



SEEKING SIMPLICITY IN LIVE-ROLEPLAYING GAME SYSTEMS

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This is a compilation of a series of posts made to the rec.games.frp.live-action newsgroup on ways to simplify interactive drama systems.

ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
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SEEKING SIMPLICITY IN LIVE-ROLEPLAYING GAME SYSTEMS

[This essay is focused towards White Wolf's Vampire game, though the ideas presented here can be applied to any genre.]

I.

When I set out to invent a Live-Roleplaying game "system," the first thing I needed to figure out was why people enjoy these types of games. After all, tabletop roleplaying is superior to live action in many ways: the story can have a world-spanning scope, traditionally involving great journeys and quests; the action is



more daring--I can plummet over a waterfall only to save myself at the last moment by grabbing hold of a stray tree limb (try that at your local 4H camp); the cast is potentially enormous as it is not uncommon to be in the midst of warring armies; the settings are varied as your imagination (underground kingdoms of jade, jungle villages perched in the branches of trees a mile high, castles in the sky, etc.), and the power attainable by a character is limitless. None of these can be matched through pure live-action without some device in the game mechanics that allows all the players to pretend. In other words, these elements cannot really happen in our world as we know it. We may be able to simulate an underground kingdom by agreeing to pretend that our gathering hall is three miles below the earth surface for the duration of the game. However, what we must realize, and admit to ourselves, is that doing this--imagining we are someplace we are not--is no different than what we would do in a sit-down game, and therefore incorporating such a tactic in an LRP is not really live-roleplaying, but simply roleplaying standing up. This is not to say one should not do this. The point is to illustrate where tabletop roleplaying and live-roleplaying differ and to isolate those things unique to live-roleplaying which one cannot experience while sitting down at a table munching Tostitos and salsa.

I once played a game hosted by Quest (Connecticut), and one by The Realms (New Hampshire), (some friends of mine played a Massachusetts N.E.R.O. game once) and my friends and I have run about ten LRP games or so amongst ourselves. So I went back and tried to remember what I liked best about all those games and which parts I didn't like at all to figure out what it was about live-action that interested me. Two things came to mind:

1. **The Rush.** The actual physical sensation of fighting, running from a band of orcs, climbing up a cliff face, sliding down a roof, juggling, dancing, whatever, is intoxicating. I feel my pulse move, my breath quickens, I feel tired, hungry, thirsty. I decide when to rest, how long to keep watch, whether I have time to get a drink or if Kavis is already on his way to retrieving the statue and I had better get moving. The physical side is a very potent, very alluring aspect of the game. If I sit still all night, I get edgy. I need to run and feel my cloak whipping in the wind.
2. **The immediacy of the scene.** The place is real. My senses are my own. I see through my eyes, not eyes with five dots in "perception+alertness." I tie a knot as well as I can tie. I perform as well I can perform. There is no mediator between me and the locked door. This is an important part. If there is an obstacle to overcome and I need a judge to tell me if I succeed instead of trying it myself, then I could do that in a tabletop game and the obstacle



would be ten times as difficult and I would be ten times as flashy. The point of the game is that I get to do it. Hands on. There is a significant amount of distance between me and the scene in a sit-down game. There is a character sheet, there are dice, and a GM. The reason I play the LRP is to close that distance. I am in the scene. To put those elements back in--to give me a character sheet detailing what I can and can't do, to introduce a method of resolving actions in lieu of real action, to make the GM a noticeable presence--defeats the purpose of participating in live-action. There are, of course, necessary exceptions and allowances (combat, e.g.) which I'll touch on later.

II.

As is probably evident from the preceding two paragraphs I support the "Player AS Character" school of live-action as opposed to "Player WITH Character." The Player with Character school says that you should be able to roleplay any character you want, irregardless of personal ability--after all, isn't that what roleplaying is all about? Pretending to be someone else? The Player as Character school says pretty much the opposite: you play a character who is pretty much yourself, possessed of all your strengths and weaknesses. At first glance this may seem atrociously limiting, but don't be too quick to judge. All this says is that your character has the same stats (ability scores, attributes, etc. depending on your preferred RPG) as you do. The same ranking in strength, intelligence, speed, persuasion, what have you. With that in mind let us not fall into the trap of thinking that a character is simply a collection of numbers. Anyone who has played roleplaying games for more than a few years can tell you how many different thief characters they've played; the pirate, burglar, spy, gentleman highwayman, gambler, drifter--you could give them all the same stats and they'd still be vastly different characters.

This is the difficulty I run into when I think of live-roleplaying with character sheets, or using some other method of defining my abilities: what happens when I want to convince a crowd of people to help me raid the village? I would like to think that I could stand atop a soapbox and say my piece, try my arguments, threaten and cajole as I see fit, and then see who buys it. Supposing I do just that, I spout my speech...what next? Do I draw a card (roll a die, consult a referee, etc.) and see if I succeed in my "manipulation+acting" skill? If that's the case, then it really doesn't matter what I say. I could say, "I'm making a speech to convince you all to help me raid the village. Hold on while I pick a card..." Meanwhile, others in the crowd are picking cards to see if they can see through my lies. This seems like a rather ridiculous method of roleplaying. On the other hand, supposing I don't have to draw a card, supposing I don't have to consult any attribute scores and I



make it or break it on my own merit...why "make up" a character sheet? Or if I do make one up, why don't I put the most points in the things I'm naturally weakest in so that I can draw a card and succeed some of the time, and put very little points in my strengths so I can just do those automatically without checking vs. my attributes. If I am beautiful and dumb I shall put one point in appearance (what roleplayer could ignore such a pretty face, regardless of my "character's" stats?) and five points in intelligence. Then I can enjoy the attention of the crowds and consider myself entitled to be told what brilliant things my character thinks of.

Intuitively, it seems right that my actions be judged on my own merits instead of resolved via a simulation. After all, it IS live-roleplaying; my character is live, not a simulation on paper. In fact, I would say that putting a character on paper is very limiting. Who can accurately reflect the breadth and depth of a person's expertise with only a handful of broad categories such as athletics or computers? We all have little bits of experiences and tidbits of knowledge that cover a range of topics. I may not know more about processor chips than your average MIT graduate, but there might be a very clever trick I know on MicrosoftWord which would never occur to the class valedictorian. Who's got more points in computers, and who's going to finish his term paper quicker? You get a much wider variety of character if you throw away the structure. You get characters that would not be viable in a sit down adventure game, simply because the live role-playing environment is so different. When creating a character for Rolemaster, say, you need certain skills and a certain level of stats to survive. Likewise if it's AD&D. Vampire has its own survival formula built in, one which makes all the characters basically equal in power. This is done so that everyone is given a fighting chance to succeed. However, equalizing the power-level of the player-characters is a crutch for the notion of "fair play," as if giving each player comparable power will give them comparable access to fun. But this simply isn't true. In fact, this idea retards certain role-playing combinations such as a Knight and his Page, a Wizard and his Apprentice. It IS fun to play a servant in a live-action milieu, where it wouldn't be in a table-top game. This "level playing field" strategy does not really suit live-roleplaying, mainly because, well, isn't that's not the point of it. The point of live-roleplaying is the character ... I really can't imagine any other raison d'etre.

