

## Chapter 15: First Game



## Picking Your Role

### GMs & PCs

When you play a role-playing game there are two different roles to fill. Most likely you will play a Player Character or PC. A PC plays the role of a single character. Over the course of several adventures or even campaigns you will build your character and develop a unique personality for him or her. In the group that you play with there will most likely be many other PCs.

There is only one Game Master or GM. The Game Master is the narrator of the story-line. The GM generates the entire worlds

that each of the Player Character players in. The role of the Game-Master is not always fun, and by far is the most work.

Rather than controlling the fate of one single character, the GM controls many Non-Player Characters or NPCs. The many NPCs that the GM controls are enemies, neutrals, and friends to the PCs. They can be very simple or rather complex. Some will interact with the parties for several adventures or may never be seen again. In addition to NPCs the GM controls everything else from the weather to the actions of the Empire, Mega-Corporations, and clans.

### Playing Your First Game as a PC

Your first game as a Player Character is much easier than being a GM. Before the game you should read through the player chapters of the Basic Hand Book. You should at least be familiar with the system so you don't have to ask as many questions your first time playing. You should pay special attention to the rules about character generation. If you have the time to meet with the GM before your first game, he may ask you to make your character with him. Never make a character that you expect to use without the supervision of the GM, otherwise they may ask you to create a new one. This helps to ensure that everyone has characters with fair rolls. The GM also may be able to give you guidance to what type of character to create what skills to pick, and help you develop a background for your character that is appropriate for the game that they are going to be running.

A character is just a series of numbers until your begin to develop a personality for them. Make sure that you completely read and become familiar with the information that is presented for your ace. In addition you should also be familiar with how attributes and skills work. Make sure the GM knows what equipment you are buying. It is possible that the game they will be running will have restrictions on what you can purchase. This may be because of the technology or law level of the planet that you are beginning on or simply part of the plot.

Since role-playing is a form of acting, you should develop a personality for your character. The information about your race will help you develop a general sense of what they are about. Your GM may also be playing with alignment rules. Choose an alignment that sounds like the character that you would like to play. You should try to act as this type of person throughout

your first session. If it is not to your liking, talk to your GM and see about changing it to something more appropriate.

Now that you have your character complete, you should converse with the other players and discuss what their characters are like. It is best to create a party that has a diverse set of skills, as this will allow the party to competently tackle more situations. Also learning about other characters in the group will help you to interact with them better while you are playing. The better you are at acting the part of your character and acting towards other characters as they have defined their character will help you gain more experience from the GM.

With all of this achieved all you have to do is wait for game time. When the game starts the GM will tell you all about the world you are on, the situation you are in, how your party is connected, and so on. They will put you into a series of situations for you to resolve. Sometimes these situations will be resolved by your acting abilities, sometimes by your attributes and skills, and other times by NPCs controlled by the GM. You control only your own character in the game, so that is your sole responsibility.

Other than simply having fun, your goals are to keep your character alive, and to gain experience. Gaining experience allows you to increase the capabilities of your character. You use the experience that the GM gives you add the end of the gaming session to raise your attributes and skill levels. This makes you character more capable of resolving situations in later games.

The GM awards experience individually to each member of the party, so it is important that you are assertive in the game to reap

your just reward. You are awarded experience points by achieving objectives that the GM has set forth in the adventure that they have planned for you. The GM also awards experience for your role-playing abilities, teamwork, and observing your alignment. Try to excel in these different areas to receive as much experience as you can.

Occasionally characters die during game play. This is a sad thing but you should not let this discourage you. You should always have a GM approved backup character. This will allow the GM to write your new character into the story line as soon as possible so that you don't miss any game play. A character can die for any number of reasons. Typically this is because the GM thinks that you have made some rather poor decisions, or the result of extremely bad dice rolls, or simply because your character has become too powerful and it is time for them to be retired. Sometimes when this happens the GM will allow you to inherit the equipment of the former character, or give you an exp bonus to create the new character, but neither of these should be expected. A character death is something that you should expect to happen sooner or later, so don't get discouraged by it.

If you are interested in being a GM in future games, volunteer to become the Assistant GM. The AGM will record the events that occur during the adventure. In addition to simply detailing the story, you are also in charge of recording names, places, and any notes that they party may need to refer back to later in the game, or subsequent adventures. If you do not have this information recorded, the GM may or may not choose to divulge the information again, depending on the situation. It is very important to record everything that may be vital to the game.

