



“Well, Nobody Is Perfect”

Character Creation and Development

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Bio – Tobias Heussner

- Game Content/Narrative Designer
 - Currently working as a Senior Level Designer
- 13+ years of professional game development experience
 - 16+ shipped games incl. AAA RPGs like *The Dark Eye: Drakensang* and *Drakensang Online*
- IGDA lifetime member
 - SIG Writing member and Assistant Editor of the SIG's quarterly
 - SIG Game Design member
- Studied Feature Film Writing at the University of California LA, Extension



Bio – Toiya Kristen Finley



- PhD in Literature and Creative Writing, with a focus on world building and community creation in fiction
- Over 60 short stories and critical articles on science fiction and fantasy in print
- Narrative designer, game writer, and game designer of indie titles, text-based games over SMS, and interactive fiction

Bio – Carl Varnado

- Degrees in English, Film and Video, and a Masters in Education
- Expert in Archetypes and the Hero's Journey
- Screenwriter
- Author of the graphic novel *KINGS*



Disclaimer

"Nobody knows anything."

—William Goldman



This is a workshop and not
a pure lecture, so
please let us discover
together the secrets of
Character Creation and
development.

Session Outline

- Characters and Story
- Pitfalls and Solutions
- Writing Exercises
- Sample of an Adaptable Workflow

Why?

- ... because we want to create better characters, tell better stories, and, ultimately, create better games.



Takeaway



- We' ll discuss why Character Creation and Development matters.
- We' ll discover how we can develop and improve our characters.
- We' ll see how using merits and flaws as examples can help us to create better characters.

Why does Character Development matter?

- There's no Story without characters.
- Characters are the meat of a story (and conflict the sauce).
- Well-developed characters help players to connect with our stories and game worlds.
- Well-developed characters can define an IP.



What is Character Creation?



- Development of a new character from scratch
- Should start with writing, but can benefit from input coming from every department
- Analysis is needed for specific characters

What is Character Development?

- Comprised of 2 Major Areas
- Character Growth
 - Describes the transitions the character goes through during the story
- Character Development
 - Describes what is revealed through the character during a story



What makes a character great?

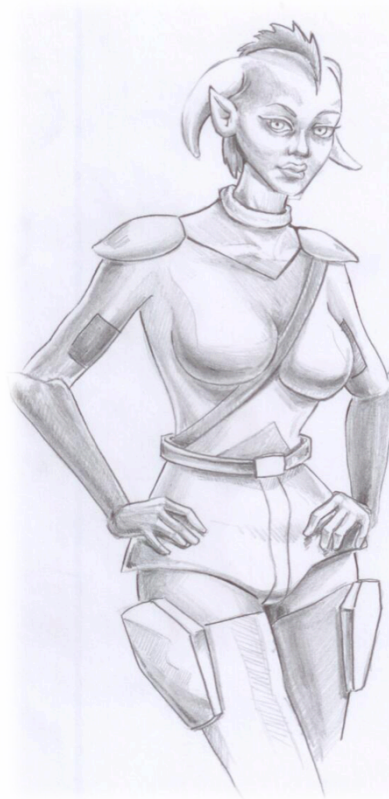


- Name?
- Physical appearance?
- Social skills?
- Inner conflict?
- ...that you can relate to him/her?

...

First Exercise

With your group, write a short character outline for each of the 2 character sketches. (5 minutes)



Concept Artwork created by: Munia Bouzaid (m.bouzaid@yahoo.de)

Trap #01 - Stereotypes

- Extremely simple character without any depth, or only uses well known concepts without surprise
- Often relies on visuals or a very common imagination
- Often based on primary characteristics (like race, job, etc.)
- 1D Character



Stereotypes vs. Archetypes



- Stereotypes use a commonly held belief based on perceptions.
- Stereotypes are based on assumption rather than investigation.
- Stereotypes are used when the creator has an unfamiliarity with a particular group or culture.

Stereotypes vs. Archetypes



- Archetypes are not based on assumption or belief.
- Archetypes are universal symbols that transcend culture.
- Archetypes can be used commonly across story, time, and space.
- Archetypes reflect the human condition.

Using Archetypes

- Archetypes reflect the characters as symbols in your stories.
- Archetypes are the hidden psychological underpinnings that connect your story with your audience.
- Archetypes seem general, but they should be used for specific reasons when developing a game or telling a story.



Trap #02 – Clichés



- General
- Overused
- Flat Underdeveloped
- Similar to other work
- Unoriginal
- Reminds of you of most PowerPoint Presentations

Trap #03 – 2D Characters

- A good start, but lack personality, history, substance
- Screen time does not matter
- Famous 2D character - great screen time – Jar Jar Binks
- Famous 3D character – no screen time Bobba Fett



What is a 3D Character?



- The Physical Character
 - Everything that can be seen
- The Social Character
 - Background
 - Life Experience
- The Psychological character
 - Likes/Dislikes
 - Tics
- Characters need conflict!

