

## GENERATION X

### **Bringing Jorune character generation back into line**

One of the biggest changes brought to "SkyRealms of Jorune" by the 3rd edition was character generation, both in terms of game mechanics and Jorune concepts. Players now have the option of selecting from three types of human, three of the Iscin Races, and a variety of Joruni occupations. My (perhaps unpopular) opinion is that the 3rd edition character generation process has created a philosophical off-shoot of Jorune gaming and has veered "SkyRealms of Jorune" toward the power gamer.

#### **THE PHILOSOPHY OF "SKYREALMS OF JORUNE"**

Beginning characters in "SkyRealms of Jorune" - hereafter SoJ - couldn't have a simpler profile; they are ordinary non-citizens (toth) travelling to their realm's capital city to declare themselves citizens-elect (tauther) by undergoing a process (tothis) that will test their worthiness and patriotism. When these characters buy "The Tauther Guide" their in-game lives begin. As I read it, these characters are coming to the big city for the first time, probably a little bewildered and certainly unsure of what the whole process entails<sup>1</sup>. They are innocents abroad<sup>2</sup>, and as they discover the world around them so will the players. This is the classic starting point for a campaign and it works very well.

However, it is not particularly glamorous. Players might not like starting out as misinformed hicks, doing the Dick Whittington bit down to Ardoth Bay. This seems to be the inherent assumption of the 3rd ed, and marketing the game must be easier when there's all sorts of whacky stuff to include in the back-cover blurb. Extra races, more occupations, and easier characteristic rolls have the cumulative effect of pandering to the player, as if the designers are afraid that the basic premise is not enough to hold their interest. It's ironic - a cult game needs a larger audience to be economically viable, yet in attempting to broaden the appeal of the game the original concept is being eroded.

I've addressed some of the problems in the sections below, and before I get stoned to death by irate Jorunis let me say that this is my opinion based on the vision of Jorune that I feel most comfortable with. I'm not trying to make you agree with me, or to accept my rules changes (well, I suppose I am), but I would like to stimulate some debate.

#### **CHOOSING A RACE**

In all the following material I assume that PCs will be human, maudra, or boccord. I disagree with allowing the Iscin Races as player-characters, particularly to beginners. There is sufficient variety already without dangling extra carrots in front of players. SoJ has an inbuilt mechanism in the Drenn system to limit non-humans in a campaign (because they spend much longer in tothis) but it's not a particularly stringent drawback. While role playing is an interactive hobby, you do have to put your foot down sometimes. I remember horror stories

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<sup>1</sup> Those with Campaign:Ardoth will remember "Huedurt Williams' First Day in Ardoth".

<sup>2</sup> This is the concept as applied in "Innocents of Gauss", though the pre-generated characters were hopelessly out of their depth against the teeth and guns arrayed against them.

about *RuneQuest* games where playing a human was disdained, to say the least; why should you play a normal guy or gal when there are so many more tougher/stronger/weirder options available? Don't let SoJ get sucked into this trap.

If you must allow Iscin Races limit it to Woffen, who are at least culturally close enough to humanity to make playing them relatively easy. If a player has a Crugar and Bronth simply for the physical benefits of extra speed or strength then they are playing a non-human for the wrong reasons. A non-human should be played as such, with proper forethought. In this sense I agree with the *Traveller* theory that most players with non-human PCs are just playing humans in a furry suit. More than once we are told that an advantage of a certain PC type is that some feature or other is "really cool". This doesn't help. As an aside, note that the 3rd ed gives PC Crugar a +1 in Spot, yet the Sholari's section cites Crugar as poor at depth perception and possessing more or less black & white vision. +1Spot? I think not.

