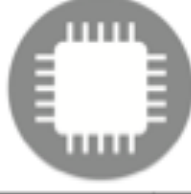


# OUT OF CHARACTER ISSUE 3

Tech Name:

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**EPHEMERA**

**MAGAZINE**

**COLLABORATIVE**

SANDBOX CAMPAIGN • TALES OF A  
FIRST-TIME GM • QUANTUM WEREWOLF

If the content of this pressed wood-pulp publication interests *you*, sentient carbon unit, please make your way to our informational portal, identifiable by the string: <http://www.saga.org.nz>

Out of Character Issue Three was produced by shouting at the computer until it did what it was *told*, goddammit. THE SUCCESS LEVELS WILL BE AT ONE HUNDRED PERCENT. Fonts set in Space Age and Chaparral Pro.

This issue's theme is *Freemarket*. Welcome to the Donut. We're a community of 80 000 functionally immortal, cybernetic, telepathic infovores. Join us!

Many thanks to our contributors for this edition: Mark Berry, John Massie, and Keegan "My AW game finished before yours" Miekeljohn.

The best part of my job is putting silly stuff on the inside cover of Out of Character. If any of you have found the source of the random quotes posted here for the past two issues, you're doing *really well*. This issue we'll dial down the niche factor, just for you.

"Don't you just love this issue? Everything's so fancy, and there's some kind of illustration over there."

"It's not as good as last issue."

"Oh really? What'd they have last issue?"

"Standards."

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# EDITORIAL

## JAN-YVES RUZICKA

Would you pay your GM for the privilege of the game?

Entertainment costs. Movies cost something approaching \$10 per hour to watch. Want to go bowling? That's \$15 per game. But when you sit down to game, your GM gets...what? A bag of candy? If the table's anything like mine, I'm too busy trying to work out what to throw at the group to eat gummy worms.

How much time does a GM put into the game? It's tricky to answer -- it varies from GM to GM. I'm lucky: I'm running a low-prep game right now. But if you're playing a high-prep system and a custom campaign, I wouldn't be surprised if the GM put in two or three hours per session. Let's say, for argument's sake, that it's one hour of prep per session. Let's say your game runs one night a week, for three hours. That's four hours per week. If you're paying your GM minimum wage (and I sure as hell believe that GMing requires more skill than frying chips) that comes to \$54 per week. Over the course of a year-long (50-session) campaign, your GM is investing approximately \$2500 of his time into your game. That's two 3D printers. I wish I had *one* 3D printer.

How much would this cost you as players? Let's assume you have a small enough gaming group - four players, one GM. Each session would end up costing you \$14, give or take. That's not bad, really. And if you have a big, six-player group, you're looking at reducing that cost to around \$9 for the whole session. You're looking at less spotlight time, of course, but that's what you get paying less than \$10 for the session, you cheapskate.

The question is: is it worth it? Would *you* pay \$14 per week to keep your game running? Would you reimburse your GM so they can live a slightly more stress-free life, or at least a more profitable one? And what would you expect in return?

If you're running a game and you have a bad session, well, these things happen. Your players may walk away from the table disappointed, but that's the way the game runs sometimes. But what happens when they sit down, pony up the cost of a takeaway, and then look at you expectantly? What happens when you have a headache, work's been grinding you down, and you just don't have anything for them? Do you hand your money back to them? Do you run with it, even though it's now work? Do you disappoint them and make them wonder if it's worth the money? And what does that do to your social circle?

Every GM knows that GMs are undervalued. We don't go into the game expecting to get paid: we GM because we *love* gaming. It's not all good news, of course, and sometimes you wonder why you do it. It's tempting to wonder what life would be like if you got paid to GM, but that why lies slavery to the evil dollar.

Gaming is a hobby and a labour of love, even for us GMs. If you put money into the equation, it starts to get complicated. Boundaries of entitlement blur, and the whole thing can become more trouble than it's worth. I'd like to think that the role of professional GM isn't just a pipe dream, but it's something that should be approached with caution, like a sleeping tiger or an unexploded mine. And it's something very, *very* different from your regular Tuesday night game.

# SANDBOX

MARK BERRY

Not too long ago, in some twisted state of dementia and self-hate, I told my regular gaming group I would run a Mage: The Ascension game. I had, in times past, only GM'd a game a few times and never for this group. A few of those times had even been using Mage and from my own perspective they had been either 'alright' or 'disastrous'.

