

Issue 1, 2012

What'd you get  
this time,  
Glenn?

I got some candy  
bars for the kids, some  
soap, detergent...and the  
first

Out of Character  
for 2012.

Great!



Welcome to SAGA • Intro to Role Playing • Our favourite games  
Meet the committee • The year ahead

For more information about SAGA Inc., visit:  
<http://www.saga.org.nz>.

Out of Character couldn't survive without your membership money. Keep OOC going, bring your friends to SAGA!

Many thanks to this issue's contributors: Rose Nichols, John Massie and Alan Downward. Thanks also to everyone on the Facebook group for their contributions to the article "Our favourite games".

Article laid out in Apple Pages, and produced by repeatedly hammering the Print button. Headings in London Tube and AA Typewriter, body text in Georgia. Cover image and interior art nicked shamelessly from *The Walking Dead*.

I'll cook up a solution with the knowledge I've accrued  
They say a kitchen time saves nine, but I'm just saving two  
I've gathered the ingredients to make some time sorbet  
There's hardly room for seconds when the seconds melt away!

Watch as I work my gypsy magic  
Eye of a newt and cinnamon  
Watch as the matter turns to batter  
open the portal, jump in!

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# President's Address

**Rose Nichols**

Hi, my name is Rose and I am this year's president of SAGA Inc. This will be my fourth year on the committee: I have also held the treasurer and promotions roles. During the day I disguise myself as a teacher.

This year, with the help of my committee I hope to run a number of events for you, including our annual convention Buckets of Dice, two BBQ and Board Games days, and two mini-cons. As a club we are also involved in running SANCon, a great weekend run by a few of the nerdier clubs.

Hope you enjoy the year, and all we provide. If you need anything drop me an e-mail [president@saga.org.nz](mailto:president@saga.org.nz)

# Your new committee



**Rose Nichols**

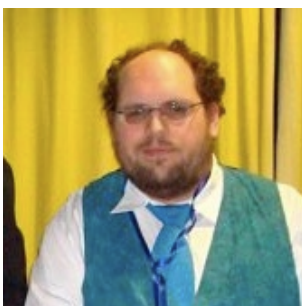
## **President**

Hi again, I am assuming you read all about me inside the cover. Along with being your president I also teach at Hagley Community College and dance with Swingtown Rebels. Last year I mainly played board games, this year I hope to do more role playing, whether in a campaign or a series of one-offs.

**Kane MacIntyre**

## **Secretary**

In the still of the night, that place where there is no sound and no movement, comes the stealthy motion of a thief. Not your ordinary thief of blood and bone, but one made of wishes and of hope. The type of thief that strolls in the recesses of the mind looking for chance opportunities of adventure and glory. Those glimmers of need that come from watching people, establishing a rapport and fulfilling wants...stealing moments of enjoyment and glory that comes from the world of dreams and wishes. Riding the steeds of legend and fantasy, through the world of imagination, might and magic. Strolling through the world as a clergyman, demon, knight of God, orc, dragon-slayer. This is where I live. This is where it all begins, endures, and continues...the world where Saga is...my name is Kane, known by many names not all good, Thane to Rose. Solver of issues, Keeper of Names. In the Mortal world, known also as Secretary.



**Alistair Steele**

## **Treasurer**

Well, this is embarrassing.

See, we did elect Al to be our treasurer, and he was doing an excellent job of preparing our budget for this year. But then he accidentally forgot to close a parenthesis in a formula, and he was sucked into an alternate dimension.

So now our treasurer is busy making a pact with Grgh'Nyralthep, the Devourer of Cell B5 and Birther of Visual Basic, and we don't have a budget.

But don't worry, folks! I know how to use Excel.



## Jan-Yves Ruzicka

### Promotions

#### Skills:

Great	Fair	Average
Organisation	Hipster lore	Introversion
Good	Enthusiasm	Character death
Dress sense	Fast-talking	Narrative theory
Narcissism		Pop culture

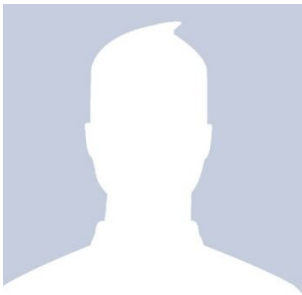


#### Aspects:

- Someday my Ph.D. will come
- I found this amazing RPG, you've probably never heard of it
- There is no such thing as overdressing
- There's an app for that
- Now my socks are arranged alphabetically!

#### Stunts:

- **I'm sorry, I can't hear you over the sound of my colour-matching:** Spend a FATE point to make a skill check with Dress Sense, regardless of the original skill required.
- **Ubiquitous capture device:** You always have a pen and paper handy, no matter the circumstances.



