RollPlay

GM

NOTEBOOK

ISSUE 4

0101
0011

Welcome, Patrons!

This month's issue continues letting you in on the background of our campaigns in progress and contains some pretty heavy hints about the world of Court of Swords. It brings us up to speed on what's going on in the world after the loss of dear sweet Janus and the continued adventures of Ramus, Berg, Gideon and whatever poor souls end up in their company next. I've included two essay pieces in this month's issue as well; one that pulls back the curtain of how a new RollPlay show gets started and another about player priorities that I think might shed some light on how I handle my players from game to game. As usual, we close with a look into the past of Asgard Sigma. Thanks for coming along on the journey with us, friends.

Thank you so much for your support, and welcome to Issue 4 of the GM's Notebook.

Adam Koebel / RollPlay GM

TAKING A STANCE
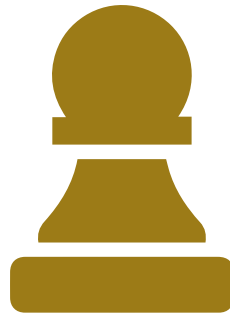
Recently, during an episode of Office Hours, I was asked by a fan about how to avoid metagaming in his campaign. That is to say, how to encourage players not to play the game but to play their <u>characters</u> in the game. How to avoid character action reflecting player knowledge. I think this is a great question. Issues of *immersion* and *metagaming* come up pretty regularly both in the general audience space for RollPlay discussion but also for GMs more generally. I answered the question live (you can find the recording here:

https://youtu.be/65d8_nhRD34) but I want to talk more about my answer in a RollPlay context. Let me lay out some terminology.

When I refer to *immersion* in a roleplaying context, I mean the sense that one has while playing a roleplaying game of being deeply engaged in the narrative of play. The sense that the logic of the game world is flowing naturally and that the characters (player and non-player alike) and circumstances of the world follow a kind of internal

consistency. The feeling that the characters are acting in accordance with their desires and pursuits as seemingly whole entities and the world is responding in kind as a result of its own motivations and energies.

When I talk about *metagaming* I mean the opposite of this, in many ways. It's a bit of a dirty word in the general lexicon of roleplaying games, and is generally used derisively to refer to a player acting in their own interest rather than the interest of their character - making decisions based on knowledge external to the character - acting on rules choices or player understanding of a situation instead of solely on information the character would possess. This often comes into play when a character makes a decision like choosing to attack or not attack a monster according to the player knowledge of that monster's statistics or when a character acts on information that was presented in a scene in which that character was not present.

By these definitions, it is understood that *metagaming* is the enemy of *immersion*. Which, under the assumption that all roleplaying desires the immersive state is certainly true. What throws a wrench into the works is something that RPG scholars have called "stances". A stance is a sort of mode of roleplaying that players take on to embody their character and engage the narrative space that an RPG takes place in. Players will not always have a preferred stance, but most players can be seen taking one or more of them during a given session. Players often aren't aware of these priorities themselves, but can absolutely be seen adhering to them nonetheless. Keep an eye out the next time you watch Court of Swords or Blades, I bet you'll see these stances in action.

The stances, in regular english (insomuch as that exists for roleplayers), are:

Actor Stance is a player priority in which characters are portrayed much like an actor portrays their character in a play or movie or TV show. This is roleplaying according to "the method". The character has explicit or implicit motivations, and everything about play goes towards embodying those motivations. These may be external to mechanisms

(my character is a plucky cybernetic hacker and I want to portray her as such) or may be mechanically driven (using game elements such as Alignment or Bonds). Either way, this is the default stance it is assumed most roleplaying takes place in. When we think of *immersive* roleplaying, it comes from this player priority. The core tenet of Actor Stance is "be your character". A statement like "I will kill the Orc, because my character hates Orcs." emerges from Actor Stance.

