

THE PRACTICAL GUIDE

TO BECOMING A



GREAT PLAYER



GUY SCLANDERS



THE PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BECOMING A
GREAT PLAYER
FOR ALL ROLEPLAYING GAMES





DEDICATED TO

My amazing fans who have journeyed with me for so many wonderful years!

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Note: Throughout the book we use the terms Heroes, Characters, Audience and Viewers. These can be interchanged with PCs, NPCs, and Players if you are running a TTRPG and using this book.

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INTRODUCTION

I wish there was a single perfect solution for this. Luckily there is not. I say luckily because it means we are forced to think around, inside, and outside the box. To begin with then, the only place we really need to start at is accepting this mantra:

I am a creative person. I create awesome characters.

Why here? Well, I hear this all the time: “I’m just not creative. My characters are boring because I cannot be anything else but me.” It’s a complete lie told to you by yourself. Don’t worry all Game Masters have the same fear. The bottom line is: if you enjoy doing it, you’re good at it. Don’t let anyone tell you differently.

I am a creative person. I create awesome characters.

The other reason we cannot use one path to creating great characters is because we have so many RPGs to choose from, and some of them have very structured construction processes which require us to follow a premeditated path. We need to be agile and mindful that just because the TTRGP system requires us to pick our skills before our talents, or our class before our abilities or our species before anything else, does not mean that we can only make awesome characters in certain games, and poor ones in others. It means we have to be flexible in how our character is formed regardless of the game’s system.

As with all those RPGs out there, this book has a process – a structured approach to bringing your character to life. The process is meant to be as flexible as possible so that you can use it in any order, with the caveat that you remember what other processes are to come. Why?

Poor characters often arise from only utilizing one step from this book and forgetting the rest. I didn’t write this tome for the sake of filling pages; I wrote it because this is a complete character generation process. To get an interesting-to-play, engaging and well-rounded character you need to follow all these steps.

Do you have to do this for every character you make? And do you have to do this every time you make a character? No. Once you are used to the processes, to the steps, you can lock down a few before you start playing and then develop the rest during your game. Some are critical to do before the game, but some can be added in as you draw inspiration from the game and understand the character more.

We need to choose a starting point for the character. There are many options, and the people I’ve spoken to are totally mixed about where they start. I’ve found, and this is common for most, starting with a concept is best. Have vague idea of what you want to make based on some rough initial impulses, and only after you have read, or been briefed on, the RPG ruleset and character creation system.

RULESETS

If there is one piece of advice to take away from this book it is this:

It doesn't matter how good your character is, if you do not know the ruleset you are playing, your character will never shine.

Why? Simple. Every time you have to stop and look up rules, or find the right dice, or ask someone how your character works, or what the ability does, you are breaking the game back into it being a game about mechanics and not a game about characters.

Obviously, if you are playing a new game you won't know the rules by heart, that is to be expected. But don't then expect the first character you build to be what you want it to be! You won't meet that amazing and awesome character until weeks of playing and you are more familiar with the rules, at least enough that you don't pause the game every time it's your turn to look for rules or understand what dice to roll.

That's point number one about the RPG.

The other point is this: if you expect the GM (Game Master, Dungeon Master, Narrator, whatever you want to call them) to know the rules so that you don't, you're just a bad player. Forget making a great character, you're a slacker leeching off your GM hoping they provide you with answers.

That is not the kind of player I want sitting at my table, and as a GM, I'll never respect a character who is made by a player who spends a decade playing the same game and still doesn't know how the game works because they expect everyone else to do the hard work for them.

I'm not advocating you become a rules maniac and learn all the subtle rules of the game (but why not?) I'm saying: know how your character works. Read the rules and figure that shit out before you start playing.

ENCOUNTER

Ask your GM what rule system they will be using for your next adventure/campaign. Do some research on the system, and the character creation method.

Write down the answers to the following questions:

- What is the basic mechanic of the game?
- How does magic/special abilities work?
- How does combat work and what dice do you roll?
- How do you recover from being injured?
- Is there a mechanism that lets you roll more dice/change dice rolls?
- What is the core idea behind the TTRPG in terms of setting?

4 XP per answer

PERMISSION

Hello, my name is Guy and I'm the author of this book. I hereby give you permission to create any kind of character you like. Go ahead. Want to create a pretty princess in bright pink who giggles at everything? Perhaps you want a sweat-dripping hulk of a superhero who wears very little, says less, and has the biggest sword in the world? Maybe you want to make a mild-mannered character who collects book titles (not the books, just the titles)? You could even want to be a six to eight-breasted*, part-cat, part-human hybrid (yes, I've had someone ask to be that in one of my games). *And yes, all cats both male and female, have six to eight nipples.

This is YOUR character. You should be free to play whatever you wish. Don't hold yourself back because you're afraid or nervous of what others might think. This is your space. Be bold.

I also now give you conflicting permission: you are permitted to listen to the GM and to understand their worldspace that they're running their game in. You are permitted to listen to your fellow players

and understand what type of game they are playing, and you are required to make sure that whatever you permit yourself to do is within those limits.

Creating a homophobic sexist who hates life isn't going to sit well in a game focused around sexual freedom and liberation. Equally so, a flamboyant camp homosexual character will need to be very, very carefully played in a game set in Nazi Germany.

What's my point?

You should feel free to make any type of character you want to or feel inspired to play. No one should stomp on your dreams. However, you are also responsible for making sure that whatever you are creating is going to work within the game and with your fellow players' characters.

You are never given permission to play something contrary to the group's wishes, or the GMs world space restrictions. That's like asking to play American Football with a tennis racket – dumb. Don't do it. Look at the options available to you and work within those.

ENCOUNTERS

Throughout this book there are these:

ENCOUNTER

Identify the TTPG you will be creating the character for. Answer these questions:

- What species are available?
- Are there any specific roles or classes you are limited to?
- Is magic part of the system (including divine magic)?
- Are there gender roles / setting specific restrictions you need to keep in mind?

5 XP per answer

These are encounters for you to overcome. Once you've read the section of text, run the encounter. If you complete it, you score XP! If you complete ALL the encounters successfully, not only will you have a complete character, but you'll have extensive knowledge on the roleplaying system you're going to be playing in, a fully developed idea on what it is to be a great player, and a thoroughly prepped imagination waiting to take your game to new places.

In some instances, I've provided sample answers, where I feel those answers are useful for you to read through and learn from.

You can grab a copy of the complete set of Encounters plus space to answer them from our website www.greatgamemaster.com This is a working document that you can use to keep track of your answers and XP total.

What can you use the XP for? It is a measure of how much of this book you've encountered successfully, and you can check your score against this table.

SCORE	GRADE
500	It's a great start but you haven't done much have you?
1500	You've put in some of the effort, what will it take you to push just a little more?
3000	Nice job, you've got through a lot and are hopefully inspired to create great characters!
4500	I'm impressed! You've put in the time and effort and your characters will benefit from this moving forward. Well done!
5500	You are truly a great player, a wonderful and dedicated friend who wants to make sure the entire table is having fun, and you'd be welcome at my table anytime!

TERMS

Throughout this book I mix and match genders and pronouns. If you read a sentence and it doesn't make sense, know that I use, he/him, she/her, they/them as needed.

EXAMPLES

Any examples are always provided in a green box. These are examples to help demonstrate an idea or concept.

CRITICAL IDEAS

Anything in a red box are concepts or ideas that you should really pay attention to and understand before moving on to the next section.



IMAGINATION

Before you hurtle into the realm of creation you first need to step back and understand how your imagination works. This is based on my own experience and talking with thousands of gamers over decades. Your imagination is comprised of four disciplines, each of which you can practice, refine, and strengthen.

The disciplines are:

- Research
- Experience
- Freeform Association
- Inspiration

How each discipline works with each other discipline generates a totally new set of creative, imaginative outcomes and you must learn how to use each aspect individually, and all of them together in your gaming experience.

Understanding and mastering your imagination will allow you to create amazing characters. It will also empower you to make those characters come alive with realistic dialogue, open and honest reactions, and to guide you on keeping your character within the game space and to perhaps go against what your character might seem to want. Imagination is our most powerful weapon in this game.

RESEARCH

This is the easy one, though some folks seem reluctant to do it in case it's dangerous (there are some people who think learning new things is bad for your health). Learning new things, reading a wiki, watching a documentary, or talking to others about things is not inherently dangerous in my opinion. Research constitutes the biggest 'easy' win for the imagination. Instead of making stuff up from nothing, you're making stuff up based on what you've learned. Others have done the hard work, you're reaping the benefits of seeing into their lives and drawing from it.

How would your medieval character react to learning that his wife is a cheating monster? Henry the VIII would advocate for cutting her head off. Others may extort the wife into handing over a fortune. Some simply dismiss it. There is no 'imagination' used here. Just recalling the research I've done in the past. Absorb as much as you can. The more you feed your research discipline the easier it becomes to apply it.

Any information is useful, on any subject. What makes that information particularly potent is understanding why the thing is. Or why it happened. Putting it into context brings new insight for you.

Why did kings kill cheating wives? Out of love? Out of hatred? Sometimes. Out of a need to keep their heir safe from rival claimants. Most certainly. Naturally the king would feel betrayed - who wouldn't - but if you look at the rival claimant line - suddenly

there is a more sinister aspect. It didn't exist before you understood why such a thing happened. Could your character be the hidden heir to the throne, whose mother was killed by the king a decade or two ago? That's an interesting character. No imagination was involved here. Not yet.

You can always learn new things. Instead of watching a billion hours of TikTok videos on cutting cucumbers into flowers, watch one hour of the history of the Aztec people, or on how aircraft carriers are built. Expanding your Research Discipline is really easy, it just takes a little time.

ENCOUNTER

Pick one of the following to go and do some research on. You should spend at least an hour reading this subject. If you know the subject already, choose another one. If you know them all, score the XP instantly.

- Aztec rituals and festivals
- Victorian fashion trends in the 1890s
- How China was unified into a single empire
- The silk road
- The fifth emperor of Rome
- Life of a submarine sailor

**100 XP per 30 minutes
spent reading/researching**

EXPERIENCE

You can read and learn as much as you like about a subject and gain as much insight as you like, but you will not know what it *feels* like. Personal experience is invaluable in looking for emotional truth. When you climbed that mountain using ropes and pitons and things (do some research and you'll have this information) the emotions you felt are the real gold: fear, nervousness, anxiety, gut-wrenching terror, exhilaration, relief and so on.

Being able to link an emotion to an experience roots your thoughts into something real. All humans experience emotions, and it is through this common emotional experience that we bond most with others. Our emotions are universal. Our research is not.

What does it feel like to ride a dragon? No one knows. However, if you've ever ridden a horse, you might have an emotional experience you can draw from. It's like being very small on a very big thing, a powerful thing, and yet you are in charge – if you pretend to be. Nerves still tingle in the back of your skull, and the fear that floods your stomach when the animal begins to run is intense. The feeling of the muscles moving underneath you, and then the breath-jarring bang of your nethers against the rock-hard body of this monster is suddenly there. It's not pure joy, it's wonder and fun and feeling the wind of your face, and also the pain of your muscles tensing and bashing against the flanks of the animal. The feeling of being heavy when you dismount. The smell of the animal and the sound of its breathing.

That's a lot of truthful experience right there. Now, tell me, does that feel like riding a dragon? I certainly think so. Expanding your Experience Discipline is not as simple as 'living more'. Or booking a holiday to go ride horses through the swamp. It's about reflecting upon the experience and mentally recording the experiences. How did you feel, what details do you remember?. Being mindful of what you've just experienced is not only a good trait to gain but empowers you to recall easily what you felt so you can draw from it later.

If you pair Research and Experience you can create an emotionally truthful experience that is based in fact for any kind of fantastical situation. This still is not imagination. It's combining concepts together.

ENCOUNTER

Think back to an emotional moment when you were excited about a received package (getting this book in the mail for example). Use this the next time your character opens a chest or a coin purse. Describe the following:

- How did you feel looking at the unopened package?
- How did you go about opening the package?
- What did you initially feel about the contents?
- How did you hold the contents of the package?
- What did the package smell like?

25 XP per answer



FREEFORM ASSOCIATION

What is reality? This is a tremendously complex question – so here is a better one – what makes something real? Aside from the buckets of philosophy on this, the simple answer is: Facts. A fact makes something real. The sky is blue. This is a fact. The sky must exist because it has a color. Why is the sky blue? Due to atmospheric depth, light scattering properties of airborne particles, angles of light, pollution, and a dozen other reasons. All of these are facts.

This means when we introduce something to the character or to the world in which the character exists it must be rooted in a fact. But how can it be rooted in fact if it's made up? Well, that's where we use the Research and Experience Disciplines to help us out.

What has this to do with Freeform Association? In the context of a character adding random things that are facts makes the character more real. So, what are random things? There are easy ones and more complex ones. Easy ones: the look of the character. The character wears scuffed boots. Why? How do we make the boots real? Add some facts. They are scuffed because they are old. Why does the character wear old boots? Because... the boots belonged to their grandfather who wore them for good luck during a war. It could also be because they have no money to buy new shoes. Or perhaps the style of their culture is to wear clothing until it falls off you. Pick any one you like, and it's all made the character more real by adding a fact about their boots.

More complex facts to add are behavioral facts. My character acts like this. Why? What fact do you have to make this real?. Our behavior is derived from many sources, so a single fact might not cut it. You may need to link a few together to create a more complete 'truthful' picture. My character is nervous around elves. The facts: As a child elves burned down my character's village. I have never felt so powerless. I couldn't move to do anything during the attack. I was scared and a coward. I don't like feeling that. Thus, when I meet elves, I am nervous they are going to show the world that I'm a coward.

Randomly linking the Research Discipline that villages are often destroyed in raids by other cultures to the Experience of being helpless and feeling like a coward gives us a complex fact. This fact makes the reaction of being nervous around elves truthful. Even though this is all fiction.

Freeform Association is therefore a two-fold Discipline. You are randomly combining Research and Experience facts together, and you are then extrapolating additional information that didn't exist before.

How on earth do you practice this? Anytime you are in a space with other humans wandering around

(a mall, a restaurant, a classroom etc.) simply look at their clothing, hairstyle or behavior. Now work out the facts that are needed to justify the choice. You must prove the fact, not just randomly list it. It works best on people you do not know, so your brain is required to do all the imagining for you.

A certain haircut for example. Why did he cut his hair like that? The fact that his hair is red, and his face is round means that the super short cut makes him appear like a tomato. So why would he do it? Perhaps he has been forced to do it. By whom? An evil witch? That's interesting. Why would the witch be doing this? What's the fact? He has a bet with the witch. If he can get the high school jock to fall in love with him, looking like a tomato, the witch will be destroyed. If he can't he turns into a tomato and the witch can make her vegan lunch. That's basically the plot of Disney's Little Mermaid. But it works.

Another way to look at it is this: A haircut and the fact that F-16 fighter jets use an unusual grade of aviation fuel. Two very, very disparate facts. How do we prove them? The haircut could be a safety measure. Long hair gets tangled in the fueling apparatus used by F-16 fighter jet ground crew. It could be the haircut is an initiation or hazing haircut used for new recruits. It could also be that the person who saw a picture of a World War 1 fighter pilot, thought their haircut was cool for a pilot, and since they fly F-16s felt it was a 'cool' look but now regrets it because the 1910' style has been out of date for 70 years. All of those are perfectly suitable facts to prove these different things to all be true and all give us emergent information.

But which one of these options is the most creative or useful answer? For that we have to turn to our last Discipline.

ENCOUNTER

Freeform cannot happen without research and experience. For this encounter you'll need your answers to the previous two encounters (your research and experience encounters).

Link the following things together: Allen, a dog, and a small brass-colored bead.

Use your answer to your research encounter as the setting, and your answer to the experience encounter as the event around this you're going to like the above three items.

Note that if you simply change your research encounter answer, or the experience encounter answer how your freeform encounter answer will change radically?

100 XP

INSPIRATION

Inspiration might seem like a nebulous thing, a thing that just happens. It most certainly does not. Inspiration happens all the time and at odd times. Sometimes it is triggered whilst in the shower, hanging upside-down from a fifty-story building, or just walking the dog. That doesn't mean to say these random thoughts are useful in any way.

The Discipline of inspiration is separating the random thoughts into two groups: that's fun to think about in the shower, and stuff that is actually useful to you as a creator. What's the difference? Practically, it's the one that raises more questions but also provides answers. The idea of creating a hippo character who needs to spend at least 6 hours a day submerged in water is an inspiration. But how will it spend 6 hours a day in water if there is none? Must it carry its own bathtub full of water? That's not practical. Why would it go out adventuring with this extreme set-back? It's in dire need of something. But then, why would it remain outside adventuring with this hardship once it has attained its initial goal?

Feels like that idea is not going anywhere except into the realm of difficulty. What about a hippo character who wants to spend all their time in the water, but is allergic to water? It's very similar but has turned the situation on its head. Now the hardship is emotional. It provides an instant answer: it is looking for a cure so

it can go swimming. Why would it carry on adventuring after it has overcome the allergy? To go swimming in all the different rivers, lakes, and oceans of the world of course!

This is what inspiration looks like. Taking the spark, exploring it, and looking at it from different angles. Which one answers questions, and which one becomes a headache to try to answer. Good inspiration should do exactly what the name implies: Inspire, not hinder.

How do you practice this? Take your daily sparks that drift through your head and ask for answers. Look for reasons why the spark answers your questions. Look at sparks of ideas that do not, that provide more and more questions. If it becomes a struggle to answer those questions, it isn't inspiration: its constipation.

The more you actively turn inspirations around in this way, the better you get at dismissing bad inspiration from good inspiration.

ENCOUNTER

Write down the first idea that comes to mind when you read the word GIANT BANANA. Take your answer to the previous Freeform Encounter and rewrite it to include a giant banana.

100 XP

THE REAL IMAGINATION

It appears we now have four Disciplines that, on their own, require no imagination. Only actively applying what we know to be true. Is that all imagination is? No. Imagination is the next step. The 'what if' question. You cannot ask the 'what if' if you don't know the facts. What if women could fly? What would that look like? You have to roll that question backwards and apply Research to it. Women have never been able to fly. What can fly? Birds. What do you know about birds? Are there any six-foot tall birds flying around? The albatross is pretty big - in wingspan, but not in body size. Bumble-bees are huge body-wise to very small wings. They fly. So, women would need small wings that beat at extraordinary speeds. What else do we know about flying things? They are incredibly light. Their bones are hollow (or have exoskeletons).

Even if you don't want to work out what these weird bird/insect hybrid women look like, and just say: magic, then you have a different rabbit hole to explore: what is the world like with magic and is it only women who can use it?

Look at all the imagination happening. Finding the facts and truths to support the 'what if' is part of the process of being creative. If you don't do it, if you just 'what if' and leave it unanswered then you have created something that is unreal. If it is unreal, it will remain unreal and just an idea. It is only when we make it real that a thing truly comes to life.

Now that you know how to make real things out of nothing using your imagination, it is time to turn our creative brains to the subject of bringing life to a character who is absolutely a work of fiction, but who will be as real as your best friend in every aspect except one: there is no physical body...





PART 1: BIRTH

*"You're sexually transmitted you know."
Most of us come from parents and in one way
or another who they are, where they were when
you were born, and how they behaved after
your birth is hugely influential upon you. But
your character, your character can start almost
anywhere, and is imaginatively transmitted..."*



CHAPTER 1: CONCEPT

You sit down at the table and stare blankly at the rule book. You need to make a character. But what type of character? Where do you begin and how to design a character? Regardless of the TTRPG you are playing, the fundamental idea of ‘my character’ never changes.

Someone who wants to do something with their life or is seeking to find out what they should do with their life.

What is critical to understand in this step is that you are creating vague concepts. No stronger than a single sentence: I want to play a tough warrior prin-

cess. I want to be a starship captain. I want to explore a woman learning to accept her disability. I want to play a dead man seeking his murderer. Keep it vague and loose at this point. Trust me.

Who is that someone? What is it that they want to do? What type of build* should you go for? Where do you start?

*Your build refers to the mechanical build of your character based upon the TTRPG ruleset you are using. Having a great character concept that isn’t supported by the rules is going to be an issue and means you cannot create that character.

INFINITE CHOICE

Infinite choice leads to many answers, so we need to make it a finite choice.

If you can choose literally anything to play, and TTRPGs this is the case, you have no option but to not choose anything. What? With infinite choices, comes infinite answers. Choosing from an infinite

number is pointless. We must reduce the infinite to a finite number. Then, and only then, can you begin your choices in a meaningful way.

To do that we have several limiting factors that we can draw from immediately.

LIMITS

I begin with defining those limits. Necessity is the mother of all invention – so they say. Limits give you the playing area and provide – I believe – an excellent starting point. What are the limits? That depends on

what TTRPG you are playing, but usually boil down into a few broad areas:

- TTRGP
- Genre
- Species
- Era
- Tone
- Sex

TTRGP

This one is obvious, but it is always my first stop when creating a character. If the GM has said: We're playing using the Call of Cthulhu 7th ed. rules, it is extremely unlikely that you'll need a character who is a Klingon from Star Trek. Knowing the TTRGP gives you a lot of scope. And if we do not know the setting or tone of the TTRGP there are thousands of YouTubers out there desperate for you to watch their video on 'how to play X TTRGP'. Go do some homework like a good human being :p

We want to make sure our character concept fits within the overall design of the TTRGP. It must be something that feels like it comes from that space otherwise it is going to create a bizarre anomaly and also run the risk of being rejected by the GM. Do not be *that* player who arrives at a Cyberpunk game with a medieval knight. It just won't work. Accept that and move on.

You need to look at the possible options you could be rather than focusing on what you cannot be.

Some TTRGPs have distinct roles or classes. That is another limitation – and a powerful one at that. What role speaks to you? What possible characters pop into

your mind when you look at the classes available? In games without specific roles, what skills or abilities inspire you? Is Archeology an option? Perhaps you want to play someone who digs in the dirt? Look to the TTRGP to give you potential insight into the type of character you are going to be playing.

The GM may also have decided on certain home-brew style classes or abilities or may be altering certain parameters of the rulebook. Make sure to check on what those are before even beginning this process!

ENCOUNTER

Identify the TTRGP you will be creating the character for. Answer these questions:

- What species are available?
- Are there any specific roles or classes you are limited to?
- Is magic part of the system (including divine magic)?
- Are there gender roles / setting specific restrictions you need to keep in mind?

5 XP per answer

DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT, THERE IS NO SAFER ENVIRONMENT THAN WITHIN ROLEPLAYING!

GENRE

This is extremely specific and often tied to the TTRGP you are playing: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Science Fantasy, Steampunk, Modern etc. Some TTRGPs do not have a defined Genre and so you should consult with your GM as to what Genre they want to play in.

Genre is the world setting of the game and also the tone of the game. A romantic horror – for example – doesn't give you much of the world setting other than horrific things exist in it – but the romance gives you an idea that it's going to involve loving couples, or throuples, or whatever, who will have a happily ever after ending. A romantic tragedy would mean the world is normal, but the romance has a tragic ending.

Genre gives us new limits that the TTRGP system may not. Here you are limited to your understanding of the genre. How do you find out what the genre is all about? Ask the GM for some details. What are warriors like in a steampunk genre? How are women treated in this genre? How are elves seen in this world? Elves from the Lord of the Rings TTRGP are very different from Elves from the Starfinder TTRGP – mechanically, and from a genre perspective.

The limits of the genre should help you refine your ideas or inspire new ones. Your initial idea from the TTRGP may need to change. Be willing and open to the idea. Do not try to force your 'vision' into the TTRGP or Genre. Look at how your vision would be altered by those limits. Want to make a Vampire Hunter, but the TTRGP is set in Star Wars, and there are no vampires? Replace Vampire with Jedi and your concept remains the same. Begging the GM to add space vampires really isn't a great idea unless you know the GM is willing to hear new ideas.

ENCOUNTER

What is the genre of the game you're playing in – find out and answer these questions:

- What defines this genre?
- What are the social norms of the genre for regular inhabitants of the space?
- What other books/films/TV shows use this genre?
- What excites you about playing in this genre?
- Are there any things you dislike about this genre?

5 XP per answer

SPECIES

The available species from the TTRGP and the genre will give you a solid line on what you can and cannot play. Look at all the species available to you, then go back and ask yourself if any of them excite you. Frequently what happens to many people after playing the same TTRGP for a while is that the species are no longer exciting due to familiarity. Your new limiter has now become to play something you've not played before. For others, the biggest factor about playing non-human species is the lack of knowledge about the being and its culture. *"I only play humans because I know how to be a human."* It is a valid point, but if you're reading this book, one that you should hopefully come to learn is a weak one. It means that you are not interested in investing in the world created by the GM. You just want to play in it. Some GMs are rigid and play the species as written without altering them. Some, like me, allow for the culture

and species to grow and evolve as players play them. Why not? Check with your GM first.

You now have three limits: TTRGP, Genre, and Species. If nothing has inspired you yet, that is OK. We have more coming!

ENCOUNTER

List the available species within the game and give each one a single sentence descriptor relevant to you.

For example: D&D 5.24 edition

Orcs – Honorable barbarians who must have storytellers? Oral history?

High elves – Aloof and cold, calculating – what about art and music – the logic of music?

Goblins – small, smelly, ignored but must have paladins for their gods!

50 XP

ERA

Very similar to the Genre, as some eras are genres in their own right: Victorian Era, or World War II. On the other hand, there are some TTRGPs or Genres that change completely depending on the era. The Star Wars TTRGP had 3 eras of play at once (Before the Empire, During the Empire, After the Empire). Now it has 6, each unique and distinct with ramifications on species, genre, and classes and abilities. (The Old Republic, the High Republic, the end of the Republic, the Rebellion, the New Republic, and the After the New Republic in case you were wondering.) Another example is Call of Cthulhu which has a Victorian era, a 1920's era and a modern era (amongst others).

The era of play brings limits that should guide you and give you your character's voice: Do they embrace the era? Do they fight against it? In all eras there were rebels, supporters, and mostly indifferent people. Which one do you think might be fun to play?

CROSS-GENRE/ERA CHARACTERS

There is a fun trend of taking characters from one genre and popping them into others to 'explore what they'd be like in that space'. Spiderman is taken from

modern superhero to feudal Japan superhero. What's changed? Usually just the costume. The character behaving in exactly the same way is *poor* character creation. An American teenager raising in the 1960's, 70's, 80's, 90's or later is going to behave very differently from an Edo period Japanese teenager raised in the 1800's, 1850's, or 1890's.

If you're going to take a character from one setting and try to put them into a new setting or genre, you need to put in as much effort as starting from scratch - perhaps even more so - if you want the character to feel real, rather than just a cut-out and paste job.

ENCOUNTER

Is the game Era specific? If so answer these questions:

- What defines the era?
- What are the social norms of the era for regular inhabitants of the space?
- How does communication work in this era?
- What excites you about playing in this genre?
- Are there any things you dislike about this genre?

5 XP per answer

TONE

Unlike Genre which sets the overall reality in which the game is being played, the tone talks to the general mood the game will follow. This might be light-hearted, or deeply serious. It is often comical and sometimes it is fantastical or extremely realistic. The GM determines the tone with you and your fellow players (or they should. If they don't send them to me). We play TTRGPs for fun. But what I consider fun, others do not, so we must be aware of each other's desires and make sure we're getting that (or else find a different group to play with).

If the tone is comical then you are free to make the mad scientist who bungles experiments and tries to do the impossible. If the tone is fantastical - aka most Hollywood movies involving superpowers - then your mad scientist can be trying to make the world's first carnivorous chicken. If the theme is serious, and realistic - then your scientist (now a criminally insane sociopath) might be trying to make a super virus that will infect the human species and turn all of mankind into hollow automatons.

The genre has not changed, and the TTRGP hasn't changed. The tone has changed. Using the tone to

guide you should help you in finding your inspiration.

In my experience longer-term games, campaigns, often have a fantastical tone. If Marvel could make it, that's probably what you're playing. There will be elements of humor, elements of ridiculousness, and elements of seriousness. There is a reason these films are super popular: they are fun. There are other tables that might want extremely dark, difficult, and serious games, though these are rarer as they can be emotionally draining to play over a long term.

Usually, games that are designed to be run in a single session, one-shots, are the only ones who hyperfocus on a specific tone: insane comedy, farcical, or hyper-realistic. The players know their characters are going to experience an extreme of the tone and should be prepared accordingly.

ENCOUNTER

Ask your GM what the tone is for the rpg. Then write a short paragraph on what you understand that means for the average citizen of that world.

50 XP

GENDER

Don't freak out. I'm not suggesting you suddenly start describing intimate sexual encounters in your next gaming session. Choosing the gender of your character is a nuance that may have zero effect on your game and your character or could become the entire crux of the character. Should you play across your own gender? A female player playing a male character? A male playing a female? What about playing a non-binary character?

The question shouldn't be: "is it right for you to do", it should be: "does it make the character more or less interesting?" If it doesn't make a difference at all, then why bother? Just play what you are comfortable with.

There are many folks, dozens in my own games, who have used the gender of their character to explore their own internal questions or thoughts that are deeply personal. Whatever your motivation, there should be something to be gained from choosing a specific gender for your character.

When you link gender to tone, to era, to genre, and to species, suddenly all kinds of new questions pop up. What are the genders like in those different spaces? What are they treated like? Are there two? Three? Twelve different genders? Do some species even have genders? How would that play out in a typical scene where one character is trying to seduce another?

Take your character concept and compare them in different genders. Which one raises more questions that you find interesting or intriguing?

Because if you are playing a female character, and you are a bearded, deep-voiced male, what will happen around the table is player confusion. You're going

to constantly get referred to as him, and you'll need to correct with a 'she actually'. Especially if you're not expressing your character's gender from time to time to remind your fellow players. What this does, it breaks the flow of the game, and pulls everyone out of the character space. Make sure you're playing the character and showing all aspects of the character on a regular basis.

I once did a video on how to play across the genders. What basic attributes do female genders have versus male genders?. That was a fun exercise in being right but also wrong. It is impossible for a man to know what it is like to be a woman and vice versa. Just as it is impossible for a human to know what it is like to be a cow. We have no frame of reference. There are too many factors that contribute to the experience to be able to glibly define it.

There are some generalizations that can be made, there are stereotypes (we'll talk more on those later) that we can employ, and there are our own observations from the world around us that we can draw from.

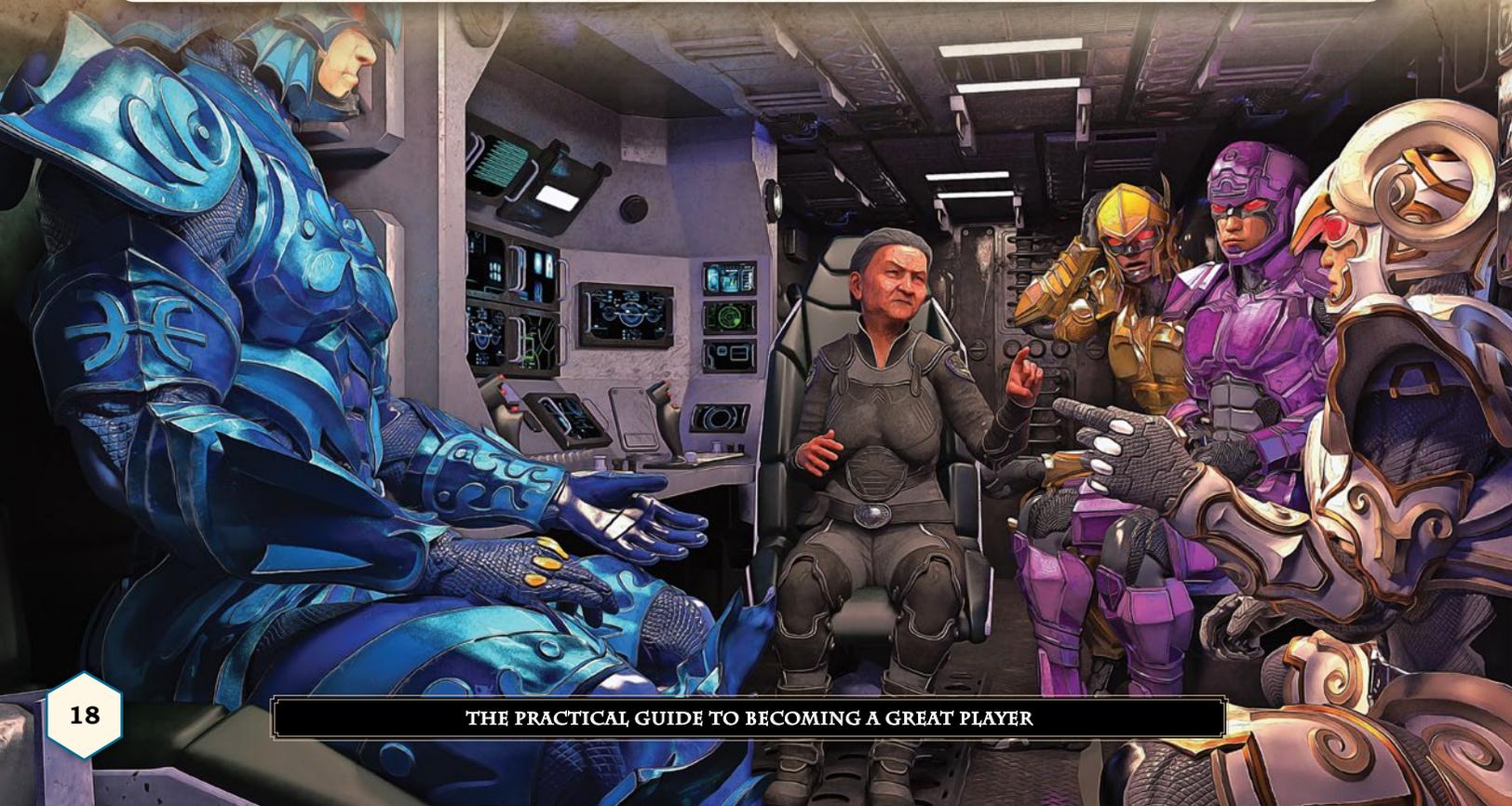
If you do decide to cross-gender and there are different genders sitting around the table from you, consult, ask, and engage in meaningful research as to how they would do things.

If you're not prepared to do that, why bother?

ENCOUNTER

What are your thoughts on playing a different gender to your own?

50 XP



PUTTING IT TOGETHER

You have several limits in place, and you've done a little reading on areas that you are unfamiliar with (rules, species, cultures, time periods etc.) but you still don't have a character, only some concepts. This is where you now step back and look at the most important element of the game: Fun.

FUN

This is time for some soul-searching here: Why do you like to play TTRGPs? What motivates you to play? There are many reasons we play:

- I like spending time with my friends
- I enjoy being part of the story
- It helps me forget about my own troubles in "real-life"
- I can be someone I am not
- I can live the life I want, not the one I have
- I like to win and can build mechanically powerful characters
- I find it a good challenge to work out solutions to the problems
- I like being in a group who accept me for who I am or who I want to be

Those are the ones I come across the most. There are many others. Some are very personal and talk to escapism. Others are social and generally use the TTRGP for light reasons. There is no right or wrong answer. I've had many friends who play TTRGPs because it allows them to work out who they are in real life and equally as many who just want to hang out and have some fun being a hero.

Looking at why you play can often provide insight into what you should play. If you like playing because it allows you to forget about 'real-world' problems, then avoid playing yourself. If you play for social reasons, make sure your character is there to support the rest of the group – to help the team. If you are using TTRGPs to explore who you are: create

yourself and explore – it's as safe an environment as you can hope to get. If you like being superior to your enemies, and like seeing the numbers fall in your favor because of clever uses of the TTRGPs mechanics, then play in a group that appreciates that and will challenge your character builds.

You should always play for fun.

ENCOUNTER

Why do you like playing?

- Social
- Escapism
- Winning (mechanically, or encounters etc.)
- Mentally challenging
- Group acceptance
- Self-exploration
- Combat and defeating bad people

Perhaps you have your own reasons. List them and reflect upon them.

5 XP per answer, bonus 25 XP for critically exploring your answers.

My Answer:

- I like playing because it's fun to see the story emerge and I find it creative.
- I like playing because my mind is given a thorough workout.
- I like playing because people tell me I'm good at it and I like getting praise.
- I love imagining the scenes as they unfold as it stimulates my imagination.
- If I look at my answers, I can see that almost all my reasons revolve around creativity and being praised for creativity. Ego aside, who doesn't like being told they're good? I can see that anyone who doesn't like my games or who says my games are not creative will be treading on almost ALL my reasons for liking the game and that could be a problem for me.

FEELING OVERWHELMED? PICK A SINGLE CHARACTERISTIC OF YOUR CHARACTER AND FOCUS ON EXPRESSING THAT.

STILL STUCK?

In the event none of the above have inspired you to think of a vague character concept, your best recourse is to then create yourself. Use the limits and place yourself in that space. How would you – in your present form – exist in the TTRGP you’re going to play? If you are a PC Engineer today, what would you be in ancient Rome? Possible someone who builds abacuses? Or who works in designing massive arenas? What if you’re in a fantasy world? Do you make spell books? Or perhaps magical items? This can be a really fun way to make a character concept.

You shouldn’t be afraid to play what makes you happy. You also should never be forced to play something you are not comfortable with. The worst experience I’ve ever had was when a GM shouted at a player and told them “You’re not good enough to play that character. Stick to a basic warrior who is 16 years old, cause that’s all you’re capable of playing.” That player left the group for good reason. No one should tell you how to play your character. Find a group that accepts you and your characters.

With that said you must make sure that the group you are with is a group that you are compatible with. If you enjoy mechanically strong games with logic and tactics, and the group is more focused on casual fun and ignoring physics, then you will not fit, and your character won’t shine.

However, there is also a social contract you make when you join a game. If the GM has laid out the limits, and you’ve agreed to play in that game, you must now create a character that ‘fits’ within those limits. Nothing frustrates a GM more than having a player create a character who doesn’t fit the game. It isn’t clever, or funny, it’s disrespectful of everyone else at the table.

Now that you either have a character concept in its loosest form, or just yourself with some limits around who and what you are it is time to start putting it all together.

Meet my character – Blank. Blank is everything and nothing at the moment. Let’s apply the process thus far, and this is the context: My GM has told me she will be running a D&D game (fantasy), Bounty Hunter, a sci-fi game, and a Call of Cthulhu (Victorian horror) game. So Blank will be part of all three. (I’m doing this so that you can see just how radically different a sci-fi character, a fantasy character and a modern character can be.)

These characters will slowly be built as we work through the book. There are two steps to each answer. Step one is my rough work, included so you can see what I was doing to get to my final answer. Step two is then translating the information from step one into something that reads like a character biography for use in game by myself and the GM.

I hope it is clear from these examples that each question doesn’t require a million lines of text. Just the basics – names and places. It makes it truthful, plausible, and gives your GM something to work with. You should also note that each entry is written in the tone of the game. I find this helps me keep to the tone as I create the character.

For the sake of example my fellow players will create stuff based on what I do. At the moment none of them stand out as being particularly interesting.

	D&D	BOUNTY HUNTER	CALL OF CTHULHU
TTRPG	Warrior, cleric, paladin, wizard, thief etc.	Captain, pilot, scientist, doctor, tactical officer etc.	Investigator, member of the press, bored noble etc.
Genre	The D&D game is high fantasy with lots of magic. It’s the traditional setting of Faerun.	The setting is exploration and fleet life within the Confederacy (a giant fleet).	The Call of Cthulhu game will be set in the 1890’s in Victorian England and involve the usual eldritch horrors.
Species	For the D&D game I am limited to the original species in the core rule book.	There are seven standard races, and the GM said we can make our own!	Call of Cthulhu has me limited to humans from cultures in the UK and Europe.
Era	The D&D game is set in a non-specific time in which most of the books are set.	It’s sci-fi: cowboys in a space tech setting style... 2436 AD-ish.	Call of Cthulhu has already been set as the 1890’s.
Tone	The D&D game is going to be a high-stakes epic. Lots of heroic actions, some fun moments and slaying of beasts.	Bounty Hunter is about exploring the galaxy and finding people...	Call of Cthulhu is embracing the dark and macabre nature of Cthulhu mythos.
Sex	For the D&D game I’ve been told that it doesn’t really matter. The GM is happy with either, equality exists.	Bounty Hunter is all about equality of the genders.	Call of Cthulhu has strict Victorian attitudes where women are not allowed to vote, etc.
Blanks concept	A male orc barbarian intent on winning glory and fame.	A female Borikian science officer dedicated to finding a new type of radiation.	A male war veteran hoping for a quiet life of retirement in the countryside.

THE BIG DEBATE

Do you start with the mechanics of the RPG system that you're playing? Or do you start with the details of the character? There is absolutely no consensus on how it's done. These two options (and there are many more) bear exploring for yourself to better understand how either process works and therefore be able to draw from both.

MECHANICS FIRST

Look at your concept: a vague idea of the character without much information and certainly not much to go on in terms of who they are. By working out the mechanical values of the character, the nature of the character is slowly limited down and molded. "Limited" is used in the positive sense remember! We want limits so we can work within them and be guided by them.

Whatever system you are using, there will be a process of making a character. Often these systems give your character physical, mental, and spiritual scores or points, and then some kind of training statistics. Some advocate random number generation for those values and some have specific methods of generating the scores.

Generate those numbers and check them against the concept you have had floating about in your mind. The young man who has windswept hair and holds a sword defiantly - that might be your concept, suddenly takes on new dimensions when your mechanical value for his physical form is below

average (for the system you're using). Now the windswept hair belongs to a physically weak character. The sword being held defiantly is also shaking because he is physically unable to hold it steady.

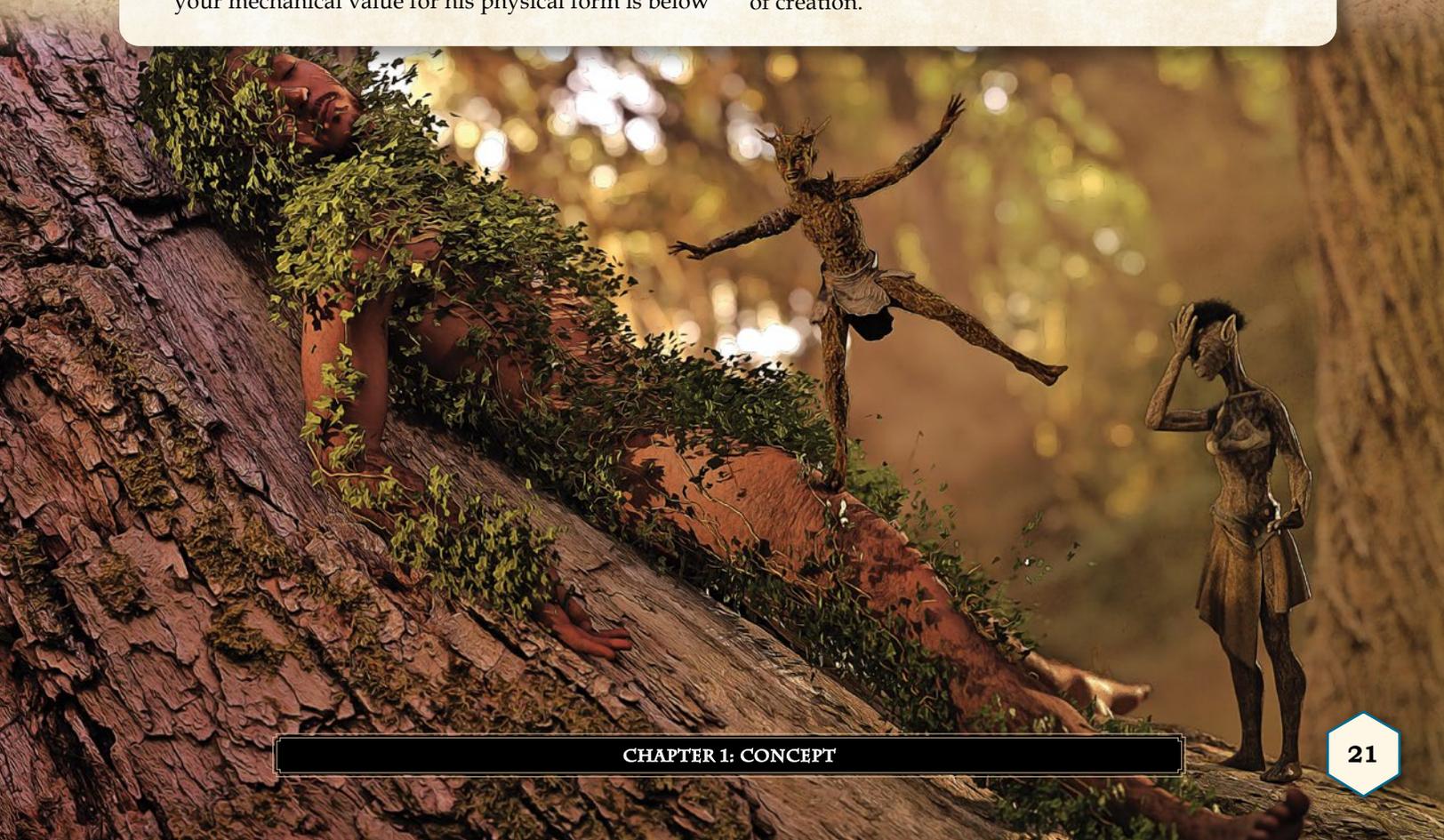
Compare that to the young man having above average physical attributes. The sword is now unwavering, the stance is now secure. The young man is now a physical threat. Both of these are perfectly viable and remain true to your concept. However, can you see how both are radically different from one another? And that is just one attribute! How will the others affect the character?

By working mechanically first before defining the character, you are creating a series of limits as to how you can define your character. There is nothing wrong with this approach and many find it useful to have these limits. The character that you create is rules appropriate and with those limits you can create a character really quickly. Those are all positives.

The downside of this approach is that your values and mechanical devices are constraining your character creation in certain directions.

This means the final character that emerges is not necessarily one that you would have created if unconstrained by the mechanics. Is this bad? No. Not completely. It is bad if you really had a strong concept, or if you find yourself getting bored with the character later down the line because the character is a bunch of numbers and not really someone you can identify with.

This isn't an irreparable situation, but it is a path that, to some extent, is devoid of your own journey of creation.



CHARACTER FIRST

Ignoring the RPG mechanics (but not the genre, tone, setting, rules of the RPG!) and starting from the point of the character first and then finding mechanics to represent the character is a much tougher route to take as there are less obvious limits. As you saw in the mechanics first approach, the RPG will define values (limits) for you and the results of those values will force you to design the character to fit them. It's like having the end result and working backwards to the beginning. At least you know the final outcome before taking too much time to work out the details.

Working the other way around means we need to find limits for ourselves first. It is a much longer process, one of the downsides of this approach, but it results in a character that is constructed from the beginning rather than reverse engineered from the end. Naturally, working through all of the details means that your final character may be quite different from the concept you started with, as your own limits shape and form the character over time.

The trap with working this way is that you might create an amazing character but then cannot find the mechanics to support it within the RPG you are playing. This is why it is super critical to be familiar with the RPG and its rules before embarking on character creation – regardless of which approach you take.

As this method requires us to create our own limits first before turning to the TTRPG that we're going to be using, these steps are described in detail moving forward. The mechanical first approach is discussed later in the book as it is more straightforward, but will require you to fill in the blanks: those blanks are the self-created limits that we'll be working through now. It makes sense to know and understand these before we jump too far ahead.

ENCOUNTER

As you've already looked at the mechanics of the TTRPG, answer the following:

- Is there a class or role within the TTRPG that gets you excited? Or inspire images in your mind?
- Is there a species or race that seems interesting to you?

If you have answered no to both questions then you need to talk to your GM. Ask them why they like the TTRPG and try to find something that will excite you based on the GMs responses. If you are still not interested, maybe sit this campaign out?

5 XP per answer

A NOTE ON WRITING

Before we leap into creating your character, let's pause for a moment. Some of you dread writing and will want to keep it short. Good news! You can. You can literally keep it to a sentence or seven. That's it. Some of you will want to write a thousand pages. That's also... great. You must always ask yourself, am I writing this character and their story for myself or for someone else?

If it's just for you and this is a creative experience, then go mad. Embrace it and write to your heart's content. Don't stop until you are done.

On the other hand, if you are writing for someone else, for example your GM, then you need to alter the way in which you are writing your backstory. Nothing major, don't panic, but it's a subtle change that will make reading your character's story more approachable. Write it for a young person who knows nothing about your character or their world.

"Agathan, from House Jursi, surrendered his Tasak, and all of his Dossii to the Pardalax of Sepgruvi Prime just before the dawn of Halvo in the third year of the Doormi. After this, his title was Yavordich, and he was free to follow his heart and marry his Tochi, Dinjin of House Kalasta in the rite of Baglash."

I mean, it sounds cool, but what the hell happened? Agathan Jursi surrendered something to a Pardalax three years ago? Then got married to Dinjin?

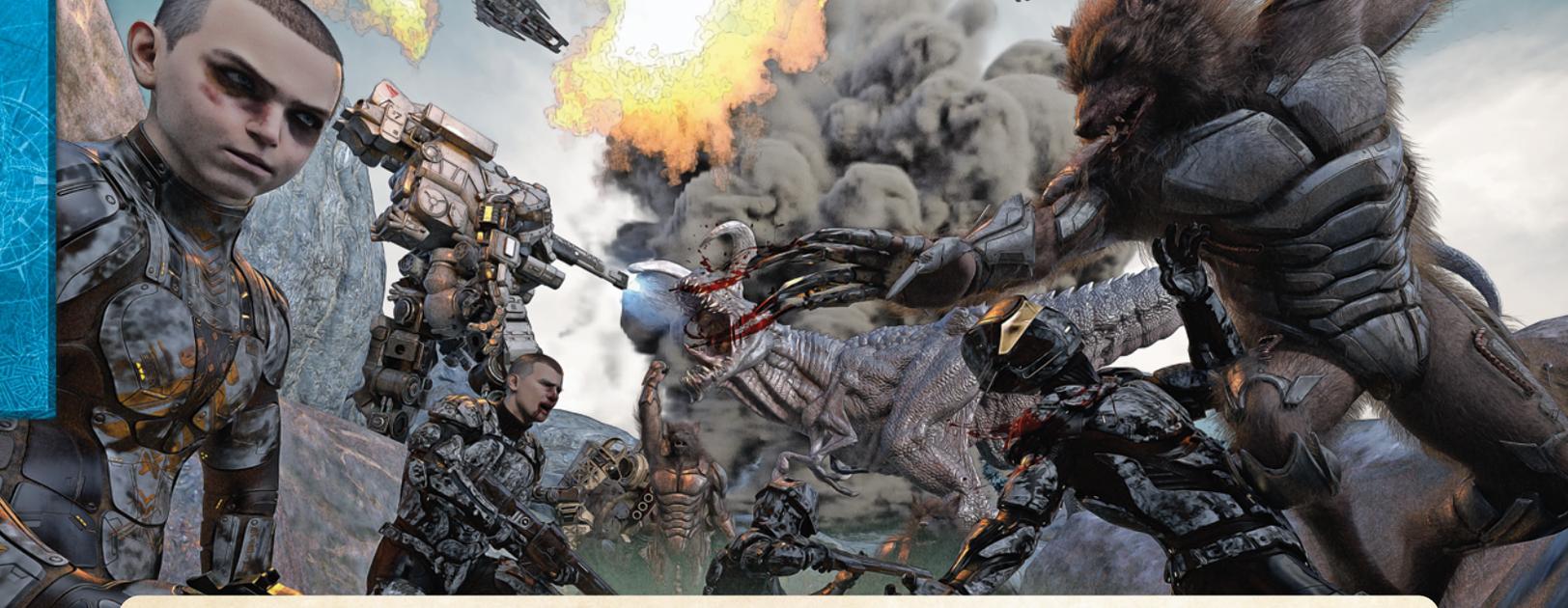
As glorious and monumental as that first written piece sounds, it leaves the reader confused and totally in the dark. It would be best to write it like this:

"Agathan, of House Jursi, surrendered his crown (known as a Tasak to the Gorva people) and all his obligations (his Dossii) to the Lord (called a Pardalax) of Sepgruvi Prime (a powerful planet in a nearby star system) three years ago. Once he was free of his title and obligations, he could marry Dinjin of House Kalasta in a life-long binding ceremony, locally referred to as the Rite of Baglash."

It requires a little more wording, but it is much clearer now what is going on to the reader who knows nothing about the Gorva people or their customs.

Whenever you finish writing a paragraph go back and see what you've written. Read it aloud, constantly asking yourself – do I know what this means if I don't know the definition of a word or phrase? It is a remarkable means of keeping your reader engaged when you cut out the stuff they don't know and let them enjoy the tale.





CHAPTER 2: NAMING YOUR CHARACTER

We love to label things as a species. Once it has a label, we can begin to attach emotions to that label. Dinosaur - has a huge number of things, positive and negative attached to it. As opposed to: "A large warm-blooded carnivore that can run at 10 miles an hour, has fifty hit points, and can carry

40 pounds of weight" ... it could be a dinosaur. It could be a Yak that has gone rogue and given up being a vegetarian. Names are incredibly important. Starting with a name gives you someone to label, assess, and decide if you like them or not. In other words, to build a relationship with.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A name can give us so much information about a character it is incredible. Consider your own name. In most cases it will be two names. Older generations like myself have three names. Older still have more in their official name. Your first name - do you like it or hate it? Do you know why your parents chose it? Do people say to you: You are such a James/Julia/insert your name? I've met a few people who share my first name - Guy. Most people when I tell them my name think I'm joking. But in the 1860's until about the 1920's it was a fairly popular name in the UK. There is even a famous hospital named Guy's in London. Of the other Guys I have met, we do share certain characteristics - creative, explorer, dreamers. Is that because we grew up with a name that, since the 1940's, has meant 'male person'? Is it because our parents who chose the name were slightly mad and so gave us this odd name and, as a result of their non-conformity of avoiding dumb names, raised a child that inevitably became more creative and dreamed of having a different first name? Have I just not met enough Guys?

I could continue to break down my name - the Campbell and the Sclanders have interesting stories too. When you combine them together there is no other individual on the planet who shares my collection of names, and the history that goes with it. I've checked. With all the information that a name gives us, it becomes impossible to start anywhere other than naming your character first.

Once named, you can then refer to them by their name as you are creating them. You can start to follow the story of your character and see how they grow into the hero you're going to be playing.

With that in mind, where do we start when creating the name - as I know for most people this is the most difficult part of the game. Slaying dragons, saving princes from burning towers and dodging lightsabers is nothing in comparison to coming up with a name apparently.

For the next few steps, you will create a list of names - there is no limit to how many names can be on your list, but I'd aim for three or four, not more. As we work through our process, we're going to reduce that until you get your final name.

LIMITS

Before we rush headlong into a name, we need to remember the limits imposed upon our character in the first place when we were coming up with the concept of the character. Those same limits apply to the naming of the character. We must be careful to choose a name that is appropriate to those limits. The names from the 1890s were quite different from the names in the 1990s, and even in different parts of the world names are culturally linked regardless of decade. The tone of the game should also be consid-

ered. Creating a Brandy Suckmeoff character for a grim-dark medieval fantasy world is not in keeping with tone, genre, or era. That name is more appropriate to a 1960's spy comedy adventure.

We have the limits for a reason, they help guide us. Just as calling your character Kevin, in a Star Wars based game would be deeply disruptive, so would calling your character Aethelred in your Samurai based fantasy game. That doesn't mean however, that you can't use a Kevin or an Aethelred as a base from which to start...

INSPIRE

Next on our checklist should be: What do we want to inspire with the name? Names, traditionally, come from the past, and usually had a meaning or, more appropriately, an occupation associated with them. Different cultures have different naming conventions and different associations with names. One thing that is common to all, however, is the ability for the name to inspire us when we hear about it.

I always start with names I know from 'real-world'. George, James, William, Lucy, Amanda, Sam and so on. Thinking of my concept I try out the name on the concept. This is William the Hunter. This is Lucy the Jedi. Detective James. I use these names regardless of the limits we used earlier because I know the names are placeholders only at this moment.

I want a name that sounds like the character. Some names fit, others do not. What makes a name fit? That is totally dependent on you. Experiences you've had with people named Tom might change what kind of person you think a Tom is like compared to others' ideas of a Tom. Think of some great characters from film or TV and replace their names.

Captain Andy Brown, of the USS Enterprise... Jean-Luc Picard has a much nicer ring to it.

Princess Hillary Smith, from Alderaan... Princess Leia Organa sounds so much more fantastic.

Alan - the Wookiee co-pilot... Chewbacca feels more appropriate to a species who can't speak English.

Bryan Rogers, hobbit explorer... I think Bilbo Baggins is more of a hobbit name.

Your entire goal in this first step is to find a sound that fits your character. The actual name isn't important - the Consonants are. And the emphasis on those consonants. What am I talking about? The syllables of names usually give us a clue as to how 'strong' a

name is versus a 'reliable' name. In many cases the more syllables the stronger the name.

Alexander - 4 syllables Elizabeth - 4 syllables
Maximillian - 4 syllables

Strong names with strong consonants. Why are they strong? Because they command us to pay attention to them because of their complexity.

Hugh - 1 syllable Tom - 1 syllable
Anne - 1 syllable Sam - 1 syllable

These are reliable names. Easy to say, dependable and they don't require us to pause for a moment.

Equally, much more complex names become intimidating and thus dissociate as we don't want to say them, so we'll avoid them - at least within western culture.

Neither of these two groups is wrong for a character. Notice however, that when the character is called to power, their full name is used, but when there is familiarity, and dependability or reliability required, the strong names are contracted down into single syllables: Maximillian becomes Max, Elizabeth becomes Eli, Liz, or Beth.

Using this idea of syllable power, we can then apply this to our concept. Is our character meant to be a leader? Or is our character meant to be a reliable character? A Frodo or a Sam or a Gandalf? You don't need to fix on a single name now. Have a few that might work. And yes, it may be silly to have a monster hunter called Walter / Henry / George or a Jedi named Lucy/Lilly/Holly, but you'll see how we use those to get to our final character name later. For now, focus on names that fit the concept of your character in your head.

I even say the name out aloud to see how it rolls off the tongue. Is it something I could get behind? Does it inspire me? Some names I detest personally and will usually not use them. Other names are robust and useful and so I keep those around for the entire character creation processes.

PERSONALITY

We haven't really looked into the personality of the character yet, and we will explore personality in much greater detail later in this book. Some names have a strong link to personality. Often that link is personal. As with the previous step, an Anne to you might be someone who is kind or someone who is

fiery and aggressive. Think of your character concept – is the person dominant? Passive? Aggressive? Timid? Strong?

Looking at your list of names, eliminate any that don't match your character's personality. Some names fit better than others. Don't be afraid to add more names to your list during this process of refining your concept. Test out the name against your concept. Does Richard really work for the concept?

