

IMPETUS

*the solitaire rpg driver to move things forward when
you're stuck*



Rory Bracebuckle
© September, 2017

What's This?

Impetus is simple, really.

It's a doohickey for playing tabletop role-play games all alone. (Yes, solo RPGs are a thing if you didn't already know that.) It's a tool that gets you un-stuck when you hit a roadblock. A simple thing that gives a nudge when you need it. In the solo gaming niche (currently, a small but growing wedge of the rpg gaming community, and generally made up of very swell people), they might call this a driver.

You see, when you sit down to play an rpg, whether it's that funny game they played at the beginning of E.T., or some other game with books, dice, and pencils, and you're alone, you need something to help out. Something so that you're not taking part in a fully scripted premeditated storyline invented by you.

We have dice that show us outcomes of actions. That's a part of the role-playing game you've decided on. Solo gamers usually attach oracles, GM emulators, and the like to those. There are a bunch of really cool ones written by smart and fun people. I won't educate you on what those things are, but there's some help. Sophia Brandt's excellent blog, [Die Heart](#), has a whole list of them to look at. There's also a super awesome community of solo gamers on Google+ called [Lone Wolf Roleplaying](#) that discuss this sort of stuff.

Impetus is another one of those extra attachments. (*Have I confused you yet?*)

Generally, here's how these sorts of things work... You have your published game. Maybe it's about dragons, trendy vampires, or super-heroic puppies. You make up your persona and you've got rules telling you how to do stuff and how to roll dice to see what happens. *Now what?*

Well, if you're with a group of players (which is how most people do it), you have one player who runs the game — a *narrator*, a *GM*, or whatever. You know, the guy that tells the other players what sorts of circumstances their characters find themselves in, and who they meet. And he runs the bad guys. The players respond by making choices and rolling dice during risky actions.

If you're alone, you need some dice rolling thingamabobs that insinuate what the guy running the game would say if he was there. **Impetus** is like one of those GM substitutes, but a simpler one than most. Using any of the number of drivers and oracles out there can still be a lot of work. You're getting into your protagonist's role. But you're also interpreting prompts that do the narrator's job, including when and how to apply the rules. You're running bad guys and deciding what they're like and what they do. You generally have to be good at asking questions too.

Sounds exhausting? Yeah, *believe me*. Sometimes it is.

This is a simple driver that will help you out when you're stuck for asking the right questions. It does this by feeding you surprising events. You'll still have to do some of the normal question asking to figure out what's happening in your game world. But **Impetus** is there for when you get stuck. You can also run a whole solo game based on it.

Now that I've thoroughly intrigued (*or confused*) you...

How's It Work?

Okay another concept for you... I've heard them called idea generators — or story prompts. These can be things like random pictures, those awesome [Rory's Story Cubes](#) icon dice, picking a random word from a dictionary, or tarot cards. We'll call these *sparks*, because they can spark your imagination.

You can always ask a question about something in your game world, and draw a spark. Draw one and turn that idea into something relevant in the story. This generally requires some interpretation. We can do this at any time during a game session. One cheap and dirty way to get a spark is to stop what you're doing and look around you. The first thing that catches your attention is a spark. Use it to give you an answer.

Now that we know what a spark is, we move on to twists. One of the hardest things is to do is set up the next bit of action. We often know what we want our alter egos to do, but we don't always know what happens next, especially when nothing suggests itself as an obstacle.

Stories are full of twists — unexpected things happen that combust into action and drama. Impetus is a single chart, really, of generic *twist events*, or things that can suddenly pop up during your game. It answers, "What happens next?". It's making stuff happen to you that will change the story...stuff that normally the game's narrator would say happens in a group game when there's a lull in the action.

Okay, I Get It. Now What?

Roll or pick from something on the chart on the next page and apply a spark to it. Give yourself a moment. Put down the pencil and relax. Think about the twist event and the spark. Let the idea come to you. When you have a firm enough idea on something interesting, run with it. Most of the twists are vague enough that there could be a million ways to interpret that idea into a specific event.

Oh, yeah. Feel free to use a normal *oracle*. That means if you want to be surprised about an event, phrase a yes or no question and flip a coin. Heads is a "yes". Tails, a "no". If you want more nuance, use Freeform Universal RPG's die result system:

| D6 | Result |
|----|-------------|
| 6 | Yes, and... |
| 5 | Yes... |
| 4 | Yes, but... |
| 3 | No, but... |
| 2 | No... |
| 1 | No, and... |

Or alternatively...

| D6 | Result |
|-----|-------------|
| 6 | Yes, and... |
| 4-5 | Yes, but... |
| 3-2 | No, but... |
| 1 | No, and... |

Feel free to reflect odds of something happening or not happening with an extra die or two, taking the best or worst result.

Now, back to twist events...

You're going to roll two six-siders, one at a time. Match the result or just pick a result that looks good to you right now.

