

ADVENTURES ON EARTH NOW



This rule book has almost reached critical mass. With the rules for creating characters and conducting combat out of the way, the only thing left is the easy stuff: Heroic Do-Gooder & Dastardly Deed-Doer adventuring. Or maybe this is actually the hardest

part. It depends on how you look at it. What we're going to try to do in this section is fill you with the HDG adventuring spirit. And, yes, this is a very spiritual thing.

Some might say that an Earth Now setting is the least-imaginative setting possible for a RPG, but they are wrong. It requires little imagination to generate, but unlimited amounts of imagination to navigate. There is a million times as much to contend with in a contemporary setting than there is in an imagined one. In a world with endless possibilities (which is what this world has), there are a million more complications. Out of that complexity, players draw infinitely from their own experience to create the richest of all possible worlds of play.

TO PLAYER-CHARACTERS

The spirit of HDG is an Existential one. You have to have your character do things, just as someone in the real world has to act in order to make anything happen. For HDG to be played to it's potential, players must interact in the operation of any adventuring. They must contribute to the gameplay by driving adventures with their input. There is no sitting back in your chair and waiting for the monsters to come to you, literally. Players must have their characters act, do, be. This is Earth Now, and sitting there in your living room watching your Game Operations Director's pre-planned adventure go by is just like having your character sit in his living room and watch TV for hours on end: there's lots going on, but none of which your character will be participating in.

There are no random monsters waiting for your character to happen along. YOU, the player, know what's outside YOUR door, and you know where you wouldn't dare to go. Have your character go there! Never has there been a better opportunity than right now to have an adventure in the world you know, but with a fictional character who puts you yourself in no actual danger. HDG characters are meant to fit into an Earth Now setting, with none of the corny peculiarities of super heros. So they can do everything ordinary people can do, only better, stronger, faster.

It will be your responsibility to have your character behave in a manner fitting a real-world setting. It will also be your responsibility to throw a wrench into the best-laid plans of your Game Operations Director, in other words, to screw things up. If your GOD has the idea that there is only one way to get from point A to point B, show him another route or don't go at all. Think of yourself as the master of your own fate. If GOD wants you to do something, he's going to have to provide a motivation. He can't force you to do something just by eliminating all of your other options. This is Earth Now. You know almost as much about what's out

there as he does. GOD is not going to be able to say there's no train depot, airport, or bus station by which you can just up and leave town if you want to.

Of course, the flip-side is also the case. If GOD does not provide you with a motivation, you're going to have to come up with one of your own. You're going to have to contribute. GOD might well say, "Okay, guys, what do you want to do today?" and then sit back and watch what happens. Instead of your character running through GOD's maze, he can just sit back and let you create a maze of your own. In fact, that's the ideal HDG scenario, one where the players guide the adventure, and GOD simply says where the street signs and parked cars are. Where you drive is up to you.

Extensive play-testing has shown that this player-centered rather than game-master centered approach can be very traumatic for players accustomed to doing it the other way around. The creation of a character that is entirely up to the player instead of random rolling of limited choices is the first step to freeing the players' understanding of what his role is. He is the center of his own universe. In other settings, this approach is next to impossible because the world their character inhabits is entirely the brain-child of the game master. But on Earth Now players know almost-unlimited amounts about the world they're in. They are not playing in a tunnel. Even if their knowledge doesn't include world-affairs, and their experience is limited to the United States or even just their own town, there is still so much that they can potentially bring into an adventure that they will never be able to use it all. Think about it. You as a person know millions of things about the world outside your door. You know everything from what parts of your town are dangerous at night to the telephone number that will get the police to show up at your door (911)! You're going to have your character walk out into that world and make an adventure of it! GOD's responsibility is going to be to add Stats to its populace, and speak on behalf of the 4½ Billion other inhabitants.

"But how do I start an adventure?" you whine. Well, you have a character right? And he's hardly a run-of-the-mill Joe-Schmo, right? And you personally are in no danger,



right? So, what's stopping you from having your character do all those things you wish you could do, but know you never could do in real life? Do you want to be an FBI agent? A private eye? A soldier of fortune? Now's your chance. The door is wide open.

There is only one essential rule that should guide a player-character's actions: Creativity. In a world where player-characters can do almost anything they want, doing the ordinary doesn't cut it. Start by making your character a creation, instead of a collection of numbers. There's no dice-rolling in HDG character creation because we want players to work to create a character, to make a commitment to it, and to entertain themselves and each other with what they've made. From there the need for creativity continues. Think up your own wacky Acrobatics Maneuvers, unpredictable Luck Rolls, and say to yourself that your character is going to do entertaining things. Instead of walking up to your opponent and punching him in the kisser, grab hold of that 7-11 Slurpee on the counter and throw the icy goop it in your opponent's face, saying "Take that, you stupid, Slurpee-sucking Son-of-a-, etc." and then slug him with a jar full of beef jerky.