THE SURNAME

Now that you have a few names on your list that you think fit the overall impression of your character, your next step is to give the character a surname. There are many ways of deriving this. Commonly, surnames were either occupation based, or location based.

Cooper is a surname that is a direct link to the profession of making barrels.

Brewster is from brewing.

Skuitemaker (derived from a Dutch surname) is Ship Maker in English. Literally someone who makes ships...

You can create your own if you're playing in a fantasy world. Spelllinger, Mageguard, and so on are fantasy examples. In science fiction we see "modern names", although "handles" or nicknames are more frequent. These are mostly self-generated by the character. Names change and evolve; some go through revivals and some die away. So, for this process use the same technique but up it to sci-fi: Starrunner, Voider, Heliumsucker. They might sound silly for now, but just wait, we're not done yet.

Other surnames started out as locations.

William of Tell – Tell was a village well known for its apples. Over time, William of Tell contracted to William Tell.

Of <insert town/region> is a good way of creating a solid surname that really evokes the character's origins. Of can be converted into O' – giving us names like O'Brien, O'Grady, and so on.

The German equivalent is Von – meaning from and of a place. Von London would indicate the person is from London. Van is the Dutch equivalent.

William Von London, Willian van London or William O'london – amazing how different names suddenly pop into existence with a simple addition of a place and how different the person sounds just because of this minor change!

There are many other languages who add the prefix 'from/of' which can be added to a surname.

Where do you get place names from in a TTRGP – you can ask the GM for information on towns that certain races might come from, or towns that might be situated near the starting adventure.

Perhaps dwarves use Thra to indicate a place whilst they use Uta to indicate a job. So, a dwarf might be Thramoria (using Moria as the place) or Utabaker (using the baking profession).

Another origin of a surname is the addition of son, common in Scandinavian surnames. Williamson, Johnson – all derive from this approach. What was your character's father's name? Trevor? Then you might be a Trevorson. What is son in dwarvish? Ask the GM, you might be Trevorgid (assuming gid is dwarvish for 'child of').

Finally, some surnames come from people being people and remembering your family based on a quirk. One-eye, Spinster, Lonely, Toothless. These may not immediately seem nice or fair, but as you'll see in a moment, they are still useful to us as a beginning point.

**REMEMBER, EVERYONE NEEDS TO SLEEP, EAT, AND
FEEL A PART OF THE GROUP.**

MAKING THE NAME

Now that we have our list of names and possible surnames it is time to make it fit the limits and the world, we are playing in. This requires us to know a little more about the cultures in the world and to have some idea of the race we might want our character to be. This is still at concept phase, so it isn't yet cast in stone.

VOWEL GUTTING

To make it fit we do the fun part of name creation: We vowel gut it. This is where you remove all the vowels (a,e,i,o,u) from the name. By doing this you detach from the original name and its modern world connotations. It frees you up to have fun with the name.

Then, you fill in the missing vowels with random vowels, trying not to replace a removed vowel with the same vowel (no dropping an "a" only to replace it with an "a"). Try multiple combinations and keep them all. What you get is a list of names that have the same syllabic structure but sound completely different from their origins.

Here are two names by way of example.

James Lightbringer. Embeth Van Rooibok.

We cut out all the vowels and see what we have left.

J_m_s L_tbr_ng_r

_mb_th V_n R__b_k

Now, we add back the vowels.

*Jomus Latbrengir, Jimos Lutbronger, Jemis Letbrangor
Ombuth Vin Ribok, Imboth Vun Rubuk, Ambith
Ven Rabak*

From this list you can change the names around. Perhaps you find the first name that you like but the surname doesn't make sense. So, you use another combination surname. Jimos Letbrangor or Ambith Vin Rubuk. There is nothing wrong with this, your syllabic structure remains the same.

And bear in mind, you don't have to do a Vowel gutting for names you already like or want. If Lightbringer was your favorite surname, using Jemis Lightbringer is perfectly acceptable as well!

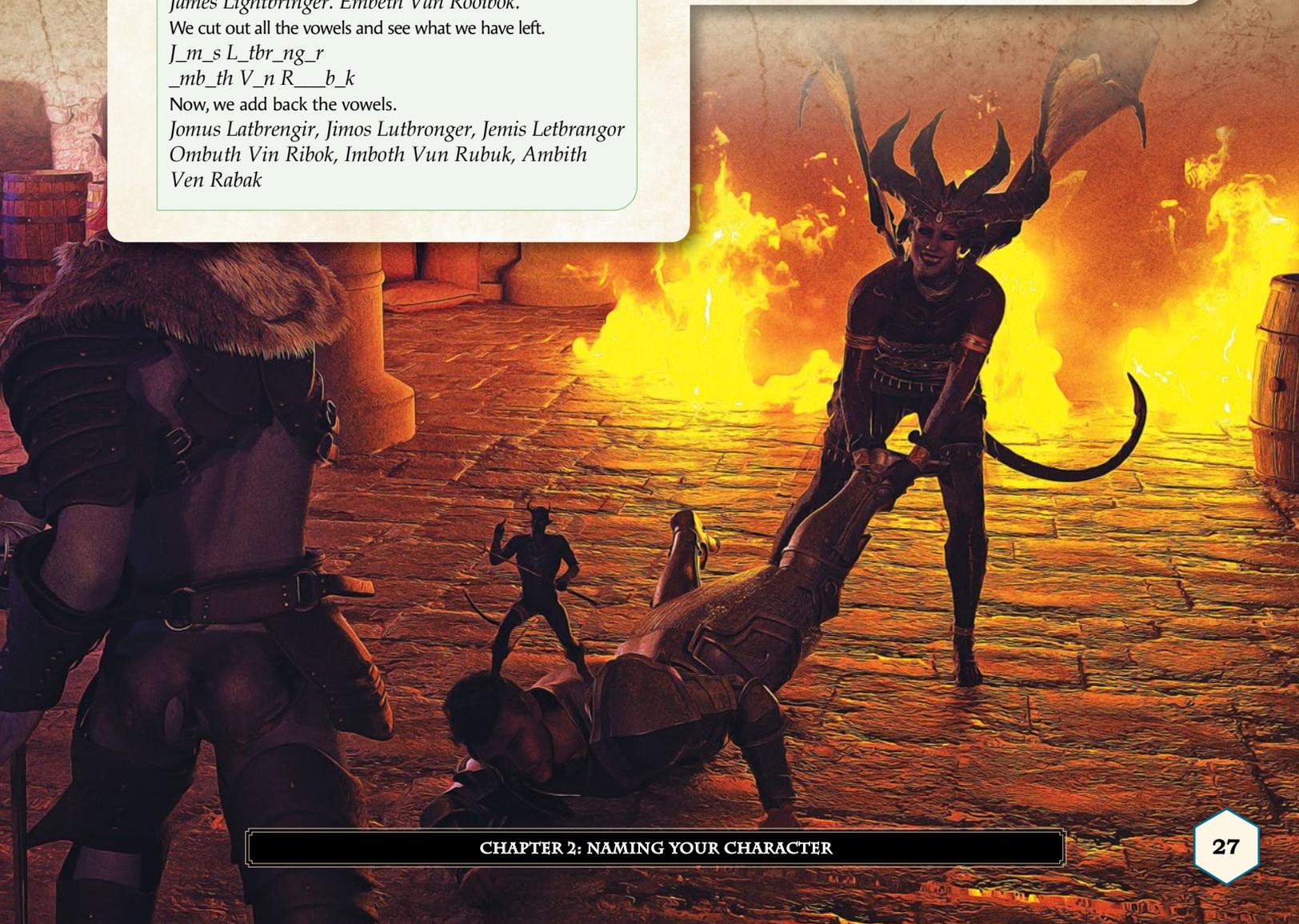
We have one more transformation to make before we get to our final name.

ENCOUNTER

You knew this was coming. Take your name (full name) and turn it into the following:

- A male name
- A female name
- A strong personality name
- A weak personality name

5 XP per answer



CULTURALIZATION

We now need to name the name fit for the culture we think our concept is from. In most TTRPGs we have hundreds of cultures to explore. If your concept for your character is based on a dwarf – what culture does your GM use for dwarves? Is it Scottish? Is it Germanic? Is it Swedish?

Ask your GM. It's an easy question: I'm thinking of playing a dwarf. What would you say is the cultural basis of their names? Remember part of your imagination is research? Well, once the GM tells you where their cultural basis comes from, you can go and have a look at names from that culture. You are not looking for a specific name, just a pattern of sorts. You can even ask the GM for sounds they associate with the species.

Our goal with a character name is to give us something solid to build around, and to act as a shorthand for when other PCs interact with our character. As a result, using a 'stereotype' or 'trope' often helps us with doing that quickly. Especially with names. It entrenches our perception of the character.

Once you have a general pattern or idea of the sounds likely to come from the culture, you now take your list of names you have, and you begin to convert the name to sounding more like the culture. This process will be dependent on your own research and on each culture so there is no specific path to take other than to try saying it aloud. When you say it, does it sound appropriate? If not, go ahead and tweak some more. Work syllable by syllable to help you keep the original structure but to assess each sound against the culture.

You are free to drop vowels and consonants as you see fit in this process.

Say that Jomus Latbrengr is going to be a Sand Elf whose cultural base is Ancient Egyptian. Trope-wise Egyptian names tended to end either in 'I', 'es', 'un' or 'ep'. Tutenkarmun, Imhotep, Ramses. Jomus is not bad. Jomun is a neater fit. Jomusi seems nearly right but it has an additional syllable. Perhaps the J is throwing us off? Tomus, Ptomus? Romus? Ptomus sounded the best (as example) Latbrengr does not sound Egyptian at all. Latbrengr... Lat... Lut. Lut seems more Egyptian. Bren feels too barbaric... What if we drop the b? Ren. That could be Egyptian. Last syllable: Gir. What about gep? Lutrengep? The g is guttural. Let's look for something lyrical – t. Lutrentep. Or h. Lutrenhep. That flows nicely when you say it out aloud...

James Lightbringer meet Ptomus Lutrenhep. Pto to his friends.

You can now even have a small anecdote – Lutrenhep means Lightbringer in the language of the Sand Elves.

What about Imboth Vun Rubuk. The name is not particularly a good match for a Jedi (the setting we're wanting to play her in). Culturally the Jedi favor two short syllables for their first names, and then a surname that denotes their origins. Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda (although we never learn a surname), Qui-gon Jin.

Imboth Vun is almost there already: we could go with Im-Vun, Both-Vun, Bith-Vun, Beth-Vin. Rubuk might not need to change: Beth-Vin Rubuk sounds fine. The buk of Rubuk seems harsh when you say the name aloud. Let's drop the K. Beth-Vin Rubu. That sounds like a Jedi to me. Embeth Van Rooibok, meet Beth-Vin Rubu.

Rooibok is Afrikaans meaning Red Buck. Perhaps a Rubu is a type of red antelope on Beth-Vin's homeworld? Or Rubu means Herder of Animals? Although it is not necessary to have this level of connection between a name and the world, it is just another fact that proves your character is real.

Culturalization ensures that your character fits within the GMs world.

Names raise useful questions. Lots of useful questions. Does your character like their name? What is the history of the name? Does it weigh down upon the character? Does Ptomus Lutrenhep fear the expectation placed upon his family for a thousand years that they are the light-bringers? Is the surname well known? Or is it obscure and local? Are the family proud of their name? Does it bring loathing? In some cultures, in the 'real-world' a surname denotes what your occupation could be. You can not change or decide for yourself. You are locked into it for all time. Is Beth-Vin Rubu locked into being a herder of animals on her native planet unless she runs away leaving her caste system behind?

ENCOUNTER

Take the name you liked the most from the previous encounter and adjust it to the following cultures:

- Dwarvish
- Elvish
- Chinese
- Swedish
- Star Wars

If you are uncertain what names from these different settings are, you've got some bonus research to do, enjoy!

5 XP per answer

USE YOUR OWN NAME

Another avenue to follow is to use your own name. If finding the right name seems daunting, try using your own name for a while. It takes a little getting used to. Guy the fighter, Guy the Jedi... doesn't seem right. But once we vowel gut it, and stuff it, we get some interesting options. My name is particularly painful insofar as it is technically one consonant and two vowels – the Y acting as it does as an I.

Guy Sclanders gutted becomes: G__Scl_nd_rs.
Let's see...

Gao Sclundors. Gee Sclindirs... Let's go with that Gao Sclindars.

And we want him to be a Roman soldier. Names often ended in an 's' and surnames often ended in a double ii. So Gaos Sclindarii? The Scl is problematic, so Scindarii. All hail Senator Gaos Scindarii. I can live with that.

CHECK WITH THE GM

Now that you have gone through this process, which I hope has been fun, a little insightful, and possibly educational as well, it is time to present your character name to the GM. If the GM says that they do not think your name is a good fit, ask them why. Remember names and what they mean or inspire in others is very personal. Perhaps the GM feels that Ptomus isn't appropriate because all Sand Elves have to start with the letter R. (It would have been nice for them to tell you that earlier, but things change, people forget details and so on.)

You now take the feedback from the GM and rework it a little. Romus Lutrenhep isn't going to make me lose any sleep, it still sounds cool. Although now it sounds like this guy is going to be walking or roaming about, bringing the light. Hell, that's even cooler than I thought!

The GM might also say that the Jedi are hunted, and the character name might be too revealing. Beth-Vin Rubu needs an alternate name. We can either create a different name, or simply change it to Beth Rubu dropping the Vin. Or by making the triple name a single by conjoining the names and dropping the last syllable: Beth Vinru.



IT IS NAMED

You can now sit back and smile. Say hello to your character. Literally. Say it out aloud. Get used to saying it. It's your PC's name. You should be proud of it. Armed with a name, we have someone to work with. The name alone is going to help us create the real character. Who is Beth Vinru, why did Romus leave to go adventuring? Are the Rubu family still alive? So many questions all from a simple name.

I love working with names. I sometimes tend to go too far, and people find it difficult to pronounce the name. Sometimes I forget that not everyone speaks more than one language, and so some sounds that are easy for me to make are impossible for others. Test out the name with your fellow Players and make sure they can say it easily. This will ensure they use your PC name rather than your player name when talking to you. It is easier to say: I talk to Olivia's PC, then I talk to Sh'Natha'Klik. A good way of keeping your name culturally specific, but also making one that works for other players is for the character to have a nickname. A name they get 'foreigners' to use because their home name is too complex to say aloud.

BLANK CONCEPT	A MALE ORC BARBARIAN INTENT ON WINNING GLORY AND FAME	A FEMALE BORIKIAN SCIENTIST DEDICATED TO FINDING A NEW TYPE OF RADIATION	A MALE WAR VETERAN HOPING FOR A QUIET LIFE OF RETIREMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE
Name	Blank Concept	Blank Concept	Blank Concept
	Bl_nk C_ns_pt	Bl_nk C_ns_pt	Bl_nk C_ns_pt
	Blonk Kensupt	Blink Cansipt	Blunk Cinsopt
Personality	Proud and fierce	Bubbly and excited	Tired and unassuming
Culturalization	Blonk Kruststrike	Blinkis Cansipit	Brent Conwar
	Bronk Bloodshrike	Linkis Consipi	Brandon Conway
	Braon Bloodshrike	Linis Cositsi	Brendon Crawly

Meet Braon Bloodshrike, Linis Cositsi, and Brendon Crawly.





CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER HISTORY

There are hundreds of questions we might ask ourselves about the character. So how do we know which ones to ask? Ever had a friend of many years suddenly reveal something new about themselves?

Suddenly one afternoon it comes up in conversation that they love banana on pizza. All these years you've seen them avoid pizza. Why? Because there was no banana, and they were afraid people would laugh.

CONSTRUCTING THE PAST

We learn things about one another all the time because we are complex individuals. Why should our characters be any different? Attempting to answer all the questions at once is like going on a first date and asking them to list 'everything about yourself'. Usually when we ask the question: So, tell me about yourself - we're expecting a few surface things.

Don't be afraid to leave questions about your character unanswered. As you play with your character in the game, you'll learn those answers naturally. You might be surprised to find those answers being answered in unexpected ways. We'll return to this later on. For now, don't worry about answering every question. Just these ones here.

For every answer you provide in the next few steps, provide an additional totally different answer. Give yourself the chance to explore both. How does the first answer compare to the second? Which is more interesting, which one leads to more interesting places?

For example: What is your favorite color? The answer Blue might be expected for a male character in Western society. What if the male character instead answered Turquoise? What does that mean for the character? Stereotypes aside, it means the character has some knowledge on colors - possibly meaning they are interested in fashion or art. Second, it means they really considered the question and didn't dish out the usual answers. Does that mean they're a little more thoughtful than the others? Or does it mean they take their friend's questions seriously and give honest answers? However, you might feel that although Turquoise is most certainly a more interesting option, it doesn't fit with your character as they're a straight-forward lower-class peasant who is unlikely to know what Turquoise is and so Blue is a better answer. We spawn answers to examine and unpack and test for fit, for inspiration, and for fun. The goal is always to create a character who can answer these questions truthfully.

WHY WE BUILD CHARACTER HISTORIES

For some folks this is the joy of character creation. The chance to get stuck in and build a small piece of the bigger collective story that will emerge at the table. For others it feels like a waste of time. Something that will never come up and never be of relevance.

Aside from flexing your creativity there is another, vital component, that those who feel a backstory is a waste of time are missing: the GM needs your help.

As a lifelong GM, having character backstories is beyond critical. It makes the entire game! A character's background and history is such a rich resource

and can influence the game in such a big way that to not have one is to deny the GM a large chunk of what they need to run the game.

Don't think of a backstory as being exclusively for your own use. It is for every other player to use as well. Not having one denies everyone a chance to roleplay and to have fun and find out cool things about these characters.

Finally, if this isn't enough motivation, remember that facts make something real. Having a lot of facts about your character - a good back story - means your character becomes more real. The memories you will form in playing that character will be stronger and will ultimately last longer than generic character number six with barely a name.

**WHEN IN DOUBT ASK: WHAT DOES MY CHARACTER WANT
AND IS THIS HELPING OR HINDERING THAT GOAL?**

PLAYING A SPECIES OTHER THAN HUMAN

Roleplaying is all about playing someone or something you are not. As has been established earlier, your imagination is a collection of research, experience, freeform association, and inspiration. When choosing a species from the offering of your TTRPG it really is about the research and your experiences growing up.

CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

I begin with trying to understand the culture of the species. Orcs in World of Warcraft are the traditional orcs that many folks think of. They're quite different from the orcs of Lord of the Rings, or Warhammer 40K. None are the same as the Orcs from the film Bright. However, each group of orcs is based in part on a particular culture: brutal, survival of the strongest, take what is needed and use everything.

Compare that to the elves. In some worlds, the elves are calm and peaceful, in others they are stoic. In origin they can be crafty, devilish, and evil. That's quite the difference in culture. Yet, there are some common threads: long-life, long-term thinking, and a fey origin.

Science Fiction is just full of aliens that all have cultures based on species rather than regions. Klingons from Star Trek are honor-bound warriors, delighting in conquest, never retreating, and desperate to keep their houses intact. They're often called space orcs.

The Alien xenomorph is modelled on a beehive or ant colony with a queen controlling the actions of the drones. These bees have acid for blood and a propensity to reproduce inside your chest. But the culture is there.

Understanding the basic culture allows you to begin to add truths. Considering most fiction uses existing Earth culture as a basis for their own fantasy cultures it means that Research will allow you to unlock more information when none is forthcoming.

It is imperative, however, that you ask your GM first before assuming the culture of the playable species within the game. The GM may have made

alterations by having a specific reference culture in mind that differs from the norm, or they embrace the existing material and add more to it. Either way, they have the info you need. Go get it.

Embrace all aspects of the culture, not just the parts you like. If you cherry-pick only the pieces you like, you're not representing something different from your normal space. Only when you learn why the 'negative' elements exist within that culture can you begin to play a character who, though they may disagree with these elements, can understand their cultural relevance.

Think of Roman culture as a base. The good aspects of the Romans were technological improvements for all, education was about learning more, challenging the status quo, a centralized government who respected other religions, and who generally had a means by which all citizens could advance. The dark side was slavery, brutal blood sports, and an ethnocentric approach to politics. To name just a few.

If you are playing a Roman character, the question must be asked: how do you feel about slavery? What about gladiatorial combats where thousands are executed in the name of entertainment and justice? If you were born into that culture, this would seem normal to you. When you encountered other cultures who disagreed with this approach (and there were not many at that time who would have) you would have wondered at their distaste.

In the game then, if your character is happy to take slaves, that is something you have as a tool to bring up in roleplay. Instead of slaying all the orcs dead, you'd probably want to take them back home as slaves, they're worth a lot of money. It's nothing personal, it's just good business and a little prestige.

Reconciling that with our modern view of slavery seems difficult. Slavery in any form is terrible and should never happen. How then do you endorse it in game? Honestly, the right answer is because that is the culture, not you as the player. Now, does that mean your character can't have a conversation with the slaves enroute, learn about them, and decide to set them free? Absolutely not. That's a great role-playing journey.

MECHANICAL IMPLICATIONS

As this is a character for a game system, you need to be familiar with what the game system imposes upon the species you've selected. Just because you think mermaids should be able to walk on land like a seal, doesn't mean that the game system agrees with you.

Before selecting a species, always look at what the mechanics of the system say. It will save you a lot of effort in the long run, as you won't end up with a mermaid flopping about like a flounder.

Some systems also put limits on the character - perhaps limitations on career paths, occupational options, powers, or abilities.

PLAYING SPECIES IN CONFLICT WITH THE STATUS QUO

There are some players who find it fun to play a species that is a known enemy of the 'good' species of the world setting. Playing someone from a species traditionally seen as the enemy is fine. Accepting that your character will be constantly treated with

disgust, hatred or loathing is part of the deal. Working with your party to ensure your presence doesn't detract from their ability to play the game is essential. Just because you want to be a small green monster doesn't mean everyone else should suffer.

CHOOSING A SPECIES TO PLAY

Being a different species allows you to explore a different perspective to your own, yet always through a human lens, as that's the only lens you have ever known (assuming that you, the reader of this book, are human of course). There is a section under Playing your Character that details how to play these characters. What you need to do for now is choose the species.

tone

The tone of the game, as the GM should have told you, should help you focus your attention on certain species. Selecting a species that is cute and cuddly might be appealing to you, but picture that cute and cuddly character covered in blood, entrails, and the despair of her enemies. Is the species appropriate?

style

What is your personal, preferred style? Do you like rough, savage cultures, where brawn prevails? Or perhaps you prefer quick-witted, glib jokers who revel in a party. Some species lend themselves to certain styles. If you're going to play one species but ignore their origins and pretend your character was adopted by another species, thus adopting their mannerisms, then why are you playing them? Why not just play the other species?

If it is part of your character's journey to seek out who their own species are, and that puts them at odds with their guardian species, that's a specific story choice. Intention was there from the beginning.

interest

This feels a little redundant, but you should be interested in the species you are choosing for your character. Looking at all the species options, when you find one you are interested in, you should do the homework and learn as much as you can about that species. It will only help you make the character more real.

Playing a species you have no interest in but only want because of the mechanical advantage is a wasted opportunity. Why play something you don't really care about, if you just want your imaginary numbers to be higher than someone else's?

If you really care that much about the 'perfect mathematical combination' for your character, then find a

species that you can be interested in and that does give you the numbers you're looking for and still research it. You might just find a whole new aspect of the game you didn't know existed.

Armed with these limitations, choosing what species to play should now be a matter of curiosity and creative flexing. There is a little homework to be done on the subject and that should be exciting. It can literally take 20 minutes on a wiki to learn the nuances of some TTRPG species.

Where there are a few elements missing, make them up – in consultation with your GM. How do the plantfolk of Gamma 3 say hello to one another? What do elves do when someone farts? These little additions are just truths that you can inject to make your character real.

Braon Bloodshrike

I chose the Orc species because I like to roleplay and explore, and I also like the idea of this big muscular warrior trying to come to terms with a changing world and society. The orcs of Faerun are, by and large, warlike, and treat warfare and combat as a means of proving one's worth. Braon, will be like those orcs. Embracing conquest, violence, and strength as a means to resolving issues. What will be fun to explore is when his strength fails, or when he is shown an alternative that works.

Linis Cositsi

According to the setting guide, Borikians are friendly, outspoken, and eager to serve. They have potentially corrosive body excretions and have polyamorous relationships. This sounds like a lot of fun to explore – how many husbands or wives does Linis have and why did she go into science?

Brendon Crawly

If Bran was an officer in the army he'd be allowed to marry and bring his wife on campaign. If he was a non-officer then he had to get an officer's permission to marry, as he was supposed to be loyal to his regiment before wife and child. This isn't his species, it's his culture and I think it makes for an interesting question: if he never got married because he wasn't allowed to, how does he feel now that he's no longer in the army?

THOUGHTS ON DIFFERENT SPECIES PERSPECTIVES

Here are my thoughts on some interesting perspectives of different possible species. Use these for inspiration or to just see what not to do.

BRUTAL SPECIES

Species that are inherently brutal, or portrayed as brutal, generally have a lack of value for life. Life is cheap, death is quick and easy. Orc clans who view strength above all else or Klingon warriors are quick to defend their own sense of honor but equally quick to kill one another. This doesn't mean they're blood-thirsty. The mentality is: survival of the strongest. If you were not the strongest and you died, too bad. This perspective means there is reverence for strength, for resilience, and for elders who have fought the longest.

Traditions might include a violent greeting, testing or demonstrating strength – imagine a handshake, one that Schwarzenegger and Weathers would be proud of, that does not break until both parties are satisfied that the other is strong enough to sit at the same table as them. Anyone whose hand breaks or who pulls away is seen as a coward or as weak.

Academics seldom flourish in this 'might is right' environment as most of the free time is spent in weapons training or building muscle. Similarly, traders and merchants are scarce and 'tolerated' as a necessary weakness to the species.

You should think about how this kind of species deals with others who are stronger or weaker. Is there disdain? I think there'd be dismissal. You're not a strong species, therefore you are either cunning and evil, or just weak and pathetic. Either way, you should not be trusted and certainly cannot be taken at your word.

LONG-LIVED SPECIES

For most humans, as we get older, time passes more quickly. A teen, however, has a different experience: a year seems like a very long time, as a thirty-year-old, time is moving at pace. At sixty the years flit past incredibly fast. That's due to how our brains perceive time. The older you are, the less a year makes up your existence. 1 year to a 60-year-old makes very little difference. 1 year to a 2-year-old is half the time they've been alive.

Long-lived species are often seen as being patient and calm, flowing with the years. Certainly, in my opinion, species like Elves or Immortals, are seen as taking a decade to master a single concept of a skill, let alone a complete set of skills. Perfection takes time and a calm mind. Rushing won't get you anywhere. At least that's the conventional way of thinking. Your character might experience the world rushing around them but will know that time cannot be rushed and must be spent cautiously.

On the other hand, whilst to us normal aging humans, it might seem like the elf is taking way too long

to learn something amazing. What a human might master in just a few years, the elf might spend decades perfecting. To them, time is getting faster and faster. A year spent training with a sword 100 years ago felt so much longer than it did last year training with the same sword.

Dealing with others would also be a problem. Taking two weeks to think about a solution to a single negotiation point might be considered fast by some standards. Taking a year to look at the solution, exploring all aspects, would seem interminable. To an elf it would seem like the blink of an eye.

As all disciplines could be studied, the more disciplines the more variation in a population that could 'all be weapons masters, all be scholars, all be explorers, all be authors' and all still have a good 500 years left to master whatever else they fancy. I think elves would hyper focus, finding areas of mastery that other species might not encounter – like making a sword sing whilst being flourished, or using the spread of ink on paper to create hidden messages within the brush strokes. Only through that would they achieve uniqueness.

TALK TO THE OTHER PCS – FIND OUT WHAT THEY ARE MOST AFRAID OF AND SHARE WHAT YOUR CHARACTER IS MOST AFRAID OF.



AQUATIC SPECIES

The world of water is so different from the terrestrial world. There is no concept of falling, or tripping. Up and down, left and right, diagonal forward and up, it's all the same. All that changes is the amount of light. There is no rain, no wind but there are strong currents, and different salinities of water. Sound is short-lived and complex sounds cannot be formed. Most species that live in the water are incapable of making a sound. Ever heard a shark roar? Didn't think so.

How do you define territory? Is it the land under the water? That's a very surfer thought. Is it the entire space, the land, the water, and the surface of the water? Does that extend beyond into the sky? Provided that your species can breathe air, it must seem like a very heavy, hard place. Ariel the mermaid kept wishing to have legs, but did she realize she'd put on 60 pounds of weight as she emerged from the water?

I think aquatic species would communicate very

cautiously outside of water. Sound would be a mess – just a noise. Those more experienced in terrestrial life might get used to it over time. So quiet times, when the wind is playing with the leaves of a forest, might be magical moments for an aquatic.

The biggest adjustment is the limitation of land: you can't go up, or down, you are stuck on one plane. That would make everything an aquatic has been taught redundant. When you flee, your brother swims up, you swim down. That no longer works. When you hide, go down into the dark. Kinda works except there isn't a major shift in light – not really.

Aside from those cultural upbringing rules flying out the window, structures become interesting too – entrances are at the top, not the bottom, and rooms would contain very little by way of furniture, possibly weed beds, or poles for the aquatics to hold onto whilst sleeping? And sleeping is another question: fish don't have eyelids in the same sense we do. Would the terrestrial world be very, very bright?

COLD-BLOODED SPECIES

If brutal species are violent, cold-blooded species are just plain savage. Anything with a pulse is food. There is no other creature on the planet as important as you. You need the warmth of the sun to get going, but once your muscles are warm, you are the master of all. Eating less often, capable of incredible bursts of speed and immense power, your species thrives in hot and humid environments.

Laying eggs that are raised in collective groups, hoping your own offspring consume one another to leave a few dominant strong ones, and then relishing the moment when they turn on you in the future and consume you: such is the life of a cold-blooded species. It isn't hatred or evil that drives this indifference to anything else living: it's survival.

Generally, long lifespans, and incredibly old genetics, means your species have survived the eons of time and are still present and thriving – not many other species can claim that. Everything must be

calculated. Any wrong move is a waste of energy. Patience is a virtue. Unlike the long-lived warm-bloods, hibernation is a possibility for your kind, and what better way to spend the horrid winter months than in a writhing mass of your fellow cold-bloods plotting and scheming?

Societies of cold-blooded sentient beings must be harsh places – punishment is easy: consumption. It's all about being careful, being fast, and being the biggest. Whilst you might hesitate to kill one of your own kind, anything not of the scale is fair game and an inferior. No natural armor, no endurance. Cold-blooded species have; no emotion, lack of facial muscles other than jaw muscles and no loose skin to show it. A smile and a jaw set to strike are all the same for a cold-blood.

Logic and patience, calculation and precision, these are the hallmarks of this species. It could be interesting to play them out, slowly adopting some of the warm-bloods humor, or sense of loyalty – whatever that is...

**WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTER'S FAVORITE FOOD AND
WHEN DID THEY FIRST HAVE IT?**

NON-HUMANOID SPECIES

A centaur, an android, a floating brain in a jar, a dragon – these are non-humanoid and we seldom dig deep enough into them as a living species to know specifically what is going on. There are dozens of memes on how centaurs would wear pants. Is it the back legs? The forelegs? Or all four legs? If you've ever ridden a horse, you'll know these graceful equines will drop great clumps of manure anywhere they feel the urge. As centaurs have always been depicted as having human mouths which are not suited for eating grass (let alone the issue of reaching it), their dung would be more like a pig's... you see where I'm going with this? We don't have a lot of information on the mundane existence of these creatures to really connect with them. That'll be your job. Not describing how your dragon defecates, but in answering questions like: does it shed its skin? Is it a tea in the evening drinker?

Your GM should have some answers, and you should work together to expand upon those ideas, as that could be a lot of fun. The notion that bipedal creatures are the epitome of evolution or godly design to a non-humanoid should be seen as very speciesist. Whatever your species, you should consider it to be the best form for existing in. Sure, humans can run fast, but I have nine arms and can see in 360-degree vision. Clearly the floating jelly brains of Antares are better.

Travelling in a humanoid-centric space must also be taxing. None of the doors are the right shape, height or width. There are never enough acid pools available to the public, and the notion of wooden floors (to a treant for example) would be like sleeping on a grave. Look at your species and determine how they feel about not being able to do what they normally do, and then think about how they feel when they can.

AERIAL SPECIES

Flight is a major advantage, and if you maintain opposable thumbs, flight becomes incredible. There are a few things to consider with being able to fly: the bigger you are, the lower your surface ceiling (how high you can fly). After around 8000 feet you're going to get winded as the air gets thinner. Higher than that and you're going to start passing out from exertion versus lack of oxygen. Especially if you spend a lot of time on the ground with non-flying species.

Wings also need to be kept clean of parasites constantly. If you think it takes a while to shampoo your hair in the shower before work, imagine preening your nine-foot-long wings each day looking for dry mites, feather worms, and scale spiders?

The advantage of flight is obvious, you're faster: not hindered by things like mountains or rivers, and are free to move in three dimensions. Many species of bird flock together – for safety or support. How do you feel without a flock? Or perhaps you are from a solitary species and enjoy the quiet of being away from the party?

I can imagine a winged species becoming increasingly frustrated with their terrestrial counterparts who need to stop and figure out ways across chasms and the like. Equally so, they might become frustrated with your wings filling up the entire passageway when inside.

What kind of greeting would an air born species have? We know that bats using echolocation, and that birds have shrill cries. Does your species have something similar? Can you shake hands whilst flapping your wings? The bigger the bird, the less likely they are to be able to hover – the energy needed to beat huge wings is tremendous. So perhaps humanoid beings with wings glide next to one another for ten minutes before even talking to each other?

When it comes to being inside, is that like being in a cage? Imagine if whenever you visited a government building in your hometown you had to wear shackles around your feet and only walk in small steps – that's what it would feel like to a being capable of flight and yet not having the room to fly in. I think a lot of aerial beings would be claustrophobic for very valid reasons.

**WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER THINK ABOUT
WHEN THEY LOOK UP AT THE STARS?**

SHORTER OR TALLER SPECIES

This refers to significantly different sizes: creatures who cannot grow taller than 2 feet, or who cannot bend down below 6 feet. Giants, pixies, fairies or gnomes spring to mind. This is an opportunity to explore the different perspectives that one gains. The shorter you are, the bigger the world becomes. A 1-mile hike becomes a tremendous distance, a table becomes a stage, a bar-counter a mountain.

You are lucky if you can remember yourself when you were shorter – around the age of five or less. I can remember incidents from that age, mainly embarrassing ones. Standing at the men's urinal and not being high enough to use it for example. That's a good memory to draw from – in a human-centric world, embarrassment is bound to be a major component to a small person who needs to constantly be lifted or clamber up to be part of the conversation.

The same is true of giants. A whole world exists below your sphere of comprehension. Tiny voices and individuals run around and do all manner of delicate things that make no sense to you. A meal is a challenge – you need a whole cow, not just a roast leg. Travelling a mile is nothing, but not stepping on things becomes an issue.

You can never go inside, because most insides are designed with a 10-foot-high ceiling. In the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* we see this disparity beautifully in the hobbit holes. Generally, I feel there should be frustration and consternation about the party moving indoors when it comes to bigger or smaller characters.

A giant shouting must be like a foghorn blasting, whilst a pixie screaming must be like a two-year-old trying to sing opera: loud but also very short, there just isn't enough air in their lungs.

UNDEAD SPECIES

There are some games which allow you to play undead characters. What is the perspective of someone who is dead but still functioning? No food, no drink, not warmth, no threat of death. You've experienced it already and have come out the other side. Is there passion? Is there urgency? Like an immortal, time is moving so fast that nothing seems permanent.

Like a cold-blooded creature, a hug is no more satisfying than hugging a robot. A kiss is no more interesting than kissing a fish with a tongue. Do you have meaning? People die and their legacy is oblivion, except in your case. Everyone who loved you and whom you loved is going going to die soon, and they won't be around.

I suspect you will need to distract yourself from your condition. Attempt to forget it by having really long-term goals. The short-term stuff is amusing and possibly engaging for a short period of time, but if an opponent frustrates you, just go sit in a cave for a hundred years and emerge once their great grandchildren are teenagers.

As death has little to no meaning to you, does that mean that killing others is something you do without thinking about? Perhaps it is something you avoid as death is something you cannot have and so do not wish to let others enjoy its sweet, peaceful embrace? Do you hold onto your living self's goals? Does it matter if you're the head of a corporation worth billions?

You have to 'retire' after a decade or two as the aging board-members might get suspicious of you not aging? Is all the stress worth it? And what about the future?

Selfies, mobile phones, camera watches, all of these things make anonymity even more difficult. Somewhere, someone will be comparing CEOs of companies, billionaire lineages and so on. The future is going to reveal your kind presence. Perhaps you can have parades down the street to celebrate dead pride, or will religious fanatics hunt you down for your heretical existence?

Undead, vampires in particular, have always had to mask their true nature from the living because of what they represent, and for their usual diet of living humans. That must be frustrating, tiresome, and lonely.

ENCOUNTER

Take a species that interests you from the above examples and create a culture around them. How do they greet one another? What is a cultural dish and how do you eat it? What does their art look like and what does their music sound like? What are the mating rituals and at what age is marriage/union normalized? Have fun exploring this species!

350 XP



EIGHT KEY QUESTIONS

We already have a few questions floating around just from naming the PC. Our concept should also have inspired us to have a few more. Critical questions that must be answered to create a fully rounded character, however, fall into two broad categories: Dependent and Independent. These two times separate a good backstory from a bad one. We seldom venture in

the deep past of the character in the game, but it can lead us to creating amazing characters before the game even starts leading to a richer and more rewarding experience.

There is a blank character template at the end of the book, and available online on our website www.great-gamemaster.com for you to use as you work through these key questions for your own character.

DEPENDENT

When we talk about a character's Dependent period, we mean the period from before your PCs birth to the time around which they left their caregivers. The schooling years, the childhood, the birth, all of that is lumped into this category. It should be information that only your PC knows (and the GM, the GM

knows everything). It should be used during character creation to give a rounding out of your character. In-game the information is unlikely to come up but may be used as 'bonding' information when your PCs are talking to one another.



QUESTION ONE: WHERE WAS YOUR CHARACTER BORN?

You can't decide this question on your own. This is one of the few questions that you must ask your GM to answer with you. You can provide some options to be sure, but ultimately it is for your GM to decide. Just as we had no choice where we were born, our characters share a similar fate. Why is this important?

The GM might have some specific campaign ideas and certain locations in the world that are unimportant, impossible to include, or simply off-limits for GM reasons. We must respect this. It also means we get a vital injection of random chaos in our character backstory. This is a collaborative hobby (there are not many like it) and we need to learn to 'roll with the punches' as it were.

Birthplace can be significant or insignificant depending on the character concept. It forms the foundation of the character regardless of what the character might think. Born on the outskirts of the Empire? Born in the middle of the Empire. There will be massive differences in the perspectives and outlooks of the character. Look at your own place of origin. Mine was a backwater little forestry town in the middle of nowhere in southern Africa. It was a good hour-long drive from home to the nearest store, the area was incredibly British in its outlook, but had a German culture as the area was home to dozens of well-established German immigrant families. Neither of which seem consistent with the idea of Africa. Great rolling forests of pine trees stretched across the horizon with everyone speaking English and singing German beer-songs. The majority of the population lived in near slavery due to a demonic government in power through a century of political corruption. History made this place, I just happened to join it.

What was the impact on my life? Massive. I could speak 3 languages by the age of 6: English, Zulu, and German. By the age of 16, through government influence I'd lost the German and Zulu and was down to only English and Afrikaans. This world of speaking multiple languages, having a nearly a dozen cultures (British, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, German, Hindu, Italian, Greek, Muslim, Jewish, and

an emerging new South African) and their perspectives all around me, and eating so many different styles of food was normal to me. I couldn't imagine growing up speaking only one language and eating one culture's food. I have the utmost respect for other cultures and languages because I was exposed to so many during this time. Compare that to someone born in Japan today, where there is a fairly homogeneous culture, and foreign cultures only make up 2% of the total population. That's a very different world view.

We each have an origin story, and our origin stories will impact us.

In my case the GM said: Let him be born such that he might experience many cultures and see the kindness of all people regardless of skin color. Oh, and just to screw with him, let's make him part of a family who get arrested for fighting against the state. Cause that'll be fun.

When your GM gives you a point of origin, embrace it and explore it as much as you can. If your GM does not have much information or says: surprise me - then you are free to decide. Look to your character concept. Most frequently in storytelling the character starts life as far from their end state as possible.

A valiant hero starts as cowardly or uncertain. A beautiful queen starts as a muddy peasant in a no-name town. A faceless individual in the mass of a mega-city rises to be The Face of the people. If your concept is a noble knight, what if her family are petty nobles who govern a rural area of the kingdom at the furthest edge of civilization?

We can swing in the opposite of this mantra as well: the beautiful prince who starts out with everything and rises to save the kingdom is acceptable - provided he loses everything, including the kingdom, and then must fight to restore it.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Choosing a location can be complex or simple. Once you have chosen it, that is when we really get to the interesting sub-questions (which do not count towards the 8-question total).

WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTER'S PREFERRED SEASON AND WHY?

WHAT PERSPECTIVE DOES IT GIVE THEM?

It should be clear to you that the place of birth has a significant impact on the character. The perspective of the character is often formed here because the 'learning and growing' phase of the character occurred there.

Perspective is the foundation through which your character will engage with others. Suspiciously, cautiously, openly, happily – just some examples of how their perspectives influence their social interactions.

Thinking about the location your character is born in, try to find some facts to make it a real place. Were the local people friendly or hostile towards outsiders or different species? Does that bias your character favorably or unfavorably? Just because I grew up in a country where skin-color determined your status does not mean that I embrace that ideology. As a matter of fact, I actively worked against that notion and, to this day, will fight anyone who thinks it is correct. Again, looking at the answers you create, examining the opposites can lead you down paths that bring greater meaning and joy to the character.

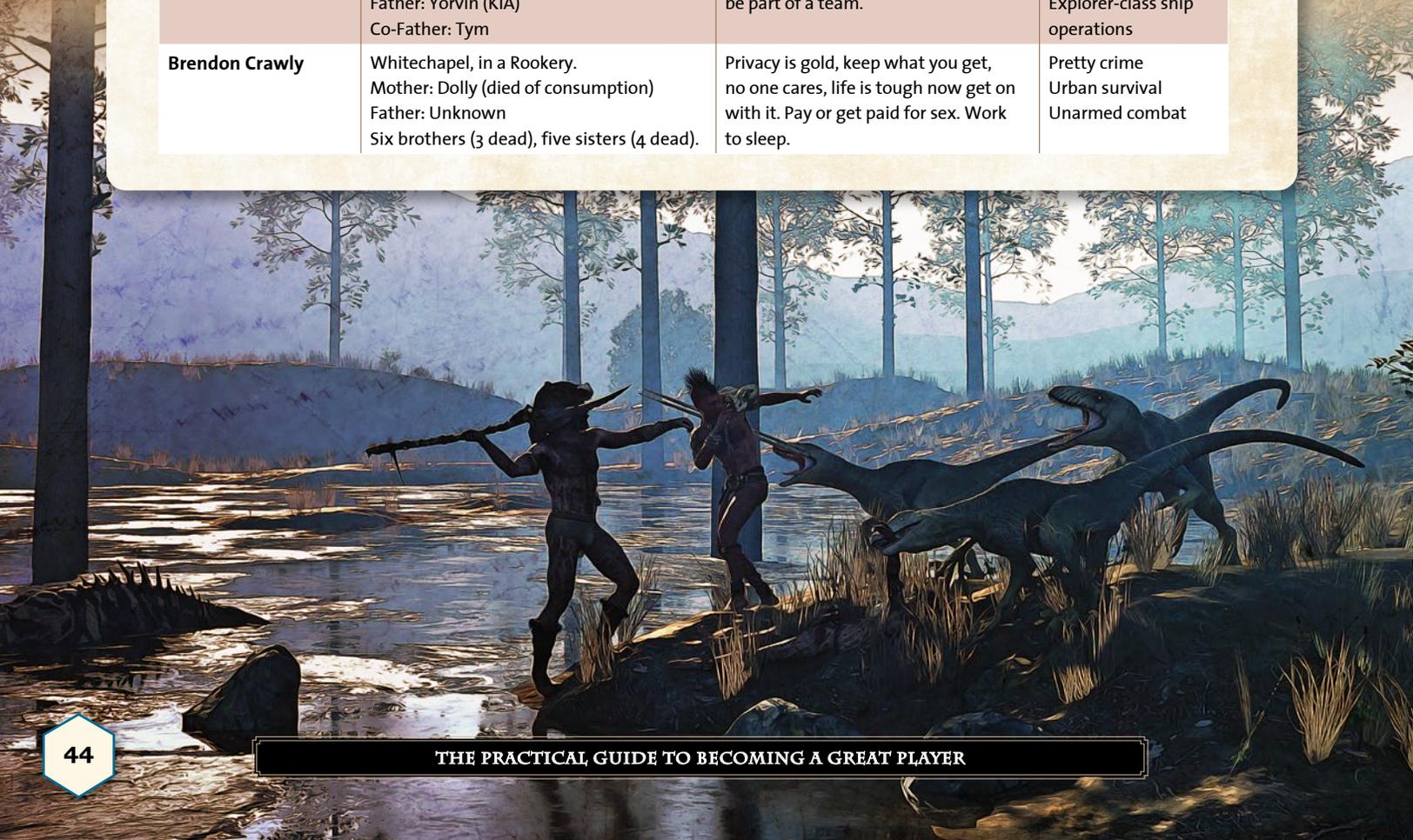
WHAT LOCAL KNOWLEDGE MIGHT THEY HAVE?

Growing up on a farm will give your character certain knowledge that someone growing up in a town or spaceport would not have. Just as those growing up in a spaceport will know things that someone growing up in an aquatic environment will not have. Don't think of these in terms of absolutes, rather, keep them nebulous. For example – my character grew up in a slum area, so they have knowledge of self-defense, how to spot a drug deal going down, and who the local low-life gang leaders are.

In the Netflix TV series *Fallout*, the Vault-dweller character has a radically different perspective and knowledge to the Surface-dwellers who are much more cynical and accustomed to their surface world. This knowledge and perspective difference is played on throughout the entire first season, and we witness the Vault-dweller learning and adapting to this difference over the course of the season.

Braon Bloodshrike, Linis Cositsi, and Brendon Crawly.

CHARACTER	WHERE BORN?	PERSPECTIVE	LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
Braon Bloodshrike	Sword Mountains, near Mount Sar Mother: Gredda Father: Broal (KIA) Five brothers, three sisters	Life is mountains: you make a mistake, you die. Flat land is deceptive. A strong dislike of Trolls.	Mountaineering Mining Survival
Linis Cositsi	GSC Yaaltru 2346 near Heriar Nebula Mother: Hythia Father: Yorvin (KIA) Co-Father: Tym	Life aboard a starship is amazing, never being in one place for long is good, be part of a team.	Stellar cartography Starship systems Explorer-class ship operations
Brendon Crawly	Whitechapel, in a Rookery. Mother: Dolly (died of consumption) Father: Unknown Six brothers (3 dead), five sisters (4 dead).	Privacy is gold, keep what you get, no one cares, life is tough now get on with it. Pay or get paid for sex. Work to sleep.	Pretty crime Urban survival Unarmed combat



I'd express the above thought table into something like this:

Braon Bloodshrike

Born in the shadows of the Sword Mountains, near Mount Sar to a fierce warrior Broal, who was killed in a raid upon the trolls four years ago, and his even more dangerous wife Gredda (now the current war-chief of the clan, Braon learned quickly that life in the mountains was tough. One misplaced step, one error and it was death. His five brothers and three sisters still hold positions of respect, except for two. The Twins. Always causing trouble, they disgraced the family when they left six months ago – sneaking away like a pack of humans.

Linis Cositsi

Born on the GSC Yaltru in '46, my dad, Yorvin, my co-dad Tym, and my mom Hythia were just overjoyed. So was !! I was alive! And what a time to be born in too. There was so much going on in the quadrant and the 'Tru was right in the middle of it. Cataloging gaseous formations about Jorn class planets. Yorvin died when I was about 10. That was sad. I mean, death is part of life but he still left a gap in my heart.

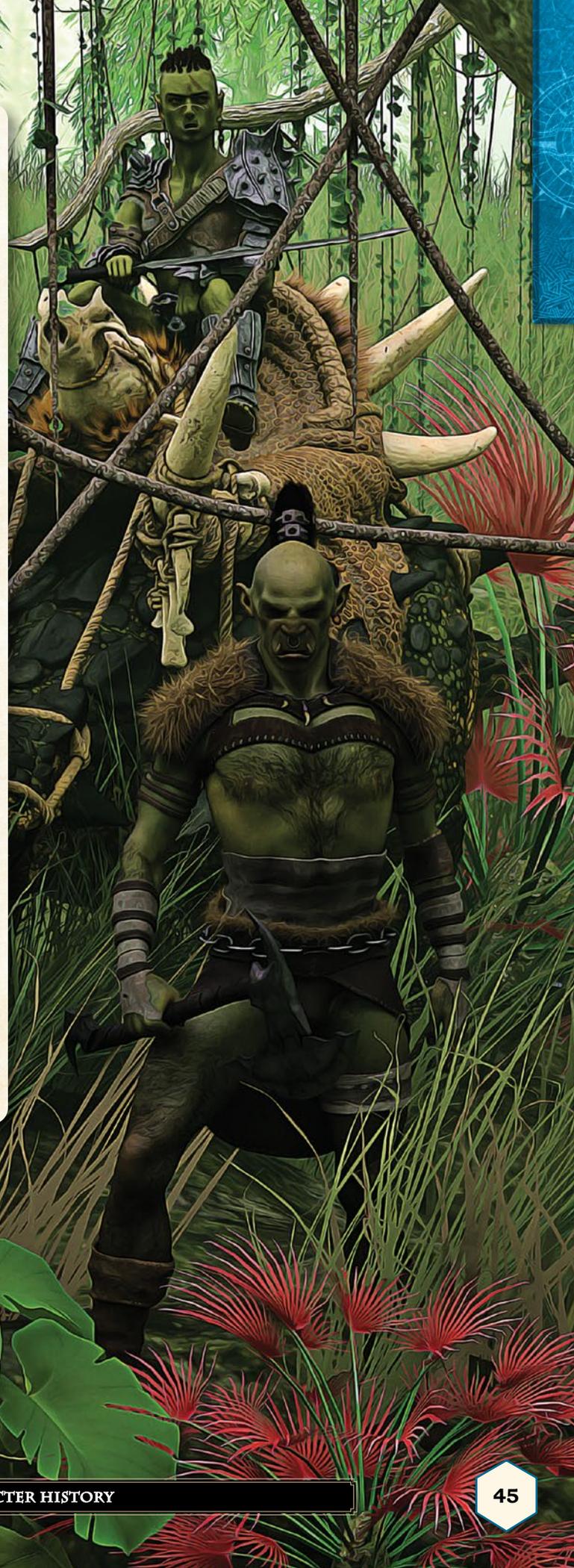
Brendon Crawly

Born in Flower street, Whitechapel, London 1870. Mother Dolly Crawly, deceased 1878 (Consumption, syphilis suspected). Worked as chimney sweep until 1880. Records unclear but known to loiter around Agnes Brewster's brothel. Known ruffian and associated with Thomas Tingle of Dean street. 3 living brothers, 2 in Dartmoor prison. 1 sister remains, Jessica Bombrough-ne-Crawly. Lives in Kensington, London.

ENCOUNTER

Your turn! Answer the questions: Where was your character born, what perspective does this give them, and what local knowledge might they have. If you're uncertain about what the area is like, get a hold of your GM and ask them!

30 XP



QUESTION TWO: WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTER'S GENDER?

This isn't a question of which gender you are choosing; you should have resolved that earlier. This is a question of: how your gender is treated in the world in which your game is set. You will need to consult heavily with the GM on this, as they are the world-creators.

In most games I've seen and played in over the past 5 years, there is seldom a gender discrepancy. The historical approach in western history (pre-2000's) casts women as subservient to men, and only able to perform some functions. Some cultures have always had gender equality, some still do not have it. Looking critically at the setting and the table, it is important for you to consider the impact it will have on your character.

As a player looking into this subject may or may not be interesting to you, and may or may not ever arise in game, but answering it personally for your character's sake can be hugely insightful.

A gender that is seconded to a primary gender creates three possible states in the character's headspace: Acceptance, Defiance, or Reliance.

Acceptance comes about as no alternative is presented. The characters accept their role and position within society because that is how it has always been and always will be. From a character perspective this doesn't seem to open up any questions or interesting avenues. It does when the character encounters an alternative view. How will they react? What will they do? And what will it mean to the character's perspective? If you've been taught your whole life that men are nothing more than walking reproductive organs good for breeding the next generation and digging in the ground, what will you do when you meet a man who is an artist, has no interest in reproduction and has never dug in the ground? It raises some interesting questions.

Defiance is the classic route many characters are forced to go down because it's the 'more entertaining' route. It is also the easier route, in my opinion. A female character who rebels against the role of women in a society is a trope that we expect of heroines. Although that kind of means that a new 'norm' is being enforced rather than a liberation from norms (which was the original goal of the defiance). A man who has been raised to see women as superior now fights against all women trying to prove men are equally as powerful as women (I purposefully twisted the norm here) is going to bang heads with society. This is a given outcome of this perspective.

Reliance is the belief that the normal state is the correct state and anything going against it, any alternative, is deeply wrong. Fundamentalist thinking is that this way is the only way. These characters are much less likely to change their perspective and may

'die' defending their perspective. This journey is the most complex as the conditioning is slowly undone and a new way of thinking takes place. The Reliance perspective is often aware of alternatives, but they present so many different ways of thinking and behaving that the Reliant are afraid of losing who they are, and so fight against them.

Whatever choice you make, being aware of the implications of these is useful when we get to designing the character's destiny - which is later.

HOW DOES THAT INFLUENCE YOUR PREVIOUS ANSWERS?

Thinking about the gender of the character - does that change or influence Question One? Did you consider your character's gender when answering Question One? The gender wouldn't influence where the character is born, but it will affect how the character grows up within that society. A girl born into the Spartan culture faced a tough physical routine - ensuring her health and fitness were peak as the role of women Spartan society was to raise strong children. In the 4th century BCE, a Spartan woman might find herself being given to different men once she'd borne enough children for her current husband.

Would your character be Reliant on this type of society? Expecting to be admired for her physical strength and conditioning, expecting to only bed those with whom she felt she could raise strong children?

HOW IS THE GENDER EXPECTED TO BEHAVE?

Our own history is full of expectations of how the different genders are expected to behave. Boys are expected to love the color blue, cars, guns, and sports. Girls are expected to love pink, ballet, horses, and tea-parties. That was the norm for the past 100 odd years in western society. In the past 20 years there has been a radical shift to deconstruct these notions.

What do dwarves expect of males and females? If they expect them to be the same, as some authors like Terry Pratchett describe, then questions around courtship become interesting: if all genders look the same, and behave the same, how do you know what you might find under the chainmail? In the case of Pratchett, he explored what happens when dwarves start to adopt more human approaches to gender, and some start wearing lipstick.

Each setting and each GM will have some ideas and if they don't, then you should be free to create your own, but make sure to share them with the GM first. Just as the GM is co-creating the world with you, and should keep you updated, you should do the same. Other players might find what you're adding to be exciting and fun or perhaps uncomfortable. Open dialogue is vital in a collaborative game.

Braon Bloodshrike

Given that Orcs value war and warlike thoughts, I'm going to draw from a similar culture from our own history: The Sacred Band. This was a Thebean military unit of 300 men, all of whom were married pairs. The idea was that lovers fought harder on the battlefield. So Braon will have a male lover/husband, Jerosh Redtooth. They will act as one, representing strength and honor.

Linis Cositsi

The Confederacy is all about acceptance, and the Borikians have polyamorous relationships. Linis comes from one, and her gender is neither here nor there for her. She may want a husband and a co-husband or to be a wife, or perhaps a co-wife as that sounds less intrusive on her own time. Yes. That's it. She wants to be a co-wife, anything else takes away from her personal and work time.

Brendon Crawly

Born in Flower street, Whitechapel, London 1870. Mother Dolly Crawly, deceased 1878 (Consumption, syphilis suspected). Worked as chimney sweep until 1880. Records unclear but known to loiter around Agnes Brewster's brothel. Known ruffian and associated with Thomas Tingle of Dean street. 3 living brothers, 2 in Dartmoor prison. 1 sister remains, Jessica Bombrough ne Crawly. Lives in Kensington, London.

As a soldier in the Victorian army, he wasn't allowed to marry. Now that he's out, he can but who would want a wounded veteran? He isn't much use to anyone. His gender means, in this time period, that he should provide for his wife and family. What can he provide? Nothing but hardship and failure.

ENCOUNTER

You know what to do: answer these questions. Does your gender impact any of your previous answers about your character? It should influence the name at the very least if it hasn't already! What is your gender expected to do socially? Ask your GM if you're unsure.

20 XP



QUESTION THREE: WHO RAISED YOUR CHARACTER?

This is a big question. I don't know why most players want their characters parents to be dead. Is the allure of being an orphan and struggling in terror to survive really that romantic? Is it just easier to have them out of the way? That speaks to me of a player who has had bad GM / parent experiences (the GM has used the character's parents to control the PC). The responsibility to roleplay the parents lies squarely upon the shoulders of the GM. They cannot do justice to them if you don't give them the information, they need to do it in accordance with your 'vision'.

Answering this is not a Schrödinger cat problem: Either they are alive, or they are dead. They cannot be both. If you want them to be alive, but your character believes them dead, then they are alive. If you want your character to be like the thousands of orphan PC heroes out there, then they are dead. The only person with the power to bring them back from the dead are the GM or a really good Necromancer.

What is the implication of either state?

DEAD PARENTS

Without parents the child must rely on someone or something whilst growing up. The notion of children being left on the streets to fend for themselves at the age of 5 and growing up into a superhero is romantic if you ignore the eating of garbage, the addictions, the prostitution, and other horrific sacrifices they must endure to make it. It is also highly unlikely the child survived alone. Most street-kids have older kids who do by-and-large take care of them in some way. It might only be because they're useful to have as crowd fodder, but there is a modicum of guidance and support.

When deciding that your PC should have this traumatic experience just know you're only replacing parents with 'guardians'. Are the guardians of the PC still alive? If they are also dead - let's say - the entire town was obliterated in a war, then your PC is incredibly lucky, but also likely to distrust forming bonds with anyone of a serious nature because: they all die and leave me alone. And given that the PC is 2 for 2 it is fact for the PC.

