

WARPTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



GET A LIFE!

By John Keane

"So lad, tell us your story" urged the old and seasoned adventurer.

"Well sire, I grew up on my father's farm. My poor mother had sacrificed her life to bring me into the world. My father never really forgave me for that, not even on his deathbed. He died at the hands of a roving band of Beastmen. If only I hadn't been hunting that day, maybe I could've..."

"Could've what, been killed as well? You were lucky lad, the gods were on your side. Never turn you nose up at good luck" explained Janus.

"So, I left what remained of the smouldering farm and set out to find my fortune, with nothing but a sword and a small sack of food. Three years ago that was. I've grown up a lot since then, I've had to. No family, no friends, no strings attached. So what do you say?"

The motley band of adventurers nodded in agreement, one by one. "You're in lad, welcome to the Party!"

Someone once said that life is what happens when you're busy making other plans. This is a concept I believe is often lost in the creation of Player Characters. It's so much easier to say "My whole family died in a Beastman raid!" than to have a living and thriving family somewhere just waiting to cause you grief. There is danger that PCs can be very much one-dimensional. This applies to most areas of a character, from friends and family, to enemies, and even morals. This is not to say that we, as potential PCs, don't give any thought to these areas. Sometimes it is so much easier to ignore or gloss over them; especially when you generate a character to quickly slot into an ongoing campaign. A little time spent in fleshing out a character can go along way towards making them more interesting, and more importantly, fun to play. Of course you can build the details of your character as you campaign but it is good to have a solid base to work from. The following ideas are intended to help you on the way towards creating a more fully rounded character.

Family

A prime and often under used resource is the family. If your entire family is dead you can go through life with no worries, hell! you might as well just stay and work the farm if that's what you want. Role-playing a farmer, whose biggest hurdle in life is whether Bessie the cow produces milk, does not make for enjoyable gaming.

Many players believe that relatives can only be a hindrance, with the GM using them as a stranglehold over a player to make them do things they normally would not do. Well, they're right! Helping to carry out the evil machinations of a necromancer, in order to save your family, can prove a great source of role-playing and can help to blur the ever-changing definitions of right and wrong. A family will allow the GM to have something to use against you, but the consequences of having a family should not always be negative. When necromantic antics abound, imagine how useful it is to have uncle Leopold as a prominent cleric of Morr, or having cousin Helmut the Physician nearby when you're in need of surgery. How comforting it is to know that you always have somewhere to go

where people will look after and care for you without the need to pay them. What about a spouse? Most people marry young, especially in rural areas. This of course leads to another complication. Do you have children and if so how many? With little birth control available your family is likely to be large. A desirable option with such high infant mortality. Having dependants can put a completely new slant on your characters' priorities and goals. Why have you left your family behind? Do you still intend to support them and how will they survive whilst you're away? This may well lead to further complications down the line with your bitter children blaming you for their impoverished upbringing.

You don't need to spend hours creating a family tree or writing biographies for each of your relatives. A simple list of your immediate family will do. Name them all and note down each of their professions and where they live. Make a special note of any family members who might be of more use or importance than the average farmer, and include any other more distant relatives who may be useful or interesting. Remember of course, that although cousin Otto went to Carroburg to become an Artisans apprentice, it doesn't mean he did!

The final thing to consider here, is that it doesn't have to end with death. Why throw away a perfectly good family just because your PC has died. With the GM's agreement you could play any one of the host of characters you have weaved into your late PC's family. With a bit of thought and imagination the Old World will begin to seem that much more real.

Friends and enemies

Before you start to role-play your new PC they will have lived real lives. Along the way they will have made friends and even enemies. It is unlikely that your character will have wandered through their formative years not talking or interacting with anyone. Again you could say that they had all died after you befriended them, but even in the dangerous world of Warhammer, this is unlikely (or even suspicious).

If you have created a friend or enemy, and the GM knows about it, they could turn up at the most opportune or inopportune time to help or hinder you in completing your task. This will be much more interesting than if the GM just informs you that you have one! You don't have to be in constant communication with all those who have crossed your path. You may well have lost touch with them, but as long as

they exist the GM and player will always have them available as an additional tool. Note down how you became friends or enemies. This can be as little as "adventured together until Karl lost his right leg" or as long as you are inspired to write for. Try not to make it so long that the GM won't read it! Also, make it clear whether it is a friend or an enemy. The above note about Karl could mean that Karl blames you for the loss of his leg!

Most importantly on creating friends, family and enemies discuss them with your GM so that both of you are happy with them.

Geography

Where you grew up helps define your character more than just an accent or hair colour. The type of attitude you have to life is likely to be different if you come from a coastal village in Tilea, compared to an urban upbringing in Middenheim. Even people from different parts of the same country are going to be different. Using your career as a guide, think about where exactly you were raised.

Villages, towns and cities will nearly always have a rival community. This rivalry may be innocent and friendly but on the other hand it may be verging on warfare, especially if the Nobility are involved. Once you have moved away from your home this rivalry will not disappear. Whether you give a damn about your home may not make any difference. What if war breaks out whilst you're away? Do you go and defend your home? The reasons for the rivalry may be anything from border disputes to cultural or religious differences. These disputes would inform your attitudes.