Author Stance is a player priority in which the player makes decisions about their character's actions based on what seems to be the most fun or interesting or entertaining choice. This is the decision making process that leads to players making not the most *immersive* choice but the most interesting to them, as a player. This means that we're seeing players making decisions that might alter or bend our ideas of a character - we might see out-of-character decisions that allow for mechanically optimal decision making or change-of-heart moments from a purely roleplaying perspective. What separates this stance from the next is that these choices are <u>retroactively</u> given motivation. So what might seem like an out of character choice can lead to an alignment change or a change in mechanical motivations. When Galahan becomes a fallen paladin, he is doing so first and foremost because it's an interesting decision to Sam, who then retroactively decides that there are reasons for this fall. He may decide this in the moment, or have a "plan" for Galahan, but Galahan certainly has no intention to violate his oaths. Without that retroactive motivation assignment, we find ourselves in the next stance.
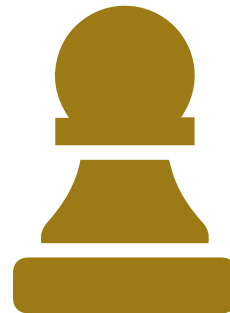
Pawn Stance is Author Stance without the retroactive assignment of motivation. This is making decisions for your character because it makes sense and is interesting to you as a player and nothing else. There's no effort to reconcile motivation because all that matters is player intent. This might, however, still reflect very "rp heavy" play, because a player can be motivated by whatever seems most interesting in the moment,

but without consistency (often in the form of behaviour encouraging mechanisms) this sort of play can lead to characters that feel flat on one end or chaotic and unbelievable on the other. Some games, like early versions of D&D, rely almost entirely on this sort of play, and the character is just a thin veneer the game is played through. This stance is near anathema to *immersion* and as such, can be very grating when it's not expected or not part of the original concept or discussion for the game. We don't see much Pawn Stance in RollPlay, though I'll admit, Grigori was about 95% Pawn Stance with a thin layer of bad Russian accented Author Stance behaviour on top.

Director Stance is only really possible when the GM of a game allows for it - in the traditional division of authority, the player of a game doesn't have the ability to take on Director Stance, as it requires the player give not only the thoughts, speech and action of a PC but take responsibility for elements of context, timing and location as well. This is something that some games have built into them (games like Fiasco or Microscope, for example but in RollPlay we see some of this in Dungeon World or Apocalypse World) but there have been moments in Swan Song (incidentally) and Mirrorshades (I'm thinking of the finale particularly) where GM responsibility has been turned over to the players for the sake of the narrative. You can tell when a player is in director stance by the magic words "we see…" often followed by the player setting the stage for a scene or moment their character might have. I've noticed JP doing this on more than one occasion and as someone interested in seeing the players take ahold of their characters' surroundings once in a while it delights me to no end. The rarest stance, but one that has some special opportunities for character revelation and growth. In a RollPlay context the West Marches alternate Inspiration mechanisms illustrate a controlled version of Director Stance most prominently.

The reason I wanted to discuss these stances vis-a-vis RollPlay and the *immersion* question was that in a normal tabletop environment, I think Actor Stance is the clear prevalent priority but the addition of an audience and of the idea of a roleplaying game qua broadcast

entertainment pushes players hard towards Author Stance. Our cast is tasked not only with the inherent elements of play - the demands that a game places on making mechanical and performative choices to embody their characters at the table but the element of entertainment as well, which is much easier to do in a slightly looser, dare I say more meta stance. We make choices as players to depict the character both as we imagine them and as fictional element in a larger narrative meant not just for us to explore but for an audience to consume. We strive to depict our characters consistently and with an eye towards maintaining a fictionally consistent world not because verisimilitude is a requirement of good play but because it is an element of entertaining play. *Immersion* is not an end, but a means.

What I think is most interesting, with all this in mind, is that we are playing games that were not intended for the purpose we use them. We are hacking games by playing them to an audience, and we are adding a reward element that was not present when the games were designed. Our players are rewarded for play with experience points (or karma or whatever) for play but also with views and tweets and forum comments. With accolades for a performance that is both immersive (in a media-consumptive sense) and *immersive* in a roleplay sense even when those two are at odds.

The ultimate skill, I think, for anyone who is playing a roleplaying game to an audience, is to know when "it's what my character would do" is or is not the right choice to make and the ability to make whatever we choose to have our characters do make sense no matter what stance we might be taking. *Meta* or otherwise.