Dead parents do not remove the responsibility from you for creating individuals who shaped your PC in their early years. Don't panic - if you don't like them, you only need them until around the age of 12, by which time you're more than capable of surviving on your own.

The questions that arise from dead parents are staggering. I think a lot of people forget to ask them: Did

your PC know them before they died? Was it death in childbirth? Are there memories of a mother and father from the early years? One of the more famous recent orphans are all the orphans from Star Wars. Nine movies revolved around dead parents. Did it make the characters stronger? Or more interesting? Certainly, when Luke discovers that Darth Vader is in fact his father and is no longer an orphan it rocked the cinematic world. "No, I am your father" - still echoes around our social consciousness.

Does your character care that they don't have a family? Do they long for one? Do they see them as vile and detestable and too much of a personal burden? Look at your character concept and if you have a name try it out - say it out aloud:

Gurian lost his mother at childbirth. He doesn't blame himself. He blames his father for that. The drunkard was asleep and didn't help during the birth. The first ten years of his life was nothing but misery. Gurian's father used him as a source of income - cleaning chimneys, pipes, hard to reach places. The money all went on booze. Thank the maker for booze. He'll never forget that night. Gurian had come home reeking of sewage having just cleaned a tavern's privy. He expected to be met by Dad - drunk and angry. Instead, when he pushed open the door - there was Dad alright. Bloated and cold. Seems that in a drunken moment the corpulent abscess of a human had tripped and smashed his skull on the fireplace. There was blood everywhere. That night Gurian sat alone in the light of the small fire and drank the ale he'd bought for Dad. Now, it was ale he'd bought for himself, and he couldn't stop smiling.

That took a dark turn. But the PC is now most certainly an orphan. Parents dead, his guardian's dead, he is now solo with a viable career as a chimney sweep or plumber, a roof over his head, and an ale in hand. But what if we twist the story: What if the PC's mother didn't die in childbirth but was in fact a prostitute that the father had been hiring. The father, to protect his son from learning about the nature of his real mother, invented the whole thing. It is still trope city, but it's an interesting question. Will Gurian find his mother? Is she retired? Still working? Does she care? Does he care? His world will turn on its head when he discovers his hatred for his father is misplaced. The child labor for alcohol is, in my opinion, enough justification for hatred, but the seed of his hatred started with resentment towards the death of his mother.

LIVING PARENTS

Parents that are still alive are, in my opinion, far less clichéd than dead parents. Happy supportive parents seem to be the rarity in common storytelling. I am unsure why – I suspect because that is the ‘common state’ of many people, so it is cool to subvert and have them dead, or evil, or abusive.

Living parents give you an anchor. It is where the PC can retreat to in times of crisis. It is a comforting word, or a hug. Or it is a place of evil and cold. It could be an embarrassment for the PC. So many options explode into our creative pool that it becomes difficult to keep track of them all. Which of the parents are alive? Which one was the PC most fond of? Do they still talk? Is there support or distancing? Is there pride or rejection? How does the PC feel about them?

You don’t have to answer these all at once, and leaving some unanswered allows for character growth, for the evolution of your character as you go. Here is Gurian’s story again but if both parents lived:

Mother worked day and night to help feed the family. Father didn’t seem to care about the family, always away, always working. Gurian spent his days playing in the street with the other kids, or on the day of ‘tears’ as he calls it, spent his days in school once the family had enough money for it. His reports were never high enough, his scores always too low for his father. His mother seemed supportive but was barely awake from exhaustion. His father died when he was twelve. The void it left in the house was unimaginable. For although he’d always been away, when he was home, he’d brought a kind of light into the place with stories of his far-off travels and adventures. Mother had even stopped working for a few moments to relax in the warmth of their little hearth. Once dad was gone Gurian left school and began working for the local smith. Money was tight but it allowed Mother to ease up a bit, which was funny because she didn’t know what to do with her free time. On his sixteenth birthday they decided it was time for a change. They sold the house, took their money in hand, and left to find the great cities that dad had spoken of.

So mother is now an adventurer perhaps? Someone who is tough as nails? Gurian’s sense of adventure comes from Dad’s stories. What were those stories? Unimportant. For now. Later, you might be able to tell one of those stories to the rest of the party in-game and spark a new adventure. Or your GM might use that as a hook: You get a note from your dad’s old party – they need you for a ritual to bring back your father.

Our goal when asking about the status of the parents is always to establish a good character background, to begin to formulate a personality for

the character through their upbringing and circumstances, and to give our GM useful opportunities to drive a stronger narrative. The backstory is serving a multitude of purposes.

WHO RAISED YOUR CHARACTER?

To round out the living or dead question, the answer to who raised your character lends itself to broader interpretation perhaps, allowing for: the street-urchins gang, the old tutor, the friendly aunt, the distant but financially wealthy great uncle, the pack of wolves. The parents might be alive, but if they were never around, perhaps it was the nanny or governess who raised them? The reason we focus on this question is because it gives us the final piece to the upbringing puzzle:

WHAT INFLUENCE DID THEY HAVE ON YOUR CHARACTER?

This question is the first question that requires you to think a little outside the box. I always turn to my own upbringing to see how my caregivers raised me and what influence that had upon me. Once I understand that I can then apply a pseudo-projection onto my character. If the character’s parents died at a young age, and the character was raised by an orphan pack what would that influence be? It could be that a strong sense of independence and self-reliance prevails over the character. Or it could be a deep-seated sense of lack of trust in others. It could also be that the ‘pack’ the gang (the party) is the most important group in the world and worth doing anything for.

If the PC’s parents are alive and they are supportive of the PC what influence might that be? That the PC believes in their own abilities? That they are kind to others? Perhaps being close and investing in their party is their impulse because that’s what their parents did?

There is no right or wrong answer. Merely options when deciding upon this answer. The more options you explore, the better your final choice will be. Influence is strange and wonderful and whether we like it or not, we are all influenced in some way by our caregivers and those around us.

Sometimes the influence is in the opposite direction. Kind parents cause a child to be vicious because they are not able to set strong rules and boundaries. Cold parents raise a child who is warm and loving because they discover that not everyone is like their parents and hugs do count for something. Look at this as a viable option too. What would your character be like if they rebelled against their parents? Is that more interesting or less so?

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Linis Cositsi

Born on the GSC Yaaltru in '46, my dad, Yorvin, my co-dad Tym, and my mom Hythia were just overjoyed. So was I! I was alive! And what a time to be born in too. There was so much going on in the quadrant and the 'Tru was right in the middle of it. Cataloging gaseous formations about Jorn class planets. Yorvin died when I was about 10. That was sad. I mean, death is part of life, but he still left a gap in my heart. Which kinda makes me think of my own future partner. A husband seems like a lot of work, but... if I join with an existing couple, and become a co-wife, then I'll have the benefits of a family with like, only half the work? Or at least, someone to share my work with? Work comes first, is that wrong?

Tym and Hythia were huge influences in my life. Tym was always going on about medical science, and how the real frontier was inside the body. Mom, the botanist, kinda had the same approach – it's flowers or bust. They were so supportive of me joining Fleet, but both seemed... unimpressed that I went into physics. We don't talk much now. No common ground really. But I still love them.

Brendon Crawly

Born in Flower street, Whitechapel, London 1870. Mother Dolly Crawly, deceased 1878 (Consumption, syphilis suspected). Worked as chimney sweep until 1880. Records unclear but known to loiter around Agnes Brewster's brothel. Known ruffian and associated with Thomas Tingle of Dean street. 3 living brothers, 2 in Dartmoor prison. 1 sister remains, Jessica Bombrough ne Crawly. Lives in Kensington, London. No wife. Claims he has nothing to offer an honorable woman.

Brewster seems to have had a soft spot for the kid. No record of him working for her. Tingle however, had a huge influence on him and his brothers. Never caught but pickpocketing, burglary, and smuggling seem to have been Tingle's bag, and Crawly's by association. Brothers, all older, physical abuse seems to have been their training method of young Crawly. Probably why he joined the army as soon as he was old enough.



ENCOUNTER

Write about your parents. Are they living or dead? Who was your guardian or who raised you as a child? What influence did they have on you? How do you feel about them now?

50 XP

QUESTION FOUR: WHO ARE/WERE THEIR PARENTS/GUARDIANS?

This is a great question for you to answer because it gives you some interesting backstory and it gives the GM some amazing plot-hook-ability. And we want that – we want the GM to be able to explore our backstories. Unlike the previous question, this isn't so much about your relationship with them, it's more about them as people BEFORE you came along.

This question is also a bit of a double question: It speaks to occupation/trade of the parents but also their role in society. And both answers will be interesting depending on how you look at them. For dead parents this question would be about the guardian or caregiver of your character. There must have been individuals around who helped.

WHAT DO/DID THEY DO?

Most species require two parents to have a child, sexually. Provide answers for both parents. If the mother was a warrior who delved into dungeons and rescued helpless princesses, and the father was a stay-at-hearth father who liked to paint, how does that affect your character? Do they see women as being strong, tough, and providing whilst men are soft, homebuilding and expressive? Do they cringe when their mother goes off on another adventure because she has bigger muscles than most of the men in the village? Does dad wearing nothing but an apron whilst sitting painting a flower on the nearby riverbank make the PC hide in shame?

It also means that whatever the parents do our character will have some recollection of and might be influenced positively or negatively by it. Think of your own caregivers. Their occupations impacted upon your own life in an extremely specific way and in a subtle way too.

Dead parents must have had an occupation too. Sometimes their occupations lead to their deaths, and sometimes it was just an accident. We still need to know them. The GM is waiting for this information. Old friends from the parent's workplace are a powerful NPC option for the GM to give you even more story and adventure.

As with the influence the caregivers had over your character being trinary in nature as to the effect on your character, so too is their occupation. Mother was a priestess, and Mom was a temple guard. Did the character hate the fact that Mother had to wake up before the sun so she could cause the sun to rise? Did your character love wearing the temple guard

helmet and pretending to be a guardian for both their moms? Was it the opposite and your character hated the guard because mom was so strict, whilst mother was kind and caring?

Perhaps it was neither and it was just how life was in the temple? The child didn't like or hate either because there was no other option and life was good? Or it was the opposite, and your character hated temple life, hated the god their parents worshiped and spent their lives devoted to, and couldn't wait to leave the temple?

I spend a good amount of time answering this question as it leads to all kinds of interesting personal insights into the character. It will also help us later when we are talking about goals and destiny.

NON-NUCLEAR FAMILIES IN RPGs

It is important to pause a moment and remember to ask your GM about their world's attitudes towards non-nuclear families, or traditional family arrangements. Historically same-sex marriages were unheard of in many cultures. In others no one cared. Today the topic is a hotbed of acceptance and rejection. Your GM may not have given it any thought or may not care. Respect their choice in their world setting. If they have a religious dogma in place in their world that declares families must consist of three caregivers, or two, or a matron or whatever, do not ignore it.

Instead, use it. If you are playing a feline-based race, and the GM has decided that in their culture the kits (youngsters) are separated from their mothers and fathers at birth and placed into a prideling (pack of newborns) which is looked over by a Matron, then explore how that would make your character different. How would it impact your character?

If the GM declares that homosexuality is illegal in the world, consider how it would be to be a child growing up in a family with two mothers or two fathers – constantly hiding their love and pretending to be friends raising a child.

It goes without saying that if the GM refuses to accept a non-nuclear family as a character background because they are against it in reality, and it has nothing to do with their world it might be time to change groups and find a group that suits your playing style better. Similarly, if everyone in your group wants to play deeply scarred characters because of abusive parents and you are not comfortable with that, time to find a new group too, or not play in that campaign.

DARK FAMILY PASTS

Before you start down the rabbit-hole that is creating a well-rounded character, consider your fellow players and the GM. We often do not know what has happened to our friends in their own past. I always ask my group – if I'm making a truly dark past – if it's OK for me to have that in my background. Abusive parents, sexual exploitation, isolation, or enslavement are exceedingly difficult topics to explore, and their impact will be significant on the character to be sure. Your fellow players may have had that in their own lives and do not want to be reminded of it, or may not care.

Do not assume that because you are comfortable with it, everyone else will be! Even if the incident is drawn from your own past and you are using TTRGPs as a means of working through that, there might be others at the table who are not ready to hear or relive it.

Please remember, regarding the last two points about non-nuclear families and dark pasts, whilst it might be fun for you or interesting for you to create a character with these attributes and influences, if someone at your table is not comfortable, then what harm does it cause you to change it? This entire section is about your fictitious character's fictitious past. You might love the idea of growing up with three fathers in a loving household, or of being the product of child slavery, but if someone at the table is caused discomfort by that, to change it is so simple. The three fathers? Becomes a father and mother forced to live together by society, and both had lovers on the side. Child slavery becomes a hard past where sometimes your character had to work to help pay for the food on the table. Minor adjustments can be made to keep the game state acceptable to all players and the GM.

Remember the goal of roleplaying is to collectively have fun whilst exploring and building a great story as a team.

**CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO EXPLORE
YOUR CHARACTER MORE, GO
DEEPER, HAVE A CONVERSATION
WITH THEM, LEARN WHO THEY ARE.**

Braon Bloodshrike

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The Twins, younger than Braon, were always challenging Gredda and the leadership. They felt the clan should be more expansive, control more territory. Hrosh, the eldest brother, would often get into fights with the twins, trying to shut them up. Why Gredda allowed them to challenge her Braon couldn't fathom, but he assumed it was for a reason. She seldom let anything happen without one.

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The Yaaltru became my family. There's Gwen, she's awesome. A total maverick when it comes to sublimation system dynamics. Yoshi, a sweetheart, and a great athlete. He's in security. Maddocks is in science with me, he's smart. His focus is on AI, but like, understanding it as an AI not as a machine. We're on beta shift, so I don't get to spend much time with the senior officers but our Chief of Science, T'vail, is so cool. She knows everything about science. Just amazing.

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ENCOUNTER

Get to know your guardians/parents! What did they do? Did they like what they did? Were they a happy unit? What kind of people were they? Was it a marriage? Or a single parent? What dark pasts might they have?

50 XP

HOW HAS YOUR CHARACTER HELPED OUT TODAY?

INDEPENDENT

Classically the coming of age was around 9 - 13 years old and was linked to being reproductive. Different communities across the world adjusted this age for various factors and for the different genders it often had large gaps, women being treated like children or infants until they died of old age for example. Some cultures used endurance as a means of separating the boys from the men.

There are so many ways that a character gains their independence. The age shot up rapidly with the rise of modern education and social reform until it peaked at the age of 21. In subsequent decades this age has slowly decreased back down to 14 in some countries or 18 in the majority of countries. This no longer has a link to reproduction but is now about paying taxes, criminal prosecution and voting rights.

Whatever the coming of age is in your character's worldspace (ask the GM if unsure) the age at which they became independent from their guardians is critical for your character story. From this point on in the life of the character their decisions are now influenced by peer-pressure, social expectation, and the 'social contract' of the land in which they live.

Does the nation conscript those who turn 15 years and 45 days old into their massive military machine for the next 5 years? Perhaps it is only when a child can recite all 400 rules of magical theory that they are no longer considered a child and must now join a college of wizards or be exiled. It is an exciting time for the characters. Do they go with the norm? Or rebel and strike out on their own? Perhaps they begrudgingly accept it and just plod on? So many options for you to explore!

With this in mind, we can move onto the next important question and give it some thought. Whatever they were doing CANNOT earn the character advancement points (or whatever system your TTRPG uses for character mechanical growth). A young pilot who has already flown their starship through the Mawl (a highly dangerous nebula that only ace-pilots survive) would have to be substantially loaded with piloting skills, so how does that make sense when you present your character with only 1 point in piloting? Create a story that the child was helped through by an alien species who have sampled his DNA and that's how this inexperienced whelp got through - now that is a backstory!

QUESTION FIVE: WHAT WAS YOUR CHARACTER DOING BEFORE THE ADVENTURING LIFE?

Most players will create characters somewhere between the ages of 18 and 35 with a few enjoying playing characters who are older, grizzlier, or wiser. Usually there is a gap between the coming of age and the time at which the plucky hero steps out of the front door and goes on an adventure.

What were they doing? How did they make their money? What did they do to survive?. This mundane question should be hugely influential in your character creation process. This should lay the bedrock for the skills/abilities/traits/powers that your character starts with. A teenager who spends their life on a computer playing PC games will have a specific cluster of skills that differ from those a teenager growing up on a working farm has. Even if both go and join the NASA space program and are trained as astronauts. They'll have the same astronomical skills, but very different starting skills.

The table below is something that might help inspire you if you are uncertain what to do. Choose your own history for your character. What did you do and what skills did you pick up as a teen?

MODERN SKILL	FANTASY SKILL	SCI-FI SKILL
Mathematics	Magic Arcane learning	Piloting
English	Extra language	Extra language
Science	Magic Arcane learning	Science
Biology	Healing / Medicine Nature	Medical first aid training Xenobiology
Accounts	Gambling	Bureaucracy
Art	Culture Etiquette Cartography	Culture Anthropology Xenoanthropology
History	History	History Tactics
Geography	Survival Cartography	Navigation Stellar Cartography
Performance	Perform Deception Persuasion	Perform Deception Persuasion
Computers	Smithing Siege craft Arcane learning	AI Engineering FTL Operations Cybernetics

Use your own upbringing as a base template. Convert it across to the setting, genre and tone of the game. My own background I'd have an extra language, Arcane Learning, Nature, Culture and a smidgen of Perform (as

a fantasy character). I'm a bard! As a sci-fi character I'd have poor piloting and science skills, an extra language, Xenoanthropology, Xenobiology, Persuasion... I'm an ambassador perhaps?

Well, this is not true - your teenage development does not necessarily dictate your actual adventurer. Merely what they could become if they remained on their current path. It is laying down some groundwork.

There is another reason why using ourselves as our base is only a starting point. We did not grow up in a universe with magic, gods, monsters, or faster-than-light travel. So, what we studied and learned as teens might have been very, very different. This is something to consider when looking at this question. How would those change you?

If magic had been a real thing when I was a teenager, I'd have thrown my all into learning it. But I suck at details. My Mathematics, Science, and Computer grades were... shall we say... just passable. I probably would not have ended up there. I'd need magic that relied on passion and glibness. If such a thing existed that is where I would have ended up, and I certainly wouldn't have gone into entertainment or teaching. It would have been into whatever academy controlled that school of magic.

On the other hand, I also didn't live under the threat of alien invasion and imminent death from intergalactic weapons. I'm certain if I did, I'd have studied something a little more focused on avoiding death.

Consider this when constructing the answer for this question.

Importantly you are not writing a thousand words on this subject. Jot down some basics - list some skills and some basic notes.

Focus

What you really need to focus on is: who was with you during this time in your character's life and where they were based.

Whilst studying high magic at the academy, who was your best friend? Your enemy? Your tutor? And what kind of impression did they make upon you? Are they still alive?

Your backstory is not just for you and your character, it is also for the GM. They need information that they can use or discard as they need to. Remember this is a collaborative game. That aside having a few friends and a few enemies is great for building truth to the character. Very few will go through life without some teenager friendships, relationships, and possibly romances. Use those to help you.



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Braon and Jerosh were assigned to the Greyeye training camp. Maulger was a tough old veteran of the Troll wars and worked all the warriors hard. Long days, short nights, and plenty of climbing, fighting, and tactical training. When Braon turned 17, the age of the tusk, he and Jerosh completed their rites of passage and became warriors of the clan. Patrolling the boundaries of their territory, repairing crossings, and maintaining the peace would be his sole duty for the next 3 years.

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So, yeah, gaseous formations are cool. There is so much going on inside them it's crazy. Been doing this now for about six months. We're on a five-year tour. I'm hoping to make Lt. by the end of it. Just gotta keep my head down, impress T'vail, and somehow win the J'ama tournament (J'ama is a Borikian card game. Yoshi seems to be able to read my mind and is the current champion).

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Enlisted at 16 with the King's Royal Rifle Corps and sent to India. Performed without much note. Moved to South Africa, Egypt and Sudan. Performed better, under Captain Alwyn Dyson. Involved in an investigation into theft of Egyptian artifacts but cleared of all charges.

ENCOUNTER

What did you study? What did you do? How did you make a living? How did you survive? How do you feel about that?

50 XP

QUESTION SIX: WHY DID THEY LEAVE THEIR LIFE AND GO ADVENTURING?

Many of us dream of going off on a life of adventure but the reality is that by the time you're capable of making a rational decision, the pressure of the universe is already building. How will you support yourself? Where will your rent come from? What if you're in a relationship – how will that be affected?

These are excellent questions to ask but before we get to them, we need to decide what motivated our character to run off in the first place. I can think of two major categories that will help give us some limits and provide us with character direction.

- A catastrophic event
- An opportunity

A CATASTROPHIC EVENT

These are events over which our character has no control. There are a few that immediately come to mind and each one brings with it a bucket of truths we can attach to our character. All of these events require you to talk to your GM before committing to them. Your GM is going to have ideas about each of these and each of these directly affect all the other players. You cannot have your character survive a war if another player has a character from the same village and they don't have anything about a war in their backstory.

WAR

Your character was drafted into a war by law, joined a war by choice, or your character was a victim of a war in their homeland. Each has a very different perspective to offer us. Drafting into an army is usually done as a last effort on behalf of the nation in a conflict. Most ask for volunteers and only turn to drafting when there are no volunteers left. Others use it as a form of equality: everyone aged X to Y is required to serve the country in the war.

Popular stories from this kind of enlistment are conscientious objectors – who rebel against the draft law and suffer consequences, those who volunteer and believe they are doing the right thing, and those who are mocked for not joining the war by the rest of society.

How the war played out and what experiences your character went through are up to you. But by

the end of the war there is nothing left to go home to, or the character can't return home. Their life as they know it is over, and they must now find a new path – through adventuring.

NATURAL DISASTER

Floods, droughts, volcanic eruptions, pestilence, or plague are sadly a common disruptor in our normal lives. Unlike a war, there is no enemy to fight, merely an event to overcome and survive. How did your character make it through the event? What allies did they make along the way? Who did they meet and what did they learn?

How long the disaster lasted is again your choice but the outcome, like war, is the same: returning to the normal is not possible and your character takes the chance to find something new. Or is looking for the cause of the disaster or has some other motivator to go and do something extraordinary.

MEDICAL RARITY / MAGICAL INTERVENTION

Mainly the purview of the Superhero genre, a medical rarity is an event that kicks in around the time of puberty and completely changes the character making the normal mundane. Irradiated spiders are not too common in an elvish kingdom of high fantasy, but a spell gone awry, or a demonic curse could do the same thing.

How does your character feel about these new-found alterations and who helped them come to terms with them? A mentor or guide is needed to help your character understand their destiny.

This particular event can only be chosen if you are familiar with the TTRPG that you will be playing in. Having the ability to turn yourself into solid iron because of a naughty fey creature who put a curse on you is one thing, but if the game setting does not have a mechanic that allows for this, it is either a delusion of your character ("Look at me, I'm made of iron!") or you simply can't choose it. This delusion is used to great comedic effect in the *The Guardians of the Galaxy* films with a character who believes they can turn invisible when in reality they cannot.

**ENCOURAGE ROLEPLAYING IN OTHERS BY
ENGAGING IN ROLEPLAYING YOURSELF.**

SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

Playing cards completely disrupted European social culture and were banned for fear of what they could do: educate an uneducated population. This was a result of that hyper-dangerous device: the printing press. For this one you'll need to work with your GM. What event could have arrived in your character's hometown that changed things? Indoor plumbing? Electricity? Quantum entangled Transporters are installed and now everyone is going everywhere.

It could also be that a reigning monarch dies, and a new ruler changes the laws, or the existing monarch changes their mind, and the laws change. A character who was female and living in England in 1660 would have been banned from being an actor. It was illegal for women to act on the stage. However, a year later, and suddenly it's 1661 and women can now act on stage and the world did not come to an end.

How does your character feel about this? And what does it mean for their future? Perhaps it is no longer legal to be a blacksmith if your hair is green and your character must find a new career or move towns? These are not as dramatic as wars or natural disasters but are emotionally much more charged: this is a decision made by someone, which means it could be reversed. If there is no logical reason for the choice, is it a just one? Are there groups who defy this?

RELIGIOUS SHIFT

It's 323 CE and suddenly Jupiter, Zeus, Ra, and any of the old gods are dropped from the Roman Empire and Christianity becomes the official religion. Religions play a huge role in our society and who or what we can do within it. In a fantasy world, the gods can and do manifest from time to time making religion less of a faith and more of a natural process that must be followed. But gods can change, be eaten by titans or usurped by new ones.

In sci-fi, the gods may be present but usually have no direct influence over the cosmos. They may be more like religions that rely on belief and act as mental support structures for society. Even the famous 'Force' of Star Wars, although a magical element of the universe, is non-judgmental. It was a natural substance like air or water. Worshipping it will not help crops grow, or a character to win the lottery. Using it is for the select few and although they can influence things, the Force itself doesn't have a moral or ethical requirement, merely a consequence.

Any of these events can force your character to re-think their life and to have to go out and make a new life for themselves. Each adds characters and places to your backstory and provides you with truths.

AN OPPORTUNITY

This is less about external influences and more about personal goals or needs. These are often as a result of the following basic motivators of humans. If you have read the book 'The complete guide to becoming a great GM' then you'll recognize these motivators as part of the 'how to make a great bad guy'. In the case of villains, these motivators are taken to the extreme that they'd kill or destroy to attain them. Your character, as the hero, should learn that none of these is worth killing or destroying for. If not, then you are part of the bad guys and PCs should be hunting you down you monster...

POWER

Perhaps your character feels powerless. Their destiny was chosen for them by their guardians and now they must simply follow it, without a choice. Rebellious against this authority creates a great motivator for the character to leave the nest and go looking for adventure. They are seeking to claim their power. And why not?

Who helps them do this? Where or what do they think will give them the power to choose? How do they react to others who attempt to take their power from them? Remember, villains will kill to keep their power or gain power, heroes will realize that the power is within themselves, and they do not need to exert it over others, except for the evil ones.

STATUS

A character who just wants to be king because they want the status is a selfish, self-serving character and most likely to be a villain. A character who feels that there are those, like themselves, who are ignored simply because of who or what they are: they are warriors for equality and justice. Why does your character feel marginalized or without status? Where do they think they can get recognition or how?

WEALTH

Prince John was greedy and would see peasants starve to death so he could feast using their taxes. Robin Hood was not greedy but needed wealth to distribute to the starving peasants. See the difference? A character who just wants to be rich is a simple character. A character who wants to make sure everyone is safe, healthy, and cared for, is a character with a cause and a wonderful opportunity to grow and form allies.



AVENGE / REVENGE

This one is a fine line as it borders on all kinds of criminal activity so glorifying it as a character motivator for going on adventure is problematic. The revenge needs to be changed to avenge. What is the difference? To avenge something is to seek justice for a wrong that was committed in the past. Revenge is to punish those involved in an injustice in the past.

An avenger is acting under legal and moral authority and will use social norms to bring justice to the criminal. The Revenging madman does not care about social norms and ignores the legal and social norms and only wants to satisfy their own internal sense of justice.

JUSTIFICATION / OBLIGATION

It could be that the civilization believes that it is appropriate for the character to head out on their own at a certain time of life. A great pilgrimage must be undertaken, or the last rites before death demand that the character walk over the last hill on the last sunset. Unlike a power situation where the character has no choice in the matter, here your character believes in this and is excited or nervous, or reluctant but complying, nonetheless.

Unlike the other motivators the character is not out to prove something to themselves but instead is out to complete something that they feel needs completing. This does not mean that the character ends when they have achieved this goal. Far from it. It means the character is then faced with the reality of: what now? It is an interesting prospect.

LOVE

Perhaps your character is seeking love or is following a love that has left for their own reasons. Looking for love in a TTRPG can be a sensitive topic for some gamers who abhor the idea of romance within the game. Seeking love is not the same thing as trying to get laid in a graphic way involving all the characters and players. Don't get confused, this is not a reason to suddenly begin describing your sexual fantasies.

This is about the character finding acceptance for who they are, finding unconditional love and support, and learning how to give it to others as well. Copulating and all those squishy things that make some gamers cringe need not enter it at all.

A classic example of this is Legolas and Gimli from 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy of books. An elf and a dwarf, distrustful of one another, slowly start to form a bond. Initially through mutual admiration of skill, and then finally, simply because they liked each other. No sex. Just a wonderful love motivator driving the character arc and growth.

USING EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Whatever path you choose to explore, and there are many more I've not listed, you should think about things that give truth to your character and make them more real. Apply your imagination to each answer asking: how does my character feel about this?

Braon Bloodshrike

Born in the shadows of the Sword Mountains, near Mount Sar to a fierce warrior Broal, who was killed in a raid upon the trolls four years ago, and his even more dangerous wife Gredda (now the current war-chief of the clan. Life in the mountains was tough. His father was highly respected for his cunning, and his loss was felt by all. Gredda was always very proud of her children, and never let any of them, even after they were assigned to battle training, walk by without a hug. His five brothers and three sisters still hold positions of respect, except for two. The Twins. Always causing trouble, they disgraced the family when they left six months ago – sneaking away like a pack of humans. Braon is mated for life to Jerosh Redtooth. As boys they both trained under Graala Maulger.

The Twins, younger than Braon, were always challenging Gredda and the leadership. They felt the clan should be more expansive, control more territory. Hrosh, the eldest brother, would often get into fights with the twins, trying to shut them up. Why Gredda allowed them to challenge her Braon couldn't fathom, but he assumed it was for a reason. She seldom let anything happen without one.

Braon and Jerosh were assigned to the Greyeye training camp. Maulger was a tough old veteran of the Troll wars and worked all the warriors hard. Long days, short nights, and plenty of climbing, fighting, and tactical training. When Braon turned 17, the age of the tusk, he and Jerosh completed their rites of passage and became warriors of the clan. Patrolling the boundaries of their territory, repairing crossings, and maintaining the peace would be his sole duty for the next 3 years.

The annual moot of the clans was supposed to be a great time for all. All the shadow mountain clans coming together to trade, mate, and party. The avalanche decimated almost all the clans present. The Whitespear clan, arriving late, avoided the destruction. Braon lost Jerosh in the carnage. Only his mother, badly wounded, and Hroth survived from his family. Instead of aiding the clans rebuild, the Whitespear clan declared themselves masters of the mountain, and those orcs who did not swear loyalty instantly, were either killed or exiled. Braon was exiled, along with his mother and brother. Scattered orc families look to make coin, and the easiest way to do that – is to hire themselves out as mercenaries. There's always humans looking for bodyguards.

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So, yeah, gaseous formations are cool. There is so much going on inside them it's crazy. Been doing this now for about six months. We're on a five-year tour. I'm hoping to make Lt. by the end of it. Just gotta keep my head down, impress T'vail, and somehow win the J'ama tournament (J'ama is a Borikian card game. Yoshi seems to be able to read my mind and is the current champion).

Just my luck... 4 years into the mission and suddenly my vision starts to get blurry. Sub-Commander Dex, the chief medical officer, ran every test they knew. And tried some other things too. Seems Confederacy Medical also didn't know what was happening to me either. Seems my science is making me go blind! The gas samples I was examining were emitting a spectral frequency that destroys Borikian optic nerves. I'm officially off the project. In good news, Hoshi finally lost J'ama to me. At least I think he did. He said he did, I couldn't see the cards. Dex says I should get my eyesight back... soonish. I've heard there is a position opening up on the Temeter. They're a supply ship, no cataloging gas giants. Could be fun?

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ENCOUNTER

Create two scenarios for your emerging character: A catastrophic event and an Opportunity. Explore them both by writing them out. Compare which one makes for a more interesting character or combine elements of both. Don't like either? Try again!

50 XP

QUESTION SEVEN: WHAT DID YOUR PC LEAVE BEHIND?

By now you should have a thorough understanding of your character's early years through to the moment they left to go on an adventure. You should have a list of NPCs, places and events that have been milestones in your character's backstory.

But what has become of them since your departure? Have they all simply stopped existing? The answer should be an instant hell no! You must leave them in some kind of state – but what they do after the game begins, that's up to the GM. You officially hand over your backstory to the GM the moment the game begins.

If you are unwilling to let the GM take command of your backstory you shouldn't make one. This is a collaborative story telling game. Just as the GM doesn't control how you choose to interact with the NPCs of the world, you shouldn't try to control how those NPCs interact with you, including 'your' backstory characters.

The GM is encouraged to ask: "Hey, what was your relationship like with your guardian, and in a word how would you describe their attitude?" But other than that, you should never stop the GM and say: "That isn't something that my mother (the NPC from the backstory) would do." After the session or during a break you can ask the GM: "Hey did you read the part where my mother is a kind and generous woman? Because I'm confused why you played her as mean and vengeful." The GM may have reason, and you are being given a quest to find out why your mother has shifted her perspective. Or the GM may have screwed up, forgotten you'd written that, and will now need to create a quest to explain the shift.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

How do your family, guardians, and friends feel about you leaving? Are they happy? Bitter? Confused? Nonplussed? They are not coming with you and there should be a reason for that. It could be they think you are insane, or that they can't abandon the family farm for example. Dropping a few lines describing how those you left behind are affected will help the GM immensely and give you some truth as to what happened on that fateful day of your character's departure.

INHERITANCE

Is your character the heir to a criminal syndicate? A throne? A particularly fine pair of scissors? The family yeast? Perhaps there is no legacy at all. Having something that may come back to your character later can be a really cool possible story for the GM to explore (if they wish). It can also be a ticking bomb that your character is anxious about. What will happen when the old king dies, and the heralds start looking for the heir? Or when the evil spell is transferred from the eldest living son to the next... you?

And while it may seem a dull option, having nothing left behind creates some interesting life choices for your character. They have no roots, nothing to anchor them anywhere. So where do they feel at home? Do they crave something like that? Do they fear being the ones left behind who will just fade into history as little grey NPCs?



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Whitespear seized all the lands once controlled by the orc clans. Hrosh is rightful clan leader when Gredda becomes too weak to rule. Braon had no time to mourn his lost mate. And the treasures of the clan remain buried in the caves. The Twins are also still missing, they may not have even heard of the disaster. Gredda and Hrosh are now on a long convoy, leaving Braon to find work. (It could be fun to have Braon fall in with one of the other PCs characters at this time).

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I miss Gwen, Yoshi, and Maddocks so much. My eyesight is back, although I can now also see a little bit into the infra-red spectrum thanks to the ocular implants I got. Nothing major. But I can tell hot and cold now by looking at it. The Temeter is OK. The first officer is a bit of a tight arse. I'm sure he will mellow. I gave Hoshi my J'ama cards. Mom and Dad are back in my life! Dad was super worried about the eyes, and even made a special trip to examine them himself. Mom is looking for a plant to fully restore my eyesight. They do care about me.

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The police force refused Crawly on grounds of his disability. Pinkerton's, of the USA, has launched an independent investigative branch in London. Records indicate Crawly is on their payroll, mainly conducting surveillance of 'individuals of interest'. The income he earns is sent mainly to Brewster for some reason.

ENCOUNTER

Who or what has been left behind? Family? Friends? A favorite bakery that makes specific special buns? Perhaps an inheritance of some kind? Or a legacy that you'd rather not think about? Go wild!

50 XP



QUESTION EIGHT: WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTER'S PLAN?

Unlike the answer to question six, which, was the reason why your character left their existence and traded it up for something totally different, question eight deals with the idea of goals and how to get them specifically. These can go hand in hand with their motivator: they want to feel as though they are in charge of their destiny and so, needing power, their goal is to attain it.

That, however, as a goal is useless to you. It is a starting point from which you must then answer this: How will your character achieve that? What is their plan?

Planning is something we all do (or avoid doing) in the hopes that our plans will actually come to fruition. In many instances short-term plans do work. I plan on getting a sandwich after finishing this chapter. There is a very, very high chance that I will get a sandwich.

Long-term plans are more complex but much more useful in character creation. That dreaded question we get asked from time to time as adults: what is your five-year plan? My plans stopped at sandwich.

Having a long-term plan for the character gives you the BIGGEST motivation and roleplaying opportunity of all these eight questions. Why?

A PLAN GIVES YOU THINGS

Having a plan gives your character a direction to head in, and a starting point. Both are useful to us during roleplaying. A starting point is the position in which your character needs to be for their plan to start. Your character really, really, should want to be there, and should actively work to get to their starting point as soon as possible.

Meaning you need to work out the plan. How do you do that? Well, this is a fairly broad-stroke approach:

1. Visualize your character's primary goal
2. Establish where your character currently is in relation to that goal
3. Break down what needs to happen for the character to get to the goal – small steps are better

BREAKING IT DOWN

Starting with the goal. Let's assume the goal is to avenge the death of a beloved character. How do we break that down? Well, we visualize the end: the murderer is in chains being sentenced to life in prison.

Where are we now, at the time of character creation: we have no idea who the murderer is or where they are. The only thing we know is that they smell of lavender and have boots that leave a specific imprint in the dirt.

Then looking at your character's current starting position; always make sure to put them as far from their end goal as possible. The reason we do this is so there is room for progression and development.

Even if, in our working example, the character knows who killed their loved one, they would need to start in a position where they cannot, under any circumstance, approach the murderer. The murderer could be king of the land, or an Admiral with an impeccable record for kindness.

Working on the idea that we know nothing about the murderer our plan would then follow this path:

1. Find out who the murderer is.
2. Get to the murderer.
3. Bring them to justice.

That's an easy plan on the surface. Step 1 is the hard part. We need to break it down again.

1. Visit all perfume sellers and ask if they sell lavender scents.
2. Any perfume sellers who do should then look at the boot mark and see if they recognize it.
3. If there is no lead, head to all the cobblers and ask them about the boot. Someone must have made it.

So that's 3 steps. As a character we must assume these are the most difficult. As a player we do not need to plan any further than this. Once the game begins, our character might get to step 1.1 – Visit all perfume sellers before the GM, and the rest of the players disrupt the plan and go off on side-quests or different quests.

Once you complete a step, then, and only then, can you plan the next step, breaking it down exactly how we did to the previous step and adjusting accordingly. Repeat this until your character achieves their goal, dies, or gives up.

Now armed with our plan we can, at the beginning of game play, begin to put that plan into action. If the GM starts the character in the middle of a battle, once the battle is resolved and the situation safe, your character can now look to going to perfume sellers. The other players must be curious. You cannot decide the outcome of that initial plan, only the GM can choose what to do with it.

PLANS NEVER GO ACCORDING TO PLAN

We must be prepared for our plans to fail. This isn't the end of the road for the character. Not in the slightest! It is the first step in actually achieving their goal! When the step of the plan fails the character must make a new plan to get back on track of their original plan. That is life, and that is the truth.

If, in our example, the GM does not give your character any information about the lavender, or the boot mark, you might want to chat to your GM privately and ask if they read your notes. If the GM has, they may have other plans for your character. This does not mean that your character should give up. They should now move onto more radical solutions. Like consulting with a witch doctor, or a fortune teller, or making deals with shady characters in exchange for information.

When you, as a player, give up, that is when your character must then face the harshest reality of them all: they might just never achieve their goal. What now?

Now, they must make a new plan. If you never find the murderer of your loved one, what do you do? Give up and become a miserable creature only to be consumed by grief? Or do you become a justice warrior hoping to prevent anyone else from ever suffering what you've suffered? There are many options open to you, each one requires a plan, and each plan needs to be broken down into steps - the cycle continues until the character is dead.

If, on the other hand, your character does eventually achieve their goal, what then? Well, that's when you as the player decide if the conclusion is satisfactory and should be the 'end' of the character journey, or just chapter 1 in an epic saga. If it is to go on, then you need a new plan...



DO NOT FOLLOW PLANS TO THE EXCLUSION OF THE OTHER PCs OR THE GM'S PLANS

This is one of the greatest sources of pain and suffering in TTRPG's. The statement: "it is what my character would do." That is the biggest, lamest excuse ever and is the mark of someone who is not a team player but a solo player. I do not play with players who use this as a reason to justify anti-group activities.

And now a dose of reality: anti-group activities can be and should be done from time to time but should be used like a scalpel - with precision. What do I mean by this?

The character has been seeking the murderer of their loved one and learns that the murderer is the Fleet Admiral. By chance, the PCs are all in the office of the Fleet Admiral. An alien species is invading the galaxy, and the Fleet Admiral wants to brief the PCs on her plan to save the human species. The moment the Admiral walks into the room, the avenging PC declares that they arrest the Admiral. The other PCs are aghast but beg the PC to let the Fleet Admiral at least explain the plan, and then they can face justice.

The avenging PC disagrees. One of the other PCs pulls a weapon and threatens to shoot the avenger if they don't let the Admiral go. At this moment, this is a classic story driven drama that any Hollywood director would love to have in their sci-fi film. But the avenger's player, decides that their PC will kill the Admiral to gain justice before it can be stolen away from them. "It's what my character would do."

Is this terrible? I've purposefully been ambivalent in my example. This is neither a right nor wrong outcome to the situation. With the Fleet Admiral dead, the entire game changes. It changes for the GM - who now must figure out what the navy will do without its Admiral, and it changes for the other PCs who no longer have a plan from the Admiral to act upon. They now have a decision to make: What to do with the avenging PC who just committed the execution of an unarmed, and non-convicted Admiral.

One of the players declares their PC will shoot the avenger and will kill them. When asked why, the Player explains they are sick of the avenger always controlling how the adventure runs and following their stupid avenging story.

What we have here is the true issue.

Just because you have created a character with a compelling goal and specific plans to get to that goal, does not mean that every single moment should be devoted to your character getting what they want. That's unfair. It becomes important to realize that you must SHARE the time you have.

Your character, regardless of their level of devotion to their goal, must at times shut the fuck up, sit down and help someone else for a little bit, instead of always doing things for their own plan.

So how do you justify this? Surely the "it's what my character would do" statement should apply all the time? No. Your character needs to realize that they cannot complete their goal without the other players' characters. They need their help and support.

Oh! I hear you cry; you don't need them. You can do it on your own. For sure buddy, go write a novel. Then you can do it on your own no problem. I encourage you to do it, it might be a great book! You have to accept that we are collaborating. That means sharing. You, therefore, in the spirit of a Multiplayer game, have to create steps in your character's plan that include the other PCs. Obviously, you can't do this for step 1. Your character may not know the other PCs. But once you do get to know them, you should be looking for the skills, abilities, powers, or whatever talents they have, and factoring in how they can help you.

This is a critical component to good collaborative roleplaying. Actively engaging with other PCs to learn their strengths and weaknesses, and then actively including them in your plans. Part of that inclusion is realizing the concept of reciprocity. You need their help, and they need yours. You need their time, and they need yours. You give and take.

Now that sentence of "it is what my character would do" takes on a new tone. It now means, your character, after seeking the help of the other PCs and helping the other PCs, must now do this thing that is contrary to the will of the PCs, and your PC is fully aware this endangers relationships and the future.

What a huge weight is now upon that statement! If you have been collaborative, supportive, and an engaged PC, the other players will see this moment and understand its significance.

And if you see another PC doing the same thing, remember to react accordingly.

There is always an alternative however, and that is seeking a way to alter your plan to accommodate the new situation without sabotaging your own ultimate goal. If we go back to the Fleet Admiral walking in, instead of instantly arresting her, the avenger should shake and fight to control their anger and rage that they feel towards the Admiral. They may even make barbed comments about blood on the Admirals' hands during the briefing.

Their new step in their plan is to get as close to the Admiral as possible, to get solid evidence and to make the Admiral feel the same betrayal as the avenger felt when their loved one was murdered.

Which one you use depends on the balance you've created. If this is the moment for your PC to shine, then go ahead. If your PC has been shining a lot recently, then sit down. You have alternative steps to plan. You'll be delighted to hear they are just as fun and satisfying as forcing the other step, only it is less disruptive and more inclusive.

Braon Bloodshrike

Born in the shadows of the Sword Mountains, near Mount Sar to a fierce warrior Broal, who was killed in a raid upon the trolls four years ago, and his even more dangerous wife Gredda (now the current war-chief of the clan. Life in the mountains was tough. His father was highly respected for his cunning, and his loss was felt by all. Gredda was always very proud of her children, and never let any of them, even after they were assigned to battle training, walk by without a hug. His five brothers and three sisters still hold positions of respect, except for two. The Twins. Always causing trouble, they disgraced the family when they left six months ago – sneaking away like a pack of humans. Braon is mated for life to Jerosh Redtooth. As boys they both trained under Graala Maulger.

The Twins, younger than Braon, were always challenging Gredda and the leadership. They felt the clan should be more expansive, control more territory. Hrosh, the eldest brother, would often get into fights with the twins, trying to shut them up. Why Gredda allowed them to challenge her Braon couldn't fathom, but he assumed it was for a reason. She seldom let anything happen without one.

Braon and Jerosh were assigned to the Greyeye training camp. Maulger was a tough old veteran of the Troll wars and worked all the warriors hard. Long days, short nights, and plenty of climbing, fighting, and tactical training. When Braon turned 17, the age of the tusk, he and Jerosh completed their rites of passage and became warriors of the clan. Patrolling the boundaries of their territory, repairing crossings, and maintaining the peace would be his sole duty for the next 3 years.

The annual moot of the clans was supposed to be a great time for all. All the shadow mountain clans coming together to trade, mate, and party. The avalanche decimated almost all the clans present. The Whitespear clan, arriving late, avoided the destruction. Braon lost Jerosh in the carnage. Only his mother, badly wounded, and Hroth survived from his family. Instead of aiding the clans rebuild, the Whitespear clan declared themselves masters of the mountain, and those orcs who did not swear loyalty instantly, were either killed or exiled. Braon was exiled, along with his mother and brother. Scattered orc families look to make coin, and the easiest way to do that – is to hire themselves out as mercenaries. There's always humans looking for bodyguards.

Whitespear seized all the lands once controlled by the orc clans. Hrosh is rightful clan leader when Gredda becomes too weak to rule. Braon had no time to mourn his lost mate. And the treasures of the clan remain buried in the caves. The Twins are also still missing, they may not have even heard of the disaster. Gredda and Hrosh are now on a long convoy, leaving Braon to find work. (It could be fun to have Braon fall in with one of the other PCs characters at this time).

Braon wants to return to the mountains. Find his lost love and perform the proper burial ceremony. They will both burn upon a fire for Jerosh did not die in combat. To do that however, he'll need to raise a powerful force to knock the Whitespear clan out of their lands. That means making a lot of money. The best way to make money is to go get someone else's. As a mercenary, protecting convoys isn't going to help him. He needs more. First step in his plan then: find a group who can go into the old tombs, take on the big jobs, and earn the big coin. Anything he hears about Whitespear is a bonus.

Linis Cositsi

Born on the GSC Yaaltru in '46, my dad, Yorvin, my co-dad Tym, and my mom Hythia were just overjoyed. So was I! I was alive! And what a time to be born in too. There was so much going on in the quadrant and the 'Tru was right in the middle of it. Cataloging gaseous formations about Jorn class planets. Yorvin died when I was about 10. That was sad. I mean, death is part of life but he still left a gap in my heart. Which kinda makes me think of my own future partner. A husband seems like a lot of work, but... if I join with an existing couple, and become a co-wife, then I'll have the benefits of a family with like, only half the work? Or at least, someone to share my work with? Work comes first, is that wrong?

Tym and Hythia were huge influences in my life. Tym was always going on about medical science, and how the real frontier was inside the body. Mom, the botanist, kinda had the same approach – it's flowers or bust. They were so supportive of me joining Fleet, but both seemed... unimpressed that I went into physics. We don't talk much now. No common ground really. But I still love them.

The Yaaltru became my family. There's Gwen, she's awesome. A total maverick when it comes to sublimation system dynamics. Yoshi, a sweetheart, and a great athlete. He's in security. Maddocks is in science with me, he's smart. His focus is on AI, but like, understanding it as an AI not as a machine. We're on beta shift, so I don't get to spend much time with the senior officers but our Chief of Science, T'vail, is so cool. She knows everything about science. Just amazing.

So, yeah, gaseous formations are cool. There is so much going on inside them it's crazy. Been doing this now for about six months. We're on a five-year tour. I'm hoping to make Lt. by the end of it. Just gotta keep my head down, impress T'vail, and somehow win the J'ama tournament (J'ama is a Borikian card game. Yoshi seems to be able to read my mind and is the current champion).

Just my luck... 4 years into the mission and suddenly my vision starts to get blurry. Sub-Commander Dex, the chief medical officer, ran every test they knew. And tried some other things too. Seems Confederacy Medical also didn't know what was happening to me either. Seems my science is making me go blind! The gas samples I was examining

were emitting a spectral frequency that destroys Borikian optic nerves. I'm officially off the project. In good news, Hoshi finally lost J'ama to me. At least I think he did. He said he did, I couldn't see the cards. Dex says I should get my eyesight back... soonish. I've heard there is a position opening up on the Temeter. They're a supply ship, no cataloging gas giants. Could be fun?

I miss Gwen, Yoshi, and Maddocks so much. My eyesight is back, although I can now also see a little bit into the infra-red spectrum thanks to the ocular implants I got. Nothing major. But I can tell hot and cold now by looking at it. The Temeter is OK. The first officer is a bit of a tight arse. I'm sure he will mellow. I gave Hoshi my J'ama cards. Mom and Dad are back in my life! Dad was super worried about the eyes, and even made a special trip to examine them himself. Mom is looking for a plant to fully restore my eyesight. They do care about me.

I didn't make Lieutenant as I'd hoped, but I have a new plan: the confederacy is a big organization with a ton of species that all react to natural phenomena differently. I want to develop a helmet for use in the field that will be 100% protective. So, no one has to go through what I did. I'm no engineer but I know the science. Well, kinda. I need to take scans of all the species in the fleet to build up a catalogue of weakness to various effects. Then once I have data, I can begin working on how to protect against those effects. It may take me a while...

Brendon Crawly

Born in Flower street, Whitechapel, London 1870. Mother Dolly Crawly, deceased 1878 (Consumption, syphilis suspected). Worked as chimney sweep until 1880. Records unclear but known to loiter around Agnes Brewster's brothel. Known ruffian and associated with Thomas Tingle of Dean street. 3 living brothers, 2 in Dartmoor prison. 1 sister remains, Jessica Bombrough ne Crawly. Lives in Kensington, London. No wife. Claims he has nothing to offer an honorable woman.

Brewster seems to have had a soft spot for the kid. No record of him working for her. Tingle, however, had a huge influence on him and his brothers. Never caught but pickpocketing, burglary, and smuggling seem to have been Tingle's bag, and Crawly's by association. Brothers, all older, physical abuse seems to have been their training method of young Crawly. Evidence from a local doctor indicated Crawly suffered multiple broken bones, beatings, and poor diet from 1878 until 1886. Claims it was all accidents that caused it. Probably why he joined the army as soon as he was old enough.

Enlisted at 16 with the King's Royal Rifle Corps and sent to India. Performed without much note. Moved to South Africa, Egypt and Sudan. Performed better, under Captain Alwyn Dyson. Involved in an investigation into theft of Egyptian artifacts but cleared of all charges.

OFFICIAL REPORT: Honorably discharged for being wounded in action. The Sudan sniper's aim was off and took out Crawly's leg instead of Major Earnest Payne.

Damned lucky too. Crawly is expendable. But the Major, he's needed for bridge in the evenings, and it would have been a damned shame.

Crawly's Version: I saw the sniper and ran up to the Major to warn him. I tripped, took a tumble, and slammed into the major. Bullet hit me instead of him. Arsehole claims the sniper was a bad shot, not that I saved him. Truth is, I didn't, it was an accident. Fairs fair, he did give me £40 to shut up and be a good soldier. Whom I to argue with 40! Could set me up in London. My legs are a bit lame but otherwise am fine. I might go into law enforcement maybe.

The police force refused Crawly on grounds of his disability. Pinkerton's, of the USA, has launched an independent investigative branch in London. Records indicate Crawly is on their payroll, mainly conducting surveillance of 'individuals of interest'. The income he earns is sent mainly to Brewster for some reason.

Whitechapel, 8th June 1895. York (from Pinkertons) got us to keep journals. I'm done with them now, watching gents having affairs in Soho isn't for me. But the journal thing has stuck. Now, I'm looking to go legit for myself. Private investigator. Like that bloke Holmes. There's money to be made, and I'm only going to take jobs that are actual crimes, not adultery. That's dull. I need a crime to solve, that'll make my reputation. Then I need an office. Can't use the Brewster, gotta be all above board. So... a crime. Will head down to The Fox and Hounds tonight, bound to be something.

ENCOUNTER

What is your plan? Break it down into at least eight steps, with each step slowly building upon the other. Why do you need the rest of the party to help you?

50 XP

WHAT DICE GAME DID YOUR CHARACTER PLAY AS A CHILD? WITH WHOM AND HOW DID IT WORK?

WHAT THESE QUESTIONS GENERATE

The character that you've been putting together, step by step, is starting to take shape. You can go back and change elements that you don't like, tinker around with some concepts and ideas and so on until you are completely happy with the result.

But what have these questions generated? A wealth of information (if you've been good and included places and names) for you and your GM to work with. I often find it useful once I've written this kind

of backstory to go back into it, and extract the critical information so I don't have to go looking for it.

I usually work it out into a table like the one below. I list the name of the NPC, whether they are alive or dead, their last location that my character knows about, what event we left on, or how we are linked, and then a date. If you're not sure about the date, pick your birth as year 0 and work on events from there.

NPC	LIVING OR DEAD	LOCATION	EVENT	DATE

This allows me to see all the NPCs in my character's past at a glance. Incidentally, this table is quite useful for adding to as you go on your adventures!

If we take one of our budding examples, let's take Crawly for example our table looks like this.

NPC	LIVING OR DEAD	LOCATION	EVENT	DATE
Dolly Crawly	Dead	Flower Street, Whitechapel, London	Mother, died of Consumption or Syphilis	1878
Agnes Brewster	Living	Whitechapel brothel	Hires a room in exchange for protecting the girls	1974 – present
Thomas Tingle	Unknown	Dean Street	Associate, criminal	1880
Brother 1	Living	Dartmoor Prison	Older brother	?
Brother 2	Living	Dartmoor Prison	Eldest brother	?
Brother 3	Living	Unknown	11 months older brother	?
Jessica Bombrough	Living	Kensington, London	Married to Bombrough	?
Captain Alwyn Dyson	Unknown	India?	Commanding officer in King's Royal Rifle Corps	1886 – 1890
Major Earnest Payne	Living	Sudan	Saved from being assassinated by sniper by accident	1891
York	Living	Whitechapel, London	Works for Pinkertons investigators	1891 – 1885

That's quite a list of NPCs to work with. It doesn't matter that there are question marks all over the place. Those are potential adventures or moments you can use later during the game.

ENCOUNTER

Generate your family/guardian template.

50 XP



CHAPTER 4: WORKING WITH THE MECHANICS

Now that you've got a pretty good character going, it's time to look at the mechanical aspect of the character. The games all involve mechanics in some way. Now, you might be thinking: but we haven't worked much on the character personality, or the mental state – surely we're not finished? Not by a long shot! However, the mechanics will give us a framework upon which we can continue to build. The reason is simple:

The backstory gives us all the bits and bobs that most TTRPGs need in terms of building the char-

acter. The numbers, the stats, and so on – those are usually fairly rigid and so there is little wiggle room. If we find that a certain skill or ability is not within our 'build' options for the mechanical character, we then can go back and tinker with the backstory.

If we've already laid down all the character's groundwork, we can end up with a complete character but one that isn't supported by the mechanics. This means we go back into the character and re-work a lot of material. That doesn't work for me – I find it tedious.



JOB/CLASS/ROLE

Possibly the most hated question I see asked is: “so what classes are you guys playing?” Not all TTRPGs require your character to have a predefined role but there are quite a few that do. The player asking that question is hoping to create a character that fits within a class or role not currently covered by the rest of the party.

Is that such a bad thing? Not at all. If we all created the same class or fulfilled the same role on the team, it would quickly get boring as there is no diversity of thought. If everyone is a hacker, then the game is solely going to be about hacking. Anything else will seem impossible for the characters because they have no skill sets outside of hacking. We’ll talk about why that’s actually fun to play later on.

I tend not to care about the prescribed roles or classes that a TTRPG offers and look instead at the way in which obstacles are overcome within the game. Does it use skills? Is it a combination of values?

The reason being – often it is solely the mechanics that allow us to turn our concept into a reality within

the game system. The Class or Role is secondary as we can adjust to match. It also means that when we turn to the other players and ask them what they’ll be playing we’re asking a different question:

What does your character want to do?

This breaks the thinking away from ‘prescribed roles and classes’ and forces the others to think in terms of character. My character wants to serve their god and bring justice to their family by researching ancient texts. Does that sound like a cleric? A paladin? A modern fanatical rebel? A religious freedom fighter? Does it matter? Not really. What matters is that you now know that that player is looking to do investigation and combat under the banner of a religion.

You can now look at your own character and decide if you were going to be an investigating war-machine. If yes, then perhaps you can adjust that to being a war-machine who wants to help others. It’s a small shift but lets you look at a mechanical build in a different light.



BUT WE NEED A BALANCED PARTY TO SURVIVE!

There are a few suggestions when creating characters in roleplaying games around creating a party that has the following components (as canonized by World of Warcraft in the 2000's):

- A Tank
- A Healer
- A DPS
- An AOE

Tanks are all about absorbing damage. They don't deal a huge amount of damage but have heavy armor, and lots of health. Think about the TTRPG you are creating a character for: there may well be a few mechanical build options that involve increasing your character health or armor at the expense of other abilities.

Healers, by definition, restore lost health to their allies. They might also provide boons or bonuses but principally healing. Most TTRPGs have a health system, and the PCs can usually die if their health is reduced to a zero value. Healers try to stop this.

A DPS is a Damage Per Second character. In games the amount of damage that a character can deliver in a round is always part of the mechanical calculations that have gone into the TTRPG. Characters who focus on being DPS deliver a huge amount of damage per turn but have little health or armor. They rely on the Tank to keep the target busy whilst they strike from the side.

AOE, or Area of Effect, are characters who can deal damage to a lot of creatures at the same time, or who can influence a lot of creatures at the same time – say via mind control. These characters may deal some damage, but it's usually split across multiple targets. Or they may not deal any damage but lock down multiple targets so the DPS can go in and kill them all.

A party made up of these four roles is considered a balanced and unstoppable force. In computer games this may be very true. But is it in TTRPGs? Yes, well, no, I mean maybe...

- A Trap/Puzzle solver
- A face

These are two additional roles that exist within the TTRPG space by virtue of the game being dynamic (there is a GM who determines outcomes and instantly creates new non-scripted scenarios or dialogue).

The Trap/Puzzle thing is a character who can open locks, find traps, and generally work their way through a restricted area without having to kill everything enroute. This character might also be a DPS or an AOE character, but their main focus is on overcoming mechanical things within the game.