TO THE GAME OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

For a game that calls its game master GOD, HDG is notorious when it comes to bringing deities down to earth. There are basically two ways of thinking about masters of the universe (their universe): There are those that think that one supreme deity lays out every step in the course of existence, that every single thing that happens is a piece in the jigsaw puzzle of Fate. People who believe this have a tendency to resign themselves to their Fate and give up on making any effort whatsoever. Whatever will be, will be. The second way of thinking about an all-important master of the universe is to think of an entity that looks down on the world, but doesn't interfere with it's goings on. Once things have been set in motion, free will is the only guide. The Game Operations Director in HDG is a would-be deity of the second order. He's someone who's job it is to manage the non-player parts of the adventure, but not to manage the players themselves.

GODs who cannot resign their absolute control of every minute aspect of gameplay can certainly run HDG that way, but they might be better off trying another game. They just won't be playing HDG to its full potential. This is not meant to put potential game masters off the game. No way! This player-centered approach is meant to multiply the fun and playability for GOD as well as the players.

There is an incredible level of freedom that comes with playing in an Earth Now setting. No longer is your existence guided by maps and modules. No longer are you burdened with the responsibility of articulating every nook and cranny of a fictional world. No longer are you the only source of creativity and excitement. For the first time you, the Game Operations Director, get to play along. Because players have the knowledge and background to contribute, to provide motivations for their characters (such as a desire to intercede in the epidemic of urban crime), to outline settings (such using real geographical and sociological information

from their vacation to Europe last summer), to understand things without needing drawings or lengthy descriptions (such as knowing **exactly** what GOD means when he says "the bad guy just turned his Chrysler LeBarron into the drive-through at Burger Queen"), because all this is instantaneously part of your's and their mutual understanding, role-playing takes on a whole new dimension.

By becoming malleable, able to roll with the punches, reacting to what the player-characters do instead of telling them what they can and can't, GOD actually **PLAYS** this game. He has to think on his feet, act and react, he stops being a slave to a pre-made adventure, and starts playing a game, and one heck of a fun game at that.

At first it takes some getting used to. You may find yourself saying "No" a lot, but after a while, the free form play becomes infectiously fun. As players work hard to come up with clever ways of getting into and out of situations, GOD is going to compete at having his non-player-characters do equally inventive things.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Despite our claim of absolute freedom, there are things demanded of GOD. For starters, he has to play the part of everyone on Earth. Since characters can feasibly go anywhere and do anything that the players could do in the here and now, they might suddenly decide to fly off to South Africa, and GOD will be stuck with the responsibility of populating South Africa with NPCs without any preparation at all. This is not as hard as it sounds, primarily because most of the people that PCs will encounter will be ordinary people. You already know how ordinary people behave in general terms: they avoid violence and conflict at all costs, and flee from danger. They may lie to you, they may insult you, they may make passes at you, but these are things you as GOD have to play by ear. It is not necessary to generate Stats and Skills for these people. Simply use your good judgement in deciding what they will and won't, can and can't do. Giving a store-keeper a roguish personality, or making every word that comes out of a street vendors mouth an insult, are the kinds of issues you should be thinking of in regards to NPCs, rather than worrying about numerical Stats.

There are NPCs, though, who are going to need Stats and Skills and Powers: Police, Criminals, Soldiers, Psychopaths, and anyone else you decide to put in an adversarial role towards the PCs. Creating NPCs is done in almost the same way as creating PCs, with one exception: GOD does not need to abide by the Max Level per Grade restrictions as strictly as do players. GOD and the players cannot have characters who violate the Max Lvl/Grd restrictions, and players cannot buy extra levels over the limit to make up for levels they didn't buy during previous Grades. GOD gets to cheat, to a certain extent, but for very practical reasons. To follow the letter of the law, he would have to create NPCs one Grade at a time. If he wanted a tenth Grade NPC, he'd have to create a 1st Grade NPC, then add one level at a time spending points as he goes. That is they way we have generated sample characters (see Appendix F, p.108), but it's a bit to labor-intensive to expect GOD to do every time.

What he can do is make the character he wants to build, decide what Grade he wants that character to be, spend the total points for that Grade plus the Starting points (either 1200 or 600), limiting himself to a cumulative number of Max Levels per Grade.

Blast, for instance, has a max lvl/grd of 5, if GOD generated a 7th Grade NPC, that NPC would be limited to a maximum of 35 levels of Blast (5 x 7 = 35). PCs cannot do it this way. They have to spend Grade by Grade. If they buy only 3 levels of Blast at one Grade, they CANNOT buy 7 levels at the next Grade in order to make up the difference.

