

Major Project - Strategy

Proposal

I Propose to write, typeset, and illustrate a Role Playing Game¹ setting, or at least that was the original idea, now I have had time to think on it I realise that to completely detail the entire setting in just twelve weeks is totally overambitious, even if it were the only project which I had during that time frame, which it isn't. With this in mind I have decided to scale the project down to a much more realistic single chapter completed in full, with the remaining chapters limited to just one or two pages, to set the tone for the chapter.

To be perfectly clear I'm intending to produce a book. To be exact, an Adobe Acrobat file with the longterm (i.e. Post graduation) goal of publishing over the Internet. I am setting my project goal as the completion of a single chapter, for the simple reason that I have never had to structure my ideas into this format before, and I am uncertain as to how long it will take. Should I complete the chapter in good time, I will of course move onto the next one.

Some Perspective

Simply stating my intent as a single chapter makes the amount of work which I plan here seem somehow small. What I am looking at is around fifteen to twenty pages of text varying in subject and style between whimsical storytelling, and authoritative reference work. Beyond writing there is typesetting, layout, and illustration. Typesetting and layout can be standardised to an extent, but will need to be double checked to avoid the terrible printing errors which seem to plague RPG books. Illustration is task number two in terms of size, the number of pictures used in RPG books seems to have risen steadily, until it seems that every other page carries it's own image, these range from simple symbols, to full page original illustrations. This level of image saturation is impractical for me to achieve on my own, so only areas that warrant it will contain illustrations.

Layout Examples

I could spend pages trying to describe what I'm wanting to achieve with this project and still fail to convey my meaning, so I have located a number of examples available online.

- From Eden Studios we have the Witchcraft Corebook which is out of print, and has been placed for download² on their website³.
- From Steve Jackson Games we have GURPS Lite, which is a quick start book for their GURPS system, it's available to download from their website⁴.

These two should give some idea as to what I'm aiming for in terms of basic presentation, GURPS Lite sticks to a clean three column layout, while Witchcraft changes between single column and two column layouts in quite a haphazard fashion. I'm wanting to sit somewhere between the two, changing layout based upon content type rather than sticking to only one, or changing at convenience. So beginning of chapter fictions would have a decorative single column layout, whereas the main body of chapters would have an easy to read two column layout.

¹The initials 'RPG' are used as shorthand

² <http://www.edenstudios.net/witchcraft/WitchcraftCorebook.zip>

³ <http://www.edenstudios.net/witchcraft/index.html>

⁴ <http://e23.sjgames.com/item.html?id=SJG02-0004>

a direct link to the Witchcraft book

a link to Eden's Witchcraft homepage

from SJgames' online PDF shop, for free.

Rules Free Roleplay Book

Roleplaying books such as this usually contain the rules needed to run a game, either a complete rules system, or supplemental rules to tailor a separately published rules system, are included. However creating rules systems requires many months of painstaking work in order to arrive at a workable system, and using existing rules systems runs me into the knotty ground of licensing. I would dearly like to use Eden Studios' Unisystem⁵ rules as the base on which to build my game, but licensing the rules system from them would be an extra level of complication which I don't need, and most likely an expense I can't afford.

I could however use Wizards of the Coast's D20 system, thanks to the Open Gaming Licence⁶ (OGL) so I could use the D20 Modern Rules, but for two things which stop me. The first is that the OGL has a reputation for being a torturous piece of legal mumbo jumbo. The second, and probably more important, reason is that I really don't like D20 rules very much, and I don't want my game to be just yet another D20 setting, lost amongst the crowd.

So I am therefore writing a roleplaying book which ties itself to no one rules system, but I am instead concentrating on evoking an atmosphere and creating a feel for the world it details. But if I'm not working to any rules system, how can I define Non Player Characters⁷ in any meaningful fashion? By defining them, their characteristics and abilities, based upon a sliding scale of words. For attributes such as strength, and intelligence the scale is built on the basis that almost all systems define an average value for the attributes, so the scale starts at Average and works up and down in defined stages. For learned abilities the scale is simpler, it starts at "unskilled" meaning that they have no formal training, and works up from there, it also goes down one step to "untrainable" meaning that the character is unable to ever use the ability.