### **GENERATING CHARACTERISTICS**

The 3rd ed creates characters with abnormally high characteristics. The current system of rolling 4D6 for each characteristic, dropping the lowest number, arranging them as one wishes, and then allocating 1D3 bonus points creates high numbers for just about every characteristic. A 4D6 roll creates an average of about 14, then adding 1 or 2, plus racial modifiers, bumps this up. In the 2nd ed there were strict admonitions that characteristics should not be boosted beyond 15 with the bonus points, and that no characteristic could exceed 18. Neither of these are 3rd ed rules, in fact there is a section on special success rolls for characteristics above 20. The point allocation system (150 points between the 12 characteristics) produces much fairer characteristics as well, so it's odd that this method seems frowned upon. "You must have your Sholari's permission..." etc.

My recommendation would be that each characteristic be rolled on 3D6, then arranged to suit the player, but no bonuses are added. The human racial bonus of +2 to Social should be removed. Why should a human be regarded as +2 Social to all and sundry? Most non-human races have uneasy truces with Burdoth, at best. Giving humanity a +2 Social makes the game system as narcissistic as the Burdothians. In fact note that all the Social modifiers relate to the being in question operating within human society, so Muadra supposedly get a -2. Junk it. The +2 Education is valid as humanity controls a lot of information. The Burdothians may not tell the populace the planet's true history, but they do make sure that it knows the three Rs. Keep careful watch on Education though, this is the characteristic that players like to have at high levels. Like the same stat in *Call of Cthulhu*, a player with his Education has significant advantages in initial skills.

### **SKILLS**

First, get rid of bonus skills for parental occupation. At one time my father was a lorry driver and my mother was a receptionist. Can I pilot an 18-wheeler? Can I operate a telephone switchboard? No, I can't. 3rd ed PCs can have the embarrassing situation of 'too many points, not enough skills' already, and this rule makes it worse. Only allow the 1D3 bonus skill ranks for writing a PC background if you really must. This rule is present to encourage beginners to put some effort in, but it's a basic requirement of any good player. Does anyone select the pre-generated PCs from the occupation examples? If so, let them keep the extra skill ranks just for the self restraint involved. You can get a much better PC with the standard rules.

## **INTERACTION vs ETIQUETTE**

I have a beef with this as well. I don't see why all PCs have all Interaction skills with all races. It doesn't make sense. What does your standard tauther know about Cleash interaction? Would he live more than 5 seconds in any situation where he was likely to see Cleash interacting with anything? The Cleash could be interacting with his head on a pole I suppose. A similar point can be made for certain non-violent races. There is no reason for PCs to know more than basic information about a given race and its customs, at least as far as interaction goes. As an exercise think about what you know about, say, Outer Mongolia; personally I associate Outer Mongolia with a region somewhere near China, I know its national sport is wrestling (I don't know how I know this), and the people there may have goats and hats that look like coconuts. I don't know what happened to Inner Mongolia. Now think of the average tauther's understanding of Voligire or Thantier. How good would you be at 'interacting' with a Mongolian goat herder (actual Mongolian goat herders can sit this question out)?

The +3/-3 rule for Interaction/Etiquette compounds this problem. Players will just take the +3 to Interactions and merrily plonk it on top of their abnormally high Social characteristic - remember that an average 3rd ed human PC will have Social 16 (14, +2 for race). Ah, but on Jorune interaction and etiquette are very important. The 2nd ed supplement actually makes a clear distinction between them:

Etiquette differs from Interaction in that Etiquette is used in situations where the correct actions are more formally complex (spoon on the right, thriddle are to be seated at the ends of tables etc.) (p11)

It's a cop out. How many players are bothered where they put the spoon? How many PCs even stipulate that they use utensils like cutlery at all? Etiquette by this definition is practically useless. Players will apply the +3 to Interaction and swan off with nice fat double figures in almost all Interactions.

Solution? Abolish Interactions altogether. Use Social amongst characters of the same race, but make any significant different race interactions governed by Etiquette; which will now cover base interactions at Familiar (like not mispronouncing the "Ch" sound in Chaun-Tse). You can leave important stuff like spoon placings until later. Much of Jorune's dynamism comes from the cultural differences between the various races - make the players feel part of it.