???

### Quartermaster

SAGA Inc.'s last quartermaster suffered a fate worse than death, so we're currently looking for a replacement. Expect to hear more soon!

# The year ahead

If you're new to the club, you probably want to know what you can get out of us once you part with your hard-earned \$5. In order to ease your fiscal suffering, here's a list of the activities we have planned, as well as some other gaming-related events happening around New Zealand. Keep it as a handy reference, or use this page to make an emergency flare, MacGuyver-style, for when you get trapped on a desert island during a Geology field trip.

## **February 22-23:**

Clubs Day

## **February 25:**

Board games and Barbecue

2pm-late

2/290 Avonhead Road

## **February 28:**

Intro night (Tuesday edition)

6:00pm-10:00pm

KHo7, KHo8

Kirkwood Village

## **March 1:**

Intro night (Thursday edition)

6:00pm-10:00pm

KHo7, KHo8

Kirkwood Village

## **April 13-15:**

Hydra LARP Convention (Wellington)

## **April 21-22:**

MiniCon (venue TBA)

## **May 5:**

Day of Games (Wellington)

## **June 2-4:**

Buckets of Dice (see the centrefold)

## **August 24-26:**

Chimera LARP Convention (Auckland)

## **September (date unconfirmed):**

SANCon (<http://www.sancon.org.nz>)

## **October (date unconfirmed):**

Fright Night (Wellington)

# DIY RPG

## Alan Downward

*Reprinted with permission from <http://www.gameintheory.blogspot.com>*

When I am looking to run a roleplaying campaign, the first thing I do is decide on a story. I write the beginning (usually the first 3-4 sessions) and the end (or at least how I would like it to end). I leave the details of the middle sections vague so that the players are free to move from A to B as they see fit. And only once the story outline is done do I start to think about what system I want to use.

Generally I like systems that provide the players with lots of freedom and choice, but at the same time I like those choices to be resolved quickly. One of the problems I have always had with D&D is that although it provides the players with lots of actions that they can perform during combat, the combat sessions would generally drag on. In 2009 I decided to run a Cthulhu-esque horror game set just after the death of Queen Victoria (I didn't want to run Call of Cthulhu because that mythos is already well known which can lead to metagaming and take part of the fun away). I considered several systems for use, for example BESM (because it can be used with any game), Call of Cthulhu, Trail of Cthulhu, and World of Darkness. But, in the end I decided that what this game needed was its own custom system.

I wanted the system to be quick and simple, with very little time spent reading dice rolls. I also wanted combat to be treated in the same way as any other conflict and not need its own rules section. Towards this end I decided that every conflict should be decided by a single dice roll and that only PCs should roll dice, with the target number they needed to beat being the average result that would be rolled by the NPC. Each player only had four stats (physical power, physical finesse, mental power, and mental finesse), they also had two advantages, one disadvantage (although depending on the situation an advantage could act as a disadvantage and vice versa), and some items/equipment that it would make sense for them to own.

The stats were a dice type, with an average person having a d6 in all stats; but because a PC is better than average they were given two upgrades, so they could either increase one stat to a d10 or have two stats at d8, if they desired they could also decrease one stat to a d4 giving them a third stat increase. Each character also had ten hit points and ten sanity points, but these were kept hidden for reasons I will explain later. When a conflict occurred the players would need to state what they were doing and what they hoped to achieve by doing so. For example, not wanting to be interrogated by the players. an NPC pulls a knife and begins to back away towards the door: now rather than the player just saying 'I attack the thug with the knife' they would need to specify what they were attempting to gain, for example 'seeing as the thug has a knife rather than wrestle with him I will attempt to quickly knock him unconscious and stop him getting away'. This also provides the



implication of what would happen if the roll failed: the character is stabbed and thug escapes. The actual role would involve taking the player rolling physical power and adding any appropriate bonuses from items and/or advantages: in this case the target number would be 4.5 ( 3.5 being the average result from rolling a d6 and +1 for the knife). In situations where a conflict might involve multiple NPCs the target number is determined by adding the two NPC averages together, for example if there were two men with knives in the above situation then the target number would be 9. If the target number was outside the range of numbers a player could achieve then no roll was needed.

The game also included a magic system which involved the players gaining runes (with rather poor translations of what they meant), from which they had to form sentences. Depending on the runes used different magic effects would occur. The use of poor/ambiguous translations was so that player wouldn't be 100% certain the first time they cast a spell what it would do: for example would 'give, fire, other' cause the target to catch fire or become enchanted?

