Brief Description
3. Mission

NPCs

Any named NPC from the groups building block or that influences the PCs life should be noted.

These NPCs can be the PC's:

- mentor,
- boss,
- friend,
- lover,
- family member, or
- rival.

Johnn Four's 3 Line NPC method fits perfectly within the E.P.I.C. Campaign Starter method.

Intrigue

The Intrigue pillar deals with:

- conflicts,
- stories, and
- interplay

Conflict

Characters and conflict are at the heart of your campaign and so this phase touches upon the Place and Character pillars of E.P.I.C.. This is because the best conflict is embedded into the setting and the PC needs conflicts to make them who they are and to drive them though the campaign.

Intrigue doesn't deal with internal character conflict. That is covered within Place or Character. What it does cover is external conflict within the campaign.

Conflict occurs when 2, or more, forces compete for contradictory goals.

To make conflict decide what 2 groups will go head to head. Then choose 1 group and discover what it wants. Go to the 2nd group and figure out a goal that either opposes goal 1 or blocks goal 1 from happening.

Stories

Stories are at the core of who we are. They're at the core of everything around us.

Every campaign, location, group, and NPC will have their own stories. You don't need to detail every story just those that are important to the campaign.

There are 2 types of stories:

1. Ongoing
2. Historical

Ongoing stories are those that are currently shaping the campaign and the world around the PC.

Historical stories are those that have shaped the campaign in the past and led to the current situation.

For the galactic war survivors the historical story is obvious: there was a galactic war and the humans joined up with an alliance of alien races. They managed to survive but at a cost.

The Trading Post 496A's historical story is: one of the last battles of the war was thought in this system. The humans won and went on to win the war. Trading Post 496A was a space station built to celebrate the victory and remember those who died protecting the system. The problem was that it was out of the way and soon the station fell into disuse. An entrepreneur brought the station and set up a camp from where he could search out for artifacts within the system. Lured by good prospects others came. The entrepreneur then set up space docks, beds, and a bar. From this humble beginning the space station grew in power and stature making the man, and his descendants rich and powerful. An example to all scavengers.

Trading Post 496A's ongoing story: the previous owner died leaving no will behind and no children. There are 3 relatives fighting for control over the station. There is also a rumour that the owner did have a will and was leaving it to the inhabitants of the Trading Post 496A for them to govern and own. This turmoil has caused lots of chaos and unease within the station. Some people have been grabbing what power they can.

If you can't think of a story, and one isn't clear from what you've built, the easiest method to make a story is to use random content generators.

I use Rory's Story Cubes though any random content generator that gives you ideas as to what happened can be used.

Break down history into 3 to 5 epochs. For each epoch use the random content generator to get a random word or 2. Using the result write down what occurred in that epoch.

For less important stories a single roll to provide a gist of a story would be enough.

Interplay

If there is any reason why 2 elements (location, groups, NPCs) might come into contact then there is an interplay. This step helps to discover, and see, the relationships and reactions that drive the world.

An interplay might be as simple as acknowledgement of the existence, or deigning not to see them, of each other; then again it could also be a full out contact; or anything in between.

Character

The Character pillar is all about the main character, the PC.

There is a reason why this is the last stop in the standard E.P.I.C. Campaign Starter methodology.

All too often we rush in, create a character, and play a game which leads nowhere. I have an embarrassing amount of half-started campaigns under my belt none of which completed the first adventure. If I had have created the characters at the end there would be fewer campaigns and more adventures completed.

Leaving Character to the end means you've created enough material for you to have at least 1 adventure idea before you start playing. Or, if your a sandbox gamer, have some interesting hooks for you to explore.

Your PC will be made up of 5 elements:

1. Big Picture
2. Internal
3. External
4. Mechanics
5. Intrigue

Big Picture

Like the Pitch, and World Hook, the PC's Big Picture is a single sentence or short paragraph describing the character.

Internal

What we are is built from within. 2 people confronting the same situation can react in different ways because of the way they handle themselves.

To create an internal life for the PC I start off with their life philosophy. This is how they see life and their purpose on earth.

Each of the following philosophies will influence the PC in different ways:

⟩ Life is short, nasty, and brutish.
⟩ Life is a journey: I'll never reach the destination unless I keep on going.
⟩ The strong are meant to rule over the weak.
⟩ The strong have to protect the weak.
⟩ Only the strong survive.

With the philosophy picked the next step would be to work out what the PC is working towards getting. We need of know their goal. This goal should bring them into conflict with those who want similar but contradicting goals. The goal could also bring them aid by introducing them to those who are willing to help the PC for whatever reasons.

External

Anything which can be seen, heard, or felt about the PC goes here.

This can be anything to do with the PC's:

- behaviour,
- looks,
- goods, or their
- station in the world.

A well mannered ugly tavern waitress is different than a sexy flirtatious gold-digger.

Mechanics

Once the PC has been made it is time to translate the internal and external world into game mechanics.

As each rule set is different there is no single way of creating a character. Restrictive systems might even force you to start work on creating the mechanics of the system before you're able to work on the internal and external world of the PC.

Intrigue

Once you've created your character go back over the Intrigue pillar this time focusing upon the PC.

If the PC has contact with a group tell the story, how they interact, and what conflicts the PC has with the group.

This is where the character's backstory and current story are created.

Putting the E.P.I.C. Campaign Starter Into Action

At the start I said it's possible to work though E.P.I.C. in any order and while that's true I recommend working though in order as much as possible.

- E – External Factors: this goes first because it's where we discover what type of campaign you want to play. Some of the mechanical details can be left to the end, just before you create the PC's mechanics, once you know more about the campaign world.
- P – Place: this sets up the big, and not so big, picture of the world that the PC inhabits. This goes 2nd so that there can be Intrigue.
- I – Intrigue: interactions between the elements you created in Place go here. This is 3rd because you need to know what elements there are before you can create the conflicts and interactions between them.
- C – Character: this is where we create the PC. The reason this is last, as mentioned above, is to slow you down and allow the creation of conflicts, stories, NPCs, and locations that the PC interacts with during the campaign.

There may be times when you want to dart around: making a note about a conflict that's come to you while you're working in Place creating a NPC. That's fine but when you've finished head back to Place and carry on with E.P.I.C..

Comments

James: Following these steps, I have modified a game I was playing into an Epic Campaign. I'm considering using this for future campaigns so I can get a good idea of what I'll do.

Here be the link: https://solorpgvoyages.wordpress.com/2015/03/16/e-p-i-c-greek-titan-world/

Mythos Fantasy: Discovering the Truth in the Darkest Hour

To discover the truth one must seek it out.

To seek the truth out one must be open to what one may find.

To be open one must be fearless.

Fearless and determined.

– Grandmaster d'Thomria

This is a video post. Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/onGvJ1QOvt4

Fantasy Mythos: Worldbuilding

A sense of Place is one of the overlooked elements of roleplaying. Within this video I'll start to craft an identity of the Fantasy Mythos world.

I'm using the E.P.I.C. Campaign System to provide a template, a framework, on the essentials that needs to be built for a roleplaying campaign.

This is a video post. Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/0Pc7FKu0x_k

7 Questions to Start an Unstoppable Campaign

Picture: Creative Commons 2.0 Milos Milosevic

Even with the best will in the world there are times when you don't want to solo roleplay.

You feel bad because you've done the hard work. You've got everything ready to play. Still, though, you struggle to get those dice out.

Then again maybe you want to get playing without having to think things through. You just want to start and see where you end up. But you just stare at a blank computer screen thinking about what your character should do.

I've been in both those situations. It sucks. The answer is to do a bit of planning.

I've created 7 questions which will help you take small steps to create a character, give them something to do, a direction to go in, and to help get a campaign moving.

The 7 Questions

Q1: What game are you going to play?

This is the External Factors part of E.P.I.C. Campaign System. If you're not going into the full details then you just need to know the genre, rough idea of the world, and game system. Remember don't build too much detail.

Q2: Who's your character?

I put Character (the last stage of E.P.I.C.) near the front of these questions as this is a very character focused method. You can put as much or as little detail in as you like. If you're stuck pick a descriptive word and a job and put them together to give you an idea about your character.

Q3: Where's your character now?

This gives you a place from where the game starts. It can be a scene, a place, or even a frame of mind. It can be anything that helps you understand where and how the character starts off the game.

Q4: What's your character doing?

People are seldom not doing anything: even if they're staring into space they're staring into space. Once your character doing something it helps takes the brakes off and allows motion for the game. Changing direction is easier than starting so starting is best.

Q5: What's about to disrupt the character's life?

Following a person through a normal day is boring. We want to see something happening. This is what this question is about. This event forces the character to start moving through the world in a different manner. It makes the character move away from their boring and comfortable life.

Q6: Where's the story going?

Once we know the direction the story is going then it helps drive the story. It gives you something to help you when you get a blank mind during the game. This direction could be the final scene or some future event or even a conflict that could, or will, occur.

Q7: Why can't the character quit?

We know where the adventure starts. We know what will occur. What we don't know is why the character will go towards the end of the story. Why they traipse across middle-earth and into Mordor when all they want to do is settle down in the Shire and grow cabbages. Knowing this will make it easier for us to motivate us to motivate the character when we take a stop between sessions.

How to Answer the Questions

There are many ways to answer questions. I'm guessing you know many ways yourself but if you're stuck you can try these methods:

- Rory's Story Cubes
- Mythic GME's Randomiser[1]
- Random Content Generators
- Useful Random Content Generators include:
    - Ennead Games' Quick NPC Generators: Fantasy or Sci Fi
    - UNE: The Universal NPC Emulator Revised
    - Moebius Adventures' Insta-NPCs
    - Moebius Adventures' Open Spaces
    - Moebius Adventures' Little Spaces
- Brainstorming
- Freewriting

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[1] the list of words to describe something

DAWN RUNNER SAGA: INTRODUCTION

Picture from NASA.gov

Earlier this week, on May the 4th, the whole world seemed to go Star Wars mad.

This is my entry into the 4th May fun (a few days late I admit). I enjoy sci-fi and it's a shame that not more space opera films are made. So, along with reading, I'm forced to create my own space operas to enjoy.

Dawn Runner Saga

The Dawn Runner / Shattered Stars Universe that this game is set in is created by me in the guise of Winston Robertson. It's a dark world that's set in a post-apocalyptic sci-fi world.

Q1: What game are you going to play?

I've mentioned that this is a dark world: it's a sci-fi world that's falling apart. Ships don't work all that well. Few new ships are made and it's hard to keep the ships that are working working well. Most humans live in space ships or space stations. Few planet based civilisations survive all the known garden worlds have been destroyed.

Humanity was almost wiped out. All populous worlds were destroyed. This happened as a result of a misunderstanding with an alien race that has now left humanity alone.

The bright spot of human civilisation is the Dawn Runner. Dawn Runner is a massive ship. It's the largest ship ever created by humans. It was launched too soon and before it was complete to save it from destruction. Now this ship must travel through space to try and survive and satisfy its immense need for food, water, and technological parts.

Q2: Who's your character?

I'm using Ennead Games' Quick Sci-Fi NPC Generator to create the basic character.

My character is a: Flamboyant Roboticist

Previous to this roll I didn't think of robots in the Shattered Stars / Dawn Runner Universe. Now I have to find a way to get robots within the setting. There is an interesting mix of ideas, which deserve more time to filter, are gathering in my mind.

Q3: Where's your character now?

Within the universe there are different groups:

1. Rough Riders
2. Order of the Lancers
3. The Guards
4. Freeshippers

2 of the 4 are Dawn Runner based (Lancers and Guards). 1 is associated with Dawn Runner but based on ships (Rough Riders). The last (Freeshippers) are a group of pirate-type people / warlords.

I don't know if I want the game to be based upon Dawn Runner or on ships on behalf of the Dawn Runner. Before I answer that question I'll roll 3 Rory's Story Cubes to see if I can get an understanding about where the character is.

Screaming Face / Undergrowth with Peering Eye / Beetle

Once I rolled I did, as I always do, a small brainstorm to get more ideas.

