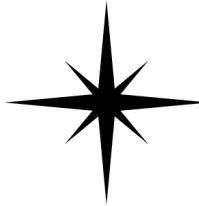


Pole Stars

A system-agnostic supplement for creating character relationships and campaign issues.



What is a Pole Star?

A *pole star* is a fixed point around which character drama can revolve. Pole stars are things a character wants to do something about, or with. They encourage characters to have a reason to be together and interact, but they may also introduce tension or drama. Pole stars aren't what your game is "about", but they can be if you want.

A pole star is an element of the fictional game world, like "rune magic" or "dragons" or "the Northern invasion". If you suggest a pole star, you are asking to add it to the world. The group must decide whether a given pole star is appropriate or not, using safety tools and personal preferences.

Characters will have a *position* toward a pole star. If you can say "My character wants to (something) this pole star", or "My character is (something) about/toward this pole star", that something is your character's position.

Using Pole Stars

The group should decide on one or two pole stars at the start of a game, during character creation. You don't have to flesh out every detail of a pole star, but everyone should understand and agree what is meant by a pole star. For example, you might pick "rune magic". You don't have to know all the rules of how rune magic works, only that it exists.

Players should come up with positions for their characters, then share these with the group. For example, Tana wants to *learn* rune magic, Woody *mistrusts* it, Basler is *curious about* it, and Sir Emory is *ignorant* of it.

Finally, look at your positions as a group, and ask yourselves, "how will my character interact with these other characters, given these positions?"

If the group talks about an idea they want to add to the world, but can't make it work as a pole star, that's okay. Just add it to the fictional world anyway.

What is a good Pole Star?

Pole stars should be accessible to the characters. If there's dragons, sooner or later the characters should probably meet dragons. Preferably sooner.

Pole star positions should be personal. Is there something in your character's history that makes them feel this way? Did an inciting incident give them strong feelings about it? Did a dragon burn their farmlands, save their sister, or impress them with its grandeur?

Not everyone should have the same position. When everyone is opposed to "the Northern invasion" because invasions are bad, it shouldn't be a pole star.

Starting positions shouldn't immediately create strife. If one character wants to save dragons and another wants to kill them, either rethink the positions or rethink dragons. If this kind of conflict happens later in the game and is dramatically interesting, though, then it's okay.

Changing Pole Stars

Pole stars that don't do their job - drive drama and create interactions - should be replaced with ones that do. Many people don't realize what their characters or storylines should really be about until they inhabit them for a little while. A pole star is a tool, not an unbreakable commitment.

If an idea for a pole star doesn't work out, look for an adjacent issue to replace it. For example, maybe there's a neutral kingdom in the path of an invasion, and some characters want to leave it alone while others want to convince it to join the fight. That kingdom then becomes a pole star instead.

Pole stars and positions can and should change in play. The players will discover new things they care about. Characters might take new positions on existing issues. For example, if the Northern invasion is thwarted in-game, players might revise their positions based on what happened, or the group can choose a new pole star.

Example Pole Stars and Positions

I want to (protect, manipulate, befriend, get help from) **the young prince**.

I want to (join, resist, investigate, expose) a **new religious order**.

I want to (research, exploit, explore, warn the world about) the **elemental imbalance**.

I want to (obtain, study, use, safeguard) the **magical artifact**.

I am (suspicious, excited, curious, angry) about the **new technological discovery**.

I (am skeptical of, want to believe in, follow) the **strange prophet**.

I want to (win a game, upstage a rival, impress someone, keep people safe, denounce antiquated traditions) during a **competitive event**.

Random Pole Stars

Your pole star is... (roll a d6)

- 1: a person or creature (e.g. a princess)
- 2: a group or organization (e.g. a fraternity)
- 3: an item or artifact (e.g. a ring of power)
- 4: a place (e.g. a lost island)
- 5: an event (e.g. an invasion)
- 6: a phenomenon (e.g. weather)

And it's... (roll a d6)

- 1: tied to magic or religion
- 2: physically or socially powerful
- 3: recently arrived or departed the area
- 4: in or causing trouble for someone
- 5: risky or uncertain
- 6: strange or mysterious

Credits

Thanks to Drew, Jay, Mike, and Deanna for playtesting help and suggestions. Pole stars were inspired by the plot of "The Dragon Prince" on Netflix.