The final aspect of the system were the hit points and sanity points. Players start with 10 of each and these were represented by stones, black for hit points and white for sanity. The stones were kept out of sight in plastic dishes but because of the nature of the material players could hear when one or more was lost or gained. Keeping the details of the exact number of hit/sanity points secret added to the feeling of the unknown, and also provided me with a way to 'confuse' the players. When a player became low on sanity the way I as GM interacted with them changed: simple things such as calling them by the wrong name, passing notes with ambiguous meaning, and picking up and dropping some stones back in the dish are simple examples of ways I tried to let the players feel the mental strain their character was under.

This should give you a general overview of how the system works. I encourage everyone to at some point try and either design their own or modify their favourite gaming system. You learn a lot about what does and doesn't work, and don't worry if things don't go all that well as you can always change or tweak the system. When I first presented this system to my players there was some concern over their not being enough to differentiate the characters stat-wise, but I asked them to try it with the promise of changing to a different system if it didn't work out. Due to some good roleplaying and back-stories on their part all the characters did act and feel very different.

# Our shields can't handle

## **FEATURING:**

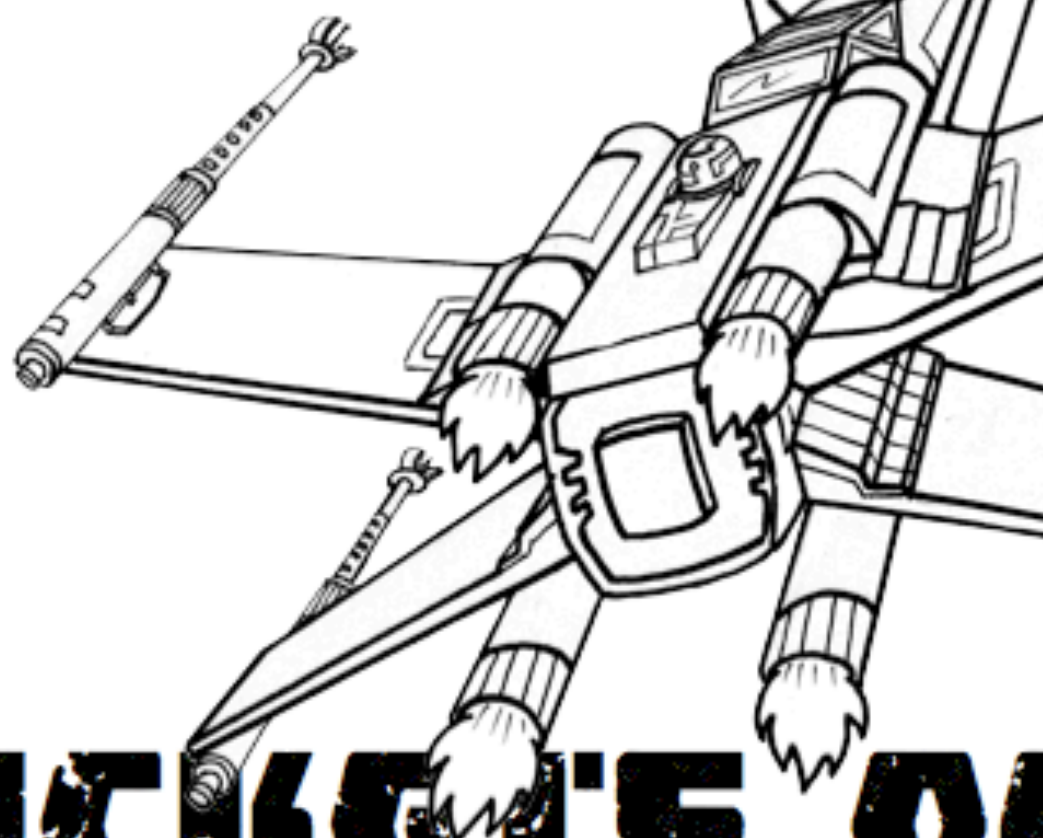
Sun and Starship

by Dillon Burke

You are Cordially Invited To...

