Friday, 6 April 2012

Solo RPG?!

I decided I wanted to run a campaign setting for my 15mm collection, specifically to play lots of Throwdown games. However I didn't really want the hassle of a complex structured campaign system. What I did want was a cool narrative that gave meaning to my skirmishes. The more I thought about this, the answer was staring me in the face. Solo RPG sessions for in between battles.

When I first read on Solo Nexus that the author was working on solo rpg gaming, I was skeptical to say the least. How would that even be possible? Surely if you are "roleplaying" alone, all you are doing is making stuff up in a vacuum? It seemed crazy.
The more I read about it though, the more I liked how JF, Carsten and others were achieving this. The answer is more like writing a living story than traditional roleplaying, but it's absolutely fascinating.

What is a roleplaying game *really*? It's you and your friends making up a story with some vague simulatory constraints and guided by the GM. The various styles of roleplaying are incredibly vast, but for me this is what it boiled down to with my group. We drifted away from complex rules (Champions, Palladium etc) as time went on, and our most successful games were generally of a comedic nature toward the end of high school (Teenagers from outer space, Ghostbusters). By this point most of the work was being done by the GM, and he wasn't huge on preparation so

most of it was very off the cuff.. It was fantastic.

Solo, you can play a game by setting up your character and asking questions of the game mechanics. they will tell you what happens and it's up to you to determine exactly what this means and come up with a good narrative.Solo roleplaying can be done in a way that is basically: You write a story about your protagonists, *where you don't know what will happen next.*

There are several systems out there for doing this. I investigated Mythic [GME](), [FU]() and JF's own [9 questions]() system. Being me, I messed around with various ways to tweak them to something that would suit me.. with the special constraint of a way to play on an airplane on my laptop (I've got the longest flight you can do coming up, and a few weeks before my stuff arrives after that).

How all these systems work to an extent, can be summed up like this:

Describe the scene
Ask yes/no questions about what's in the scene and take whatever actions you like
Sometimes there will be a random event

Does it work? Read on after the jump to find out...

One of the most exciting things about this form of roleplaying (which needn't be done solo) is that you don't need to do any prep if you don't want to. The game mechanics and your own imagination can generate the entire world for you as you go. This is perfect for me, as I like making stuff up and I don't have a lot of time.

I was very set on Mythic GME for a while, but after reading Carsten's sessions and thoughts, I was in total agreement. It's too fiddly.

Next I read FU, the free universal rpg. It's pretty ingenious but is geared toward a group.

What I did was take the general concept of solo play from Mythic, but discarded all the rules. I adopted FU's dice mechanic, which is very simple, and even further simplified it. Then I took Carsten's answer to the Chaos die and replaced it with my own.
This left only one hurdle.. Random event generation.
Mythic handles this via random charts of words that you interpret, and JF likes to use Rory's Story cubes. I experimented with both methods. They are great, but I wanted something *faster*.

My answer was to look more toward movie and tv scriptwriting, as I wanted to play a game more like the 5th element and Lethal Weapon than I did a game about broody vampires or Victorian librarians.

START HERE!

My rules are as follows:

Stat up your Hero, Declare your setting.
These can be done as simply or as complex as you like. The more complex it is, the more detail you will have to work with and some answers may come easier to you.. The more simple it is the more surprises will be in store.. You can't lose.

Set your first Scene.
This is a short description of **where** the Hero is and **what's happening.**
At this time you should also come up with a **Scene Goal** for the Hero... This will determine when the scene is over (whether they achieved or failed at the goal).

Begin asking questions! A question can be either an **Inquiry** or an **Action outcome**. Questions must be in a yes/no answerable format.

For each question, roll a d6 and read the following result (If your Hero has a significant advantage, roll a second d6 along with it and choose the result. If a significant disadvantage, roll the second D6 but take the worst result for the hero):

1-No and
2-No
3-No But
4-Yes But
5- Yes
6-Yes And

"And" means even more than you expected, "But" means there is a limited effect or a drawback.

In addition, roll a different colored D6. This is the **Twist Die**.. If it comes up a 1, there is a twist to the scene.

What is the twist? Take 2 different colored D6, declare which one if "first" and roll them, then consult the following chart:

1st d6
1-NPC
2-PC
3-Organization
4-Physical event
5-Emotional event
6-Item

2nd d6
1-Appears

2-Alters the location
3-Helps the hero
4-Hinders the hero
5-Changes the goal
6-Ends the scene

Exactly what this two-word sentence means is up to your interpretation based on what you know about the goings on. This is even more open ended than the other systems I looked at, but I found it sufficient for my imagination.

Once the scene ends in some way (the protagonist's goal is met or failed) take a breath, and roll the next scene:

1d6

1-3: Dramatic scene
4-5: Quiet Scene
6: Meanwhile…

A dramatic scene means the action doesn't let up! A quiet scene means there is no immediate danger, probably a good chance to gather intel or discover more about the characters or situation. A Meanwhile scene is a remote location, and does not involve the protaginists! This should be immediately randomized as a twist and kept quite short. I haven't done one of these yet but I'm looking forward to it.

Some more randomizers may be helpful, such as the ones in Mythic or other games. I didn't really need them in my test game. What I did lean on a bit was name generators, of which there are many available as web pages online.