Clearly, the Game Operations Director is going to need to have pre-generated opponents, ones who's behavior is anything but ordinary. What you are going to want to do is create villains that spark the players' interest, so that they will want to stick around to confront and conquer them, instead of getting on a plane for Katmando. With the exception of police, political figures, and ordinary street punks, GOD should avoid locking his villains into specific geographical settings. Since PCs aren't always going to be where you want them to be, make it possible for your NPCs to exist almost anywhere. Make them members of an international crime ring, or executives in multi-national corporations, or anything that can justify their world-wide travelling. Remember, PCs don't necessarily have to chase after NPCs. Sometimes it's the NPCs who are going to be doing the chasing.

Appendix F (p.) contains several pre-made NPCs, which GOD can use verbatim, or use as examples or springboards for creating characters of his own. Many of them are generic types (like "Urban Cop") which can be inserted into almost any setting with only minor changes to suit your adventure.

CREATING ADVENTURES

In HDG the Game Operations Director is bound even more by the demands of creativity than are the players. Because GOD cannot force PCs to participate in an adventure by virtue of eliminating all other options (as is often the case in fantasy and Sci Fi RPGs), GOD has got to do some marketing. He's got to entice players into wanting to stick around and see what's up. He's got to make his adventures entertaining and clever in order to hold the interest of the players. If keeping PCs in one place is essential to the adventure, GOD has to make what's happening in that one place engaging.

Players are not going to waltz into taverns and ask what adventures are in the neighborhood. If GOD wants them somewhere, he needs to hit the players over the head with it. Splash it across newspaper headlines! Put it on the lips of every NPCs in sight! Create a spectacle that the players are there to witness! Or (and this is the real key to keeping the attention of your players) make villains and opponents that the players will absolutely despise and do anything to capture or kill or frustrate. This is not done by having the villains be cruel and insulting (they can be, but you don't want those insults to seem as though they are aimed at the players instead of their characters). Nor is it done by

making super-powerful NPCs that defeat PCs in combat every time (the player's will hate the villains, but they'll also hate playing the game). The secret is survival. Villains that avoid combat, or flee combat before they are defeated, escape, and then return again and again, are the best kind! Defeating these elusive villains becomes a challenge, and no-longer is every adventure resolved with a big battle at the end. Play the main, most-important opponents (the crime bosses, the military generals, the CEOs) like you want them to survive. Don't make them punching bags. If players can't get their hands on the villain himself, they can target the things the villain cares about: his corrupt business interests, his fellow terrorists, his new Ferrari, whatever. Once players become committed to the idea of eradicating an elusive opponent, you won't need to drag them to adventures. They'll come to you.

What are these adventures, you ask. Don't think in terms of modules, or dungeons, or maps. You may find use for maps (especially road maps, world maps, tourist maps), but you don't want to tie yourself down to a solitary setting. Wherever the PCs go, make that the setting. You can be flexible like this by having multiple NPC villains in the ready, picking and choosing which ones are most-appropriate for the current situation. Another thing that can be helpful is to have a multitude of plot ideas that you can draw upon at a moment's notice, flashing them across the local press wherever your players happen to be.

How these ideas turn into adventures is a give-and-take proposition between GOD and the players. If the players start conducting an investigation (asking questions, poking around, confronting suspects) then GOD should be prepared to put clues in their path (witnesses who know just enough to lead characters to the next clue, co-conspirators who can be coerced into spilling their guts, and more headlines to point the way). If the player-characters take a brutal all-out attack approach, then GOD needs to know when to fight and when to take cover (what are local police response-times? Is the enemy going to strike back when the PCs least expect it? Are hostages going to pay the price for the characters' rashness?). If you get stuck and can't seem to come up with any ideas of your own, open a newspaper, switch on the TV, rent a movie, read a book! The examples there are endless! Plus, you can use the pre-made characters in Appendix F as starting points.

"Car bomb destroys entire city block! Police are baffled!"
"Gunmen storm Court House and free notorious mafioso in the middle of his tax-evasion trial!"
"City held hostage as street gangs unite in rein of violence! Could a mastermind be behind it all?"
"Bandits seize Brinks truck and drive across the boarder with \$2 million in cold, hard cash! Foreign police refuse to cooperate in investigation!"
"Environmental activist cut in half by chainsaw! Logging Company spokesman declairs it a suicide!"
"Invisible madman stalks neighborhood! Where will he strike next?"
"Top Secret prototype weapon disappears from government lab: 'We must have misplaced it,' says head scientist."
"Faceless commandos in high-tech armor seize Senator during Press Conference on gun control: NRA witness claims commandos were Aliens!"
"Republicans seize US Congress! Millions flee in panic!"