A Face is a character who has to deal with the social aspect of the game. As the party interacts with NPCs within the TTRPG, the Face is generally the character who is good at talking into or out of situations. These characters are diplomatic at times, and forceful at other times. During combat they can sometimes step back as their mechanical build is at the expense of combat abilities.

These six are then the perfect party right? Well, if you are playing with a group of six players then it may seem to be. Anything the TTRPG can throw at you, you are ready for. Does that mean that groups of less than six simply can't play?

Not at all. Most of my groups are 4 or 5 players strong. They get along quite well. So how does that work? It is possible to do multiple things, so a Tank who is also a Healer. Or an AOE who is also the Face. It is also possible to simply not have these roles and for the game to be just as fun.

That is why my answer is: balance is an illusion. It makes the game feel more achievable. But given that the game is not about achieving, but about building a narrative. Achieving every roll and winning every outcome must surely then be dull? Many think so, and many more think I'm completely wrong, and you can win D&D.

Whatever your choice, I remain steadfast in my opinion: look to the character's goals and what you enjoy doing within the group, rather than playing something or being something you do not enjoy, merely because 'it balances the party'.

RESEARCH, EXPERIENCE, AND FREEFORM ASSOCIATION ALL CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR IMAGINATION, WORK ON THEM DAILY TO IMPROVE.

YOUR ROLE

Working with the notion of what you want to do, you can then turn to the TTRPG and look at what it offers in terms of satisfying that. The obvious is the usual choice, so think around that too. In a classic fantasy style game, a character who wants to look after others by healing them and protecting them might immediately be a 'Cleric' who has healing magic. A completely different angle might be a 'Mage' who throws magic around their companions to prevent any damage from even getting through. Or perhaps it is neither, perhaps it's a mad alchemist who brews potions that restore health?

Often the classes of TTRPGs are designed to cover the broad roles we spoke about earlier, as those are common classifications of jobs within the TTRPG world. However, as the designers fleshed out each of the classes or roles, they added in nuances and variations. This is classic game design, and you should take advantage of that.

Focus your investigation into the options around all the classes or roles on offer. You'd be surprised

what you find. Jot down some of the options presented to you, and remain flexible. Look at the options and then compare their 'mechanical overcome' options. How do they allow you, as a player, to overcome situations. These could be skills, traits, abilities, or powers or a combination thereof.

Which one seems the most interesting to you and which one allows your character to accomplish their goal?

Creating a character who wants to learn how to fly using their superpowers only to make a mechanically incorrect version who will never be able to fly seems pointless. Unless you're going for the character story of overcoming the odds and doing what no one in this class has ever done before. In which case that's fine.

In most cases, however, it does seem odd.

I also try to match up the abilities with the backstory. If my character can see through walls, then why, in my backstory, was my character shocked at who was hiding behind the wall... You will need to go back and alter as needed once you've made your character.



WORKING THE STAT BLOCKS

Having chosen your class or abilities it becomes important that those values reflect your character. We can start to use the game to help us design and discover our character. Although each TTRPG has different

means of expressing the character, they generally all have the same areas: physical abilities and health, mental abilities, and spiritual or innate abilities.

WHAT ARE THE PHYSICAL CHANGES YOU NEED TO MAKE?

Your character's backstory doesn't really have a huge amount of information on your character's physical abilities and well-being. You might have said you're a great warrior, but that doesn't mean that you're a great warrior who is prone to illness. Or who can't touch their toes because they have so much muscle it gets in the way.

A character who has a lot of mechanical dexterity can be thin, fat, average for Australia, or somewhere in between. What you can be sure of is that they know how to focus on a target, and how to control their body when the time comes to it.

I love this part. Suddenly your character is no longer purely your imagination, but now, there are out-

side forces shaping and molding that character too. They're becoming an individual, distinct from you.

Another consideration is how the character got to their current position. A street orphan who barely survived needs to have become a muscle behemoth. That requires vast amounts of calories, a lot of time and dedication in the gym, and a focus on health. How did they get from orphan to Mr. Universe?

If your character is poor with their agility, or can't hit a target at 5 feet, is it because they're just not good at balance? Or perhaps because they lost an eye in their backstory? If they didn't, you can go back to the backstory and add it in. No problem.

The accounting of the physical mechanics and your character leads you to add all kinds of fun things and makes your character more truthful to those around the table.

MENTAL ADJUSTMENTS

Since we haven't gotten to the character's personality, the mental adjustments become valuable to our forward thinking. A character who has dedicated their time to being smart, is a character who spends a lot of time reading, observing, or downloading (depending on the setting) information and people.

Again, tie this back to the backstory. What prompted your character to start down that path? Are they mathematical geniuses? Savants? If so, what did their guardians do about it? If it was ignored, what did the character do about it to nurture it themselves? Was there someone who saw their ability and pushed them in a direction? All these are great opportunities for adding in NPCs and more information and truth.



POWERS AND ABILITIES

Almost all TTRPGs give the characters some inherent powers or abilities that set them apart from the 'average NPC' wandering the streets. These need to come from somewhere and your character needs to have learned how to use them or harnessed them in their backstory, unless you are playing a very specific type of TTRPG where you develop your character as you play (I'm looking at you Traveler).

Accounting for this should be significant. Imagine if you went to bed as a five-year old and then woke up with the voice of a God in your head? Or you were waving your hands about in frustration and blew a hole in the wall. Not everyone can hear the thoughts of others.

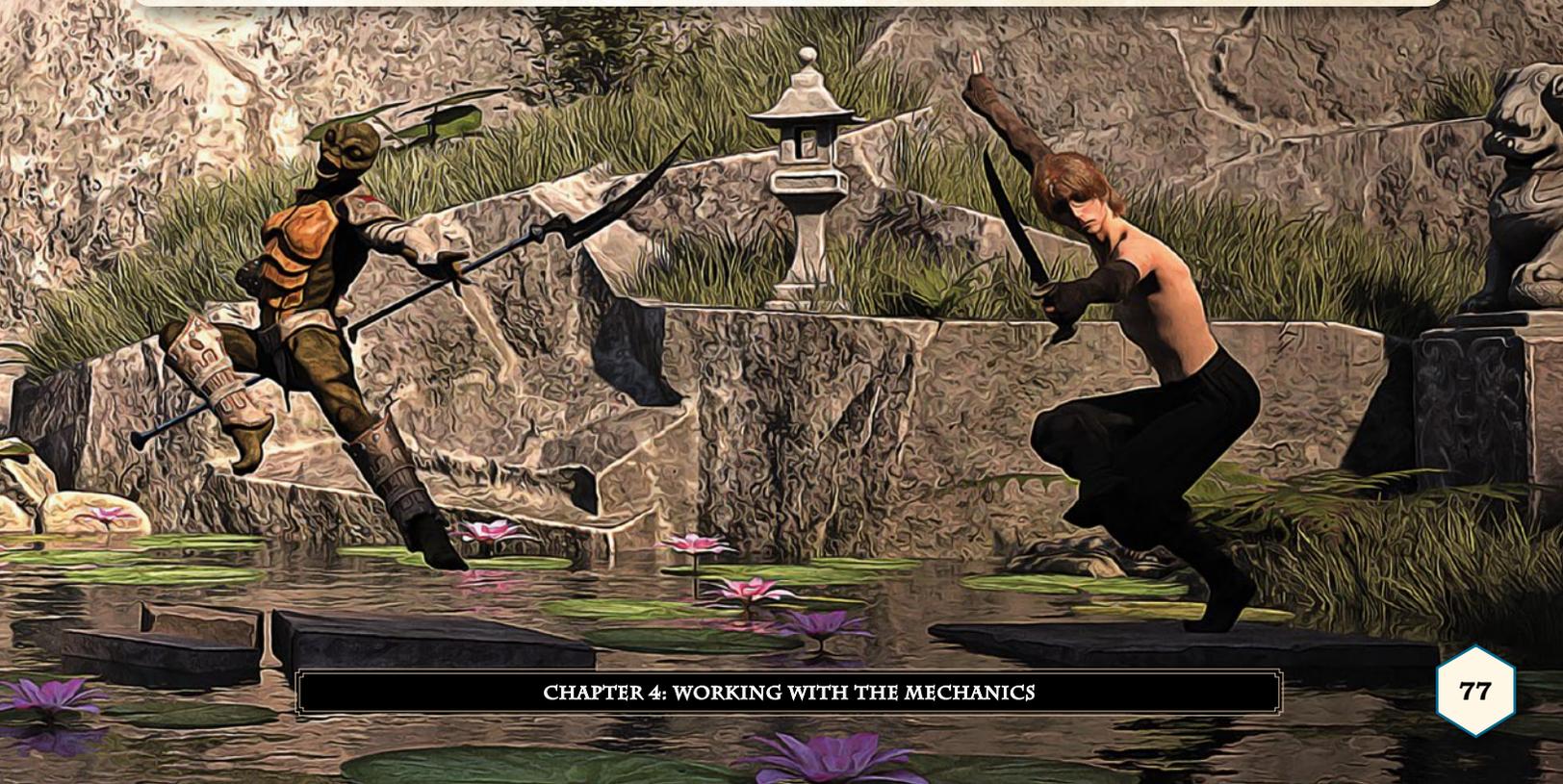
You can decide how this manifests or ask your GM if they have specific thoughts on it. If the world is full of magic and your character, at the age of four, happened to create a spark of light, would your guardians send you off to a school for mages? Or would you be hidden away and banned from learning more magic? You have to get that info from the GM and then decide how your PCs guardians would have dealt with that situation.

You are not accounting for each power your character has, or each spell they can cast, merely the very first one. If your TTRPG doesn't have anything out of the ordinary then you don't have to work on this, although most systems do have a 'something' that makes your PC the hero and not just a highly active NPC.

Braon Bloodshrike has been turned into a D&D 5th ed. level 1 character based on his backstory and the mechanics available to me. He has the following values.

INITIATIVE	+3	ARMOR CLASS	16
Str	12	Hit Points	13
Dex	16	Battleaxe	+3 to hit 1d8+1 damage
Con	16	Javelin	+3 to hit 1d6+1 damage
Int	10	Languages	Orc, Giant
Wis	8		
Chr	13		
Athletics	+3	Intimidation	+3
Perception	+1	Stealth	+5
Survival	+1		

The rest of the information isn't relevant. Given that Braon grew up in the mountains, and that he was part of the soldier caste almost from birth I made him a Ranger. Able to fight but also able to move about the mountains. He isn't very strong, but I figured his older brothers would be the tough and powerful ones, and he'd be the quick one. He certainly hasn't learned his lesson; his Wisdom score is very low. He's still learning. But I didn't like the mechanical value to reduce his ability to hunt and survive in the wild (which he would have learned to do or die), so I put extra effort into making sure he at least had a positive value for his Survival skill. And, as the mechanics worked out, he is incredibly stealthy, with a Stealth score of +5. He must have learned this sneaking up on animals he was hunting. Because he wasn't very good at spotting them from afar (his Perception is only +1), and he isn't good at tracking them (his Survival score) I think he learned how to be really quiet, allowing him to make a kill.



I gave him a battleaxe, as that seemed most fitting to a warrior of the Orc mountains, but because range is fairly useful in mountains, I gave him a half-dozen javelins. He's fairly quick to react – his Initiative score is +3, so hopefully he can hurl a javelin or two before the enemy close and force him to swing his axe.

I now return to the backstory to see how this character information has affected it.

Braon Bloodshrike

Born in the shadows of the Sword Mountains, near Mount Sar to a loyal scout named Broal, who was killed in a raid upon the trolls four years ago, and his even more dangerous wife Gredda (now the current war-chief of the clan). Life in the mountains was tough. His father was highly respected for his cunning, and his loss was felt by all. As a boy, Braon learned to stalk Sibra Goats with his father, a memory he still treasures to this day.

Gredda was always very proud of her children, and never let any of them, even after they were assigned to battle training, walk by without a hug. His five brothers and three sisters held positions of respect, except for two. The Twins. Always causing trouble, they disgraced the family when they left six months ago – sneaking away like a pack of humans. The Twins, younger than Braon, were always challenging Gredda and the leadership. They felt the clan should be more expansive, control more territory. Hrosh, the eldest and strongest brother, would often get into fights with the twins, trying to shut them up. Why Gredda allowed them to challenge her Braon couldn't fathom, but he assumed it was for a reason. She seldom let anything happen without one.

Not without his charms Braon met and was mated for life to Jerosh Redtooth, a handsome scout from the Bloodshale clan. As teenagers they both trained under Graala Maulger, elder of the Greyeye camp. He was a tough old veteran of the Troll wars and worked all the scouts hard. Long days, short nights, and plenty of climbing, fighting, and stalking. When Braon turned 17, the age of the tusk, he and Jerosh completed their rites of passage and became scouts of the clan. Patrolling the boundaries of their territory, repairing crossings, and maintaining the peace would be his sole duty for the next 3 years.

The annual moot of the clans was supposed to be a great time for all. All the Sword mountain clans came together to trade, mate, and party. An unnatural avalanche decimated almost all the clans present. The Whitespear clan, arriving late, avoided the destruction. The day before, Braon had pa-

trolled the area and the rocks had been stable. Something caused them to shift, but what he does not know. Braon lost two of his brothers, and all of his sisters. Tragically he also lost Jerosh. Only his mother, badly wounded, and Hroth survived. Instead of aiding the clans to rebuild, the Whitespear clan declared themselves masters of the mountain, and those orcs who did not swear loyalty instantly, were either killed or exiled. Braon was exiled, along with his mother and brother. Homeless, the orc family looked to make coin to survive, and the easiest way to do that – was to hire themselves out as mercenaries. There's always humans looking for bodyguards.

Whitespear seized all the lands once controlled by his clan. Hrosh is rightful clan leader when Gredda becomes too weak to rule. The treasures of the clan remain buried in the caves under the avalanche. The Twins are still missing, they may not have even heard of the disaster. Gredda and Hrosh are now on a long convoy, leaving Braon to find work.

Braon wants to return to the mountains. Find his mate's remains and perform the proper burial ceremony. They will both burn upon a pyre (Jerosh did not die in combat so both he and his mate must immolate to gain access to the afterlife). To do that however, he'll need to raise a powerful force to knock the Whitespear clan out of their lands. That means making a lot of money. The best way to make money is to go get someone else's. A mercenary, protecting convoys isn't going to help him. He needs more. First step in his plan then: find a group who can go into the old tombs, take on the big jobs, and earn the big coin. Anything he hears about Whitespear is a bonus.

Not a huge number of changes, and more were reworking material so that it made a little more sense. Mainly it was about adjusting the roles from warriors to scouts (rangers). And when going over your material it's always good to just tweak it here and there.

ENCOUNTER

Time to generate your character using the TTRPG system you're going to play them in. This can take a lot of work, and you can lean on your GM for help with the rules. Make sure you understand the rules for your character as you build the character!

250 XP

REWORKING YOUR BACKSTORY

There may be some reworking that needs to happen to fit your character and the mechanics together. Embrace it. Look at the ripple effect that it has – your character needs to have a demonic bloodline for the mechanical requirements of the species you want to play. How would that affect your parents? One of them was a demon! That’s insane. That changes

things hugely. How does that change your upbringing? Significantly if your mother was hacked to death by an angry mob who learned of her demonic links. Or perhaps it doesn’t. Maybe everyone just accepted her demonic roots and let her get on with life?

Your character is a working, living document right up until session one. Even in session zero they are still open for change and alteration. I’ve said it many times before – nothing is fixed until the first session...



MARK MEER: THE KEY TO BEING A GREAT PLAYER

Interview, London Café 2024

GUY: What kind of mindset do you think a player should have when joining a game?

MARK: I think that the crossover between D&D and improvisation is what you should look at there. The same rules that would apply to improvisation would apply to D&D. Be open and accepting, be willing to accept offers not only from the DM but also from other players. And it goes two ways. The DM should also be open to accepting offers from the players which might completely derail any pre-planning that the DM might have done. D&D is ultimately collaborative storytelling. The DM isn't just telling the players a story, they're creating a story together, they are creating the world together to an extent. I think if everyone is open to accepting then that can help the narrative move forward sometimes in ways that are completely unexpected. Especially when you have the dice offering their suggestions as well.

The other thing that improv teaches us is, in addition to accepting and saying yes, is to make the other guy look good. If everyone is trying to make the other guy look good, then everyone is going to look good and everyone is going to have a good time.

GUY: What kind of prep do you think players should be doing?

MARK: I think the character that you create is one that you should know fairly intimately. Know what you can do. Know what abilities your character has. In addition to pre-game prep, in-game prep might be knowing what you would like to do on your turn, before it is your turn. Don't make your decision as the DM says it's your turn in the initiative. Make that decision at least on the previous persons turn.

GUY: What makes a good character in your opinion?

MARK: A good character is a character that you want to play. No one can tell you what kind of character you want to play, so play that character but do keep in mind that it should be a character that is fun, not only to play, but fun to play with. Everyone probably goes through at some stage in their playing career, the lone wolf type character who goes their own way, and yes, it is possible to play that character whilst still contributing to the group. They can have a grumpy

outlook, they can be cranky, but they can still serve the party's needs.

GUY: How should players handle the social space at the table? Should they adapt to it, challenge it, find a different group, or just accept it for what is and shut up and carry on going?

MARK: The thing is, that you are one of the components of that group, and so what you bring to the table will influence what that group is like. If you find that you are moving in a different direction than all the other players, that is what session zeros are for. You might have a good idea after a session zero that: "this might not be for me". You can give it a try, see if you're able to adapt to the new situation if it isn't one that you are not necessarily familiar with, but if you just find yourselves butting heads constantly, it might be better to find another group or perhaps suggest some changes and if the other players aren't amenable to that then maybe greener pastures is what you should seek out.

GUY: What makes a great player?

MARK: A great player is usually one that not only is looking out for their own good time but looking out for the good time for everyone at the table. As I said, it's a very collaborative form of storytelling. A truly great player, I think, will look at not only wanting to serve their character and their backstory, but perhaps interact with other characters' backstories and help other people tell their story. And if you're all telling your story together, then again, it becomes a cohesive whole.

A truly great player is one, you know I am partial to people who get very into character, but that's not a prerequisite, I think a truly great player is one that manages to not only immerse themselves in the game, but also immerse themselves in the narrative that is being brought to the table by all the players.

GUY: As the creator of many great characters, how did you know they were going to be a good character?

MARK: For me personally, I usually start with what voice am I going to do (laughs). No one really plays like that. It's usually I going to enjoy looking out of this character's eyes and being in this character's

skin? That doesn't necessarily mean I need a unique concept that no one has ever thought of before. Some of my favourite characters have been very standard: dwarf fighter with battle axe. Ultimately, I think, it's the interplay that is what makes a great character, and you can come to the table with a character with a very intricate backstory that you've worked out in great detail, the details of that backstory may never be spoken out aloud. They can influence your character and can have an internal life, but ultimately, it's going to be how they interact with other people.

GUY: How much do you put into creating a character arc? Do you even think about character arcs? What is your planning for the future if any?

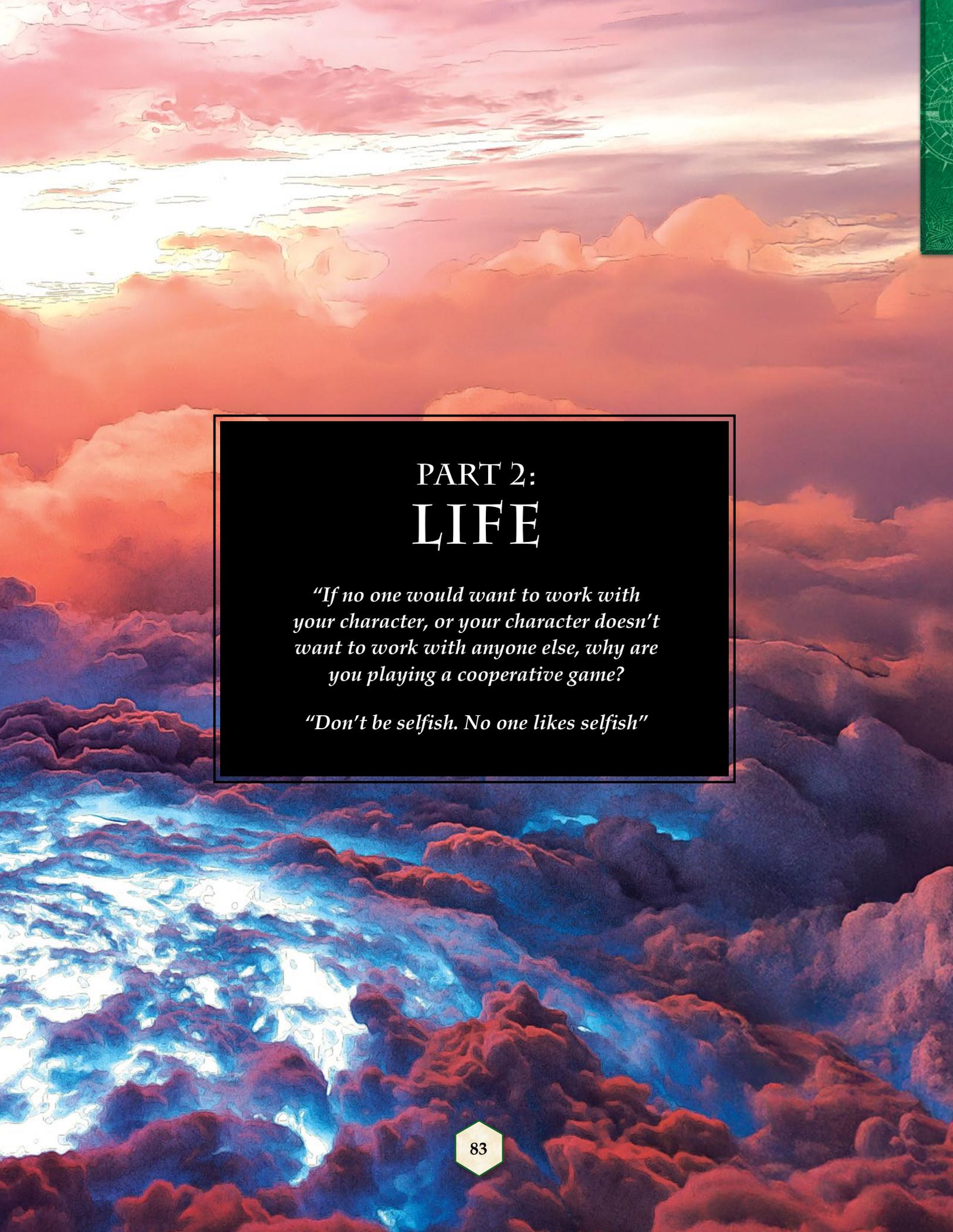
MARK: I think trying to plan out your character's arc is really self-defeating because it can just lead to frustration. If you are doing that, you're essentially

planning improv. You're hoping that things go your way so that 'Ah ha! I can reveal the tale of my backstory.' Really, it's being in the moment, just like in improv. That's what will determine your character's arc and successful character arcs, especially if you can incorporate experiences not that are in your character's past that you made up yourself, but character experiences that actually happened at the table with everyone present and that everyone was a part of. Then that can lead to extremely satisfying character arcs.

Certainly, the pre-formulated tales of your character's background can inform that, and you can drop nuggets of that in, but seldom are you in a situation where "well we're all sitting by the campfire, and I'll tell you my entire backstory." It's usually going to be little snippets that get dropped. The actual arc of your character is going to be what everyone else experienced, not what you wrote on a sheet of loose-leaf paper back home.







PART 2:
LIFE

"If no one would want to work with your character, or your character doesn't want to work with anyone else, why are you playing a cooperative game?"

"Don't be selfish. No one likes selfish"

CHAPTER 5: WHO IS YOUR CHARACTER

With your character ready to go we now need to begin working on their mental characteristics. You may have an idea already from your concept or just in writing the backstory. It's time to make a character that people will remember and will like.

Although you have a collection of truths about your character, those are mostly historical facts and don't really tell us if we'd like the person or not. It's a reason that we know a lot about Ramses II but don't really know if we'd like the Pharaoh or not. We need to create their personality. Aside from that task, we also need to create a consistent response.

This is a term used in scriptwriting where the character responds to situations in a predictable manner because they have consistently responded to similar situations before. We can only do that if we have a profile of the character in our heads (as we're the ones responding on their behalf). It is when the character responds in an inconsistent way that the story of the character either becomes very real and amazing, or terrible and falls flat, dying an ignoble death in obscurity.

We'll begin with creating the broad outline of our character, and shade in with nuanced emotions and actions after.

PERSONALITY TYPES

By selecting one of the follow personality types, you can begin to align your character. All their history, and their mechanics don't give you how they'll react to a situation and why they'll react to that situation. This means you either have to make it up each time something happens, or you need a system to be consistent with. It is the consistency of the character that makes the character personality true. Repeated actions in the same manner make the character a real character.

It is important for me to point out, according to my editor, that these are not rigid and immutable. Indeed, a good character will have the primary personality, and two secondary ones. These help create a more rounded character but require finesse to play. Often times there are even more types stacked into a single character that manifest only under certain circumstances. When the character is in a dangerous or stressful situation they might exhibit one personality type. The same character when in a relaxed or intimate situation might be a totally different personality type. These are layered complex characters which you are encouraged to explore. Just remember we all have a default go to personality type and that should be your main 'type'.

There are three broad types of personality that you can look at. Good, Neutral, and Bad. These are not the dispositions of the characters. These are in terms of group dynamics. The Good types are great at working in a team, as part of the party. The Neutral types focus more on the objectives of the party, on the outcomes and on driving the story forward. The Bad types are likely to cause party issues, derail the plans of the group, and can even cause rifts between players. Why do we look at them then? So that you can make sure you are not creating a character with a Bad personality type.

Each of the types is broken down into roleplaying options: what you could have your character do on a regular basis to express your personality type. Driving questions are questions your character could ask to fulfil their personality and are a guide for you to add to your toolbox. Weaknesses are opportunities for you as the player to explore your character and also warning of what this personality type could become. You want to avoid those. Finally, the examples are characters from popular culture who are most like these types.

THE GOOD CHARACTER TYPES

THE DEPENDABLE

The character is self-controlled. They don't act erratically or without reason. They want to understand the situation or are waiting for others to take the initiative. They focus on keeping the status quo or fulfilling the plan to the letter. They will manage the party funds as they won't allow for frivolous spending. They don't take risks.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The Dependable is the responsible character. Voted most likely to keep their word, these characters put their trust in the fact that once the word is given it is followed, regardless of how the situation might change. They want others to be responsible and can get frustrated when others are erratic.

They are also reliable. These characters have what the party needs, have made plans, and have accounted for what may be needed. They will not turn away from the group because of a disagreement or because there is something they don't like.

The character may disagree with the party totally but will stick with them through thick and thin once they have built trust or given their word to the party. They will find a way to make the bad idea work. They are reliable.

When you react in an unpredictable way, or in a non-self-controlled way, it means that something drastic is happening in your character's head. They're in such a situation that everything they stand for and believe in is gone and they have nothing left.

Once they regain their stability, however, they should do everything they can to return to their normal method of behaving. This requires them to be predictable.

This isn't the boring version of predictable. This is the kind that gets everyone excited type of predictable. The tension building predictable. What do I

mean? The paladin who always saves princes from goblins, when faced with a goblin who has a prince captive, will not listen to reason, will not pause, will act. The scientist who just can't help poking the life-form in case it turns out to be sentient, will poke the unknown blob... always. This predictability works overtime and if you get to a point where the other PCs are trying to work around your 'predictable reaction' means you have succeeded at playing this personality type.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- What are the facts?
- How will this impact the party?
- What can be done to prepare for the future?
- How can we salvage this situation?

WEAKNESSES

Because Dependable characters often don't voice their opinions or might find their opinions shut down by other characters who are more impulsive it may feel as if their opinions do not matter. This can be a point of roleplay within the party.

These characters also don't get to do crazy or stupid things very often. It isn't in their nature to do it. They want the safe and controlled option always.

EXAMPLES

- Spock, Star Trek
- Sam, The Lord of the Rings
- Chewbacca, Star Wars

ENCOUNTER

Can your character be a dependable character? How would this change their backstory? What do you like about dependable characters? What don't you like?

25 XP

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE RULES GOVERNING YOUR CHARACTER'S ABILITIES? IF YOU'RE UNSURE, READ AGAIN, ASK SOMEONE OR WATCH A VIDEO.

THE CONSCIENCE

This is the character type that cares. Cares about the PCs, the NPCs, and the monsters. They are not pacifists. If they need to fight they will. Their focus though is on a swift outcome where everyone wins. Kill off all the goblin warriors, who will feed the goblin children? No one? Well, that's on us, now we must take care of them. This is the character who makes great roleplaying opportunities out of being empathic with others.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The caring aspect is a major component of the character. Making sure there are provisions, making sure that the magic items are distributed in such a way that everyone benefits from them, that's all part of the caring aspect.

They are also helpful. Setting up camp, bringing extra supplies, and offering to pitch in when needed. This is a great character to play if you don't like coming up with ideas but are happy to help others enact their own. Everything that is done should be done for the greater good of the party, and the Conscience is there to make sure it does.

The Conscience is also the memory of the party. They might remind the party of previous outcomes, of previous consequences to their actions and attempt to offer advice or guidance on how to avoid bad ones. By making notes and keeping track of the emotional effects of events, the Conscience builds up a library of empathy. They can recall that and use it to help the party to find a better solution.

This guidance often forms the basis of the Conscience's last major aspect: being the moral compass of the party. Often in TTRPGs the players can lose sight of the NPCs as 'real living beings' and become a little... callous towards the sanctity of life. The Con-

science should be there to remind everyone of what they should be doing, or what they are fighting for and why they should refrain from doing what they think is right and instead do what they know is right.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- Is anyone hurt?
- Can I help?
- What needs to be done?
- Can it be done in a safer way?
- Do we have a plan for the survivors?

WEAKNESSES

The Conscience can sometimes be a bit of a wet-blanket, squashing 'fun' ideas in favor of safer or nicer outcomes. The other risk is that the character can quickly become dissatisfied with the other PCs if they constantly ignore the help and advice that the Conscience is offering. At some point the character may stop and realize they are travelling with psychopaths with no hope of redemption and that they had best leave the party.

EXAMPLES

- Aragon, Lord of the Rings
- Flounder, The Little Mermaid
- Beast, X-Men

ENCOUNTER

Can your character be the conscience? Do they honestly have a moral compass and if they don't in what direction does it point?

25 XP

THE PROTECTOR

Unlike the Conscience who is trying to make sure everyone is emotionally OK and alive; the Protector is seeking to bring about order and stability externally. They are often strong characters, who believe in what they are doing to their very core. They can also be blinded to other possibilities due to their unwavering sense of duty. This often leads them into conflict with ideologies or plans that run contrary to their obligations.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The strong protector focuses on justice. Not a particular justice or set of laws, but on what they believe to be justice. This is a fine line to run if you are creating your own sense of moral imperatives for your Protector to follow. All characters need to be predictable, and that means the Protector needs to be fixed on what they believe their sense of justice is. You need to decide what your character believes to be right or wrong.

You can root this in the local laws of the land, in religious doctrine, or in your own set of laws, but you must make sure they are well defined so that you do not end up bending those laws to fit the situation (as this would make the character unprincipled, and not predictable at all).

Protectors are also loyal to their party. They will remain with the party until the end of days. This is because the Oath of a Protector is the highest form of contract and cannot be broken (in the eyes of the Protector type). This makes them really good allies. This doesn't mean that they won't question or challenge the party when the party seems to be going off the rails and acting against the internal law of the Protector.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- Does this ring true to my code?
- Who needs protecting?
- What can be done to enforce my code?

WEAKNESSES

When the justice that the other PCs are meting out is not in alignment with this character type, they have to find a way to ignore it or address it. This could be a great character moment, the dressing down of the party for having lost its way. It could also be a major challenge for the Protector when the PCs refuse help or protection, or when they disagree with the Protector's code. Whilst the Protector is really easy to roleplay as they have such clear-cut guidelines, they can be a challenge if the party changes its stance on matters of importance to the Protector.

EXAMPLES

- Brin, Game of Thrones
- Gimli, Lord of the Rings
- Captain America, Marvel Universe

ENCOUNTER

Being a protector can be very rewarding. Is your character up for being a protector? Can you handle the responsibility?

25 XP

THE ADVENTURER

These are the quintessential explorers of the world. They are motivated by finding the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. They want to see what is over the next hill. Their aim is to see new things and experience all the wonders of the world. They can be very impulsive, very independent, and notoriously difficult to keep in one place.

They are the fun character who has little regard for consequences other than experiencing life to the fullest (however short that may be for some). These characters drive the party forward, as they hate being stuck in one place for too long.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The Adventurer is upbeat most of the time. It's raining fire. At least it's warm and you can see where you are going. The floor is lava? That's amazing and excellent, now we can learn to climb walls. Positiveness in the face of certain doom because it's new and exciting, that's the Adventurer. They keep the spirits up of the party, regardless of how bad the situation is.

They also ask questions, not deep questions, just lots of questions. They are inquisitive by nature and want to get basic information on stuff so they can assess if it's fun, exciting and something they want to do or not. They don't care about the whys and the nuances; they care about the possibilities of adventure.

This drives them and will drive the party too to keep looking forward and to keep trying to do more things. The risk of course is that the Adventurer leaps before checking, and so they pair really well with Protector, Dependable, and Conscience characters who can help temper that 'Leroy Jenkins' attitude of theirs.

No other type wants to explore as much as the Adventurer. Secret doors are awesome. Traps are awesome. Corridors leading to a certain doom - awesome! Although the class seems very straightforward

there is a suitable difference between an Adventurer who is blind to danger and an Adventurer who embraces the danger with the intention of overcoming it.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- What's over there?
- Can we leave now?
- Who do we speak to get into there?
- Anyone have any kind of plan?
- What does this do?

WEAKNESSES

The temptation to play this character as a reckless individual should be stopped dead in its tracks. This is not someone who will endanger their friends. This is someone who will volunteer to stay behind and press the big red button when the time comes. The Adventurer is not about to kill anyone in the name of the adventure or curiosity. They can also be a little prone to not wanting to put in the effort to research the plan or the situation overly much. This can lead to other party members becoming a little frustrated.

EXAMPLES

- Spiderman, Marvel Universe
- Indiana Jones, Indiana Jones
- Lara Croft, Lara Croft

ENCOUNTER

Although this is the stock-standard type of character most players adopt, I want you to figure out why your character is NOT this type. Only once you've looked at why you shouldn't be this can you try then be this type of character.

25 XP

HOW DOES YOUR CHARACTER VIEW THE WEAPON THEY USE? DO THEY LIKE IT? LOVE IT? DOES IT HAVE A NAME? A SPECIAL MEANING?

THE NEUTRAL CHARACTER TYPES

These characters focus on the adventure outcome and on the party as a whole rather than on the individual, unlike the Good character types. These Neutrals will work with anyone and will treat everyone as a tool to be used in some manner. This isn't a heartless approach; it's the approach that these character types feel most appropriate to getting the job done.

THE LEADER

These folks make decisions. Good ones or bad ones they take on the responsibility of making the call. They then stick with that and try to make the most of it until they either succeed or are forced to abandon it and make a new plan. The difference between a good leader and a bad one, however, is in how they make the call.

A good leader does not have answers to questions. A good leader asks others for the answers. They listen to the answers and then, based upon that information they make a call. A bad leader either doesn't ask for answers or input, or just ignores it once it is given. That is the key to being a good leader: listen first, then decide.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The Leader is an industrious individual. Unlike the Adventurer who is ruled by their curiosity, the Leader is focused on outcomes. Rescue the prince, follow the princess into battle and win, organize a search party, clear the tomb of undead. The Leader knows what needs to be done and gets it done.

They do this by being inclusive. They must ask everyone for their input. This should be a given regardless of the situation. By being group inclusive you ensure that everyone at the table feels as if they are participating. The leader should ask for input, weight it up, and present the basis of plan. The best leaders are open to their plan being challenged and changing their initial thoughts based upon that feedback. A leader isn't about being right, it's about doing the best they can with the information and support they have.

Leaders should be goal oriented, which means they should set goals. We need to get here before we can do that. We need more information before we can move

forward. When you combine this requirement with group inclusivity, the leader should be explaining to the party what they think needs to be done, and then allocating the jobs that need to be completed to the PCs that can best do them.

The leader should also be prepared to be decisive. This is what we need to do. The time for input is over, we must act, and this is the plan. They therefore have to live with the consequences of those actions not working out or failing. The leader does not blame the input of the others, nor themselves. The situation was more complex than anticipated. A great leader learns from the mistakes and tries to not make them again.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- Suggestions?
- What do we know about this?
- What is our goal?
- Who can do this?

WEAKNESSES

Leaders can sometimes feel like they are trying to herd cats; everyone has an opinion, and no one is willing to decide. This can be very frustrating. The only way to manage it is through discussion and asking for the support of the other PCs.

Another and more common issue with Leaders is they can forget to get input from their team, and just ignore others. This can alienate them from their team, and certainly make others feel like they're not contributing – the opposite of a Great player.

EXAMPLES

- Princess Leia, Star Wars
- Leonardo, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- Captain Picard, Star Trek

ENCOUNTER

There is a whole section dedicated to leaders and the burden that goes with it. Will you step up? Will you lead? Or do you accept whomever your group's leader will be as being the LEADER?

25 XP

THE SOLVER

If you like to have answers to everything, then a solver is an ideal character type for you. They don't care overly about the outcome of the adventure, or anyone within the party, they focus on the answers to the questions. The research, the history, the reason behind the actions of the villain. They find comfort in knowing the answers to everything.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The Solver will always be questioning. It could be NPCs directly, asking probing questions, or it could be diving into ancient tombs or lost code. The investigation is the adventure. There is no greater calling than finding the truth behind everything.

This questioning should also extend to the plans of the Leader and the musings of the Adventurer. Why do they want to go there? What advantage is to be gained? What do they know that I do not? That questioning should also extend to the Solver themselves. What is the most important information and how will this information help me and the party? That is often forgotten when a Solver is on the trail.

The Solver should also be willing to problem solve. Just because they ask how or why a thing is done doesn't mean that they should look for answers themselves. They should look into what they are told, and what they can research and then provide solutions to the problem based upon that. This forms part of their cognitive support that they should be lending to the party leadership.

They also need to focus on seeing patterns. We did this, and we are planning on doing it again, this was the outcome, and this was bad. We should do

that instead. Always seeking ways of understanding how the party works, or why it doesn't and then providing those answers to the party so that everyone is informed.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- Why?
- Where did this come from?
- What is the proof or evidence needed?
- Can this be improved?
- Is there another way?

WEAKNESSES

The Solver will often get lost in trying to find the answers to their questions. They need Adventurers or Leaders to pull them out of these holes and keep them moving forward. They also tend to hoard information, not sharing it with others. And, as with so many of the other classes, they can get quickly disillusioned if their provided solutions are ignored by the party.

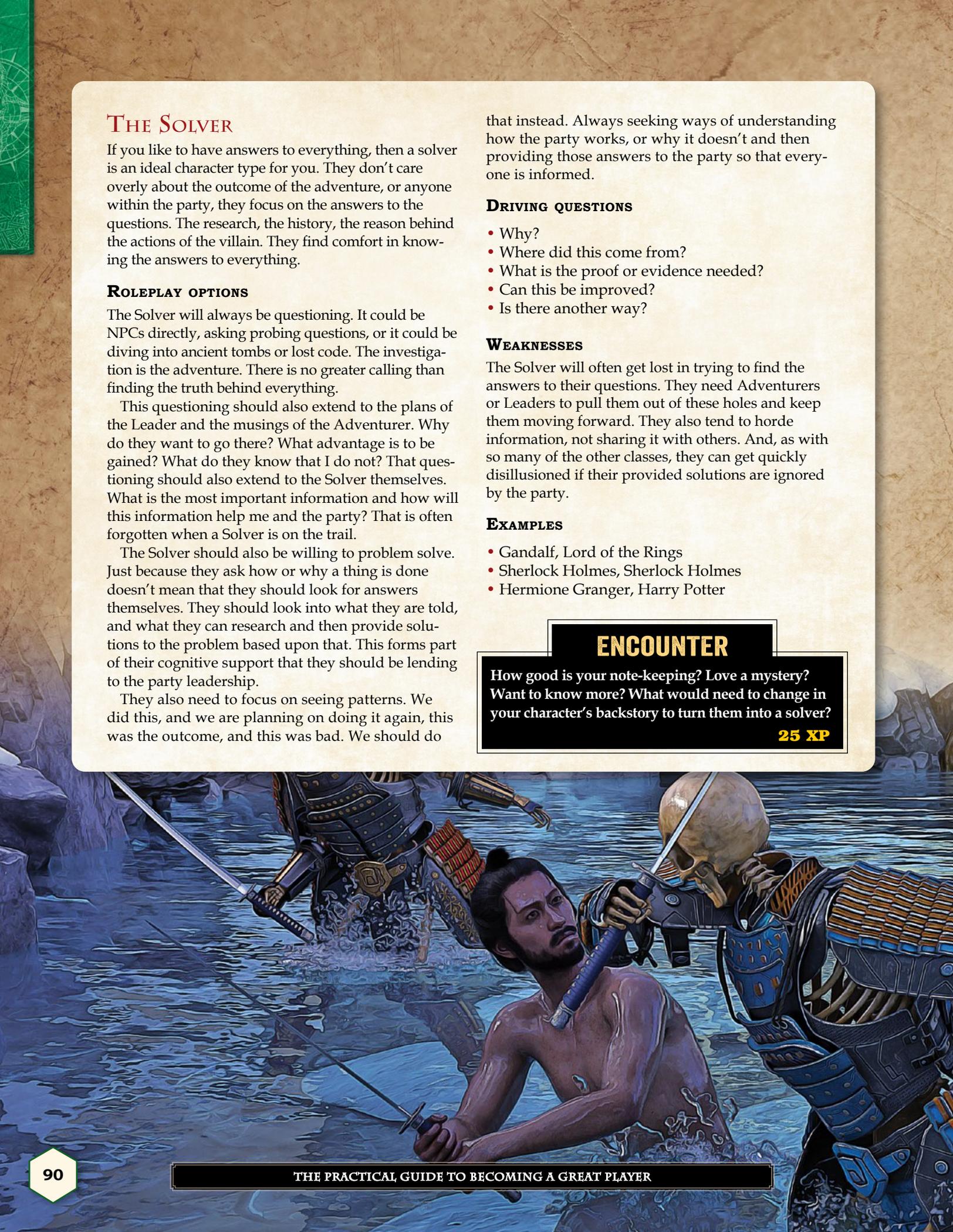
EXAMPLES

- Gandalf, Lord of the Rings
- Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes
- Hermione Granger, Harry Potter

ENCOUNTER

How good is your note-keeping? Love a mystery? Want to know more? What would need to change in your character's backstory to turn them into a solver?

25 XP



THE AMBASSADOR

This character is there to communicate with others and that starts with the party. The character is about open and honest discussions and looking for common ground. They don't really care what the common ground is, just that they get there. They are not pacifists and do not want to avoid combat but if they can work a means where combat is irrelevant and they get their goal faster, then that is what they will do.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

Speaking with everyone in the group requires the Ambassador to be a neutral party. If they do not, they may attempt to manipulate their discussions and instead of finding common ground they promote their own agenda above all others. This is not a good Ambassador.

Unlike the Leader who is asking the opinion of the other party members and deciding, the Ambassador is the one who is getting the party to agree on the goals and the direction so that the leader can begin to formulate plans on how to achieve those goals.

There is no right or wrong in the eyes of an Ambassador - they must be easy going and impartial. Getting the crowd around the table is the first step and the important step for an Ambassador. They can then be told by the decision makers what the outcome is and use that in their next engagement.

The Ambassador can sometimes also act as the face of the party when dealing with others. They don't make decisions on behalf of the party unless the Leader has empowered them to do so. They merely talk, gather information, and find the position of the NPCs before reporting back to the leaders and the rest of the party.

Ambassadors must also be prepared to find compromises within the party. Not everyone is going to want to do what the leader wants, or what each

other want. The ambassador should step forward and quickly make suggestions and seek common ground. They may need to prioritize adventures and ensure that those are then followed. An ambassador who cannot be trusted is no ambassador at all.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- What do you want to achieve?
- What is stopping this?
- How would you achieve this?
- Is there something we are missing?

WEAKNESSES

Ambassadors avoid making decisions. They sit on the fence and refuse to budge. This can make them useless as tiebreakers. That's the one type of Ambassador. The other is the one who has an agenda and plays the party against itself to achieve the secret agenda of the Ambassador. They are no longer an Ambassador but a manipulator. This will quickly turn the party on itself and break the group. It may even extend to the players themselves.

EXAMPLES

- Qui-Gon Jin, Star Wars
- Hughey, The Boys
- Lord Vetinari, Discworld series

ENCOUNTER

Finding common ground, making deals, and ensuring that others agree to your terms can be a real challenge. Sometimes it's important to make sure both sides win, sometimes, just your side. Are you the face of the party? If so - why?

25 XP

THE FOOL

Unlike the adventurer who seeks to go on adventures and explore the world, the Fool is about the party moral. They want everyone to feel good, and they want everyone to have a great time. What sets them apart from the Protector, the Dependable, and the Adventurer is that the fool uses humor to diffuse situations.

They also volunteer themselves first if it means keeping the party going and moral up. They tend to not think about the consequences of their actions until it is too late. The fool is a light-hearted soul who just wants it all to be fun and for no one else to get hurt.

This doesn't mean they are not scared, nervous, anxious, or worried about their choices. They just hide it really well.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The Fool is a joker first and foremost. Making light of the situation as often as they can. However, a good joker knows that a punchline needs set-up, timing, and most importantly must be appropriately timed. A good joke told at the wrong time will not work. A Fool balances this out.

It also doesn't mean that the Fool is empty or devoid of empathy for other characters. This is how they show empathy. They show they care by lightening the mood. By doing this they are often seen as eternal optimists. The Adventurer relishes a challenge but might not always enjoy a defeat. The Fool looks for the silver lining.

This false optimism is a mask for the real Fool. The self that is hiding from the crowd because it is afraid to come out. A Fool hides their true nature behind the jokes and the quips. The reason they do this is as deep as you like it to be. They could have commitment fears, perhaps they believe they don't deserve friends, or they think they are genuinely useless, and their only value is in making others smile.

This is where the Fool becomes a very complex character. Why are they hiding? And what happens when others begin to see through that foolishness? What then?

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- What did the horse say?
- Why did the octomorph cross the nebula?
- I'm sure it will grow back, look on the bright side, you only have to buy one shoe from now on...

WEAKNESSES

There is no easy way to connect with a Fool. They dodge and avoid questions and make light of situations rather than answer directly. They are not in the party for any specific reason other than to jest (or so it would seem) and so finding the Fools' value (aside from humor) can be difficult. The Fool is a layered character and will need an Ambassador or a Protector to take an interest in them to really find the real them. The others will be too busy with their own issues.

EXAMPLES

- Joker, The DC Universe
- Pumba, The Lion King
- Orko, He-Man and the Masters of the Universe

ENCOUNTER

Keeping things light, helping raise spirits, and driving forward the story are demanding. Why would your character become a fool? What are they hiding?

25 XP



THE SOUL

This type is all about making the world come alive. The Soul is about relishing the moment. Finding the emotion or truth in an event and giving words to it, entrenching it for everyone sat around the table. It doesn't matter what is happening, if there is something to comment on about the reality of worldspace then the Soul will be doing it.

Unlike the Conscience who is worried about consequences of action and so on, the Soul is just there to comment on it all. They are focused on living the experience (happy or sad) and tend to be emotional rollercoasters and are not afraid to express themselves.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS

The Soul is about taking what the GM gives you and spinning it even further. Using the five senses, the Soul should, on a fairly regular basis (at least once per gaming session), expand on an experience in a creative way. It could be to write a poem about the encounter, or to simply describe their character's reaction to it.

Looking for these moments of reality make the character introspective, expressive, and grounds the entire experience for everyone at the table. Of all the types, this is perhaps the most metagaming of them because the Soul is there to connect the players to the PCs and the world they are in.

The Soul should also be present in the now, keeping others grounded in the now as well. When the party begin to speculate about the future, or get lost in 'futurist' arguments, the Soul should step in and bring everyone back to the here and now and focus the group. This gives them a good opportunity to interact with the others, much like an Ambassador would, but with less purpose of unity and more a purpose of intention.

The Soul is also willing to sacrifice themselves, or their goals for the rest of the party. Unlike the Fool who rushes in, the Soul will walk into danger provid-

ed that everyone knows they are doing it for the great good and in a cool and artistic way worthy of a song or at least a chapter in a history book.

If you are playing a Soul take the time to stop and smell the weird alien plant, taste the exotic orc dish and stare at the stars. Ask the GM for additional emotive or sensory information and make that space come alive.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

- What does this feel like?
- What does it taste like?
- What is everyone hearing? Your own heart beating because we are alive!
- What color is it?

WEAKNESSES

As the Soul has no mandate other than to be present in the world and make the game more real for others, Souls can often feel lost or like they are not contributing to the party dynamic in a real way (more on this later). This doesn't mean that the Soul has no value. Just that sometimes, like the Fool, they're not essential to the game.

EXAMPLES

- Data, Star Trek
- Tonto, The Lone Ranger
- Hagrid, Harry Potter series

ENCOUNTER

Looking into the 'humanity' of the situation, finding the light in the darkness, and even embracing the darkness from time to time to create context and reference. Why would your character become a Soul, and how would they express this?

25 XP

THE BAD CHARACTER TYPES

These are bad character types because they are exclusionary of other characters. Their principal focus is on the self. If you have chosen this type of character for your own, you'll need to figure out how you will get them to change from one of these types into one of the above types after a dozen sessions or so. You should also let your fellow players know your plan

because there is a real risk they'll just abandon your character on a moon and move on. There is also a risk that they will ask you to leave the group as they think that you, as a player, make poor characters.

Look at these and decide if you might accidentally make these characters, and if so, what you can do to fix them.

THE CONTRARIAN

This type of character is just difficult. They don't agree to things, they don't want to help, and they don't want to work with the party. They argue for the sake of arguing. They hide information from the party or lie about the information they have got.

They might do this because they think it is fun, or because they believe that no one cares about them so why bother caring. They might also believe it is because it makes for an interesting debate or provides an alternate view. The problem is when there is no rationale behind the contrarian's actions, and it's just point-blank obstinacy or obstruction.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS AND FIXES

The spoilt brat, the teenager dealing with internal issues, or the character who feels that everyone has a

grudge against them, so they need to keep everyone at arm's length, and they do that by being diffident or negative.

What is going to convince your character that this is the wrong approach to life, and that they need to learn to trust others and to work as part of a team? There must be something that impresses these characters enough to want to change their personality type. If there isn't, then this character will just be a pain in the ass, no one will want to talk to them, and eventually they'll be cut out of the group.

If you choose this type, make sure to let others know, and also you must figure out what your character will grow into. A Protector maybe or an Ambassador? This growth could be an amazing journey to watch. But only if everyone knows it is the character's journey, not the player being a contrarian.

THE HEDONIST

This is a character that only cares about themselves and their own goals. They will manipulate others into achieving their own wants and will not help anyone else except themselves. They are the opposite of Ambassadors and Protectors. Everything is about them, and they truly believe that they deserve everything that they can get. Everyone else is just a rung on the ladder to be climbed.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS AND FIXES

The character's focus is on self-gratification. It is all about their way or the highway. They hoard all the magical items for themselves, they don't share information, and they enjoy letting others be destroyed if it saves their own skin.

These characters use PCs and NPCs like tools, working with them until they are no longer needed and can be discarded. The challenge is that often those tools realize what is happening and leave.

To fix this character, who obviously thinks the world of themselves, they need to go on a humbling journey where they discover that helping others and doing things for others is as rewarding as doing things for themselves at the expense of others. Telling this type of character that they're bad will not help. The character must internalize it. That's a long journey and like the Contrarian the Hedonist needs to have a plan on what they will become - the Conscience or perhaps the Ambassador?

THE DO-IT-ALL

This is the character who can do everything and doesn't let anyone else do anything. They are not a Fool who blindly volunteers, but instead, they volunteer because they believe they are the best. These types are often the result of a mechanical build within the TTRPG whereby the character can do everything that the other PCs can do and so they end up just stealing the show.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS AND FIXES

The Do-it-all may not realize that they are trying to do it all. They may think they're a Dependable, or a

Protector and are actually helping. They've oblivious to the fact that their actions are causing others to feel useless. (This may also be a player trait and not just the character!)

Do-it-all types should learn to delegate, to ask for help, and to occasionally step back and not offer any help at all. This turns them into a Leader or a Conscience, or maybe even a Solver. Although this type doesn't have as dramatic a swing as the other bad types, the character growth is great, especially considering the character will be mechanically getting better at doing things. The character must consciously step back and accept help.

THE LONER

Whilst the Do-it-all is doing everything and not letting anyone else help, the Loner simply ignores everyone else and does only what they want to do. They don't work as part of the team, unless they see value. Most of the time they are happy to ignore the party and just do what interests them. Even the Hedonist realizes that the party will help them achieve their goals. The Loner doesn't want the party there at all.

ROLEPLAY OPTIONS AND FIXES

The Loner really works well in a novel or a TV series, and it is frequently the basis of most anti-hero characters. In a collaborative game like roleplaying there is no room for a single character. All the PCs must be part of the team and work together as a team. Start-

ing out as a Loner, who is forced to work with the PCs can work, provided that the Loner realizes (as so often happens in TV, books, and films) that they are better as part of a team and begins to shift into a team role like a Leader or a Protector.

ENCOUNTER

Have you created a character from any one the bad character types? What is your plan for redemption and reconciliation? Have you spoken to your fellow players about this? Why is this more interesting than any of the Good or Neutral types?

25 XP



ARE YOU STUCK WITH YOUR TYPE FOREVER?

Never! All of these types are merely starting points. In writing there is the notion of the Character Journey. A series of events within the bigger story that cause the character to shift from one type to another, usually shedding the bad habits of the one type and gaining the good habits of the new type.

Your character is free to transition from one type to another over the course of a campaign. This shift must be gradual, and it must be motivated. What would cause a Protector to become a Solver? As with your character coming up with a plan for their future, so too must you come up with a plan. Perhaps your Protector, try as hard as they might, can't protect someone in the party, and they die. The Protector may feel responsible. The Protector might look to never letting this happen again, such as, becoming a Solver. If they know all the answers beforehand, they can make sure to protect against everything.

What is not in your hands however is that triggering moment. That first step down the path towards a new type. That belongs exclusively to the GM. What can you do about that? Be vigilant. Look for opportunities that your fellow players and GM give you. That's option one. Option two is to talk to your GM about it and see if they can help you out.

Another fun idea is to play a shift back journey. The character, being a specific personality type, shifts to another type, and then through growth and realization shifts back to their original type. The

Leader type who fails their comrades and so becomes a Protector only to realize that they didn't fail their comrades, they failed themselves in not trusting themselves. They shift back to being a Leader type but a much better Leader because they have learned so much as a Protector.

Who are these Character Journey's for? There isn't (usually) an audience watching and learning about your character and tracking their transition. There is a small group of folks playing the game and they are aware of your character. But are they really paying attention? They should be if they are good players and if you are playing a truthful character. You need to express your character type in order for the other players to really get to grips with your character, and then when you shift, those players should start to realize. Then they see this amazing journey of a person, not just a character.

ENCOUNTER

List the last three types of characters you created or played. Score bonus points if they're all different. Score additional bonus points if your current character that you're making as part of this read-through is of a different type.

15 XP + 15 XP + 20 XP



APPLYING YOUR TYPE TO YOUR CHARACTER

It is time to take your character type and apply it to your character. You'll be doing this multiple times over the course of the game but for now, we need to focus on the backstory. It's nearly finished with only a few more tweaks it will be perfect.

PRE-GAME

The personality doesn't change the events of your character's backstory. It should, however, change how your character feels about those events. It could act as a reason for the character doing what they do next. It may even fill in some gaps or blanks you had.

Critically evaluate each entry in your backstory around your personality type that you've chosen. This is good practice as you'll be doing this a lot in the future, though not on your backstory. Look at how your personality might respond to the situation. What would make them do that or how would it change if a different type of personality was experiencing it?

Don't be afraid to change your backstory to suit your personality type, but this isn't a rewrite, this is an adjust and augment. Work within the limits you've set yourself, don't redefine those limits unless you absolutely have to.

Brendon Crawly

Brendon is going to be a Fool character. He has a lot to hide. His background is shady, his honorable discharge is shady, and working as an investigator is also shady. How does him being a Fool change his backstory?

*Born in Flower street, Whitechapel, London 1870. Mother Dolly Crawly, deceased 1878 (Consumption, syphilis suspected). Worked as chimney sweep until 1880. Records unclear but known to loiter around Agnes Brewster's brothel. Known as a **friendly jokester by the locals**. Associated with Thomas Tingle of Dean street, possibly criminal links. 3 living brothers, 2 in Dartmoor prison. 1 sister remains, Jessica Bombrough ne Crawly. Lives in Kensington, London. No wife. Claims he has nothing to offer an honorable woman, **and even if he did, no thinking woman would have him**.*

*Brewster seems to have had a soft spot for the kid, **no surprise. Idiot is the first to volunteer for anything**. No record of him working gents for her. Tingle, however, had a huge influence on him and his brothers. Never caught but pickpocketing, burglary, and smuggling seem to have been Tingle's bag, and Crawly's by association – **though not an actual crime it is believed Crawly would distract punters with a joke whilst Tingle fleeced them**. Brothers, all older, physical abuse seems to have been their training method of young Crawly. Evidence from a local doctor indicated Crawly*

*suffered multiple broken bones, beatings, and poor diet from 1878 until 1886. Claims it was all accidents that happened as his grandmother's bachelor's party that caused it. Probably why he joined the army as soon as he was old enough, **although he hardly needed encouraging**.*

*Enlisted at 16 with the King's Royal Rifle Corps and sent to India. Performed adequately without much to note. **He was popular with the boys as a stage and dress-up man. Put on shows to keep morale up**. Moved to South Africa, Egypt, and Sudan. Performed better, under Captain Alwyn Dyson. Involved in an investigation into theft of Egyptian artifacts but cleared of all charges, **seems to have been standing outside talking to officers on duty the whole time**.*

OFFICIAL REPORT: Honorably discharged for being wounded in action. The Sudan sniper's aim was off and took out Crawly's leg instead of Major Earnest Payne. Damned lucky too. Crawly is expendable. But the Major, he's needed for bridge in the evenings, and it would have been a damned shame.

Crawly's Version: I saw the sniper and ran up to the Major to warn him. I tripped, took a tumble, and slammed into the major. Bullet hit me instead of him. Arsehole claims the sniper was a bad shot, not that I saved him. Truth is, I didn't, it was an accident. Fairs fair, he did give me £40 to shut up and be a good soldier. Whom I to argue with 40! Could set me up in London. My leg's a bit lame but otherwise am fine. I might go into law enforcement maybe.