This time however, I knew things would be different. Why? Because I was determined to make it different.

My first challenge was myself. See, I have subscribed to the thinking that unfortunately, the game you want to play in is the game you end up having to run, for no one else can know the game you want to play in. You want to play a swashbuckling super-hero space opera set in a dystopian corporatocracy? Then you are going to have to sit down, do the hard yards and run that game.

By the by, if anyone does run that, please let me know. I want credit for the idea and may even want to play in it.

So, here I was wanting to play/run a Mage game. Mage is, from my perspective, an awesome setting. I won't go too far into the details as that is what the internet is for. It's where the titular mage's own outlook and view of 'what is right' can have an influence on the world. Magic isn't so much magic as sheer force of willpower. You are absolutely, positively determined your new jetpack will fly versus exploding and killing you and lo', because you believe it, it does.

I was also determined to run a semi-sandbox game. I wanted the players free to choose their own paths and directions. To go explore what they wanted while at the same time having some sort of meta-plot in the background to help prod things along.

This was the first major hurdle I had. A sandbox game is, if one thinks about it, at the conceptual level, incredibly easy. Pick a setting, pick some rules, drop some characters and shaken, not stirred. Unfortunately that's at the abstract conceptual level. Settings can be very complex. Sure, you've decided the modern day, centred in New York. Great. Who lives there? Who is interesting that the characters may wish to go interact with? What could happen in New York?

Those questions right there. Answer them. **THEY ARE IMPORTANT!**

I have learned this the hard way. Have answers, or a vague idea of answers before you start. Sure, you don't need a name for the crazy old church deacon who's secretly a powerful wizard straight off the bat, but you might just want to have somewhere in your head that hey, there is a powerful crazy old church deacon who's secretly a powerful wizard.

You can literally just make up names as you go. Though, I suggest having a list of names handy. Everyone being called Bob, Fred and Jenkins will get kind of confusing. Save for Jenkins. They rarely tend to survive the scene, at least for me. I personally recommend a census record or the such for the area the game is centred in, or of an ethnic background for the area. It's all about flavour. *[Have a google for "The Story Games Name Project" for another resource -Ed.]*

And then of course, what's a game without a Big Bad Evil Guy (BBEG for short)? I was lucky when it came to that as I knew from the outset who my BBEG was. Here's a small bit of advice for GMs and one you should not be ashamed of ever doing:

Steal ideas.

Steal ideas from everywhere. Just don't steal completely. Steal an idea, mix it up, redress it, make it your own and then present it. People may recognise the inspiration, but if you treat it right, handle it well, then hey, it's an original take and all is good.

BBEGs can be a bit hard to come up with. Here's a few questions to answer. What's their motivation? Are they direct and upfront? Mage, warrior, rogue, general? Single person or faceless conspiracy? Evil beyond compare or understandable evil? If you just want the stereotypical evil villain, just run with that. He just wants to see the world conquered or burning. If you want one that is more than a cardboard cut out, then give him some depth and flavour.

Remember, people should love to hate your villain.

Then comes a really, really important question, in my opinion. If your villain is left completely unopposed in your sandbox, what is he going to do and how is he going to go about doing it?

As a GM, think like a player. How devious is your villain going to be? What was his background and how does that help/hinder him? Give him a bit of a head start on your players. He's been about his business for a week, a month, a year or more before the game starts.

It was only after I had answered all of these questions for myself that I presented the idea to my group for consideration.

I knew my setting, I knew my BBEG, I was mentally prepared to have all my planning ruined within five minutes. No plan ever survives contact with the enemy or players. Remember that, for it will keep you in good stead.

Plans suck, go with frameworks. There's story behind that.

Your next questions shouldn't come to you till after character creation and everyone gives you a character history. Always make sure to get a history. Why you ask? Plot hooks, my good fellow.

A good character history will in its own way define an aspect of the sandbox. Where once was a featureless plain with the vaguest notions of landscape, you will now have detailing. A character's back history has their family being killed, sending them on tragic revenge mission? Congratulations, you now have a minor side villain to distract them with from time to time. You have an evil family-killing organisation roaming around.

You should take the unanswered or open parts of your character's histories and use them. Answer them in your way. It's all a surprise to the players. Mind you, don't answer everything straight away. You might just be struck with game-changing inspiration later on.