The AGM may also be asked to also look up rules for the GM while they are busy continuing the story with the other parties. Questions about rules come up all the time, so the more familiar you are with the rules the better. Performing these functions are valuable skills that will be helpful when you make the transition to being the GM of your own adventures.

## Running Your First Game as the GM

To be GM you have to do a lot of work simply preparing, well before your friends ever meet together. You should be very familiar with the entire Basic Hand Book (Players & GM Chapters). Don't worry about the supplemental rules until you have played a few adventures.

If you are running a purchased adventure, you should be very familiar with the storyline. There is nothing worse than having to hold up the group, because the GM has to take 5 minutes to reread something. If you are running an adventure that you created yourself, you most likely are very familiar with the rules already.

After you feel comfortable with both game and the adventure, arrange a meeting of 2 to 6 of your friends for a day when they all have 3 to 6 hours free. You should also pick a location that is close to everyone, although you most likely will want to have it at your house, or dorm room. Other places that you can often

### Helping the Party & GM

There are many ways to make your role-playing sessions go smoother and allow better play. Some of these are deciding functions that each character will perform during the game.

Assistant GM - Whoever seems to be the most comfortable with the game, or the most interested in also becoming a GM, you should ask to be your assistant. This person can look up rules that need to be verified for the GM, while they are busy continuing with the party. This function is often combined with the chronicler. This will give them valuable experience in GM'ing. After a few games or so, the GM will most likely want to play a game themselves, and the AGM will be experienced enough to develop and run their own adventures.

Chronicler - The Chronicler is a designated player that records the names of contacts, ships, enemies and other important details to a mission. This allows them to remember important facts. If the GMs forget something that they should have recorded earlier, the GM should not simply give them the information. The GM should either make them go on a sub-adventure to regain the information or at the minimum make an Intelligence test. The Chronicler should also make any maps that the party needs.

Party Leader - A party leader is not always necessary but can be very helpful with a large party. It is often very difficult to find a good party leader when you first begin. The leader should be the one person that always seems to listen to the other players, offers solutions and compromises, and basically that everyone respects their decision making capabilities. The leader does not actually make the decisions for the group, but organizes the party with a unified decision as to what they all decide to do, and presents this to the GM. Their sole purpose is to get the party to commit to a single plan.

run a game is at the local library (preferably a side room where they won't mind you talking), or your local gaming store (you should call and schedule this with them first).

Roll up a character or two so that you are very familiar with the character creation system. Many questions will be asked of you, when your party is creating theirs, so you should be knowledgeable. If you have the time prior, you should have some or all of the players read the player chapters prior to your meeting time.

Since your group will be together for several hours, you should make sure that either you can feed them or that they are bringing food and refreshments. Taking a break to obtain food during a game is always a major distraction, so plan ahead, even if that is a reminder to the players to bring money for pizza.

When you meet you should have the players create their characters. Depending on how many of them there are, and how experienced they are, this may take up to an hour. You should encourage them to pick a diverse set of skills, so that they are well rounded, and better prepared to face any challenge.

After all characters have been created, and the party settles down, you should begin to tell the story. Tell them about the planet they are on and what it is like. Tell them about how they know each other, or have a small adventure where they meet. After this regardless of what your adventure outlined you will need to be a storyteller, a referee, and a master entertainer.

## The GM is a Storyteller

Your primary role as the Game Master is to tell a story as a narrator, and sometimes act out the roles of non-player characters. There are many thoughts and theories on story telling, and an essay on such could overfill this book.

The basics of most stories in drama, action, or even comedy is that everything comes in three acts; introduction, dilemma, resolution. The characters should be introduced to a situation, then be presented with a problem, and finally have that problem resolved.

During the Introductory Act of the game, the characters are introduced to the setting of the story. They should find out the basics of where they are located, and about their general surroundings. The characters should be told of how they are connected, and should have a brief adventure to help them bond.

Characters can be connected in any number of ways. In FS it is often convenient to have them of the same family, clan, or even Mega-Corporation. One of the old jokes about any role-playing game is that they always start in a bar. Often this first bonding adventure has the characters getting drunk and fighting with other drunks. This old one still works in FS. Sometimes the characters already know each other, and other times this fight is how they meet.