Screaming Face

- Fear
- Crying
- Terrified
- Frightened
- Running Away

Undergrowth with Peering Eye

- Watching
- Hunting
- Hiding
- Spying
- Shadows

Beetle

- Tough Outer
- Not Normal
- Wings
- Segments
- Head

The PC is scared and worried about what he's seen in the shadows. He thinks something is watching him, or others, from the shadows. Spying on them keeping track on them. From what he's seen whatever is watching them isn't normal.

Q4: What's your character doing?

So the PC is worried and scared. How is he reacting to this situation?

Magic Wand / Puzzle Piece / Sleeping

Magic Wand

- Technology, Advanced
- Hand Waving
- Misdirection
- Illusions
- Slight of Hand

Puzzle Piece

- Problems

- Puzzles
- Putting Together
- Pictures
- Sorting

Sleeping

- Ignoring
- Ignorant
- Unaware
- Resting
- Waiting

The PC is aware of the advanced technology but is unaware of its purpose. He is trying to see the big picture and put together everything he knows but he's still got to sort out the pieces so he knows what he's got. Without going too deep either he's ignorant of what he's got, the tech is waiting, or the people he's trying to tell are ignoring him. Either way that's something to be discovered in game.

To add a bit more depth I'll roll 2 Rory's Story Cubes: Actions.

Knocking Off / *Falling*

Knocking Off

- Damaging
- Accident
- Unaware
- Falling
- Destroy

Falling

- Trip
- Accident
- Pushed
- Jumped
- Landing

The sense I get from this and from the above is that he's blundering around, even if he's being careful. He's unaware of what's he's noticing and he could damage or destroy everything people have built up. So this means he could be gotten rid of in an accidental manner.

Q5: What's about to disrupt the character's life?

Either the tech starts activating or he's called to a secret meeting. Or there's this accident.

Again I roll my Rory's Story Cubes.

Bandit / *Toad* / *Walking Stick*

Bandit

- ʃ Hidden
- ʃ Pirates
- ʃ Theft
- ʃ Dirty Work
- ʃ Outside the Law

Toad

- ʃ Hidden
- ʃ Ugly
- ʃ Transformation
- ʃ Warts
- ʃ Water

Walking Stick

- ʃ Old
- ʃ Infirm
- ʃ Hook
- ʃ Made to Measure
- ʃ Support

This looks like it's an accident that disrupts the PC's life. Someone is hired to kill the PC by making him have an accident. Something that would occur on a regular basis for those who travel the ship's less inhabited zones. So on some old area something is made to collapse and kill the PC. As it's an old ship that's infirm the accident doesn't occur as it's meant to and there's some support and the PC survives. Maybe this accident could be something to do with the water system.

Q6: Where's the story going?

Instead of using Rory's Story Cubes I'll be using the Sci-Fi charts from CP.

Opposition: Artefact / Powerful Object or Coup

Motivations: Nourishment or Status

Themes: Optimism and Overcoming

Complications: Obligation or Forgotten Information / Facts

Actions: Recover

Things: Toxins

Plot Devices: Bio-Enhancement: An NPC with genetic or bionic upgrades features heavily in this story.

I'm not going to be doing any more thinking or analysing of these responses. I'll let them sit there and just run an eye over them as I go along.

Q7: Why can't the character quit?

This is simple if the PC quits he dies. Someone wants him dead and he needs to find out why. He needs to see if it's linked with his other investigation.

Fantasy Mythos: Intrigue

The 3rd pillar of E.P.I.C. Campaign System, Intrigue, is talked about in this video.

Sorry, about the video sound quality. I'll aim for a better quality in my next recording.

This is a video post. Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/cI4Sv642FVg

Create a Deep PC Quick

Most PCs I've ever played with in roleplaying games were no more than numbers on a page. Maybe if I pushed myself I created a couple of shallow surface character traits. Solo roleplaying is one of the times when it's easy to go deeper and explore our character. Really get under the skin, roleplay, and become our character if only for a little while.

Rather than fill out hundreds of questions I'm going to be looking at creating a few details. These details will give shape to a character whom we can explore in play.

The character I'm creating is for my Dawn Runner game. Before I've got to this point I've completed the E, P, and I of the E.P.I.C. Campaign System. This means I have some idea about the world. Also I answered these 7 Questions giving me some understanding about the character and his situation but I want more before I roleplay.

So far the only concrete description I know about the character is that he's a Flamboyant Roboticist.

Naming the Character

Some people say names are very important to their characters. Other people don't care about names and just give their characters any name they like. I'm in the middle of these two extremes in my views. Yes some names are very important yet other names aren't worth putting hours of work into them.

For this world I'm using the 3 letters found on number plates and use them to create names. The problem with this is that most names tend to be 5 letters in length. Using the letters DLF I create Dalif. I then go through my list to find 3 letters that start with F and come up with EKF which I reverse to FKE. I then create the suffix of 'ecke'.

When I put the name elements together I came up with Dalifeck. Dalifecke seems over complicated so I simplified it to Dalifec.

For most people they might be happy to shorten their name to Dal or Dali, maybe even Da. Not Dalifec though, he's Dalifec.

Dalifec's Flaw

We don't tend to think of heroes having flaws. But the greatest do. It's what drives them and what holds them back. For me Superman is only good when we see his human side and see him strive to be a better person. That's the same for Wolverine; it's when we see his human side that we grow to like, if not love, Wolverine.

From the previous article about the Dawn Runner game I know Dalifec keeps on digging up mysteries even if it's bad for him. So I feel this might make a great flaw. Dalifec must know what's going on around him so he can be in control of everything.

Why Dalifec feels like this I don't know. All I know is that we'll follow him as he leads us into places where his curiosity could get him killed.

Dalifec's Gifts

All heroes are good at something. Something that makes them stand out from the world around them.

I like to think that the gift and flaw work best if they form an organic whole. A seamless mix. Wolverine is almost physically invulnerable but it's his vulnerable emotional side that makes us care for him.

For this to work with Dalifec we need his gift to fit in with his inquisitiveness. I like the idea that he's one of the few people who understand robots on the Dawn Runner and that he's so intelligent that he's weird to those around him. That's where he gets his flamboyance from. He makes himself stand out as a defence mechanism against being ignored and overlooked as yet another geek.

Inner Life

Above I've started touching upon Dalifec's Inner Life.

We know he's intelligent and that people don't get him. That's why he decided to become over the top and be this flamboyant figure that almost everyone recognises if not knows in his realm of work. He does this to stop being just another tech guy or geek.

That's good. We have an outer and an inner layer. But now it's time to make things go one step deeper. This level is the why behind Dalifec's choices.

Why did Dalifec not want to be ignored and overlooked as yet another tech guy?

We can go back to childhood for this. Or it could be an influential event that occurred in the past. It could even be something to do with his core values (which I will explore in a moment). It could also be to do with his inner fears which you should also create as part of the inner life. This inner life holds the character's hopes, dreams, aspirations, and fears.

I like the idea of a brother; either real, adopted, or picked; that went missing in the vast engine, or the system areas, but people didn't care. The brother was just another faceless tech who disappeared like a portion who always do. This struck deep within Dalifec who never wanted to be ignored or forgotten. So he dug deep and did all he could do to be more. Even being bright and being a robotic master didn't help so he took a few of his traits and made them larger than life: he became flamboyant.

Core Values

Everyone has their own priorities about what's important to them. These are the core values.

We know that Dalifec wants to know what's going on around him. He never wants to be in the dark. We also know that he wants to be known and not overlooked.

There must be more to Dalifec than this. More values within him.

One that stands out is that he takes those techs who are overlooked and ignored and helps to mentor them. In doing this he's formed a sort of surrogate family for himself and for the techs. Some of whom even model themselves after Dalifec and become 'strange' and 'weird' in their own ways.

This caring for others fits in with Dalifec's fears of being overlooked, ignored, and forgotten.

The Start

Now we've finished Dalifec's core values we've created Dalifec. So far I've not even looked at his character sheet. The only backstory I've written was created in explaining who he is and where he's come from. If you wanted to it's now that you can write the detailed backstory some feel is important to the characters. To me backstory should be used to reinforce our characters traits and not define them.

If I was to do more with a character it would be to create links between the character and other people. Not just allies and friends but those who don't like the character. Some of these can be created in play, others discovered while looking at creating the character, and others still are put in just to form more NPC interactions that make a more social character.

It is now that we create the character sheet to fit in with what we know about our character. Then we're ready for adventure.

Comments

James Smith: And here's my post for my PC: https://solorpgvoyages.wordpress.com/2015/05/25/creating-a-deep-pc-in-the-form-of-leon/

Fantasy Mythos: Characters

This is the final video creating the Fantasy Mythos world and detailing the E.P.I.C. Campaign System.

This is a video post. Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/xcV-lSTwfLM

How to Wear Both GM and PC Hats Well

Picture: CC2.0 Oona Räisänen

As a Solo Roleplayers you've got so much to do when playing / running games. So many hats to wear: GM, PC, NPC, designer, teacher, writer (okay maybe not that).

At times you get stuck, confused, and end up wondering what it is you're meant to be doing. You look back at social roleplaying and see the simple joys we got from playing, or running, games. So you pack up your solo roleplaying kit again.

There is a technique which can help when things get a bit confused: GM / PC Turns.

GM / PC Turns

In a social RPG the GM describes the scene. A PC tells the GM what they want to happen. The GM then says what happens: sometimes in response to a dice roll.

GM / PC Turns is a way of taking this model and converting it into solo roleplaying.

There are many reasons for you to understand this technique:

- ꜱ it makes asking questions of Solo Engines easier,
- ꜱ it helps to roleplay our chosen PC better, and
- ꜱ it helps your sessions flow better.

Before you go on please note that this is a troubleshooting technique and not one that needs to be thought of all the time. In fact you may already use this technique without knowing...

GM Turn

The GM Turn is a nebulous entity. Anything that the GM in a social game has control over the GM Turn covers. This means everything that happens in the game — except what the PC does, think, and feel — takes place in the GM Turn.

It's important for you to keep in mind that the point of the GM Turn is to drive the story forward. Unless it is one of the few times when colour is added to the world, characters, or adventure.

If you're not sure if it's meant to be part of the GM Turn or PC Turn then make sure it's described in concrete terms. If you cannot describe it in concrete terms it's part of the PC Turn.

PC Turn

The PC Turn covers anything that the PC does, think, or feel: not in that order though.

Pulling a trigger on a gun, or releasing an arrow, is part of the PC Turn. The effect that the bullet / arrow has is part of the GM Turn.

In a PC Turn there's a set order of what happens when:

- ꜱ Instinctive Action

-) Feeling
-) Thoughts
-) Rational Actions including conversation.

The order is important because it's how our minds work.

Have you seen the Deer in Headlights look?

That's instinctive action. For me, in that situation, I know I wasn't thinking but was feeling. I also know that I didn't do any rational actions. It was afterwards I could feel relief, think, and then join in at the laughter (at my expense).

Just because the PC has to go through these steps doesn't mean that you can't skipped a step or two if they're not moving the adventure forward.

GM / PC Turn Example

In this example, you'll see a scene twice. Once from a social roleplaying viewpoint and once from a solo roleplaying viewpoint.

Social Roleplaying Viewpoint

GM: The bar is packed full of people. There's groups of orcs, halflings, and humans sitting to the edges of the bar. In the centre are a loud, but small, group of dwarves who are getting drunker by tankard. They're destroying every bit of table, stool, and bench they can get their hands on. In the corner the barkeep is watching his eyes wide with terror and are red and puffy.

PC: I need to talk to the barkeep so I try to edge around the dwarves and get to the barkeep.

GM: Make a sneak check.

PC: *rolls dice* I failed.

GM: A dwarf sees you edging past and grabs you, pulling you into the crowd of dwarves.

PC: I edge my way to the edge of the group taking a tankard as I go.

GM: The dwarves, once you're in their midst, forget you're there and you manage to get out of the group. You do end up with a few bruises as your punches, caught in mini scuffles, and had a stool broken over your back.