ASIDE: Form follows function. What is the function of live-roleplaying, specifically what is the function of the game you want to run? What forms need to be adopted to achieve that function? If the function is character--character interaction, character immersion, character revelation--the forms must allow the presentation and expression of character to flourish unhindered. Character is in the



imagination, it is in the psyche, it is background, conflict, reflection, resolution; it is not numbers and formulas.

III.

Now then, the other function of an LRP game is to capture the majesty of the vampire. Here, we need forms to guide us. Let the player contain all the human elements within herself--the attributes, the abilities. What we need concern ourselves with is how to let the vampire out and show itself. How do we simulate the vampiric powers? It is at this point, defining the disciplines, where we need to consider rules, and not before.

In many games in the past we have had characters with superhuman powers. Clearly the player did not possess such ability before playing. In each case we made up the rules unique to each game to accommodate what we were looking for. We've gone through about half a dozen magic systems (to discover that magic in live-roleplaying never really works all that well, tending towards the silly-looking, or too easily ignored). One game that seemed to work the best was where we gave each player a certain special ability such as "Speak With Dead," "Immune From Charm," "Protection from One Hit per Combat," etc. It seems that a similar thing could be done with the Vampire game.

In deciding how best to facilitate our vampire powers we must consider what we want of them. My opinion is thus: 1) the players should not be able to abuse their powers by using them indiscriminately, but instead be forced to choose when and where would be the best times to use them, 2) the powers should work, that is, a check should not have to be made for success, 3) the use of the powers should be clear so that the other players can accurately play along.

IV.

Now that the basic concepts have been laid out, I've applied them and worked out a concrete set of rules. The rest of this essay is pretty much that--rules for running a Vampire Live-Roleplaying game.

The disciplines are linked to the blood pool. Each player starts the game with a certain amount of blood (10 for 13th generation ... 15 for 8th--since no mortal gets to choose her sire, generation is not up to the player to decide, it is up to the GM). Each use of a discipline costs one blood per discipline rating. This price accomplishes two things. One, it limits the number of times a vampire can "Command the Wearyed Mind," perform "Cloak of Shadows," or use "Heightened



Senses." Disciplines are exercised with restraint and strategy, and if not, the vampire may pay the price for her carelessness later. Two, it gives the player a real and noticeable reason to feed, they need to replenish blood to keep using their special powers.

Now that the disciplines have been restricted in frequency, we can feel comfortable in not restricting their effectiveness. When a player wishes to use her powers of command, she should succeed with confidence and not be thwarted by "rolling bad." This method also has the advantage of clear outcomes--since we assume the powers work, no one need be confused or unsure about the resolution of someone's obfuscate skill (Can my 10 dots in "perception+alertness" sense her? No, she's unseen. The power works. End of story.).

All that remains is deciding just how the disciplines work, and insuring that all the players are familiar with how they work so they know how to ignore someone with Obfuscate, obey someone with Dominate, or respect someone with Presence. The following are some suggested ways of simulating the disciplines:

ANIMALISM

NOTE: since it seems unlikely that animals would play a significant part of a live-roleplaying game I made some severe modifications to this discipline to make it more useful. The concept here is that this discipline allows a kindred power and influence over the Beast within.

1. **Song of Serenity**--Calms an opponent, can perform no violent actions for one minute.
2. **Hunger Pang**--Target kindred must feed. Sensation lasts ten minutes or until she feeds.
3. **The Burning Heart**--Increase a kindred's natural fear of fire to the most heightened degree.
4. **Cage the Beast**--Target kindred no longer feels the Beast within; she is, despite her nature, human again. Lasts up to fifteen minutes, or until power is relinquished by controller.
5. **Drawing Out the Beast**--Opponent must frenzy.

AUSPEX

1. **Heightened Senses**--Get close to someone and declare, "AuspeX." Listen in while being ignored.



2. **Aura Perception**--Can ask if person is kindred or kine. Can also ask strongest feeling at that moment (distrust, anger, contentment, hunger, etc.).
3. **The Spirit's Touch**--Consult GM. GM will supply some vague background details concerning an item, perhaps some detail about a player-kindred who handled the item recently.
4. **Telepathy**--Can ask target one question which must be answered truthfully.
5. **Enlightened Sight**--Can detect Obfuscated kindred. In addition to the normal blood cost, spend one blood per level of Obfuscate you wish to detect.

CELERITY

Declare "Celerity" and rank number. Opponent must blink--close eyes for one full "mississippi" per each rank, open for one "mississippi", then close again per each rank, and so on until end of scene.

DOMINATE

1. **Command the Wearied Mind**--Declare "Command." The verb in your next sentence must be obeyed.
2. **Mesmerize**--Declare "Mesmerize." Give careful, precise instructions. Target may pervert the meaning if possible.
3. **The Forgetful Mind**--Declare "Forget." Specify one circumstance (no longer than five minutes in duration) which target will forget.
4. **Conditioning**--Declare "Conditioned." Target will not be able to be Dominated by another for one hour.
5. **Possession**--Declare "Possessed." Follow target around giving instructions. [not usable on kindred]

FORTITUDE

Vampire can withstand more damage. Less affected by fire. Can use blood to heal "aggravated" damage. Rank number determines how much damage is prevented or healed. The details on this depend on your combat and wound rules.

OBFUSCATE

1. **Cloak of Shadows**--Remain still, hold your hand up in front of your face with your index finger extended to indicate a "1" referring to this first level of power. Can be detected if you move.

2. **Unseen Presence**--You may move slowly. Hold hand up with two fingers extended.
3. **Mask of a Thousand Faces**--You may interact with someone while being effectively ignored by everyone else. Hold hand up with three fingers extended.
4. **Vanish from Mind's Eye**--You are invisible and may move at any pace. Hold hand up with four fingers extended.
5. **Cloak the Gathering**--Hold hand up with five fingers extended. Whomever you touch (or is touching you, or is touching someone who is touching you) and stay in contact with is also invisible.

POTENCE

In a test of strength, the vampire with the higher Potence rating wins. Other applications (breaking a door down) require GM assistance.

PRESENCE

1. **Awe**--Need some signifying token. Lasts fifteen minutes per blood point spent.
2. **Dread Gaze**--Declare "Fear," then bare teeth and hiss loudly. Targets must flee in instinctual fear. The fear wears off quickly.
3. **Entrancement**--Declare "Entranced." Target really likes you for half an hour.
4. **Enthrall**--Declare "Enthrall." Target cannot leave your presence for half an hour or until dismissed by controller.
5. **Majesty**--Need some signifying token. None will cause you harm, and all will treat you with respect and listen (not necessarily obey, but at least listen) to your words. Effect lasts about an hour.

PROTEAN

1. **Gleam of Red Eyes**--You can shift your vision to see into the Umbra, the Shadowlands, or to see the aura of Magick. Only one of these visions can be active at one time.
2. **Wolf Claws**--Declare "Claws." You cause aggravated damage (cannot be healed by spending blood). Lasts one scene.
3. **Earth Meld**--Declare "Meld." Drop to the ground. Crawl. When you arise, meld is over.