by Paul Wilson & Jenni Dowsett

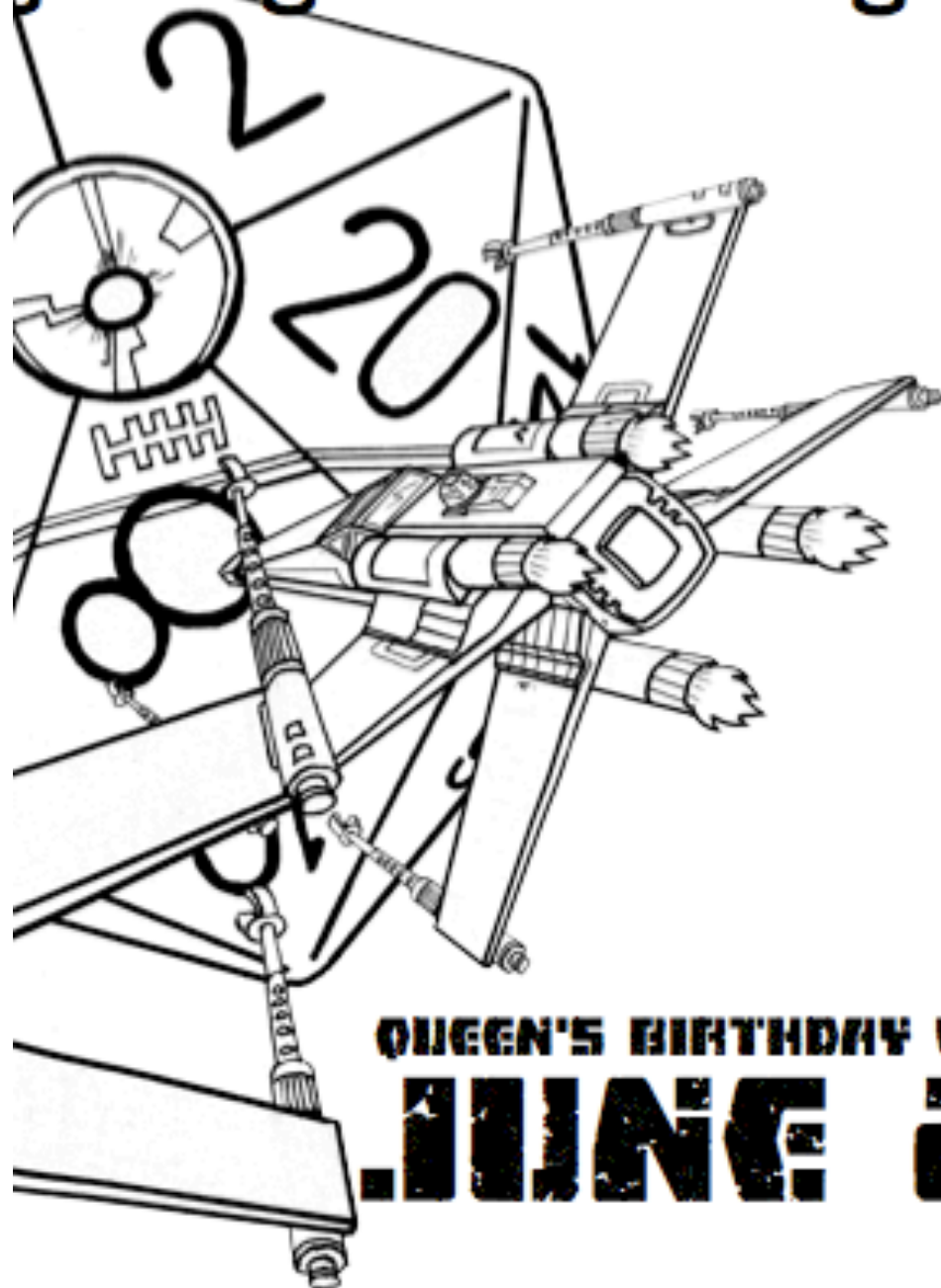
run by Daphne Cohen



# **BURKE'S ON**

<http://www.sas>

gaming of that magnitude!



**QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND**

**JUNE 2-4**

**F DICE 2012**

[aga.org.nz/bod](http://aga.org.nz/bod)

# An introduction to roleplaying

## Jan-Yves Ruzicka

If you're reading this you've presumably picked up a copy of SAGA Inc.'s magazine, *Out of Character*. If you're new to the club, you may be wondering what it is that we do. Maybe your friends have talked about roleplaying, or you've seen it parodied in *Community*, and you're kind of interested.

Today I consider it my job to give you a brief intro to roleplaying.

## The very basics

Roleplaying is basically telling a story, but rather than planning everything out in advance and sitting in a room to write it all out, we're making it up and performing it on the spot. The audience for a roleplaying game is the people in the game - we're not performing for other people, we're doing it to find out what happens.

The goal of a roleplaying game is to have fun. If that involves telling stories of soul-rending decisions and epic quests, we can do that. If it involves hilarious misunderstandings and awkward social situations, that's cool too. If it involves tense four-sided gun-battled in abandoned parking lots in North London...you get the idea.