Apply a spark to your pick. Interpret these so that whatever happens is external to character choice, or at least will complicate those choices. These should be moves from the world against the protagonist in the form of surprising action. Something your hero can and should respond to.

| D6 | Result |
|----|---|
| 1 | Mistaken identity |
| 2 | Someone you thought was dead wasn't |
| 3 | Someone you thought was alive is dead |
| 4 | Someone unexpected wants to hurt/steal from you |
| 5 | Someone expected wants to hurt/steal from the wrong guy |
| 6 | Someone you care about is unexpectedly in the wrong place at the wrong time |

| D6 | Result |
|----|---|
| 1 | Someone you thought was helping you has something else in mind |
| 2 | A person you thought you knew turns out to be totally different |
| 3 | A new person unexpectedly shows up to complicate |
| 4 | A new person unexpectedly shows up to facilitate |
| 5 | A person you trusted suddenly has a change of perspective |
| 6 | Something explodes (figuratively or literally), but not the obvious thing |

| D6 | Result |
|----|---|
| 1 | The authorities get involved or turn a blind eye (whichever is worse) |
| 2 | Random violence distracts |
| 3 | Kidnapped (You or someone close to you) |
| 4 | Reinforcements arrive at opportune / inopportune moment |
| 5 | It's a disguise |
| 6 | It's a trap |

| D6 | Result |
|----|---|
| 1 | It's a fake |
| 2 | It's a lie |
| 3 | The nature of something you took for granted is completely opposite |
| 4 | A shell game |
| 5 | A superior becomes a subordinate (or opposite) |
| 6 | Someone unexpectedly gives you a mysterious item |

| D6 | Result |
|----|---|
| 1 | Something unexpected suddenly finds you |
| 2 | New adorer / tagalong |
| 3 | Forced unexpectedly into a new responsibility |
| 4 | An old responsibility suddenly goes away (or changes) |
| 5 | Your immediate goal turns on its head |
| 6 | A prop you need for success is taken away |

| D6 | Result |
|----|--|
| 1 | A prop you need for success is taken away |
| 2 | A new unexpected obstacle stands in the way of your immediate goal |
| 3 | You wake up /arrive in an unexpected place |
| 4 | A friend becomes an enemy |
| 5 | An enemy becomes a friend |
| 6 | Roll two from above and combine 'em |

Is That All?

Pretty much. Of course a good character goal and general adventure idea is very helpful. There are no rules here for making up that stuff or generating an interesting protagonist, but applying a spark can sometimes feed ideas. In a pinch, you can always rename a favorite TV or action movie character and re-skin their desires and quirks.

But when it comes to actually going, you want things to happen in an exciting story. It's not all about characters going about their heart's desires independent of the acting, responding world that's full of unpredictable peril — unless you like that and it works for you. If you have a strong direction for a story, that's fine. You can inject some unpredictability into it with yes/no questions.

But when you get stuck or the action lags, roll an **Impetus** twist event. Or...play more passively, letting the world take the reins and roll one twist after another. When things get complicated enough your character needs to take action, and you have a clearer picture of what might happen next — sometimes that's called an inciting incident.

Sometimes you may roll an item that appears to have no relevance to your game. You don't have a close friend made up? Your game has nothing to do with a MacGuffin? You have a few choices. One, you could discard and come up with a different twist. Or two, you can use the opportunity to answer that question — fill in the missing story details and thereby enrich your game. You may need new extras or antagonists to fill new roles. That's great!

Besides solitaire play, you can even use **Impetus** in a traditional multi-player game. If the narrator wants to run a game off the cuff, this can help. Got no idea, but you want to turn up the heat? Roll a twist event.

These events will give you an idea of what happens next in the form of an interesting or shocking event. You may have to pick an actor or two from your game world to be the target of something or the subject. **Impetus** generally eschews rolling randomly for these things, but you can if you prefer. The general event and the spark you apply to it should suggest who might be the target of something. If in doubt, choose the most inconvenient, shocking, or interesting target that comes to mind.

Impetus is also a kind of adventure generator. It's paced by your need to get impetus (lower case there, see?). It interjects itself when you need it, and stays back when you have enough info to move your story forward. It needs no other trigger or mechanism to work.

Impetus is just one random list of thirty-six items and these instructions on how to combine the twist and a spark to produce exciting events without too much hassle in your game. In the future, different themed lists are possible to plug in. Keep a lookout in the [Lone Wolf Roleplaying](#) group for more fan created **Impetus** lists.

Can You Give Me an Example?

Okay. Let's say I want to play a high-tech armored billionaire crime fighter. All I know is that he's on the lookout to bring down bad guys and is juggling his personal life with heading a multi-billion dollar conglomerate. As far as current events go, I got nothin.

Time for a twist to jumpstart some action! I roll a 1 and a 5, which indicates "Someone expected wants to hurt/steal from the wrong guy". I'm using a spark from the room where I'm currently sitting. I see a clock and a poor little plant (my cats have chewed the leaves, making it look pretty sorry). I think about it and come up with an idea.

I imagine my personal assistant — we'll call her Sage. She's irate at the janitor, who she claims took something sensitive from her office, leaving his dirty fingerprints (or so she thinks) all over her desk. Our hero knows the janitor as being a generally honest guy who always empties the trash and who had his "questionable past" overlooked as a personal favor to the guy's aging mother (a woman who was our hero's godmother). Sage is ready to rip the man limb from limb. Clearly, something has been taken, and our billionaire has to look into it. But our techno crime fighter knows a more diplomatic way to approach the poor janitor.

At this point, I know what the action is about, so I ask some yes/no questions to follow through with this particular thread. I determine that the janitor is not in his office, but his credentials recently checked into the building twenty minutes before. His access card put him in Sage's room at the time when she lost her file.

The hero goes looking. At this point, I'm out of ideas on what happens next, so I jump to another Impetus twist...

Rinse and repeat.