Goals

Everyone has aspirations, dreams and ambitions, and they're not usually static. The more you achieve, experience, and see, the more your goals will change. After all, you became an adventurer for a reason. As a farmer leaving the family home looking for adventure your goal may be to one day return to the farm a rich man. But as you adventure your goals may change perhaps to dedicating your life to the will of your favoured Deity. Finally, the wholesale slaughter of your family and friends may send you off on a crusade for vengeance.

A character is unlikely to have only one goal (e.g. to get rich), unless it is all consuming, such as revenge. Marriage, children, wealth, power, happiness, self-fulfilment and a glorious death are all valid goals albeit a bit vague. Elaborate on some of these or create some more tangible goals. Aspiring to a position in life, i.e. Captain of the White Wolf, or towards an ideal such as a Rich Merchant will give you a more visual goalpost with which to measure your achievements.

Goals will affect the way you approach life and adventuring, as two characters with different goals in the same situation will probably act completely differently. In a fight against impossible odds a Troll-Slayer is likely to stay and fight, satisfying their goal of atonement with a glorious death. A Halfling with a strong sense of self preservation would probably turn tail and run, thanking Esmerelda for the raving mad Troll-Slayer covering their retreat.

When choosing goals for your character you should bear in mind that their initial goals in life are likely to be less grand than those they have after three years of the adventuring high life (unless you begin life as a noble).

Additionally, it is important that you know why you have chosen the adventuring life. Are you aspiring to the giddy heights of nobility, have you become so bored with life at sea that you'd risk life and limb to relieve the boredom, have you become entangled in a web of intrigue and mystery which fuels your convictions of right and wrong, or are you atoning for some real or imagined misdeed or dishonour? The real enjoyment is deciding what motivates you. It is up to you to find your character's motivation and make them real. Try not to make it wholly monetary, after all, it is what you want to do with the money that is important.

Morals

Arguably the most important feature of your character is their morality. What one person allows within their moral strictures will be seen as immoral by another. If you intend to play a character consistently, especially if they are significantly different from you, it is essential to know what they will and will not do.

Possibly the most important of all the moral guidelines is that of personal safety.

Although you may class this as a goal, it is important to realise that it will fundamentally affect your moral decisions. If you hold your personal safety as a high priority but are in a position where it will compromise a moral decision then you must be clear which will hold strongest. Included in this will be your character's level of greed. Do you have an avaricious nature, or do you believe that money is the root of all evil? What are you prepared to do to satisfy this greed?

Would you commit what you consider an evil act to save yourself? Perhaps, throwing a baby to a hungry Jabberwock whilst you make a hasty retreat or murdering someone in cold blood? What about torturing a suspected cultist to discover the truth (or some twisted version of it)? And what do you consider to be a Good act? Sparing someone's life by endangering your own, killing a mutant quickly to end their suffering(!), or agreeing to save a village from a mutant cow, that produces yellow milk, for legal rights to the ownership and servitude of its

inhabitants and land? Many WFRP groups have disregarded alignment but there is a danger of all characters just becoming self-preservationist neutrals. Characters whose every decision is completely mercenary are in danger of becoming boring.

Depending on your religious persuasion you may believe that it a sin to take a life. Just because you follow Shallya or Ranald does not mean that you cannot be an adventurer. The use of Strike to Stun, and Disarm type combat options could help you attain a

balance in both. On the other hand, you may agree with the philosophy of Lestat in Anne Rice's Interview with a Vampire "God kills indiscriminately, and so shall we!". A disregard for the sanctity of life may be your way, but may also prove hazardous to your freedom, your sanity and your life. This type of personality trait points towards the worship of Khaine or Khorne, and is likely to gain their attention. Even if you have disregarded alignment your actions can still be described in the terms of Good or Evil, and Law or Chaos. Your motivations may not be clear cut but the actions will generally be seen as such. Of course, even for those who choose to follow a certain Good or Lawful path, questions that impinge on these beliefs will constantly arise. Would you kill a baby if you believed it would become a Chaos Sorcerer? Your loyalty family, friends, countrymen, guild, fellow adventurers are all likely to have an impact on your actions. It is important to know what general order they come in. If an enemy threatens your family, to try and persuade you to betray your friends, which loyalty is stronger - family or comrades? Remember, just because you are a Player Character does not mean you have to be good, pure and sickly sweet. The beauty of Warhammer is that people like that don't exist, or at least they tend not to for very long. Playing a character with different moral guidelines than others in your party can cause inter-party conflict, but in my experience this only heightens the enjoyment! (Of course you must be careful not to ruin anyone else's fun) If, for instance, you fully believe that you should not break (or bend) the law, then why would you do it. Breaking into a suspected villain's house to find evidence of their guilt is going against your moral code. If you do so, you have ignored your moral make-up and you will need to reassess your morality. Perhaps you were just weak and easily influenced. Just the right type for certain illegal organisations!

Conclusion

Fleshing out your character with even a basic background and personality will make for a much more rounded and realistic persona. We as individuals are the sum of all our parts, so if you don't know what your characters' parts are how can you be consistent. Much of what I have discussed should be noted down for your character so that it will not be forgotten. The most important list is probably your moral code. If you have no moral code you can do whatever you want, but it makes you no better than the beasts of the forest. Don't forget that morals, ambitions and personality can and should change throughout your character's life.

Always remember that the most important aspect to role-playing is enjoyment. If you're not going to enjoy playing a certain type of character, then don't do it. You'll just make life miserable for all involved.