## The setup

In order to play a roleplaying game, you'll need someone to run events. This person is often called the referee or game master (GM). For this article I will refer to the person running the game as the GM. You will also have probably between three and five players. The GM is like the director of the game - they set up the story and pace events, bringing in bit part characters and providing colourful scene dressing. The players generally get to control certain people in the story: the main characters.

## Players and characters

Any actors in the story are characters. For example, if we were going to play a game based on *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo, Gandalf, Boromir and Sauron are all characters.

Some characters get to be controlled by players. Generally, one player will control one character. Players often control characters that we'd call "protagonists" in movies or books - they're generally good guys, and the stories are about them. So in *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo, Sam, Merry, Pippin, Gimli and Legolas could all be controlled by players. We call these characters "player characters", or PCs for short.

Bit part characters (e.g. Elrond), villains (Sauron, Gollum), and wise powerful mentors (Gandalf) generally don't get controlled by the players. The GM gets to play all of these. We call these characters non-player characters (or NPCs).

Don't worry, that's the last acronym I'll throw at you.

## Playing the game

Now we've got some terms out of the way, how do we actually play?

First up, the GM will tell you what sort of game it will be. There's as many roleplaying games as there are genres for movies or novels - epic fantasy, space opera, hard science-fiction, 1920s murder mystery, post-apocalyptic, modern-day heist...you get the idea.

*I'm going to throw in an example at this point. It's based on the free roleplaying game Lady Blackbird (you can google it). It's a swashbuckling gaslamp adventure that takes place on flying ships between chunks of rock that float in the sky around a dying star. The mood of the game is kind of like a cross between Pirates of the Caribbean and The Princess Bride.*

Next, you'll find yourself a character to play. If it's a one-shot game, the GM might have some characters for you. If it's a longer game, you might get to make your own. These characters might have numbers to indicate how good they are at various tasks, or they might have descriptive phrases and backgrounds. We don't need to worry about these right now.

*Lady Blackbird comes with a number of pre-made characters. The GM puts sheets for these characters out on the table and tells us all to pick one. I think I like the look of the character **Cyrus Vance**. He's a smuggler and ex-soldier, and it looks like he's adept at fighting two-gun style. Oh, he's also secretly madly in love with Lady Blackbird, one of the other characters. In my mind, he's being played by a young Harrison Ford.*

Once you all have characters, the GM will start the game by describing where you start off. It might be relatively calm, or you might be already in the middle of a tense scene. It's just like the opening scene of a movie. Regardless, the GM will set the scene up for you, and then chances are, they'll ask you what you want to do. It's then your job to have your character do what you think they'd do. Think about what they'd do in a movie, or what would make an interesting scene. Don't be afraid to suggest things to the rest of the table either.

*Lady Blackbird starts with everyone locked in the brig of the Imperial ship The Hand of Sorrow. Right now, they're running Cyrus' ship's details through the register, and soon they're going to work out who they've captured. Cyrus, his crew, and their travelling companions need to escape right now.*

*The GM describes the situation, and then says, "So, what are you doing?" I'm wondering the same thing: what would Cyrus Vance do in this situation? Maybe he'd pretend to be sick, and when one of the guards came to investigate he'd brain them over the head. Maybe he'd try to pick the lock...although he's no good at that.*

*I'm still thinking when one of the other players pipes up. He's playing Snargle, who's the ship's pilot and also a goblin. "It says here I can change my form," he says, pointing at his character sheet. "Can I stretch my arm out long enough to get the keys off the guard?"*

*"Sure," says the GM. "Is that what you're doing?"*

*"Yeah," says Snargle's player.*

*"OK," says the GM. "Tell me what it's like." He's being a director here - he wants to see some detail in this scene, and he's asking Snargle's player to provide it. Remember, Snargle's player is in charge of his character, so he gets to describe what Snargle does.*

*"Sure," says Snargle's player. "Uh, I stick my arm in between the bars and then it starts to stretch like it's made of putty. I reach out and grab the keys off of the guard's belt while he's looking the other way."*

*Technically, the guard gets controlled by the GM, since they're a bit character, but the GM in this case is fine with Snargle's player taking control of the guard for a moment. The GM doesn't want it all to go Snargle's way, however, so he says, "OK, you grab the guard's keys, everything's fine, but as you bring them back through the door, a real big one knocks against the bars with a clang. The guard spins around at the noise and sees you standing there, keys in one hand. What do you do?"*

## **Dice, numbers, and complicated bits**

What I've described so far is basically like a collaborative storytelling game. You've got a bit of back and forth, but in the end the story is going to be resolved between the GM and the players. At some point, you're going to get to a part in the story where you have a situation. You know, now you're shooting at the big bad, and he's shooting at you, and perhaps you don't want this to descend into a game of "Oh yes I did!" and "Oh no I didn't!"