You will see this pattern of three parts repeated constantly in role-playing games. Not only is this a pattern that occurs over the course of a single adventure, but you will how you will portray the continuing story over several related adventures called a campaign. The first several games gets them entrenched in your storyline, the next games allow them to make decisions about how to resolve the situations that they face, and finally the last games allow them to resolve them.

Even on a minute scale this is how you will interact with the players with the minute by minute action. Introduce them to a situation, present the problem, allow them to work out the resolution. For example the characters need to escape from captivity on a prison ship. You give them the situation, you give them options and opportunities. They decided on a course of action, and then you resolve it by acting out the plan, using attributes, and using skills. This is repeated even with the simplest of situations such as being presented with a locked door. Do they decide to blow it up, go into the ventilation system, or use security systems to stealthily open the door? Each of their possible solutions you create a story for either, by describing it, or having them roll an attribute, or skill check.

## The GM is a Referee

As the GM you have godlike powers. You control everything outside of the actions of the players. You control everything from the weather, the meteor storms, all the NPCs good and bad, and everything else in the game. At the same time, you are not a dictator. Each of the players controls their own characters, and often do radical things departing from what you foresaw at the time of writing your adventure. This is to be expected, it is good to try to keep them on track, but you should control their actions.

If they are straying from the path to far create more and more difficult obstacles facing them. Make the storyline that you created the path of least resistance or simply the most feasible solution. If they are planning on doing something that is going off track or simply have no idea what to do next, ask them to make an Awareness check, or an Intelligence check. Reward successes to clues how to resolve the situation. Sometimes though let them wander, their own creativity in playing their characters can often be rewarding to them, you and the fun of the game. Sometimes they will come up with solutions that you

didn't think of when you created the adventure. If they present a decent solution, reward them by allowing them to do it, and with experience points at the end of the game.

Your role as the referee means that you should also enforce the rules of the game. Characters cannot simply make stuff up. For example a character wants to run into a room and shoot all 10 of the bad guys. They cannot simply do this, make them perform skills checks, and observe the rules of combat. You are the only person that can create storyline. On the other hand, you should not overwhelm the characters with senseless dice rolls. If they say they are driving to the other side of town they shouldn't have to perform a skill check unless something happens on the way. For example they come under attack and are trying to avoid fire, they are racing another vehicle, or the bridge has been blown up and they need to quickly stop.

Sometimes the rules simply shouldn't apply or it is easier to ignore them. This is a decision for you to make. This is very

true for some combat situations. Rather than deal with the bleed factors and deaths of enemy NPCs, it may be easier to simply have them die when they are badly wounded. This is especially true if there a lot of them. However on characters or on prominent NPCs you should not ignore these same rules, because they are much more important. It is up to you to gauge the situation and determine which rules apply and which don't.

Feel free to ignore any rules that you feel are not necessary either overall to the game or in particular situations. You should always strive for consistency in these situations, because the Players will expect it. If you are changing the rules for any reason, whether you just reread a rule and now understand it or

want to simplify it, make sure the players are warned before they face the situation.

Filling your role as a referee you should make sure that you are both impartial to both the party and to each player. When you GM you are not playing against the players, you should be impartial. Together you are working towards making a great story. You should not cause the failure of the Players to play against them, but rather cause them to fail to increase the drama of the situation, and place pressure on them. This makes for a better story. You should also strive to be fair with all of the Players. If one character is allowed to do something, the rest should be able to as well. Again consistency in your level of adhering to the rules is an absolute must.

## The GM is an Entertainer

A truly awesome GM will not only be able to tell a marvelously intricate and captivating story line, that is loose enough to allow the PCs to be likewise creative, but also be able to bring the NPCs to life by being able to act their parts. If you are not able to breath life into your NPCs might role-playing them, then your players will have a likewise hard time with their own role-playing. You set the level of role-playing when you act out the role of your NPCs. The PCs will rarely try to surprise the effort that you are putting into it.

To bring NPCs alive, you play them as if they were your very own characters. This includes adopting their own personalities, developing and striving for their own goals and having their own ambitions. This is especially true with all of the prominent NPCs of your storyline. It is not necessary to go into this much detail with a guard that will never be seen again, or with the NPCs porters. NPCs that are friends and contacts of the party should have this level of detail. For example their clan chieftain, colony leaders, enemy leaders, and any NPC that you plan on having return over the course of several adventures.