If you want to look at the clinical and early assessment of these stances, you can see that here: *indie-rpgs.com/articles/4/*

NOTES ON A POST-JANUS WORLD
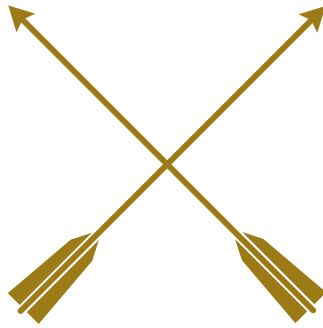
The Current Situation

After attempting to sneak into town to recover the lost shackle left on Wester's body, Janus was caught by several guards and knocked unconscious. He was the prisoner of a local monk and the constabulary, who, upon finding the intruder, alerted the soldiers whose barracks reside in Peaceful Spring. After the other PCs arrived, and a brief struggle resulted in Janus' death, the situation is as follows:

A group of soldiers is ready to attack, and do so immediately. After that...

The Soldiers are on alert, looking for the PCs and aware that there are criminals in their midst. There are about a dozen trained soldiers in town at the moment whose primary goal is finding the murderers who have infiltrated the town.

Here's what happens if they manage to sneak away:

1. The Soldiers find a witness who points them to the Blacksmith's

shop

2. The Soldiers arrive at the shop and find whatever evidence the PCs have left

3. The Soldiers track the PCs from the shop to wherever they're hiding unless they can make it back to the Fortress Town, in which case the Soldiers call off the search but notify their superiors.

If the PCs attempt to remain in town, the full force of the local constabulary will come down on them, and they'll have to deal with that. If they attempt to slip away, the guards can be avoided with a little luck and some skill.

Outside

If the PCs make it out of Peaceful Spring, they're back in the woodland surrounding it - the Xulin Valley is actually a pretty good place to hide, and for the time being, getting out of the town means getting safe. What they do after that depends entirely on their intentions to finish the task set before them by Handler Kukrit.

The shackle is on its way to Bái Yá monastery, as the village Blacksmith realized it was magical and sent it to be identified by the Wu Shi who reside there. It'll take several days, and if they don't rest, the PCs can absolutely get an opportunity to catch up with the wagon carrying the shackle to Bái Yá.

If they choose to ignore the problem or if they fail to capture the shackle, not only does Kukrit get all pissy with them, the shackle eventually finds its way to someone smart enough to recognize a few things.

+ The shackle is a Court of Swords artifact

+ The shackle is used to control prisoners or the unruly

+ It is of recent construction

Which triggers some background politicking where the Courts of Coins and Swords fall to bickering as Coins accuses Swords of planting operatives (which is true) and the Court of Swords claims there are escaped Fortress prisoners in the Valley and puts a bounty on their return (also the truth).

Meanwhile

There are elements continuing to percolate throughout the rest of the world, some close, some distant.

Elves

Drawn to the Xulin Valley by the ancient power buried here, a colony pod of Elves has emerged from whatever weirdo dimension that Elves come from and begun setting

up shop. This means capturing humans and enslaving them to harvest fuel to power the Elves' creation engines - the devices that will bring extradimensional material over to build their ziggurats, weapons and armor. For now, the Elves number in the dozens and represent a military first-wave band that is just scoping the place out and taking readings, but will eventually be followed by colonists and settlers. This goes on in the background until it's too late for the Courts to react to, and Elves start taking over the Valley.

Necromancy

There's a major Necromancy problem in the River Provinces. About a dozen towns have fallen and a large portion of the army of the Court of Swords is tied up in fighting what they're calling The Necromancer King over control of the River Provinces and their fields. Food is starting to become scarce and the disease that is killing the farmlands is spreading throughout the Court. This is a very serious problem but one that is percolating in the background. It might be of interest to the PCs if they decide to abandon the Valley, but it's there.

Hell, if they're bad enough dudes, they might find service in the army of the Necromancer King.

The Current Situation

The PCs have retrieved the shackle, murdered most of the guards in the town of Peaceful Spring and alerted the Court of Coins that there are some bad people doing bad things in the Valley. They've completed their mission of retrieving the shackle, so let's give them some XP.

This goal completion is worth 75xp for each player, and Kukrit is ready to throw them into their next adventure.