Eventually however you will have answered most of the questions. You will have your setting. You will have some sort of metaplot that is happening, be it the machinations of some villain or the eternal chess game of the gods or the struggle against the giant falling rock poised to wipe out all life in a few short years. You will have your band of player-characters, willing to venture forth and do as they so please in this world you have created, mostly on your own, but with their own usually unintended input.

Only one thing left at that point. Getting into the sandbox and getting things rolling.

Now, excuse me, I have a sandcastle to rebuild. Stupid heroes.

# QUANTUM WEREWOLF

JOHN MASSIE

My good friend, and SAGA Quartermaster, Gareth finally warmed up to the idea of playing Werewolf after years of thinking it wasn't his thing and, as people sometimes do, he found himself reading up on various Werewolf roles and advanced Werewolf theory on the internet. Somewhere on his searches he came across the idea of QUANTUM WEREWOLF and read more and more on the subject until one day he said to me "I've figured it all out, I want to run a game of Quantum Werewolf."

Werewolf, for the unfamiliar, is a game where the players sit in a circle and everyone receives a secret role card. Every day phase the players pick a player to "lynch". This is followed by a night phase where the Werewolf player(s) pick a player to "eat". Lynched and eaten players are removed from the game. Non-werewolves win if all the werewolves are killed. Werewolves win if they can get an equal Villager: Wolf ratio and thus just come out in the day eat everyone. A Seer can be added: each night they get to pick a person find out if their target is a Villager or a Werewolf. Other roles, with an assortment of weird or fantastic powers, can also be added based on player size or which variant is being played.

In Quantum Werewolf the same rules apply. Lynch someone during the day, Wolves pick someone to eat at night. The difference is that all players exist in a variety of quantum states where they have varying percentages of being Seer/Villager/Wolf, as well as a separate "Dead" stat that tells them how many of the states a werewolf has already eaten them in. As long as you can be a Seer or Wolf you get a Seer vision or Wolf kill which is then used to eliminate possible states and bring the whole game closer to a "real" set of roles. For example, you pick a player to eat as a hypothetical Werewolf, which means no reality exists where you and your intended victim are Wolves together. After all, a reality where one Wolf eats the other makes no sense. If a person is lynched, their role is determined. For example, if a player who is 10% Seer, 80% Villager, and 10% Wolf is lynched, the GM generates a random number between 1 and 100. On a 1-10 the player is a Seer, 11-80 the player is a villager, and so on. Every Death defines the role of one player, and narrows down the possible states to those where that player happened to have that role. Possible Seer visions are also done randomly but only end up being "true" if you turn out to actually be the seer.

The game we played used a Facebook group as a discussion forum. It had eleven players with eight Villagers, two Werewolves and a Seer.

Actually playing the game is kind of a crapshoot in the early rounds. At the first lynch no one knows anything, and barring some weird luck with the random number, you're almost certainly hanging a villager, which is what happened. My policy in the first two days was: "We're ganging up on someone? Are they me? No? Cool. I'm ok with that."

The first night was the first time I felt I was actually shaping the outcome. I picked my first night kill based on who I felt would be the least advantageous to have as my fellow Wolf if it came down to it. My Seer vision was whoever I felt would be the strongest Wolf if I were the Seer. This ended up backfiring on me a little as I viewed Rose [SAGA president and notorious wolf, despite her objections that "I suck as wolf" - Ed] as a villager, but she ended up being lynched second round and turned out to be first Werewolf. As Rose was a definitive Werewolf her first night kill came true and my Seer stat dropped to 0%. That night I Wolf-killed a person who had claimed to see Rose as Wolf, because if I was going to be a wolf then a dead Seer would be to my advantage.

The third day I found I picked up a dead stat of 25%, which I (correctly) assumed meant that two people had chosen me as hypothetical Wolf snack. We lynched Declan, a villager, and at the start of the night my Wolf stat was looking very low, a little over 10%, but I still chose another of the players we assumed to be Seer as my Wolf kill.

Waking up on the fourth day changed everything. My stats were: Seer 0%, Villager 67%, Wolf 33%, Dead 67%. This meant that in any state where I was a villager I was already dead. However, remembering my assumption that two people chose to eat me in the second night, and rephrasing my stats as 2/3 dead Villager, 1/3 living Wolf, I assumed (correctly or at least close enough) there were only three states left, one of which where I was a wolf and could potentially lie my way to a tricky and prestigious wolf victory.