4. **Shadow of the Beast**--Declare "Beast." Snarl, walk on all fours. Consider yourself to have one point in Potence, Fortitude, and Auspex to mimic the wolf's ability. Duration of transformation is up to you.
5. **Form of Mist**--Declare "Mist." Go where you want without fear of damage.

THAMAUTURGY

1. **A Taste for Blood**--Declare "I see your blood." Ask one of the following: current blood pool, generation, or length of time since last feeding.
2. **Blood Rage**--Declare "I give you blood." Specify the use of the blood (i.e. strength, dexterity, stamina, particular discipline).
3. **Blood of Potency**--Declare "I quicken my blood." Your generation lowers by one.
4. **Theft of Vitae**--Declare "I take your blood." Steal five blood from another to add to your own pool. The target is aware of the theft's source.
5. **Cauldron of Blood**--Declare "I boil your blood." You may destroy 1-10 blood points in a target. If the target is kindred you must leave her with one blood.

For the sake of the game we can take comfort in ignoring Rituals and Paths, as these could get overly complex and cumbersome. The Tremeres out there will just have to grit their teeth and go along with it.

When selecting disciplines each player has 15 points to spend. Each clan discipline costs one point per rank, cumulative. A Nosferatu could get three ranks in two of his clan disciplines, and two ranks in the third $[(1+2+3)+(1+2+3)+(1+2)=15]$. Non-clan disciplines cost twice as much. Some of the possible combinations are thus:

FANATIC

one clan discipline to 5th rank $(1+2+3+4+5) = 15$.

CONCENTRATION

one clan to 4th $(1+2+3+4)$, one clan to 2nd $(1+2)$, one non-clan to 1st $(2) = 15$.

BALANCED

as example above.

OUTSIDE INTEREST



all clan to 2nd $(1+2)*3$, one non-clan to 2nd $(2+4)$ or three non-clan to 1st $(2+2+2) = 15$.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

one rank in 9 disciplines, three clan $(1+1+1)$, six non-clan $(2+2+2+2+2+2) = 15$.

Okay, that's disciplines. A fantasy game can substitute spells for the disciplines, and a sci-fi setting can replace them with cybernetic abilities or psions. Remember, all we're really doing is figuring out how to simulate supernatural or superhuman abilities, whatever they may be.

V.

Last thing that we need to worry about is combat. Again, the function: 1) no player should ever actually touch another player in combat with their naked hand (to prevent accidents); 2) combat should be as intuitive and natural as the roleplaying part so that it can be savored, and not reduced to hit points or other number crunching devices.

Here, I admit, I am at a loss to come up with a system that accomplishes both these things. I have two alternatives, but neither really satisfies me, for they are both lacking in my fundamental ideals.

- **First method:** we must conceive of a universe where vampires do not fight hand-to-hand. This allows us to institute the use of foam padded rapiers and sabers, or other elegant weapon, and the players can feel the rush of their life (or unlife) slipping away in their own hands. What we lose is the bestiality of the vampire, the ferociousness, the unbridled rage and savagery that is every Brujah and Nosferatu's birthright. I want to tear someone's throat out with my teeth, not stab him through the heart at two paces [at the end of this essay are notes for the "fast & loose" combat system my friends and I presently use in our boffer fantasy games].
- **Second method:** number crunching. Combat is performed verbally. Each player has seven wound levels. Each player inflicts one point during each round of combat. After each round either combatant has the option to flee; simply declare "flee" and run from the attacker. The attacker can, of course, give chase and if she catches her prey may resume combat. A kindred with Fortitude has additional wound levels equal to her Fortitude rank. A kindred with Potence inflicts an additional point per round per Potence rank. A kindred with Celerity makes an additional hit per round per Celerity rank



(Celerity and Potence have pretty much the same effect in this case). Wounds are inflicted simultaneously during each round, so given no extraordinary circumstances, both kindred will run out of wound levels at the same time, resulting in a draw. Deciding factors will be the use of disciplines or allies who can enter the fray and do one point of damage to either kindred. In a mass melee, everyone gets to do one point to any one target. What we lose here, obviously, is the rush of combat. It is a dry, calculated experience, ultimately a simple tactic for other means, and will probably never be a means in itself because it is so dull. Sample combat:

ANNETTE (declares the combat): "I attack you, Lucien. One point."

LUCIEN (does not back down): "One point right back at you."

ANNETTE (tries to get the upperhand and bleed him faster than he can bleed her): "Potence for two. Three points."

LUCIEN (turns the tables on her): "That so? Celerity for three. Four points."

ANNETTE (smile): "Claws. Three aggravated points."

LUCIEN (he can bleed her faster and knock her out, but she can use her blood to heal herself. He does not have Fortitude and so won't be able to heal her aggravated damage.): "Flee." (Lucien bolts and goes looking for his Brujah friend.)

I think I would prefer the boffer rapier method. Since you don't want your classy vampire game morphing into some testosterone-induced, Chaos-Warrior spawned, ten foot battleaxe-fest, you can institute weapon restrictions. One-handed only, no longer than three feet from guard to tip. Rapiers for the Ventrue, canes for the Toreador, baseball bats for the Brujah, machetes for the Gangrel, clubs and broken pipes for the Nosferatu, short staffs or long wands for the Tremere, and fireplace poker for the Malkavian. But as I said, neither feels really right. I don't know.

VI.

So there it is. All the players should be given a handout describing all the disciplines so that they can be prepared. And if a victim forgets the difference between "Mesmerize" and "Entranced" the offending kindred will have to be good enough to take a moment to explain the power to her prey.

Character creation is fairly simple. A player thinks of a name, a background, a clan, the disciplines she wants, and it's probably a good idea to think of some "daily routines"--things that she does each day when nothing special is going on so that she'll have something to pass the time when the scenario reaches a lull. Drawing perhaps, in a notebook. Or collecting bottle caps. And that's character creation.

If you enjoy using "experience points" to reward repeat players they can spend them on more disciplines. Other advancements are in their pure form--whatever the player learns she gets to carry-on with her to the next game.

One final thing I wanted to comment on was the oft-heard catch-phrase, "the element of chance," and how to represent it in Live-Roleplay. The more I thought about it the more unnecessary it seemed. We have disciplines that consistently work. We have people acting things out for themselves. I think there's plenty of elements of chance at work in real life without me adding it in. I keep coming back to the name of the game: LIVE-Roleplaying. Conflicts are resolved between people, and if they plan enough, and use good strategy and innovative tactics, they should succeed...unless the other guy plans better. Why get foiled by an "element of chance" at the crucial moment? Yes, dice are an integral part of role-playing games, mostly because the GM can't possibly account for everything when making a ruling, so the dice help account for all the little details. The player tries to stack the roll in his favor by getting more skill, better equipment, but in the end something just might go wrong. Or something just might go right for someone taking a big risk. Either way, the dice represent all the unpredictable unknowns. Well, in live-roleplaying all those unpredictable unknowns are right there in the room with us. Those unpredictable unknowns are live-roleplaying, too! And about dice being integral to table-top roleplaying ... well ... that's not necessarily true, either. There's a game called AMBER based on the novels by Roger Zelazny--the system is called "Diceless Roleplaying." The system works very well, and I'd suggest anyone try it. After playing Amber, we've started playing White Wolf's Vampire diceless, too. It works.