The police force refused Crawly on grounds of his disability. Pinkerton's, of the USA, had launched an independent investigative branch in London. Records indicated Crawly was on their payroll, mainly conducting surveillance of 'individuals of interest'. The income he earned is mostly sent to Brewster for some reason.

Whitechapel, 8th June 1895. York (from Pinkertons) got us to keep journals. I'm done with them now, watching gents having affairs in Soho isn't for me. But the journal thing has stuck. Now, I'm looking to go legit for myself. Private investigator. Like that bloke Holmes. There's money to be made, and I'm only going to take jobs that are actual crimes, not adultery. That's dull. I need a crime to solve, that'll make my reputation. Then I need an office. Can't use the Brewster, gotta be all above board. So... a crime. Will head down to The Fox and Hounds tonight, bound to be something.

The example didn't change a huge amount, but it did change. Brandon Crawly is now a Fool, hiding his harsh reality behind the 'funny man' facade. He is looking to work with others and will take anything that pops up. That's a pretty good spot to start an adventure and a campaign with.

IN-GAME

Keeping your type in check, and making sure that you represent it, you need to refer to it from time to time during the game. You don't do this by telling everyone what you are repeatedly. You show them. Look at the type, look at what the type is supposed to do within the group, and then find opportunities for your character to do them!

It sounds simple but it takes practice. You don't need to do it every second of every minute but remain aware and whenever you can naturally do it, do it. Be aware of the weaknesses of your type and make sure not to over-do it.

POST-GAME

If you are unsure as to whether you did it right (including your type) during the game, after the game reflect upon what you did and compare that to your type. Did you ask for input, as the Leader? Did you listen to that input, and did you then plan based upon that? Or did you just make the call and ignore the other PCs?

If you realize you made a mistake in your expressing your type don't worry. Make a note to correct it in the next session. There is nothing more powerful than a PC apologizing to the group for something they did. Your character can wait for the appropriate time and then offer their heart-felt apology. It is a wonderful character moment and makes your character feel more real!



WHY WOULD WE LIKE YOUR CHARACTER?

With a personality, a backstory, the mechanics, and their goal for the future in hand, what is next? Well, the critical question is: Why would we like you? Just because you've made a character who is a Protector and has a strong backstory doesn't mean that we'll like you. You might be a regular dick who forces

people to accept your protection. Or perhaps you only protect those who do favors for you? Maybe you want to protect people, but you suck at it.

We have to add a layer to our wonderful creation that will let us know exactly why we like the character. It turns out it comes down to a balance of imbalance.

PROACTIVE, COMPETENT, SOCIAL

According to Brandon Sanderson, there are three areas that we can define as to why someone would like you. How proactive you are, how competent you are, and how socially adjusted you are. Interestingly you can have two out of the three and people will still like you, and if you have all three in abundance people may not like you at all.

Proactivity is about the amount of effort you put into your own work and how much effort you put into others around you. A character who is proactive will get themselves onto the plan and will make sure everyone else is getting onto the plan too. They look for things to be done and get them done. A character who has low proactivity will procrastinate, will expect others to do things for them, or will do things half-heartedly. I like to apply a scale of 1-5 for Proactivity, with 1 being not proactive at all, and 5 being so proactive they never sit down. A 3 would be the average level of a character who does what needs to be done but not much more.

A character who is competent knows what they are doing. This competence could extend to their work, their skills, their abilities, it doesn't matter, what does matter is that their general area of 'expertise' is either competent or incompetent. On the same scale,

a 1 competence score would be for someone who has no ability whatsoever and will, in all likelihood, completely fail at the task. A 3 is the average level of expected competence and a 5 is a master of their ability and cannot fail. Now, characters are complete individuals with lots of areas of competence and incompetence. You might be great at convincing others to follow your plans, but completely incompetent at flying a starship. How do you then apply this single score to your character.

In this case, competence means how hard they are willing to try. How much effort will they put into everything, and what will they do if they fail? Give up? Walk away? Or try again? They might confess their failing and ask for another chance or for education. Does your character have a good attitude towards what they're doing?

Finally, the Social component. This is really a measure of your own desire to have fun or to stretch your acting chops. A low social score would indicate that the character has no redeemable social skills. They smell, they're grouchy, they snarl, they are sullen, they hate life. They're generally anti-social. A high score would suggest a character that is understanding, sympathetic, and amiable. They know when to listen and when to talk, and what to say at the right time.

**HOW DOES YOUR CHARACTER VIEW THE WEAPON THEY USE?
DO THEY LIKE IT? LOVE IT? DOES IT HAVE A NAME?
A SPECIAL MEANING**

THE IMBALANCE

When you then apply these three elements to your character you might be convinced the best method would be to simply say your scores are 5, 5, 5. You are the most proactive, competent, and social person you know. That's how you win right? It isn't. This is a Disney Princess. About as real as a soap bubble.

Indeed, any character with the same scores across the board becomes a very uninteresting character. All 1's? You don't do anything, you can't do anything, and you hate everything. That's shocking for a moment and then no one will work with your PC.

However, a character with an imbalance in these scores becomes interesting. If you look at Proactive characters: these are the ones who pack everything, who plan for everything and who are ready of anything. Dependable, Protector, or Adventurers might have a 4 or a 5 in this. If you are playing this character you will need to make sure you reflect this score by having the character thinking and planning and preparing for themselves and others.

But a PC with a 2 in Proactivity isn't terrible. They just show up at the dungeon with a sword, and maybe half a day's rations. And probably late. They're not going to cause anyone to die (just yet). They are a lot less maintenance than high Proactivity characters.

As a working example let's take a Proactivity score of 2. It now means we can have a better score in Competence. Why? We have to avoid characters having the same scores across the board. We also have to make sure that we're not making characters that have no saving graces. So, we have to increase this value. As 3 is the average value, we need to have a 4 or higher in Competence. Therefore, our character has a 4 in Competence. They are good at what they do. However, given that many TTRPGs focus on random number generation and modifiers to determine the outcome of any action, our character also has to be very good at accepting failure. Even though they are meant to be competent, when they fail, they must try again or ask for help or do something to show they really want to complete the task.

The wild card is then our third value, in this case: Sociability. We have a low score, and we have a high score. An average score would be OK, but another low score would mean we have two lows and only one high. That is grounds for most folks to say: why are you here? We could find someone better.

We need the score to be average or higher. The choice we have to make is which score will define our character as their main value? Assuming we gave our example a 3, we would see them as someone who handles others fairly but isn't exactly the life of the party. When they succeed, they might boast a little. When they fail, they might blame someone else, if only briefly.

Our 2,4,3 character is interesting but isn't very distinctive. They're good at what they do, and they're OK to hang out with, but they won't do anything for you. Change those numbers round, so a 4, 3,2 and you get someone who will do stuff for the party, will do an OK job at it, but won't talk, or will be grumpy and dismissive. That's a great NPC butler.

If we make a more heroic character, a Player Character and we up those numbers to 2, 4, 4 suddenly a very different figure emerges. Let's do a 4, 2, 4 version. The character will volunteer, will do things for others, but just not very well. Perhaps they'll make sandwiches for everyone using tuna and marmalade except that they ran out of bread, so it's in a tub and can be eaten like a paste. They're very apologetic about it, tell a joke about a tuna being like a piano only you can't tuna a fish, and offer to buy everyone drinks.

That's a memorable character.

These scores are interesting, especially if you apply them to yourself. I'd say I'm a 4, 2, 4 personally. Most folks tell me I do way too much work and stuff and put in huge amounts of effort, but I don't think I've very good at many things, so I'd drop my score there, and people say I'm a good friend and easy to get along with, hence my social score. Now, ask your friends to score you and see what they give you...

**IT TAKES COURAGE TO STEP OUTSIDE OF YOUR
COMFORT ZONE – BE BOLD, PLAY HARD.**

APPLYING THE SCORE TO YOUR CHARACTER

As with everything we cover in this journey, we now need to apply these scores to our character's backstory. What are the numbers you choose and why? How do those values interact with your personality type? What makes that interesting for you to play? You will need to remember these values when playing the game and apply them from time to time.

Linis Cositsi

Just reading her backstory makes me think she's a 4 4 2 character. She is proactive, skilled, but a little cold and judgmental. Let me apply it to her backstory.

Born on the GSC Yaaltru in '46, my dad, Yorvin, my co-dad Tym, and my mom Hythia were just overjoyed, naturally. So was I! I was alive and I was going to achieve great things! What a time to be born in too. There was so much going on in the quadrant and the 'Tru was right in the middle of it. Cataloging gaseous formations about J class planets. Yorvin died when I was about 10, I don't remember exactly. I was doing a science camp at the time. That was in 57, so I must have been 11. My co-dad and mom were sad. It was an accident which none of them could have prevented so I don't know why they were so bothered by it. It did make me think of my own future partner. A husband seems like a lot of unnecessary work, but... if I join with an existing couple, and become a co-wife, then I'll have the benefits of a family with like, only half the work? Or at least, someone to share my work with? Work comes first.

Tym and Hythia were huge influences in my life. Tym, an accomplished medical doctor and Hythia a leading botanist set a high standard, but one I could easily reach. They were so supportive of me joining the fleet, but both seemed... unimpressed that I went into physics. Possibly because I eclipsed their own work within a year of graduating. I released a paper on the spectral dynamics of gaseous phenomena within binary star clusters. I won several awards for the paper. We don't talk much now. No common ground intellectually really. But I still love them, despite their flaws.

The Yaaltru became my family. There's Gwen, she's awesome. A total maverick when it comes to sublimation system dynamics. Yoshi, a sweetheart, and a great athlete. He's in security. Maddocks is in science with me, he's smart, almost as smart as I am. His focus is on cybernetics but understanding it as an AI not as a machine. We're on beta shift, so I don't get to spend much time with the senior officers but our Chief of Science, T'vail, is exceptional. Her scientific knowledge is peerless. I am impressed. And will one day replace her.

Regarding gaseous formations there is so much going on inside them it's awe inspiring. My studies have been on-going for six months. We're on a five-year tour. I'm planning to make Lieutenant by the end of it. I have taken on additional duties to ensure my record is exemplary. My aim is to impress T'vail, and somehow win the J'ama tournament (J'ama

is a Borikian card game. Yoshi seems to be able to read my mind and is the current champion).

4 years into the mission and suddenly my vision started to get blurry. Sub-Commander Dex, the chief medical officer, ran every test they knew. Fleet Medical also didn't know what was happening to me either. Ironically my science is making me go blind! The gas samples I was examining were emitting a spectral frequency that destroys Borikian optic nerves. I'm officially off the project. In good news, Hoshi finally lost J'ama to me. Dex says I should get my eyesight back... soonish. I remain unconvinced as their competence. I've heard there is a position opening up on the Temeter. They're not cataloging gas giants; however, my experience will be invaluable to them.

I miss Gwen, Yoshi, and Maddocks so much. My new crew are less than exemplary. My eyesight is back, although I can now see partially into the infra-red spectrum thanks to the ocular implants I had to have. Nothing major. But I can tell hot and cold now by looking at it. The Stargazer is average. The first officer is a bit of a tight arse. I'm sure he will realize my abilities and assign me more engaging work than I currently have. I gave Hoshi my J'ama cards. My mother and father are back in my life, annoyingly. Tym was worried about the eye damage and made a special trip to examine them himself. Of course, he couldn't find a cure either, but at least suggested the ocular implants as a temporary solution. Mother is looking for a botanical solution to restore my eyesight. They seem to accept me; little comfort knowing that I'm being wasted on the Temeter.

I didn't make Lieutenant as I'd hoped, the eye damage is proving a major hinderance to my advancement. I have a new plan: The confederacy is a big organization with a lot of species that all react to natural phenomena differently. I want to develop a helmet for use in the field that will be 100% protective. It would ensure no one has to go through what I did. I'm not an engineer but I know the science. I need to take scans of all the species in the Fleet to build up a catalogue of weakness to various effects. Then once I have that data, I can begin working on how to protect against those effects.

Quite a lot of changes which really make Linis look like a very different Borikian! It has washed away her cavalier and upbeat nature and replaced it with someone who seems a lot more cynical, and self-assured in nature. She will still be a fun character to interact with, as she knows her job and she gets stuff done but do not ask her to speak her mind, otherwise you'll find yourself getting some very honest answers.

ENCOUNTER

Time to apply those scores to your character. What is your Proactive, competent and social score and how does that retroactively affect your character's backstory and mechanical stats?

50 XP

DOES A LOW SOCIAL SCORE GIVE YOU AN EXCUSE TO BE AN ARSEHOLE?

I had to use the word because any other would be too polite and not express the intensity of hatred that I level at people who think this answer to be a yes. A character with a Social score of 1 might be incredibly grumpy, might swear at others, may be a bigot or a racist or a homophobic hypocrite but that doesn't mean they will be like that to everyone. They will have a circle of friends or family that they 'relax' a bit around. It could also be that they are only a monster to those specific groups, and not to other groups.

A grumpy character might bark at anyone who comes close, but they won't let a child starve to death or torture an innocent for answers. Maybe they hate

other people, but they'll be kind to animals. To allow any values (mechanical or otherwise) to act as a defense against being a horrid character is simply being lazy. Characters are more complex.

It also doesn't mean that a character with a poor Social score is unaware they have a poor score. If your character is always depressed, they probably know they are always depressed. If they treat others badly, they know they are doing it (unless they have some kind of sociopathy going on). Your character can be snarky, grouchy, grumpy, horrid, etc. but they must also have redeeming actions from time to time. A teenager who is selfish must, once in a while, do something extremely kind or unselfish. A moment of sunshine amidst the darkness.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS...

We're going to look at Destiny and character growth in another chapter, but it is worth noting now that these PCS values will help you to create your charac-

ter growth. Thinking about them now will be of major benefit. Having at least one low score will really give you an advantage. But more on that later.



ATTITUDE

Your character should always have an attitude, and often this will just be your attitude as the player. It is a challenge to have a different attitude for your PC but that is true roleplaying. There are four basic attitudes that we express: Positive, Negative, Neutral and Sikken.

Positive attitudes are easy to play. Nothing is too daunting; the world will survive, and everything will work out in the end. This doesn't mean you will 'Mary Poppins' your character through life, singing merry tunes in the face of dark evil. It means that fundamentally your character believes that the right thing will prevail, even if times are tough right now.

Positive attitudes do not require perpetual joy and happiness. Positive minds know that sometimes there are difficulties and troubles that seem impossible to overcome. However, with an accepting and a positive attitude, anything can be worked through and eventually overcome. Positive attitudes are without doubt the best attitude for a PC to have. It keeps them energized, motivated, and directed.

Negative attitudes see failure as a constant, but will continue to try, nonetheless. Negative attitudes haven't given up, they just expect to fail. A character can have a negative attitude and still succeed. In which case they will assume that success is merely setting

up an even greater failure for the future. The attitude will seek the poorest outcome. A PC with a negative attitude needs to be on a path of redemption. We'll talk about the Destiny of the character later, but a negative attitude should be temporary (as in a couple of sessions) and should slowly shift to a positive attitude throughout the game.

Neutral attitudes won't commit. These are the fence-sitters. The characters who avoid making decisions because they do not know which will lead to an outcome. They often procrastinate or wait for the world to make their decisions for them. Any outcome that didn't require input is deemed the one that was most likely to happen anyway. Although a neutral attitude seems to be a negative. This attitude is a dull way to play a character. Never committing to anything and avoiding choices will often leave the character doing nothing at all. This can be incredibly frustrating for the GM and for your fellow players.

A Sikken attitude is a self-destructive attitude that actively seeks to isolate and destroy the character. Aggressive behavior towards others, an apathetic approach to life and a desire to see everything and everyone else fail is often part of this attitude. Whilst this attitude makes for an interesting character it can only ever be used in conjunction with a character destiny plan that is incredibly robust.

ATTITUDES CHANGE

Your character's attitude should change over time. A positive attitude should change to a negative attitude, a neutral attitude should shift to a positive or a negative, and a Sikken attitude should shift to a positive one. How quick is a matter of finesse. Once per adventure? That seems too radical, although you have to ask – how long is an adventure.

The attitude should also shift again in a flow to simulate how we go through periods of positivity, negativity, and neutrality. This is why it is often easy for us to simply use our own attitude for our PC. It means we don't need to think about it. That's fine. Although, to actively be in a negative mood, sit down at the table, and be forced to play someone who is upbeat and enthusiastic may just help you to lighten your own mood. I know as a GM; I frequently go into a session with a bad attitude and by the end of it my mood has shifted, and the bad world seems a little less so.

Aside from any therapeutic value, the character's attitude should be linked to events happening within the game. If the PCs are succeeding, and making progress all characters should be shifting to a positive

attitude or having a really hard time maintaining their negative attitude. In novels, films, and TV shows made after the 1990's, we see characters go on these journeys and we sympathize with them as we see their attitudes change for justifiable reasons.

We also worry for them when their attitude slumps into a negative space and seems intractable. This is good character development and reflects a well-rounded character, a real character. If you are consciously driving your characters' attitudes and playing those attitudes in game, then you are going to have an amazing time. And your character will grow and be much more real than you could imagine.

Before we jump back to our rolling example of characters, we need to talk about their world view.

ENCOUNTER

What is it to be? What is your character's general attitude? Is that reflected in your backstory? Where does it come from? And what is your plan if it changes (or if it must change)?

50 XP

WORLDVIEW

The worldview of your character is similar to your attitude but isn't emotionally locked, it's factually positioned and can change over time but very, very slowly. The world view is how your character sees the world and the people in it. Unlike an attitude which can be applied to yourself and to others, worldview is almost exclusively applied to others.

Your worldview is influenced by your characters' upbringing, their experiences, and their education. Worldviews tend to only change when the character gets a giant update that they cannot deny. A character who believes that all elves are to be killed on sight because they are evil (and they have held this belief because, from birth, they've been told to hate the evil elves) will not be happy with an elf joining the party. They may be outwardly hostile, and inwardly hating. Or they may appear friendly but plot the elf's death.

Only when the elf has saved the PC from certain death will the PC begin to change their worldview on elves. Perhaps this elf is different from all the others. Once the PC has encountered a dozen more good elves, their view might expand to: perhaps elves are OK, and I was wrong? Finally, the worldview would shift to: Elves are like everyone else, some good, some bad, you gotta judge people based upon the individual not on a blanket cover for all.

That is a worldview journey and part of what we're going to look at later, but the worldview can shift. Not always. Equally valid is a worldview that everyone is innocent and pure and amazing. This worldview might shift as the naïve character learns the sad tragedy of reality.

Adopting a worldview for your character should take a little time and will not be a complete process when you start playing. You can't consider all the variables in the world. You don't know them all, so how can you form a worldview on them? You want to have a general answer for the following areas:

- Other species
- Special abilities/powers/talents
- Political positions
- Religion
- Purpose of existence
- Sex
- Freewill

These are pretty broad topics but cover a pretty good number of options. When your character encounters something new, they should compare the new against their preconceived worldview and decide where it sits. For ease I'd suggest applying one of these as the standard position your character adopts on each of the topics: Dead against, against, neutral, supportive, strongly supportive. I wouldn't try to do this for everything you know in the world-space, you can add to the list as you go. As with the PCs values, being neutral towards everything will create a bland character who basically has no opinion of the world. That doesn't help you create amazing stories or real characters.

When you combine these categories together you get a well-rounded worldview for your character. Link that to their attitude and you have a character who has an opinion and the attitude to back it up.

OTHER SPECIES

When it comes to other species in many TTRPGs there are dozens of sentient species in the worldspace. Aliens, elves, dwarves, and so on. All co-existing in some state or another. The worldview your PC holds on other species should be species specific and culturally broad as most TTRPGs have mono-culture species. All orcs are like this, every Carebear is like that culturally. A PC might be dead against pointed-eared species but strong supportive of flying species.

SPECIAL ABILITIES/POWERS/TALENTS

This could be magic if fantasy is part of the world, it could be extra-planer invaders, it might be mutants, it could be a group of individuals who can tap into a universal force - whatever it is, this is the unnatural. Does your character have an opinion on folks who

can do this stuff? Perhaps your character is neutral towards mind-controlling powers, but against potion magic. You need to have reasons why of course but it gives the character complexity.

POLITICAL POSITIONS

I'm not hoping to start a fight. Talking politics always raises tempers but how does your character feel about the current ruling power? For it? Against it? Don't care so long as it doesn't get in the way? The Star Wars saga has this worldview as one of its central themes and it creates interesting conflict. Should your PC fly into a rage if anyone questions their politics? It makes for interesting roleplaying but can be tedious if done too often. You should have a 'kill switch' that your PC recognizes as a step too far and so stops talking politics.

RELIGION

In TTRPGs where there is a deity, or pantheon of gods, or a higher power, your character needs to have an opinion on the matter. It could be indifference. When a god can grant spells to loyal followers, or smite their enemies, belief is no longer required. Adherence is. The rules of the religion will have a significant impact on those who are strongly supportive of their religion. Those who don't care might be neutral, and those who are dead against might actively try to 'convert' those who are religious away from their gods.

PURPOSE OF EXISTENCE

This is a big one that many, many players tend to ignore, and it leads to poor roleplaying: the value of a life. In most TTRPGs the idea is to kill the NPCs who are evil or blocking the PCs path. If your PC believes that there is no purpose to life, and that life is cheap, then killing someone because they are in your way is perfectly fine. On the other hand, a PC who values life should never allow an NPC – no matter what their actions – to be slaughtered. This stems from the purpose of existence answer. If there is purpose, then all life is important.

SEX

This extends beyond procreation. Although having thoughts on that can lead to some interesting story options. Chaste bards, nymphomaniac priests and the like might be a bit of fun and a different take on the stereotype, but sex in this context is also on gender roles – is there equality or disparity? What does your PC think and why? This is often heavily tied to the TTRPG, and if you are playing in a 'real world' setting, such as the Victorian period of Earth you may find this choice quite important.

FREEWILL

The notion of whether or not beings have freewill is a really fun and fundamental worldview to explore. If there is Freewill then it means that the future is not

predetermined, there is no such thing as Fate, and chance rules the universe. If there is no such thing, then everything happens for a reason, and the PC and everyone else are merely playing out what must happen. In game terms, the goblin was meant to die by the PCs axe this day.

Braon Bloodshrike

Braon will have a **Negative attitude** to begin with. His worldview will be the following (adjusted by his attitude):

Other species – Distrust of all other species, none care about anything but money. Honor is dead in other species.

Special abilities – Magic caused his whole life to change, special powers are a curse and should be shunned or wiped out.

Political – A true leader should be strong, wise, and always have the clan's best interests at heart, anything less should result in death. Although the world seems to embrace those who are full of treachery, lies and deceit.

Religion – The gods might be up there, but they don't care about mortal affairs. They demand tribute and they shall get nothing more. They are cruel and should not be trusted.

Purpose – Live an honorable life, protect the clan, ensure the next generation thrives and continues to uphold clan values, everything dies and is judged according to their deeds. The worthy return to teach others, the unworthy return as prey or food. He may not be worthy since he failed his clan.

Sex – Equal share, equal expectation, each to their own. He'll never know love again.

Freewill – Your heart forges your future; a dark heart leads to a dark future.

ENCOUNTER

What is your worldview? What is your characters' worldview and how does their backstory make it truthful?

50 XP

WHAT GROSSES YOUR CHARACTER OUT?

QUIRKS, SETBACKS AND UNIQUE BITS

Each of us has a collection of things that are fairly common, and we have a host of things that are unusual to us. Some of these are non-invasive and remain private and known only to ourselves and our closest friends or partners. Others are much more obvious and can almost become a defining trait that most folks think of when they think of us. These make us real. That means our characters need them too. How

extreme is up to you. The term 'normal' is made up by scared people hoping to force themselves to act in a certain way rather than expressing their truth... at least that's what my inner goblin believes.

When we look at the different types of character defining habits or descriptors we have three broad categories: Quirks, Setbacks and Unique Bits. These provide us with our limits and prevent us from going too far.

QUIRKS

These are little things that your character does physically. They are not compulsions they are habits. Whistling a tune when impressed, licking lips when focusing, chewing on hair when depressed. Any of these could be quirks and there are literally thousands of options. Praying to a shrine each night, humming a tune, eye-twitching when telling the truth - the sky is the limit.

Most characters will have a single major quirk (if they have one). These also tend not to change throughout a character's lifetime, although they might be modified over time. Unless of course there is something significant that happens: someone who always strokes their beard will need to find something else to do when thinking if their beard is shaved off.

Quirks are generally not going to get in the way of the character's general ability to function and should be a flavor that you add to the character for pure description and 'truth' reasons. During play you wouldn't need to express the quirk every second. Merely as and when the character would naturally do it. And once the other Players begin to anticipate it, then you can hint at it, rather than go through the full description.

Jake Perolta from *Brooklyn 99* had a catchphrase: Coolcoolcoolcoolcool. He would repeat the word cool, mostly when the situation was not cool at all. William Riker, from *Star Trek* would place his one leg on a higher surface when standing and thinking (this was actually due to a setback of the actor, Jonathan Frakes who had back problems and couldn't stand for long times without raising his leg). Gandalf, from the *Lord of the Rings* blowing smoke rings and smoking his pipeweed is another example of a quirk.

SETBACKS

Unlike a quirk, a Setback is a genuinely debilitating trait that your character can have. It might be that they are paralyzed or have major anxiety. Although we look at all setbacks as opportunities to discover

strengths in other areas, setbacks generally have a negative influence on the characters day-to-day activities. Merfolk who have to be covered in water for a 1 hour at least every 24 hours would count as a setback. Vampires and the sun are another example.

The impact of setbacks should be offset with how your character has learned to overcome those setbacks. The challenge with making a setback a truth, however, is that from time to time your character must suffer a failure as a result of that setback. Most TTRPGs don't have rules for setbacks (there are some that very much do). This means you'll need to play out the setback or work with the GM to establish some rules on how it might work.

A character who has a stutter might find that whenever they need to make a Speaking roll in game, they have a major negative. However, if they can sing it they gain a positive as their voice is so clear. A character who is missing a limb might not be able to climb the wall into the prison, but perhaps is less likely to be watched by guards who assume the character incapable due to disability.

Setbacks should cause complications. Be careful however, as the setback needs to be one that can be overcome or worked around in most cases. Why? A character who has too extreme a setback with no means of overcoming it will begin to hinder the rest of the party which can become frustrating. The harsh reality of the game is that the PCs are going on an adventure and don't want to stop every time to reach a stream or running water because the vampire PC can't cross it without being in a coffin. Apply the setback and have solutions to most problems; keep the dramatic difficulties for a few moments throughout the campaign.

Professor Xavier from the X-Men is a good example of a setback: he cannot use his legs. He is very much part of the X-Men but doesn't go on field missions as he knows he would probably be more of a liability than an asset. However, when he is forced to go out and loses his means of movement, he must improvise. These are rare occurrences.

Fat characters in most TV shows will constantly have the setback of not being able to run great distances, or vault over low obstacles like their healthier counterparts. Whilst this is very true (I can't recall ever vaulting anything), it is a setback. This is often used for comedy in the show but there are times when the character's weight is useful.

UNIQUE BITS

These are the true moments of creative expression as they will very seldom come up in game play but when they do, they are truly moments of gold. A unique bit is meant to be just that: in a world of magic, wings are not unique. In a sci-fi setting a cyborg eyeball is not unique. Things like: a bifurcated tongue (in a species not normally associated with split tongues), or a third nipple (roughly 6% of the USA have supernumerary nipples [more than 2]).

Double-jointed fingers, a condition I have, freaks out most folks who don't have them, and when I do meet people who are also double-jointed a minor competition begins to see who can bend their finger the most usually ensues. It comes up more often than I'd expect but still only once a year maybe.

Unique bits shouldn't be a standard on your character. These should be occasional and only hinted at.

Usually, folk prefer to hide unique bits. A missing set of ribs or a bonus toe usually are hidden away – we don't like others to think of us as being different. This is a great roleplaying opportunity and also an excellent means of showing that we shouldn't care what others think and realize our unique bits make us who we are, and we should cherish them.

Broan Bloodshrike

Quirk: He whittles spears when not busy

Setback: He will not sleep in the shadow of a cliff

Linis Cositsi

Unique bit: She has poor eyesight but can see infra-red

Brendon Crawly

Quirk: Drinks milk over alcohol

Setback: Loud explosions make him feint

ENCOUNTER

Is it a quirk? A setback? Or a unique little idiosyncrasy? Explain where it comes from and how it affects your character.

25 XP



CHAPTER 6: DESIGNING YOUR CHARACTER'S DESTINY

You character destiny is already mostly built: you have your character goals, and you have all the guidelines you now want on how they are going to achieve that goal. You also have their current attitude and that will affect how their plan is followed and also needs to shift and change throughout the game.

You also have the game and, depending on why type of campaign you are in, your GM may also

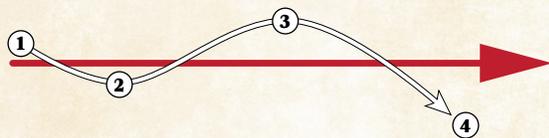
have a big story plan. Usually within the TTRPG space the biggest plan of all is: the PCs succeed at story. Very few have the outcome of a game as: the PCs fail. Even TTRPGs where that is almost a 'requirement', Call of Cthulhu for example, the mechanics exist to avoid that, and good GMs should seek to ensure that a success is a possibility, however remote.

THE JOURNEY

So why do we need to look at designing a destiny? Surely it should organically unfold. I would say that in most instances I'd be screaming for this and decrying any kind of preconceived plan. That's if you think about a destiny as being a destination. But if you think about a destiny as being a set of touchpoints for you as the player to explore and dip into as and when you need, then suddenly having a destiny makes a lot more sense.

What do I mean by this? Touch-points? What?

In writing, characters often have an S curve journey. They start at the bottom of the S as far away from their goals and dreams as possible, and then they begin (in the story) to get close to their goal. However, a major setback then pushes them away from their goal, in fact, so far from their goal that it seems like they'll never be able to get to their goal. But, with hard work and determination, the character, having eventually fought their way back finally achieves their goal, but is a different person from when they began (having learned lessons along the journey).



1. The character starts their story as far from their goal as possible.
2. The character is about to achieve their goal and has never been closer.
3. A major setback hurtles the character to a place further away from their goal than ever without much hope of getting their goal.
4. They realize their initial goal was flawed and discover what they truly need and go on a journey to reach it.

The red line is the story that is unfolding with all the PCs. The dotted line is the character journey that is unique to your character. *

You can't control this in a TTRPG. You have no idea when the game is going to end, only the GM really has any power there. Your story doesn't have to conclude when the game's story concludes, and that is something that we can control.

If we then take the S curve and begin to use it as a guide to our character's destiny, we personally create these points we can aim for. As we hit those points we reassess where our character is, what they are doing, and how things are progressing.

It also means that we are looking at the game story and comparing that to our characters head-space. The game may be following a similar path (by GM design or just naturally), and so you can then compare. You can then decide based upon your touchpoint and the game states what your character would be doing and feeling.

But to ensure that your character isn't static but constantly growing and adjusting to the world they are in (like we do in real-life) you need to move your character when the time is appropriate and when your S curve plan suggests it happens. It isn't a requirement; it's a gentle reminder for you. There is an example at the end of the next section to hopefully help explain this all better.

*In reality the main game's story line should also be an S curve of emotional highs and lows of excitement and tension and release and relaxation. But that makes it very complex for this example.

OBJECTIVES

Your character has plans, you as the player should set yourself objectives. This is what I'd call the pinnacle of creative playing by the way. This is usually reserved for novelists and filmmakers, but I believe there is scope for it within gaming.

Your objectives for your character should tie in with what you want to explore about the character. All story is about the character and how they handle the situation they are in. If you think about any commercial film, TV series, play, novel, comic book, web comic, whatever – imagine replacing the main character with someone completely different? How would that completely change the story?

Instead of Harry Potter you have Bart Simpson. Both school kids, both male, both trying to live their life. Harry wouldn't be a timid or impressionable youth; he'd be a cocky rebel. "Screw you Snape! I'm done with Hogwarts man." The story can still unfold, but how the new Barry (Bart/Harry) faces Voldemort might be totally different.

What objectives can you set for your PC then? Objectives tend to be explorations. As a creative individual you might ask the question: what would I do, and how would I behave if I was able to use magic but had an awful background? How would I react to discovering that my life is a lie?

These are deep questions, hence the term exploration – you'll be looking critically at your objective and applying it to your character frequently. There is a lot of talk on the therapeutic properties of roleplaying and how many folks use it to explore themselves but in a different skin. I've spoken about this before and now is when it becomes really relevant.

A lot of my experience with folks exploring objectives are of gender or sexuality. It might just be because I'm known to be an LGBT advocate, or perhaps it's just that I was diverse friends, I don't know. I also didn't know that most of them were exploring their own identities through their characters. And their exploration is usually along the lines of: will the other PCs / players find this acceptable? Will they still want my PC in the game?

When you translate that objective onto our S curve what we get is a character who starts in position 1 wanting to explore a relationship with the same sex (as an example). By section 2 they have been rejected. Section 3 would indicate that the character tries to have a heterosexual relationship and actually finds some joy in it. But they are not fulfilled, so they then begin to try again and this time they learn that if they accept themselves, all the other stuff (relationships) will resolve themselves (this is at point 4). This is if we are writing a novel and can control this.

In a TTRPG we might start the character as single and trying to find love in all the wrong places. Then, they make a move on the NPC prince. Now, in an actual TTRPG game, the GM does not know your objectives and may have the prince response amicably. Does this mean that your character is suddenly finished and has reached point 4?

Nope. The S curve is a guide. So, what must the character do? Or what must happen to the character? The curve says that from point 2 the character must suffer a setback that pushes them so far that they reach a point that it does not seem as if they can return from it.

You have two choices: involve the GM or look at your objective. Asking your GM to have the prince begin to betray your character or be dismissive of your character is one thing, and the GM may choose to do that but it's an imposition especially if the GM has their own plans for the NPC.

I would always suggest you discuss your objectives with your GM anyway, so they have an idea of what is happening. So that means you must look at your objective. The S curve says your character should nearly get or get what they wanted and then lose it, only to realize that what they wanted is not what they really needed.

In our rolling example then, the character might realize that what they are after is not the prince. As the prince is still not making them feel complete. They are after something else. This could be a great chance for the PC to break it off with the prince (to the surprise of the other players and the prince). Your character might then decide that they will never love another, and they are the problem, pushing them to the 3 position.

Now the character needs to begin to learn to love himself. Celebrating little moments, taking pride and joy in their own work, accepting compliments and so on. Whatever you feel self-love is about. That means at some point your character will find love and happiness within himself. And then the prince can come back, or better yet, someone else that the character was dismissive of earlier.

Can you see how the S curve helped us to create a much more dynamic and interesting story not by controlling our character, but by guiding our creativity to find a path? Set yourself an objective for the character and see how it might play out on an S curve.

ENCOUNTER

Create a basic S-curve and plot out a few points on it. Are they interesting points? Could they be fun for the rest of the party to play through? What happens if one of these moments is impossible because of what happens in-game?

100 XP

RELATIONSHIPS

Tis a dark territory that we enter into now. Classically when the hero meets other folks who all work with the hero, the hero will end up in a relationship with one of them. This is cliched as you can get but is the basis of the majority of our narratives. It stems from the fact that as humans, we often meet our significant others, and one-night stands, and our friends whilst working together. That's when we get to spend time with others and learn about them and develop feelings for them. In the case of a roleplaying game however, how many of us expect our character to fall in love with another PC?

It's almost a taboo thought. The reason is simple: it's weird for two friends to pretend to have a relationship between each other. Well, technically it isn't between the two friends at the table it's between the two imaginary PCs. Because those PCs are so closely linked to us however, the transference is easy, if both players are not roleplaying but just playing themselves. Good role players will separate PC from player.

Actors who must form relationships on stage or on screen often do things to one another that are very intimate still maintain a working relationship and know that the actor is not the character. We are not professional actors, and we cannot expect our fellow players to be either. I still don't think that's a valid enough excuse not to explore PC on PC relationships.

I'm not talking about intimate relationships either. PC on PC action is not the goal of most TTRPG groups. Mother and son, close friends, family, these are often not explored and yet can be so powerful.

Why are we talking about relationships anyway? Relationships involve another character, and by definition another player. Relationships can also fall neatly onto our character destiny S curve. Instead of having an objective to explore you might want to explore the relationship. If this is with another PC, you must make sure to constantly check in with your fellow player. Keep them updated and you can jointly have an S curve destiny that you work on together.

TO OTHER PCs

At the end of this section is a table for rolling random relationships with other PCs, and column C is about the close relationships that could be used on an S Curve. Your characters would need to begin to admire one another. Whilst you should be supporting all other characters, if you and your fellow player have chosen to work together, then you need to begin to build that.

A mention of how your character likes the way the other PC moves in battle, or small flirtations are usual. Then the relationship builds until you hit point 2. This is when the characters get together, as seemingly close as they can be. One, or both characters should have something that doesn't sit right with them.

It could be any number of things, look to your PCs worldviews or attitudes for help here. Is there something that could begin to drive a wedge between

them? This should build and divide until the PCs fight and split apart.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN YOUR PC LEAVES THE PARTY. Yes, I shouted that in caps. Your PC must have a reason for staying with the party. Begrudgingly, or with strong limits on how close the other PC can be to them at all times, whatever you and your fellow players find fun and interesting. Your character relationship should very seldom impose failure on the party. If your characters are selected for the mission and they hate one another, on one mission it might be fun to have that hatred ruin the mission because they couldn't work together. But that should act as the catalyst to force them to resolve their issue for the sake of the world/party.

Once they have realized that is more to life than the issue that split them apart, they can begin to swing back to 4 or form a different relationship and help one another achieve 4 with other PCs or NPCs.

NEED INSPIRATION FOR A CHARACTER? WHICH CHARACTER FROM WHICH FILM DID YOU LIKE THE MOST? MAKE THAT CHARACTER AND PLAY THEM NEXT.

THE RELATIONSHIP BUILDER

You can randomly roll a 1d10 on this table to form relationships with your fellow players. There are three levels of relationship: Casual, Invested, and Intimate. This does not reflect the sexual status of the relationship but the knowledge and emotional connection of the relationship. Best Friends won't be sexually active but will have the same emotional ties as Husband/

Wife, and the same knowledge (if not better) than Lovers or Sacred Oath makers.

Decide beforehand with your fellow players how far you want to take these relationships. Not all relationships should be intimate either. Most should be Invested or Casual, with only one or two being more complex. Whatever your status is, this should inform part of your character's approach to that character.

1d10	CASUAL	1d10	INVESTED	1d10	INTIMATE
1	Employer/Employee	1	Partners	1	Siblings
2	Childhood Friends	2	Guild Brothers	2	Secretly in Love
3	Political/Theological Allies	3	Uncle/Aunt	3	Deadly Secret
4	Co-Workers	4	Stepsister/Brother	4	Lovers
5	Secret Cult	5	Hated Rivals	5	Sacred Oath Bond
6	Neighbors	6	Cousins	6	Parent
7	Trained Together	7	Friends	7	Best Friends
8	Distant Relatives	8	In-laws	8	Sole Survivors
9	Friendly Rivals	9	Same Team	9	Married
10	Prison Mates	10	Mentor/Mentee	10	Roll again and roll on one other relationship column for a double bond



CASUAL RELATIONSHIPS

These relationships are not strong but form a good basis from which a relationship might deepen. The PCs know one another and have some limited expectations of each other. In all the cases you should look at adding in a little piece of common history for you both (a name and a place and an incident will do).

Employer/Employee: You work together and might know one another's name but haven't spent a great deal of time together. Possibly once or twice had a brief conversation in a hallway or at a company event. When adventuring together the question becomes: does the relationship make it awkward? Does it remain employer/employee, or does it slowly grow into a Partner or Same Team relationship?

Childhood Friends: Not the best of friends but part of the friendship group. Occasionally hanging out together and discussing irrelevant day-to-day things. These friends didn't remain in contact after they began their adult life and so would have plenty of history to reminisce about but not much more. Have they remained the same or have they changed since childhood, and will the relationship grow into something like Friends or shift into Hated Rivals?

Political/Theological Allies: Being on the same team, part of the same rebellion gives plenty of common ground but not much scope for anything more than a causal relationship. Much like employer/employee, these Allies were on the same cause, but the power dynamic is more equal with both working for the same outcome. Now that they must adventure together, does this change? Does it deepen or have political views changed?

Co-workers: Very similar to Political Allies, although here the bond is not ideological it is practical. Working together but not as part of the same team. The packer and the cleaner for example, might have shared a cigarette once or laughed at the same joke about the boss, but nothing more. This familiarity is a doorway to something more.

Secret Cult: Secret Cults might gather regularly but often the members are kept secret from one another: masks, hoods, and so on. These two recognize a symbol or sign made by the other and discover they are, or were, both in the same cult. Are they still part of it? Or perhaps they have put the Cult behind them?

Neighbors: Sharing a common boundary, even if it is just a stone wall, makes neighbors aware of each other. Provided no one caused any trouble the relationship is amicable. If you were the other PCs neighbor, what common issues did you have? And how do you feel now that you are both adventure bound?

Trained Together: The training, military, academic, or cultural is often intense and doesn't allow for more than a few nods, some half-chatter, and the occasional midnight conversation. It does instill a common set of values and a very specific shared experience. Has the training carried on or does your PC regret it? How will they feel meeting someone from the same class?

Distant Relatives: A second cousin, or a fifth removed aunt is still family, and there is still a sense of loyalty and support that comes with that. But neither have been in each other's lives at all, only knowing of one another by way of parents or the annual family gathering. Do these two characters share a common love or hatred for other family members? Do they relish the family get-together or hate it?

Friendly Rivals: These antagonists do it for the fun of it. It helps focus them to think of someone else they can beat. They don't know much about one another but are competing in some way: sports, work, titles, whatever. They see the other as someone worth respecting and definitely worth defeating. Will they put their challenges aside and become friends? Or will it deepen into resentment?

Prison Mates: Being held in a jail or prison for a time forms a unique bond: Both PCs were involved (or were framed for) in a crime of some sort, both were captured, and both served time. There is an acceptance between these characters that transcends many friendships. There is also a total indifference if one PC was wrongly incarcerated or if the sentences were different lengths. Will these felons unite or pretend it never happened?

ENCOUNTER

You should have at least one casual relationship within the party. Pick a player and ask them to join you in a casual relationship. Roll for it, choose it, or create your own, and work out the details.

50 XP

**MADE A MISTAKE? FORGOT A CHARACTER GOAL? THAT'S OK!
WE ALL DO THAT SOMETIMES. PICK UP WHERE YOU LEFT OFF AND HAVE FUN!**

INVESTED RELATIONSHIPS

These relationships would begin the game with the PCs already working together or joining the adventuring party together (in most cases). Or upon first meeting are instantly working together easily. The bond they have is strong and they were part of each other's lives before the adventure and hope to remain that way. There is definite care between these characters and that should be expressed throughout the game.

Partners: Business ventures are always risky and whatever it was that these two PCs started together took a lot of effort to get up and running. Is it still going on? Did they invest in a starship and that forms the basis of the adventuring party coming together? Perhaps they run a mercenary band for hire? If the business doesn't work out, what is their next plan?

Guild Brothers: Spending time as part of a guild, going through the training, and remaining as part of the guild combines a lot of casual relationship options together to form a stronger bond. These brothers are united in loyalty to the guild and one another. They have spent time working and playing together and have a common history. What is the guild? Who was your collective Master? Are you both still part of the guild? What are the leaving conditions?

Uncle/Aunt: Unlike distant relatives, the Uncle/Niece relationship or Aunt/Nephew combination or any thereof is, in this case, a deeper bond. Time has been invested from both sides over a lifetime. The older Uncle/Aunt might feel some paternal responsibility over the niece/nephew. Conversely the niece or nephew may feel obliged to protect their parents' sibling.

Stepsister/Brother: This depends on how close the family was and how the 'step' side was viewed by the original family. This can often be caused by distrust, loathing, or resentment. It can also be amicable and friendly, and a true bond exists. There should be shades of it all laced into this relationship. Are the parents still alive and together?

Hated Rivals: Friendly rivals hold no grudges and use their rivalry to push themselves harder. Hated rivals want to see the other fail. How does this work within a party of adventurers? These two have a long history of dislike and yet, something is forcing them to work together. A greater shared hatred? These two should remain rivals, slowly devolving into Friendly Rivals, and then finally shifting towards friends. It's a long journey and one that shouldn't sabotage the party or its plans. What happened in the past to get the two PCs to hate each other?

Cousins: Just like friends but with that intractable addition of being blood-relations and the duty that comes with that to family. Cousins can be close friends, indifferent associates or somewhere in between. The difference is that they've grown up knowing about one another and hearing about one another for their whole lives and that forms a bond. How close were their parents? Did they meet monthly? Share the same village?

Friends: Having a good friend is very rewarding but takes effort. One must actively participate in that person's life, seeking to help them and accepting help from them. There is a history of mutual support and kindness. Of shared burdens, hopes and dreams. These friends spend a good deal of time together and share everyday issues with one another.

In-laws: The cliché is a hatred for the in-laws. This is always fun and acts as a kind of rivalry but with the problem that there can be no victor without the linking person (the daughter/wife, husband/son) being hurt. So, the antagonism needs to be checked. Alternatively, there is a respect for one another, and the In-law is more like a friend. The question is: where is the character who caused this relationship to form? The wife/daughter? Another PC? An NPC left behind?

Same Team: When you work as part of the same team, be it comrades in arms, science researchers, there is a lot of time that is spent together doing tasks that have the same goal. There is also a lot of time for personal conversations and a strong bond to form. Not all teammates form this. But the afterwork drink, the shared agony of defeat and ecstasy of success can be strong unifiers. What did you both do to be part of a team? And what happened to the rest of the team?

Mentor/Mentee: These bonds were so strong that in Greek society they were happily intimate on all levels with one another. The Mentor and the Mentee see each other in each other. The Mentor hopes to shape the Mentee to avoid the mistakes they, themselves, committed and the Mentee hopes to become the Mentor. A lot of time is spent together, and bonding is unavoidable. Does this relationship remain the same throughout the campaign or does the apprentice become the master?

ENCOUNTER

This is your a-game level stuff, choose a player whom you know well, or whom you trust. Ask them for an Invested Relationship. Work it out and see what can happen. If it fits, go with it!

50 XP

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

These relationships are so interwoven that self-sacrifice and: "I'd do anything for you" statements are frequently appropriate. Whenever a situation arises where a PC is in danger, any other PC who is intimately related should be greatly concerned and willing to risk life and limb to save them (or prevent them from getting into that position in the first place). These relationships seldom devolve but can take interesting twists and turns as tensions increase. As mentioned earlier, make sure that whomever you are playing with is happy to have this kind of relationship in-game and make sure to speak with them out of game about whether they are still enjoying it, or if you're overstepping your mark.

You should also chat about creating tensions or resolving them. This is a team effort out of game to have the in-game PCs experience cool stories and events. If you have over-stepped the mark and been too familiar in the playing of your PC, do not try to defend your choices, accept that not every other player is as keen to explore these kinds of narratives as you are, and are not as dedicated to playing the PC and the relationship as a real one. Simply ease off on the amount of effort you put into the inter-PC relationship.

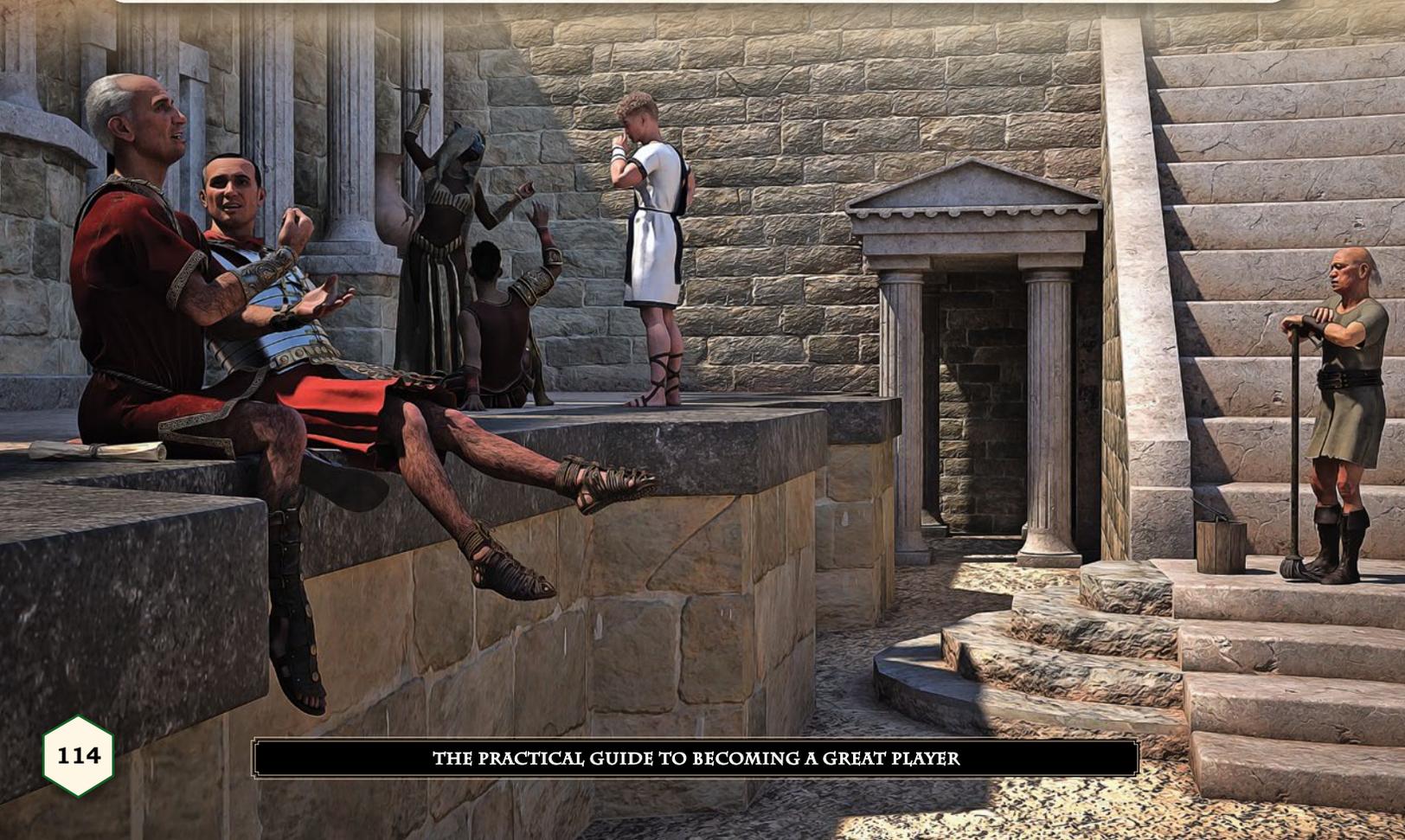
Siblings: Having grown up together and shared the same life-forming journey, and yet being independent of each other, gives siblings a perspective unique to them. They see their guardians as the

adults and each other as companions on the journey. That doesn't mean siblings cannot dislike one another, be jealous of one another or feel guilty of how they treated each other. There is a lot to explore.

Secretly in Love: Why this love must be kept secret is the real question to answer. How is it kept secret from the others? What are the ramifications if the others find out? Will it cause distrust? Will it require blood? As fun as this might be, once the secret is out, the relationship can evolve into a Lovers relationship or devolve into a Same Team or worse if the 'threat of discovery' was the only reason for the passion.

Deadly Secret: What did the two PCs do that would result in their execution? Was it murder? Treason? Did they both do it? Or did one stumble across the other and by their silence become an accomplice? Is someone hunting them? Is there a bounty on their heads? So many different options. Make sure to work it out between each other and to pose it to the GM for approval.

Lovers: As straightforward as any relationship. Lovers are bound to one another and should not willingly let either suffer harm. Quarrels can rise up and tempers flare but ultimately the love should shine through. This is often the 'end state' of a relationship journey. As everyone hopes this state would continue until death, starting at this point could mean the PCs need to break apart and either find each other again, or find happiness somewhere else.



Sacred Oath Bond: Having sworn a sacred oath, not to one another but to something else, these two PCs are bound together until the oath is fulfilled. What was that oath? And to whom? What must be done for the Oath to be completed? What happens if the Oath fails? Lots of fun backstory questions and opportunities for the PCs to struggle keep their oaths and each other going.

Parent: These are the most complex relationships we have. You have no choice over whom your parents are (in creative writing we do have the luxury). They have been part of your existence your whole life and have shaped it, in one way or another. It could be by abandoning you at an early age, or by being there always. Why are they now journeying with their offspring? How do the two PCs feel about one another on this adventure?

Best Friends: What a joy to have a best friend. Someone who knows you as closely as any other companion in your life. They know things your parents don't know. And yet, they go home and have their own family and own issues. It's a convenient relationship of caring and support but with home-time. What pushed the two PCs together? What could be so bad as to pull them apart? Will they reconcile?

Sole Survivors: Being part of the only two survivors of something catastrophic is a grueling space to be in. That shared horror, the loss, the suffering, and the pain is a strong unifier. What happened and how did these two PCs survive? What will they do if they find themselves in a similar situation again? How did

they help one another and what did they learn about each other in a crisis situation?

Married: The choice of marriage is sometimes for love, sometimes for pressure, and is sometimes not a choice. In this context the marriage is working or has remained intact. Once the game starts all that stops. The marriage should grow, shift, and change. Deepening as the love grows or breaking apart as the individuals realize their life paths are different. Both options are interesting.

Roll again: Not only does your character have a relationship with the intended PC but you have a second relationship with another PC. Explore the implications of each roll and look for ways to create a shared history moment. Remember when you, my co-worker, and my mom, all went into the goblin village and slew them all? Wasn't that fun?

ENCOUNTER

I'd suggest only trying this with professionals or with folks you've played with for a long time but choose someone you trust and go for an Intimate relationship. Choosing it is fine, but it's way more exciting when the dice choose for you. Explore the result together and decide if it works. Compare S-curve destinies and see how your relationship is going to shift them!

100 XP

IN-GAME

The starting relationship is useful to have with one other PC. This gives you and the other player a launch point into the campaign. The other PCs do not simply become meaningless nobody's to your character. They really shouldn't.

Each other PC that your character interacts with should start as a Casual relationship. A co-worker or co-adventurer. Over the course of the game, you can begin to explore how that relationship begins to shift and grow, or perhaps doesn't. It might even collapse into a dislike relationship.

This is where a great player rises to the challenge. If you can see your PC becoming frustrated by another PC, you need to speak to the player and tell them this. Let the other player know what you're feeling. It is NOT YOU THE PLAYER, it is your character. You

are also not asking them to change their character's choices or actions.

You should be asking if they (the player) want to work together to bring about a confrontation and then work on a resolving and absolving type of story. Your PC blows up, screaming and shouting at the other PC, only to feel bad, or be saved by the other PC. This forces them to apologize or to see the other PC in a new light. Slowly their attitude changes. There might still be sparks or rough points but those are no longer done as points of dislike but as differences of opinion.

If you have five other PCs in the group, you should be looking, once in a while, at how the relationship is between your PC and those other PCs. Not all of those relationships need to be fully explored and not all of them need to change much. But the more that do the more interesting the story. It's a lot to track.

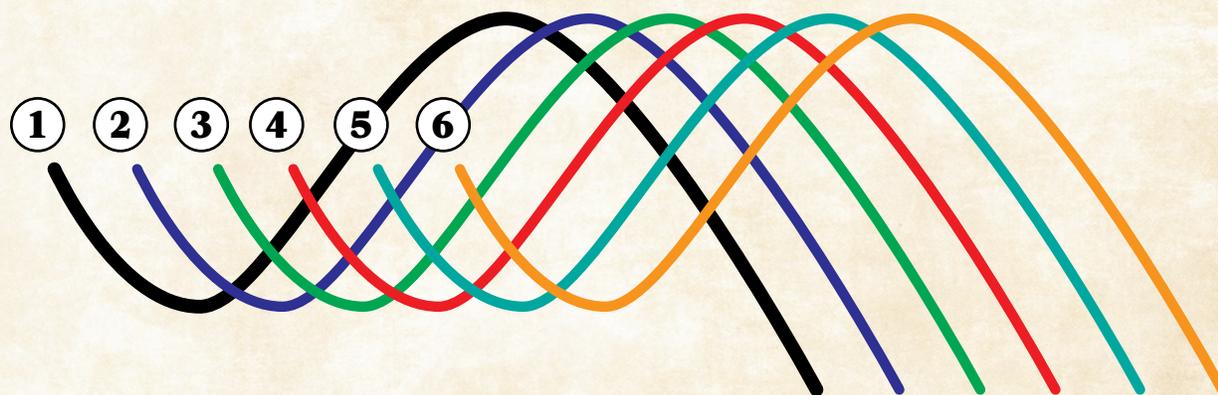
PATH

Now you have three tracks on your character path. You have your character's goals, your own objectives, and your character's relationships. Each of the tracks should be out-of-sync with one another otherwise you're going to have absolutely everything going right and everything going wrong at the same time. This might be fun on paper but can become very overwhelming to manage and, as I have often seen, characters realize they are just not having fun and begin to question why they should even be part of it all.

This is where the S curve is really useful. And where roleplaying truly stands out from a film or a novel. As the 'over-arching story' of the campaign is the GM's responsibility and you have no idea where or when it will end, you can offset each of your S-curves to create a constant state of tension and release. There is no need to link it to the campaign's path (you can't anyway). This is a great freedom, and it means you are able to manage your timing and when you want things to happen and play out in the context of your character's world.

This is what the path of the character might look like. Track 1 is the character's goals. Track 2 represents your objectives for the character. Track 3 is the first relationship between the character and one other PC. Tracks 4, 5, and 6 are the other PCs that are part of the party. Notice that Track 6 doesn't necessarily need to end, it's still in process. If the campaign ends before your S-curves that's OK. These curves are always meant to help guide you into having more meaningful experiences.

If you don't have some guidance from these curves, there is a risk that your character simply never interacts with the other PCs (aside from the initial PC with whom they have a relationship at the beginning of the game). This can factionalize your party and cause groups to form within the group. Whilst this can be fun, it can also mean that if you and another PC are forced to work together, there is little guidance or support from the S-curves to help make those interactions interesting. You might just end up 'playing the role-playing game and rolling dice' rather than being two characters who work together in the adventure. The difference is in the meaningfulness of the interaction.



A GOBLIN ISN'T JUST A GOBLIN. IT'S A FATHER, MOTHER, SISTER, BROTHER, UNCLE OR AUNT, AND AS MUCH AS IT IS TRYING TO KILL YOU, REMEMBER, SOMEONE LOVES IT... SOME STUPID.