I now had to ask myself:

1. Could I figure out who would have eaten me that night?, and
2. How do I want to use this information?

I eventually figured that lynching one of my assailants was a win/win for me. If the random number turned them into a Wolf, then sure I was dead but so were both the Wolves so the Villagers (including me) win. If they end up as a Villager, I'm that much closer to being a Wolf and get to laugh manically to myself as I imagine myself as some sort of evil quantum puppet master.

So, addressing the group I lie about still having a potential wolf state, "I'm 100% villager", but truthfully use my dead stat "But I'm 67% Dead :(" to try and lynch Beth, a friend of mine and Gareth's who isn't associated with SAGA, and the person I'm most certain of having attempted to eat me. And it almost worked: four votes, from the seven players, for Beth. Unfortunately, I had to leave Facebook and go do an exam, followed by board games. When I got back the tide had turned, and disaster had befallen my manipulative plans. The voting now stood at 3 votes Beth, 4 votes Michael. Out of time to change people's minds, Michael was lynched as a Villager and that removed the remaining state where I was wolf. Michael died, and I died with him. The great Schrödinger in the sky opened his box labelled John, and found my mangled remains.

Another player managed to have both remaining Werewolves choose to eat him, so the Village was down to four players. It turned out I was the only player lying about my stats to the village, and they were able to narrow down the two remaining werewolves to Beth or Sam S (who I wouldn't guessed as the other possible wolf, so maybe my plans weren't so great after all). They decided to hang Sam, the random number decided he was a Wolf, and the villagers won.

The second game I played, I decided from the beginning to steer myself towards being a Wolf. I chose my Wolf victims based on who was least likely to be lynched. In the second round someone I had seen as Villager was lynched and found to be a Wolf. I lost my Seer states, and my Wolfiness climbed higher.

At the start of the fourth and final round I was 50/50 Wolf/Villager. Doing a quick bit of calculation, this meant that as long as we lynched the other person who was 50% Wolf, I would win regardless of my state. If they were Wolf, both Wolves dead, I'm a Villager and Villagers win. If they were a Villager, I'd be the definitive Wolf and enough people would die that I would win. I was feeling even more smug when one of the two possible Seers had already mentioned who he had seen as the other Wolf in the previous thread.

Unfortunately, my comeuppance was just around the corner. The other possible Seer (the one from the quantum state where I was the Wolf) had seen me the night before. Before I knew it, my head was in the hangman's noose and no matter which side my death put me on, it would be the side that lost. I take small comfort in the fact I was a Villager and Nate, the werewolf, got to eat everyone in the village.

Overall, it was an interesting couple of games. Early on I really did feel powerless, but as I saw how the state collapse worked, I was able to make some surprisingly accurate jumps in logic and for a little while had a lot of fun pretending I was some kind of Machiavellian manipulator. After all, Werewolf is really about making jumps in logic and manipulating your friends in a safe imaginary environment. In that aspect Quantum Werewolf was a lot of fun for me once it got going. I do feel that most players were a little too willing to share their stats and a little too honest about what they shared, but then no-one was particularly familiar with how it worked, so it was understandable.

Thanks to Gareth, for running the games, and to everyone who played.



# TALES OF A FIRST-TIME GM

KEEGAN MIEKELJOHN

The first time you GM is never going to be easy, and always a little scary. So I am going to make it all a little bit easier on you and tell you some pitfalls I ran into while running my first game recently, using the **Apocalypse World** system.

For imagery's sake I'm going to pretend that your group is made up of all angry bikers who have all had a bad day. Why? Because it will help.

Or not, I don't really care. It's my article.

## Game type

Be aware of what kind of system you're running, and what kind of game-play it can be used for. Ask your players what kind of game they want to play: story-driven, combat heavy, or something more open. Discuss this with your players, and make them aware of what kind of game the system lends itself to.

## Players

Now, Big Dave wants to play a class/role that doesn't fit in with the party or, worse, will be at odds with them. What should you do in situation? Well, that depends on whether or not you think you can talk to them about it. Try to understand where they're coming from and why they want to play that particular role. See if there's a similar one that could allow them to do what they want, while still fitting in with the "feel" of the party.