The Fivefold Scroll

After the discovery of the burial site in the Xulin Valley, Kukrit was able to confirm that an artifact he seeks is indeed in the Valley. For some time, he's been tracking down evidence, using Court of Swords resources, that an item of considerable magical power is hidden here. The item itself is known as the Fivefold Scroll, and is said to contain secret techniques for enlightenment and empowerment and, it is rumored, secrets to a life eternal. Kukrit's superiors do not know his obsession, and do not know what he intends for the PCs.

Stage One: A Kidnapping

There is a monk, a water genasi

named Azure Vortex, who serves the Hierophant and lives in isolation in the eastern edge of the Xulin Valley, in the lowlands. She is the owner of the Feng Yan, a keystone of antiquity that was consecrated by the elemental powers. She uses its power to enter a meditative state and become one with the elements but is unaware of its true purpose. To act as a key to the ancient temple which Kukrit believes houses the Fivefold Scroll. With the location of the temple all but confirmed, Kukrit intend to set the PCs on the monk, obtain the Feng Yan and interrogate Azure Vortex as to its purpose and use.

The Feng Yan

The Feng Yan appears as a murky blue stone, about the size of an apple, perfectly spherical and cool to the touch. Around it, gentle winds blow constantly, displacing papers and light objects. The Feng Yan serves a dual purpose, firstly it is a calming item, and while it is held, the owner gains Advantage on all Saving Throws to resist mental influence such as Charm or Fear magic. In addition, any skill checks that require mental focus or calm gain Advantage. Secondly, the Feng Yan serves as key to the Temple of the Fivefold Scroll, where an artifact of considerable power is being held. This purpose has been long lost to time, though the current owner is beginning to suspect the Feng Yan is more than it appears to be.

Handler Kukrit tells the PCs this;

+ There is a hermit, a wanted dissident and political criminal, who is hiding out in the Xulin Valley. She possesses a dangerous weapon that the Court of Swords believes could be used against it.

+ The Court has instructed him to use the PCs to go into the Valley and retrieve this dissident and her weapon before the Court of Coins can use it

+ They are instructed to bring her alive, she is dangerous but she may be the only one who knows what the Court of Coins intends to do with the weapon and must be interrogated once she is retrieved

+ An advisor is being sent with them, someone who knows the ways of the Fountain, and of magic, and who will be able to recognize the object and make sure it's handled properly - this is the new PC (RIP...)

+ The hermit herself supposedly is a ten day

journey from Mong Vuot Fortress town, into the lowlands - a swampy area, murky and misty and dangerous

The PCs are tasked with going into the valley, retrieving the hermit and her artifact and bringing them both back to the Fortress where he'll turn her over to the authorities.

The Lowlands

There are some nasty things in the lowlands. Lizardmen and kobolds, for example.

GETTING STARTED:

FROM CONCEPT TO ROLLPLAY SHOW

When I'm starting a new campaign, I generally come at it first from one of a few angles but overall there are four aspects that need to come together before we can really get into playing the game. I hope this gives you some interesting insight into the proto-campaign process and what it takes to go from an idea to a show, from a GMs perspective.

The components that lead to a good campaign are *system, setting* and *cast*. Each of these needs to be solidified and matched up against the others before the game can really get going and if there's a place where one

doesn't fit the rest it can cause friction and tension. For me, making sure all these elements work together even before we talk character creation is crucial. These elements serve a higher purpose - a more nebulous thing I tend to think of as the concept for the show, but that thing is protean and while it sometimes comes first, it almost never stays the same from the day it's first defined to the day we go live and beyond. Each of these things can be worked out at different times and can be chosen in any order but without all three working together what might otherwise be a great

campaign could end up being a flop. I think knowing this, and doing this work in advance, can do a world of good for a new game whether you're streaming it for thousands or just building something cool for you and your friends at home.

The Concept

This higher-purpose element of a game is usually phrased in the form of a sort of "what if..." It doesn't always come from me, and can just as often be a question JP poses to me; "Hey Adam, what if we did a Shadowrun show?" or "Hey JP, what if we did a really lethal intense D&D game" and the following conversation starts to spin out what that might look like. This is the part where, while I'm working out ideas for the campaign, JP starts thinking about overlays and time, our time requirement for design elements and promotion and what timeslot might make sense for a new campaign.