VII.

THE FAST & LOOSE COMBAT SYSTEM

(for use with boffer weapons)

The main tenet for the system is: "You are wounded as much as you FEEL like you were wounded."



Sound crazy? Sound anarchic? Perhaps. But we have loads of fun with it.

This really has its roots in the play-fighting we did as children (cowboys and Indians), and tries to instill the same kind of spontaneity and fun. And now that we're grown up and more mature we can handle the "losing" part much better, and don't feel bad when we get killed (that's the IDEA anyway, and any clever person will see this is where the system potentially breaks down--a player who just won't go down when she should; the technical term is "rhino-hide"). Each player is referee of her own wounds, and trusted to play-act (or, imagine this, "roleplay") the damage to the best of her ability. To assist in putting some concreteness into this vague arena we have instituted three simple wound levels to help players conceptualize their mortality:

1. **SLIGHT wound**--The most typical kind. This occurs when your opponent's weapon brushes against your sleeve, or slides across your rib. A touch without any real impact. Should cause a slight pause, perhaps shifting to a defensive mode for a few seconds, but one such wound will cause no lasting effect. If you are victim to multiple slight wounds who can consider yourself to be Moderately wounded.
2. **MODERATE wound**--A nice firm rap on some part of your body. You should conceptualize this as a visible gash in the skin, probably a bleeder. That part of the body is likely to be in serious pain with restricted movement. A leg will limp or drag, an arm will hang, or your torso won't bend.
3. **MORTAL wound**--A noticeably hard hit. Limbs severed. If the blow is to the chest or back, you'll have time to utter your last curses before dying. For safety reasons we have ruled that all hits to the head are subject to the target's discretion. Probably a good idea to just not aim there.

Using this combat system with the Vampire Disciplines outlined above we would make these modifications:

- **FORTITUDE**--Able to "soak" one Moderate wound for each rank during any single combat (Vampires without this ability can only heal wounds once the combat is over--1 blood point for each Moderate level wound).
- **POTENCE**--Must declare the rank level you are exerting. Your opponent must magnify your attacks by a factor of 2 for each rank (rank 1=x2, rank 5=x10). If both characters have Potence, take the difference in ranks. Admittedly, this could prove difficult to pull off, especially in the heat of battle.

Here our "function" was to invent a system that would enable us to preserve the most DRAMA. Fairness, exactness, and realism were secondary in our minds. Thus the "form" we adopted is much more chaotic and fluid than most others (perhaps any others), and I'm sure not everyone would be comfortable with it.

In any other game where the referees utilized "hit points," or "wound counters," or "touch-equals-kill" rulings, I always felt like a guy standing around wearing funny clothes instead of Duke Bronson deGuerre, or Balo j'Acartu, or the Marvelous Mikos.

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
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Kevin Thomas (kt16@ix.netcom.com) wrote:

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First let me say that I thought your post was a very useful and well thought out presentation. Your system suggestions struck me as very useful. I've had occasion to run several one-evening MET games, and I'm inclined to experiment with your system at the next opportunity, as it seemed very useful.

I both agree and disagree with some of the other comments you made. Rather than argue, I thought I'd try to present a slightly different viewpoint. I don't think you're wrong, but I think perhaps your comments are applicable to some games but not to others.

This is the difficulty I run into when I think of live-roleplaying with character sheets, or using some other method of defining my abilities: what happens when I want to convince a crowd of people to help me raid the village? I would like to think that I could stand atop a soapbox and say my piece, try my arguments, threaten and cajole as I see fit, and then see who buys it. Supposing I do just that, I spout my speech...what next? Do I draw a card (roll a die, consult a referee, etc.) and see if I succeed in my "manipulation+acting" skill? If that's the case, then it really doesn't matter what I say. I could say, "I'm making a speech to convince you all to help me raid the village. Hold on while I pick a card..." Meanwhile, others in



the crowd are picking cards to see if they can see through my lies. This seems like a rather ridiculous method of roleplaying. On the other hand, supposing I don't have to draw a card, supposing I don't have to consult any attribute scores and I make it or break it on my own merit...why "make up" a character sheet? Or if I do make one up, why

It seems to me that what you mean by "character sheet" and what I mean by "character sheet" are two different things. When I say "character sheet," I generally am thinking of a body of background material - essentially a story - which tells the player who he is. The cards and numbers that you would consider a "character sheet" would be what I would call a "stat sheet" and "special ability cards." There's nothing wrong with your terminology, but you may want to qualify the description, to get across a better idea of what you are getting at.

The type of character sheet I am familiar with is vital in developing an interesting plotted game. In this sort of game, players are usually given a character to play, rather than inventing their own character. Let me give three quick examples of the sort of things one might find in a character sheet...one from a WW Vampire Larp, one from a Choose-your-own-character LARP, and one from a theatre-style event.

1. **LELAND** In Frank Branham's *Fire at Midnight*, Leland is a Ventrue Archon who has been assigned to investigate the murder of a Brujah gunrunner. Leland's character sheet details why he was sent by the Ventrue Justicar, and what obligations he has to Atlanta's Gangrel Prince. It gives him a working knowledge of the political characters who do not figure in the game, but are his principal motives for action. It also informs him of a past fight which has left him with a distaste for Gangrel. This is important to the pacing of the game - there are Gangrel characters with important information, and if Leland is too disposed to cooperate with them, or believe them, the game, while neat and short, will likely be rather unexciting. By seeding this basic motivational information, Leland has motivation to draw the action out, and engage in confrontational behavior. Leland's sheet also included some information about what he had done before the game (where he was, when he found things out) that could help solve the question of who murdered the Brujah.
2. **Hudson Hawk** - In OAGC's *"Dimension Next Door"* players could choose to portray any character from their own imagination, from literature, media, or even another game. One player chose the movie character Hudson Hawk. The GMs assumed that the player would know his own motivations, and concentrated on plot and details. Not in his own world, Hawk needed to know what contacts he had and who he had done "business" with. Even

when the player has the character well defined, a sheet can be critical for telling the player "what they already know."

3. **Dean Rusk** - In Ed Moser's "*A Blink of Mars*" the action surrounds the Cuban Missile Crisis. I played United States Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and the character sheet had two parts. The first was a biography of Rusk. While I knew a bit about the man, an in depth biography was useful to portray him. For example, while he was a State Department official, not a military man, he had served as Commander for U.S. Forces in Asia during WWII. This told me that he had plenty of high ranking military experience, and could see eye to eye and talk military shop with General Curtis Le May, and other military leaders. The second part of the sheet contained certain beliefs and deductions I had "already" made. This was the elements of one of the five historical arguments on why the Soviets were pressing the confrontation. Because the game was only eight hours, I could not come up with an argument that it took Rusk seven days to formulate. By seeding the elements, I was able to join the action "already in progress" and develop the remainder of my argument on a coherent framework.