Solo Roleplaying Viewpoint

Instead of doing the whole scene here's a snippet. Because it's solo roleplaying there's more of the thoughts and feelings of the PC giving emotional depth to the adventure.

GM: The bar is packed full of people. There's groups of orcs, halflings, and humans sitting to the edges of the bar. In the centre are a loud, but small, group of dwarves who are getting drunker by tankard. They're destroying every bit of table, stool, and bench they can get their hands on. In the corner the barkeep is looking his eyes wide, red, and puffy.

PC: The barkeep is the next contact I need to talk to. Just my luck the dwarves are having a party in this particular tavern. Yes they deserve to be rewarded but, still, couldn't they keep it down. Maybe if I keep to the edge I could edge round to the barkeep. Okay, so I'm going to sneak round the edge of the dwarf party. *rolls dice: damn it, I failed, okay so at least 1 dwarf sees me*

GM: A dwarf sees you edging past and grabs you, pulling you into the crowd of dwarves.

Using GM / PC Turns

You don't need to use this technique all the time. It's there for the times when you need clarity and are wondering how to get it.

If you do want to use GM / PC Turns you can write 'GM:' then description followed by 'PC:' and what the PC does. Much like the example above.

You can also use a Table. In one cell you do the GM Turn and in another you do the PC Turn.

GM / PC Turns, as mentioned above, is useful when crafting questions for use with Solo Engines.

Aside: for more on this topic please look at Master Solo Engines: Gain Compelling Adventures by Asking, and Answering, the Correct Questions

Dawn Runner: A Death to Escape From

The lights went out again.

This time the red emergency lights didn't flicker on. Only my torch shone out in the room.

'You should've told us, Dalifec,' Tazet said.

I nodded; I should've. My fears about what would happen if they, whoever they were, would do if they knew I knew. What they would do to my friends if they knew too. So I kept it a secret, to keep them safe. It didn't work. Whatever was happening is happening to them too and they didn't know the secret.

We were all caught in the trap and they didn't know why. Damn it, I didn't know either. This must be bigger. Bigger than I'd guessed.

Dalifec's Character Sheet

I'm starting this campaign using Risus and Mythic.

Dalifec

Description:

A tall lanky man who wears over-the-top clothes full of colourful patches and straps. Under the colourfulness the clothes are functional just like the man who wears them.

Clichés:

- Flamboyant Roboticist (4)
- Obsessive Mystery Solver (2)
- Dawn Rider Cartographer (2)
- Leader of The Outsiders (1)

Lucky Shots: 3

Starting Off the Campaign

As I'm unsure of all the ins and outs of the attempt on Dalifec I decided to ask Mythic GME a few questions about how the campaign starts. Once I know about the starting scene I'll see how the campaign grows from there.

Chaos Rank: 5

Question: Is this an obvious attempt on Dalifec's life?

Odds: 50/50

Roll: 66

Result: No

Double: Y

Random Event: N/A

This means that whoever wants to kill Dalifec will make it look like an accident, or mechanical disruption, kills Dalifec. I think there is a chance that though Dalifec works alone people may be with him when the attempt occurs.

Question: Is Dalifec alone when the attempt is made?

Odds: 50/50

Roll: 92

Result: Expectational No

Double: N

So Dalifec is not alone. But who is with him?

Question: Are The Outsiders with Dalifec?

Odds: Somewhat Likely

Roll: 78

Result: No

Double: N

Now I know the larger group aren't with him. Maybe there is an inner core group, in fact I like that idea. So The Outsiders have a sort-of hierarchy with Dalifec at the centre.

Question: Are the core of The Outsiders with Dalifec?

Odds: Likely

Roll: 03

Result: Expectational Yes

Double: N

This means all of the core are with Dalifec. As they're with him it's likely that they're in the settled area rather than the working area of Dawn Runner. Let's check my logic.

Question: Are this group in the main area of Dawn Runner?

Odds: 50/50

Roll: 24

Result: Yes

Double: N

So they are in the main area. I'm thinking now that Dalifec would want them somewhere private. What's more private than a private cabin?

Question: Is the group in Dalifec's cabin?

Odds: Likely

Roll: 55

Result: Yes

Double: Y

Random Event: NPC Negative: Triumph Misfortune

Event Meaning: Something happens to an NPC while saving the core of The Outsiders and Dalifec's life.

The random event means that I'm nearing the end of finding out what's occuring in the opening scene. In the opening scene an NPC gets hurt — maybe killed. There is one question left I want to know. Why was the core meeting together?

Question: Was Dalifec talking to them about the threat?

Odds: Unlikely

Roll: 88

Result: Exceptional No

Double: Y

Random Event: N/A

To me this means the core were asking about what Dalifec was keeping secret but he didn't want to tell them. In fact they were pushing him to tell them what he knew.

Those questions have given me an idea about where the campaign starts and what's happening. This means I can start the adventure and see where it leads me.

How to Harness the Powerful Punch of Story

Picture: CC BY-ND 2.0 World Series Boxing

The thrill of a heart-stopping story.

Eyes glued to the screen, or the page, wanting to see the hero overcome this new danger. The edge of the seat as they try their last trick in their bag. The relief as it works. But the heart beats faster when the villain smiles in spite of the hero's success.

Wouldn't it be great if all solo roleplaying could be like that. It can be and the first step is to understand story.

Maybe it's due to the fact I love stories in all their forms, or I've spent ages learning about fiction writing but I cannot underestimate the power of story.

Story elevates roleplaying from yet another table-top game. That's why you hear so much about story from me and how to get it in your solo roleplaying sessions. Story is so important you cannot overestimate its place in roleplaying. In fact I believe that story is at the core of roleplaying.

Knowing story is important is good but knowing what a story is is even better.

It's easy to say you know a story when you see one. For most that's good enough: it might be good enough for you. Digging deeper to get a better understanding will help you enjoy roleplaying more.

What is a Story?

This is a question that published authors, even those who teach fiction writing, struggle to answer. In all my reading about story the best definition I found comes from a researcher, Kendall Haven, about the power of stories.

Haven's definition isn't simple but is relevant. It is:

A detailed, character-based narration of a character's struggles to overcome obstacles and reach an important goal.

Breaking the definition apart will help you'll get the more out of your roleplaying.

Character-Based

A character is your vessel in the story. It's through their eyes and feelings you experience the story. A character allows you to live their struggle and grasp what they believe and want to get: their goal.

Narration

You don't need to roleplay every moment of your character's day. You need to focus upon the events that occur because they're there to show the character defeating problems or reaching for their goal.

Goal

So far you should've noticed goal mentioned twice so far. A goal is very important. A goal has to be something important to your character it should be something they're willing to die (in whatever manner) for.

Detail

Detail, or colour, adds depth to your story. These are the light-hearted moments or moments when not much seems to be happening but we love none-the-less like the scene in the extended Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring film when the hobbits are talking about food and Strider chucks them apples out of the mist as he goes on. No tension but lots of colour and interest.

Detail also adds depth to the story. It's also the moments that add wow to the story. Much like the time in Fellowship when you're watching them on the river and the camera flows up to the top of the statues. Adds nowt to the narration but much to the world and hence to the story.

Struggles

A story isn't fun if it's simple or easy.

You need problems to overcome. The greater the problems, the greater the struggle, the more interested you are in the story.

Get Story into Your Game

To get story into game may seem complicated but at the easiest it takes 2 steps.

These 2 steps are:

1. Give your character a goal that's important to them.
2. Put relevant obstacles to stop the character getting the goal.

The easiest way to get obstacles is to brainstorm a person who wants to stop the character from reaching their goal.

Then you figure out why they're getting in the way of your character.

This opposing character could:

-) want the same goal as your character,
-) want to stop your character from getting the goal, or
-) by reaching their goal stop your PC from achieving their goal.

If, like me, you like discovering who your character is up against as you go along then here's another 2 step method.

1. Brainstorm a list of different reasons as to why your character cannot reach the goal.
2. Put your character into a situation where 1, or more, of these reasons come into play

Over time let your character, and yourself, discover more about who's trying to stop them getting their goal.

How will learning about story help you take your solo roleplaying to the next level?

Dawn Runner: Assassination Attempt

This time the red emergency lights didn't flicker on. Only my torch shone out in the room.

'You should've told us, Dalifec,' Tazet said.

I nodded; I should've. My fears about what would happen if they, whoever they were, would do if they knew I knew. What they would do to my friends if they knew too. So I kept it a secret, to keep them safe. It didn't work. Whatever was happening is happening to them too and they didn't know the secret.

We were all caught in the trap and they didn't know why. Damn it, I didn't know either. This must be bigger. Bigger than I'd guessed.

Nisi darted to the control panel and tapped on the emergency override button. It remained dark. She frowned.

'Look I– I don't know how to say this...' I looked at Tazet then around at the rest. They all, but Nisi, were looking at me. 'There's something going on. No–' I shot a look at Tazet. 'I don't know what's going on. All I know is that something is happening on Dawn Runner. Something big.'

They all started talking at once.

'Shhh.' Nisi shouted.

They all went silent. In the silence I heard a hissing.

'This terminal isn't working. Even all the overrides are non-operational. We're shut off.'

Tazet moved over to the air vent. He coughed then collapsed. One of the others darted forward and grabbed Tazet.

I went to the door and opened the access panel. The power light was off. I reached in with my fingers and toggled the manual override. There was no thunk, no give, no resistance. Someone had disconnected the manual override.

Dawn Rider Cartographer (2)

Does Dalifec know another way out of this room?

Difficulty: 10 (Challenge)

Roll: 2+3 = 5

I thumped the door. I might be one of the best of knowing the layout of the ship but of this area I didn't know much about his room. No. Maybe I did. I took a breath. Someone barged me out of the way.

Dawn Rider Cartographer (2) + Lucky Shot

Does Dalifec know another way out of this room?

Difficulty: 10 (Challenge)

Roll: 1+6 + 4 = 11

This room wasn't a proper passenger cabin. It was bigger than a normal passenger cabin but as it wasn't fully working when I moved in no one took a proper look at it. Something had happened in this room. One of the shelving units that surrounded the walls hid something. Maybe another passage way. Of the parts of the ship I'd explored I'd never gone down that passage. I closed his eyes and thought back to when he first moved in.

Even then it was hidden. Why I never searched out that passage I forgot. Maybe it was because it was a secret and it was the first thing I hid when I moved in. I didn't want someone to take the cabin away from me. It wasn't on the wall in front of the door. It was not obvious at first glance. Yes. It was hidden in the corner. To the left. I looked at the shelving unit. It was the oldest one, battered, but still strong. I pulled it out of the way.

Yes, there was the panel. A small half-height hatch. I twisted the lock in the middle. The hatch opened.

'This way.'

They all looked at me then at the open hatch.

I climbed in first and hoped the others would follow me. Maybe we'd be leaving the danger behind. But I had a feeling the real danger lay ahead. Maybe not in this passage tunnel but in the journey we'd just stared. The journey we'd been forced down.

Game Notes

Rule Set: Risus

Solo Engine: Mythic GME (not used)

Tools Used: None

This session was about getting the story going. I did this by using Mythic GME to create a scene and hint at a disturbance to draw Dalifec into the story. This is why I didn't roll on the solo engine and didn't have another character solve the problem of being locked in a room with no way out. This scene was all about Dalifec and getting him to shine whilst solving a problem.

I would've loved to have done something with Dalifec's robotics but decided to use another skill instead.

Most of this session was done without reference to games tools. That's okay. It's up to you to discover how you best enjoy playing solo. For me most of my first sessions don't include much game interaction.

From now things in the game will get interesting. I'll like to know what happens next and I hope you too.

