

PATREON DISCUSSION FOR JANUARY 2013 Q&A

JC: For a historical note. The Heritage Miniature Star Trek roleplaying game also suggest players play multiple characters. Allowing one "primary" character, and (any number?) of secondary characters per player.

- **Me:** Is a given secondary character restricted to a single player? The fluidity among those characters, regarding who plays them, is the striking feature in Star Trek Adventures. Especially since their rules/mechanics are the most dynamic, more so than the one-player-one-primary characters.
- **JC:** I assume there isn't fluidity based on the example of someone playing Kirk and one security guard. However, it does mention later (section C11) that players select characters before each scenario. So, I am not quite sure what the intended way is.
- **Me:** Maybe we should lay out the variables explicitly.
 1. Whether a given character may be played by more than one person (from unit to unit, e.g., session or adventure or whatever)
 2. Whether characters occupy a position in a distinct hierarchy by fiction (typically reflected by rules)
 3. Whether a player plays more than one character at once
 4. Whether a player makes up more than one character
- (continued) Ars Magica 2nd edition, as far as I can tell: #1 no, #2 yes, #3 no, #4 yes Star Trek Adventures, as best as I can tell, regarding the secondary characters: #1 yes, #2 yes, #3 no, #4 no [a supporting character is initially created by the GM during play; they gain features from players via successive use]
- Tunnels & Trolls 5th edition: #1 no, #2 no, #3 yes, #4 yes Circle of Hands: #1 yes, #2 no, #3 no, #4 yes
- (continued) I have found profiles like these to be difficult to extract from game texts but very clear once played, so I don't demand that you totally clarify the Heritage game here. I'm listing these to show that the variables are completely independent from one another, and to understand this topic for a given game, we need to see them all.
- **David:** In Ars Magica 5th edition, they suggest a few forms of troupe style play, including one where players can rotate from the pool of Companions and Grogs (#1). I cannot remember if this suggestion was present in the edition that I played (3rd). Rotating GMs is something else they suggest as a "dial" to modulate troupe play. That rings a bell for me from 3rd. My experience in playing 3rd was with a bunch of people who loved everything about the game on paper but could not swallow #2. Everyone wanted to play a Magi all of the time, and there would be sessions where players would just want to research stuff. This felt like picking things out of a catalogue rather than play. It didn't last for long. The troupe play section in 5th edition is not unappealing to me, and I like the idea of putting #1 into effect. I would be interested in hearing about earnest attempts to play any edition by people who didn't have hangups about the notion of troupe play or #2 in particular.

HANS: Thanks for your answer to my question. Very thorough, and enlightening to see the precedent in AH RQ in its own context--it's as if the nature of the activity of roleplaying can't help but break out into lucidity even in the midst of intense effort to control and wrangle it into something pat and transitive. The importance of listening to improvisational music-making, as a part of the analogy, is also noted especially vis-a-vis your concept of listening as the fundamental nature of the activity of roleplaying, as we're currently discussing in the People & Play class. The analogy as a whole is a useful tool to teach basic concepts, so I appreciate you teasing it apart.

- **Me:** The more I reflect about it, the more I realize that the improvisational phrasing doesn't belong in there at all. It's not in the RuneQuest text and it's not in my Sorcerer & Sword text - people just seem to want to add it into the concept, and I think it only causes problems.

JC: The Runequest 3rd Gamemaster Book makes GM'ing look like *a lot of work*. Early on under Presenting an Adventure, it says "your own scenarios need only your memory, some notes on the important subjects, and your imagination." Yet, when examples and instruction are given, it starts telling you to prepare - maps, diagrams, floor plans, character statistics, background information, photo reference, visual aids for tactical combat etc etc. *whew* This creates the impression a well-prepared home game should produce the amount of material a published campaign or adventure would have, and your material should be presented & organized in a similar

manner as a pre-written module. I wonder what the text says about using Published Material... "Published campaign packs provide by far the easiest and quickest way to run or to learn to create campaign". The cynic in me says "its intentional to make GM'ing look like so much work, in order to sell campaigns and adventures!" A more charitable side to me says "the designer's tried to teach and give examples through modules/scenarios but kept adding *unhelpful* detail due to customer demand and inquiry." Here is an example with two products from Greg Stafford which show a difference in a campaign to teach, and a campaign to run - The Boy King (1st Edition, '91) and The Great Pendragon Campaign ('06) for King Arthur Pendragon. The Boy King which requires a copy of Malory (it tells you what sections to read), has an outline of the 80 Year Campaign, but only details it out so far. The book is explicit that it is starting point but is unfinished, and can only be finished during play. Here is a quote from Stafford's old Pendragon website (gspendragon.com - you can find it on the wayback machine) about it. "I hoped that this book would show GMs how to run a campaign. In case it didn't, I started to imagine how I might explain the whole life of King Arthur in such a way." - Greg Stafford However, the questions kept coming - and a more complete, less customizable version The Great Pendragon Campaign was written. The GPC is intended to be ran through, and only customizable up to a point. The RQ3 GM Advice reads like the beginning of (what I feel) condescending "you need your hands held, you can't tell a story - follow our script, and manage the players" style of writing that plagued the 90's and early 00's. RQ3 still has the verbiage of an impartial referee, and hasn't fully embraced illusionist style writing of "rules don't matter, cheat the players" but it is in there.

- **Me:** I agree with you fully, with a lot of footnotes and different pathways for discussion. Unfortunately the lesson seems to have been thoroughly absorbed, culturally. Even people who find my discussions sensible as spoken and heard revert at the table, thinking about "how we get to place X," and "how do make them feel like Y," and especially, being trapped in a false dichotomy of "prepare every single horse trough as if it were a dungeon room" vs. "wing it sing it whatever it takes for the fun." I'm not advocating a middle way - I'm saying the whole framework is broken.
- **JC:** I agree that dichotomy is purely nonsense at best, it doesn't hold up under any scrutiny. It is so ingrained, recently the idea that a "system is a loss leader and only adventures make you the money" has become the defacto standard (or make hacks of a popular game, which is still making a stream of familiar content). As this is a boring, inward looking model that sell solutions for problems they've created or perpetuate. Heck, the GUMSHOE system exist because of folks being convinced that the Call of Cthulhu module structure wasn't the cause the issues GUMSHOE was solving. It just creates all these expectations that I hate, and have nothing to do with nuts and bolts play.