These are a few examples of what character sheets can be used for. The primary reason for such sheets is this. On any given night I am not likely to be as clever/machiavellian/etc. as an Archon of the Ventrue Justicar, Hudson Hawk, or the U.S. Secretary of State. By giving me a jump start in the form of information, ideas, confrontations, etc. I am more likely to go out and initiate action and make for an interesting event.

I am still relying on my own skills. As Dean Rusk, when I commented in a deep Georgian accent to Bobby Kennedy that "Your brother is up to his eyes in a very deep pile of shit!" it got people's attention. I didn't have to draw a card to see how they would respond. They buckled down and got to work. However, I am being supplied with information that *I* wouldn't have because I haven't lived the character's life.

There are a couple of reasons for this. First, it avoids the "I know I know you but..." questions. Example: "We've both lived in Paris for 400 years, but I quite suddenly seem to have forgotten what clan you are in...would you mind reminding me..." (Character sheet reference - Jeanne Valdras is a politically influential Toreador).

Second, it allows for plots that do not have to be created by the players or extrapolated entirely from physical clues. In *Fire at Midnight*, resolving the murder depends on cross referencing a series of individuals activities, and filtering out the



lies. If they don't know where they were when before the game began, the plot would go no where, or have to be resolved by a special ability.

Now, there is certainly room for gaming that does not have internally driven plots. All plots are driven by monsters, GM-NPC characters, or just the players imagination. And this can be fun. Every year in January, my wife and I hold a Victorian Tea. You can play any character, real or fictional, from the Victorian or Edwardian period. We supply food, and players chit-chat, argue, and are expected to provide their own fun. Last year, one player chose to play Caractacus Potts (sp!) the inventor of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, the flying automobile. Another player was a noted British Social Reformer and pacifist. He severely upbraided Potts about his "infernal invention" because of the potential military abuses "What if your contraption were used to carry bombs...and rain them down on London! What if some foreign power built a thousand of them! Then what would the children say! They would look up and scream with fear "Oh my God! CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG," and they would RUN IN TERROR From your TERRIBLE MACHINE!"

A wonderful bit of impromptu role-playing. But I'm afraid without the tea and food the event would be on the weak side. Its an excuse to play around and be a bit fun.

I'm not even going to say that a dozen really talented and brilliant roleplayers can't sit down and develop intricate plots among themselves. But it isn't always going to happen. Obviously, in a WOD campaign, there is a lot more potential for that sort of thing than in a four hour minigame.

The point is...there is certainly room for both approaches...I think you made the case pretty well:

The point of live-roleplaying is the character ... I really can't imagine any other raison d'etre.

ASIDE: Form follows function. What is the function of live-roleplaying, specifically what is the function of the game you want to run? What forms need to be adopted to achieve that function? If the function is character--character interaction, character immersion, character revelation--the forms must allow the presentation and expression of character to flourish unhindered. Character is in the imagination, it is in the psyche, it is background, conflict, reflection, resolution; it is not numbers and formulas.



In some cases, a free-wheeling approach is necessary. However, form should follow function. If the primary function of a game is to allow you world spanning conquest, then some numbers will likely be necessary.

But that doesn't mean it is the same thing as table gaming standing up. I played Julius Cesar in John Corrado's Pax Romana several years ago. I dealt with numbers, and a good bit of table gaming. But I assure you that when I was seated there in the senate, and Cassius fell on me with the knife, it was **not** table gaming standing up. It was very realistic....

Anyway, I'm not disagreeing with many of your basic precepts. But some of your conjectures do seem to be limited to a pretty specific type of game, and I'm not sure they translate into all types of game, or even all types of Vampire game. That doesn't mean that they're wrong, just that one has to make certain allowances for stylistic differences, and differing goals in presentaion.

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
Author: Joseph Dzikiewicz
Email: dzik@access2.digex.net
Date: 1995/12/11
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

First of all: Thanks, Kevin, for a fascinating, well reasoned, and thought-provoking post. I hope it spurs a good thread.

I must admit, I didn't read the section on Vampire rules in much detail, as I am not all that interested in the Vampire genre. But I do have a few things to say about the other portions of your essay.

In article <4aehm2\$b1c@cloner3.netcom.com>, Kevin Thomas wrote:

liked best about all those games and which parts I didn't like at all to figure out what it was about live-action that interested me. Two things came to mind:

I particularly like your spelling out the reasons for LARPing here. However, for me your descriptions are incomplete.

1) The Rush.



No real problems with this one. I'd just note that it is possible to get a rush from LARPing without requiring the athleticism of your examples. As an example, I got a pretty good rush at the latest game I played when I noticed the Nazgul (who was out to get me) spy me from some distance down a hotel corridor, and I fled from him through hotel corridors - and the rush was from spotting him and the associated terror, not from the physical act of fleeing.

2) The immediacy of the scene. The place is real. My senses are my own. I see through my eyes, not eyes with five dots in "perception+alertness." I tie a knot as well as I can tie. I perform as well I can perform. There is no mediator between me and the locked door. This is an important part. If there is an obstacle to overcome and I need a judge to tell me if I succeed instead of trying it myself, then I could do that in a tabletop game and the obstacle would be ten times as difficult and I would be ten times as flashy. The point of the game is that I get to do it. Hands on.

This is nice, but incomplete. After all, there are many degrees of immediacy.

I have noticed, in particular, that your examples all emphasize character-vs-setting type things. You emphasize physical obstacles and physical challenges, leaving out the challenges that arise when involved in non-physical conflict or interaction with other characters.

For me, the best reason for LARPing is the immediacy of the other characters. When interacting with another person, I don't have to say, "You notice me limping and in a cold sweat" - I just limp and sweat. Or the other player doesn't tell me, "I have a haughty look on my face and a stern gleam in my eye" - he just acts it.

(Perhaps this emphasis on live-action character interaction is part of the reason that the style of LARPing that I like is commonly known as INTERACTIVE literature.)

In other words, you seem to leave out completely the more theatrical elements of LARPs. For some of us, that's an important part of them.

Another thing that I like about LARPs is the scale of them. I don't know about you, but I've never been in a table-top game with 60 other players. I can't even imagine such a thing working.

But I've been in plenty of 60 player LARPs. And it works very well. And the variety provided by those 60 different players, all driven by a different intelligence

with different intellectual skills, adds a great deal of spice to the mix. Much more than provided by a single GM playing the entire world.

Finally, I also think there is one important aspect of LARPs that is shared with table-top games, and that is the dimension of make-believe. I enjoy pretending to be characters who differ greatly from myself. I don't like to be limited to characters with a subset of my abilities. After all, I get to play professional-computer-geek-and-family-man every day of the year: maybe at the LARP I want to play submarine commander, master detective, or petty thief, all of whom can do things that I cannot.