Being really attached to a concept at this stage has only ever proven to be a mistake. I generally get excited about some small details here and there but as we learned so well with Mirrorshades sometimes what starts as "a game about hardcore mercenaries in a cybermagical world" can become "a cybermagical dating sim". The concept of the game is really best seen as a starting point - it's an elevator pitch but it's not a full solution. I keep my concept a question as long as I can because as I add to it: bringing in a rule set, specific setting elements and especially cast member chemistry, the concept tends to blur and change.

The Setting

Setting and system are often closely linked. I try to look at setting for a show as both the literal "where is this taking place" but also the more general "what is that place like?" and "what's going on there?" I think of setting as encompassing both the space the game will take place in and the situation at hand - the emergent stuff in the world that gives it a reason to exist. Sometimes, like with Mirrorshades, the basic setting comes with the game we've chosen, and this is just an adjunct step that comes along with picking system but more often than not, it's a refining of the concept. It's an idea that is fleshed out step-by-step and all that's really done beforehand is working out what kinds of characters might fit into the world (so that the players are informed and ready to go) and working out what kinds of things those characters might be doing (so that I can prep a first arc - building out some adversarial elements). A lot of the time, for me,

this is the most creative part of the early process. It sometimes comes in what you might traditionally expect from a game - working out things like the gods of a world or the town the game starts in, but it also comes in flashes of inspirational imagery, sounds and ideas. Little disconnected bits of sound or visuals. Things that come randomly into my brain. Combining all that stuff and just letting it percolate almost always turns up something fun that I can get excited about, and once I have something exciting, I can take it to my cast, who will almost always give me back all the creative energy I give them, though it's almost always a different colour or tone by the time they do. Setting is never complete, always organic, especially when I mix in a cast of creative people and a dedicated audience with interesting ideas of their own.

The System

If I am very very lucky, this is an obvious choice. Only in very rare circumstances, though. If you look at Balance of Power, it was basically a non-choice once we'd settled on the setting. I could have gone, I suppose, with Saga edition or West End Games' Star Wars (to be honest, the REUP version isn't half bad) but for me the choice was clear. In most cases, I'm in a position where, I suspect like you

- if you're a perennial GM as I am - I'm the one with the most knowledge of a system. If I were to say to my cast "hey y'all, I have an idea for a game, and here's the concept, we're going to play using INSERT RULES HERE" they'd probably blank out on whatever the rules were and trust that I'd be there to teach them. That's okay, that's totally a workable model. I have players that tend to engage on the rules as they see them in action. That's okay, because I'm generally working with nerds and friends first and RPG players second. We're lucky to have the Kaitlyns and the Dans and the Zekes of the world - folks who are happy to dive in and learn and help with mechanisms, so the choice of the system often falls to me. This is more often than not a synthesis of a few things - I rarely choose the system first. I pick a game that I think will fit the concept and the setting I've got in mind, if there isn't one immediately attached. I pick a game that will be both fun to watch and fun for the cast to learn (or, honestly, even possible for the cast to learn / possible for me to do the heavy lifting for them). System and setting have to fit together, to be able to empower the cast to tell stories together based on the concept. This is tricky stuff, and even harder to do before really knowing the campaign or the players all that well, but gets easier as time

goes on and we all become better at this thing we're doing. RollPlay gets better because our cast are becoming better roleplayers, and the systems we choose have more meaning as the cast members learn the disciplines of roleplaying overall.

The Cast

What's been most interesting as I transition from purely small-group tabletop GM to playing games on the internet with content-creating talented strangers is the kinds of people I've been given the chance to work with. Before RollPlay, the folks I'd played with had been traditionally pretty into roleplaying games, and who understood them from a particular angle. I'd cut my GMing teeth on people who knew the difference between the Burning Wheel and Apocalypse World and who could elaborate on the details thereof. Now, though, I have the pleasure to play with folks who've never played RPGs at all, or only when they were younger, or who'd only played "a game or two or D&D" and it's been absolutely intriguing. I really think that getting a chance to play with a wide variety of people makes us all better players. We can learn so much from each other. I think that synthesis of system and setting

puts the cast in a unique position to create the magic that we get from roleplaying. Honestly, the cast is often the thing I have the least input into. That isn't to say that I'd want more, but generally I leave casting to the producer, and then learn as much as I can about the people that I'm going to play with either through consuming their content or just talking to them about the things that excited or interested them about RPGs. The first time I ever saw Geoff or Dodger or Jesse do anything was after I'd learned I'd be GMing them, and knowing your players is the best way to help them be the best they can be.