Instant Universe Review: Building a universe 1 roll at a time
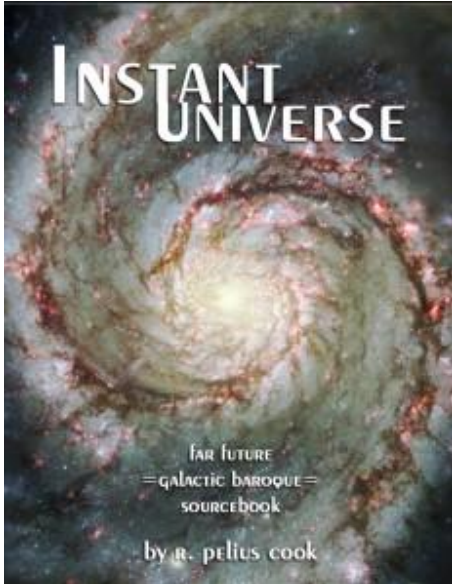
One of the problems of sci-fi RPGs is the lack of generic resources. You can get lots of material for fantasy and modern games: for sci-fi it's not so easy. As my first love is for sci-fi it's nice to see good sci-fi resources being produced. And I'm excited by the latest offering: Instant Universe.

Instant Universe is a product that helps you produce the physical world to set your sci-fi game in. It does this by starting large and drilling down to planets and even if there's life on planets. It also talks about civilisations which is a nice extra but can be a bit annoying in sandbox type games when a planet suddenly produces a universe spanning civilisation.

Instant Universe In Use

For this review I'll be creating a star system for the Dawn Runner campaign. I would recommend starting large and getting more detailed until you get to the level of detail you want. This is because those larger scales influence the small scale details.

The Universe

From experience I've discovered the first roll in the Instant Universe creation needs a complete set of polyhedral dice. This speeds up the process, you'll still need to roll extra dice for the other galaxies created.

The result of my roll means that The Dawn Runner is in a galactic group which has 0 galaxies in it. Instant Universe says if there are 0 galaxies it's a Megaparsec Void. This void is 90 Megaparsecs in size and houses just 3 galaxies.

- Galaxy 1 is a barred spiral galaxy.
- Galaxy 2 is a dwarf amorphous irregular galaxy.
- Galaxy 3 is another irregular galaxy. This time its a dwarf elliptical.

A void means the space around them is emptier than in most other parts of the universe. A perfect place to hide if you're avoiding killer aliens.

The Galaxy

To make this as random as possible a d6 roll indicates that the Dawn Runner is in the barred spiral galaxy.

A roll on a chart in the book shows the Dawn Runner ended up in the halo of the barred spiral galaxy.

What I like about Instant Universe is the detail included in the book. I've learnt much about stellar geography in reading this book. For example the halo is a sparse area of space that surrounds a galaxy.

In rolling to see how the galaxy differs from the norm I rolled 'roll twice' 3 times. I also rolled some repeated and contradictory results. So, after many rolls, the galaxy has 4 peculiarities.

They are:

1. Super-massive: the galaxy is 4 times larger than a standard galaxy
2. Dusty: the galaxy is high in metacllicity
3. Gas Rich: star formation is faster than standard
4. Compact: the star density of the system is 150% normal

With these details it's clear that, although the galaxy is in the middle of a large void, it's a good place to rebuild as there are lots of benefits of this galaxy. I'm guessing The Dawn Runner wasn't the only human vessel in this galaxy. In fact I know they aren't.

Stellar Neighborhood

The stellar neighbourhood that the Dawn Runner finds itself in is an old region. This means that star formation is rare and most of the stars in this region are dwarf stars. The age of this region is 2.5 billion years old.

The inclusion of details that other products tend not to include is great. For example there is a chart that helps create the size of different parts of a galaxy and a way to work out the star density. The latter is something I have long wanted to know. The neighbourhood the Dawn Runner is in has 0.6 stars per cubic parsec.

Solar System

Creating an understanding of what star is where is easy and for most of the time all you need to do. Each Star Class roll is modified and making a note of all the modifiers is handy. So far we've just created the neighbourhood where the Dawn Runner is. Now we're looking at creating the solar system.

The star that Dawn Runner is orbiting is a bright orange star round which orbits a standard system with chaotic orbits. I rolled 8 bodies but with the chaotic orbits this is reduced to 4 bodies.

As with all scientific based system generators creating the system involves lots of maths, rolling, and darting backwards and forwards in the book. I wish this could be streamlined and made quicker without sacrificing detail. I'm not sure how this could be done though.

So after much rolling the system's 4 bodies are:

1. Meteoroid Belt
    ♩ Orbit: 0.36
2. Rock Dwarf
    ♩ Orbit: 1.72
    ♩ Mass: 0.01 Me
    ♩ Atmosphere: Very poor atmosphere (Special)
    ♩ Other Details: Extreme axial tilt, no moons, no native life
3. Gas Planet
    ♩ Orbit: 3.75
    ♩ Mass: 9 Me
    ♩ Other Details: Fast rotation, ring system w/ 23 moonlets
4. Metal Dwarf
    ♩ Orbit: 5.4
    ♩ Mass: 0.06 Me
    ♩ Atmosphere: Very poor atmosphere (Carbon dioxide dominate w/ sulphur dioxide)
    ♩ Other Details: Volatile poor, 7 dwarf moons, no native life

Instant Universe Final Thoughts

I really do like this product. I hope you will too.

There is lots of information in Instant Universe. On the + side there is not too much information to drown you in details. On the – side I would've liked some further reading resources to help expand my knowledge.

The great thing about this title is it helps you go from universe to galaxy, stellar neighbourhood, solar system, and down to a planet. The details and information included help you make each region of space different. No longer will the core look like the outer regions. You'll know how each of them will differ.

Getting from universe to star generation is fast. Going from star to planetary generation is slow. Though with practice and the right cheat sheets I'm sure this can be sped up. But this is a complaint I have with all major scientific based solar system creators.

To help understand the process it'll be nice to have a walk through, or 2, on the website after the site is launched. (See below for more about this.)

Other factors:

- Author is responsive.
- Book seems very well researched.
- Don't need to do everything just what's needed and add more later.
- No art but lots of useful illustrations.

I would say that this product is worth buying if you play ship-based sci-fi games. Its contains useful content and random content generators making it a solid purchase.

I mentioned that the author is responsive. As proof of that before this review was even published he's taken on board feedback and created a walk through as an appendix to the book.

Interview: Zach Best creator of CRGE

Heya, Zach, I'd like to welcome you to Solo Roleplayer. Thanks for coming.

Hiya, Kenny. Thanks for having me.

In this series of interviews I'm talking to all the major solo engine creators: myself included. Next time will be the creator of Mythic GME, Tana Pigeon, but for now I'm going to interview Zach Best the creator of CRGE (Conjectural Roleplaying Gamesmaster Emulator).

Zach has also put out other interesting tools to aid soloists. This interview focuses upon his Solo Engine but don't be surprised if we talk about his other tools.

So, Zach, can you tell me a bit about CRGE?

Sure thing. It's a system that allows for creative solo roleplaying. I used a tiered approach because I noticed that solo roleplayers seemed to like to tinker. I felt if I created modular tools CRGE would be beneficial to beginners looking to learn to solo roleplay and veterans just looking for ideas for what they already do.

What made you want to create your solo engine?

My love for Mythic GME. CRGE started out as a framework device to attach on to Mythic GME because I was finding that my stories in Mythic were just spiralling out of control with complexity and narrative threads. So I created what would eventually be the top tier for CRGE, a method of making frameworks to drive a story to completion. Then I started to tinker downward with creating more prominence with threads and getting rid of the need to determine probability every question.

So it grew from being an add on to a tool in its own right. That's interesting. Since you made CRGE, have you played more solo or group role playing, in hours played?

It's stayed about the same, but I was playing Mythic GME a lot prior to CRGE. Solo roleplaying in my experience is fantastic for the depth of experience and story. Still not much replaces a fun night with friends. We also play a GM-less game using CRGE in a PbP format. People play when they want, which is another interesting experience.

I do agree that getting round a table with friends is fun and it's something that I miss lots. How does your CRGE PbP work? It sounds interesting.

We play Werewolf the Forsaken, and basically whenever someone gets a hankering to add to the story they post. It's agreed that whatever happens, happens, but other PC's that aren't active stay in the shadows, so to speak. It's pretty light, mechanically speaking. Combat is rarely a group effort for instance. But we have fun. One player might set up the scene, and then another might just pop in to change the scene just a bit. It's not to get some of that player reaction gameplay instead of always being in control.

That sounds like it's fun, Zach. When you do solo game what rule systems do you tend to use?

I really like White Wolf's systems, especially the new World of Darkness, but I would say my greatest successes have been using FATE. I've been trying lately to really play Chuubo's solo, but that has proven daunting without a released campaign to fill in lots of gaps.

Fate does seem to be a popular system for soloists. It just takes a bit of time to get used to and play. What do you like about WW and Fate, Zach?

The emphasis on story and narration is paramount for these games. I do not really enjoy dungeon crawls or fair combat (CR5 vs. X level party). I think that the more narratively open the system is the better I can move the story.

So story for you is very important: as it is for me. Why is story important to you?

I feel that for mechanics, the other side of the roleplaying game coin, they are better done in video games, even simple ones such as roguelikes. Video games though rarely give that feeling of infinite story where anything can be explored. I've only ever seen one that comes close, Dwarf Fortress, and that has its other problems. I like deciding I want to explore a story. What's it like when a new vampire accidentally kills an elder? What happens when an anomaly vampire that seems sane comes from Atomic Robo's vampire dimension?

What rules systems do you feel work best with your CRGE?

Probably a more narrative-based system such as FATE or Chuubo's. The way threads move in CRGE are similar to how any GM would fix things behind the curtain, but I really enjoy being able to, as a player, have the ability to counteract those movements.

How would you counteract those movements when playing solo?

In FATE the system allows players to basically bend the narrative with aspects and stunts. My favorite ever is "Unflinching Walk" where resolve is used as defense. That moment when a bullet misses because the hero stared at it with diamond resolve is fun. In Chuubo's the system gets even crazier since I can spend points to push the story and actions towards progress.

Now I want to dig a bit deeper, Zach, what's your philosophy behind CRGE?

Play fast and loose. Go for the story. Keep pushing for resolution. The last thing I want is for players to feel like CRGE, or any solo GM, is a pixel bitch fest where everything needs to be asked of the GM emulator. Take the reigns.

You like it when the story keeps moving forward in a fast-paced manner. Much like an action flick. How do you get that feel across in the way you designed CRGE?

I think it comes out in the top two tiers of CRGE. In the middle tier the probabilities of crazy answers begin to die down as a player heads towards climax and resolution. There might be an unforeseen twist, but I don't want to get in the way of the momentum of the story. The frameworks build on top of that to provide that narrative device pushing things to wrap up. There will always be loose threads to chase for another story!

How does CRGE work?

There are three tiers. The first tier is a chart used to answer 'yes or no' questions to determine things that are happening now. 'Does the guy have a gun?' or 'Is the store locked?' However, depending on the stage of the scene (exposition, rising action, climax/resolution) the chart has answers in differing probabilities to shake things up. One answer might be 'no, but' or one might be 'yes, and unexpectedly... a new NPC arrives'.

The second tier is more about story threads, which are usually questions or goals that can't be instantaneously answered or completed. 'I want revenge on Bob' might be a good story thread. 'Who framed Roger?' another. The first two tiers interact in that the answers from the chart can have significant impact on the threads.

The final tier is a framework to ensure that each scene is meaningful. It takes the threads and starts pushing them towards resolution. The goal is to create a finite 'chapter' or 'chronicle' for the PC. For players that want a sandbox experience, they can completely ignore the framework.

Zach, can please you give an example of CRGE in action?

There's a really good example in appendices of CRGE, which I randomly rolled and played. In no way did I fudge any dice or anything. A CIA desk jockey, Bernard, goes on an adventure to find a thief that burglarized his CIA office. He heads to China town to accidentally find the burglar ordering food from the Bernard's favorite Chinese carryout. He follows the burglar, and they are both accosted by Russian Cold War agents. Bernard barely gets away in the firefight.

This was one of the first questions I asked for the story and it set the whole trajectory: Did the burglars steal sensitive documents? (Rolled 84.) Yes, and... they got more than they were looking for. I am going to say that the more sensitive stuff was what they accidentally nabbed. This way the agency has that time to respond before the bad guys realize what they have.

It turned out to be nuke launch codes, which the Russians wanted. So the burglars got way in over their heads. I almost felt sorry for them in the end.