(Here I suppose I find a problem with your methodology. By emphasizing only the things unique to LARPs versus table-top, you ignore those things about table-top games that are valuable in LARPs. In essence, you are throwing out the baby with the bathwater. I don't know about you, but I LIKE table-top games, and I have no problem with describing LARP as table-top with a couple added dimensions.)

Given these differences in my starting point, there are clear differences in my conclusions. First of all, the absolute correspondance between game-world and physical world is not as important to me. In your terms, I have no problem with "Player WITH Character." This is primarily because, for me, the greatest rush in LARPing is the interaction with other characters. As long as those interactions are in place, I'll enjoy the game.

(Incidentally, interactive skill cards, while a part of many LARPs, do not dominate the interaction in the ways that they are often portrayed here. Conversation and persuasion will almost always be more important than skill cards when it comes to interaction in the best LARPs. It is usually only when things get physical that skill and combat cards dominate the proceedings.)

Further, because I do want to play those other characters, I prefer the "Player WITH Character" approach. I don't want to be limited to using my own skills, to a subset of myself. (Frankly, limiting players in that way seems to me to be less "Player AS Character" than "Character AS Player." But to each his own.)

One last question: if you limit the primary skills of a character to those held by a player, how do you game genres in which no player has the skills of the character? As far as I know, there are no starship pilots among those players that I game with. Should I avoid science fiction then? I don't know of any trained clergy among the

local LARPerS - should we avoid games that include such clerical actions as marriages?

Admittedly, these examples are a bit extreme. But there seems to be a fine line between those skills that you might want a player to possess, and those you do not care about. (And even for those skills that players might possess, any real and reasonable challenge to those skills would probably be unplayable. For example, there are plenty of local players with computer programming skills. So by "Player AS Character", I could reasonably insert a challenge whereby a bug in a program needs to be found. Should I then generate a large program with an obscure bug, all for the purposes of this? And after my players spend hours trying to track down a bug that I thought would take minutes, and when they are ready to lynch me, what do I say to them?)

Some degree of reality-simulation is always going to be necessary. From the sounds of things, I find more of this acceptable than you find.

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: psydanwi

Email: psydanwi@psysun.psy.gu.se

Date: 1995/12/14

Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

Bravo!

When I first came in contact with American lrp-style on the net I soon discovered that this style is very different from the style we have in Sweden. Here the focus is on the moment of theater, the possibility to play another person or perhaps be another person. The important thing is to make an illusion that you really are the person that you are plying, living the life that that person would be living. This make it really important that there is nothing that breaks the illusion, as a card would in Vampire, or a Vampire T-shirt in an fatasy setting. The fixating on rules and systems is for me really odd. If one wants living roleplay why kill it with rules? (I am not asking this question to be rude and I hope to get a god answer :-))

So I got really glad when I read your essay and found out that there are hope for the American lrp soles to experiens some LIVE-roleplaying.

**Dante

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
Author: Chris
Email: cgvang@access.digex.net
Date: 1995/12/14
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

In article psydanwi@psysun.psy.gu.se writes:

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I hate to burst your bubble, but I live very vicariously through the lives of my alter-egos in the games I've played in. I do this because of the rules, not in spite of them, nor for a lack of them.

The attitude that rules **must** stand in the way of role-playing is narrow, and perhaps indicative of a lack of experience with it, or at least a good experience with it. If so, I'm truly sorry that you've missed out on it.

living the life that that person would be living. This make it really important that there is nothing that breaks the illusion, as a card would in Vampire, or a Vampire T-shirt in an fatasy setting. The fixating on rules and systems is for me really odd. If one wants living roleplay why kill it with rules? (I am not asking this question to be rude and I hope to get a god answer :-))

See my reply above.

So I got really glad when I read your essay and found out that there are hope for the American lrp soles to experiens some LIVE-roleplaying.

Well, in spite of your assertion to the contrary, there are many American souls out there that **have** enjoyed some LIVE-roleplaying.

Best,
Chris
cgvang@access.digex.net

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
Author: Dennis J. Halnon
Email: mendelin@esslink.com
Date: 1995/12/15
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

Chris wrote:

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*The attitude that rules *must* stand in the way of role-playing is narrow, and perhaps indicative of a lack of experience with it, or at least a good experience with it. If so, I'm truly sorry that you've missed out on it.*

Nothing could be more true.

I've played in games with extremely simple rules systems, in which very little *real* role-playing went on. OTOH, I've seen games with complex systems, such as ours, in which role- playing is emphasized.

The problem isn't with the AMOUNT of your rules -- it's with the WAY the rules are written. And above even that, the people who run or play the game can affect how it turns out.

I've argued before -- some might say successfully others not :(-- that complex rules systems CAN, in fact, help to encourage better role-playing -- again, depending on how they are developed.

How? To put it simply, the more options a player has, the easier it is for him or her to differentiate him- or herself from other characters. Once a player has this feeling of "uniqueness," his or her bond with the character is intensified.

So I got really glad when I read your essay and found out that there are hope for the American lrp soles to experiens some LIVE-roleplaying.

*Well, in spite of your assertion to the contrary, there are many American souls out there that *have* enjoyed some LIVE-roleplaying.*

Call me crazy -- but didn't we go over this American vs. Others thing and establish already that there is no single LARP style, on either side? :)

Dennis J. Halnon mendelin@esslink.com
Fantasy Quest Setting Director "Live the Adventure!"
Personal Web pg: <http://www.esslink.com/~mendelin/mendelin.htm>

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
Author: Dunmail
Email: D.J.Hodkinson@shef.ac.uk
Date: 1995/12/18
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

"Dennis J. Halnon" wrote:

*I've played in games with extremely simple rules systems, in which very little *real* role-playing went on. OTOH, I've seen games with complex systems, such as ours, in which role- playing is emphasized.*

I can't deny your personal experience! The problem lies in the amount of input into background vs rules and the way they are linked. A finite amount of effort is put into the whole system, so the more that goes into rules the less there is to put into background in alot of cases. Moreover, if the rules system doesn't tie in well with the background then it will start to become obtrusive.

I like games with well-thought out backgrounds, with rules complementing this, as I find these satisfying to roleplay in.



The problem isn't with the AMOUNT of your rules -- it's with the WAY the rules are written. And above even that, the people who run or play the game can affect how it turns out.

I agree, the people make or break things.

Dunmail

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
Author: Joseph Dzikiewicz
Email: dzik@access2.digex.net
Date: 1995/12/14
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

In article , wrote:

When I first came in contact with American lrp-style on the net I soon discovered that this style is very different from the style we have in Sweden. Here the focus is on the moment of theater, the possibility to play another person or perhaps be another person. The important thing is to make an illusion that you really are the person that you are plying, living the life that that person would be living. This make it really important that there is nothing that breaks the illusion, as a card would in Vampire, or a Vampire T-shirt in an fatasy setting.

I am curious: have you tried a game using skill cards? They do not break the illusion in the ways that you suggest.

Western theater has, over the past century, adopted many of the elements of eastern theater. In these, there are clearly theatrical touches that are not at all realistic. (For example, stage hands are clearly visible on stage, or theatrical machinery is clearly present.) These things do not detract from the illusion of reality: because the audience becomes familiar with the touches, they become accepted.