Just as a few examples, Swan Song was cast first, concept second, system and setting third and fourth. Mirrorshades was system first, setting second, cast third and concept last. You can see why that one's concept became kind of fluid after a few episodes. Balance of Power was setting first, system second, concept third and cast last. Court of Swords was concept first, system second, setting third and cast last. We definitely don't do these things in any fixed order, but these four things - a concept supported by a cast, a system and a setting all go together to make a RollPlay show.

RollPlay
BLADES

CHARACTER PORTRAITS

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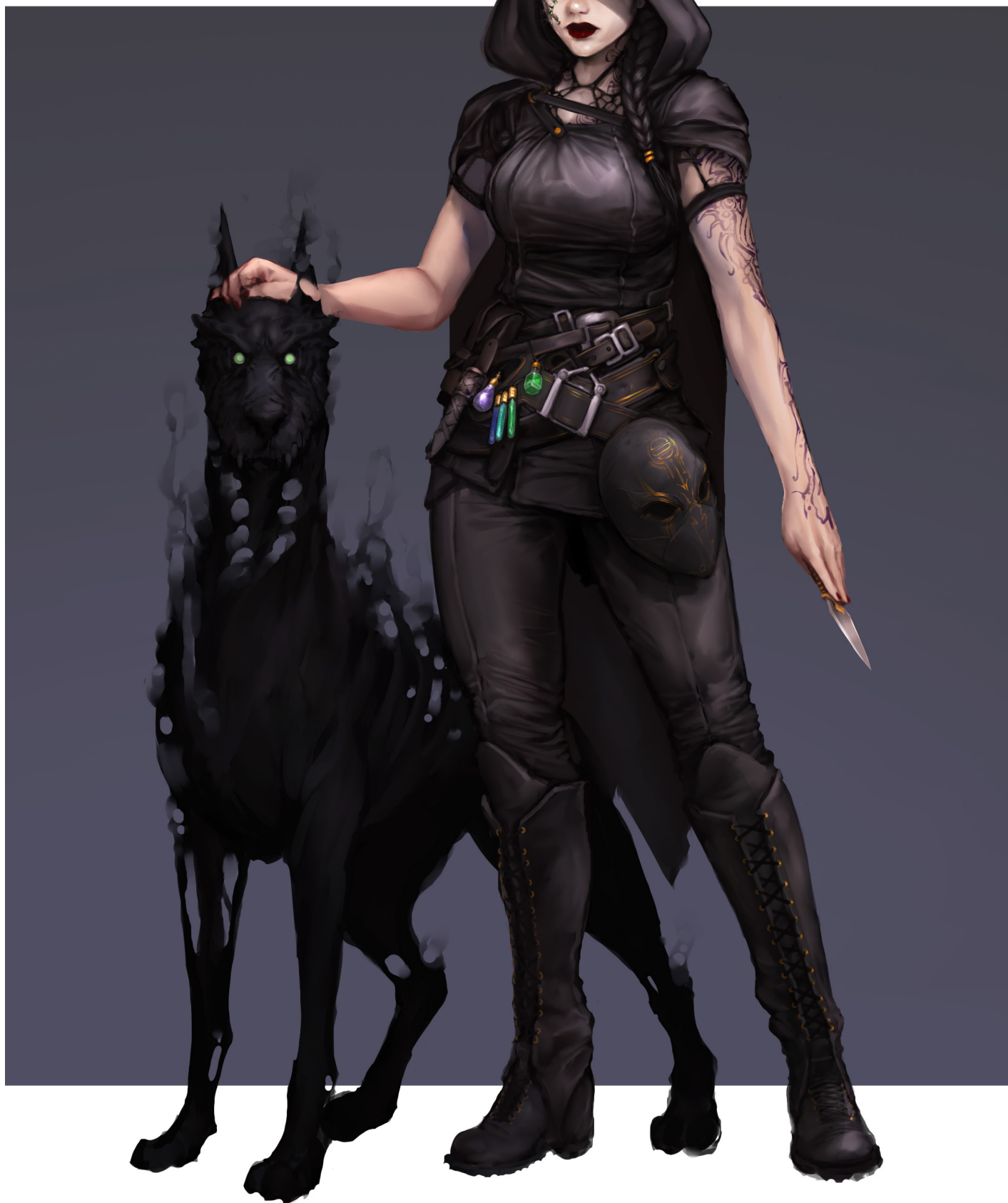
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SWAN SONG