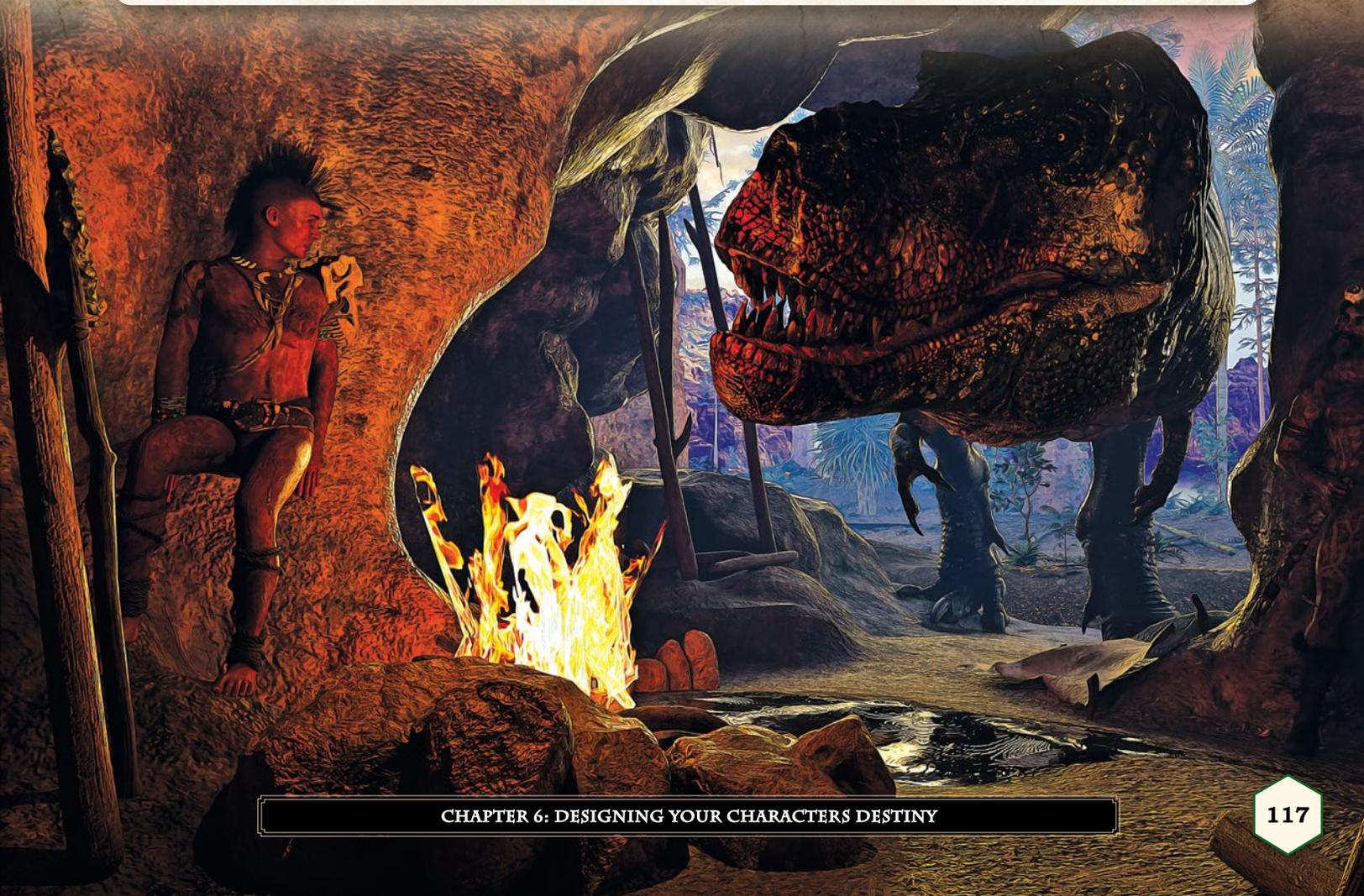
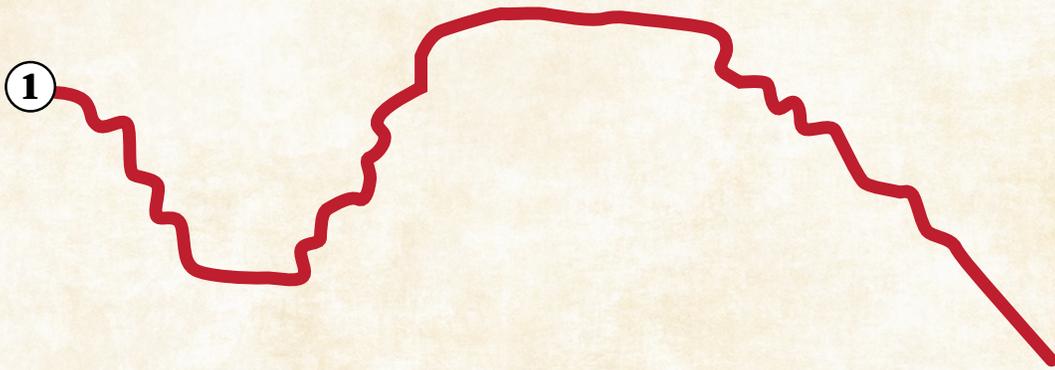
RECONCILING THE PATH WITH THE PLANS OF THE CHARACTER

I've been lying to you. Forgive me. The S curve is not really as curve-like as I have led you to believe. In reality, it looks more like a Mayan temple in profile.

Each step on the curve is a moment where you move your character towards or away from their goal. It isn't a smooth transition that happens flawlessly. It can dip or rise, stagnate, and sometimes reverse.

What this means is that some curves will be doing nothing whilst other curves are moving forward or

also not doing anything. What I am trying to say is: you do not need to have every s curve path being active. As a matter of fact, you need time where nothing is happening in your PC's life. Or put it another way: your PC will need to put their own life on hold to help the other PCs in the game. This means their plans, their relationships, their goals, and your goals will sometimes have to take a back seat and stop. This is part of the reciprocity of the game that all players (including the GM) should realize and include in their playstyle.



HOW DO YOU KEEP TRACK OF THIS STUFF?

OK. So, you've got tracks for everything. How do you remember to, well, keep track of it all? With so much going on how can anyone expect to keep track of it all? Here's the kicker: YOU DON'T. Remember the curves are stepped. EVERYTHING can be paused and later resumed. The curves are there to remind you in which direction you were heading the last time you worked on one of the tracks.

This means that in this session you can focus a bit on revealing more about your character's history. Next game night you can drop in to your attitude journey. Then you can do a little character plan progress, and then some player objective stuff. By mixing through it all, and not doing it every single session, you begin to create a fully rounded character who progresses slowly but consistently forward.

One thing I like to do is to have colored dot system. One color for everything I'm keeping track of. Then after a session I like to sit and think about the session. What happened, what did we learn and so on. I also like to reflect upon my characters' journey.

What did I learn about the other PCs? What did I learn about my own PC? And how have my PCs goals moved or not moved? What has changed? Any shift from the previous week (and previous dot) up or down (towards or away from the next S-curve point) is considered a success. Where there has been no shift, I consider that an opportunity.

I look at one of the tracks that hasn't changed in a while, and I focus on that in my next session. Perhaps I need to build into the relationship between my PC and another PC? Or perhaps I need some player objective time. Very seldom will I try for more than one or two dot shifts per game session. I don't want to hog the entire session with my own character advancement stuff.

If you look at the example below it becomes clear what is happening almost instantly. I'm slowly moving towards my player Objective (above the darker line is away from, below the line is towards). I can easily put the brakes on working my personal Objective for a while. My PC Goal (green dots) is however only marginally changed in 7 sessions.

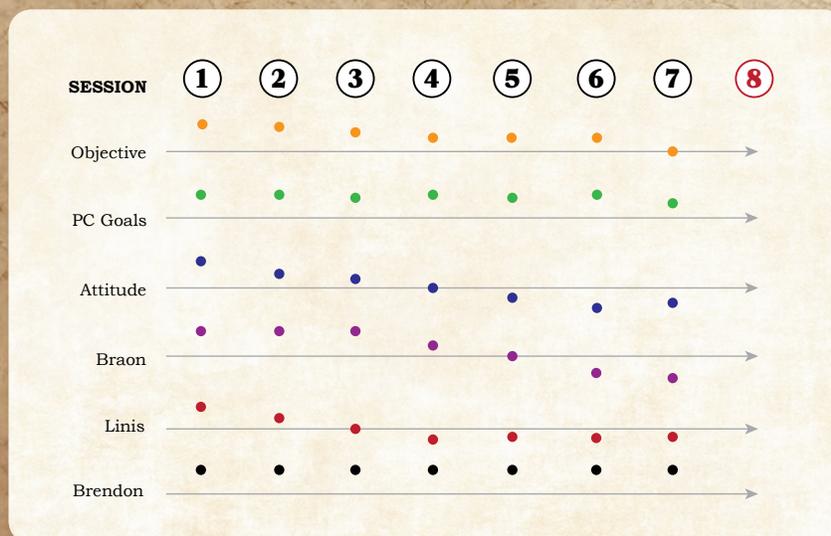
This can inspire me to look at Session 8 (the next session) as a session where I explore *how* my PC feels. They are not moving towards their goal. Does this frustrate them? Does it not bother them? Should they raise it with their fellow players? What's going through their head?

A clue can be found in their attitude change (the blue dots). If my character's attitude was positive to begin with, then it cannot move towards more positive. It must move towards the negative. And that's what happened in session 6. In fact, something big happened in session 6 between my PC, and Braon. My attitude went towards the bottom of the S, as did the Braon relationship. Was there a fight between them? One that revealed new information about Braon causing the shift?

Regardless of the cause, I can see one PC that I've done no work with at all: Brendon. He needs a lot of attention in session 8. What could motivate my PC to connect with him? Or try to connect with him?

By tracking the movements of your characters various goals and objectives, relationships, and attitudes you should be arriving at each session with a ton of stuff to do.

And we haven't even looked at what is happening WITHIN the game world itself. Your GM needs attention too! But that's a later chapter.



IMPLEMENTING IT IN GAME

How then do you implement this in your game? This requires you to reflect on your PC. Have a conversation with them. It sounds crazy, but it's a little roleplaying session you can run whilst on the bus or in the shower.

YOU: Hey PC! How are you doing?

PC: Cool.

YOU: So, you've been kinda grumpy recently (accord to the track), how do you feel about that?

PC: To be honest, I think it's Brendon's fault. He never follows the plan.

YOU: Have you tried speaking to him about it?

PC: Well, um, I thought he'd get the hint when I just sigh a lot...

YOU: I think you need to talk to him about it.

PC: Fine. But then I want a unicorn.

YOU: Fair. After you've spoken to Brendon we can go hunt a unicorn.

PC: Excellent, I'll bring the carving knife.

YOU: Wait, what?

This kind of roleplay can be fun and help give you some insight into how you will, and importantly why you will do something. Your character should never do something because the s-curve says so. Oh, I have to change my attitude in this session because the curve needs to move.

That's completely not the point. You need to understand what would make the curve move for

your character. If you just suddenly begin the session angry – for no reason – the rest of the table is going to be very confused. Good players may even try to talk to your PC about it. If your response is: "Err... I need to be..." you've missed the point.

Our goal is to bring about the truth, to direct our actions according to truthful, provable motivations and reasons. This means that if your s-curve suggests you should be moving towards your goal or away from it and there is no opportunity within the session to do it truthfully, then you don't move it. No one is going to explode because you didn't advance your character growth.

The key is to be able to look at the situations that your PC is in, and, if you need help, guidance, or a little prompting, to look at your s-curve tracking sheet. It can only show you where your character might go. You have to use your imagination, character history, personality type etc. to find the cause of the change.

Alternatively, in downtime when the GM asks, "What are you doing?", instead of responding that your PC sleeps, your s-curve tracking sheet might prompt you to ask another PC how they are feeling. Build some relationship dots there. Or for your character to reflect upon themselves, and perhaps get a little attitude adjustment. And sometimes, your character should just sleep if you feel you've done enough in the session.





CHAPTER 7: BRINGING THE CHARACTER TO LIFE

All the s-curves in the world won't give us your character. They'll give us an idea of what has been happening. Your backstory is what has happened. We need to focus now on bringing the character out of the realm of numbers and shapes and into the real world around the table.

Am I going to tell you in this section that you need to learn how to do an accent? Or how to use the Stanislavsky acting method? No. A great player is not an actor. Does it help? That depends. I have played with folks who are amazing actors but, to be fair, mediocre players at best. Their character was alive and had ticked off all the creation boxes, and their performance was applause worthy.

But that doesn't mean I liked the character or could remember the character because the character was overshadowed by the player. It is a fine balance, if you are a good performer, to be a great player and a great character. But more on that later.

What makes the character come to life is, in my opinion, *instancy and authenticity of response*. By response I mean an action or reaction to anything happening within the game world. A PC is standing in the game world. The player is in the real world (if only we could shift?). This means when the player

is saying something about the game, I remember the player. When the PC says something about the game it makes no sense.

Suspension of disbelief is a term that we use when we have to accept what is happening as real for the space in which it is happening. A superhero can fly, because in that game space, heroes can fly. Sherlock Holmes, the Victorian detective, cannot fly because his game space is set in a historical 'real world' space. This goes for the characters and their responses as well.

Is the characters' choice based on them in their game world or is the characters choice based on the players real world choices? This sounds pedantic, and I am not advocating that you subsume your real self into your character the moment you sit around the table (although some groups do that). I think if that's your game, that's awesome. But for the majority of us we understand there are two worlds (game and real) that are running and that we are playing a game.

That doesn't mean though, that your character should not have their own authentic voice. And a voice that might be contrary to the player. In fact, the more contradictory it is, the more interesting it can be. It can also be overwhelming too.

YOU ARE NOT YOUR PC, BUT YOU ARE...

For some of us, the separation of the character from the player (in thought, action, and emotion) is super easy. As a Game Master, you have to run all the evil, negative forces in the game world, yet no one thinks of you as an evil negative force in the real world (usually). Players, however, seem to struggle to have the Player and the PC as separate entities.

Why is it important to separate? Firstly, you are not the fictitious character. Your thoughts are your own, and your characters are theirs. If you begin to believe their thoughts are your own, you are creating a potentially harmful space. What if you like your character and their thoughts, more than you like yourself or your own?

I'm not going into the psychological impact that that would have on your existence. It's too far. If you like your character more than yourself, ask yourself: How do you become more like your character? What do you need to do to get there. And then you need to go a do that.

Secondly, by having a detachment from the PC, you can then start to look at the PC as a tool. A vehicle through which you are helping shape the story of the game. When you see the PC as this, suddenly things change.

Instead of not wanting your PC to die, or not wanting the GM to change or adjust your PCs background because you are your PC, you have the chance to stand back and relish the changes, the failures, and the successes. In fact, you will want to inflict more upon the character to help you tell a better story. No movie was ever made about a valiant princess who never struggled, was good and kind and then died. It is only through hardship, adversity, defeat, and failure that we get a story.

Thirdly, when your character fails, or your party loses against a big bad, you, as the player, should be celebrating and jumping for joy. (Hold on, I'm not insane, I have a point which you'll agree with in a bit,

let me get there.) As I mentioned in point two, your PC is only interesting when they face failure. If you win everything, how in the name of Hades, will it be an interesting game?

"We broke into the castle, super easy. We killed a thousand warriors, no problem. The big bad dragon at the end? Annihilated that sucker in less than a minute. We're amazing heroes."

To quote Gina Linetti from Brooklyn 99: "Ya boring!"

"We were spotted by the guards before we could even get to the outer walls of the castle. They surrounded us and threw us 'The pit of Doom' before we could do anything. Gwarg, the ghoul tore Boriks head off. It was so dark we couldn't see anything. We couldn't save him. We used the ghoul's bones to fashion a lock-pick and escaped. We had fled the castle under cover of darkness and will try to attack the dragon again, but this time, we need a plan..."

You tell me which is a more interesting story?

Does this mean you constantly need your PC to fail? No. Failure is part of the game. However, when you dissociate from your character, you can enjoy that failure as a successful s-curve moment, a great story moment, and as a potential for future adventure and story. Am I so insane now?

Still not convinced? Right, think of it this way: if you turn defeat into a happy chance for future adventures, at the end of the day, you cannot have a bad roleplaying session. Sure, your characters failed, died, and screwed up everything. If you don't dissociate you may feel that YOU failed, screwed up, and destroyed the game. That's a shitty thing to feel after playing a game. Why the hell would you play it?

On the other hand, if you walk away grinning with maniacal glee as you can't wait to see how the hell your PC is going to get themselves out of the situation they are in, then the game is working, and it gives you all the reasons to play it. Am I right? I'm right. Nod your head.

NEED SOME INSPIRATION? WHAT IF YOU PLAYED AN ANIMAL INSTEAD OF A SENTIENT BEING? WHAT WOULD YOUR NAME BE? AND WHY ARE YOU LOYAL TO THE PARTY?

IMPROV 101

How do I know what the character would say or think? This is THE question that every GM I've ever worked with has asked me when talking about the thousands of NPCs they have to manage. You're asking the same question about just one character that you need to run. This doesn't make GMs gods of improv, or diminishes your own attempts, the ability to improv for one or a thousand characters requires the same skill (one requires a slightly stronger memory but that's academic).

Improv is not the art of improvising nonsense and 'anything', and it most certainly is not about 'making it up as you go'. That kind of thinking generates insane, unrealistic characters. Lesson one in Improv is

therefore: avoid making it up. Draw from reality.

"But, Guy, the character is made up. Nothing is real about my six-foot-tall blonde elf warrior princess." Have you been reading this book Larry? It's all about making truths. We got buckets of truth. We have so much truth about our character that they are more real than some of those losers down at the bar that you call friends! OK, I'm leaving this example now before someone gets hurt. The point is made: You know a wealth of truths about your character.

So, when looking at dialogue, you don't need to make stuff up, you need to look at your truths. There is also a checklist. Did I mention the checklist?

CHECKLIST FOR REAL, THINKING, CHARACTERS OF A FICTIONAL NATURE

This checklist is a character thought/dialogue/action launch pad. You look at the list, pick an item and then apply it to your character. It should precipitate a series of actions, thoughts or conversations, and shouldn't be taken as a once-off event. Follow where it leads until you exhaust the topic, or something interrupts the situation. Improv isn't about ending interaction, it's about causing it and then following it.

These are not in any particular order and can be used as an when you like.

Base Needs

- Food/Water
- Shelter/Sleep

Short Term Needs

- Health / Security
- Spiritual nourishment / Connection
- Group Bonding

Personal Needs

- Close Bonding / Friendship
- Sex

Social Needs

- Goals
- Respect / Acknowledgement

Creative Needs

- Morality / Meaning
- Creativity / Interests
- Spontaneity

CHECKLIST BREAKDOWN

These are suggestions for what item in the checklist might cover, so feel free to expand as you like. If you like a challenge, the next time you're in a session, have this checklist handy and see how many of these you can tick off.

BASE NEEDS

Food/Water

In roleplaying this is one of the least used improv motivators unless the PC is a drunk or has taken the cooking skill and wants to work on it. Most players forget to use it because they are not suffering from it, so their mind is not thinking about it. How many times have you wandered around a shopping mall

whilst friends dithered and all you wanted was a coffee or a meal? If you think this one is weak, Tolkien had a whole thing about second breakfasts...

Shelter/Sleep

Another very overlooked topic of conversation and discussion: finding a safe spot for the night. As an ardent camper, we've clocked putting up our tent, setting out bedrolls, getting a fire up and running in 45 minutes flat. There is intense focus, lots of shouting and looking for the "invisible" hammer, and it's an awesome time. You are not using every single one of these conversation points every minute of the game but occasionally pushing the party to find a campsite or safe hotel for the night, and then commenting on it, or the state of the bed etc. is a great little improv moment waiting to happen.

SHORT TERM NEEDS

Health / Security

Expressing tiredness, weariness, fatigue and the like are common things to do, we all get tired. 'Let's stop for a second?' are great little moments to take in the view, discuss the mission and then move on. Watching for safety issues, danger, or being cautious crossing a stream and talking about it are other great opportunities.

Spiritual nourishment / Connection

Whether the gods exist or not is irrelevant. Taking a moment to nourish the soul of your PC either through prayer or taking in the view and smelling the roses is always going to lead to some interesting conversations. Your GM might be surprised when you stop and ask for a description of the view or the taste in the air but indulge yourself. Relish the space and your character will grow.

Group Bonding

Asking how your fellow PCs are doing, looking for ways to make their lives a little better, not in a huge way, just in small ways, is a wonderful chance to enhance it all. You have two means of doing this: Describing how they contribute to your PCs life, or asking how you can contribute to their lives. Sometimes you don't need to ask, you just need to show that you were thinking about them.

PERSONAL NEEDS

Close Bonding / Friendship

Unlike group bonding which is aimed at the whole party, close bonding is about friends and good friends. Share your fears about the mission, your concerns, your victories and celebrate theirs. Find out what they are most fearful for, or what they hope and dream about. This is a powerful conversation starter.

Sex

Reserve this one and read your table first. Some of us seem to think about sex all the time and others seem to be oblivious to it. Finding intimacy, starting that journey, even choosing who to be close with can be daunting. Asking for advice on how to go about things is always fun. Asking to get intimate can also be very bold, fun and possibly change the dynamic of the party and the PCs involved. And post event, things should really get interesting. Explore them with your partner/s!

SOCIAL NEEDS

Goals

A fairly common topic but a critical one for the world of roleplaying is to question the goal. The goal of the PC, the group, the mission – everything. Whilst this is highly constructive and bound to push the adventure forward, it shouldn't overshadow other improv topics. Like the rest, this is just one of the many.

Respect / Acknowledgement

Whether we want respect or even just acknowledgement we all harbor fears that we either have none or possess unfounded respect (imposter syndrome). Does your warrior fear she is not as strong as everyone thinks she is? The only way the rest of the party is going to know this is through either her actions or her words. Asking if one is doing what is respectable or questioning why the acknowledgement of the skill is lacking etc. These are good personal moments.

CREATIVE NEEDS

Morality / Meaning

Asking if the current course of action of morally right or wrong, or what the point of the whole enterprise is, is a deep question, that certainly shouldn't get asked every moment, but is worth reflecting upon from time to time. Thoughts that the PC might be having – are they morally correct? Is there more to live than piloting a starship? And how do others feel about them? Do they agree or disagree?

Creativity / Interests

Needlework, singing, humming, asking who built the road, looking at the uniforms of the guards and appreciating the historical significance of the symbols, these are ways of you adding some flavor and color to your character. It becomes really useful when you include one of the other PCs. "Quick! The light is perfect. Broan, strip naked and pose like those old Hagavian statues we paster earlier, I want to paint this!" That might not go down too well with Broan, but it creates a moment. It includes Broan, it recalls something about the past and shows folks that your PC has an eye for lighting. Now, if your PC finishes that painting and gifts it to Broan that's an even better journey and what a story!

Spontaneity

This is a broad category of: do something out of the ordinary. The reason it is listed here is that these acts should not occur often, and if they are part of the list, it helps keep them in check. Use these to inject a bit of humor, or to add a bit of weird personal history to your character. "My grandfather had three nipples...", "I hate the color orange," are classic lines you can drop. Squishing a specific type of bug and screaming at it, things like that get remembered.

USING THE CHECKLIST

The checklist isn't exhaustive, but it does cover pretty much everything you could wish to talk about. The key is that you should apply whatever item you have selected from the checklist to one of these topics and answer it with as much truth as you can muster. Apply it to yourself to begin with if you are unsure.

How do I bond with my group? (From group bonding under short term needs).

How do you? I know I how I do it. It radically changed in my lifetime. I used to bond with my group of mates around the gate to my house after school. We'd ride home, play D&D 2nd edition, and then at 5pm precisely they'd all have to go home. But from 5pm until 5.45pm we'd loiter around that gate chatting. What did we talk about? The game, teachers, homework, and mostly cool stuff that we'd learned about watching TV or reading books. The big thing we were doing was also making sure we were all OK and still part of the group.

Apply that to your character. Your deranged, half-drunk, retired veteran cop from the 1930's. How does she bond with her group? Look at how you designed her. Look at the truths: It's the 1930s in downtown Portsmouth (a British coastal town). She isn't actually a cop, is she? She's a secretary who worked for the police force and solved crimes from the side-lines. Sure. She knows how to cook (most likely given the time frame). She's a Protector type. She wants to look out for her 'boys'. How does she do group bonding? She bakes healthy snacks, cracks down hard on any of the men who drink too much and makes sure every lad on the force is looked after in some fashion. Her Proactivity level is moderate, her competence is good, but her social is poor. She isn't a motherly figure - she's more like an iron lady. You want tears and a shoulder to cry on, go find the Chief Inspector, you want real advice and to actually fix your problems, come to me. She's a tough love.

That's all good and well but how does that help me? I've got all these truths. Turn that into dialogue. Turn it into action. Using our earlier example:

"Here, I baked. It tastes like you smell, but you haven't eaten since yesterday, so eat. You should take better care of yourself."

"I know it doesn't taste like much, but I made this for you and the rest of the boys. This case has you all running in circles, and you forget to eat. Can't catch bad guys on an stomach, stomach right?"

"I baked this for everyone, it's healthy. So, no complaints. And don't expect this every day, I'm not your mother. I did have a think though whilst baking... what if there were two shooters?"

All of these are solid examples of taking the characters' truths and applying them to dialogue. How do I do that? I use words and I put them in order. But I'm limited to working with the limits of what I want to convey.

She had to mention:

1. She baked food for the squad
2. She needed to say it was healthy or for the health of the squad
3. She wanted to show she cared, without saying it, or saying the opposite.

The situation is whatever has arisen in the game. So, in this scenario, the squad are struggling to solve a case. This is because of lesson two which we'll get to in a bit.

The most basic sentence you could make would be: I baked food for the squad, it's healthy. And there is nothing wrong with that sentence either. So, where does all the flowery other stuff come from? Personality. I've not really spoken about Personality as a singular item yet. That's because it isn't. It emerges from everything you've been doing so far. However, we're getting too far ahead of ourselves. The point is: the checklist gives you dozens of potential topics to raise for your character without really needing to do anything other than look at the work you've put in already and just express it in context to the checklist item.

USE WHAT IS AROUND YOU

This is a big one. When in doubt look at what is around your character. Comment on it, explore it, or hit it with frustration. Engage with it. You'd be curious

to discover that if you do this, the other PCs might ask you: "Hey Freidel, why did you just kick that bunny? Made of rock..." it leads to all kinds of conversations. I'm being ridiculous but you get my point.

LISTEN FIRST, TALK SECOND

Another great way to improvise is to let others do it for you. Listen to what the group is talking about, and follow suit, or just carry on listening. But there is a difference between passively letting the words flow around you like a warm bath of humming noise and actively listening to it. Listen to the words, understand what they are saying and then try to understand why they felt it necessary to say them. If you don't that's when you speak up and ask them to clarify or why they are saying what they are saying.

The key to listening is seeking to understand the motivation behind it. Sometimes it is just to fill air, in which case isn't there something better to talk about?

ENCOUNTER

What are your characters thoughts on the following:

- Food
- Sleep
- Sex
- Creative outlet (what is theirs?)

50 XP



FINDING THE CHARACTER'S VOICE

I would consider this an advanced technique that isn't necessary to be a great player at all, but which some great players do and that makes them shine so it's worth understanding how they do it. The voice of the character is really about controlling how you speak. It doesn't mean you're putting on an accent!

OPTION ONE: WORDS

"The canine appears to be unconscious. Prudence indicates the avoidance of altering this state."
"What dreams might such a beast as this shag-pile monster dream? And whereupon tis woken what violence might such a toothed maw as that commit upon the interloper who dares tread so loudly?"
"Oi! Wake the fucking dog, and I'll fucking deck ya."
Three very different ways of saying the same thing: Let sleeping dogs lie.
All can be said in the same accent and yet the voice of each speaker is radically different.

OPTION TWO: TONE

Not only can our choice of words vary from character to character, but also the tone in which they are said.

"Sit down, or you'll hurt yourself."

It's an innocent suggestion. Change the tone so that it becomes a warning. The first half becomes a command. Sit down. And the second phrase becomes threatening and sarcastic. If your character has a tone, it might be upbeat, or cheerful, or it might be dark

and morose. That's a big voice difference and strong one to use.

Combine tone with words, and the voice of your character is already distinct and at no point have you needed to produce an accent.

OPTION THREE: ACCENT

I'm guilty of doing this as a lazy way of getting out of having to think too hard about the character. The accent often describes the character. Admittedly I'm usually doing this as a GM, where I'm running a dozen NPCs in a scene and need a shorthand. Adding in an accent is a solid way of giving voice to your character.

Selecting an accent you can comfortably do is very important. Consistency is the key when it comes to accents for a single character.

OPTION FOUR: QUIRKS

Adding a quirk into how your character speaks can be another method of giving your character a unique voice. A stammer, or long pauses. Perhaps the character uses a phrase often. Repeating a word or repeating the last word of the previous speaker can all be quirks. Perhaps there are lots of hand-gestures that go with it?

Explore some options, and again, remember, nothing too elaborate as you will need to do this every game for the life of the character.

HOW TO CHOOSE WHAT TO DO?

Now, these are just four options for creating a voice, an actual sound of the character. But what about finding the motivation of the character, their inner voice. Look at their type, look at their upbringing, look at their goals.

Would a soldier who grew up in a military style environment have a loud, succinct voice? Bereft of emotional comforts? Growing up in such a space might give the character a very 'orders issued' voice.

"Let! That sleeping dog! Lie! DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?!"

On the other hand, a dwarf who has grown up in unstable mineshafts where echoes can cause all kinds of structural risk, might not speak much, and when they do, they might be brief.

"Leave it." (Let sleeping dogs lie).

A kid raised in an academic family may be encouraged to explain their reasons, to listen carefully, and then provide counter arguments. Depending on the focus of the family.

"I feel the question that is most pertinent here is: is it a dog? Establishing the species can be illuminating in determine the approach that should be taken. To quote Jeffery Goorman: 'can we truly know a thing without it telling us?'"

Combine all these options and the type of voice the character might have, and you'll have someone who might be quite different from you. Lean into it! That's roleplaying.

Another thing to keep in mind: when you, as the player, are addressing the players drop all the voices and make sure it is YOU who is talking. And remember, when back in character addressing PCs and NPCs to put it all back on. The more you practice this, the easier it becomes, and it really helps keep everyone around the table on the same page as to who is speaking: you or your amazing PC.

ENCOUNTER

Rewrite the following sentence using words, tone, and a quirk (if applicable) that your character would use: "The enemy is approaching, and we need to get out of here!"

Go for the bonus XP and try to put on an accent to match and say the sentence out aloud!

150 XP + 100 XP



B. DAVE WALTERS: THE ULTIMATE CHARACTER AND PLAYER

Interview, online, 2025

GUY: What, in your opinion, makes a good character?

B. DAVE: A good character is someone that the audience is going to give a damn about. In the realm of TTRPGS, it is ideally a mask that you can put on, a persona that you can embody. And by doing so, you can say something that is true. A lot of people know me for DMing and playing; however, I'm first and foremost a writer, so I approach it from that standpoint. And the thing I always tell people, especially at the beginning of a story, is you have to establish an interesting world full of people that the audience will give a damn about. And by audience, I mean one person. It is a mistake to look at the audience as a monolith; you're only ever talking to one person. Now, in the TTRPG arena, you are interacting with the other humans around the table. Sure. But your bubble ends right there.

And it's not so cliché. It's not: they have to have an interesting background, a compelling motive, an emotional journey, and an arc of change! No, people just need to give a damn about this person [your character]. And give a damn can mean a lot. I want to see them win. I want to see them lose. Joffrey Baratheon [Game of Thrones] is a great character. Nobody wanted anything good for Joffrey. But you were invested.

GUY: And how would someone create a character within the TTRPG space that others would give a damn about?

B DAVE: I can tell you what not to do. The fastest way to fail is to try and act significant. I won't bust anybody out as I've been a member of many an ensemble cast, where you can see the people that are just desperately like "Give me the spotlight, this is MY moment! It's my moment!" That's not how it works. To apply this to cinematography for a moment, I am largely a Zack Snyder apologist. Rebel Moon's not good. But I didn't hate things like Batman versus Superman.

The problem is you can't make every moment epic: Superman flies into the sky, and everything's in slow motion, and the lightning crashes behind him, and you're like; "Oh, this is important. He's telling me this is the important part, right?" When you try to do that, it will fail.

When your moment comes, ask yourself: how can I assist? My greatest strength as a player is I tell people

I like to lead the league in assists. In basketball, we call them assists. I try to set other people up to have a moment. If I can choose between "I can shoot" or "I can set you up to do something really cool," I'm always going to try and set you up to do something really cool. I'll find my moments, to be sure, but the more you can set the other people up to look like a badass rockstar, the greater the whole story you're going to tell is.

And you become a person people are going to want to be at the table with, you know. But if you're the person that "I must be the one to down every dragon, I must be the one to tell the necromancer we are here to destroy you." That's selfish. Nobody likes selfish.

GUY: What kind of mindset should a player have when joining a game?

B DAVE: I think there should be two things you should be looking for. One, I think you want to make sure that everybody else at the table is having a good time, including the Dungeon Master! People lose track of the fact that the Dungeon Master is playing too. This is also a game that they're theoretically supposed to be trying to enjoy.

So that means things like if they're dangling obvious plot hooks, maybe bite that hook. If you hear a crash in the next room, maybe go see what happened. You know what I mean? Help the DM out. I've been a part of plenty of groups, both as a player and as a storyteller that intentionally resist that, you know, like "Is that the inciting incident? We're going to go in the opposite direction to the pub." Now, I've been at this long enough, I'll just roll with it. I'm like, joke's on you. Someone else gets killed in the pub now, you know? But I always try and figure out where the storyteller is trying to go, and then I try and help enable that.

The second thing is, again, setting up others to win. The third thing, and I know you and I have a slightly different opinion on this, is optimization. Let me explain. I am much older than I look, I was there 3000 years ago when the deep magic was written.

I was there for 2nd edition, 3rd, 3.5, all that stuff. That was when character choices really, really mattered and a bad choice early, doomed you later, sometimes years later, like, "Oh, you can't take that spell, or you can't take that feature because you didn't take this other feat at level two." I suffered for

that, so much. To this day, every time I make a character, I map them out from 1 to 20. I'll make a spreadsheet of what I want to do, even though 5th edition is far, far, far more forgiving. I was still trained that way so I always try and make the strongest, most effective, most optimized character that I can.

And then I hold back a little bit! I make Superman on purpose. Now, to be clear, it is completely valid in the current meta that if you make a sentient ham sandwich being carried around by a mage hand that fine. The reason why I try to make the best characters that I possibly can is I want to give everyone else the luxury to be goofy because when it's time to lock in, I'm like, cool, cool, cool, great, great, great. I got you guys. I always make sure I have at least a little bit of healing, can do some damage, and can do some buffing, because in the back of my mind, I personally want to be the toolbox [of the party] so that if we run into a situation, which hopefully the Dungeon Master has not designed something that we're incapable of surmounting, I'm there to help out. Hopefully. That's just my personal ethos that even though I'm trying to set everybody up to be cool, I'm set for the moment when it's time to "win". Then blammo! Or at least "here's haste on you" and "here's bless on you". I know those are both concentration spells. You can't do both. Leave me alone. But you know what I mean. I don't personally perceive that optimization and an interesting character are different or exclusive.

One of the characters I'm most known for was Baron Victor Temple in Vampire the Masquerade, L.A. by night. If you're not familiar with vampire, there are different clans of vampires, and the different clans have different powers. And it so happened everything I [Victor] could do, someone else at the table could do too. Except for an ability called Dominate, which is mind control. So, I specialized in dominate just because it's what made me different. And it turned out to be super-duper, super, super useful that I could mind control people. Whenever we would go into a situation, by and large, I'd let them [my party] all charge in and be fighting and everything. And then when things were starting to go sideways, like they tend to go, then I'm like, all right, let's deploy the Jedi mind tricks. Here we go. And now we win. Try to be as useful as possible.

GUY: How should players handle social stuff at the table? Should they be accepting or challenging? Should they just leave and find a different table, or should they ignore social stuff at the table?

B DAVE: Let me say up front, not every table is for every player, not every player is for every table. If you are consistently not having a good time as a

player or a storyteller, if you're not getting what you want out of the thing, you do not have to do that thing! A lot of this hopefully gets resolved during a session zero. I hope you had a session zero. If you didn't have a session zero, you can have one 50 sessions into the game! Where everybody just sort of checks in and asks questions like - what even is this? What are we after here?

I think if you're having an issue with a person, it depends on the kind of person you are. I mean, I am the omni extrovert. I have no problem whatsoever saying "hey, bro, you're stepping on my moments. Like, I don't know if you realize this, but I was trying to do a thing." I have no problem having that conversation, but not everyone can. If you have a problem, if you can't talk to the person, talk to your storyteller, your Dungeon Master.

If you're Dungeon Master is the problem, talk to a couple other players, see if everybody has the same problem. Bring it up at once. People may not realize it [what they're doing]. "Oh, you didn't think that was funny? Oh, I didn't know." They may be mortified by it, "You didn't want to be murder hobos? Oh, sorry. We can talk to the next person." But if their response is "screw you. I'm Fireballer the magnificent!" That's when you might be like, cool, cool, cool, great, great, great, I'm gonna be busy next week. Don't overly stress yourself [move on] but do try [to resolve it first].

When I did the Black Dice Society, which was a horror stream, for D&D, Wizards of the coast, I was blessed to have exactly who I wanted on the cast, but I also knew the personalities of some of those people. Becca Scott - I love Becca. She did such a great job. But she is an A.D.D. Bunny, and I said to her: "I love you dearly, which is why I asked you to be on this show, but this is not the "That's what she said" Show." Horror is about tension. That's what horror is it is ramping up tension. Comedy exists to defuse tension. That is the purpose of comedy.

That is why people crack jokes during odd moments, because you feel it [the tension] and you want to let it out, right? But when you're expressly trying to generate a certain tension, no matter how great you think that zinger is, keep it in your heart box, keep it inside, because you're going to undo what we're trying to do here. But that had to be communicated. And again, I, as storyteller, had to give moments of levity.

You have to wave the energy. A thing about human beings is we cannot maintain a heightened emotional state for more than about 20 to 30 minutes. Our central nervous system won't let us. You can't laugh for an hour, and you can't cry for an hour. You'll just level out. When you're telling a story that

you want a certain emotion, you have to give them both [the emotion and its opposite]. That's why when you watch horror movies, there's a moment where everything seems fine. There may even be truly funny things. And then usually, like a roller coaster, it drops. Never be just one note. Whatever that note is. Don't be just that note.

Xander Jeanneret does this wonderfully. Every character Xander plays is a master class because Xander, as a human, is a human hug. And so being the kind, silly, joyous, and yes sometimes catty (depending on the character he's playing) just comes very easy to him. But he's got such dramatic skill, he can turn that corner. And when the sweet boy plunges that knife, it goes in twice as deep as when the emo boy does that.

Because you're like, I expected it from emo boy. But sweet boy, my one weakness, sweet boy hath betrayed me! So, something to be mindful of: wave the energy in your character.

GUY: In the broadest of strokes, what makes a great player?

B DAVE: I think it's important to know how to play the damn game. It's something that I say a lot. Obviously, of course everyone begins somewhere. And if you are a new player, especially if you're a new player reading this book, God bless you. You light years ahead. But know what [in the most current rules set your using] an action, a move action, a bonus action, a reaction is! You've got to learn it. I know a shocking number of people that have been "playing" for years and they're still like "oh, what can I do? What am I spells? What am I?"

To be clear, this does not mean you have to become a min-max storyteller. That is not how everyone engages with these games. And that is fine if you are more for the role play, more for the drama, more for the cosplay. If you like to watch. I know a lot of introverted people that barely make a peep and are almost there to watch a play at the table. All of this is completely valid, but you do need to have an idea of what your character is capable of, and to the best of your ability contribute something when it gets to your turn.

Know what you're going to do when it gets to you. When it gets to be your turn that is when you say what you're going to do, not when you decide what you're going to do. Otherwise, everything grinds to a halt where you're looking at your spells, and then you're kind of panicking because everybody's looking at you

and you're like, me!? So be thinking about that when it's coming around to you so that when it gets to you, it's more of a declarative thing. Not a deciding thing.

And one last thing: there was a person in one of the worst games I ever played in my life. Lisa Marie was there for me. She saw this happen too. Although if you try and figure out all the one-shots that Lisa Marie and I've been in, it won't help you narrow it down too much. So, we're fighting a lich and we're losing badly. Half the group is down. We were losing and we were near the end of the session, and they [bad player] had a book [mundane item] and they declare: "I throw my book at the lich!" We're all [other players and DM] like, what?! Why? And they responded that their PC was angry and wanted to "throw the book at them". And they thought that was the moment for that gag. I was so angry at that. So don't be that person. Row in the same direction as everybody else. If everybody's silly, if it's the Three Stooges take on Vecna, great. Because if it's the Three Stooges take on Vecna and you're trying to play the Punisher now you're the jerk. It's no match. The vibe must match.

Now, as I said before a great player is also about selflessness. Trying to set other people up to win. But I want to caution you, I don't mean self-flagellation by that. I don't mean denying yourself moments. Always find your light, find your moments to. But if you notice when I'm playing every single time I do something, especially if we're just talking, I set up the next person. I will be "I think blah blah blah. What do you think? Tom." And I will name the person, you know what I mean? I will hand it to that person, especially if it is a quiet person. If I want to attack, I'll look at who's up next. Then I'll use Guiding Bolt to give them advantage or, even if what I do mechanically doesn't matter like just attacking, and, say Throg Dar is up next, I will purposefully say: "I softened them up a bit for you. Throg." Let me make you cool. Then everybody wins.

And by winning, I mean everyone has a memorable, fulfilling experience. Everyone at the table. And I think, the extent to which you're trying to enable everyone else's happiness is equal to empowering yourself. The more you can look for opportunities to do that, and to seek your truth, that's what people will resonate with. Remember to have a good time. Remember that everybody should be having a good time. Check in on people. If somebody seems sad or stressed, check in. Just the fact that you checked in on another human being can often mean the world.



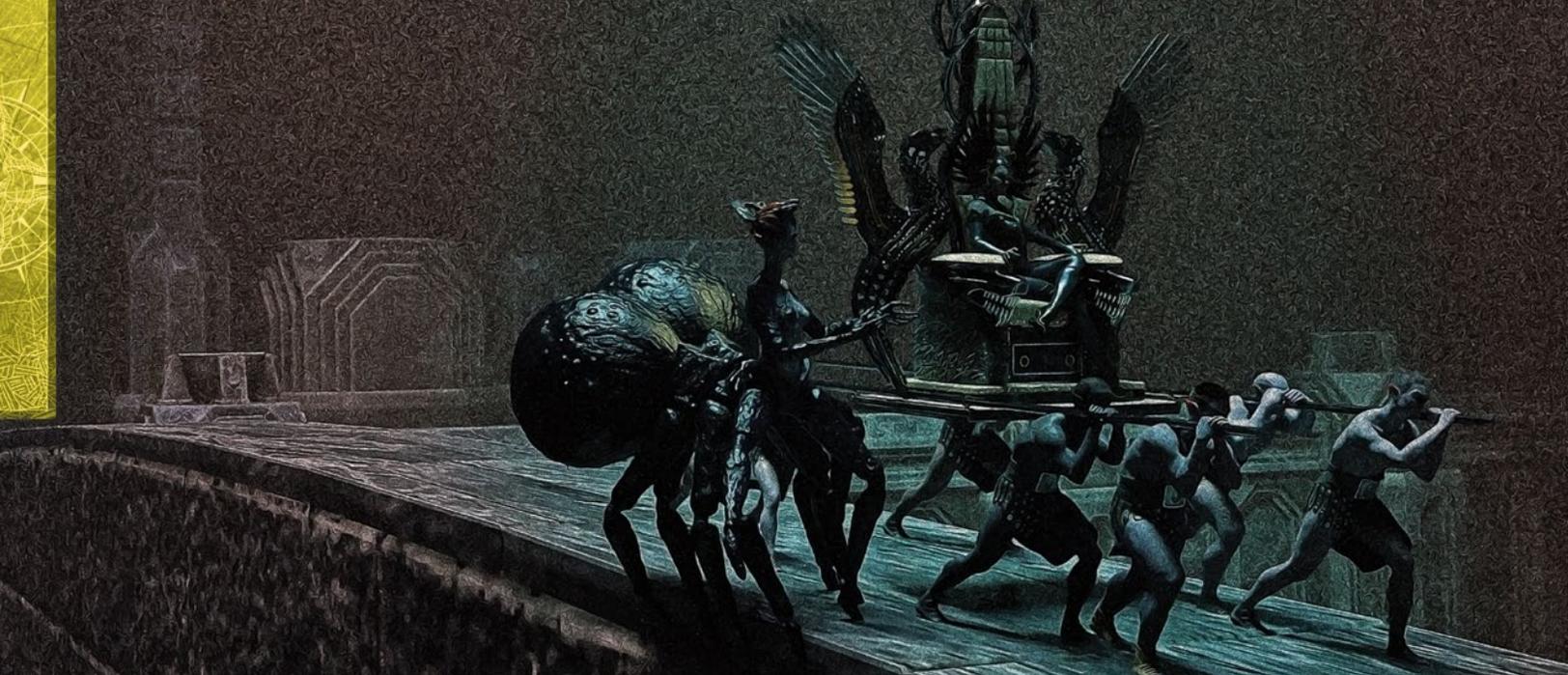




PART 3: OUT OF GAME

"Your character is amazing, pity that's not you in real life..."

There is no point in playing this game if you don't understand the nature of the game and what it requires of you beyond your character."



CHAPTER 8: YOUR JOB AS A PLAYER

Wait, there's more? Absolutely there is more to being a great player than just creating an amazingly complex, dynamic and living character. As I've mentioned, like a gazillion times already, this is a collaborative game. You are not the only player. This requires us then to realize it is a team sport. Now, I know a lot of you have never played a team sport before, and the prospect is daunting, but it is a requirement of the game.

How do you play TTRPGs as a team sport? Exactly how you play all other team sports! You focus on your teammates, you listen to them, guide them, you support them, and you engage them. It's a little different in the TTRPG space as you are playing a game that often mixes up the 'you' from the 'character' so it can feel very personal. Where do we start? With the social contract...

SOCIAL CONTRACT

A social contract is something that we, as players of the game (including the GM who is also a player of the game) all agree to. Usually this is unspoken when groups of friends get together, but I believe it should always be spoken. The contract outlines a set of values that the table holds to and offers recourse for those who violate the contract.

Why would you need such a thing? One of the most frequently asked questions on my channel is: 'We have a player who sucks, how do we get rid of them?' A social contract will help. It removes the emotional element from the table (to a degree) by providing a dispassionate framework against which any actions can be judged.

This is not the main reason for a contract by the way. It is the most often useful clause, however. What is in a social contract? This varies from table to table but in general the contract will cover the following topics:

- Purpose of the group
- Roles and responsibilities
- Type of game being played
- Age Rating
- Taboo or Trigger subjects
- Attendance requirements
- New Member policies
- Cheating
- Financing
- Homebrew Information
- Adjudication

This certainly sounds like a ton of information but if you stop to think about these different categories, how many can you answer for your current group? And if you can answer them all, then you have been subconsciously doing them all along, but have the rest of your table? And if you are thinking this is something that the GM should be responsible for doing, then you are gravely mistaken. Why? Well, I'll get to answering that in the Roles and responsibilities section.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A SESSION ZERO

Regardless of how much planning and preparation you do for your character, you're going to hit a major moment in the character's life from the instant you start playing them at the table. Our best plans fall apart when we open our mouths and begin to talk. Characters we thought would be kind and gentle become a little sharp and sarcastic. The cute little engineer we wanted to see bring joy the world, does so by swearing like a trooper and hitting things with her wrench.

Far too often we then ignore everything we've prepped and planned and just go with this new

persona that has emerged. What then was the point of it all? Session Zeros are there for us to explore our character for the first time, and to correct issues that might pop up.

If you wrote the character to be cool and collected, then you need to make sure that if in session zero you found yourself being scattered and screaming at lot - as the character - then when the game starts next week or whenever, you address that. This means you need to critically explore the character as much as you can in a session zero and to actively reflect upon it post the session.

BE AWARE

Look at how your character is responding and behaving. Compare that to your notes, your characters attitudes, type, and role. Are you being true to your plan? Change it in the next scene. Look at what you are doing differently.

Critically, compare how the other players and characters react to your different styles. And if anyone asks why your character seems like six different characters, simply, and openly tell them, you're trying to find the character, and this is your process. Don't be afraid to use session zero to do this, that's what it is for!

CHANGE DURING PLAY

Changing your character during the session zero is acceptable, and you should actively stop the game and ask the players and GM if you can 'do-over' that dialogue with how you want the character to be. It might feel strange but when you nail it and you are happy with it, it can make all the difference for the ENTIRE campaign. It's worth doing!

Once the game is going however, changing what your character is like is unfair to your fellow players and a shock to the games 'truths' that have been established. Having said that, you can change over time. Traumatic events change your happy-go-lucky character into a more cynical individual. That's awesome roleplaying.

RELATIONSHIPS

You might have worked out some relationships with other characters. Explore those in session zero. See how they feel and ask yourself if you're comfortable with them. You don't need to spend huge amounts of time on this, just a single scene, a small run of dialogue will help. If you don't like it, change it. Everything about this character should make you want to play them more, not less.

Tell the other player that you don't think the relationship you chose is working and list your reasons. Let them propose other solutions, or you propose them too. See if you can find a solution that makes the situation more interesting. A brother/sister combo not working out? Perhaps you were never really close, and you blame each other for the death of the goldfish and have never really seen eye-to-eye since. The relationship remains the same, but the dynamic is quite different.

A TOTAL CHANGE

You might find that your character really, really doesn't fit with what the rest of the group has made, not in terms of mechanical build, but in terms of personality and approach. This can sometimes happen. You have a choice, carry on and slowly have the character adjust to conform to the party needs, or

scrap the character and start again. When I say scrap I mean, save for another game.

I do find that sometimes, characters that I think are going to be amazing just somehow fail outright because of the style of the other characters. In a session zero an antagonism emerges, or a disinterest. Do not ignore it, explore it! Change it, fix it, or abandon it.

PURPOSE OF THE GROUP

Every group gets together for certain reasons. In my lifetime of gaming, I've pretty much joined groups for all the different reasons. Common ones include: Socializing, Playing a TTRPG, Making new friends, escapism, it's a job, creative outlet, personal exploration, and therapy. These are the most common reasons for people to play in a TTRPG.

SOCIALIZING

There are some people who don't mind playing a TTRPG, but they are not concerned with playing it. If it happens, it happens. The real reason they've joined the group is to hang out with others. Roleplaying can be a social space where folks get together and enjoy chatting. There is nothing wrong with this. The downside of this is that being part of a group that is focused on another reason for getting together can mean that the socializing player doesn't take the game as seriously. You might want to eat pizza and talk about the latest episode of Star Trek, and the rest of the group wants to slay the dragon princess in glorious combat.

The type of game that would best work is a casual, fun system, rules lite, easy-going campaign. Characters are stereotypes, and don't have much depth. They can live or die without much impact on the game.

PLAYING A TTRPG

This is a common reason for people to get around a table (virtual or otherwise). To play the TTRPG. There isn't too much focus on socializing before or after the game, it is about the game. There is some roleplaying going on, but the focus is on finishing adventures, overcoming challenges and exploring the game space for as much action as possible. Even political games where it's all mind-games and cloak-and-dagger stuff count as 'action'.

These games should have a strong focus on the details of the adventure. Complex interactions and lots of 'discovery' type information should be hidden throughout the worldspace. Players should be focused, goal oriented, and have specific in-game objectives to accomplish.

MAKING NEW FRIENDS

This is one of the greatest powers of Roleplaying. You can be anywhere in the universe (yes, I stick to this statement [aliens will play RPGs]) and you can find roleplayers. And if you play a couple of games you can begin to pick out people whom you would want to be friends with outside of the game. Moving to new cities, countries, planets, is intimidating if you don't know anyone. Finding common ground in TTRPGs means making friends fast. It's different from the Socializer groups who are there to hang out and have surface acquaintances. Making new friends is about making deeper connections.

The best games for this kind of reason for playing are one-shots, short campaigns, or new system-of-the-month type groups. The focus is on exploring TTRPGs together and enjoying learning together. The actual adventures can be light and quick.

ESCAPISM

Escaping your day-to-day life and hiding in a TTRPG is, arguably, the number one reason people play games. We want to forget about what is going on in our world, and we find being a hero in a fictional world an easy means of doing that. Nothing wrong with that at all. Provided of course, you don't end up spending all your time there, avoiding the real world.

These games should be big on the heroics, light on the emotional distress or turmoil. PCs are heroes and setbacks are cool moments before major progress is achieved. The bad guys should be bad, betrayal should be obvious, and rewards should flow.

IT'S A JOB

For some of us, and growing each month, it is a job. We play the game because we are paid to. This brings with it a totally different focus. You are now a performer and must perform for the audience. Personal motivation aside, you do what makes the audience happy. The implications of this kind of game are to be a professional performer. This is what makes giant Twitch or YouTube shows so different from non-commercial games. There is a job to be done.

These games require the players to understand the 'big picture' of entertainment and to make choices that are daring, exciting, interesting, or down-right controversial rather than what they would normally do.

CREATIVE OUTLET

Many people use TTRPGs as a means of creative expression. I've seen so many folks use the games they play as a basis for writing books, for creating artwork, or for getting into costume design. It's a creative space and the focus is not so much on the adventure or the world but on becoming inspired by the game and the characters.

These games should be rich in world lore, and in being as different from reality as possible. The mundane is only interesting if presented in new and updated ways.

PERSONAL EXPLORATION

Maybe it is just me, but at my table I get many, many players who use the roleplaying space as a safe space to explore themselves. How would I be if I was a hero? What if I was openly gay? Perhaps the group will accept my bad jokes? Maybe I can let my hair down and give a passionate speech? These should be safe spaces, and if you do not feel comfortable at the table, walk away. The players are not your friends. Find a group who let you be what you want to be.

These games should focus on the individual, giving each character plenty of chances to unpack themselves, to form friendships or romances in the game, and to come to terms with who they, the PC and the Player, are.

THERAPY

Unlike personal exploration which is about opening up to the world and seeing it isn't a big evil place of judgement; therapy roleplaying is often about opening up and accepting things about yourself or your past - to yourself. You can talk about a bad experience, but living through it, roleplaying through it, can be tremendously helpful. These kinds of games

should only be run by trained professionals and in close collaboration with medical professionals.

The games should explore specific topics, avoid certain trigger events, and are usually limited in size to four or less players who should already be in a common state (all medical staff who are dealing with long hours, all police officers etc.)

Knowing these different types of reasons for the purpose of the group can help everyone to know what type of game they're getting into and what is expected of them. Often where groups are formed out of existing friendship circles, this step is ignored. When a player is in a game for a different reason from the rest of the table, that player may eventually leave, or become unconsciously disruptive and the group could fall apart. I've lost many a gaming group because of this misalignment of purpose.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Not to repeat what I've said before, I'll keep it brief: The GM is a player. The Players are players. Everyone involved in the game is a player. That is the golden rule. EVERYONE IS PLAYING. This means that no one individual is responsible for the 'story', the 'fun', the 'organization of the group', the 'provision of food' or the 'spending of money on the game' and the eternally wrong 'knowing the rules inside-out'. Everyone is.

It is a legacy of the past. The GM is the provider of the venue, of snacks, of the fun, the adventures, the story, and the organization of the game. Why this came into being I have no idea, and why it continues to exist is insane.

The role of the GM is to run the worldspace in which the game happens, to adjudicate on the game rules, and the manage the characters within the worldspace. That is their mandate, that is the game they have signed up for. Anything else is for everyone.

The players of the game (all) should look at: Venue, food, story, fun, support. No venue is free, so the next time you show up at the house, and complain about the chairs being uncomfortable, realize that you, as a human, are demanding that another human should spend money on your ass so you can sit comfortably. Step-up and offer to chip on new furniture.

Food is another aspect. I've seen forums where the players (PC only) are encouraged to bring food tribute to the GM. Or GMs who are constantly providing tea, coffee, drinks, and snacks to players who bring nothing but eat everything. Unacceptable behavior!

Equality on everything or leave my table thank you very much.

TYPE OF CAMPAIGN BEING PLAYED

This may seem like a strange one but agreeing what the game is going to be about is important for the

social contract to hold up. What do I mean by the type of game? There are many different types of games but generally speaking they fall into four main categories. Your GM should be familiar with these, if they've read my other book on being a Great GM. Epic, Character, Sandbox or Accidental.

EPIC CAMPAIGNS

Epic games are full on campaigns designed to run for a number of sessions, over months or years of game play. The campaign is a big bad nemesis who is out to do something horrific, and the understanding is that the PCs will attempt to thwart them and their plans. The requirements for you, as the player, is to actively attempt to find the plans of the nemesis, and to attempt to prevent them from succeeding.

This does not mean that you cannot explore your own character's backstories or interests. It does mean, however, that you put them on hold when you come across the nemesis or their plans. Sacrificing the nemesis' adventures for your own means you've chosen to play a different game, and that can alienate you or your character from the task at hand.

The GM, knowing that they are running an Epic Campaign, will have spent some time planning out things and prepping things. What you are doing by ignoring them, or 'pretending to avoid plot' as some call it, is wasting everyone's time. You signed up for an Epic campaign, that means, you need to lean into it. Imagine if Aragon had decided to simply give up and go live with the elves. The entire Lord of the Rings would change. What if Harry Potter ignored the 'dares and investigations' and just accepted he was an orphan and got on with his schoolwork? Epic campaigns are about heroes stepping up, not stepping away.

CHARACTER CAMPAIGNS

If you want to play a game that focuses on your character specifically, where the GM is an opposing force but not an active opposing force (like a nemesis), then a character campaign is for you. These campaigns will follow your character's goals. Notice the wording: YOUR CHARACTER'S GOALS. This means your character, and you, need to have those goals. If you spend your time waiting for the GM to throw up adventures, then you've missed the point, and should be playing in an Epic Campaign! You should be driving things. Your character should be making plans and trying to achieve those plans.

The GM is now going to provide difficulties and obstacles (that hopefully make sense to the worldspace) for your character to overcome. You do not give up playing until your character has achieved those goals or found new ones. The key with character campaigns is this: there is more than one character! So, it goes with saying: you must ensure each of your fellow players characters get to follow their goals too.

If they don't have goals, don't override yours onto the game and just have it as your character's story. Help the others find theirs through roleplaying and engaging with them. Only when you have finished all the characters' goals is the campaign over, so you had best make sure everyone is working towards theirs. And if you find you've spent the last adventure on your own goal, make sure to let other characters pursue theirs for the next adventure. It is not the sole responsibility of the GM to balance who does what. You can too.

