

Who Are These Morrow Folks, Anyway?
A Character Creation Variant for *The Morrow Project*
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One of the complaints I've heard most often from players of the *Morrow Project* concerning the game system is the character creation rules. They're sparse, to say the least. There's a good reason for that. From what I understand, the idea was that the players provide the "character" for their player characters, so only the physical statistics are randomly generated. The characters then have the mental abilities of the players themselves. It certainly seemed like a good idea at the time. Later, the role-playing supplement added the concept of degree fields and skill percentages, but the concept wasn't terribly self-supporting.

In my own games, I solved that problem by switching to the *Call of Cthulhu* game system by Chaosium. Their system is copyrighted, so I won't go into details about it here. In general, though, skill points in *Call of Cthulhu* are distributed based upon education and intelligence. Education is used for professional skills, intelligence for personal interest skills. It's a very workable system, and I strongly urge those of you who've never used it to check it out.

However, the purpose of this offering is not to extol the virtues of the *Call of Cthulhu* game system, but rather to address some of the quirks and idiosyncrasies of the *Morrow Project* character creation system, and present my method for dealing with them.

First of all, as stated in the game manual, every player character has at least a baccalaureate degree. With very few exceptions for geniuses, that means every character will be at least 22 years old before he or she is even recruited for the Project. Characters with military experience, in combat or not, will be at least three years older, to allow enough time to obtain both that experience and the college degree. The Project has no wet-behind-the-ears teenagers.

Characters with military experience can be either officers or enlisted. As a general rule, an enlisted person would have gotten his military experience first, and gone to college after he got out of the service. Few college graduates go enlisted. On the other hand, most former military officers will be college graduates at the time they signed up. Damned few enlisted personnel go officer right from the start, though they may be graduates of Officer's Candidate School after a few terms of service. You may have other ideas, but I assume that the *Morrow Project* picked up military officers who went ROTC. From the military officers I have known personally, most Academy graduates are career types. ROTC officers have a hard time making the military their career, even if they want to. The "old boy network" works against them.

In the modern Army, based on information presented in the 1998 *Soldiers' Annual*, one in six active duty personnel are officers. This proportion remains the same for both male and female. One in six active duty personnel are female. One in six as officers seems high, unless you consider the fact that all pilots are officers (helicopter pilots may be an exception, I don't know), all doctors

are officers, all engineers are officers, etc. Unless the Project was specifically targeting officers in their recruitment, a 1-in-6 chance of being a former officer sounds about right.

Bachelors degrees should predominate in the process. The higher you go in the educational process, the more specialized you get. The Project needs generalists more than specialists, except in fields like medicine where lower degree levels fail to provide adequate skills.

Has anyone else noticed that one degree field missing from the role-playing supplement is Law? I for one assume that was *not* an oversight. Rather, in my version of the Project, the planners took Shakespeare seriously when he said, "First, let's kill all the lawyers." Meaning no offense to Morrow Project aficionados who are lawyers, of course. You may not be part of the 99% who give the rest a bad name, after all. That is *not* to say that the Project recruited no lawyers. Law degrees are only available at the graduate level, so every lawyer *must* have a baccalaureate degree in something else first. Whatever the BA/BS degree is in, *that's* what the rare Project lawyer was recruited for.

Although it is possible for a character to be recruited straight out of college, I prefer to allow my players several years of experience in the real world before they join the Project. My reasoning is that the Project doesn't want "ivory tower intellectuals" but rather people who get their hands dirty. An engineer who works as a field foreman on a major construction job would be preferable to one who spent a couple of years at his desk designing that same project, for example.

At the other end of the scale, the Project planners knew that the work of rebuilding society would last a lifetime or more. For that reason, I arbitrarily assigned a maximum age of 45 to the player characters. If you want to generate age randomly, use 1d20 or 2d10 (I prefer 2d10 since it groups people together in the middle of the range due to the bell curve) and add 25. My rationale for using 45 as a base maximum age is that it allows the character at least 20 years of active Project duty after awakening, barring accident, disease, or violence, long enough to not only make a good start, but to train the next generation of re-builders. No point in selecting Project members who would die off from age-related problems within a few years. Using 25 for the base minimum means that a BA/BS degree holder will have at least a few years of experience, but a graduate-level degree holder might still have been recruited directly from college.

Once a character joins the Project, he has a year of training. I disagree with the statement in the game manual that everyone knows how to operate all of the Project's equipment. When you consider the wide variety of equipment available, there simply would not be time for any character to become proficient with all of it before they're frozen.