In addition to developing them as a character, some GMs like to put on some extra polishing touches. Depending on your acting ability you may want to give them different voices, and have them talk passionately about topics. Take these two following examples. The GM says "Your contact at the bar tells you that the Cosquetta are hiding in the sewers, you should pay him for this information" is very bland.

Try to speak in the voice of the PC Solstrahd with utter distaste for the Cosquetta. "The Cosquetta bastards have taken to hiding these days. I followed one of them last night, stalking his ugly

hide to an abandoned entrance to the sewer down near the old Cosquetta Clan Hall. It was all I could do not to kill him myself, but I knew that you would find this information valuable, as well as my purse" says Solstrahd as he extends his waiting hand palm up, with the glint of credit in his eyes. Doesn't this sounds much involving to you? Your Players will think so too.

You should run NPCs as complex characters. Your plots should not play them against the players, but to also play them against each other. The more complicated you make their machinations, the more involved the characters will be, and inspire them to become more interactive with them. Having multiple levels of deceit, double-crossing, lies, betrayals, finding friends in enemies and enemies in friends, creates incredible amounts of drama.

You should also try to avoid hack and slash or meet and sheet games. Many first time GMs of FS, either try to recreate a first person shooter computer game, or build dungeons like fortifications for the characters to fight through. Combat is actually the slowest part of the game, and although sometimes necessary, becomes very boring if that is all that they are doing. Characters that continuously fight there way out of every situation, usually will find that they are rather mortal. Rather than focusing on straight up violence and combat, it is best to weave a complicated tale of intrigue.

Although creating a great storyline is central to constructing the skeleton of an adventure, being able to really role-play the NPCs well, breathes life into your game. The PCs will follow suit. Those that do should receive extra experience points rewards.

## Planning The First Game

After you have learned the rules, and prepared your adventure, gathered the party, and they have characters, you are ready. The first couple of minutes are usually fairly hard. Most of the party is new to role-playing or they have not settled into playing yet.

It is important to get their attention immediately. Begin by welcoming them all for coming. If they are really new, explain briefly what a RPG is. You should also set forth any expectations you have as to their level of role-playing. This way

they know that they are to act out verbally what their character is doing instead of just saying "I am going to shoot the bad guy."

This should take a couple of minutes and they should have quieted down and begun to listen to what you are saying. As soon as they are attentively listening, begin describing the setting they find themselves in.

"You are all members of the Clan McConnolly, who has been disgraced by the betrayal of the Cosquetta Mega-Corporation. A Mega-Corporation is a large galaxy spanning company. They control vast regions of space and their power in the local sectors rivals that of the Empire itself. Cosquetta is well known for their treacherous ways."

"Your clan was the fall guy for one of their backstabbing double deals, and since you have fallen from being a once proud house. Your clan lives on the planet Tintagel, a colony world in the outer fringe worlds. Even here on the fringes of the Empire, your name is mocked. You live as a member of the dispossessed, those that have no Mega-Corporation sponsorship."

"Your lives are those of poor, almost beggars, living off the streets in any way that you can. You have witnessed your clan hall fall into disrepair as your heart has grown colder to those that have betrayed you. The desire for revenge against the Cosquetta, and the vindication of your family name is often the sole thing that keeps you alive."

An introduction like this gets their attention, and gives them a purpose. They know where they are from, their common history, and have been presented with a common purpose. They will most likely have questions for you, so take the time to answer them. When they feel comfortable with the story that you have presented continue to start the adventure with the situation they are currently in.

"After many years of apprenticeship within the clan, you have finally reached the age of adulthood. Your rite of passage into a full fledged member of the clan will be attending the school at the Imperial Monastery here on Tintagel. Here you will learn the art of combat, as well as trades to earn a living, and bring prosperity back to the clan. It is a great honor to attend the Monastery, and if you prove yourself there, it will be the beginnings of restoring your family name."

"The Monastery is operated by Thorian Draconis Battle Priests. Their mastery in the ways of combat, their dedication to the ways of the Empire, and their vast Psionic abilities makes the few students that they accept the envy of much of the Empire. It is a great honor to attend the monastery, and offers great possibilities of a future that you had not dared to dream of."