In college, I was in a production of Equus in which the horses were played by young men in black turtleneck sweaters wearing head gear made of clear plastic tubes shaped like horses' heads. These were clearly not horses, but they did a remarkable job of suggesting an illusion of horses.

In other words, there are two ways of handling a theatrical illusion. One is to try to produce the most realistic possible setting, scenery, and effects. The other is to allow for less realistic touches that suggest or convey a feel for what is happening, perhaps trying to get to the essence of the experience without worrying about the detailed realistic trappings. I think of IL as trying to be closer to this second approach.

YMMV, of course. But in general, of the plays that I've seen, the ones that I remember best are those that are the most "theatrical" - that use the conventions of stage, or create their own, interesting conventions.

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: Joel K. Furr

Email: jfurr@acpub.duke.edu

Date: 1995/12/14

Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

psydanwi@psysun.psy.gu.se wrote:

If one wants living roleplay why kill it with rules? (I am not asking this question to be rude and I hope to get a god answer :-))

Because LARPing is a competitive event for many people and rules are necessary to keep things fair.

Some people **claim** that they don't need rules and that they could just automatically do the logical thing in any given situation, even if it was to their disadvantage, but I've noticed that the people who claim this, with only one exception, don't practice what they preach. Oddly, in every scene they're in, they **have** to be at the center of attention.

Characters in IL-style LARPs often have conflicting goals and the rules are needed to provide a level playing field so each character has **some** chance of achieving their goals. That's why we have the rules -- people don't want to be trapped in improvisational theater where you're dragged willy-nilly down the plotline the most egotistic character wants to drag everyone else down.

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
Author: Eddie Maise
Email: emaise@crl.com
Date: 1995/12/14
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

Joel K. Furr wrote:

Because LARPing is a competitive event for many people and rules are necessary to keep things fair.

This is very true, in my experience. Some people do approach live-action games from a competitive standpoint. However, see below.

*Some people *claim* that they don't need rules and that they could just automatically do the logical thing in any given situation, even if it was to their disadvantage, but I've noticed that the people who claim this, with only one exception, don't practice what they preach. Oddly, in every scene they're in, they *have* to be at the center of attention.*

[Irrelevant aside: am I the exception you're referring to? I certainly have said a few times that for some games and some players (myself included), rules would not be necessary, and as far as I know, you've got no basis to say I don't practice what I preach. We've never met, let alone played together. But that's not what I wanted to talk about.]

I may be misinterpreting your point here, but it seems to me that you are confusing two different kinds of competition.

The first is competition to achieve goals. Characters often have goals that conflict with each other. In one-shots, such conflict is written in by the game writers; in campaigns, such conflicts usually develop from long-term character interaction. Example: In *_Mary_Celeste_*, the truly evil person wants to find the magic item in order to rule the world while the truly good person wants to find the magic item to keep just that from happening. Example two: A handful of powerful vampires vie for control of a city of the damned.

Note that this is conflict. However, very often players will adopt a competitive attitude towards that conflict. When that happens, their goal as a player in playing the game becomes to succeed in their character's goals. The game then becomes a

competition between players, rather than a cooperative effort to entertain each other.

I don't like that sort of attitude towards a role-playing game and I try to avoid it in myself. But I recognize that that sort of competition is a natural reaction, and, when applied in moderation, can even help the players play out their parts in the in-game conflict with more realism. Furthermore, the more people in the game, the more likely you are to have players that do take a competitive approach. It is for the benefit of those players that you have rules, with which you can enforce fair play.

That having been said:

In your last sentence, you seem to be implying that rules are needed in a game to keep people from unfairly being the center of attention. That's a very different kind of competition. Being in the spotlight (aka grandstanding aka hamming it up) is not dependent on how well you are doing at accomplishing your goals. You can be failing utterly and still be the center of attention. You can have been screwed from the very start of the game and still get attention from the other players.

I suspect that the people you are referring to could not be kept out of the spotlight with any kind of rules, unless there were rules dictating how often you could speak or how close you could come to other players.

In short, I don't think that attention-getting has anything to do with fairness, rules, or goal-achieving, as you seemed to imply.

Eddie Maise emaise@crl.com Serving Donuts on Another Planet

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: Eddie Maise

Email: emaise@crl.com

Date: 1995/12/15 Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

Chris wrote:

From: emaise@crl.com (Eddie Maise)

Joel K. Furr wrote:

Because LARPing is a competitive event for many people and rules are necessary to keep things fair.

This is very true, in my experience. Some people do approach live-action games from a competitive standpoint. However, see below.

And it isn't in and of itself bad, so long as it doesn't become obsessive to the point that it interferes with other people's fun.

Absolutely. Just as I wish more people would be less competitive and more cooperative (as players, not as characters), I also wish some of the people who criticize competitive players would relax and lighten up. Here I'm referring to groups of players in the vampire game I play in.

There's plenty of room for everyone to have fun in almost every large game, no matter what your preferred style of play is.

Eddie Maise emaise@crl.com Serving Donuts on Another Planet

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: Joel K. Furr

Email: jfurr@acpub.duke.edu

Date: 1995/12/15

Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

emaise@crl.com (Eddie Maise) wrote:

In your last sentence, you seem to be implying that rules are needed in a game to keep people from unfairly being the center of attention. That's a very different kind of competition. Being in the spotlight (aka grandstanding aka hamming it up) is not dependent on how well you are doing at accomplishing your goals. You can be failing utterly and still be the center of attention. You can have been screwed from the very start of the game and still get attention from the other players.

There are some people with whom I have played in games who are the sort of people you just *know* shouted "No you didn't" every time they were playing Cowboys and Indians as a child and someone came up behind them and shot them in the back. There are some people who simply *cannot* cooperatively roleplay

and who *insist* on being the center of attention and having their way in any given encounter.

Those are the people I want rules in place so I'm protected *from* them. I don't enjoy being forced to be a minor character in some power-gamer's fantasies.

And no, you're not the exception. Mike Young is; he's the only person *I*'ve played with who I think might actually be able to roleplay without any rules and not wind up trying to twist everything to his own benefit so he got all the attention.

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: Endre Fodstad

Email:

Date: 1995/12/15

Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

jfurr@acpub.duke.edu (Joel K. Furr) wrote:

psydanwi@psysun.psy.gu.se wrote:

If one wants living roleplay why kill it with rules? (I am not asking this question to be rude and I hope to get a god answer :-))

Because LARPing is a competitive event for many people and rules are necessary to keep things fair.

Why did then the number of complaints from players significantly decrease when we simplified our rules system?

Endre

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: Joel K. Furr

Email: jfurr@acpub.duke.edu

Date: 1995/12/15

Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

Endre Fodstad wrote:

Why did then the number of complaints from players significantly decrease when we simplified our rules system?

Simple. Too many rules creates a species of being called "the rules lawyer."

When rules are expressed simply or as guidelines, it becomes much more difficult to rules-lawyer them.