That sounds like a fun adventure to have. I want to move away from CRGE for a moment and into the realms of general Solo Engines. My first general question is: What are your top 3 tips for asking questions of solo engines?

Don't pixel bitch unless it's fun for you.

Ask the question based on your gut feelings, even if it might be bad ("is he bleeding to death?") because better stories will result than you trying to game the GM emulator ("is it only a flesh wound after he was shot 8 times?").

Push the theme and emphasis of the world you are playing in. There is so much material for multitude of settings, and utilizing the small things can really add up. Context is everything, especially in questions and answers.

Once you've asked the questions and answered them. How do you go about interpreting the answers given by a solo engine. What are your top 3 tips?

Go with your gut. If your gut feeling to "is he bleeding to death" is "no and.... he's already dead" so be it. Go with that story.

Don't waste time on interpretation. Keep things moving. Make it make as much sense as possible, and ignore things to move on when necessary. I guarantee plot twists will still happen.

Move a few narrative steps forward after each question is answered. Don't immediately ask another question unless it is really necessary.

I know you like asking as few questions as possible for pace purposes. But sometimes you need to ask a couple of questions. Do you have any tips on what to do when you've realised that you're asking too many questions?

Stop doing it. Realize that it is okay to push the story forward. If you feel you are fairly pushing forward without asking questions, then rock on. There is no need to get approval from the dice gods for every decision.

I strongly suggest that when a question is answered figure out which dominoes are in motion, and help some to the ground. If Mr. Bleeder-to-Death bled out, maybe Sam starts crying. You could ask the GM emulator of course, or just go with it. You already thought of Sam crying. That's good enough.

Thanks for the sound advice there, Zach. I had a reader who when reading a Mythic play through saw an interesting, yet strange, character becoming a GM PC. It worked in the play through but when they were reading it made them worried about strange things happening in their game.

What they would like to know is how they can keep things focused upon their game and not go off in strange, and maybe stupid, directions? All of this whilst still maintaining surprises coming out of the solo engine.

I'm not sure how to answer that because there are too many variables to how things went awry. The best answer I can give is keep things in context. Questions, answers, threads, PC's, NPC's, etc. All the elements should be in context of the setting and theme you want to drive.

If you use the philosophy I stated above of asking a question and then moving narratively forward a few steps you should be able to keep control of a 'strange and stupid direction' coming out of the solo engine.

Breaking away from solo engines for a moment. Yet keeping in spirit with the previous question; what tips do you have to make sure a solo adventure sticks to a story and doesn't just end up being little more than a string of encounters?

I feel like giving the encounter depth within the context of the overarching story is important. I really pay attention to the Chekhov's gun narrative device in solo roleplaying. If something gets introduced and my time was spent on that thing, I want it to be meaningful to the story. Ask some follow-up questions to why the encounter existed, especially if it can be related to other recent happenings.

String of encounters or anti-Chekhov guns (things that have no meaning to the story) are not bad. Plenty of people like a more real world sandbox style play, but that will not stick to a story as much.

I feel a new list to keep track of coming up: Characters, Threads, and (Chekhov) Guns.

As roleplaying comes from a social setting groups in roleplaying are the norm. Some people tend to keep with groups in solo play. What do you find works better: controlling an entire party yourself, having the solo engine control part of a party, or having a single adventurer?

I personally like having a single PC with a supporting cast. I keep them NPCs in the sense that I will sometimes ask for actions and responses from CRGE (or UNE), but I retain some control over them. I do not like controlling an entire party myself because I find then I lose the depth of that single PC.

You mentioned UNE, so let's take a break from CRGE for a bit. Before you released CRGE you released UNE. Between CRGE and UNE how do you control faceless 'single use' NPCs? NPCs like merchants, town guards, pizza delivery, taxi drivers, and so on.

It depends on if they are a prop or meaningful to the story. If you start making NPCs have motivations and backgrounds, their role in the game should be enhanced.

How about major, named, NPCs?

This is where UNE shines. I view it as adding vectors to important NPC's. They aren't just there to give the PC some information. They have their own motivations, wants, and flaws. If there is an interaction with your PC, and you know that the NPC now 'hinders pride' that could change the whole dynamic. What if your PC is really good at picking up tells and can see that the NPC prefers a humble attitude? What if you are playing a brash hero?

So vectors are how a NPC moves through the story. For example: if a brash hero does something that makes them proud the NPC who hinders pride gets involved in some way to hinder the hero. So maybe he says he done that before, or knocks the confidence of the hero in some way. Is that right?

Yes, or perhaps the NPC goes cold on the hero if the hero brags a bit. UNE is not a magic answer machine. My real life group uses it a lot, and I see my friends often asking "what does this mean?" My response usually starts with "I don't know, but let's explore all the possibilities. Recently we were rolling up new characters for a western RPG, and a player rolled "views propaganda". We surmised it could be something as simple as the PC being aware of things being propaganda to something where the PC actively searches for propaganda. It's just a small push. It's not what the PC is.

How do you get monsters and NPC to act as if another player is controlling their actions and decisions that will surprise you as a player and act like an intelligent AI?

I feel a lot of players confuse the moment of surprise. Take the NPC that 'hinders pride'. Your PC has the flaw 'egotistical'. We can see where this is going. This isn't surprising at all, I've seen players say. But, that's not the case. The surprise was already there in giving an interaction that would not necessarily occur.

If you push the NPC's motivations, the story should be affected in ways that would not have been apparent if those motivations didn't exist.

If you are looking for true 'gotcha' moments, I guess ask very specific questions during the interaction. 'Does the NPC pull out a gun and shoot me?' That's about as good, I feel, as you are going to get. Perhaps someone could make a 'gotcha' moment chart so you don't have to ask the question knowing the answer might be yes.

So there is no surprise, just people reacting how they always react. Unless of course something forces your hand, you talk about specific questions. I would also say that maybe random events can do the same. If you ask a question 'will "hinders pride" NPC give me the info I want'. You roll a reply and get 'No, and unexpectedly...pattern change'. You think for a second and decide that the 'hinders pride' NPC is not your friend but an enemy hiding their true intentions and now you're threatening them. This means that they now show their true colours.

Yes, asking an oracle to define an UNE motivation at the time you need interaction is definitely a good way of using the systems. I guess you have to ask where do you want the surprise? Rolling up a tavern owner that 'hinders pride'. Why? Maybe he's sick of drunk braggarts? Doesn't seem surprising, but then what about a tavern owner that 'reinforces pride'? He likes being regaled with tales of heroism. Doesn't seem surprising either. Yet, either way they should have impact on the story that you didn't consider before rolling that trait. Then ask if the trait is enforced at the time, and that adds another layer. Your PC is telling how he slew the dragon, and the owner decides NOT to 'hinder pride'. Why? Could be interesting...

After that interesting side step let's get back to CRGE. I'll like to know more about the behind the scenes and design about your solo engine. What were your influences behind the making of your solo engine?

Mythic GME first and foremost. Solo roleplaying would not be anywhere near what it is without Ms. Pidgeon's great gift to us. Then probably frameworks for plays and stories, such as the Hero's Journey and the simple dramatic structure.

I do agree that Tana's gift of Mythic GME is revolutionary and it's that gift which I owe lots too to. And of course this site wouldn't exist without Mythic GME. You mentioned tinkering occurs amongst soloists. When you use your solo engine do you use it as is or do you find you end up tinkering with it a bit?

I use it as written, but I don't use every tier all the time. Sometimes I'll add UNE or BOLD. Sometimes I'll add Rory's Story Cubes. It depends on my mood and what I feel is necessary to get creative. I usually feel the more context I can provide to a situation or scene the better solo roleplaying is for me. So if I roll a scene and add a few Rory's Story Cubes as background noise, some of that noise, like somebody walking down the stairs, can add a lot of flavor to the scene.

If you were allowed to, or forced to, how would you modify your solo engine?

If I could figure out a way to get rid of the three columns (to knowledge, to conflict, and to endings) in the yes/no question chart, that's what I would do. The simpler the better.

I do agree simple is best. If you do manage to get rid of those 3 columns it'll be interesting to see how CRGE works then... From self-tinkering to external-tinkering: what is the best way you've seen your solo engine changed?

I think seeing the Lone Wolf thread on players creating more "... and unexpectedly" modifiers was fantastic. I tried to shepherd players that way by keeping a few slots blank so that they could tailor them to the specific setting or game system they were using.

So CRGE is designed to be altered by others. That's great to know. All too often some people are too precious of their work and don't like it played with. Having an understanding that it'll happen is different from building it in to the system itself.

What are some of the pitfalls and problems you ran into while developing your solo engine?

If I recall, the biggest change was in tier 2 where I was trying to figure out how to modify threads with unexpectedly modifiers. I had things that would merge, combine, split, and modify threads in really extreme ways. I found that it was really taking away from the story and creating this kind of random 'telling'. A thread, I felt should be an important thing. The player chose it because it was important, and they wanted the story to be about the thread. So to all of the sudden modify it in extreme ways, I felt wasn't fun. Things were getting too random at times.

I can see that. Though some people do like thinks getting out of their hands. It is a hard line to follow. Now we've heard your problems. What advice would you give to someone who wants to make their own solo engine?

Check out as many different systems as you can, and then decide why you are making your own. What is different about it? Why would a player want to check yours out? I feel it is 100% okay to modify an existing one to feel the gap, but reinventing the wheel takes a lot of time and forethought. Then playtest the crap out of it. Try all different systems and situations. Try and break it. Players can definitely tell when a system has been playtested or it's just a fancy idea put to paper.

Playtesting is important. My Fate Solo changed in subtle but interesting ways when I used it. So I would second that: use your solo engine in play and test its limits. What do you think is most, and least, important in making a solo engine?

Most important is having the solo engine mechanically provide the goal you are after. With CRGE I wanted as transparent an overlay as I could for any system, which is why I went after some more extreme RPG's like Chuubo's. The next solo engine could be tailored specifically at being a ruler to a kingdom using SRD. That would be awesome! Still the goal is clear.

The least important thing is competing with other solo engines. I feel we belong to a very communal tribe, we roleplayers. This is regardless of being solo or not. Even Hasbro owned DnD has communal goodness with the SRD and allowing players to write up new classes and enemies. (This is also why Palladium's over-heavy copyright/trademark protection sometimes grinds my gears.) Expect players to cobble your solo engine, steal parts of it, make parts their own, etc. If that doesn't make you happy, I wouldn't share it.

People will do that if you want it to happen or not. Someone even stole a march on me and made a random event generator before I managed to do one for Fate Solo.

Do you have any plans for the future of CRGE?

I don't. I worked intensively hard over the past 2 years to bring the Conjecture Game's solo roleplayer's suite of tools: CRGE for the solo engine, UNE for NPC's, and BOLD for creating adventures. I have some other ideas, but I really need a time to refresh my creative juices. I think my next step is to work on COPE, a system of finding that butterfly effect dependent on player actions, but it's far out there in concept and thought.

Thanks for the interview, Zach. Just 2 final questions 1) where can we find you on the 'net, 2) have you got any questions for me?

You can find me at conjecturegames.com and DTRPG.com.

I guess my main question is what adventures have you had with CRGE? Has it impacted your solo roleplaying in anyway?

I haven't had too many adventures with CRGE. I've got too many irons in the fire at the moment for that, I'm afraid. What it did do was to help me shape my mind when working on my random events system for Fate Solo. It also helped me realise that some design choices in Fate Solo were the right ones. So, thanks Zach, for that.

Thanks again, Kenny. I love all the energy you bring to our niche RPG corner!

Interview: Tana Pigeon Creator of Mythic GME

This is the second in this series of interviews where I talk to the major solo engine creators. This time I'm talking to Tana Pigeon.

Heya, Tana, I'd like to welcome you to Solo Roleplayer. Thanks for coming.

Thank you for inviting me, Kenny! It's an honor to be asked, you do good work.

Thanks, Tana.

I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you and Mythic Games Master Emulator (henceforth Mythic GME).