"You will leave for the school in two days, and you are currently at a feast in your honor. The clan hall is filled with all the members of your clans, and a rare feast has been prepared for you. The clan is so impoverished you feel guilt at the thought of the expense both for this feast and at the trouble it must have been to arrange your entrance to the monastery."

"The clan chieftain Argus McConnolly introduces you to the clan as men of the clan for the first time in your lives. This

moment brings great pride to you, and you are humbled at the honor bestowed upon you. Argus finishes his speech 'and so the best and brightest of the youth of our clan have been chosen. May you serve the clan with honor, and bring glory again to the name McConnolly.' You are distracted away from the faces of your mates that have not been so fortunate, as you realize that you are being prompted to make a speech your first before the clan."

This puts the characters into a situation that allows them to role-play their characters for the first time. They should then begin to speak as their characters would in this situation. If they are being timid about who goes first, tell the character with the highest charisma to begin, or whoever seems eager. Ask each of them to go in turn. If they speak well, the clan may give them weapons or other types of supplies prior to them leaving the feast. If they speak poorly or joke around, have the clan become offended, and make them attempt to make amends.

You can see the pattern here of the 3 parts of drama that will cycle throughout the game. You have the presentation of a situation, the characters present a plan of action, and the GM follows through with a resolution based upon their choice.

From here the other youths of the clan decide to take them out to the bar where they will celebrate. The other clan youths are obviously jealous and as both a prank and with a little bit of viciousness proceed to get the party wasted. They feel that making fun of them in this condition will and watching them nurse hangovers the following will be a small but satisfactory way to get even with not being one of the chosen.

To compound this they will befriend a seemingly cool person at the bar, who is actually a serial killer. At the end of the night they will have to deal with an assault by this individual who will escape and become the focus of a later storyline while they are at the monastery.

During their evening at the bar, the Bartender tells them that they are not the only ones celebrating being accepted to the monastery tonight, and points out another group of youths. This group turns out to be from a rival clan and members that is closely allied with the Cosquetta. A non lethal fist fight might ensue. They will turn out to be their chief rivals at the monastery. They will do every dirty trick in the book, from sabotaging the party, to betrayal and attempting to get them expelled. When they have their final showdown with them, they will find them victims of the serial killer, which brings them back to that plotline. They end up befriend the sole survivor who vows to avenge their deaths and find an ally into Cosquetta.

These complications change the bar from a rather boring time, into a realm of complex plots and machinations. Ultimately the entire Monastery setting is simply the introduction to the party eventually being able to exact their revenge on Cosquetta. Plots woven into plots are an excellent way to build an elaborate and exciting adventure. From here your adventure will wind its way through many gaming sessions, and those into extended campaigns as the adventures continue their explorations of the FS universe.

## Making Things Easier for the GM

There are a couple of things that will make it easier being the GM, by preparing ahead.

**Know the Rules** - Being familiar with the rules of the game cannot be over stated.

**Know the Adventure** - Having a solid outline of how the adventure will unfold in your head will greatly increase the speed of the game. Since the GM speaks for most of the game, any delays while they are looking up information about the adventure, is a serious delay of game.

**Know the Characters** - It is extremely helpful to be familiar with the characters the party is using before the game starts. This will allow you to create challenging situations for them to resolve without overwhelming them or making them too easy. This is true with both freshly created characters and with ones that have used experience points since the last game. There is nothing worse than finding out that no characters have the skills needed to even attempt one of your plot elements. Imagine for example that the crew needs to steal a spaceship and no-one can pilot it.

**Times of Action Chart** - Each character has a certain number of actions, and also a time when they can perform them. If you create a chart of all of the players times of action, it is much easier for you to properly sequence them with your NPCs which will also have TOAs. Making this chart at the very beginning of the game will make combat flow much more smoothly.

**Marching Order** - If the party is doing a lot of walking in groups in unfriendly territory such as jungle or caves recording their preferred marching order can prove invaluable. This will help prevent those prevent those game delaying discussions of who was in front during the ambush disputes. This should be prepared prior to the adventure, but is not as critical as the Time of Action. They can update this at any time, however they must declare and record it before any situation arises.

**Models & Figurines** - Models are not required but often enhance your abilities to describe and explain complex situations to the players. I often use them in addition to a sketch of their immediate surroundings, explaining where escape routes are and the location of combatants. This often allows the players to come up with more brilliant plans, then 'kill them all' strategies.