SANDBOX

These are sometimes called Monster-of-the-week campaigns. There is no single purpose or goal, and anything can be explored. The GM can throw up adventures, the players can set goals for their characters, and it's just generally a large-scale free-for-all with anyone taking the lead. These are fairly common types of games but again, like character campaigns, it is important that everyone understands it's about sharing. Let the GM run an adventure or two, let the other player's PCs explore what they want, and balance out the time.

The key about going into a sandbox campaign is: Everyone is even more responsible for driving the game's narrative forward. You need a character with goals and ambitions and need to have plans going into the game. Do not expect others to drive the game, and most importantly, be aware that you might need to steer the ship for a while.

ACCIDENTAL

These campaigns are not planned. In fact, most of them were one-shots, that were so much fun, that you end up playing in the same worldspace again, possibly with the same characters, and a campaign suddenly emerges. The challenge here is that your character may have been built quickly, or assigned to you, and you haven't spent a particularly large amount of time thinking about them. This changes how you go about building your character but shouldn't change your approach to playing the game.

Here your character is going to be 'discovered' and molded over time. Don't like an aspect of the character as it was given to you, don't just drop it, work through it in game. An orc who hates being

blood-thirsty; that's a quest to find absolution for war crimes, that's an orc who becomes a monk to find inner peace, or who apologizes after combat. Accidental campaigns evolve into one of the other three types of campaigns. Your character should evolve too.

Make sure you are providing time for others to evolve their characters and provide support where possible.

Do you see how understanding the nature of the campaign to be played impacts your approach significantly? Players who do not understand these differences can find themselves losing interest in the game, or constantly underwhelmed, bored, or at differences with the rest of the party. Don't end up there! Do better.



AGE RATING

A very, sensitive and personal topic to which there is no right answer other than: you must feel comfortable, and if you don't, find a group where you do. Do not attempt to enforce your opinion on the rest of the table, that's unfair. It also can create tension where we don't need it. If you want to play an R18 game involving rape, torture, sex, and all the other subjects covered in R18, and no one else at the table wants that, find a group who does.

The inverse is true too, if you want a PG13 rating game, and complain when other players use expletives, you are impinging upon their own space as well. Agreeing to an Age Rating is the quickest shorthand to identifying a lot of these potential pitfalls.

I've never played in a group at a true R18 rating.

However, most of my games sit at the 18 rating because most of them involve horrid bad people doing horrid bad things to innocents. If I am in a live-streamed game or in public, then it drops to 15 or even PG13. *Pirates of the Caribbean* was the first Disney movie to get a PG13 rating if you're wondering what the rating standard is. The original *Conan the Barbarian* was 18, as it involved significant violence and sexual acts (with a camel in one scene).

The defense that: "It isn't me; it's my character." Is not a defense, it's a lame excuse. Sure, you're playing a drunk, washed-up hero who hates his life and what he's done. Even in a PG13 movie, you won't be using Fuck as a go-to word. *The princess bride* is a class example of that exact scenario. Simply state: "My character swears, injecting harsh words in between his speech." Problem solved.

TABOO OR TRIGGER SUBJECTS

Sometimes called Lines and Veils, or Limits, or Personal bugbears. Although the age rating should help cut things like child labor, slavery, racism, bias, prejudice and so on from the game (or include it as the case may be), there may be some subjects you simply don't want in the game. Incest, the game of kings and queens throughout most of our history, may not be something you want to know about. Including certain creatures or events (drowning or suffocation) might be triggering, and although the GM should be most aware of any of these issues, you as a player should also be aware of them. If you have a player who abhors the idea of violence against animals, and you have your character kill the evil witch's innocent cat, that could be triggering.

Never dismiss someone's triggers. Most folks I know laugh at some of my triggers (namely snakes). For them it's just a reptile. For me, if it is CGI, or in a game that's totally fine. If it's real, then do not expect me to be in the same building. A player in my group invited us around to a game at their place. I walked in to come face-to-face with a large terrarium and inside a very large Rock Python. That was possibly the shortest game on record. I didn't say anything, I simply turned around, got into my car, and drove home. Had they respected my complete phobia of these creatures, they would never have invited me over.

I'm not an extreme case, I'm just a case, like everyone else. I've had folks who hate jelly or wobbly things, as it triggers their gag reflex just thinking about it. I can cut that out of my game in a heartbeat, and guess what? The game doesn't change one iota except that there are no oozes, or wobbly-wobbly things.

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

This one crops up, time and time again, in the FAQs on my channel: “We have a player who misses out two sessions, comes back, doesn’t know what is going on and it’s a drag.” Or: “How do you run a game when a player is missing?” There is no right or wrong policy here, just having a policy is important. Some GMs hand-wave and have a missing character vanish or play them as a GMPC for the time they’re missing.

Whatever your group decides, stick to it. Real life is going to intrude, it’s going to suck. The older you get the more difficult it becomes to find time. Trust me, I’ve had folks spend thousands of dollars on a weekend of gaming, just so they have a chance to actually game uninterrupted.

This leads me to the second aspect of attendance: distractions during the game. If the venue is a home and has children, how often can they interrupt the game before a new venue is chosen? Or does it matter? Well, if your group are gathering because everyone is being social, then attendance requirements can be very open and loose. If your group are focused on playing the TTRPG then attendance needs to be maintained at 100%.

Taking calls during the game, or ‘slipping out’ to run a quick errand, these may be one-offs and not require a social contract, on the other hand, having a quick thought about it, committing it to the contract and moving forward will save you a lot of issues later if one player constantly causes issues with poor attendance.

NEW MEMBER POLICIES

Bringing in new members can be exciting. It can also sometimes be as a result of a player gaining a significant other. These are challenging considerations: Do you let new folks join, and if so, under what circumstances? Is there a trial period where everyone gets to play and decide if the new member is a fit or not? Or does it come down to the GM? It should be a whole table decision.

Should significant others simply be accepted into the game? My advice is always to run a one-shot with the new player (significant other or not) to see if they fit into the group. Showing them your social contact will also help tremendously to get them into alignment quickly, or in convincing them not to join in the first place (and thus avoid the horrid situations which may arise later).

CHEATING

Oh, this one. Surely those sitting around your table should not have to cheat. Isn’t that the action of a child? I have seen so many folks ‘fudge’ rolls or ‘forget’ to track ammunition (if that’s a thing that needs tracking). The urge to ‘win’ or to not be seen by their fellow players as losers, is strong. Remember to

ask the question: What is the purpose of the group? If it’s social, an escape, or personal exploration then perhaps a fudge here or there is OK and shouldn’t be called out.

If it’s about making new friends, a job, or playing a TTRGP, then have in the social contract a strict policy: Cheating is to be called out. Repeat cheaters will be asked to leave the group. It’s only fair.



FINANCING

Who pays? Should the GM be expected to buy all the rulebooks? Provide all the snacks? Pay for the minis? Should the group pay? If so, who keeps the things when the game is over? These questions can quickly sour relationships so, my strong advice is: Get it in writing.

This game can be played on a park bench with nothing but a pencil and some paper (the pencil can be fashioned into a dice for rolling purposes). It is one of the cheapest hobbies out there. And then you can go spend thousands of dollars on it and have a running monthly budget for new stuff. It can become a very expensive hobby too.

Generally, most groups operate on a: 'Food is by split bill', 'snacks are for self', 'drinks are for self' and

'the host doesn't provide anything except electricity and water' policy. Purchasing minis, maps, terrain, markers and the like – that's up to each group. I've played some games where there was a per game fee of a couple of bucks. The fee went into a purser's strong box until there was a new rulebook or item that needed purchasing. That was then bought with funds from the purser's box.

When the group dissolved, the GM by default got to keep the stuff purchased, or it was divided equally between the group.

I've also had games where players purchased adventure modules they wanted to play and shared them with the group. Whatever works for your group, just make sure everyone is happy with the final policy. Not everyone in the group has the same disposable income.

HOME BREW INFORMATION

In case your GM has not already shared this information about their game, or if you have additional rules you'd like added, this should be included in the Social Contact. We have some generic house rules: If the dice isn't flat, it's rerolled. You can call a single die a

dice and you won't get called out for it. If it's not on the table, it's rerolled. These rules apply to any game, TTRPG or boardgame.

If there are things that feel should be noted, this is the section to note them down in. It helps keep everyone on the same page, and if new players are allowed into the group, then they can be quickly apprised of the situation.

ADJUDICATION

Finally, you need to clearly outline the process of how the contract is enforced and by whom. Is it the GM's job to make the final decision? Why? Just because they are the rules arbitrator for the game doesn't give them super-human powers to be a judge over the group. It could be a quorum-based system, where it's on a vote basis. Whatever system you put in place, everyone needs to agree with it, and to back it up when it is enforced.

Deciding who sends the text to the obnoxious player who cheats, eats all the snacks and never brings their own, and also just talks about Star Trek all the time (in a Call of Cthulhu game), can be tough. Sometimes it is also tough to stop everyone sending it.

However it is done, it should always be with an example of the contract violation and with an opportunity to appeal, change, or have a second chance. Sometimes folks get carried away in the moment, and slip-ups can happen. Sometimes what one player sees as cheating; another sees as creative interpretation of an alternative solution.

ENCOUNTER

Write down your thoughts on the following and in doing so, create a social contract you can share with others!

- Purpose of the group
- Roles and responsibilities
- Type of game being played
 - Age Rating
- Taboo or Trigger subjects
- Attendance requirements
- New Member policies
 - Cheating
 - Financing
- Homebrew Information
 - Adjudication

350 XP

My name is Guy, and this is my social contract.

- The purpose of the group is to collectively tell an emergent story using a predefined set of rules that apply to all. We are here to have fun, be creative and enjoy the process.
- The GM is a player and is not responsible for my entertainment. We are all collectively responsible for contributing to the story, and for ensuring we're all engaged and enjoying ourselves. As a player, my responsibility is to be inclusive of my fellow players, engage with the world my GM presents and to do my best to faithfully work as a team.
- I believe the game we're playing is all about dark and gothic themes and will have an age rating of 18 due to elements of horror, violence, gore, sexual abuse and slavery. I understand that this will be in the context of evil, and will be things we, as the party, are striving to end.
- I have a personal phobia of drowning and would prefer not to have any part in scenes where my character is suffocating or drowning. I also dislike mustard and would prefer it not to be included in the game or placed on the table during gaming.
- I commit, and expect everyone else to commit also, to attending the bi-weekly game, arriving no less than 30 minutes prior to game kick-off and leaving only once the GM has closed the session but no later than 11pm. Any new members must be agreed upon by all players and the GM.
- Cheating is unacceptable, in any form, and should result in the character instantly failing their roll. A second violation of this and the player should be asked to leave the group.
- As I like the idea of pizza being a collective, and of having minis, I'm happy to contribute £20 a month to the kitty. That money is to be spent on minis or terrain as decided upon by the GM. At the end of the campaign those minis are divided up equally amongst all who contributed to the game. Pizza will be a bi-weekly expense and will vary depending on the place ordered from but not exceed more than £15 a head.
- The GM is responsible for all rules calls and I agree to not dispute those calls during the game. The GM will agree to hear my out after the game and possibly adjusting their rules calls moving forward but not retroactively change anything. The GM, if creating their own world setting or rules must inform every player BEFORE character creation of these changes and or additions.
- We're all here for the game, and we're all here for each other. For the game, for the group.

YOUR DUTY

Every player of a PC at the table has a duty to the game and to the other players in that game. I know of so many roleplayers who do not know about this duty, and who often find themselves left out of new groups, or uninvited to games. They don't understand why, or in most cases assume the group has simply ended.

What then is your duty to the game and the players? It is, quite simply, to not be a self-centered drama mongering hot-head, who is only interested in their own game. As someone once put it: How not to be a dick.

But we need a definition, one person's Dick is another person's Richard. I've already alluded to a few of these duties, and here they are: Inclusion, Questions, Notes, Engagement. Four little words that seem normal, and for a lot of you, you'll already be doing them.

INCLUSION

Inclusion here is used in the broadest sense of the word: You should seek to include your fellow players in the game. Weird right? Shouldn't they be including themselves if they're playing? Sadly, this is often not the case as we are dealing with introverts and extroverts. The Extroverts will make sure that their character has fair game time, is actively pursuing goals, and is present in the worldspace. An introvert might be happy to go with the flow, and not be too active. Both states are fine, however, both states should be looking for ways to include one another.

What do I mean? Let's say you are an introverted player, and your character is part of a group setting up camp. The GM asks everyone what they are doing. You respond with: "Helping set up camp." That seems, on face value, to be sufficient. It isn't. It's a very passive response and one that doesn't include anyone else.

A response of: "I'm helping Broan set-up the tent. It's difficult because I'm not really strong enough to hold the ropes tight enough."

The meaning of the two is fairly the same. Mechanically your character is helping set-up camp. However, the second response is inclusive. Helping Broan - you've included Broan in this and now the player of that character can choose whether or not to participate but that's their choice. You've also created an opportunity for another character to set-up and help with this: "It's difficult because I'm not really strong enough..."

Any other player sitting around the table can now have their character jump in and help secure the ropes. And if you think for a second your whole team pitching in to set-up a tent is not roleplay relevant, then you shouldn't have read this book. It creates a wonderful moment for you all to reflect upon: "Remember that time we set-up the tent. Oh, that was right before the troll attack..."

Extroverts have a different challenge. They need to learn to slow down. Often brimming with ideas,

or eager to move on, or hoping to simply be heard, extroverts can sometimes rush through the experience: "I set-up the tent, then I do a patrol, oh, and then I cast a ritual spell." This is just as exclusive as the introvert who just helped. It is going to force the GM to slow you down anyway, as there are three things you want to do, each of which may have consequences. You don't know what those might be, or if there are any, but it's the GM's prerogative to decide, not yours.

There is also no room for others to join in, unless they tag along with your crazy plans. That isn't inclusive either, expecting others to figure out their own plan, or join in yours. That's bulldozing the game in a direction you have chosen. We're a team remember. We play together.

Let's reword that statement to be inclusive: "Seeing Broan is setting up the tents, with Olly's help, I'll go ahead and gather firewood - anyone up for a walk in the woods?"

And suddenly it is inclusive, it's controlled, and you are only doing one thing at a time before asking for other player or GM input. I know, we all get super excited to move forward, or when we come up with great ideas, to push those ideas forward before we forget them. This game doesn't work like that.

The other form of inclusion often refers to including non-discriminatory words and ideas. Using gender neutral terms, not judging another character or player based upon their actions, dress sense, lifestyle choice, gender, sexual orientation etc. You have no idea what each of the other players is going through in their own lives. Far too often I see in games with Social focus where the social folks, not reading the table, push forward views or ideas that are exclusive and will alienate others. If that is what you want to do, then go ahead and state that you don't care what others do/are just so long as they don't expect you to change.

Find a group that works for you or realize that societal norms are in a constant state of flux, and that our language is in a constant state of change. The rules from 30 years ago do not apply today. We need to change to remain relevant. That's life.

QUESTIONS

You should be asking questions. All the damned time. What is happening? Why is it happening? What can I be doing? How does this connect to everything else? Does it connect? Should it connect? What do we, as the group, know? What should we be looking for? I can't list all the questions that should be flooding through your head as you play the game.

In general, however, what you should be asking yourself as often as you can is:

- What is our goal and what do we currently know about it?
- Why are we doing what we are currently doing and is this the best way to achieve our goal?
- If we don't know what to do, what are we missing?
- How can I help this situation?
- How can I include others in the current plan?
- How does this new information link to everything we have so far?

These are the key questions I constantly ask myself and hope others to do. There is an over-reliance on others to ask these questions that needs to stop. You are the great player; you cannot rely on others to ask your questions.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL AND WHAT DO WE CURRENTLY KNOW ABOUT IT?

I cannot tell you how many times I have asked the players: "So, what's your group's goal?" And their response is: "I dunno, we're looking for a starship in the nebula I think?" It chills me to the core when I learn that some players really don't know what they are actually doing but are just there to roll dice. Have they heard about tabletop wargaming? It's like role-playing without having to pay attention to the story.

On a more serious note, I do find that parties seldom sit down and discuss what they know and what their current plan is. We are literally sitting around a table – the usual place to discuss plans – so why are we not discussing plans?! It's a great inclusion tool too: "So, Brendan, what do we actually know about the one-eye sailor we're following?" By throwing questions out to the rest of the party you are automatically including them.

Having no answer to this question should automatically raise a flag of danger. If players can't answer this question, then you all need to sit down and talk. This is good for the GM to hear because the GM might think you all know what is going on, but in reality only one of you seems to grasp what is happening.

Here's a trick with questions though: just asking them isn't enough. You need to put them into action somehow. It could be by making notes of what is missing, or what you currently have, or of keeping a plan of action nice and clear.

WHY ARE WE DOING WHAT WE ARE CURRENTLY DOING AND IS THIS THE BEST WAY TO ACHIEVE OUR GOAL?

This goes hand-in-hand with the first question. If you are on track to your goal, is what you're doing the best approach? Are there alternatives that could be considered? Often parties will latch onto the first idea proposed and will blindly follow it until the end. Questioning the approach opens up doors to explore different options, and potentially new angles to the story. That's always a good thing.

Having said that, this question shouldn't be asked constantly, as too much doubt can stall the game. Ask it occasionally or after a major event to make sure everything is still OK.

IF WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, WHAT ARE WE MISSING?

Blindly lumbering forward, hoping that the GM will drop a coincidental piece of information in our path is not great roleplaying. It's passive and puts the burden on the GM to keep the game moving. Go watch a movie, it's easier. So this question is about looking at what has happened to the party in the last session or couple of minutes and looking for potential leads.

Just because none of you saw it at the time, doesn't mean you shouldn't be reflecting upon past events. Doing this as a team is inclusive and can reveal insight from each other into events that you never considered.

Remember in the tavern, that dwarf who suddenly dropped his beer, and then left? Maybe he heard us talking about the mine and went to warn someone. Maybe we should find the dwarf?

You may not have even registered it as anything but a clumsy dwarf. Make sure you all have input into the current situation and then move forward.

HOW CAN I HELP THIS SITUATION?

During combat we are always looking at our character sheets wondering what we can do to help improve the situation. Why then, when we are out of combat, do many folks switch into passive mode? You don't always need to use your character statistics to help the situation. Sometimes it can be by supporting your fellow characters, sometimes by just shutting up and getting on with it.

This question is also useful if you're with a group who are not good at being inclusive. You can insinuate yourself into the other players actions and reverse-engineer inclusion. I also feel that this question goes beyond merely 'active' actions. You could help the situation by vocally agreeing with the party. Or by looking to the current party lead and nodding support, and then waiting on them to act.

HOW CAN I INCLUDE OTHERS IN THE CURRENT PLAN?

You should always be asking this question. Even if the others have no valuable skills or abilities (mechanically) to add to the situation they will have the player's abilities. Things like: "Keep a look out, listen for guards, can someone watch my back" - little things are great.

The biggest way to include others is to ask for their opinions. How do you feel about the current plan? Do you think we know everything we need to know? What are your thoughts on our current enemy? Probing questions which strike up conversation and include others. It's an easy one.

HOW DOES THIS NEW INFORMATION LINK TO EVERYTHING WE HAVE SO FAR?

Whenever you get new information about the current adventure you should look at it critically and ask how it fits in with the bigger picture. Inconsistency is often a key to solving adventures. Sometimes it could also be the GM making a mistake so it's useful to ask these questions as soon as possible so that they can correct the information there and then.

If you can't see how the new information links to the goal of the adventure or mission, then it is time to ask why is there no link? What is missing? What could it be, or where might you go to find that missing information? Hopefully, however, the GM is giving you information that is relevant in some shape or form. Keeping track of this as it crops up is very important. It means you won't miss things or become overwhelmed when trying to recall things.

NOTES

This is the eternal question: how do you keep notes? Is it in shorthand? Is it scribbled anywhere on a random piece of paper? Most of the time it's not methodical nor is it laid out in a manner that makes sense to you, weeks after you've written it down.

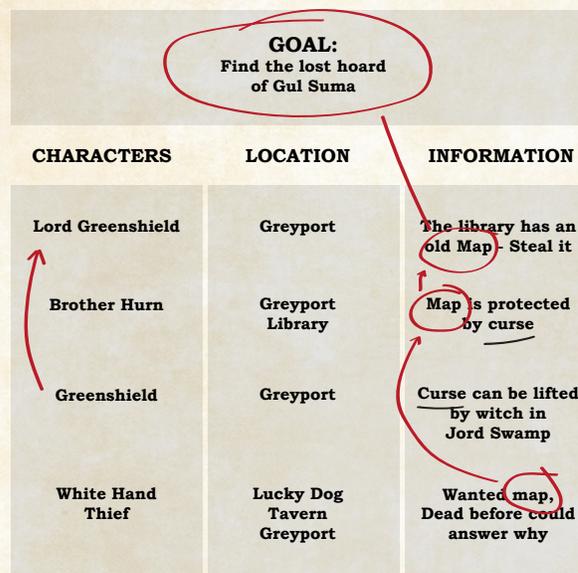
What is the solution? Personally, I have found two methods to work really well. They both have their shortcomings, and both require a little organization after the game. But since the GM is putting in a few hours after the game you can do the same right? Everyone is equal...

THE DROP-DOWN SPIDER

This is a spider diagram, or visual way of recording information. Start at the top of your page of notes with the central question you think to be the 'plot' or 'goal' of the mission. From there, draw out three branches - Characters, Locations, Information.

These will expand as you gain more information. Each time you get new information from a specific character, note the character, their location and the information. You can then link that back to the main goal or plot of the adventure. Most entries should link back to the main goal. If they don't, then perhaps they pertain to a side quest or a different quest altogether. Of course, they might not link back because you haven't asked the right questions or missed a clue.

This way you can track what is happening, where it happened, and link things back as needed. I find it helps organize my notes tremendously.



TAGGED

This is a system whereby I write down information and then TAG it. So, I'll jot down the information I need, my thoughts etc. and then tag it: Plot, NPC, Lore, Location, suspicion.

After the game is over, I then go back and look at what my notes say, I'll look at any plot entries and see if I can see a pattern. I can reflect upon NPCs and look for angles or weaknesses that my notes might have mentioned. My suspicions will be suppositions

that I make as I play the game and are a great way to remember what my gut instinct or insight was into a particular event.

Both systems require discipline, however. You have to consistently fill in your notes using the same method each time otherwise it becomes a mess. I've also used both systems at the same time, keeping the 'facts' for the drop-down spider, and my tag system for thoughts and ideas that have no relevance to the adventure.

REVIEW

I cannot state this enough: you need to review your notes before each session, and sometimes during the session with your fellow players. Ask them for

details or thoughts on specific topics or subjects in your notes. It is always good to get a second opinion on your notes - sometimes you miss a detail, or your notes are just wrong.

ENGAGEMENT

When I talk about engagement, I'm talking about engagement in the game. If you've read this far, you're already engaged in the game: You're willing to put in the effort to make the game better. The core thing with engagement is finding things to keep you interested in the game and alert. We all get some points where we're not actively involved in the scene currently happening within the game, and this downtime shouldn't be used to zone-out or check your phone. It should be used to check your notes, perhaps consult with others in a non-disruptive way or to do a drinks refresh run for the table.

That's one kind of engagement. The other kind is in games. If your character isn't engaging with the other PCs, that's an inclusion issue. If you're not engaging with the NPCs, the camp followers, the individuals your character meets, then you are letting slip a big opportunity for making the world feel real.

Obviously, and I hope it goes without saying, you

shouldn't talk to every single NPC you walk past. But you should try to do it at least once or twice a session (opportunity presenting of course). And if your character has an important NPC friend/ally/lover then engaging with them is vital to making them feel like a friend/ally/lover etc.

This kind of engagement makes the world feel like it is a living, breathing space, as you form bonds with the characters you talk to. And if you talk to them over time - different adventures - their world will have changed, and their lives will have moved forward (assuming the GM knows what they're doing). It enriches your experience.

ENCOUNTER

What is your taking notes plan?
What have you prepped?

50 XP

UNDERSTANDING HOW OTHERS THINK, AND FEEL CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY ASKING THEM HOW THEY ARE FEELING AND WHAT THEY ARE THINKING. THIS IS THE FOUNDATION OF ROLEPLAYING.



CHAPTER 9: BAD PLAYERS

Understanding what type of player you are is important for several reasons. Firstly, knowing whether or not you are a toxic player is a great first step to working out how to best fit into a group. Secondly, you can find groups of similar players and have a marvelous time. Thirdly, you can find GMs who match your type with their style of GMing and end up with a truly exceptional experience.

Often groups fall apart for no apparent reason and one of them is player type mismatch. Everyone might be a good roleplayer in their own rights, so it doesn't make sense as to why it all collapses. Knowing the type of player you are is a critical tool to learning your strengths and weaknesses, and understanding how to deal with others. Solve that riddle and you have a group that will work for years.

TOXIC PLAYERS

Here is a simple checklist to determine if you are a toxic player or not. Be honest. Toxic players usually lie on these checklists. If you feel the urge to ‘sugar coat’, ‘massage’, or downright ignore the question, you don’t need to finish the checklist, you’re a toxic

player. Move on to the next section on how to resolve being a toxic player and there is hope for you yet!

Put a X in all the boxes next to the statements that you have done in your past gaming in the last year.

X	STATEMENT	X	STATEMENT
	You have spoken over your fellow players in an attempt to get your idea heard.		You have made a loud noise, stood up quickly, slammed a door, hit the table or clenched your fists in frustration at the game or the players.
	When someone has made a foolish statement, you shot them down with a pithy comment or remark reinforcing their mistake/ignorance/statement.		You frequently have to correct the GM about rules calls.
	You often correct the GM on the geography and positioning of things, or on events that happened past because it helps your character now.		You use the dice roll as a suggestion, and you should hit or succeed anyway because your character wouldn’t likely fail.
	You have difficulty hearing your own ideas over the noise of the other players who make no sense anyway.		You are tired of carrying the whole party, who are incapable of doing anything right.
	People who don’t know the rules of the game shouldn’t play the game, why are they wasting your time?		You got distracted whilst filling in this checklist by something.
	You think that it is fun to inject a little chaos into the game because it’s boring otherwise.		If you have to repeat yourself, you get frustrated.
	No one ever listens to you, and you just have to act because if you don’t nothing will happen.		You’re the most experienced player in your group and they should just listen to you as it makes the most sense.
	You don’t really mind what happens to your character, you can just make a new one.		Who cares about the story? It’s the fighting that is important!
	I don’t mind if the game is cancelled, I’ve got great TikTok vids I can share about cats in hang-glidors.		I hate players who are slow, or don’t know what is going on, and I have to make all the decisions.
	Did you go look for TikTok cat videos while at the table?		If the GM makes a bad rules call, I need to fix it right there, because the GM should know what they’ve done and do better.

There are 20 items on this list. Did you get any? How many of these do you feel would constitute a toxic player? Having 1-5 is an indicator that you’re a toxic player. Having more than 5 means that you are having a very, very frustrating time playing TTRPGs

and that then raises the question of why do you play?

Just ticking the box once is enough to say: hey, read the description of Toxic players that follows and reflect very seriously on whether or not you are one, or whether you’ve just had bad experiences.

AVOID THE LONER CHARACTER TYPE. UNLESS YOU ARE EXPERIENCED AS A ROLE-PLAYER, THIS IS NOT A GOOD CHOICE. PROVE YOU CAN PLAY OTHER TYPES OF CHARACTERS FIRST BEFORE PLAYING A LONER.

TYPES OF TOXIC PLAYERS

Most toxic players won't know they are toxic players, or will, and just have no idea how to not be toxic. They can't help themselves. On the surface most toxic players seem to be friendly decent folk. They may even be super social outside of the game. It's when the game begins that it all falls apart.

Once the game begins, the player transforms into the Hyde of their social Jekyll. This can manifest in a few different ways, and I've seen some toxic players who have more than one or these listed, and who manifest more than one in a single game, making for a horrific experience for everyone at the table.

General hallmarks of a toxic player however are:

Self-Centered - it's always about them, their story, their character, their choices.

Their way - It must happen according to their plans, their orders, and their decisions.

Dominating - Anyone who defies that is shouted at, spoken to, or ignored.

Immature - Zero social skills, sulking or pouting when denied, or malicious/vindictive behavior in game

Overbearing - Talking over, ignoring others, or constantly harping on about decisions others made in an attempt to subvert them.

Unhelpful - Will not help out if they didn't plan it, authorize it, or if they warned against it.

These are not always present but usually toxic players will have some of those traits in the way they behave during the game.

THE BULLY

Anger management is a serious condition and if you have ever felt the need to physically express your frustration, then it is something you should look into. Slamming doors, throwing dice, or smashing the table are extreme expressions of frustration and rage. Getting up and leaving the room to go and get some air is also an extreme reaction. If anyone has ever cringed back from you at the table, or asked you to calm down, it's time to take a long hard look at yourself and get into therapy.

The only advice that can be given to someone who is getting so emotionally worked up about the game is to try to understand why you play the game. Not just because it's fun, but for the deeper reasons: Maybe you feel in control when playing the game, or that you are safe in the game space. Roleplaying can be an incredibly therapeutic tool.

THE SNARK

This player thinks it is funny, or clever, or just does it because they are bitter, to belittle others at the table. Scoffing at others' ideas, putting them down with sharp comments or simply dismissing them out of hand might be a 'character trait' but the player needs to make it very clear that they are not dismissing other players. When it's player on player commentary, it's awfully toxic. I've had players say to other players: "Don't bother thinking, we know how that turns out." On the surface that might seem like a joke, but

when repeatedly used, or constantly reinforced, it becomes incredibly toxic to the human being.

Before you say anything to anyone at the table, turn the statement back upon yourself. How would you feel with the GM looked at you and said: "I smell smoke, your braincell trying to work again?" And if your instant retort is: "But I have good ideas, no one would say that to me", then you are the worst kind of snark: an arrogant one.

THE IGNORER

There are times when other players seem to talk in circles, never moving forward, and that warrants someone stepping up and taking charge. That is leadership. Someone who simply takes charge all the time and doesn't listen to others is a toxic player. This can happen because you believe your solution is the best, and you must prove it to everyone else. Their ideas might be cool but yours is the best and will work out the best too. They just have to shut up and let you do it. This hyperfocus on their own cool choices blinds Ignorers to their fellow players, who may feel if they are just an audience for this person, and not really required for participation.

The best advice for this kind of behavior is to present your idea to the group and then shut-up. Wait for them to decide if it is a good idea or not, and what to do with it. If they choose not to take it, that's got to be OK with you. Don't go and try to do it anyway. That's not helping. Show others respect so that your next idea is asked for, rather than you having to force it.

THE CONDESCENDING

Knowing the rules is an excellent achievement. Telling people how the rules work, when asked, is also excellent. Telling people that the rules don't work that way, and then telling them to look it up for themselves whilst you smugly sit there is toxic. You are not helping them learn the rules by forcing them to look them up themselves. They won't remember the rule, they'll remember the experience of being made to look a fool in front of the table, whilst you sat there judging them.

When a rules question comes up, or someone does something that doesn't fit with the rules, volunteer to give the correct rules and then swiftly give it them. You can quote page numbers and paragraphs with impunity as the table it is waiting for it. Forcing others to look it up just to prove you were right isn't helpful, and it breaks the game's flow.

THE GM BROWBEATER

I've experienced this less and less over the years but as a starting GM it nearly broke me. A player who calls up the GM on a mistake about the hair-color of the NPC is a good player. The GM may have made a forgotten or might be purposefully doing it. A player who tells the GM their story is boring, or the combat is boring and the game isn't fun, is a player who doesn't know how the game works. Constantly twisting the GM's words or trying to force the GM to accept your interpretation of the situation is very toxic.

I've even had players try to force me to include things in my game because I never said they were not there in the beginning: "There IS a ledge I can use to do my amazing nonsense on, next to the head of the dragon! You didn't say there wasn't one, so there

must be one. I'll use the ledge." This attempt to force the GM to let there be a ledge, in a giant cavern, is only for the benefit of the player.

If you find yourself trying to convince the GM of things that should be in place but are not, then you need to shut up and sit down. Ask the GM for the description, and then work with what you have been given. Put your creativity to work within those limits and express your frustration through your character. They can be frustrated too that there isn't a ledge right next to the monster.

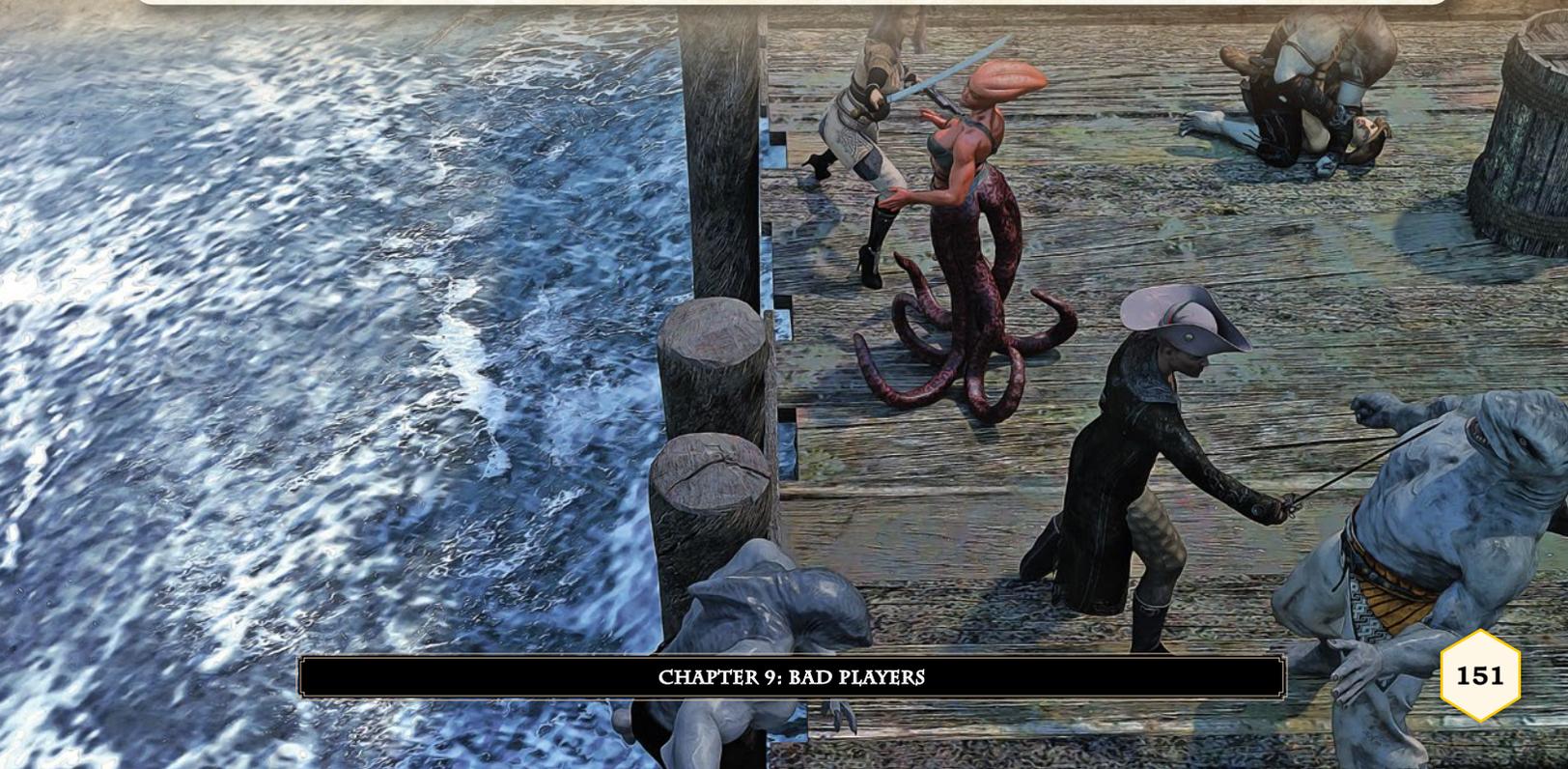
THE DISINTERESTED

I never understand this one. Players who simply don't care about their character. They are happy to use pre-generated characters because if they die, they die. They mean nothing to the player. In a very real sense this is true, it's a fictional construct, but then a better game to play would be a board game. Even if you don't care about your character, your character should. And they should try to stay alive and find happiness.

Not investing in the character is like driving a car and never taking it for a service or a wash. It's just a machine until it is sold, and a new one bought. That car is not going to last long, won't make much of an impression and no one will miss it. Again, why not go play boardgames where the characters are usually just tokens?

The biggest negative here is that the character isn't interesting to interact with. This means interacting with the player is equally futile and the player isn't going to be invested in what happens to their character, and by default, every else's.

If you can't find an interest or care for your character, then go play boardgames.



THE JERK

You find it fun to disrupt the plans of the party. You throw in stupid things or do ridiculous things to cause some chaos. You don't really care about the characters in the game, you just want to see what would happen if Gandalf slapped Elrond with a dildo shaped like a fish and made of orc jelly. You also don't like following the leader, and will act against the party or, if not against the party, you will just go off and act on your own.

This isn't helpful to anyone. This kind of player might also find it fun to argue just for the sake of arguing. It doesn't make the game more entertaining; it slows everything down. Again, not useful.

To combat this, the average jerk needs to sit back and tell the group what they are really thinking, and when they don't have a thought, to be silent. They should also be team players and learn that there is fun to be had in following someone's lead, and that chaos will find a way. It will inject itself.

THE NON-PARTICIPATOR

Unlike the disinterested who doesn't care if their character lives or dies, the Non-participator goes a step further by not caring about the game at all. If it happens it happens, and their character will do the barest minimum using mechanical rules. I'm playing an archer. I shoot arrows at the target till it's dead.

This doesn't give other players a chance to engage with your character, or to work with your character. Having no opinion in the path of the party, no thoughts, no ideas at all, begs the question: why are you there? Go play a video game.

This may be due to the fact that you don't feel confidence in your opinions or ideas. That's fair. Many folks think they won't say the right thing or will say something foolish. Fair. You will need to learn to enjoy saying foolish things, and the wrong things, and the right things too. This is a team sport requiring team interaction. If you are not prepared to try to become part of the team and do not feel that the team is a space enough space for you to do that in, then you need to go play computer games.

THE DISTRACTION

My editor said it would be unethical to fill the next seven pages with images of cats pretending to be dragons, or skateboarders scorpioning themselves. Also print isn't as effective as...oh! Did you know that squirrels can't remember how deep they bury their nuts, so they can sometimes dig down three feet... into Jello which is mixed with the glitter to make a glittery ball. 3 - 1 was the score.

Right, point made. The distractor is not really focused on the game, they may want to be, but their brains want to share other things. Thoughts make them want to quote a movie, or sing a phrase from a musical, or pull up a video of Dracula on Ice. Whilst the distractors' brain is fired up, this feels like part of the normal progress. Everyone else is now distracted, torn away from the game by irrelevant stuff.

It is impossible to stop your brain from forming connections, recalling exciting or interesting things, and from becoming inspired by these. That's awesome. The difference is in choosing to action it by speaking it aloud, singing it, showing it, reenacting it, or drawing it in front of everyone. When you find yourself wanting to share non-game related content, look at this note:

**WRITE IT DOWN, KEEP IT SAFE,
AND SHARE IT LATER**

If you can do that, you're on your way to learning how to keep your distractions to yourself. However, if you find your distractions taking you out of the game too frequently, you need to ask: Why bother playing the game? Why not just watch those videos, sing that song, and chill on the sofa?

**UNDERSTANDING HOW OTHERS THINK, AND FEEL CAN ONLY BE
ACHIEVED BY ASKING THEM HOW THEY ARE FEELING AND WHAT THEY
ARE THINKING. THIS IS THE FOUNDATION OF ROLEPLAYING.**

THE TIMID

The bane of my table is the player who is timid. I am not talking about in a social anxiety kind of way. I'm talking about the player who never makes their own choices. They constantly look to the rest of the group, or to someone in particular to make the choice for them.

GM: Well, you've walked up to the door. It's currently closed.

What would you like to do?

TIMID: What should I do?

GM: It doesn't look locked. And Linis already scanned for traps.

TIMID: What should I do?

GM: -

TOBY: Why don't you open the door?

TIMID: OK. I open the door. Then walk?

GM: The room inside looks warm and inviting, there is no one else there.

TIMID: What should I do?

GM: -

TOBY: Walk inside.

TIMID: I walk inside.

GM: Everyone dies of old age, game over. Thanks folks.

I had to get that off my chest. Clearly it's lived with me a long time. Timid toxics can also extend to those who never know what dice to roll, or what check to make. What should I roll? That die. What do I add? The universal constant for Suck.

Make choices, right ones or wrong ones, but take ownership of the game and the character. If you don't know the dice, make a drawing of them on a piece of paper and look at them daily until you do. It's like showing up to a soccer match and not knowing what the black and white thing that everyone is kicking around is.



HABITS OF BAD ROLE-PLAYERS

This isn't an exhaustive list, but it does cover a lot of ground that I haven't focused on elsewhere in the book, and in some cases is a repeat of what I've said a

dozen times already. If you think I've repeated it too many times, chances are, I haven't repeated it enough. These are in no particular order.

TRYING TO WIN

I would argue that the entire point of a roleplaying game is to create a satisfying shared story experience using a predefined set of mechanics, coincidence, and creative application of both. Winning therefore has no end goal, no interest in success or failure of the PCs just in the story experience so long as it feels satisfying. You could argue and say that winning would be achieving the goal or objective of the character or party. I think that's fair too.

What winning isn't, however, is the PC, and by extension the player, winning at breaking the game or beating the system. Frequently there are players who build characters so mechanically strong that unless the GM is an equally mechanically mad genius cannot do anything about. The character just overrides everything. Has that player won? Well, the GM is now a useless component of the game. As are all the other players and their characters. So, if by winning you mean: "My PC is the only one of value", then sure. You've won.

Similarly bad are players who cheat at dice rolls or keeping track of their health. How many spells they have left or what their shields are. Who is winning? The PC? No, because they had to cheat to survive. The Player certainly isn't winning by being able to stay in the fight longer. Sure, they're engaged but if the GM learns they cheat, then what? Does the GM cheat too?

The long and short of creating winning characters is not about creating perfect characters or cheating so that your character remains perfect. That's dull, boring, and isn't in the spirit of the game.

NOT COMMUNICATING WITH FELLOW PLAYERS

This is one of those ones I have mentioned time and time again. PC-to-PC conversations are so important and yet they very seldom happen. Then player

to player conversations also seem to be vague and only just before the game starts or just after it ends. Groups that talk about their game regularly between sessions and have PC-to-PC conversations always have better experiences when it comes to gaming.

Their stories feel well rounded, their plans seem to stick up and, for the most part, they get on better with one another. Take a moment next session to have some PC-to-PC conversations about what is going on or where your PC feels things should be heading. You'd be amazed as to how cool it makes the session and experience.

NOT LISTENING

We often listen to defend or react rather than to understand. The art of listening. Which is about hearing and understanding before thinking of a response and making one. Many folks hear the first few words and instantly their brains spin off into a thousand solutions/rebuttals/answers, but they don't pay attention to the rest of the words being spoken. You cannot hear if you are thinking, you can only hear when you are listening.

Players who pre-empt conversations by cutting off their fellows mid-speech, or who try to finish other's sentences are not clever, they're not listening because they're thinking about what the end of the sentence will be.

This is then exacerbated by the player missing the point, and either continuing without knowing (because they don't ask for clarification) or act incorrectly based on only half the information. Some players are embarrassed when they miss what was said and don't ask for a repeat. Others ask for six repeats as they lose focus easily.

The best way to ask for a repeat is to ask the group if you can explain what you think is going on. Let them listen to you and accept corrections as you go. This will help you internalize the plan or idea as you are saying it and adjust it as they help you.

WHAT KIND OF GIFT WOULD YOUR CHARACTER LIKE THE MOST?



NOT READING THE RULES

This one is a bugbear of mine as a GM more than anything else. Players will read the rules for their abilities or skills or whatever system mechanic and then apply it. When challenged on the rule, they defend it, saying they have read it and that is just how it works. Instead of going back to the rule to check they just continue. Later it is proven that their “interpretation” was wildly incorrect. I don’t have an issue with that. We all make mistakes. The issue I have is with folks who grossly misread the rule so that it works to their advantage, and blindly ignore rules that don’t apply to their liking.

As an example: (The rule as written). This attack requires you to have less than half your health, to scream a blood chant, and then, using a two-handed melee weapon, make an attack. Your damage for the attack is doubled.

(The rule as the player ‘interpreted it’) This attack doubles your damage.

They used it when healthy, they used it when they were ‘sneaking’ to kill the guard before the alarm could be raised, and many times used it with a single-handed weapon because it was magical and had better stats. It was for many sessions a killer attack which seemed unstoppable. Then we double checked the rules, and the player suddenly realized they’d misread it...repeatedly.

Don’t be that player.

In the same vein, the player who sits back and expects others to know how their characters abilities work is equally shameful. Why should someone else put in the grunt work of learning your character’s abilities? Sure, when you first play the game and character you might need to consult with the others to make sure you’re reading and applying the rules correctly, but after that the onus is on you to remember and apply them.

NOT TALKING TO NPCs

PLAYER: We’ve searched everywhere for clues and can’t find any!

GM: The barkeeper, six barmen, and dozen witnesses look at you expectantly.

PLAYER: We interviewed the barkeeper. And he didn’t tell us anything. This GAME SUCKS.

The world is full of NPCs, and yet, players think that asking just one will solve their entire problem. So many times, I’ve had to have NPCs volunteer information because the group have asked one NPC and no other. This is bad detective work. Engage with the NPCs. Looking for armor? Don’t just stop because the fruit and veg seller said they didn’t know of any. There are more NPCs out there. And good GMs will have information for you all over the place, not just lumped into a single info-dumping NPC.

The next time you feel stuck, look at who you have spoken to in the game. You might find it’s a very short list. That’s your problem there, not the lack of clues.

NOT PLANNING AND FOLLOWING IT

As a player I get so frustrated with my fellow players who don’t bother to set up a plan of action. You arrive at the cave of the dragon. What’s the plan? Scout? Gather intel? Nope. Walk in through the front entrance bold as brass and then wonder why all the bad things happen. As a GM I constantly have to think about the preparations of my NPCs because, unlike the PCs, my NPCs have a plan, and they follow it.

That brings me to my second point: following plans when they are actually made. It blows my mind that folks can sit around a table, come up with a plan, and then totally ignore it once the plan starts. This can happen for a few reasons, I agree (learning new information as the plan begins or being unable to be in the right place at the right time) but most of the time it’s players who either were not focused during the planning or simply don’t care about it.

There is a section later on how to plan for those of you who may need a little guidance on the subject, go check it out.

DOES YOUR CHARACTER DANCE AND IF SO, WHERE DID THEY LEARN TO DO IT AND WHY? IF THEY DON’T, WHY DON’T THEY?

DON'T TRUST THE GM

In fairness, this one is a bit of a finesse. The GM is responsible for creating scenarios in which your character is thrust by some means. Your job is to then get the character out of it, alive (as well as all the other stuff). I had players get thrust into a scenario, they knew it was coming, and once it landed, they hated it and left the game. They didn't trust the GM. The GM was using the scenario to set-up something else but needed the scenario to happen. With the players' lack of trust the GM's plan was destroyed.

Your GM should always have a cool story at the heart of their plans. When you do things with your character, you may find the consequences are unpleasant. Arrest being a common one. It is a poor GM who would have you sit in a dungeon for a year without offering some adventures whilst in there. You may not like the idea of being imprisoned but you should trust that your GM has a plan (even they are making it up on the fly). Embrace it as a new chapter in the character's story and use it to build your character's experience.

BUILDING AN ISOLATED/NON-COMMUNICATIVE/LONER CHARACTER

Oh, this one. My character is a loner. Fine. Get out and fuck off. Go be alone. This is a cooperative game, where you have to work together. There is no alone together. If you want to play soccer but don't want to work with your teammates, go play singles tennis instead. There are countless films, books, plays, comics about 'solo' characters. "I work alone!" They are forced to work with others and become better characters because of it. So, unless the loner is going on that kind of journey and begrudgingly accepts the help of others, and does actually look after them too, then and only then can you play a loner.

But, if your character keeps slinking off to do their own stuff, or doesn't ever work with the party, please go play a computer game.

TRYING TO BE INVOLVED IN EVERYTHING

FOMO (fear of missing out) is strong. We would all like to be included. Some folks try to get their PC included in everything. Like hyperactive bunnies they want to be everywhere all at once. A split party sees them oscillating between all the splits, desperate to be there and to be taking part. Why is this a bad thing? Surely it shows engagement.

It does but it also shows a lack of perspective. Could your character really be present at the negotiation talking to the king, whilst also listening at the door for intruders, and casting a spell? Oh, and also near the stables to hear the conversation with the horse. It becomes ridiculous. It also denies other players a chance to do things. No need to do anything: Fomo the hobbit will do it all for us.

Eagerness to be involved is excellent and something every GM hopes will happen in their game. Just make sure you are engaging in your assigned task, and not in everyone else's.

LYING

When a player lies about their stats or die result that is cheating. Lying is when the player purposefully has their character lie to the other PCs. This is applicable in many situations as it creates drama and tension. However, it also only works when there is justification for it. When it's just pure malice or to get the rest of the PCs into trouble, then it's jerk behavior.

It doesn't come up often, but when it does it can be a really difficult situation to resolve.

As an example, let's say the character learns that the door down the corridor is trapped. All the players hear this information because everyone is sat around the table. It's meta-game knowledge. The PCs approach the door and the one who knows about the trap, backs away. When asked by the other PCs they lie and simply say they are guarding the rear. The players know what is about to happen. They approach the door. The expectation would be for the one who knows about it to warn them, but for some reason the player chooses not to. The PCs open the door and all die in a horrific explosion. The player who is left giggles. When questioned why they didn't say anything, they responded with: "I thought it would be fun."

That's awful play. On the other hand, if they responded that they believed the rest of the party were doppelgangers who had replaced their real friends, then that is tragic for the story and works well, if that PC is then distraught and overcome with grief.

It's not a fun thing to do, no one benefits from lying and the game is made a little sadder when it happens. Don't do it.

CHAPTER 10: GENERAL GREAT PLAYER TIPS

The rest of this book focuses on tips and techniques that will help you improve your game

as a player. They are not in any particular order, and all are equally important.

HOW TO QUESTION OR CHALLENGE OTHERS OR THE GM

Table etiquette is a vital skill for all players to have. I've seen too many players challenge each other or the GM in such deplorable ways that it makes the whole situation very tense. We don't want that, most of us are playing the game to have fun and relax. How do you challenge something then? Politely and calmly. But there can be different approaches depending on what you're asking.

I'm curious, I want to learn, please explain, demonstrate, show...

If it's about a rule or something that exists in writing/with evidence, you can simply ask: "I've looked at the rule/evidence and I don't see what you're seeing. Help me understand how you get +400 to your attack roll? I'm curious and want to know more."

This is a great way at opening a topic: Making yourself the target of the inquiry because you are curious and want to learn. No one can fault you on that. Anyone who gets defensive about that kind of request, or refuses to help you, is hiding something and that's then on them. If they can't own up to their own actions who needs them at your table?

I'm confused and need clarity; this is my interpretation of what is happening...

If you think that the GM has forgotten something, or is changing how things were, or that another player is doing something they shouldn't or didn't say they did but claim they did, walk them back to those statements by explaining how you understand what is going on.

I'm confused, I thought you were standing by the door, and that you'd said the door was locked, now you're saying the door is not locked so you can escape before we can react.

Once you've outlined what you know to be true, let the others either correct you (there is a good chance you misheard, or they were not clear in expressing the situation) and when they can't, it forces them to correct themselves.

Can someone draw me a map? This is how I see it...

When the GM uses theatre of the mind and yet somehow always has advantage for the monsters to hit characters regardless of their movements, it might be time to turn it into a map. Don't tell the GM they're bad at theatre of the mind, rather, phrase it that you are bad at it, and need to see it. Why shouldn't you tell the GM they are bad at theatre of the mind? The GM might know they are bad, but not have the time or resources to draw maps beforehand. They may be worried you and the other players expect beautiful maps. They may need some guidance.

Drawing a map is never going to hurt anyone, and in fact, it should help most players anyway. When in doubt, draw it out. It will help wonderfully.

The bottom line is: When challenging something, put the focus on yourself. You need to understand what is happening. It takes out the accusatory undertone that some players might feel and turns it into a learning session rather than a witch hunt.

TENTACLES. LOVE THEM OR HATE THEM? HOW DOES YOUR CHARACTER FEEL ABOUT MULTI-LIMBED SPECIES?

META-GAME VERSUS IN-GAME

This is a huge concept, and many players and GMs will argue back and forth over it. In summary here is the premise: Meta-game knowledge is knowledge that the players have but that the Players characters do not possess. In-game knowledge is knowledge that both the PC and the player have. Some adamantly proclaim the directive is: Meta-game should never enter into the game or be used in the game. It should remain outside of the game.

Why? Essentially it is about keeping the PC as 'real' as possible. We've spoken at length on the subject of finding the 'truth' in the character. If the PC is suddenly injected with knowledge they couldn't possibly have, does it break the game's immersion? Most will say yes, some will say no. Neither are absolutely correct in my opinion. Some Meta-game is good, and some is bad. It should be used as a scalpel to heighten the story and the stakes, but not as a blanket bludgeoning weapon.

Classic meta-game example: The party has split into two groups. Group A is exploring the mineshaft whilst group B is doing research in the lab on the surface. Group A has an accident, and their elevator plunges down into the darkness. They desperately attempt to fix it, but will all die if they can't slow their descent. Group B's players are aware of this because they are all sitting around the table. Their PCs in the soundproof lab have no idea about the accident.

If no meta-gaming is allowed at all, Group B continue on with no recourse but to finish their research in the lab. Group A all die tragically as they fail to stop the elevator shaft from failing.

If all meta-gaming is allowed, Group B stop what they're doing, rush out to the elevator controls and apply the brakes as they know exactly what is going on. Group A survive.

If some meta-gaming is allowed but it must be explained (it must be turned into a truth before it can be used) one of the PCs in Group B takes a pee break, heads outside and is drawing yellow snow angels when they notice the mine-shaft elevator is in free-fall. Desperately they call their team for help. They don't know what is happening, so they radio Group A, but realize they are too deep down to send a signal. They

stop the elevator just in case. Group A survive.

Of the three options which one is the most dramatic? Which one results in the more interesting story for all the players?

I've always advocated for the third option: the truthful meta-game. If the player can figure out how they might know or find the meta-information, then a small random act or two should be enough to justify it.

This requires a great deal of trust from both sides. As a GM I have to trust that my players will make the most use of their meta-game power, and my players need to trust that I will give them a chance to make a difference. Obviously if they're in totally different locations and there is no way for characters to cover the distances then those laws override any kind of meta-game knowledge.

Isn't this a kind of cheating? Well, most TTRPG books don't cover meta-gaming, or if they do, they usually say that it's at the discretion of the GM. Make sure to check with your GM before you do anything meta-game however, and preferably check in session zero.

There are times when meta-game knowledge makes the story even more powerful, when it is used AGAINST the PCs. You, as player, know that beyond that door is a vacuum, but your PC has not found this out at all. They've failed their checks; they've missed the warning. The GM is helpless, so are the other players whose characters are elsewhere. One of the players tries to use meta-game knowledge by calling your character as they're about to open the door. They hope to call you back from some reason. You know however, it would be absolutely awful for your character to be vacuumed into space. But it would make all those objectives and story points you've been working on just burst with tragic power. You meta- the meta-game by having your character tap her communicator and saying: "Later, I'm just opening..." And then your character opens the hatch and is sucked out into the vacuum.

When and how you use meta-game is something you need to learn to do as it is a really powerful weapon in your storytelling arsenal. My rule of thumb: If it's been used in the scene already (the current day in game or location etc.) then I don't use it again. But that's always subverted by law of cool story.

THE MOST COMMON GOALS FOR ALL CHARACTERS ARE: ACCEPTANCE, SECURITY, SHELTER AND NOURISHMENT IN REVERSE ORDER. WHICH OF THESE DOES YOUR CHARACTER HAVE AND WHICH DO THEY NOT HAVE?





WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE DOESN'T USE META- CORRECTLY?

Unfortunately relying on the trust aspect of using Meta-game correctly means that some players will use it without making it truthful first. I have seen it happen many times before where a player uses meta-knowledge and is instantly shut down by their fellow players who all bark: "Meta! You don't know that."

Whilst they are correct in pointing out the meta use, they have shut down the whole line of meta without knowing it. That chastised player will now

shut up and disengage from the situation to avoid being accused of meta'ing again.

Instead, a good response is: "Your character doesn't know that but how could they discover it? What could lead them to discovering it?"

Now the player is engaged and although they may not come up with a reason, at least there was an option. And they learned how meta-gaming works when correctly applied.

CREATING A PLAN OF ACTION

We have previously discussed a plan for your character, so do not get confused with this plan. This is a plan of action for your character's mission objective. Need to break into some place? Hunting down a beast? How do you do that?

Please note these plans are sold free of charge and carry a 99% of failure... or is it 99% chance of success? I forget. Use them carefully.

STEALTH MISSIONS: BREAK IN / HEIST / BREAK OUT

These missions are always a challenge to knights wearing heavy, loud, metal armor, and frustrating to those ninjas who make no sound. This is most often because of a misuse of resources.

This is about understanding the timing, layout, and defense of a situation.

STEP ONE. RESOURCES

What are the current resources your characters have access to and what are their limitations? What do you think you'll need to succeed and where could you get it?

(Look at each party member's skills and abilities, don't allocate jobs just yet, make note them. List any items which may be useful)

STEP TWO. IDENTIFY THE TARGET AND TIME FRAME

You have to get into this room by this time, you have to steal X from that room by this time.

STEP THREE.

IDENTIFY THE PREVENTION / PROBLEMS

You must get a sense of what might stop you, or what is in place that could be a problem. Guards, security doors, access codes, pits of lava, these are good to know about. And if your characters do not know about them, find out. Launch an undercover mission, speak to the guards in the pub after hours, learn what you can.

STEP FOUR. NEUTRALIZE EACH PROBLEM.

Look at the challenges you've identified in step three. Work out a solution for each one. Some might require brawn, some might require finesse, or something to happen BEFORE the event occurs. Each problem must have a solution. Don't just bulldoze in. This should all be done as a team by the way.

STEP FIVE. ALLOCATE RESOURCES

Taking what you did in step one into account, you can now split the party into teams that most effectively can neutralize the problems of step four and accomplish the mission as outlined in step two.