From my understanding, Tana, you didn't set out to create a solo engine but rather a GM Emulator for group play. Did solo roleplaying come as a surprise when you first heard about it?

Actually, it was meant as a solo engine. I loved role playing games as a child, but had few people to play them with, so I had an urge for a good solo system from an early age. So, this is probably the other way around, I was surprised when the final result came out as a GM emulator, basically a pen and paper artificial intelligence.

Wow, interesting. Though looking back with hindsight I guess it's almost inevitable that it'll turn out as a GME. That is part where most help is needed when playing solo. Can you tell me a bit about Mythic and it's GME?

The Game Master Emulator is the heart of Mythic. It's system for generating answers to yes/no questions based on logic and interpretation, with a good dosage of randomness tossed in. Mythic, as a separate book, includes more rules to flesh the Emulator out as a more fully functional RPG, although the essential bits are still the Emulator since it can be used with any game, not just Mythic.

What made you want to create Mythic GME?

This goes back to my lonely childhood lol I also loved computer programming, and I tried to make artificial intelligences on my computer as a kid. It occurred to me that role playing games shouldn't have to be played in just groups, there should be a way to replace a human being with an artificial player to run the show, without it needing a computer or a complicated system.

So you created Mythic GME to replace the GM. This was so you could play solo without the need of a computer. Seems a bit strange especially since you love computer programming. But I have to thank you for that. Since you made Mythic GME how often do you play solo?

I love solo play. It's really the only way I ever play now.

Mythic GME is part of Mythic. Was the GME always meant to be a part of Mythic or was it added at a later stage?

The GME is really all Mythic was originally meant to be, but I felt I couldn't publish an entire book with just that. So I included additional material so it could stand on its own, as a full RPG. As it turned out, the fans liked the GME a lot, and seem to mostly pass on the additional material or use bits and pieces of it for inspiration. The Emulator is the star of the show.

I can see that. When I brought Mythic GME I too passed up getting the full Mythic. I wanted to use Mythic GME to work with my other games I was playing at the time. I think they were GURPS and Mutant and Masterminds. When you play what rule systems do you use?

I use the GME usually with other game systems. I have a couple of shelves worth of games going back 30 years. This may sound totally geeky, but when I want to play a game I will randomly determine which RPG to play next, then use the GME to act as my Gamemaster.

Hey geeky is what it's all about in this hobby. If we weren't geeks we wouldn't be roleplaying. At least it seems that way to me from all my interactions with roleplayers over the years.

Other than Mythic what rules systems do you feel work best with Mythic GME?

To be honest, I'm not sure the Mythic rules are the best to play with the GME. There are some awesome systems out there, such as Savage Worlds, that work well with the GME. I find rules light games work best because the GME tends to work best when the game is moving fast, and less crunchy games require less brain processing, especially if playing alone. However, if you are playing solo, going fast isn't necessarily a necessity, since no one is waiting on you, so it really depends on one's preference.

I do love Savage Worlds but it's one that I've not yet tried playing solo.

Back to Mythic GME for a moment before we change direction. What is the philosophy behind Mythic GME?

The philosophy is that any question, no matter how complex, can be answered simply using basic logic and interpretation. The complexity and verisimilitude begins to emerge on its own because our brains are hard-wired to fill in the understanding gaps, as long as there's a basic structure already in place.

That's deep, true, and interesting. How does the psychology and philosophy behind Mythic GME shown in its design?

The basic engine is fairly simple, but Mythic Emulator games tend to quickly take on a life of their own. There is often a feel that you are dealing with a living GM, because your questions are being answered and you begin to get immersed into the adventure.

In the broadest manner how does Mythic GME work?

You ask a yes/no question, consult a chart comparing odds versus what I call a Chaos Factor, and get a percentage result for the chances the answer is yes. Based on a percentile roll, you will either get a yes, a no, or an exceptional yes or no. The result is interpreted, and you move on to the next question, each question building on previous questions.

Following on from that Tana, can please you give an example of Mythic GME in action?

Sure. Let's say a gumshoe detective is chasing a suspect across rooftops and needs to leap from one building, over an alley, and onto another rooftop. The player may decide that the action is likely to succeed since the gap isn't too far. The Chaos Factor is currently at 6, which is slightly above average and means a greater chance for a yes answer. Checking the chart, we get an 85 percent chance of success. The player rolls a 7, which is in the range of an exceptional yes result, and he interprets the results this way. 'While at full run you step on the ledge and leap, sailing over the alley and landing on the other roof, not missing a step and gaining on the suspect where he is now within your grasp.' The player says, 'Well shoot, I tackle him. Did I get him?' We figure he's right on top of the guy, so the odds are Very Likely, Chaos is still at 6, so the odds are 90 percent. He rolls a 33 percent. This means a yes, but since it's a double identical digits, this means a random event happens. Rolling on the event charts we get 'Move away from a thread' and 'waste allies.' These are descriptive terms meant to inspire a meaningful interpretation. Let's say at this point in the adventure, our detective has been working with a retired police officer to apprehend the suspect. So, all of this may be interpreted like so: 'You grip him by the shoulder and you both go down, our detective on top. As you rise to your feet, you see the retired police officer standing on the rooftop with you, pointing a gun at you. "I'll take him from here, thank you very much."'

That's an interesting example. It's also fun to see how NPC motivations can be changed by random events. Thanks, Tana.

I want to now move away from talking about Mythic GME and look at solo engines in general. What are your top 3 tips for asking questions of a solo engine?

Ok, tip number one, try to resolve your situation with as few questions as possible, one or two. Any more information can be inferred through interpretation.

Tip 2, only ask questions when the answers really matter. Otherwise, go with whatever makes the most sense based on what has already occurred and the past answers to other questions.

Tip 3, be honest when you ask questions. Don't try to game the questions to get an answer you want, because honestly, what fun is there in that? The goal of all of this is to watch a story unfold, not to win anything.

I agree there, Tana, you want to see a story unfold. If you want something to happen just make it happen: it's a hobby so enjoy yourself.

Now we've got the questions what are your top 3 tips about interpreting the answers we get?

Tip 1, keep your brain limber and loose and pay attention to the first thing that springs to mind. That's what you go with.

Tip 2, keep the game moving. If Mythic kicks back a response and you have no idea what it means, forget about it and move on, don't bother re-rolling or taking too much time to figure out an interpretation. If an interpretation doesn't come fast and naturally, it's not worth it.

Tip 3, don't be afraid to allow bad things to happen to the character, even if it's yours.

I know you semi-answered this above but it's a major concern for some soloists. Do you have tips, and what are they, if you feel you're asking too many questions?

Yes. If you have to ask more than two questions, then something is wrong. There should be enough information already to intuit a complete answer by then. You have to keep in mind that the answers to the questions is not the only information at your disposal, you also know everything that has come before. You should take the minimal information you produce and generate maximum results from them. That'll not only give you quicker answers to complex questions, but will help tie new events in with old ones and maintain internal consistency of your ongoing story.

So minimal info to get maximum results. That sounds like a solid piece of advice. Related to that there was a reader who, when reading a Mythic play through, saw an almost random character becoming a GM PC. It worked okay in the play through but it made them worried about random things occurring in their game.

How can they keep focused upon their game and not go off in not-so-good directions? All of this whilst still maintaining surprises.

Nothing happens in Mythic without someone first asking a question. You can focus the game by being picky and choosey about what questions you ask, focusing mostly on what interests you the most. This is why it's important not to necessarily ask a Fate Question about everything, just the most important thinks. That will generally keep a game on track while allowing for surprises. However, I'll also add, don't be too resistant to going 'off track', that just may be where the adventure is evolving toward.

Tana, it's time to break away from solo engines now. What tips do you have to make sure a solo adventure sticks to a story and not end up a string of encounters?

Meaning. Everything has to mean something. Nothing in your adventure is happening randomly, at least from the character's point of view within the story. Everything that happens should mean something, and it should be connected with something else. As long as those meaningful attachments exist, then that string of random encounters has just turned into a complete and maybe epic story.

You play solo games but in social roleplaying groups are the norm. So much so that some people tend to keep with groups in solo play. What do you find works better: controlling an entire party yourself, having the solo engine control part of a party, or having a single adventurer?

I generally like a single adventurer, but when I have a group of characters, I'll generally identify one as my character, the player character, and the others are NPCs controlled by the solo engine.

You mention that you use the solo engine to control NPCs. I've heard you talking about creating an NPC Emulator. How's that coming along?

Slowly. I want it to be natural and give organic results, but also be applicable to any situation and be extremely specific. I'm finding this may turn out to be a greater puzzle than Mythic itself was, and Mythic took about twelve versions and ten years to reach its finished form. I don't think the NPC Emulator will take quite that long, but it's going to be a little while. I want it to be perfect.

You can tell Mythic is well researched has great depth. Now we can see why. Going back to NPCs how do you control faceless 'single use' NPCs? NPCs like merchants, town guards, pizza delivery, taxi drivers, and so on.

They are really no different than any other question. 'Is the merchant pleasant?' is no more complicated than 'Is the door locked?' The less important the NPC, the more creative license you can take to just go with whatever the most common sense action would be for that person, modified by your solo system.

What about major, named, NPCs?

The same, but with more care and detail. If using Mythic GME, you may ask questions about the villain's actions on a round by round basis. 'Does he attack with his sceptre?', 'Does the villain gloat?', 'Is he accompanied by lackeys?'. It doesn't take too long before the accumulated answers to the various questions start to paint a picture of the villain, you get to know him. At that point, you can roll less and less because you now have a better idea what he would do in a given moment, and you only roll when a change in behavior matters or when you think it's a good time to check.

I know you mentioned this in your play example. How do you get monsters and NPC to act as if another player is controlling them and will surprise you as a player?

Questions, just like with the major villain. A simple question like 'Does it attack?' can produce four results in Mythic, each a little different, and each would be interpreted differently depending on the NPC and situation. That right there gives us a cascading range of behavior, and with only a single question. Throw in a few more questions over a few rounds, and you have the NPC largely acting on its own.

You mentioned that it took you a decade to complete Mythic GME I'll like to know more about the behind the scenes and design of Mythic GME. What were your influences behind the making of Mythic GME?

The initial motivation was my childhood desire for a solo system that was more satisfying than Choose-Your-Own-Adventure. I coupled that with my interest in computer artificial intelligence. After about six game systems that I thought were failures, I started to look for fuzzier ideas to make the system less like an engineering project and more like a human being. By this time I was in college working on a degree in Psychology, so I started looking at psychological concepts to make the artificial intelligence seem less artificial. I also looked at fortune telling systems, like Tarot cards, because I figured if they could be used to answer questions about the future, how about using them to answer questions about the present. I learned how to do Tarot readings, and there are portions of Mythic that are inspired by Tarot cards, particularly the Event Meaning tables. After a few more failed versions, the system started coming into shape, until I got what we have now.

Wow, what a ride. When you use your GME do you use it as is or do you tweak it?

I'm often tweaking it, playtesting new variations to perhaps present to players in a future book. I use my own gaming sessions as my playtests.

In what ways do you tweak your GME?

I'm always looking for new ways to flesh it out. It's very modular, so the GME can stand on its own without any other support. However, I like creating new bits that can be optionally added into it if you wish, or if it applies to a certain gaming style or flavor. I'm always looking for new ideas like this.

If you were allowed to, or forced to, how would you modify your GME?

I would do away with the chart. Some people just hate charts. I've actually tweaked it to where I don't use the chart anymore, it's replaced by a dicing system that gives nearly the same percentile results. That's going to be in another Variations book soon, I hope.

That's something I'm looking forward to. The first Variations book had some really good ideas in it. I'm looking forward to Variations II and not having an oracle table, that'll be interesting to see.

What is the best way you've seen your GME changed?

The players in our Mythic Yahoo group have come up with, I think, hundreds of variations for Mythic. It's honestly hard to pick one I like best, because as soon as I do, I notice someone else's idea and I think, oh that's cool too.

What are some of the problems you ran into while developing your GME?