So we make some rules. Here's a real simple example: everyone has an awesomeness rating, which is between one and six. Whenever you try to do something dangerous, roll a six-sided dice. If you roll equal to or under your awesomeness rating, you succeed. So, the more awesome your character is, the better chance they have of succeeding at something.

Of course, these rules can get pretty complex. You could have a number rating for every skill you possess, but is shooting a revolver different from shooting a rifle? If I can drive a car, can I drive a truck? What about a train? What if we want to generate random numbers that aren't just between 1 and 6? How about a bell-curve? Gamers have invented dice with four, eight, ten, twelve and twenty sides to provide different odds. (Incidentally, we refer to these as d4, d6, d8, d10, etc., depending on how many sides the dice has. 3d6 means rolling three six-siders and adding the results.)

Here's how *Lady Blackbird* handles the dice and rules things: you've got a number of traits and tags. Whenever you do something dangerous, you get to roll a number of six-sided dice. You get one just for trying, and one for each trait or tag that applies. It's a bit more complex than that, but that'll do for now. You roll all your dice, and each dice that comes up four, five or six is a success. More successes mean you do better - two successes are enough to succeed at something that's fairly easy, but more difficult feats may need three, four or even five successes.

*The guard rushes forward, and Snargle hurriedly opens the door. One of the people in our group is Naomi Bishop, the Lady Blackbird's bodyguard and an ex-pit-fighter. The*

*player says to the GM, "I want to kick the door into the guard as he runs up, so he rebounds into the wall."*

*"Sure, says the GM, "but you're going to need to roll for it. It'll take three successes to knock him down."*

*Naomi's player gets one for trying. "Well," she says, "I'm an ex-**pit fighter**," she adds a dice, "and I'm **combat-tested**, so thinking up plans like this comes naturally to me," she adds another dice. "I'm planning on sprinting from the back of the cell and smashing into the door, since I'm **fast** and a **living weapon**, and I figure it won't hurt me because I'm also **hard**." She adds another three dice to her pool. Now Naomi's player has picked all the tags she can, she rolls six dice (one for trying, five for traits and tags). She rolls: 6, 5, 5, 3, 1, 1. That's three successes, so she gets to smash the guard into the wall. The escape proceeds.*

## Where to from here?

If you're reading this, well done! I've gone over roleplaying games in a bit more detail than you really needed to know here - but it'll set you in good stead for your first game. You might know what you want out of your game now, which will help you pick your first group (and will hopefully make your first game more enjoyable). But now you know what sort of game you want to play, what do you do?

The best thing to do is to come along to one of our introductory nights. Anyone who wants to run a game will get to advertise it, and you can see what's on offer. If a game appeals to you, hunt down the GM and tell them that you want to play. It helps if you mention you're new - lots of GMs like introducing people to the hobby, and it also means they can keep an eye on you in the first couple of sessions to make sure you're doing fine.

If there isn't a game you like the sound of, don't lose hope! Games start up at weird times. I recommend you follow SAGA Inc. on Facebook and also check our mailing list regularly to keep up to date. If a game comes up, it'll get advertised on one (or both) of these venues.

If you *still* can't find a game, speak out! There may be other people out there who want to play the same style of game as you, and if there's enough you might be able to get your own group together.

## End of Part One

There's plenty I haven't talked about. I haven't told you *anything* about the big name games out there, or where roleplaying came from. I haven't warned you about LARPer or rules lawyers. I haven't told you about the superstition that surrounds a gamer's dice. I'm already pushing close to three thousand words, and if you've read all this in one sitting you're probably overwhelmed with information.

My advice for you now: go and find a game. Play some, find out what it's like in practice. I'm sure you'll work out all the things I've forgotten to tell you in good time.

Happy gaming!



# Our favourite games

Before this issue dropped, I asked our fans on Facebook:



**SAGA Inc.**

Hey everyone. What's your favourite game right now? If you're a roleplayer, what's your favourite gaming system? If you're a boardgamer, what's your favourite game as of right now? Feedback may find its way into OOC.