So what does the Project teach in their one-year training course? Part of it is a fitness regimen. Not at all like military boot camp. These aren't kids who are away from home for the first time. They're highly educated, individualistic self-starters who would probably chafe under anything resembling military discipline. Military veterans are the exception, of course, but even they show more initiative than the rank and file, or the Project wouldn't have head-hunted them. So the Project trainees don't do the spit-and-polish drilling, but they certainly do the obstacle courses, the cross-country runs, and lots of calisthenics.

Part of the training is a team-building exercise, like the mountaineering or white-water rafting done by the Outward Bound schools. Remember them? For that matter, Outward Bound could even be a front for the Project, though it's not necessary.

Part of the training is a series of one-week introductory courses in specialties outside their own. In the Corps of Engineers, I get sent to a course or two like this every year, within my specialty. The class consists of a pretest to find out what you know, a week of lecture and hands-on experience, and a posttest to see what you've learned. You don't get enough knowledge to actually use in a meaningful manner, but you do get enough to at least know where to look to find out more. So, along with all the introductory courses is a lot of free study time where the characters can do further research in what interests them. Advanced courses in a similar format are also available for those who have the interest and aptitude.

Some of the things that would be covered are map reading, radio procedures, shooting the guns, cleaning the guns, driving the vehicles, maintaining the vehicles (ever try to change a tire weighing a couple hundred pounds?), basic first aid (not including CPR!), plus each other's specialties. One subject definitely *not* covered is flying the Air Scout. The Project doesn't have enough time to teach a non-pilot how to fly. However, someone who comes into the Project with pilot training could get his type certification on autogyros, which are damned uncommon in both the military and civil arenas, and thus be allowed to fly the Air Scout.

One idiosyncrasy of the training is that no one fails. No one washes out. Those who do poorly on the fitness part might be assigned to a support base of a science team with a fixed base, but I assume the Project wouldn't recruit anyone who is too unfit to handle physical labor. Team members who don't learn much in the training course still have at least one usable skill from their previous lives, if not more.

A significant part of the training is teaching. Everyone gets to teach at least one course, preferably more, either in their specialty or in an area of personal interest. In order to fulfill the goals of the Project, the team members must be able to pass on their accumulated knowledge to the locals, so this may in fact be the most important part of the training cycle. They not only have to teach the locals, but they also have to teach their teammates enough that any of them can fill in for each other with at least a modicum of skill.

Rather than arbitrarily say that everyone can use all of the Project equipment, I allow a pool of skill points due to training (over and above the professional skills brought into the Project by the character), enough to cover one field well, several fields poorly, or all of them at a bare minimum. The player allocates these points based upon his character concept. I absolutely do *not* want my characters to *all* be able to drive the Science-1, fly an Air Scout, and fire the Rh-202 equally well.

I also created a new skill. Okay, I shamelessly plagiarized it from the *Traveller* role-playing system. In *Traveller* it's called "jack of all trades" but in my version of the *Morrow Project*, I call it "Heuristic Problem-solving". The idea is that the characters are taught in the training cycle to approach problems in a new way. Basically, if you can't solve the problem the first time, you can "think sideways" to come up with another plan for tackling the problem. In game terms, for any repeatable task that requires a skill check, if the character fails the task, then makes a successful

Heuristic check, he can try again, without limit, until he runs out of time, gets a critical failure, or succeeds. This allows people with a low skill level in a field of study to still fill in for the specialist character, though he'll likely take longer to accomplish the same task. In fairness to those who get it right the first time, a critical success is only possible on a first attempt. Simple success is the best you can do on a second or subsequent attempt. If it's a non-repeatable task, then Heuristic skill counts for nothing.

My main reason for using Heuristic Problem-solving as a skill is to eliminate the unrealistic game convenience of everybody on the team being able to use all of the equipment equally well, while still allowing those less proficient characters a reasonable chance of success.

For my biggest heresy, player characters *cannot* be psionic. I have decided for my games that psionic powers are the result of a favorable mutation, and thus cannot be held by prewar characters. Player characters may still have a psionic strength score for the purpose of determining whether or not they can resist telepathy or other psionic attacks (though I use a characteristic called willpower instead). When you look at the occurrence of psionics in the modern world, even including unproven cases, it's so statistically insignificant as to be nonexistent. You don't have to agree. Your game, your house rules, after all. Maybe in your game there is a strong push to recruit people who have such powers. I just think that I've seen too many games in which the team has a psionic (or more than one!) in a team of five. If you allow prewar characters to possess psionic powers, I'd suggest making them a lot more rare, and to only allow nonviolent psionic skills. The postwar characters (the locals) can have just about anything regarding psionics. It gives them an edge against a Project team with technology on its side.