"It's not like I'm going to massacre them all on sight."
- Mr Sicarian

Burning Wheel [Character Burning] ~~January 20~~

Stars Without Number: Swan Song Mission 02: Scavenging

- Ximenez Shipyards built an experimental Spike Drive for the XSS ~~Lofty Ambition~~ *Pizza Party*, and attempted to test it in the Franco system. The drive failed, killing the ship's life support system. The crew attempted to abandon the ship but were picked up by Highbeam pirates. The pirates are using the ship as bait, waiting for someone to attempt to retrieve it. If the PCs get it, they're contacted by Sunbeam, who offers to buy it for 50,000 credits.

NPCs

- Xerxes Escobar, Ximinez Research Division scientist
- Captain Cassandra Wu, Highbeam Pirate
- Engineer Leon Anders, survivor of the Lofty Ambition
- Tex Monday, a Sunbeam sales agent

Pizza Party
- the ~~Lofty Ambition~~, a braked AI

Ship Defenses
- sealed blast doors
- locked AI security
- mounted guns
- quarantined spike drive

Ships   *Pizza Party*

- the XSS ~~Lofty Ambition~~, a ruined destroyer (full worth 14,000,000 ~ 140,000 / 280000 / 560,000)
- the HFS Black Aurora, a Patrol Boat (pg.198) w/ 20 souls ~~aboard~~

Rules   → the AI is on the Swan Song.

Scavenging requires a Tech/Astronautics or Tech/Postech roll, a crew of at least 20 and 2d20 ~~weeks~~ *days*. The crew can be hired via the Exchange for 125 credits/day/person (2500/day) Alternately, salvage rights can be re-sold for 10% / 15% / 20% depending on a Business roll.

monday, 28th

Pirate Stats: HP 5 / AC 4 / AB +2 / 1d8 damage / RE 12, ME 15, EV 14, Tech 16, Luck 13

Travel Time from Andoni → Frois is; [3 hexes]
They can jump 2 hexes w/out refuelling and can refuel for 4 days in any system. (or buy fuel)
Andoni to Varvaressos (refuel), 6 + 4 days
Varvaressos to 305, 6 days
305 to Vafa'i (6 days + 4) (refuel)

} ~~36~~ days [~~704~~ 84 person-days]

will need to reload life support @ Varvaressos
20 credits / person / day
(320 credits)

at some point, the ship's maintenance fee will need to be paid (3230 credits)

- New Profit Christians on Majid
- Street battles on Onintza

Notes on Systems

Varvaressos: home to only one planet: Strophios, a frozen world with Bubble Cities, built using slowly-failing pretech. A pilgrimage site for Holy Family Buddhists due to the Temple of Lu Wei, a buddha who lived here.   (potential friends / enemies here)

Frois: in the Vafa'i system (home also to Majid and Onintza) the system is heavily populated, many worlds and lots of ship traffic. Frois is an apocalypse planet, TL 2, recovering from a massive planetary disaster. (potential friends / enemies on Majid or Onintza)
(ASTEROID STRIKE)

Swan Song GM Notes

Commentary

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Swan Song Mission 2

This is a big one, and really, I had no idea it would go the way it did and colour the rest of the game. I kind of expected the same as we'd gotten from the characters in the first mission - some chaos, some antics and then maybe they'd move on to the next thing. This mission introduced two really significant elements of Swan Song's narrative. The first being, obviously, the Pizza Party and its nascent AI and the second being the trope of the Cook and Mr. Sicarian's seemingly invincible response to danger. One of the most amazing things about comparing your prep and the reality of a campaign is where the game and your players can really come together to amaze you. The things they attach to and love become so much more than what you anticipate them being when you first start putting elements together. This, I think, goes double for running a game for RollPlay, where we've got an audience that falls in love with the world just as hard as we do.