I'm slow. Like, really slow. I'm not a perfectionist by nature, except when it comes to gaming systems. I'm kind of a wonk in that regard, like a lot of roleplayers are, so I can tool and retool a system forever it seems before I'm happy with it.

What advice would you have for someone who is interested in making their own solo engine?

My advice is to go for it! I think solo play has been underrated by the hobby for too long. I realize role playing games are usually considered, by nature, social activities, but I don't see why that necessarily has to be the case or why we should feel limited by it. Solo gaming also has applications to group play by replacing the GM, so solo systems are an important tool to have in your gaming arsenal.

What do you think is most, and least, important in making a solo engine?

I think most important is speed. The solo engine should run smoothly and quickly. If someone is truly playing alone, then they have a lot of paperwork to handle, and somewhere in all of that they want to enjoy a game, too. So, keep it simple. Least important? I couldn't really say.

Do you have any plans you'd be willing to talk about for the future of Mythic or Mythic GME?

I have another Mythic Variations book coming out, with more tweaks on the GME. There's also the Character Crafter book, which is the NPC emulator. I would like to produce a big, tenth anniversary, hardback version of Mythic, although I think we actually just crossed the ten year mark recently. At some point I want to make this great big, lavish, hardbound, full color, illustrated, beautiful edition of Mythic just so I can put it on my shelf and stare at it with pride. It would probably be outrageously expensive and no one would buy it, but it would exist, so that makes me happy.

Crowdfunding could be your friend then, Tana. I would back a project to get a 10th anniversary edition of Mythic.

Thanks for the interview. Just 3 final questions 1) where can we find you on the 'net, 2) what future plans have you got, 3) have you got any questions for me?

You can find Mythic at wordmillgames.com, my future plans are to hopefully get off my butt and make more books, and yes ... what inspired you to become an advocate and supporter of solo role-playing? And thank you for the interview :)

In short I became an advocate for solo roleplaying, Tana, because of my love of roleplaying, storytelling, and having no social outlet for them.

How to Use Rats to Start Solo Roleplaying

Picture: CC 2.0; L Eaton

You're unable to roleplay on a regular basis when you hear about solo rolepaying. It seems fun and just what you want.

You spend time learning about solo roleplaying and get the tools. When you get to play it seems so vast you're unsure of what you're meant to do. In frustration you pack up everything. You turn on your PC and start the computer RPG everyone's raving about.

Then it hits you: Rat's in the Basement. A perfect way to start solo roleplaying.

When you start a computer RPG there's a short, simple, adventure that teaches the basic tasks required to play the game in a safe environment. Once you've got the basics you're able to progress.

In computer RPGs the introductory adventure often sets the game in motion. When starting solo roleplaying it's best to keep your Rats in the Basement separate from your desired campaign.

Breaking Rats in the Basement Down for Solo RPGs

Rats in the Basement makes a perfect introduction to solo roleplaying as it makes solo roleplaying manageable.

A Rats in the Basement adventure comprises of 4 parts:

1. Getting the mission,
2. tooling up,
3. completing the mission, and
4. getting the reward.

To create your own Rats in the Basement adventure you need to know about:

1. The Setting
2. The Basement
3. The Rats
4. The Shopkeeper
5. The Tools

The Setting

The genre and setting shapes everything. Hunting rats in a fantasy basement is different from hunting mindless post-apocalyptic mutants in a scrap heap.

The Basement

The basement is a smallish enclosed space. It defines and contains the 'win' conditions for the adventure.

The basement needs to make sense in your setting. An abandoned spaceship makes more sense in a space opera than a cave in a forest.

The Rats

Rats are simple enemies who can be overcome without much effort.

In a traditional adventure you kill the rats. You don't have to; you could trap, convince, guide, scare, or chase away the rats.

Rats don't have to be bad. They can be good. You could be a superhero who has to find and rescue 'rats'. The rats being innocents in a flaming building who are trapped and cannot escape.

The Shopkeeper

Your shopkeeper can be anyone, or anything, who sets the adventure off. They set the deadline the rats have to be cleared by.

You don't have to start with a person in sight. Screams coming from a broken window in a rundown house or a distress call from an abandoned ship can set the adventure off.

The Tools

You don't always need to tool up. It's been included to aid in NPC interaction.

Tools can be:

- equipment
- information
- help

Creating the Adventure

Either:

1. Pick a setting, or
2. brainstorm 5 to 20 settings.

Then brainstorm:

- 10 to 20 different types of basements.
- 10 to 20 different rats to infest your basement.
    - Pick a method to rid the basement of the rats.
- 10 to 20 different shopkeepers who need your help.
- 5 to 10 reasons why they need your help.
- 5 to 10 different deadlines.

Put your answers in this sentence: in a [setting], [rats], are in [basement] and [shopkeeper] needs them [method of removal] before [deadline]; you need [tool].

This sentence helps you:

- understand your adventure,
- keep it on track,

⌡ and define when the adventure is ended.

Once you got your sentence written get your solo roleplaying tools together and play the adventure.

Don't forget to use the core elements of solo roleplaying in your adventure.

These include:

- ⌡ NPC Interactions
- ⌡ Detailing the Setting/NPCs
- ⌡ Skill Use
- ⌡ Combat
- ⌡ Solo Engine Use
- ⌡ Special Powers such as:
    - ⌡ Magic
    - ⌡ Psionics
    - ⌡ Superhero Powers

Get Roleplaying

You've got everything needed to play your own introductory adventure. Now it's time for you to get roleplaying!

Aside: In my product Frustration to Freedom: 30 Days to Legendary Solo Roleplaying Adventures I've included an expanded discussion about Rats in the Basement.

Interview: Kenny Norris Creator of Fate Solo

Aside: You can also find this interview, with minor differences in Fate Solo.

Heya, Kenny, I'd like to welcome you to Solo Roleplayer. Thanks for coming.

Heya, Kenny, it's great to be here.

In this series of interviews I'm talking to all the major solo engine creators: myself included.

Don't worry, this should be a one off...

Yeah, interviewing yourself can be a bit strange. Anyway... Can you tell me a bit about your solo engine?

Fate Solo, yeah.

Fate Solo is a small and streamline Solo Engine that uses Fate Dice to run a solo adventure.

What made you want to create a solo engine?

Why, umm, well I wanted to see if I could do one first and foremost. I also wanted it to be different from the other solo engines out there. So I thought I'd try and make one using a narrative system. My other idea was trying to make one that fit well with Savage Worlds.

It was a tie for a while but I decided that Fate would force me to be different.

Since you made your system, have you played more solo or social roleplaying?

I've only had a single social roleplaying experience in the last few years, and that was earlier this year. So I've mainly played solo.

Thanks for that so far, Kenny. I want to look at your solo roleplaying experiences. What rule systems do you tend to use when playing solo?

Most of my recent experiences have been with Fate, FAE, and also the D6xD6 System.

What do you like about these systems?

The mix between easiness, flexibility, depth, and narrativeness.

What rules systems do you feel work best with your solo engine?

That's a bit easy: Fate or FAE. Though Fudge might work too.

What is the philosophy behind your solo engine?

That when playing Fate you don't have to pick up non-Fate dice.

How does your philosophy behind your solo engine come out in the way you designed your solo engine?

All the rolls used in Fate Solo require 4dF.

How does Fate Solo work?

There are 3 modules to Fate Solo.

1. *Character Modifying*

2.   *Oracle*

3.   *Surprise*

Each of the 3 modules are optional, like the original Fate, so you can add, alter, or use them as they are.

Character modifying is a module to change the default character creation method to making a more rounded and powerful character.

The Oracle answers yes and no questions. It's the core of the solo engine.

The Surprise module adds surprises to the game. When I built this module I included methods to alter how often surprises occur.

Can please you give an example of Fate Solo in action?

Thustan is tracking some orcs back to their lair through a forest. He plans on doing a quick scout and then bring back a much larger force. Being an old, not bold, scout he's careful and wants to know if he can see any signs that the orcs he's following are leading him into a trap.

The odds are Even. A 0 (-,-,+,+) is rolled this results in a No ++. As he's in a forest and the orcs believe it's their safe haven they're getting louder and less careful watching their surroundings. As I rolled 2 + I roll twice on the Surprise Factor table getting a 2 and a 1 (with a Mediocre chance of a surprise). So no surprises are triggered.

Easing back Thustan follows the orcs from a greater distance. In the distance Thustan can smell, and hear, the unmistakable sounds and smells of an orc encampment. Now we find out if there are any orc sentries. The odds are Good. Another 0 is rolled. This time it's a +, blank, blank, - so the result is a Yes- -. There are sentries but they're not paying much attention to the outside of the camp for a solitary sneaky scout. As 2 more modifiers were rolled 2 more Surprise Factor rolls are required. A 2 is rolled and as there is an Average chance of a surprise (as no surprise was triggered last scene) this comes out to a 3. Leading to a minor surprise. The chance of a surprise falls to Mediocre and a 1 is rolled so no surprise for the 2nd roll.

This minor surprise means that there are more than 1 orc band out at the moment, another one is going straight out, or the orcs Thustan were following were welcomed back with a party. Anything could happen to add colour to the world. If a major surprise occurred a monster could appear and massacre the entire orc encampment.

What are your top 3 tips for asking questions of solo engines?

Context is everything. Following on from the Thustan example. He's in a forest and trailing a monster then don't ask about what's happening in a nearby village. If you're getting near a village and want to ask a question you can ask: Is there something happening in the nearby village? The 'something happening' should be related to the monster somehow.

Don't be afraid of asking clarifying questions. The fewer the questions asked the better but if you're unsure: clarify.

Ask the question as if you're asking a GM.

Now what about interpreting the answers given by the solo engine. What are your top 3 tips?

List your answers. This is where I differ from Zack and Tana. Don't go with your 1st answer make a list of 5 to 10 answers and pick from amongst them.

Context is everything. If you ask a question about the monster, from above, make sure the answer is about the monster. If something is happening in the village it's caused by the monster. You could find the body of a child, the remains of a hunting party, a dog's carcass, a wounded villager, or a bloodstained trail?

A concern, and problem of soloists is about the amount of questions you ask. Do you have any tips on when you're asking too many questions?

The problem maybe that:

- *) you're not asking the right question,*
- *) you're trying to get the outcome you want, or*
- *) you're not clear on something.*

Asking the right question is quite often the best way to stop asking so many questions.

Write 5 to 10 questions down about the situation your character finds themselves in.

Go through your list of questions and pick the question you most want answering to ask. You may then give yourself 1 further follow up, clarification, question.

A reader had an experience when reading a Mythic play through about an interesting, yet strange, character becoming a GM PC. It worked in the play through they were reading but it made them worried about strange things happening in their game.

What they would like to know is how they can keep things focused upon their game and not go off in strange, and maybe stupid, directions? All of this whilst still maintaining surprises coming out of the solo engine.

As mentioned above focus upon context. Everything that happens within a game is focused upon the character's story. In a novel, film, or TV show there is nowt that occurs that doesn't relate to the story being told or the bigger series story.

In fact in my whole experience I can only think of 1 good series of books that add non-relevant information. This detail adds colour to the series and is limited to a paragraph every couple of books.

Breaking away from your solo engine for a moment. Yet keeping in spirit with the previous question; what tips do you have to make sure a solo adventure sticks to a story and doesn't just end up being little more than a string of encounters?

I keep talking about context and focus and this should be key. Everything that happens in the game is part of the PC's story. This means it's best to focus upon a single character and tell their story.

I also like the idea that Zack introduced: he Chekhov's List. Everything introduced that doesn't seem relevant is added to the list and your mission is to find ways to add the items from the list into your game as you go along.

You mentioned your view above but can you tell me why if groups in roleplaying are the norm and some people tend to keep with groups in solo play you think that's wrong?

Part of it is lazy thinking: well I always played in groups so I must play in groups now.

Part of it is the ruleset they use. I recommend people to stay away from rulesets that require groups to run.

Most of it is that you're telling a story. A story requires a single focused character. These are the characters that in a movie change the most, grow the most, or even falls the most.

Another advantage of running a single PC is that it speeds that game up.