Loud characters (those without stealth) should be assigned to overcoming obstacles that require noise. Creating distractions, blowing up walls, or driving the get-away vehicle. Do not rely on the un-stealthy to do stealthy things. It isn't fair or wise. There is no small role in these kinds of missions, each role should be vital to the successful outcome.

If a loud character is required to move through stealthy zones, they should be added to step four as a problem to be neutralized – coat their armor in oil, wear a disguise as a washerwoman, forgo wearing armor and so on.

STEP SIX. GETTING IN, GETTING THROUGH, GETTING OUT

Each unit (squad, group, PC) needs to have the following sorted out: How are they getting into position, how will they work through their position, and how will they get out of that position? If the answers are: "We'll figure it out", then you must assume the mission will fail as characters fail to figure it out.

STEP SEVEN. IDENTIFY WHAT ELEMENTS REMAIN OR WHAT IS MISSION CRITICAL

Now you know what you have and what you need to do, you might need to find or get some things that you didn't consider. This is the time to make that wish list and to go and get what is needed. Remember step two, pay attention to your timeframe!

STEP EIGHT. DOUBLE CHECK THE PLAN

Check that things are still in place, that things haven't changed and double check to make sure everyone is on the same page.

STEP NINE. EXECUTE THE PLAN

Time to watch it all unfold. You got this.

STEP TEN. REGROUP AT PREDETERMINED LOCATION

Split the prize, the reward, or make it out of the local area with the loot.

COMBAT MISSIONS: INVASION / ATTACK / AMBUSH

These require understanding the enemy, their placements and their strength. What makes this different from a Stealth plan is the basic assumption: Combat will happen. The art of this plan is controlling how and when it happens and making sure that your group have the best chance at surviving.

STEP ONE. LOCATE THE TARGET AND EXPLORE THE AREA AROUND THE TARGET

This is intel gathering 101. Where is the enemy and what is the geography around them like. Do not engage the enemy at this stage. This is a discreet mission.

STEP TWO. IDENTIFY ENEMY STRENGTHS

This could be done as a test, a mock attack, or gathering more intel from firsthand witnesses (at the local pub for example). Focus on how quickly the units can move from one area to the next, and what is the maximum number that occupy an area at a time.

STEP THREE. EXPLORE THE INFORMATION

Steps one and two should give you enough information to work out the enemy response time to an assault on any area. Look for locations geographically that put the enemy at a disadvantage and you at an advantage, or that neutralize enemy strengths. This may not be in the enemy camp.

STEP FOUR. WORK OUT HOW TO GET THE ENEMY WHERE YOU WANT THEM TO BE

Account for each unit of the enemy and make sure to have a foolproof method of moving them to where you want them to be. A trap, a lure, a diversion, you have many means of attracting their attention. Make sure you keep it where you want it.

STEP FIVE. ALLOCATE YOUR RESOURCES

What do you have, who do you have, and which group or resource is ideally suited to the tasks in step four.

STEP SIX. WITHDRAWAL

In the event that your plan fails, how do you plan on withdrawing the allocated resources? Is another resource required to be held in reserve to accommodate for this? If so, it becomes part of the plan.

STEP SEVEN. DEPLOYMENT

Do your resources need to be deployed before the allocated time? PCs might need to get behind hills on the other side of the enemy for example. These should be dispatched. Any resources requiring special transport should be planned for.

STEP EIGHT. CHECK, AND RECHECK

Run through the entire plan with all those necessary (could just be the PCs, or the PCs and squads of men). Each should know their own plan, and their own exit strategy.

STEP NINE. ATTACK

Launch the attack. This is where the plan hopefully unfolds, and everything takes place accordingly. Or goes horribly wrong – so I hope your plan B or exit strategy in Step 8 was sound!

STEP TEN. IF THE PLAN SUCCEEDS

Have your catch phrase ready to drop: “I love it when a plan comes together.” “Everything is proceeding as I have foreseen it.” Something appropriate.

Between these two types of plans it should be pretty obvious how you should be running plans of action for any other scenarios. Gather intel, neutralize threats, allocate resources, rehearse plan, enact plan. These will always only work if everyone sticks to the plan and follows through on what they have to do. Of course, it makes it more interesting when things go wrong. But sometimes, just sometimes, it’s fun when things go right.

**WHAT SNACKS DO YOUR FELLOW PLAYERS LIKE TO BRING TO THE TABLE?
WHAT DO THEY LIKE TO DRINK? HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THEIR TASTES?**

HOW TO SOLVE A CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

This doesn't come up often but there are some groups who love to run mystery/detective style games, and this is the appropriate place to discuss the one process which everyone takes for granted but which no one really knows or follows, and it can lead to

frustration very easily: How to solve a criminal mystery. The reason for this is because use the GM hasn't got all the answers and gets things mixed up. This requires a methodical approach and solving the one fundamental: Time.

STEP ONE.

ESTABLISH TIME OF EVENT

At what time did the criminal action take place? Only when you know for certain can you begin your investigation. This time becomes your anchor around which everything else hinges.

STEP TWO.

INTERVIEW ALL PARTICIPANTS

There are several things that must happen in these interviews. You are looking to establish the following:

MOTIVE / PROBABLY CAUSE

If the person being interviewed did commit the crime, why would they have done it? What would have motivated them to do it? What would they gain from doing it? What would they lose from not doing it? There must be a reason (and usually it's either money or reputation).

ALIBI

Every potential participant must have an alibi. Someone who can vouch for their whereabouts at all times during the incident being investigated. Any alibi offered must be checked and verified.

STATEMENT

The interviewee should have some statement as to what they saw, heard, smelled, or didn't. Note down their statement.

TIME

Establish a complete timeframe for the day leading up to the event and subsequent to the event. Any information the interviewee gives should be noted down with a timestamp. Even approximate times can be useful.

OPPORTUNITY / CAPACITY

Did the interviewee have the opportunity to commit the crime and did they have the capacity to do it. If the victim was killed by crushing, could a skinny hobbit do the deed? Whilst no one should be ruled out on lack of capacity because people find ways around their limits, it can help.

LINK

If a murder weapon was used, or a device, if the device or weapon can be linked to the interviewee it is a significant step forward.

STEP THREE.

INVESTIGATE THE SCENE OF THE CRIME.

This is sometimes done before step two, but it depends. If the scene is complex or likely to change soon, it should take priority. However, if it is unlikely to change, interviewing witnesses is top priority as events remain fresh in their minds.

Each scene should be investigated to ascertain the following:

- The entry of the criminal, and time of entry if possible.
- Who else was at the scene, or near it.
- How the criminal enacted the crime.
- How the criminal left the scene.

Getting a time on it all is ideal. Look at how far the candles had burned down before the wind from the open window blew them out. That kind of thing will help.

STEP FOUR. THE MAP

You need to map out the whole crime scene and all areas around it, and to position all the interviewees on that map. Start with the specific moment the crime happened. Where was everyone according to their testimony? Those with unverified alibis are placed where they say they were but with big question marks.

STEP FIVE. THE DOG WORK

Now work through the crime, see who was where and what they could have or should have seen. Compare their testimonies and look for points that correlate. If six witnesses say they heard an explosion at 6pm, most likely an explosion happened at 6pm. Anything with corroboration like this should be written down as a 'fact'. These should anchor your other times.

Time to look for the inconsistencies. The comments and times that don't add up. Whose version of events doesn't sync with the anchor facts? Or just make sense at all. Look to understand first why they may not make sense, but these are the leads that need to be followed.

STEP SIX. FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

Having identified all the inconsistencies those need to be chased up. Go back and interview again, this time using the anchor times as facts. Let the interviewee know that you have caught their deception. See if they offer another or are willing to give you the truth.

STEP SEVEN. PUT IT TOGETHER

With any new information you should now be able to put together the whole picture from a time perspective. If you eliminate all your witnesses, and your

evidence points to it being an external agency that did it, you'll need to change your investigation into a hunt. Start looking for suspects and more witness who might have seen these external agents.

If it had to have been one of the witnesses, look at each one and the one with the most inconsistencies, or who cannot reconcile their movements, is most likely to be guilty. Work out a plausible method of how they could have committed the crime.

If something was stolen, work out where it could possibly be based on the amount of time that transpired from the theft to the arrival of the authorities. If possible, find whatever was taken.

STEP EIGHT. HOLMES IT

"How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?" This was Sherlock Holmes statement, and it remains very valid. In role-playing games however, the impossible and the improbable exist side by side with the possible, so make sure to check before convicting the priest with the snake tattoo in the library with the giant snake shaped dagger... By eliminating witnesses and suspects when you only have one left, they must be that one.



HELPING OTHERS TO ROLEPLAY

You're reading this book. That means you're a great roleplayer already. But what if there are new folks at your table, and they're not sure how to roleplay? Or there are older players who've only played one way

(non-roleplay focused) and don't really know how, or are uncomfortable with roleplaying? What then? There are a few things that you can do to help set the tone, level, and expectation of the table.

DO IT FIRST

"I go to the bar, I hit the monster, I steer the ship." Using the first-person pronouns is the biggest barrier that many roleplayers don't like crossing or are uncomfortable using. Show them that you are an expert in switching from first person PC to first person player and that they are two very different characters.

Having said that, don't be a dick and force others to do it. Show them the way by doing it yourself and then let them discover if they like it or not. If they do use "I", or try to as often as they can, try to reinforce this by engaging with them more.

ACT IT UP

Put on your accent, make the silly faces, laugh loudly and get into the emotion! A word of warning: when getting angry, frustrated or violent in character, always chase it up with a wink or a smile to the player who owns the PC your PC is shouting at. Let them know, it's your PC, not you, who hates them or finds them stupid.

ENGAGE

Ask your fellow player's PCs about themselves. Specifically, how they are feeling, what their childhood was like, and how they felt about it. Asking emotional questions can help other players figure out just what their character IS feeling even if they don't specifically know. Act as a guide to your fellow players: a guide to their PCs emotional state.

SUPPORT!

If a player is trying to do an accent, or trying to portray emotions, and they keep laughing or apologizing; support them. Tell them to keep going and try to stay in character so that they can see you are there for them and can use you as a point to focus on.

ENCOURAGE

After a session tell those who roleplayed well that you really enjoyed what they did. It's amazing how a little encouragement goes a long way to building stronger roleplaying and better gaming experiences.

COLLABORATE

This is one that will seldom come up, but when it does, it can be amazing. Collaborate with your fellow players for a next session event. Write a song together that your PCs then perform, or bake a real cake, and bring it out when your PCs bake a cake in game to celebrate a PC birthday or event. These should be once or twice in a couple of months of game time events, but they make a huge impact on the truthfulness of the game.

USE MINIS/CARDS

Sometimes all a player needs is a 'cue' that they're in-character or out-of-character. This can be in the form of a mini or a PC portrait. When I'm holding the card up, or the mini, I'm IN character, I am my PC. When I'm not, I'm just me the player. This can work. Sometimes all that is needed is just a physical representation of the character to act as a channel through which the player can roleplay.

WARNING!

Now that you know how to help others roleplay better, this is a giant warning. Which I probably should have put first but didn't, to prove a point: BEFORE you begin to help your fellow players on their roleplay journey you should always ask the group (in a session zero for example) whether they want to really get into roleplaying or if they don't really care for it. If they all say they want to: Then dive into it. Show them the way.

If they say that they prefer to keep it on the down-low, ask them if they mind if you do it. If they don't mind, then off you go, do it, and maybe you'll encourage them to get in on the action. If they say that they'd prefer no one really does it because they find it goofy, go find a different group ffs. If, however, they don't mind but don't participate, don't force the issue. Not everyone is ready to step up and BE their character.

HAVING A COMPANION – ANIMAL OR OTHERWISE

Animal companions, and non-animal companions are an extension of your character. Your character might be quiet and withdrawn, but your rambunctious tiger cub is out and about making friends. How is this an extension of your character? Your character chooses to have this companion and to keep this companion. It could be that the companion represents everything that your character wishes they were.

Building your companion isn't as complex as building a character, however there are a few things you can add that will make them feel real and it's worth doing it if you are going to treat your companion as such. I hate players who have companions (animals or sentient beings [NPCs]) and who treat them as disposable meat-shields. That sucks.

PERSONALITY

Unlike your PCs complex personality, companions can be simpler in their personality design. A word or two should be more than sufficient to describe how your companion operates on a daily basis.

- Happy
- Grumpy
- Dopey
- Inquisitive
- Protective
- Nervous
- Aloof
- Aggressive
- Cautious

These are some great options to choose from. You can mix and match, selecting two. My companion

is aloof normally but when danger is near, they become nervous. My protective companion (normally) becomes very grumpy when we don't take regular breaks.

These few words sum up the companion quickly. One word that isn't needed there is loyalty. The companion is loyal to your character because of MECHANICS. The game system that allows for animal companions, very seldom, will have break clauses for companions abandoning their owners/masters. It is assumed the companion is loyal to you and that you are loyal to it.

MINI-GOALS

Setting a mini-goal or series of mini-goals for your companion really brings them to life. These goals could be to find something fun and shiny for its master, or to just find a good meal. It could be to sleep as much as possible, or to make a nest in the master's

cloak. Whatever the goal, these shouldn't interfere with the party's plans and your PCs goals, but they can be mentioned in roleplaying. Each little reference to the companion and their mini goal makes them more real for everyone.



REFERENCE IT OR LOSE IT!

You should be referencing your companion on a semi-regular basis, at least once a session if not more. And your companion should be considered and mentioned when terrible things happen to your character or party. You fall down a mineshaft. Does your companion follow you? Were they sleeping inside your cloak? Did they survive? Often there is a lot of GM hand-waving when it comes to your companion. The reality of it is that if you have a pet hamster, and you get hit by a bolt of lightning in a combat, that little furball should be hit by the same rules and by all rights be fried to a crisp.

However, equally frustrating and even more game-breaking in my opinion is the companion who's never mentioned ever, and then suddenly six months after all kinds of adventures, your PC gets their pet polar bear to open the gate. What pet polar bear? You've had a pet polar bear all this time? It

could have pulled the sledge through the ice caves, it could have swum the icy river, it could have helped us fifty times in the past week, and NOW, now you bring out this polar bear. To quote a wonderful player when she and the party learned of this polar bear, "where the actual fuck has it been all this time?"

Mention your companion regularly so that the GM remembers it exists and protect it with plot armor, and so that everyone else remembers it too and make it a truth rather than a fictional creature. Now, some game systems like to have the animal companion be a 'dismissible' being. It can be sent back to wherever it was and summoned when needed. This seems awfully unfair to the animal companion who, after being sent back away from its master must now fend for itself. I'd assume it would try to find its master, no matter how far away they are.

Keep your companions close, and remind us they are there, it makes them real and makes the game more interesting.

HELP WITH YOUR COMPANION GOALS

Every once in a while, you should try to help your companion achieve a goal. If they are an animal companion, let them stalk their prey, take them on a hunt, or if they are a sentient companion, take them shopping or spend time together doing whatever needs to be done. This keeps them alive, makes them truthful, and allows the rest of the party to follow

along and have some of their own downtime or companion time.

It goes without saying: Don't do this every session. This is a 'between adventures' type activity that you should choose to drop at appropriate times. It gives the GM a chance to do a mini adventure that is not linked to anything other than a bit of fun and gives everyone else a break from whatever the main story seems to have been.

DEFEND IT

If you are not concerned about the health of your companion. Don't just sacrifice it. If you don't show remorse over sending it into danger, or fear when it is wounded, or joy when it is healed, get rid of your animal companion and just call it a mechanical bonus. Don't name it or bother to describe it.

Yes, your companion might, mechanically, be there to soak up damage and keep you alive, but if you roleplay it as nothing but a meat bag, which says a lot about your character too. And it's an untruth that

sadly means you're not really good at roleplaying. I'm being honest.

Does this mean that you can't ever send your animal companion into a situation where it will almost certainly die? No of course not. You can. You should. It makes a tragic story. Remember Rufus? The one who held the cave mouth against those trolls, whilst we escaped? Poor Rufus. He was an excellent dwarf warhorse. Those are stories. And if your character gets teary when thinking about their lost companion, that's good roleplaying.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU ASKED OTHERS HOW WELL THEY FELT THEY KNOW YOUR CHARACTER? IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE SO, ASK THEM IF THEY LIKE YOUR CHARACTER!

SACRIFICE FOR THEM

Having just said you can sacrifice them, the opposite is true too: when you sacrifice something of your PC for your PC's companion, it makes the world explode with delight and makes it all so very real. This is what makes great moments. You take damage to protect your downed companion, you give them your portion of food, you are there for them.

It doesn't get stronger than that. Of course, if your game system allows your companion to be killed, and then be returned, with a mere flick of a finger and a few words, your dynamic is going to be different. Then the creature is just a magical tool and should be treated as such.

Think of how we use AI and devices like Siri and Alexa. I say please and thank you to mine because I want the machines to remember I was a kind human, unlike most who scream, shout, or swear at their devices when they do what they are told and not what their human overlords expected them to do. A companion that can be summoned and dismissed is not a companion, unless you consider your arrows to be companions.

Companions can be a wonderful storytelling device, and a remarkably good means of creating a great truthful moment. Use them wisely and they will be a great companion. Ignore them and they're just as exciting a sword or laser pistol.

ENCOUNTER

Do you have an animal companion? Where does it go when you're entering a dangerous place? How do you feed it? What is it like? Why do you have one in the first place?

150 XP



WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY YOUR CHARACTER ANY MORE...

It does happen: You create a character you think will be awesome, or devious, or cunning, or amazing and they turn out to be something that is dull and boring. Or, worse yet, the mechanical build you thought was going to be fun to play turns out to be a total dud, you can't hit a wall, you drop like a fly, and you couldn't work out how to get out of a wet paper bag if you tried.

These can be very disappointing and discouraging eventualities, and our usual response is simple: The character retires or is killed, and you create a new character, hopefully having learned the lessons of the past mistake. (Spoiler: You won't, because these are complex systems we use, we need to experiment and fail and learn and adapt.)

This is very much the wrong way to go about changing your character, for a couple of reasons. Before we jump into them, you need to unpack what it is about the character that you just don't like.

Personality is sometimes a big one. You had planned to make a character who was exciting and dynamic but also socially awkward and difficult to control. Instead, you ended up alienating your fellow party and being stuck on the fringe as a slightly unhinged tag-along. Your character arc of growth and change never took off and you don't want to be the sulky emotional wretch that you have now become. Dear player, what you have failed to realize is that THAT is the moment you should be leaning into the character hardest. This is your time to shine. Remember all that character growth, character stuff we looked at in depth earlier? This is it. This is the beginning of your upswing.

Your character can now realize what they are. It might be a fireside contemplation, or perhaps in the middle of combat you realize no one relies on your character, or that they exclude you from diplomatic moments because of your crazy unpredictable nature.

Your character must come to realize this and then, here is the critical part: Effect a change to move away from what they are to what they will become. Suffice it to say: The personality change is the big event that we are often hoping for, and when we don't get it, we often think it's a failed character when in fact... it is the perfect moment for the big event!

Another one is mechanical failure. This is where the character simply doesn't work the way you hoped the TTRPG mechanics would. The rules might have

seemed good on paper but then in the actual game they cause way too many complications and prevent the character from doing what they want, and from you as the player being able to enjoy this rad character. Unlike a personality moment where you are disillusioned with the character, here the character is fine, but the mechanics are not.

This can be fixed in a meta-game solution but played out in a character montage. The GM, should hopefully, be reluctant to lose your PC but shouldn't care overly much about the PC's mechanical build. So, change them. Go to sleep one night a fighter, wake up the next morning a spiritual being. What happened? How do you make it a truth (for we must always do this). Your GM could have a side quest where you are transformed by a mystical device, it could be that you've been secretly practicing in the background for a couple of sessions. If you do it this way you are the greatest player of all time. What I mean is: You know you want to change mechanical build so for a session or two, before you tell the other PCs, you take time to practice something during your down times/campfire moments etc. When you do change, it has already been established as a truthful culmination of your practice. There are many ways to explain your transformation.

Conceptual is another type of failure that is the most difficult to resolve of them all. This is where the entire character from personality to mechanics is just not what you thought it would be. It's just boring, or frustrating. A character who cannot talk and uses interpretive dance as a means of communication, or a mage who uses spells where magic is illegal and you are getting tired of always sneaking about and only casting in extreme circumstances, there are many examples where changing the mechanics and personality of the character simply won't be enough.

Are these grounds for killing off/retiring the character? Sadly, at this point the answer is a yes. There comes a point where trying to salvage the character is not going to help the game and is going to ruin it.

Why don't I want to take this path though? Why do I advocate looking for ALL possible angles to saving the character before removing them from the party? There are three main reasons: Meta-game, Character knowledge, Investment.

META-GAME

Forcing the party to take on a new character is going to be tough unless your fellow players are great players. When your character leaves/dies/retires, they leave a gap, or perhaps not. The rest of the party need to consciously decide to recruit someone to fill your old space. They then need to accept whatever new character you've created as that replacement without much agency at all.

Now, I know this is a game, but it's the truth that makes it a reality. How do we then make this new character joining, a truth rather than a <press to insert player 1> option? The GM can cause you to

coincidentally meet up in the dungeon/holding cell/cantina. Your character falls in with the group and after an adventure as they seem like a good match. That's one way. As a player YOU need to focus very specifically on WHY your character would want to be part of the group, and what they are willing to do to be a part of it. Why do they need to belong to this group. The onus is on you to make yourself useful to the group, and slowly become one of the party members again.

This is such a wonderful roleplaying opportunity. Starting as the outside, and over a couple of adventures becoming one of the team again. It's a beautiful journey.

CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE

I'm all for using meta-game as a tool when running my games. What I am not for, is when meta-gaming is used as handwaving to explain why your new character knows everything your old character knew. Unless there is a mind-transfer (in which case it isn't a new character) there is no real way your new character, who just joined, knows what the hell is going on.

Players who then say: "Oh, we catch up your new PC with all the info." That's a glib way of doing it, and I think a missed opportunity for the party. Let them actually explain to the new PC. Remove the notes that the player made for their old character. Let them make news ones. THAT isn't meta-gaming, that's roleplaying. And that's a great way to get the new character up to speed, but they must use the knowledge gained in that session only, not the stuff they, as a player, can remember.

INVESTMENT

This is the part that I really feel gets lost when you change your character for a totally new one: The investment of the game world into your character. The NPCs who have dealt with your character, the backstory development, the impact your character had on the world is now just a historical record.

Any plots or plans your old character was working on are abandoned and that leaves an unfinished story and an unfinished truth. If you are going to remove your character, attempt to resolve as many

of those threads as you can first, or have your old PC leave to go and RESOLVE them in the background. How would you express this? It's up to the GM and yourself, but if you could tell the GM what your old character is doing, let the GM decide the outcome, and then send a letter to your party, updating them. That's amazing background stuff. Especially if your new character resents them for it, or doesn't care at all. Alternatively, maybe they do care and keep up a written communication with the old character and can from time to time update the party.

IF YOU DON'T LIKE YOUR CHARACTER, HAVE THEM GO ON A JOURNEY OF INTROSPECTION AND REFLECTION, CHANGING THEM SLOWLY UNTIL YOU END UP WITH A NEW VERSION OF YOUR CHARACTER.

ANSWERING THE GM'S BIG QUESTION

This is a question that you will get, regardless of how experienced the GM is: "What did you think of my game?" If you've never GM'd before, let me fill you in on what that question really means:

"What did you think of me as a creative force? Did you like what I did? Did you think it was original and fun? Am I a creative person? Will you still come back to play again? Can you tell me I was at least OK? I hope you noticed my knowledge of the rules? Did you even see the mini-terrain I made for the session? Was I too 'railroady'? Am I weak? Am I good? Who's a good GM? Woof?"

OK. So maybe not all of those things, at least not every time. I've never barked as a GM except when playing that one TTRPG - where the characters are dogs.

The GM is hoping that you'll affirm them, or possibly provide some valuable feedback to help them improve in the future. The usual off-handed response of: "Yeah, it was cool", just won't cut it folks. Your GM will be left wondering what they did wrong, because believe me, they feel as if they made a thousand mistakes.



HOW THEN DO YOU ANSWER?

Stop whatever you are doing and give them your full attention. It won't take long, and you own your GM that much. Then tell them what you liked and what you didn't like. You must find something that you liked, or if there is nothing, explain why you failed to connect with the game. Gushing and telling the GM they are amazing and wonderful won't help anyone.

Example one. Good and better

"Oh, I totally loved the session. What wasn't there to like? Combat, social distrust, that NPC who turned out to be a dragon. We all saw it coming but when it did, it was just great. I was engaged the whole time, and to be honest, could go for another couple hours."

Example two. Good and bad

"I love your games. We always have so much fun. The combat was solid, the NPC who turned into a dragon – that was classic and just perfectly timed. I didn't really care for the social distrust; it's just politics and that feels kinda like real life. But it was part of the adventure, and the others liked it. I'll be back next week."

Example three. Bad and worse

"I just wasn't in the vibe today. I couldn't get into the game. The combat was, like, all combat right? Number crunching. I don't know how you could have changed that; we all knew it was coming. The social distrust, I'm not a social character, so I couldn't do much there, and that's on me. I should have been more active in finding stuff to do. As for the dragon thing, the others liked it, but like I said I couldn't get into the game, so it was just a meh, a "more combat moment" for me really. I'll be back next week. I just need to figure out my headspace so I can get into the game."

Example four. Ending it

"Thank you for running the game today. I've been looking at our sessions and I don't think I fit in with the group. You're a traditional GM and you run a great tactical game, and the other players are really good at running those numbers. I think I'm not a numbers kinda player. I won't be back next week; I'm going to take a break and see what I can learn from this. It's been great to hang out with you guys. Thank you for that opportunity."

Focusing on your personal take rather than on attacking the GM is a much better approach all around. I know you might want to tell the GM things specifically. Don't just hurl abuse at them.

Example one. The wrong way

You suck. You didn't know the monster's stats. Your story was dull and predictable. The NPC sounded like an ostrich giving birth, and the social distrust was so contrived I nearly puked. I'm going to go play Tetris so I can at least have some story... Oh but thanks for the game. Keep at it.

Example two. The wrong way again

I would have known all the monster's stats before. I'm more of a storyteller than you, so I noticed your many mistakes in the narrative. Ever heard of the 5-step method? I'm better at voices than you, so I'd skip those if I were you, not your strong suit. I also think that in general you're boring and I'm just better than you are. But keep GMing. One day you'll be OK.

Example three. The right way

One challenge that you had, from my perspective, was not knowing the monster's stat blocks, and being reliant on looking them up each time. That really forced you to slow the pace down, and that made the combat take a long time. There are a couple workarounds for this because no one knows all the stats of all the monsters. Either use this app which tracks it all for you or make the numbers up and go with it. So long as you're consistent, you're golden, and then that will free you up to run the combat how you'd like to run it.

Notice how in example three, you only focused on one of the issues in the example. The other two just complained about everything in a deluge of information. I'm sure in example one they were meaning well, and trying to be concise in their response, but it was an information overload. Any GM getting that feedback would be crushed.

Example three tackles one of the issues. The pacing of the combat as a result of the GM not knowing the stats. You don't help someone overnight. You support them on a journey. One step at a time. Another thing that I think is invaluable when answering a GM is to provide support by way of solutions. And if you don't have a solution, ask the GM if you can help them find one; and go do that. Jump online, go to YouTube and find the support, then share it with the GM.

You become a better GM yourself by learning the answer, and you help your GM become a better GM. It also helps build trust between the two of you.

Constructive feedback with solutions, options, and opportunities are critical to giving the GM confidence to return and run another game. Something that almost all GMs need from time to time.

PLAYING EVIL CHARACTERS

The urge to play an evil character exists in many of us. My advice to folks who want to do this: Be a GM. For the singular reason that it is so much

easier! An evil player character brings with it a lot of things that need to be done in order for it to be a satisfying character.

YOU NEED TO ESTABLISH EVIL

If your character hides the fact that they're evil from the rest of the group, then you're not really playing an evil character. You're playing a neutral or good character who has evil thoughts but doesn't act upon them. That's a complex character and a very interesting one to boot. Perhaps you should explore playing that kind of character.

This means you need to do evil things that the rest of the party can see or know about. Otherwise, it's just as meaningless as not doing it. In the game *Baldur's Gate 3*, one of the characters is a self-serving vampire. Almost instantly we learn of their nature,

and their vague attempts at avoiding their vampiric tendencies, but, with a few questions, they reveal their true dark nature.

The reason you need to show your true nature is so that the party is away that your character is shady and self-centered. If they choose to carry on journeying with your character, that's fine, that's then on the group for not calling it out and stopping it.

Bear in mind, the other players are not obliged in any way to accept your character into the group just blindly. No one should be forced to play with a character they hate or despise (as a player). Why do you need to establish your nature at the beginning?

YOU WILL CHANGE THE NARRATIVE OUTCOME OF THE GAME

As an evil character you may be attempting to sabotage the group, to gain power, to do whatever it is that you think your evil character would attempt to do. Ultimately this means that the groups goals will not align with your goals (unless you're all playing evil characters). When it comes time for you to twist the knife and betray the party, it is only satisfying to all the players if they knew you were evil and yet, did nothing about it.

Gollum, from the *Lord of the Rings* books, is a classic example of an evil character who travels with a group of heroes, who accept him, because he is the only one who knows how to get to Mount Doom. And, when he betrayed them at the very end, no one

is surprised or shocked, as it is within his nature – something that we've seen exemplified many times throughout the books. If Gandalf suddenly cut the heads off of Strider, Frodo, and Elrond in the final battles, and revealed he was secretly trying to destroy the free peoples of middle earth, most likely we'd all be a little angry, frustrated, and highly unlikely to ever read the book again. At no point is Gandalf ever portrayed as something other than virtuous and just.

If you suddenly betray the party at a critical moment, you won't elicit smiles and knowing nods, you'll probably get a very cold reception. On the other hand, if you have been establishing that you're evil, and that you are only in this for yourself, and then you betray the party, that's when things turn into a happy "I knew it! I knew you were evil!" moment.

DID SOMEONE IMPRESS YOU DURING THE GAME? ONE OF THE PLAYERS DO SOMETHING REALLY COOL? TELL THEM AND EVERYONE ELSE AT THE TABLE! BE VOCAL ABOUT IT!

ESTABLISHING EVIL IN A GOOD WAY

Obviously playing an evil character requires acts of evil. If you can work those out to appear 'good' or that you were acting in the best interest of the party, or if you can twist your explanations for these evil acts so that the party accepts them, then you are a true master of evil. As an example: If your character secretly murders the prisoner that your party is holding captive BEFORE the party gets vital information, that's evil, but also really irritating to the group and the GM. However, if you murder the captive AFTER

they've revealed the information but before the party let the captive go, then it's evil, and isn't disruptive. You can then dismiss your act as: The captive could've have talked and blown our cover...

Timing your acts of evil should be around what keeps the game moving forward, but what also works for my own agenda and goals. When you disrupt the flow of the game, or deny things to your fellow players, that when you run the real risk of being asked to leave the group. You must be smart to be truly evil.

YOU MUST HAVE AN AGENDA

Without a goal in mind, your character isn't evil, they're a psychopathic individual with zero actual value to the party or your playing group. The reason you have to have an agenda is that your evil must be directed. The rest of the party must be able to work it out, and you must have specific goals you are aiming for.

Just killing everything, or committing random acts of violence isn't evil, its chaos, and any good player group should ask you to change your character. It's intolerable and shows poor judgement on your behalf.

An agenda should include steps, how is your character going to use the party to achieve their own goals, and what will they do with the party once those goals are met. The desire to become a demi-god, to exterminate an entire alien species, to become

rich and powerful, these are all basic evil objectives, when you attach the term: At any cost.

Critically, your character is one of those things that should be sacrificial for the 'cost'. If your character isn't willing to die for their agenda, then they're not committed. With an agenda your character then isn't just doing things for the sake of being evil. They're doing things for the sake of their goal.

Not only does this help the party see your bigger plan, but it gives you, as the player of the character, tremendous roleplaying guidance and scope. You now know what your character would do in many situations by simply asking: "Does this advance my goal or not?" If not, then you don't need to care, and will do whatever is needed to move forward towards your goal.

Indifference is evil in many situations, more so than taking a side in some. Remember that.

YOU SHOULD DIE

An evil character in most roleplaying games should die at the hands of the party. That is a fundamental base: The good guys (aka the party) triumph over adversity (the bad guys). At least, this is what the majority of the players and GMs will be expecting. There are, of course, many TTRPGs that encourage bleak endings, or the failure of good to triumph. There are many TTRPGs where you can plan an inherently evil character.

In general, however, if you are an evil character, and you attempt to betray the party at some point, and the party turns on you, and destroys you, your only legitimate reaction should be joy and happiness, not resentment or feeling as your character was picked on. You chose to play an evil character, and painted a giant bullseye on your back the moment you committed an act against the party. If you whine, you're a bad player.

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU THANK YOUR FELLOW PLAYERS
(INCLUDING THE GM) FOR THE GAME YOU JUST PLAYED IN?**

GETTING OUT OF TROUBLE

The art of being a good evil character is making your fellow party members see you committing evil, and then talking your way out of it, convincing them it was for the greater good, or a genuine mistake.

I know of two tactics that work fairly well:

CONTRITION AND IGNORANCE

With Contrition your character literally goes out of their way to make up for the 'evil' they made. Claiming it was a genuine mistake, or a lapse in judgement is a great roleplaying opportunity. And there is nothing safer than beating yourself up before the party do. Punishing yourself is a quick way to re-earn trust.

Claiming ignorance can work from time to time but becomes old very quickly. "I didn't know we weren't to eat the prisoners!" will work once. But a second time, everyone knows you know. So you need to find other things to claim ignorance about: "I didn't know we weren't to electrocute the prisoners... but since they're already crispy, I'm just gonna make myself a hamburger..." (example assumes the evil character is a cannibal).

Emotional confusion and distress are also a useful tools to rely on from time to time. You simply saw red and killed all the prisoners, or perhaps one of the prisoners broke free and started a chain-reaction of violence leading to them all dying.

Outright lying is a good method for revealing your characters duplicitous nature but must be used sparingly lest the party just assume you lie about everything.

One of the surest ways of throwing the party off your scent is by being overly good when it suits your plans. Murder all the nuns in cold blood, then leave milk and kibble for the nun's dog so it doesn't starve. Make sure the players see you putting down milk, and they'll forgive your sins and think you're a nice guy. You don't have to tell them, that's just to keep the mutt from eating the corpses before you do...

Random acts of kindness can cover a lot of evil, use it like a tool, playing with the players and characters emotional attitude towards you. I'm evil, but I do nice things, a lot of nice things.

ALL EVIL PARTY

Ironically in an all-evil party, there is still an expectation for the party to work together. Thick as thieves, and all those notions prevail. Even Nazi's have friends whom they expect to be loyal to one another. And if you find that sentence unsettling, then don't play an evil character. However, if the party is playing all evil characters you need to be aware of the unspoken expectation: You're all evil towards OTHER people and will work together in harmony as a party.

A cabal of vampires is an easy example to think about. The inherent expectation is that some vampires will want to rule over others, and that the majority of them are happy to feed on humans. If you are playing an evil vampire and you're working with other vampires, you still need to show you are interested in yourself first, before the party.

You can't betray the rest of the group after months of gameplay and use the excuse: "But we're all evil, of course I was going to betray you all." It still won't wash. You need to establish well before that you will do anything to get your goal.

THE ONLY TIME I'VE PLAYED...

I have only played an evil character once, in 20+ years of gaming, and I played that character for two years before he was finally killed in a glorious showdown. The GM knew of my plans, and I frequently let the group I was with know and see my characters vicious nature. The players would often have their characters challenge me, and we had several inter-party fights where my character was beaten into submission.

But they never expelled him. He remained in the group until the final conclusion adventure. Then he chose to strike, sabotaging the party for his own gain. Due to the skill of the GM and the other players; not only did they beat the big bad whom my character had been helping, but they then turned on

my character and slew the big bad AND my character. It was spectacular.

I do not consider that character to be a 'player character' even to this day. He was a character I played as a GM within a GM'd game. I was cautioned not to derail the plot, to not stop the adventures progressing, and I made sure to deal with each other player character, twisting words and ideas. At best I considered my role as a GM playing a guest-starring villain.

Out of game I worked with the players to come up with scenarios we could work through together where we dealt with my character's evil actions. It was a lot of fun, and the players really enjoyed screwing their own characters over. At no point did anyone not know that my character was evil, but none of them knew how truly evil he was.

CONCLUSION

Having worked through this book you should now have an amazing understanding of your character and yourself as a player. Seeing the connection between the game, the character, and your social responsibilities to the other humans playing the game with you, you are empowered to include, involve, and evolve your friends into an amazing, real role-playing experience.

I'm hoping that you were already doing many of the things in this book, but unconsciously. This is a great place to be in, but not the final position in my opinion. It is only when we are consciously putting into practice these principles that we can actively apply them consistently and teach others how to do them. Being aware of what you're doing gives you context to do things differently, or to carry on doing what you're doing. You can check whether you're being a great player or just an OK player. And sometimes, it's OK to be just OK. Roleplaying is about escapism for many of us, and some days we just need to hit things and win loot.

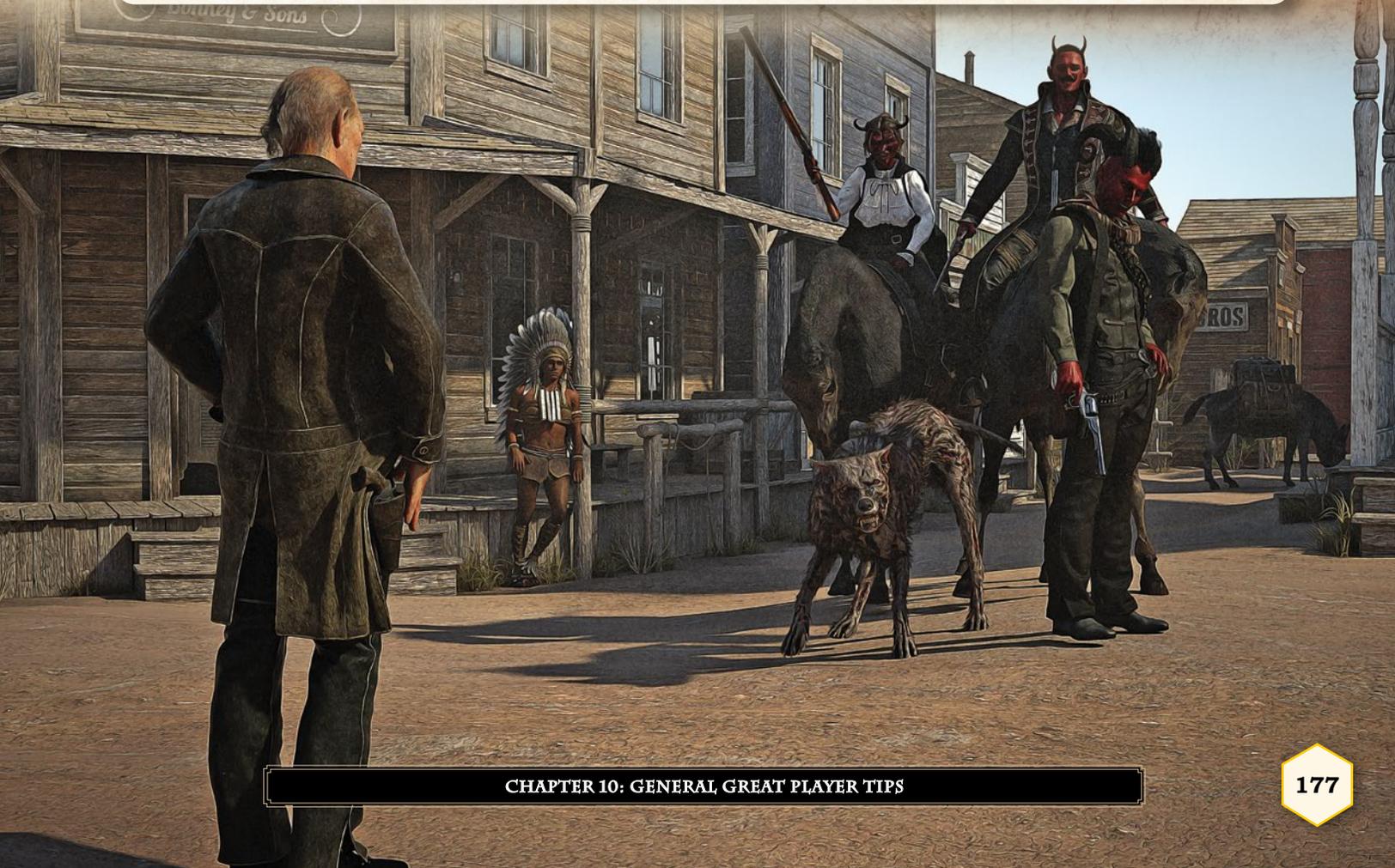
Nothing I've suggested in this book is easy. It all takes practice. There isn't a single person on a professional stage that hasn't practiced and practiced and practiced. You have a wonderful space to practice in: The game. Some days you won't get it right, and

some days you'll nail it. The more you practice, the more you'll nail it until you are nailing it every time and are no longer really having to focus on what you're doing. Be kind to yourself, give yourself the time to practice and learn.

Great roleplayers shine because they challenge what we expect, and they do things in such a way that we identify with them, and also, are surprised by them. Making the familiar new is what I think describes a great player. Find that wonder, find that juxtaposition of attitude and skill, that character type or build that is familiar but new.

It should go without saying that when your fellow players do this, or just demonstrate exceptional roleplaying, you call them out on it and praise them. Positive reinforcement can make a huge difference. But you know to do that already don't you?

Roleplaying is such a wonderful hobby that crosses all divides and lets us find truths and forge memories of fantastical situations. I cannot imagine life without it, and I hope that I get to continue to create characters and craft stories with other players that are wonderful, truthful, and amazing. And if you've worked through this book, I would hope that you are amongst those playing with me, because you are a great player!



GINNY DI: WHY THE BEST PLAYERS ARE SUPERFANS

Essay by Ginny Di

Long before I had ever written my first fanfiction or worn my first cosplay, I was already a natural fan. When I loved something, my impulse was to participate in it. I learned to write in the fictional alphabets of my favorite fantasy books; I recruited my friends for elaborate recreations of our most-loved movie scenes; I got up early before school to practice with a “sword” or a “glaive” like the bold heroines I admired. When I loved something, I expressed that love by playing in its sandbox. That’s why when I started playing tabletop games, I did what I’d always done: I became a fan. A fan of my own character, a fan of my fellow players’ characters, and a fan of the world and the story we were all creating together.

This by no means made me an instantly great player, but years later, having made tabletop gaming not just my hobby, but also my job, I believe that superfan nature remains my greatest strength. If you can become a fan of your game, I believe all the other qualities of a great player will follow.

The first step, and perhaps the easiest, is to be a fan of your own character. After all, if you plan to spend dozens or even hundreds of hours in a character’s head, you’d better really like them. Being a fan of your character will look different for everyone — one person may express this by drawing pictures of their character or designing their clothes, while another may express it by knowing their character’s favorite food, color, and type of music. One might write pages of backstory, while another likes to exchange texts in-character with other players between sessions. It doesn’t really matter what form your fandom takes, as long as it means you are deeply invested in your character.

This has two main benefits. First, it helps you more easily embody your character in roleplay. Once, I wrote a few letters from the perspective of my character. One was the letter she left for her mother when she ran away from home to begin her adventures, and one was a letter that she sent after she’d been adventuring for several months to a friend she’d left behind. The characters of her mother and her friend had felt vague to me, but writing these letters made them feel more real. To write them, I had to imagine what my character’s relationship with each of them was before she left, how she was feeling when she wrote them, and even how they might be received. When we eventually visited this character’s

hometown and got to interact with those people during a session, I felt prepared, and I understood their dynamic better because of those letters.

Roleplay is often described as deciding “what your character would do,” but while this phrase makes it sound simple, it can be challenging to put yourself into your character’s mindset if you don’t know much about them. When you’re passionate about your character, you gain a more complex understanding of them, which makes roleplay not just easier, but also deeper and more compelling.

The second benefit of being invested in your character is that it also means being invested in the game. As soon as you care about what happens to them, your time at the table takes on additional weight and meaning. Everything that happens, from conversations to combat, has a chance to affect the character you care about, which motivates you to pay attention and get involved. In a game that takes place entirely in our imaginations and our spoken words, your attention and your participation aren’t just a benefit to the game, they are fundamental to its existence. Without your passion behind it, your character is just a collection of numbers on a page.

Of course, tabletop games are not usually one-man shows, and your character is not the only protagonist. The other players at the table make up an ensemble cast, which means that a great player needs to also be a fan of everyone else’s characters. When your character finally comes face-to-face with the lost sister, they’ve spent the whole game tracking down or gets to deliver their bloody vengeance to the villain who slayed their father, you probably want your fellow players to care (or at least not be having a side conversation or checking their phone during your big moment). Naturally, your fellow players feel the same way and would be deflated if they looked up from an important moment for their character and saw their friends playing Candy Crush. If you would want the other party members to care about your character, it’s courteous to do the same for them.

Being a fan of the other characters at the table doesn’t just mean watching, though. If you imagine yourself getting to step into your favorite movies or shows alongside your favorite characters, you wouldn’t just sit back. You’d ask questions, you’d offer to help, and you might even try to influence the course of events in their life. Likewise, when you’re a fan of your party members, you involve yourself in their story, which helps it develop and gain depth naturally.

A friend of mine once played a character who had a secret: He had died once before and been brought back to life. My friend didn't openly discuss this, but he hinted at it more and more heavily as the game went on and no one seemed to notice anything strange. His hints grew increasingly obvious until he finally just told them outright. He felt disappointed that what he'd thought of as an interesting secret received such a lukewarm response. To him, it felt like the other people at the table didn't really care about his character — they were just there for their own stories. What he wanted was for his friends to take an interest in his character the way he'd taken an interest in theirs.

When we pay attention to each other's characters, we all get more engaged. Their histories and secrets come out organically, their personalities get a chance to shine, and they develop connections to each other that make the game more powerful for everyone.

But if generosity and fellow feeling aren't enough to motivate you to become a fan of the other characters in your adventuring party, you should also know that it can make your own game experience more fun, too. If you find yourself checking out when another character receives the spotlight for an important scene, you're not just being rude, you're also ensuring that a huge percentage of your gameplay is going to feel boring. It's so much more fun to play tabletop games when you are authentically excited about other characters' arcs and can watch their important scenes with the same rapt attention and excitement that you would feel when watching a pivotal scene in your favorite media.

The final piece of the puzzle is becoming a fan of the game overall: The world your game master has created or brought to life for you, the NPCs who populate it, and the story that everyone at the table is working together to tell. When you're a fan of the game, you see it as more than just a backdrop for your adventures or a list of quests and associated

rewards. Instead, you notice and respect the details that make the world feel real, you're invested in what paths the story might take, and you're curious about what you haven't yet learned.

I don't know about you, but I could name more of the great houses of Westeros than the real-world rulers from our own history. I could draw you a more accurate map of Middle Earth than of South America. I can't for the life of me remember how many days are in each month, but I can name the necromantic bells of the Old Kingdom in order of size, complete with their nicknames. When we're fans of something, we have an incredible capacity for memory and understanding. If you can apply this ability to your tabletop games, you'll be shocked by how easy it becomes to remember names, lore, and the events of previous sessions.

Being a great player is about more than pleasing your game master, but I can assure you that every GM's dream player is a player who is a fan of their game. Game masters put so much time and energy into creating and operating a whole world for you to play in. When you treat that information as worth noticing, you are acknowledging that labor and showing your game master that you appreciate and respect them for it.

If you are anything like me, you have counted down the days to a TV show's long anticipated finale or stayed up late reading the last book of a beloved series on the night of its release, because you couldn't wait to find out what happens and how it all ends. When discussing tabletop games, I often remind people that we play games for fun. No matter what the setting or the system or the theme, in the end, we're all just here to have a good time. In my opinion, the only thing more fun than having a front-row seat to the arc of your favorite story is to get to be a part of its telling.

When you are a superfan of your game, you give yourself that gift. If you can tap into that feeling, trust me: Everything else will follow.

WHEN WE PAY ATTENTION TO EACH OTHER'S CHARACTERS, WE ALL GET MORE ENGAGED. THEIR HISTORIES AND SECRETS COME OUT ORGANICALLY, THEIR PERSONALITIES GET A CHANCE TO SHINE, AND THEY DEVELOP CONNECTIONS TO EACH OTHER THAT MAKE THE GAME MORE POWERFUL FOR EVERYONE.

APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL TRAITS

PHYSICAL TRAITS

Although your character's physical attributes should always reflect the mechanical aspects of the character, it can be fun to start with the physical and then work the

mechanics to fit. These random physical attribute tables can help you create a truly interesting character, your task is then to match your mechanical attributes to these.

BUILD

Heavy	You love food and hate exercise. You are obese. Your agility and strength attributes or values should be low. As should your health as your body is under strain. Your movement should be reduced and jumping should be avoided. On the other hand, you've got plenty of time to develop mental abilities and skills.
Stocky	The pounds won't go away, but that keeps you warm in winter. Having a few extra here or there won't prevent you from doing most things. Narratively you can take strain, sweat a lot, but can manage.
Skinny	Try as you might, you cannot gain weight. You're wiry and might be nimble or dexterous but you don't have muscle and so your strength isn't there. And if the temperature drops, you feel the cold acutely.
Average	You might like to eat but you're also active and work off anything that you take in. Your body is healthy, and you are free to do whatever you might be inclined to do. Your endurance might not be legendary, but you can pull your own weight and keep up with most folks.
Toned	You spend some time each week actively working on your body. Whether by choice or not, your body is yours to command and is a well-oiled, hardworking machine.
Musclcd	A good amount of your time is spent keeping your body in peak condition. Strength and conditioning are your key motivators and values, and you may find academic pursuits suffer as you simply don't have enough time to do everything in between working out.

With your build in mind, you can now think about your character's approach to grooming. How much time do they spend on themselves.

GROOMING

Unclean	You don't care about grooming. Smell is something that other people have to worry about. Socially you may not do well, and your mechanical values should reflect that.
Disheveled	You put on clothes, you bathed last week, you ran a brush / finger through your hair. High society might order a drink from you, but they won't enjoy talking with you.
Presentable	A few minutes grooming, a few minutes washing, and possibly a couple of minutes brushing out clothes and you're good to go. A trip to a barber, or a bath house is a common activity.
Well-groomed	You take time to make sure you're neat, clean, and smell good. You notice what high society is wearing, and you match it. Most assume you're well-to-do or well-connected and treat you with a measure of respect.
Glamorous	Without you, no one would know what to wear, or how to style their hair. You are the standard by which others measure themselves. An hour spent grooming is a quick fix for you. Socially you are treated as a god, and few will challenge you.
Unique	What you do is...different. Striking colors, birds' nests, foliage, mis-matched socks, somehow create a 'look' for which you will be known. Is it by careful curation and choice? Or just what stuck to you and hasn't shaken lose? High society has no way to know whether you're stinking rich or dirty poor.

Just these two descriptors of your character give you plenty of things to do and talk about in almost any social situation. You can refine these by exploring the following additional pieces of information.

HAIR

Buzzed short	Cropped down to almost nothing, this is manageable, neat, and bug free. It's mainly used for students and military personnel.
Balding	For some a deep shame, for others a fact of life, and for fewer still an embraced status symbol of masculinity and strength.
Frizzy	It has its own mind and makes a loud statement. Do you embrace this chaos? Or bury it under hats, hoods, or clips? It can demonstrate individuality or conformity.
Combed and neatly cut	You take pride in your manageable hair. It won't be remembered by others, won't get in your face, and won't bother anyone. It does take some time to manage but isn't a hassle.
Straight and elegant	You look good, your hair looks good, and you know your destiny, at least, that's what your hair tells people. Each day will require a little bit of time to keep yourself neat and tidy.
Styled	This isn't about keeping your hair neat and manageable. It's about making a statement. It takes time to set it, and it can be a signature. Some folks define their entire look of their hair style.

Hairstyle is something we take for granted in roleplaying games but in real life think about the amount of effort you put into yours. For some it's not much: You have the same cut you've had all your life. For others it's a monthly decision. Even the color of your hair can be significantly different from one trip to the hairdresser to another.

The color of the character's hair can also be very important to the character or not. Changing the color can make a statement, and some characters will spend their entire life changing the color of their hair.

FEATURES

Chiseled	A sculptor crafted your features – sharp angles define you creating a statuesque physiognomy.
Haggard	You looked exhausted. Your cheeks are sunk in, your eyes darkly shadowed, and your lips cracked.
Flushed	Your cheeks are rosy, red, and your nose has a shine to it. Your eyes sparkle, and your hair is loose.
Adonis	Everything is perfect: Facial symmetry, your hair, your bright clear eyes and your physique is flawless.
Chubby	You chose to get into shape: A circle is a shape. A belly, round hips, and plenty of additional protection adorn your skeleton.
Wind-blasted	Your cheeks are cracked red and blue, your nose is pock-marked, and your lips are cracked. Your hair is a mess, and you look a bit wild.
Scarred	Either acne battled for years with your face, or an accident has left scar tracks across your face and body. To some these scars are horrific, to others, a sign of a hard life filled with noble deeds.
Plain	Unremarkable features, an 'average' body and a propensity for blending into the crowd, that's you. This has its advantages...
Freckled	Love them or hate them; they are as unique as you are, dotting across your entire body. Some as dark as a shadow, others as bright as a daisy, but all yours.

To deep dive into specifics, the face of your character can be very telling, and a useful hook for reminding folks about your character's personality.

CELEBRATE YOUR CHARACTERS FAILINGS AND DEFEATS! THIS IS ALL PART OF THEIR STORY AND THE MORE CHALLENGING IT IS THE BETTER A STORY IT IS.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS

	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE	UNUSUAL	EXTREME
1	Argumentative	Aloof	Questioning	Commentator	Fixated
2	Interrogative	Thinker	Positive	Unremarkable	Sadistic
3	Bitter	Coughs	Outgoing	Silent	Masochistic
4	Angry	Giggles	Helpful	Hates sitting	Spontaneous
5	Violent	Whistles	Curious	Agoraphobic	Romantic
6	Fickle	Hums	Caring	Claustrophobic	Addicted
7	Gruff	Taps fingers	Kind	Unimpressed	Selfless
8	Loud	Bounces leg	Trusting	Sleepy	Sucks hair
9	Clumsy	Chews nails	Generous	Morning person	Nervous
10	Bad Loser	Indifferent	Careful	Night person	Paranoid



NAMES – FULL NAME

Randomly choose from two columns to get your first name. If you want it to be a strong name, add a third column choice. Then select a conjunction. Then build your character's last name or surname from whichever two columns you didn't use for your first name. You can always swap the order around as you need!

- First name A, D, and E: Bikay or Kaybi
- Conjunction: Tal
- Surname B and C: Wabor
- The character's full name Kaybi Tal Wabor.
- It might work better backwards: Wabor Tal Kaybi.
- And maybe no conjunction is needed: Wabor Kaybi.
- Alternatively, take an existing name, like your own, or perhaps a name you like and replace one of the consonants with one option from one of the A, B, C or E columns.
- Gillian could be changed to Brillian, Fillian, or Zellian.
- James might be changed to Vermes, Simes, Bermes.

	A	B	C	D	E	CONJUNCTION
1	Cha	za	Al	Ak	Ze	From
2	An	wa	Ae	Bok	Y	O'
3	Be	Ver	An	Bar	Xe	Van
4	Bi	Un	Be	Cha	Ve	Von
5	Br	Ta	Bon	Dak	Vi	Gal
6	Cy	Se	Bor	Dal	Ul	Of
7	De	So	Ber	Ech	Te	Kar
8	Eg	Si	Don	Erk	Ti	Ne
9	Fi	Ro	Dor	Gak	Sa	Asa
10	Gi	Ra	Eth	Gord	Re	Mac
11	Ho	Pi	El	Hok	R	Mar
12	Hi	Or	Fal	Hek	O	Tal
13	In	Oli	Gor	Ik	N	Ser
14	Ig	Ne	Gan	Jak	Me	Orn
15	Jo	Ni	Is	Ka	Li	Bwa
16	Ka	Mo	In	Kad	Les	Kwa
17	Le	Mi	Ne	Lak	Ck	Chi
18	Me	Lli	No	Lach	I	Yon
19	Ni	Ke	O	Lor	E	Der
20	Ol	Ko	Oi	Mor	De	Nam
21	Pe	Ki	Pe	Mal	Di	Ton
22	Ro	Il	Que	Noch	Do	Af
23	Ri	Yn	Ri	Rak	Ci	San
24	St	Hi	Ro	Sek	Be	Cal
25	Si	Ge	Ron	Tok	Bo	Por
26	Tr	Fi	Ran	Tak	Bi	Est
27	Uv	Fe	San	Uk	A	Kal
28	Vi	El	Sor	Vok	Al	Ban
29	Wa	En	Si	War	An	Yor
30	Yv	De	Tan	Zek	Ar	Ta
31	Za	Bi	Tor	Zor	At	Wal



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I OFFER MY HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO ALL THE BACKERS OF THE PROJECT, THE PLAYERS OF MY GAMES AND YOU READING THIS BOOK.

THANK YOU, THIS BOOK IS BECAUSE OF YOU.

FROM BEGINNER TO VETERAN:
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO BECOME A...

GREAT PLAYER

FOR ANY ROLEPLAYING GAME

The complete guide to becoming a Great Player is a practical, applicable book put together by a veteran of roleplaying, Guy Sclanders. The book is a complete resource for players who want to learn how to make the most of their TTRPG gaming experience. The knowledge contained herein is appropriate for beginners, intermediaries and experienced players and can be used across all roleplaying systems!

Each step of the process is broken down into bite-sized chunks, allowing you to learn and grow at your own pace. Understand the nature of why you play, what you want to play, and what makes others want to play with you – that and so much more is included here.

Some elements included in this book are:

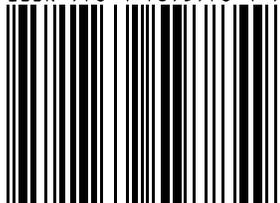
- Creating a character backstory that makes sense**
- Designing a character that you'll want to play**
- Why others will beg you to play in their game**
- Make a character that everyone loves**
- Understand the nature of the game to get the most out of it**
- How to come up with a name, easily**
- Dozens of practical exercises for you to hone your skills**
- Deep dives into what makes a great player from top DM's around the world**

Unlock your potential as a great player and discover the amazing world of storytelling that we all cherish. Don't get stuck with boring characters, or characters that no one likes. Look at your strengths, learn how to make more of whatever gaming system you're using, and take your entire experience to the next level.

WARNING: "Darn it! now I want to create a new character!"
Is often heard after folks have spent a few moments reading this book!



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