But, if you're feeling up for a challenge, try to work them in as a antagonistic "friend" or a double agent. The reason this is can be difficult is that people can feel a bit put out if they have to deal with someone who chose a role just so they could annoy other players, or "break" the system .

## Rules

You don't need to know the rules front and back for every rule system you want to GM , but you need to have a better-than-average understanding at the very least. If you have a couple of very good friends who owe you some favours, maybe you can ask them if they'd help run a one-off session, to find out what kind of questions will come up.

## "Your" world

You might have a very defined and fleshed-out world, but your players need to feel like they belong. They are creating people who have lived in this world their whole lives. Get them to help you create the world: ask them questions about where they came from, who they are, what they want, whether they know each other. Depending of the system you are using, sometimes you can get them (with prompting) to create their entire immediate world.

So that's my view on some of the pitfalls I encountered during my first role-playing campaign. Hopefully this recounting of my failures and advice on how to avoid them will help others in the future. One final piece of advice: if you are thinking about running a game but don't know how to start, all you need to do is ask for help. SAGA has lots of people who have run games over the years - just ask around.

# WHAT'S NEW UNDER THE DYING SUN?

JAN-YVES RUZICKA

## Previously, on Out of Character...

In the last issue of OOC, I started my discussion on how to take Apocalypse World and turn it from a very good game, into an excellent game. In this issue I'll continue discussing how to make the Apocalypse, and the World, your very own playground of death and despair.

## Step Two: Own your Apocalypse

Before the game starts, sit down with your players and start asking questions about the apocalypse. Ask them leading questions (if you've MC'd a game or two of Apoc World you should be good at this by now). Here's a couple of nice leading questions to get started:

- "So humanity didn't cause the Apocalypse. What did?" You don't even need to have established anything about the Apocalypse. Assume like crazy. Put creative constraints on your players. If they don't like something, they'll tell you.
- "Where did it start, and how did it spread?". Someone will pick somewhere that it started, and someone else might pick how it spread. You're dividing the creative load, which means that each individual has less work to do.

The beauty of this technique is two-fold: you don't have to do any hard work thinking up scenarios, and your players will more often than not surprise you with their creativity and ideas. If you want to get *really* deep into the nitty-gritty, you can pick up a copy of *Microscope*[1] and play an entire session setting up the history.

Once you've got that amazing backstory, don't let it go to waste! Make it affect the game. Make your apocalyptic imagery reflect the way in which the world died: if it died by plague, maybe you have all sorts of mutations hanging around the place - packs of three-headed wolves who hunt down lone travellers, or strange cultural traditions involving burning the dead, or pockets of plague that hang on around the swamps, or old folklore about coughing at the table.

## Step Three: Own your Maelstrom

This is somewhat related to Step Two, but the Maelstrom in Apoc World is something that's hugely, irrevocably part of the setting. I hate it in my games when the players just decide "I have no idea what to do, I guess I'll open my mind to the Maelstrom" - that makes it sound so ordinary, so *mundane*.

Make the Maelstrom yours. Never make it formulaic, or predictable. Make it reflect the world you've built, the people who inhabit it. Make it an active part of the game if you want. Give it its own fronts and threats, let it make its own moves (consider the difference between a game where your Maelstrom is a *Grotesque* or even a *Warlord* over one where it's *Brutes*, or perhaps an *Affliction*).

The book advises making everyone's Maelstrom unique to them, and I think this is also a great way to make it interesting. Maybe different characters find out different things in the Maelstrom. Your Skinner only finds

things out through peoples' thoughts, for example, while the Gunlugger can only see scenes where there's a conflict happening.

Make entering the Maelstrom something special as well. I'm really thinking of ruling out the standard "I sit down and close my eyes" technique for entering the Maelstrom, because I don't want it to be something that's always just *there*, waiting for you to blink the right way. Make it ritual. Make it ceremony. Make it part of your world. Make entering the maelstrom dangerous. Make your players hesitate before sitting down and rolling +weird. Make them hope like hell they don't roll box-cars, and when they do: make a move, hard, against them. They knew what the stakes were, and they brought this on themselves.

### **Finally...**

In the next issue of Out of Character I'll talk about my super-special-favourite part of Apoc World - custom moves.

[1]: <http://www.lamemage.com/>