Consistency of Character Behavior

- Characters without well-developed personalities and motives contradict themselves.
- It's difficult for players to understand who these characters are or care about them.
- Inconsistent behavior can take players out of a game (disbelief *unsuspended*).
- Well-developed characters stay “in character.”



Personalities inform Character Choices



- Characters without well-developed personalities are good candidates for picking up the Idiot Ball.*
- Characters should not be at the whim of plot points or branches in narrative.
- Well-developed characters should make designing their choices *easier*.
 - We know their potential responses and the decisions they will/won't make.
- This doesn't mean well-developed characters *won't* do the unexpected!

*“A moment where a character's stupidity fuels...a small plot line....The person carrying the idiot ball is often acting out of character.” TVTropes.com

Extending Archetypes

- Backstories
- Twists with clichéd attributes or subverted stereotypes
- Get to know your characters
 - ...just as if they are your true friends or foes.
- Respecting characters...



... via Gender...



- Respecting characters also means respecting gender.
- Gender is a part of what shapes personality and life experiences, not a determining factor.
- Create characters who are female, not "female characters."
- Olivia Dunham, *Fringe*

... via Race...

- Avoid Racialized Roles, or develop new twists.
- Race and ethnicity are not personality traits or behavioral characteristics.
 - They help inform life experiences and cultural backgrounds.
- Chalky White,
Boardwalk Empire



... via Culture



- Culture helps to define character behavior.
- Culture influences how Characters solve conflict.
- Culture defines the way we see relationships.
- The German Handshake

Second Exercise: Extending Archetypes

With your group, write a short character outline for the 2 character sketches using at least 2 of the extending techniques. (10 minutes)



Concept Artwork created by: Munia Bouzaid (m.bouzaid@yahoo.de)

Develop Characters via Merits & Flaws

- Define a Function
- Main Adjective
- MBTI
- Governing Trait or Ability
- Conflicting Trait or Ability
- Secondary Traits and Abilities



Define a function



- What is the main Function/Archetype of this character?
 - Villain?
 - Hero?
 - Sidekick?
 - ...

Main Adjective

- What adjective best describes the character?
- What will someone who meets the character for the first time see/say?
- What impression will the character give?



MBTI



- Optional step
- ... but very helpful to clearly define a personality archetype
- Other type indicators can be used, as long as your fellow writers know how to interpret them.

Governing Trait

- What drives the character?
- Why is he doing what he's doing?
- What is his main advantage?



Character Examples: Thrall & Kerrigan



Conflicting trait



- What stops the character from being perfect?
- What conflicts with her governing trait?
- What makes her vulnerable?
- What creates the inner conflict?

Character Examples: Isabela & Merrill



Secondary traits and abilities

- What else is an important trait or ability in the life of this character?
- Any other important markers?



Character Example:

Bryan Mills



Main Attribute - Father

“I don’t know who you are. I don’t know what you want. If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don’t have money. But what I do have are a very **particular set of skills**; skills I have acquired over a very long career. Skills that make me a nightmare for people like you. If you let my daughter go now, that’ll be the end of it. I will not look for you, I will not pursue you. But if you don’t, I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you.”

Third Exercise: Using Merits & Flaws

With your group, write 2 short character outline sketches using Merits & Flaws. (10 minutes)

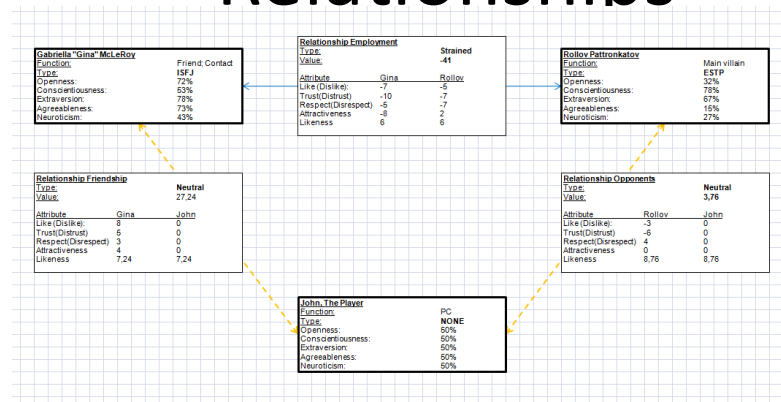
Extending the Merits & Flaws workflow



- Combine it with the 3D Character principles
- Combine it with backstory and additional characteristics
- Use multiple type indicators
- Add marker and character development sections

Other elements of Character Creation and Development

- Relationships



- Language
- Dialogue

Summary

- We analyzed different approaches to Character Development
- Learned how to avoid clichés and extend archetypes
- Discussed Stereotypical Characters vs. Fully-Realized Characters
- Discussed how important good characters are for great stories

Questions?

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Thanks for listening!