This doesn't mean you can't have a companion, in fact it's best you do. The companion, or 3 if you must run a group of characters, is an NPC.

Moving even further afield now to talk about NPC interactions. How do you control faceless 'single use' NPCs? NPCs like merchants, town guards, pizza delivery, taxi drivers, and so on.

Introduce them, use them, move on. If they're interesting or useful then keep track of any details you gave them they could be promoted later to a more major NPC.

How about major, named, NPCs?

Make sure they have their own desire, dreams, goals. Make them the hero in their own story. Record their interactions with the PC if they're important and record any information that the PC knows or thinks they know about the NPC.

How do you get monsters and NPC to act as if another player is controlling their actions and decisions that will surprise you as a player and act like an intelligent AI?

Look at their desires and goals. In any given situation what would bring them closer to that goal and make them do that. Sometimes it'll be helping the PC. At other times it'll be hindering the PC. Just make sure you know why they're doing something.

This is one of those times when you have to be a bit meta in your gaming. You have to break out of the PC viewpoint and focus upon the NPC for a while. This is something that I've not seen any solo engine capable of doing.

Let's get back to your solo engine. This time I'll like to know more about the behind the scenes and design about your solo engine. What were your influences behind the making of your solo engine?

Mythic GME, CRGE, and Fate all influenced the design in one way or another.

When you use your solo engine do you use it as is or do you find you end up tweaking it a bit?

As I'm play testing it I do tend to use it as is but, and this is a big but, I look for ways I can tweak it. The Oracle Table has had many different variations. I'm still looking at the Character Creation and Surprise Module to see if I can tweak them and make the stronger.

In what ways do you tweak your solo engine?

I look at what happens during the previous games session and the notes I made. Then I think about ways I could solve the issues that came up. When I play the game again I keep my attention on how the new method works.

As an example my first Oracle Table had odds of -4 to + 4 on it. During play I discovered that I didn't use all the options so I made it shorter and easier to use. Then I used names from Fate to label the oracle. Another way I modified the oracle was that I had it lopsided. When I thought about using it I discovered that I spent more time trying to craft the question just so. In the end I decided to make it a simple mirror of each other.

If you were allowed to, or forced to, how would you modify your solo engine?

I would love to add a randomiser into the solo engine. So that everything needed can be done with just pure Fate dice.

What is the best way you've seen your solo engine changed?

The best way I've seen the solo engine change is a random event generator. It's an interesting way of adding random events into Fate Solo. He created this before I got around to creating my random event section. In fact he forced me to make mine.

What are some of the pitfalls and problems you ran into while developing your solo engine?

I think it was when I decided to be too granular and too detailed. Fate is a simple and quick game and I forgot about this when I created my first model.

What advice would you have for someone who is interested in making their own solo engine?

Go ahead and make it. Also playtest it in your own games. While doing that keep an eye open for what works well and poorly. Then make small changes until it works until you like. Don't forget to keep looking at other solo engines and rulesets as they may contain clues and hints to make your engine stronger.

What do you think is most, and least, important in making a solo engine?

The most important thing is an Oracle Table or something of the sort that answers Yes/No questions. The least important are the complicated rules that slow down a game but add very little to it.

Do you have any plans you'd be willing to talk about for the future of your solo engine?

There is much promise that I can see in Fate Solo. I'd like to bring at least some of this promise out. Once done I'll release it as a cheap PDF with a Creative Commons licence.[2]

Thanks for the interview.

Thanks for having me, Kenny.

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[2] Fate Solo is now released and is licenced under Creative Commons.

Intensify Your Game by Mastering the Small Details

Picture: Hassan Sørensen CC2.0

The difference between board games and roleplaying games is immersion. We're involved in a roleplaying game, we flow along with a board game. With solo roleplaying it's easy to get into a shallow game: it's a 5×5 dungeon room. 1 door in. Inside is an orc. Roll to hit, roll for damage, roll for defence, roll to hit, roll for damage. Orc killed. Nothing in the room. Just the dagger the orc was holding. No wonder you'd rather play a computer game or read a book.

Details make the difference.

Let's try again:

In years gone by the northern orc tribes built underground trading outposts. You're a sage who wants to find out why the clash of cultures led to the Great Magical War. With research you discover a trading outpost deep in a forest. Being far from civilization there you hope there might be clues within.

You enter the outpost. Just off the main entrance corridor is a small room. You enter. There are leaves covering the floor and an earthy smell. On the wall is orcish writing you start to translate it. There's a grunt. You turn and face an orc. He's wearing scraps of clothes and is crouched in a corner hunched over a rabbit. He grunts again and unfolds: his head brushes the celling. He's one of the Brutes the orcs breed as soldiers. You take a step back your heart beating faster. It takes a step forward. Your back hits the wall. It snarls. An empty feeling spreads in your chest and gut.

Small details make so much difference.

The room has the following details:

1. Leaves on floor
2. Earthy smell
3. Orcish writing on wall

The orc has it's own details:

1. Terrifying
2. Tall
3. Eating a rabbit

Those six details leads to so much more. The fight moves away from roll after roll, to something deeper and more terrifying. When typing that scene my insides felt hollow and I could feel the fear. Give it a try, visualize the scene, and play. You'll feel it happen to you too.

How Focus Enhances Your Game

A crowd of protesters shouting, waving banners, and weapons is okay. With focus it gets better. Add an old solider into the crowd:

The protest gathered strength more people were joining. In the center is an old man is standing tall. He's got major facial scaring and is missing his left ear. In one hand he's waving a black banner and with the other he's holding an old battered sword. The sword seems a part of him. He's shouting anti-royalist slogans and calling for Prince William to become king.

When called to break up the protest that man means more than a faceless crowd. He can recognizes you and shouts 'you're old Thomas' son' and goes on about how Thomas wouldn't like what's going on. Those detail could turn things around. Now you're no longer on the side of the authorities and you manage to persuade your fellows to join the protest. Or maybe you can bargain with the old soldier and get him to take the crowd away instead of killing them.

Details give you choices that weren't there before you added them.

They also add depth to the game: your father's no longer just a solider who died in service to the crown. Now he's a hero who's remembered fondly by fellow soldiers. That adds emotional impact and makes your world fuller.

Don't try to describe the whole crowd person by person. If you do you'll overload yourself and make the crowd faceless again. Focus on the few not the many.

How to Build Small Details into Your Game

Details come from:

- Sight,
- Sound,
- Smell,
- Taste,
- Touch,
- Emotions, and
- Feelings

Within each scene use 1 to 3 details per major element in a scene.

Some small details come to your mind: the small room in the forest would have leaves in it. Other times you'll need help: the orcish writing on the wall or the rabbit the orc's eating.

Set Pieces

1. Use a randomiser to figure out details,
2. Work out how your PC would sense them.

Using the room with the orc as an example. You get 'Scroll' from your randomiser. You list 5 to 10 ways this can impact with the scene. After listing you decide it's a scribe's office but the wood desks have long gone. On the wall is some writing. It's also in a forest so you add the earthy smell and leaves.

NPCs

Use a randomiser to figure out details,

Figure out what the NPC is doing,

Work out how your PC senses them.

Using the crowd as an example. You get a moon. From this your listing leads you to think old and battered. You also get him waving. As he's in a protest you see him waving a banner. Because he's protesting he's also shouting. A leap of logic makes you think of a solider and make the person an old solider who's battered and scarred.

Build Your Game

In your next game when you start a scene take a moment to set it up.

Figure out what the biggest details are in the scene. Pick 1 to 3 set pieces and find out 1 to 3 details about them. Then pick 1 to 3 NPCs and detail them too.

Don't include more than 5 or 6 details into the scene or you'll get confused.

Now get solo roleplaying!

CONFLICT

Heya, Companions, it's Kenny here.

It's time for a new email from me!

I may've been quiet over the past little while but that doesn't mean I've not been thinking about you. There is a topic I've been learning about which I know would be useful to you: conflict.

In some respects this topic is so important I would love to write a whole book on the topic. However, due to conflict in my life, I'm unable to at the moment. What I can do is send you this email.

Before we take a deeper look at conflict I want to give you my (current) definition:

2 forces fighting for an important and mutually exclusive outcome.

This definition isn't perfect, it misses a couple of points:

- The outcome needs to depend upon your PC, should be in doubt, and is important to them.
- The conflict needs to come from your PC's actions.
- The opponent needs to be motivated, worthy, and has contradictory aims.
- The conflict is immediate.
- The conflict is active.

I hope the last point, that the conflict is active, comes through in the definition. But it is important to make another note of it.

Expanding the Definition

2 Forces

This is perhaps the strangest part of the definition. I know in roleplaying most of the conflict is external: the PC against a NPC. However that is only a part of conflict. Conflict can also be against outside or internal forces (conflicting beliefs, values, or thoughts).

A great thing about solo roleplaying is the ability to explore different kinds of conflict (and games). Not just rehash social roleplaying. This is one of the main reasons why I recommend playing a single PC. With a single PC you can go deeper into the thoughts and feelings of them. This introduces many new avenues of roleplaying and conflict.

Fighting

Conflict is active, immediate, and the outcome must be in doubt. The outcome needs to up to the PC.

That's why I picked the word fighting.

Conflict is a *confrontation* between the PC and another force which wants its own way. The PC must fight to get their own way.

Also as fighting isn't pleasant the fight, the outcome, the goal, has to be important to the PC for some reason. Important enough they'll go through hell and back to gain it (which they should really do).

Important and Mutually Exclusive Outcome

This is another reason I used the word fight. Because there is a single winner and a single loser.

You don't have to have the 2 forces want the same thing but you do need them to want something which stops the other force from getting what they want. If both can get what they want then it's not much of a fight because they, the 2 forces, can side step each other.

Also they both really want what that want. It's important to them, so important they'll be willing to fight for it. They don't want to back down and give up. They want to keep pushing forward and climbing towards their goal.

How to Get Conflict in Your Solo RPG

There are 4 steps to get conflict in your games:

1. Goal
2. Meaning
3. Stakes
4. Opposing Forces

You can do these in any order, not just the ones I put here. For example if you know you want to face off against Orcs or Vampires then start with Opposing Forces. If you want to protect someone then start with Goal. If your PC faces death then start off with Stakes. Or if your PC feels bad about a situation then start off with Meaning.

Goal

What does the PC want?

The Goal is the solid, concrete, time bound thing the PC wants. Goals also have a win criteria.

Save the village from the raiding Orcs is a good goal. So is destroying the Vampire's Lair before there are any new victims.

Being the best fighter in the world isn't clear or solid so it's not a good goal. Becoming the best swordsman in the world is a better and clearer goal (though not a great one for an adventure).

Adventure goals are smaller and are easier to solve than larger-focused character goals. They also need solving now.

Meaning

Why does this mean so much to the PC?

There has to be a reason why the PC is doing what they're doing. Not just for the sake of it but it has to touch a deeper meaning inside.

To be honest this can be hand waved a bit for roleplaying and is often the case for social roleplaying. Yet you can have deeper more fulfilling adventures when you look at and explore meaning for your characters in your solo games.

Stakes

What is the worst that could happen?

This is as internal focused as external focused. So what the Orcs are going to destroy yet another village. Why should the PC stop the destruction of this particular village?

Yes, this is similar to Meaning and you could even link them together.

The village could be:

- the PC's home,
- their birth village,
- home to an important artefact,
- the final line of defence before the orcs reach the soft innerlands,
- subject to orders to save it, or
- just happened to be near the PC.

Another reason for saving the village could include:

- the PC saved a little child from being attacked by a wolf and the child thanked them. Then on their way out of the village they saw signs of an Orc invasion. Now they must save the little child a second time this time by also saving the village.

Each of these gives a different slant on how the PC saves the village.

Opposing Forces

What is stopping the PC from getting what they want?

Most of the time for Opposing Forces you might think of NPCs or monsters. However there are also other kinds of Opposing Forces.

These differing kinds of Opposing Forces include:

- Values
- Beliefs
- Thoughts
- Obligations
- Events
- The PC's own Body
- Environment
- Society

That's it Companions, I hope you'll find a way to use the above in your games.