Here's some of the answers we got:

## The Board Games

**Meredith Hart:** I like Dominion (we've got all the expansions except Hinterlands). It's simple to learn. *[Other people liked Dominion too - Hamish C. for its "replayability and speed" and Nathaniel for the variety of strategies available -Ed.]*

**Melina Bourne:** Puerto Rico. Mostly because I'm good at it, to be honest.

**Gareth Reynolds:** I don't have a single favourite, but: Galaxy Trucker (it's fun to watch everyone else's ships go boom and fall apart), El Capitan (I like the need to be efficient), Ticket to Ride (so easy to get others into it), Agricola (even after nearly 200 games I still find myself needing to improve), and The Resistance (I want to be better at reading people, and it's quicker than Werewolf).

**Tim Crow:** Talisman revised 4th with Winter, Highlands, Reaper, soul pool expansions playing my two fave characters, Prophetess and Dark Cultist. (I'd list more expansions but we only had those ones to hand).

**Matt Harward:** Win/Lose/Banana is highly detailed and complex.

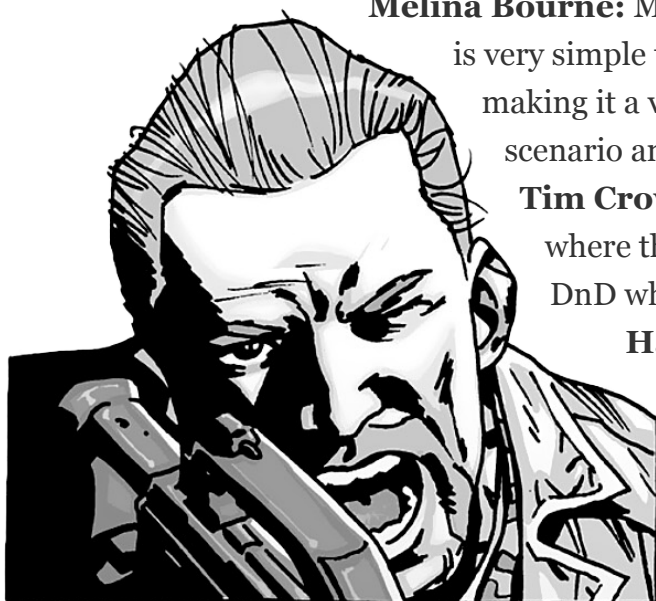
## The Roleplaying Games

**Melina Bourne:** My favourite gaming system is PDQ because it is very simple to learn and explain and it is light on rules, making it a very flexible system which can adapt to any scenario and encourages roleplaying.

**Tim Crow:** GURPS. A good midpoint between things where there are almost no rules and systems like DnD where encounters can take ages to plan out.

**Hamish Cameron:** Dungeon World: All the thematic awesome of old school D&D, plus rules that are fun to use!

**Tim Oliver:** I'm still liking D&D4 and Ars Magica. The former because I like me some dramatic but mechanically crunchy fights



and it does that flawlessly while being easy to run and prep, the latter because it's beautiful. (AM5 is available on PDF now too)

**Martin Moore:** Pathfinder is always fun, it's not too complicated yet also allows you to make some really interesting characters

**Rachel Hanover-O'Connor:** Right now I do hanker for a bit of swashbuckling ridiculously cinematographic Spirit of the Century.

**Will Howard:** Fiasco, because you basically get to make a cable movie.

**James Glover:** White Wolf's Adventure, not because of the system, but because the setting comes straight from Warren Ellis' *[unprintable -Ed.]* up junkie god imagination.

**Jan-Yves Ruzicka:** Apocalypse World - the system all but forces you to make hard decisions, which leads to excellent play.

Many of these games are available through SAGA Inc. If any of these sound like your type of game, ask one of the SAGA committee if you can get hold of it somehow. As a paid SAGA member, you get to borrow SAGA's assets too - making it even easier to run the game you love!



SAGA Inc. would like to thank **Comics Compulsion** for their continued support of the club. Comics is now located at 58 Main North Road, Papanui, and you can visit their site at <http://www.comicscompulsion.co.nz/>

# KapCon 2012: Retrospective

KapCon 2012 took place on the weekend of February 21-22 in Wellington. I asked some of our members who headed up there what their best moments were:

**Rose Nichols:** Hamish Cameron's award-winning *Dungeon World* game.

**Jan-Yves Ruzicka:** My first game of *Freemarket*. It took us three hours, but we made a cup of coffee, goddammit.

**Rachel Hanover-O'Connor:** Finding out ~~what~~**who** my character had been doing during her blackouts on the full-moon in Achaean [*the flagship LARP -ed*].

**Matthew Harward:** *Six Monks in a Leaky Boat* (a game about paranoia in 18th-century England): Succeeding in my roll to still have any sense at all after the bilge water in our wooden submarine was miraculously transformed into wine.