Want proof of concept? You got it.. I played a quick session just to see if it worked.. Here it is, exactly as I played it out.

Calamity Outpost, the Solo RPG

I set a limit for myself first off. All Characters had to be based on a mini in my collection.

Dash Allison is a spacejacker.. Galactic slang for a Jack of all trades making a living among the space-lanes. Dash captains a small cargo hauler in dubious repair and little else but his cherished free-trader license. Dash grew up on Earth, the worst scum-hole in the quadrant. He learned to fight equally well with his fists or a pistol early in life, although he has had no formal training. He learned to pilot a starship from his friend, Captain Chinto.. A Prang Spacejacker that inadvertently rescued him from a lethal situation on Earth.
Dash has ended up at Calamity outpost, on planet 15 in the Khurasan system. Almost broke and far from home, he hopes to make enough credits to upgrade his ship and get clear of this volatile Grey-zone.

Set the Scene:

Dash wakes up. He can't see anything and his hands are tied.

Scene Goal: Dash needs to figure out where his is and how much trouble he's in.

Are Dash's Eyes covered?

Yes and - Not only that but there is a bag over his head that makes it difficult to hear. Or breathe.

Dash tests his bonds, carefully feeling around to see how he is restrained. Can he get free?

No but

Dash sighs. His wrists and feel are solidly locked into durasteel shackles. He is able to sit up on his knees and move around though.

He gets into a sitting position and scoots carefully along the floor. Does he find a wall?

Yes , +Twist. Physical event/helps the hero.

Dash quickly ascertains that he is in a small cell. As he works his way around, he fumbles across a door.. Which creaks open!

Dash sticks his head out the door and listens carefully. Does he hear anything that could give him a clue to his whereabouts?

No

Getting more panicky every minute, Dash carefully taps at the walls and floor with his boot. Does it feel like concrete?

No And

Clang. Dash's years of Spacejacking tell him he's not in a building.. He's on a ship, or at least a station.

He yells out: "Hey! Somebody want to take this bag off my head?"

Is there any response?

No.

Dash sits down and tries to get his hands in front of him with a little contorting. Does he manage

it?

No and

"Aaaggh!" Dash is stuck in a curled-up position. He rolls forward onto his face with a painful clang. "COME ON!.. Anybody?! Hostage in jeopardy here! YO! ANYBODY ELSE ON THIS RUSTBUCKET?!"

Is there any response?

Yes and

Dash hears boots stomping along the gantry and he is hauled to his feet. He is shoved up against the wall in a standing position.

"Who's there? What the hell is going on?" He barks. Is it his captors?

Yes

There is no reply to his question. His mysterious assailants bundle him down the hallway. Are they taking him back to the cell?

No but

The hood is whipped off as he is frog-marched down the corridor.

Is there more than one guard?

Yes and

There are four guards standing around him.

Des he know any of them?

Yes

Are they the law?

Yes. Twist. Physical event/changes the location.

"Officers! I…" is all Dash manages to say before the wall explodes in a shower of debris and sparks.

Is Dash being rescued?

Yes and

Stepping through the rubble comes Miri Nooram, his engineer. Her magna wrench makes short work of the shackles. Coughing in the smoke are Captain Chinto and Thraken Gallen. The huge blue alien tosses Dash his blaster.

Did they bring a ship?

Yes

"Step lively now lad, we breached the hull not far from here.. If we're quick we can be void-side before they cut through the bulkheads to reach us!"

Dash slaps his old friend on the back and they make haste down the corridor.

After a few minutes of running, Dash pauses. "Just exactly where are we, Chinto?" He pants.

Are they on a ship?

Yes and

"Only a Federated battlecruiser. Now move it!"

Do they make it to the breach in time?

Yes

The four dive through the hatch and seal it, running to their stations in the glare of flashing proximity alarms.

Are they on Dash's ship?

No but

Chinto drops into the pilot harness and says:
"I'm going to try to get us clear of this thing, then we can slip atmo and get you back to your ship… It's still docked on Calamity. The robot and the psycho are babysitting it for you."
(He slams the engines into gear and they break loose)

"After that I'm gong to have to get out of this system for a while.. The Feds aren't going to forget Goosey Lucy for a while.."

The "Goosey Lucy" blasts away as the much larger Federated battle cruiser begins to come about.

Are they able to get away?

Yes And

Miri grins as she straps into a G-couch.

"Don't worry pops… I wormed their system good. It's going to be at least ten cycles before they get any signals in or out of that flying brick!"

The battle cruiser sputters to a halt as the Goosey Lucy arcs toward planet 15 and Dash's Ship, the Prospect.

End Scene. Next Scene: Quiet Scene.

This was an absolute blast and took next to no effort once I had my rules in place. All the fun of imagining a cheesy story, with the extra fun of not knowing what will happen next!

The intention is that whenever things take a violent turn, set up the minis and play a game of Throwdown to determine the outcome.. But to be honest you could play out action scenes just as easily as this one.

I'm going to stop now as this is probably the longest post I've ever done, but I hope you enjoyed it and it at least game you food for thought about ways to run a narrative campaign.

Thanks for reading!