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: Chris

Email: cgvang@access.digex.net

Date: 1995/12/15

Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

In article <4as4de\$aiif@news.duke.edu> jfurr@acpub.duke.edu (Joel K. Furr) writes:

Simple. Too many rules creates a species of being called "the rules lawyer." When rules are expressed simply or as guidelines, it becomes much more difficult to rules-lawyer them.

That is true of some people, but often questions are asked about rules simply because some soul is seeking enlightenment.

I suspect that if you had changed the focus from the stats to the role-playing by not pandering to the rules lawyers, you'd have enjoyed the same success. I say that because we have had several players who **were** rules lawyers, but who now focus on the role-playing because we **did not** pander to their need.

YMMV of course...

Best,

Chris

cgvang@access.digex.net

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: Elizabeth Cable

Email: eg31@dial.pipex.com
Date: 1995/12/21
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

Don't you think there is a difference between decreasing the number of rules and saying "that's all there is", and decreasing the number of rules and saying "anything else you want, just try it."

I run my games in the latter style, and although this can be exceedingly ref intensive, the players blossom in the knowledge that they can try to do anything they want, and the refs and other players will respond accordingly.

On a slightly different note, I used to think that you had to have come through all the rules-intensive and thus incredibly restrictive LRP and FRP systems before you could "graduate" to a much freer (i.e. less rules) system.

This I now know is tosh.

No one taught us how to play in the playground. You don't need rules at all, just a consensus of opinion as to how the world works. This goes back to someone else's point - the more detailed the world and background to the scenario, the less rules you need.

IMHO anyway.

Liz

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP
Author: The Nomad
Email: nomad@easynet.co.uk
Date: 1995/12/31
Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

kt16@ix.netcom.com (Kevin Thomas) wrote:

SEEKING SIMPLICITY IN LIVE-ROLEPLAYING GAME SYSTEMS

etc.

Here`s an idea that I came up with a while ago, after another argument about realism vs roleplaying.

(I am firmly on the role-playing side of this debate, by the way: the idea of roleplaying is surely to be able to play characters who you would like to play, irrespective of how close you are to your character in build, stamina, dexterity etc: that`s certainly why I came into roleplaying.)

(Another thought: how physically competent are those espousing the various sides in this argument, if I can ask without being offensive? It does strike me that those of us who are 6`6``, 200lb and black belts at Kendo might have considerably more reason to love the "Player as character" systems than the proverbial 90 lb weakling. Just speaking from experience. For myself, I`m 5`10`` and a county class sprinter, but I`ve got apallingly slow reflexes, hence my considerable lack of swordfighting ability)

Anyway...

Most ideas on the rules vs realism seem to say that you can either have rules, allowing players to play whatever they want at the cost of simplicity, or realism, in which case the butterfinger had best not play a thief, but the "rush" of actually being in your character`s skin is there. However, there is a third option.

At the start of the game, characters are developed as normal, according to a skill-based system: my preference would be for a system based on the Amber method, where each player is "ranked" against others in each area of talent. This stage should happen about a week before the game.

The GM then collects all the sheets and determines the monsters and players for each adventure. Then, as normal, the GM meets all the monsters for each adventure beforehand: however, in this case, this meeting should be perhaps the night before, and should be quite long.

The GM then goes through the adventure as normal. However, he also goes through the CHARACTERS with the monsters: each of the monsters should have a fairly good knowledge of each character`s ability in each area of expertise. Then, the next day, when the adventure begins, the monsters tailor their reactions to their knowledge of the CHARACTER`s notional expertise, reacting to "give" the players the results that would be generated by their character`s abilities. Thus, the monster attacked by the deadly buccaneer who in reality has 4 thumbs should adjust his fighting so that to the player it appears that he is far more skilled than, in

actual fact, he is. The guard implored by the beautiful sorceress to open the door should react in kind, no matter how beautiful or charming she is in real life. And, of course, the obverse: the black belt playing the apprentice apothecary should be attacked by monsters fighting to the best of their ability, no matter how lowly the creature.

Of course, there are flaws:

- The system relies on monsters with good memories and considerable acting ability. It also relies on the monsters to remember that the players are the "heroes" of the story and they are the ones who are meant to enjoy the story, above and beyond the monsters' own wishes.
- The "skill capping" of high-powered players playing low-powered characters doesn't really work. The player must cap his own abilities and not play more powerful than he is. However, most players will regard that as a challenge. With any luck.
- This system still doesn't solve the problem of players vs the environment: you can't tell a trap to play itself as easy to disarm. However, I think it's an enormous improvement.

I must confess I haven't tried this method of LRP yet. However, I think it would work. Comments?

The Nomad

Re: ESSAY: Simplicity in LRP

Author: James W Hines

Email: corryn@airmail.net

Date: 1995/12/31

Forums: rec.games.frp.live-action

nomad@easynet.co.uk (The Nomad) wrote:

Here's an idea that I came up with a while ago, after another argument about realism vs roleplaying.

(I am firmly on the role-playing side of this debate, by the way: the idea of roleplaying is surely to be able to play characters who you would like to play,

irrespective of how close you are to your character in build, stamina, dexterity etc: that`s certainly why I came into roleplaying.)

(Another thought: how physically competent are those espousing the various sides in this argument, if I can ask without being offensive? It does strike one that those of us who are 6`6``, 200lb and black belts at Kendo might have considerably more reason to love the "Player as character" systems than the proverbial 90 lb weakling. Just speaking from experience. For myself, I`m 5`10`` and a county class sprinter, but I`ve got apallingly slow reflexes, hence my considerable lack of swordfighting ability)

I would like to point out for any that haven't read my previous posts or were maybe confused, I am against the player as character system. It is too limiting for those people who are physically unable to fight their way out of paper bags. Physically I am 6'5", 215lb. I have a desk job so I would be lucky to sprint 200 yards without being winded. However I have found that in fighting most people will come to you. I have been in LARP and SCA for 4 years. I have won more tourneys than I've lost and I've fought in NERO, Amtgard, Dagorhir, HFS, IFGS, and SCA (combat archery). I think it would be very unappealing for weaker players to have to fight me on any kind of a constant basis in a system that never lets them improve beyond their natural ability.

I would, however, still like to play XPI at least once.

Anyway...

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I get a rush playing someone I could never be.

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Of course, there are flaws:

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Especially if there is say 50 players or more.

acting ability. It also relies on the monsters to remember that the players are the "heroes" of the story and they are the ones who are meant to enjoy the story, above and beyond the monsters` own wishes.

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In IFGS, we already use some of your ideas. In our encounter description are action and reactions the monsters/NPCs will take towards the players and their

actions. Example: I'm playing a goblin and some group tries to kill me. If the encounter description lists me as an easy fight then I lose the fight even if I could defeat the players. I would in effect "cap" down to the level of the monster.
Example 2: I am playing a guard who is easily infatuated with women. If any female player tries to be charming then I play along with it no matter how actually charming she may be. I know these examples don't exactly rely on a ranking. The female doesn't have to be rated high for charm. She just has to be role-playing it well, which is why we do it in the first place.

Let me know if I'm off base here.

corryn@airmail.net

