



THE ANATOMY OF A FREEFORM

Roleplaying 101
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"Attention please class! You, up the back! Put that Genre away! You don't know where it's been. Right, that's better. Now, let's begin."

"In this lecture, we will examining the structure and function of the various parts of the Freeform. Now, as you all know from your homework, the Freeform is a peculiarly Australian organism, evolving out of breeding between early wargaming and primordial roleplaying. Archaeological evidence is unclear on the point, but most researchers place the origin of this particular species around 1980."

"Boy, what are you doing? Well, don't cathart in my class! Go outside and do it! Now, where was I ... oh yes."

"The Freeform is characterised by several things, most notably their large size (in excess of ten players, and specimens of up to 200 players have been reported) and their emphasis on interaction between characters, rather than between characters and GMs. Other features that most Freeforms exhibit include a preference for simple or non-existent systems, lengthy character sheets, and costumes, preferably gaudy. Their life cycle is poorly understood, but it is believed that they are usually conceived either at the back of a crowded bar, or in front of a television. Many do not survive their gestation, and more emerge stillborn, usually from insufficient nurture. The laws of natural selection apply in this case, also, and it is a rare Freeform that is successful enough to have offspring, in a process known as 'sequelling'."



"Careful study and dissection has revealed that most Freeforms share a common anatomy and similar internal structures, although the species seems prone to significant numbers of sports and mutations. The separate categories of characters composing a Freeform are most commonly listed in this fashion;

- The Skeleton
- The Essential Organs
- The Non-Essential Organs
- The Muscles
- Fat
- The Useful Organs
- Non-useful Growths

The Skeleton

The skeleton is composed of those characters around whom the Freeform is constructed. While not necessarily vital to the plot, without these 'structural' characters, the Freeform would become shapeless and purposeless. Examples include The Prince at a Vampire Prince's Court; The King and/or Queen in the medieval court Freeform; the owner/ruler of the location where the Freeform is taking place; the 'Dons' in an organised crime Freeform; The 'mysterious stranger who has summoned you all here' etc. It is often better for a Freeform if these characters are Artificial (ie. GM plants) or possibly not actually present in the Freeform (although this will require careful crafting, to prevent the organism becoming shapeless and amoeboid).

The Essential Organs

These characters are the ones who animate the Freeform, and provide a place for the plot (also known as the 'soul') of the Freeform to inhabit. They provide leadership, direction and vitality to a Freeform, by initiating machinations, solving dilemmas, and creating situations. Examples include the primogen in the Vampire Prince's Court; the heads of the Secret societies; the senior princes/heirs to the thrones; the senior cyberpunk executives; the god/goddess in disguise machinating amongst the mortals; the spy/traitor/saboteur; etc. These characters perform functions similar to the heart, the brain, one lung or kidney, etc. They cannot be removed without causing severe damage to a Freeform, usually necessitating intensive care, and often substitution by external GM machinery.

The Non-Essential Organs

While not vital to the survival of the Freeform, these characters provide vital 'backup' functions, allowing the Freeform to be more confident and stable in its abilities, supporting the more essential organs and allowing much greater freedom of movement. They include the other members of the secret societies; assistants, adjutants and seconds-in-command; illegitimate heirs to the throne/position of power; heads of minor factions; the other person with the doomsday codes; another virgin (in-case the first sacrifice becomes 'unqualified');



etc. These are the equivalent to the second lung or kidney, the other 4/5 of the liver, the rest of the blood, the eyes, etc. - not life-threatening, but useful to have around in case of accidents. With care they can be surgically removed, to lighten a Freeform or to remove cancerous characters.

The Muscles

These are the characters that make a Freeform move, and get things done. They supply the options for the full range of activities a Freeform is capable of, such as providing muscle, attacking other characters, obtaining illegal or rare goods, and providing support to the genre and 'feel' of a Freeform. Examples include fighters, mercenaries, assassins, and other swords for hire; merchants, thieves, archaeologists and assorted acquirers of important items; witches, wizards, priests, and providers of supernatural abilities; enough believers to form a full sized coven; etc. The term Muscles is slightly misleading, as they also perform connective and support functions, and other assorted tasks to allow the organism to tick over and progress smoothly towards it's goal. These kinds of character can be trimmed from a Freeform, and a Freeform can usually survive if several of them go cancerous, but care should be taken to ensure that one particular essential organ isn't robbed of all support, and becomes unable to function.

Fat

These are the characters who bulk out a Freeform to the required size, and contribute relatively little to the overall running. They can provide some interest and support in lean times, but in general they are easily removable, and can sometimes encumber a Freeform. Examples include multiple backup characters (the 6th in charge, etc...); characters written solely to add flavour (the fool, the secretary, the 'limpet' wife); the member of the obscure faction that has no real power or resources and no-body really likes, but which sound rather nifty; relatively brainless characters with minimal objective or interaction, etc.

Useful Organs

These are the characters who add something extra to a Freeform, allowing it to do something useful and extra that it might not have been able to do before, but that the Freeform can survive without. These include detachable subplots like the troop of players that adds atmosphere and a smattering of skills but isn't essential; extra musculature, to allow the final lunge for the finish line, the mysterious outsider considered unlikely to achieve the position of power but with useful abilities, etc. This category also included unusual add-ons that give the Freeform an entirely new dimension, such as one member of each faction that can travel on the astral plane, creating a whole new realm of combat. These would resemble fins and webbed feet, gills, or overdeveloped legs - mutations that may prove useful but could transform the organism radically and possibly detrimentally.

Non-useful Growths

These are characters that Freeforms often accumulate during their growth. Sometimes they come from abortive plotlines that never quite clicked, sometimes from attempts to expand a Freeform beyond its natural size, sometimes from an aberration within a character that gets out of hand. They are characters that detract from the smooth functioning of a Freeform, or that are unsightly or annoying. Examples include superb duellists and expert gunfighters that get out of hand and begin killing indiscriminately (cancerous characters); the cousin to the prince that had some potential but has become a lifeless lackey; the character who will work well if only they can find their secret society; the 'fool' being played painfully to the hilt, etc. Similar to ear-wax, nose hair and warts, they can usually be tolerated where necessary, but should be surgically removed where possible.

"Well, I see that time has caught up with us, so that concludes this week's lecture. Everyone remember that this week's practical class will be at the post-con pub, where you will have several Freeforms to dissect, so bring your gloves and chainsaws. Assignments will be due next week, and I do not want to hear sob-stories like 'I was an individual entry' or 'my dog ate my anecdote'. Class dismissed"

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