Introduction To The Concept

The concept for the actual subject matter, is at its core quite simple, and nothing especially revolutionary. The core concept is that there is a college which exists to train those with exceptional gifts, skills, and innate abilities. The college exists within the heart of Oxford, yet is hidden from the world at large due to it being 'folded in' on itself so that only the entrances and exits are physically existing in Oxford, taking the form of unnoticed narrow alleyways, abandoned wharfs, and disused warehouses.

The college accepts all its students on scholarships offered at the last minute, and from out of the blue. They almost always accept, because the scholarship offer is really too good to refuse.

Those who have Gifts begin to exhibit traits during the later part of adolescence, traits which the mundane populace react to on an instinctive, subconscious level, perceiving the Gifted as a threat akin to a talking bomb. People react to the gifted accordingly. They shun them. This is a survival mechanism which has developed over time, for the 'talking bomb' analogy is closed to the truth than many would like to admit.

If left untrained a gift can manifest spontaneously, this could be something as harmless as the sudden urge to dismantle the DVD plays to see how it works. In those with a more physically manifest gift, it could be anything from the, difficult to explain, miraculous recovery of

5 <http://edenstudios.net/unisystem/>

6 <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=d20/welcome>

7 The shorthand for Non Player Characters is NPC

The website for the rules system I want to use but can't.

The website for the rules system I could use, but don't want to.

someone terminally ill, because the Gifted laid on hands, or it could be something impossible to explain, like the spontaneous teleportation of the building they work in six inches to the left.

Gateway College Oxford

Or Cambridge, or London, or Chelmsford, or Edinburgh, it doesn't really matter because once your inside Gateway Collage the outside world seems to hardly be there at all. Situated down a little noticed side road is the entrance to Gateway Collage,

Rough Description

Basically, it teaches people who have a special gift of some description, whether it is a genius for mechanisms, or a magical or otherwise supernatural talent. These people are uniformly refused entry to mainstream universities, despite their excellent skill and talent, and indeed educational merits. They would have received many letters of rejection by their chosen places of education, mostly with no or very little coherent explanation. After several of these letters, and with very little time to go before the beginning of term, potential students will receive a letter sealed with wax, hand delivered without stamp or postmark. The letter offers a scholarship at the previously unheard of university. The potential students are so desperate at this point that they almost uniformly accept, especially after they read the included prospectus, which has a list of historical and present-day alumni.

Background

Gateway College is a philanthropic trust, established in the 18th century to educate those who would not normally receive an education, initially accepting in a number of the poor and disenfranchised to maintain the semblance of charitable educational institutes of the time. But it's real purpose is to educate people who would not receive education due to their inherent natures, not their social standing.

Though the trust aspect of Gateway College was founded in the 18th century, the college has existed for far longer...

The College and it's surrounding borough sit within one of the seals which hold human kind to this plane. Seals which were put in place when the greatest of the ancient Demons quit the Earth, though by whom is a mystery as they are effective at sealing the Demons from returning to Earth.

Reasoning

I want to do something different. So far on this course I've done three animation projects, six 3D rendering projects, one and a half websites, and two image manipulations. Basically I want to do something a bit different, something which adds some diversity to my portfolio. To create a combination of graphics and text, instead of tying myself into doing yet another animation, or website.

Proto-Blurb

On the banks of the River Isis sits the university town of Oxford, seat of education and enlightenment.

Within the city is a university which goes unnoticed by the world. Down narrow side streets, and off disused wharfs and inlets lies a piece of Oxford which is forever.

Covering all aspects of life within the bounds of Gateway College and it's surrounding borough. This is a meta-setting for use with any Role Playing Game.