## **OCCUPATIONAL CLASSES**

Before I go on to question some of the occupations and their incongruity within the classic Jorune campaign, let me come back to the Education characteristic for a moment. I believe that the choice of occupation should reflect some relatively hard choices, ie. whether it's best to go for a low cost occupation and pick up a variety of extra skills, or to select a rigidly defined occupation with narrow (but high) skills and little freedom to choose extras. That's the way 'previous experience' should work; a 10 year commitment to formal training as a translator [costs 11 Edu] leaves less room for becoming a jack-of-all-trades than does a nomadic existence as a travelling merchant [costs 5]. If all PCs have Education at near maximum levels there will no such choices. In fact it's common for newly generated PCs to have enough Education to buy two occupations (which *should not* be allowed).

Those who remember the 2nd ed character generation process will recall that it was something of a mess. The 2nd ed supplement shed extra light on the situation by adding new rules here and there, clarifying some skills, and introducing the occupational classes. It's here that we first see occupations like githerin, Iscin, Burdothian soldier, and yord. The 3rd ed greatly expands on this tentative list, adding the whimsical shast (bartender) and the powerful sherja (gladiator), to name just two. Generally speaking these occupations serve two purposes, (i) to illustrate some facet of Jorune life and (ii) to give players a character template they can get to grips with in a short space of time.

The trouble is that some occupations fail to do the former while overdoing it on the latter. That is, some do not ring true as Joruni job descriptions. Think back to your first reading of the chapter and I think you'll see that the most eye catching occupations are the least satisfying in the long run. For example, is the Gloundan Shadow Warrior really anything more than a glorified arboreal ninja? If not, why not? The occupation is a better marketing device than it is a Joruni institution. It looks grafted on. Occupations like the sherja and condrij also alter the basic concept of Jorune gaming, in that these characters would probably find "The Tauther Guide" rather patronising. Unlike the everyday inhabitant of Burdoth these people will have seen something of the world. For them, buying the guide is like me picking up the latest training scheme propaganda from the Department of Employment - it is written by my government ostensibly to help me advance in life, but it's bullshit.

This problem is not exclusively a 3rd ed one. For example, the Outdoor Iscin can easily acquire Rank 20 with basic Flora and Fauna Recognition; at those skill levels you might as well hand the Sholari's section of the rulebook to the player. S/he is well beyond the summary of beasts in "The Tauther Guide". I'm not saying that these occupations have no place in the game at all<sup>3</sup>, I'm questioning whether they are suitable as beginning characters for new players. It's claimed that Iscin rarely attempt Drennship, so why are they in there?

This shows up again when you combine the more macho occupations (and there are five different types of 'fighting man') with the character background hints. The phrase "You once saw a Cleash and ran away" or "...you came across an incupod path... You never told anyone about it" seems absurd when the player has just rolled up a hardened pit fighter from the mean streets of Auklin. Creating a history for a new PC is based on the old model, the newcomer-in-town, even if a few of the suggestions are rather banal; character generation by the rules has moved into the flash 'n dash of muscle bound warriors and whistling ninjas.

## CONCLUSION

Character generation needs a serious rethink. Chapter 2 of the 3rd ed is a jumble of different ideas. Cut back the generosity of characteristics and skills, reconsider the role of non-human PCs, and take a hard look at the occupations. Decide on what sort of characters fit the campaign you want to run. There are two kinds of PC: those that belong to the "impoverished peoples of Jorune" (3rd ed. p.81) striving to better their lot on a hostile world, and those that are worldly-wise veterans, who have already lived a little. There is nothing inherently wrong with playing the latter group (it may suit experienced gamers starting a new campaign), but they will have an outlook on life that isn't reflected in "The Tauther Guide". That should be accounted for, and the fact that it isn't leads to confusion about the role of PCs on Jorune.

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<sup>3</sup> They should be modified, only allowed to experienced players, or reserved as NPCs.