**Sam Stott:** Playing the Bard that chronicled the heroic epic that was Throndar was a definite highlight, but I also had fun playing a scout in a Team Fortress shadow run game (*BLU is the night*). Partly due to a revelation about the Pyro but also because of the whole preamble involved with getting in to the enemy's compound. Doctors studying lycanthropy need a method of diagnosing the condition that doesn't involve the patient turning into a werewolf.

**Tim Oliver:** Missing the broad side of a shoggoth with a basilisk gun. Taking a swing at Zeus. Inflatable truck drivers and remote control trucks.

**Will Howard:** As an angel, embodiment of the divine host itself, helping a death god complete his ritual and bringing about the apocalypse, dragging the sacrifices into the circle and slicing their throats with a flaming sword to hurry up the ritual and break the barrier between life and death itself.

Because you know, it was judgement day, and I had orders.

**Daphne Cohen:** Burning heretics!

**Nick Adams:** Throndar says best bit when Throndar bit out throat of evil fire demon while standing on lip of fire mountain. Throndar thought it odd that rest of Throndar's party was making virgin paladin ineligible sacrifice, collecting demon bits for dinner, or running around screaming. But Throndar not mind, as he kill demon with BARE TEETH!

# My Favourite Boardgame: Race for the Galaxy

**John Massie**

**Players: 2-4 (More with expansions)**

**Play Time: 30 min approx**

**Age Range: 12+**

**Publisher: Rio Grande Games**

*Race for the Galaxy* is a strategic card game where each turn players secretly choose one of seven role cards in an attempt to best utilise the shared card supply. Players use actions to gain more cards, to turn cards into victory points, or mostly to play cards in front of themselves. Each played card provides a number of victory points and some combination of abilities, discounts and bonuses, providing greater gain in future turns. What I love most about the game is the variety of card combinations and strategies, meaning each play is different and exciting.

Despite the Sci-Fi design and setting, this is by no means a light-hearted game where you get to pretend to be aliens zipping around space and having wacky adventures. It is a strategic game with some very nice Sci-Fi window dressing. Its not the kind of game where a single mis-step can cost you the game, but it is a good idea to be thinking a turn or two ahead. For some people this is an understandable turn-off, and to those people I say thanks for reading this far, hope you enjoy the other articles.

For me however this is what I love about the game. I'm almost always in the mood for a good strategic game and *Race* manages to edge out many of my other favourite 'Heavy' games (*Agricola*, *Puerto Rico*, *Caylus*, etc.) in several areas of design. Because the game is basically made up of a large number of cards and a few cardboard chits, the box is only a little bigger than the hardcover of George RR Martin's *A Dance with Dragons* (and noticeably lighter). It also a lot easier to set up (five minutes with a lot of distractions thrown in), is quicker to play (less than thirty minutes in all but a handful of circumstances), and has far fewer fiddly tiny bits to keep track of (seriously, I love *Agricola* but *SAGA* needs a fishing tackle box to keep track of all the fiddly tiny bits, and that can be annoying).

Despite the simple design I was just praising, there is a lot of depth to the game. You can attempt a produce/consume cycle to get yourself a large number a victory point chips, or ignore the chips altogether and try to get the military strength needed to settle the high-value military worlds. 6-cost developments (which provide assorted bonuses for almost anything in the game from military strength to worlds of a certain colour to cards with

certain powers) can shape early game strategy, add a nice points bonus to the strategy already being carried out, or make you completely change your strategy mid-game. Do you start by playing a few small cards that offer the foundation to a strategy, or pay your entire hand in order to get out one awesome card? What are other people going to pick, and can I benefit from their choices? Is someone else going to benefit more from my choice than I am, and if so, can I still afford to make it?

One thing about this game that is off-putting to new players is that it does have a steep learning curve. A lot of information in this game is conveyed using an excellent visual shorthand that can be easily explained, and most of the more complicated cards have their functions explained with words as well, but until you actually play a few times it can be very hard to tie it all together. As mentioned before, an entire game is usually half an hour at most, and most people are keen to shuffle the cards and play at least one more game, so a new player can usually play a couple games in a row and see how it all fits together. On my second play, I knew I liked this game. On my fifth, without completely understanding what I was doing I managed to combo two 6-cost developments and score a convincing win over more experienced players. It wasn't until my eighth play until I could look at any card and immediately understand everything it did.

Overall, I enjoy playing *Race for the Galaxy* because it manages to both be simple and complex at the same time. Every card does what it says, and the fun is in making the best of the cards you end up with, finding new and exciting ways to combine them. It's not the easiest game to learn but for people like me who like to think a little when they play it is a game that can still be enjoyable after nearly a hundred plays.