Flavour Text

Flavour Text is an important element in roleplaying literature. It is text in a RPG book which exists to enhance the impact of the content, it is not part of the main body of text but is often the strongest influence over the feel of a game. Flavour text often takes the form of a short narrative set within the game world, often written as if by a character within that world.

I intend to write much of my flavour text in the form of lecture notes, either those handed out by the lecturer, suitably annotated and doodled on by the student, or those taken by one of the students, with the usual random side notes, doodles, and messages to the people around them. The rest will take the form of excerpts from books, and the musings of characters within the world.

Below are some short examples of flavour text, of the sort which would be found at the beginning of a major section within a chapter.

“**Q**n the distant mists of the past, the earth was home to beings unlike any known to science. Even while the Earth was still cooling, the first life pulled it's way from the very molten rock. This first expression of life was short lived and unrefined, but it was there and it could think, and from this thought sprung the next generation of life, those which we have come to call Demons.”
Excerpt from "Treatise On The Early Physical Expressions Of Life Energy"

“**Q**n the times before Mankind, the Demons rules the worlds, they where many, great, and powerful, more closely connected to the Ætheric Dimensions than we, they commanded great magics for both good and ill. For they where not the evil beings which their current name portrays them to be, they where as varied as we are, capable of both good and evil in equal measure, though they did tend towards extremes, but in that they were creatures of their time.”

“**Q**or a time The Demons and Man coexisted. This was know as the Age of Legends, or the Third Age. But the world grew too small for both the ambitions of Man, and the Empires of the Demons. As is inevitable, it seems, there was a war. A war which the humans had no hope of winning. Until something unexpected happened, the Demons vanished. Not all of them, and not all at once. But it seems that the greatest of them simply quit the Earth.”

“At various times throughout history there have been places that people instinctively avoid, equally there are places which draw people to them. Both are expressions of the same force at work. These effects occur when the web of reality becomes tangled up in itself. These knots draw energies up into themselves, focusing them at random. This random discharge can account for any number of paranormal sightings around the world.”

“Throughout the world there are places which still hold to an ancient order of things, places where the walls of what we describe as reality are thin and passage between worlds is easy, even unintentionally. Thankfully these places are hidden from the world, folded in on themselves, only accessible under certain conditions. At least that's what the textbooks say, the truth is a little more complicated...”

Document Structure

I intend to have the game setting split into two books. The first being the Player's Reference, and the second being the Games Master's Reference. This allows players to read freely from their book, without having to worry about suddenly coming across information which they shouldn't know.

Player's Reference, Chapter Structure

- Legal & Disclaimer
- Introduction
- Generic "What is Role-Playing?" Section.
- Enrolment
- "So you've just got a place Gateway College." - Flavour Text
- Departments and Faculties
- Sights and Sounds of the Gateway Borough
- Dramatis Personae
- Lexicon and other Appendices

Games Master's Reference, Chapter Structure

- Legal & Disclaimer
- Player Warning
- Introduction
- Why the Students are Really Here
- The Ancient History of Earth
- Dark Secrets of The Gate
- Bright Secrets of The Gate
- Storytelling Advice
- The Metaphysics of The Gateway College Universe
- Dramatis Personae
- Lexicon and other Appendices

Conclusion

I intend to start with the Introduction to the Players Reference, as this can be used to set the tone for the whole piece, and as an excellent place to experiment with page layout design before I'm faced with anything more substantial. After that my target chapter is most likely to be "Sights and Sounds of the Gateway Borough" from the Player Reference, because this allows me to get the geography of the setting straitened out.

Given my tendency towards that sort of thing, I foresee "The Metaphysics of The Gateway College Universe" as being the largest of the other chapters, and it is almost certainly target chapter number two should I finish the first one. As it is the equivalent chapter to "Sights and Sounds" in the Games Master's Reference.

This is an open ended project which will continue far beyond the end of this module, but I will have to draw the line at the point where I agree with my tutor that I have completed enough work to satisfy the requirements of the module.