Scavenging

The very first thing you'll likely notice on this page is all the places where the ship used to be called the Lofty Ambition and became the Pizza Party. I think that this was one of those situations where right up until play, I was going to go with the much less ridiculous naming structure for the ship and took a hard left as I was saying the name of it on screen. I remember thinking that I wanted to instill a little wackiness into the world, and show the players that they were living in a universe where some things were going to be taken out of context. The Pizza Party as a name, and subsequently as the personality of the AI that powered the ship came as much as a surprise to me as I think it did to Geoff, who I definitely remembering being startled by it. I was, and remained throughout the show, pretty influenced by Iain M Banks' Culture series of novels, whose ships and AI still have the best names you're going to find in fiction. Definitely worth a read, especially Player of Games.

This is our first exposure to AI and to the Highbeam Fleet, who I expected to be kind of a badass bunch of pirates but who ended up being a badass bunch of caliente plasma stains on the walls.

The origin of the Pizza Party AI was, in my mind, at this point, part of the deal between Ximinez and Andoni - ancient tech given to the former by the latter in exchange for the blockade fleet and alliance. The Pizza Party at this point was a failed experiment, but would obviously become so much more to the story of Asgard Sigma. For now though, it was just a busted little robot brain on a very lonely spaceship.

NPCs

I like to come up with a few NPC names just so that I don't get stuck in play when the PCs want to know who someone is. I hate feeling unprepared, though Stars Without Number does a great job providing us with tables to randomly roll up a diverse universe. I love the idea of mixing the ethnicity of the name tables, so we get random folks like Xerxes Escobar, who sounds like the descendent of an ancient Persian king and a Colombian drug lord. Having a few more prepped can help you feel less like "oh god umm, I don't know, her name is uhhh, Jane   umm, Fakeway. Yeah, sure, that." in play.

The AI is on the Swan Song

With that, the whole campaign changed direction. I often forget how fast Pi got introduced and how integral to the game they'd become. Pizza Party became Pizza AI, became Pizza Intelligence, became Pi. It's so much fun to let things grow organically in a game, and why I'm such a huge fan of saying "yes" to my players. They'll plant things that will grow and bloom through your whole campaign. You just have to take a gamble that you're playing with other creative people who all want the same thing - to see the game thrive.

Pirate Stats

Not like it mattered. El cocinero esta en la cocina.

New Profit Christians on Majid

The Church of the New Prophet was, originally, in my very early estimation, some kind of hyper-capitalist Christian fundamentalism organization. They were going to be about the Holy Bottom Line and everything, kind of a Gordon Gecko thing - Salvation

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is for Closers, etc. I think I veered away from that
when I realized the entire sector was an anarcho-
capitalist mess and the religious angle became more
interesting to me. As the sector developed, I leaned
them away from this highly NERPs background and into
what we'd see more of later. I might still use the
original concept in another game, but I think it's
cool to see what might have been.

Varvaressos

You can see here, too, that I merged the New Profit
with another religious organization called the Holy
Family - a buddhist sect that originally got created
for the sector. The great thing about all these
random tables that SWN presents you with is that it's
a rich mess of elements that you can use as-is or
merge together into new things. So here, I had two
separate ideas about religious factions that I ended
up making into one thing. This is often how things
go with my GM prep - I'll come up with a bunch of
potential things (NPCs, factions, locations, etc)
and then push them together. Players (and audiences)
don't always have as deep an attention span as I do,
and as such, it can be easier to help them focus by
presenting your ideas more concisely. Why have three
religions with one dimension each when you can have
a single more nuanced thing. This helps us avoid
problems like monoculture in games.

Transmission Intercepted xLlV3.86-5PAC3.53 ENDED

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