Pop Culture RPG

Ephreal

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Welcome to Pop Culture RPG (PRPG), a simple tabletop RPG system designed for ease of character creation, ease of play, and ease in general. The system was designed for people who have never played a tabletop RPG before and may want to play but have been put off by complicated rulesets before. In PRPG, rules are kept to a bare minumum to provide simple guidance on how to resolve things, giving both the person running the game (the GM) and the players great flexability in what they want to try doing.

PRPG allows for the creation of whatever the player would like to play, limited only by player imagination and GM discretion. The intent is to allow a player to take a character from pop culture and create them in a few minutes.

Maybe you want to create someone who summons monsters by placing down cards on a device attached to your wrist? Or maybe you want someone who has a transformation sequence with a wand and moon based powers? Or what about your favorite sword-bearing, super-reflexes, high-jumping, speedy, box-on-back-wearing anime character? In PRPG, you can do all those and more.

Required materials

PRPG requires the following to adequately play it

1. Six Sided Dice

2. Some paper or a computer

PRPG uses six sided dice because most people have a six sided dice around their house somewhere. It's possible to play the game with a single die, but having a second to on hand to do another roll when you get a six might be convenient.

Having a way to record your character's current stats is a good idea as well. Using a piece of paper or a computer with a text editor like notepad open is a fairly easy way to do this. In general, there are 4 things to track: focus, health, protagonist points, and powers. A large amount of paper shouldn't be needed.

Finally, in addition to some six sided dice and paper, it's also highly recommended to bring a good sense of humor to the game, as zany antics are very likely to happen with the loose ruleset in the game. That doesn't mean serious games can't happen, just that they are far more likely to move towards the inane.

Chapter 2

Dice rolling and thresholds

Rolling Dice

When playing the game, situations will arise where the players want to accomplish something specific. For example, Kristi wants to use her character's Sing a Pop Song power to try to distract some guards. Kristi states what power she is going to use, rolls her die, and checks if it is above the threshold of success.

There are 3 different situations to watch for when rolling a die.

1. The die can show a 1

2. The die can show any number from 2-5

3. The die can show a 6

If the die shows a 1, that means something bad could possibly happen. The player rolls the die again to see just how bad it is. If the die comes up as a 1 again, something disastrous occurs. If the die is a 2, 3, or 4, something minorly bad happens. If the die shows a 5 or a 6, the character's action had no effect without any bad result.

If the die is a 2, 3, 4, or 5, the player checks if the result is higher than the threshold. If the result is higher than the threshold, the action succeeds. If the result is equal to or lower than the threshold, then the action failed. The higher the dice roll is above the threshold, the easier the character makes the action seem to be.

If the die shows a 6, the player subtracts 1 from the roll (to make it 5) and rolls the die again. The second roll is added to the first dice roll. Note that if the die shows a 1 on the second roll, the result is added to the roll without any bad stuff happening.

1. Roll one die

2. if the die shows a six, subtract 1 and roll the die again

3. Add the result of the second roll to the first

If the second roll also shows a 6, the action succeeds in a spectacular way provided it is possible to do. If the GM wants to allow it, this could also mean that ANY action, no matter how improbable to succeed, would succeed if both dice show a 6. GM discretion is heavily advised here though.

Thresholds

A threshold is a number that a roll must exceed to be considered successful. The base threshold for any task is a 4, meaning the dice must show a 5 or a 6. When writing out thresholds, the following format will be followed.

skill or action (threshold)

For example, kicking down a door with a threshold of 5 would be

kick down a door (5)

More examples are provided in chapter 4.

The threshold can be modified by the GM depending on how difficult the GM believes the task would be for the chracter. This modification can be anywhere from -4 to +5 making the easiest threshold 0 (no roll, automatic success) and the hardest threshold 9. The player is always free to let the GM know of any reasons the character might be particularly skilled in an action.

For example, when Kristi wanted to distract the guards, the GM decides that while yes, they would be distracted, it would be very difficult to distract them as fully as Kristi wants. The GM decides the difficulty is modified by +3 making the test a singing (7) test.

Kristi rolls her die and gets a 6. Because she needs to be above a six to succeed, she subtracts 1 from the roll, making the roll a 5, and rolls her dice again. Her second roll is a 5. She then adds the 5 and the 5 together to get 10. 10 is far above the threshold of 7, so her singing attempt wows the guards and draws in a small crowd as some sound technicians visiting town hand her a microphone set up an impromptu stage with speakers.

Types of Rolls

There are two basic types of rolls: contested and uncontested.

Contested rolls happen when one person is trying to accomplish something while another person or thing is working against that goal. Contested rolls work by having both parties roll their die and seeing who has the higher result. In the event of a tie, nothing happens.

Uncontested rolls are when a character tries to do something that doesn't have someone or something working to interfere with the result. The roll is against a threshold defined by the GM (default of 4) as usual.

Here are some examples of contested rolls.

1. A character tries to punch a baddie, but the baddie wants to block

2. A character is trying to hide from Dr. Eeevil's Seek'n'destroy bot ^{TM}

3. A pedestrian walking by is trying to steal something from a character

Here are some examples of uncontested rolls

1. A character wants to drive a motorcycle with one foot

2. A character is trying to rewire a timebomb

3. A character needs to resist the urge to drink all the tea

Chapter 3

Character Creation

Character creation consists of three steps.

1. Come up with or find a character concept

2. Come up with powers for that character

3. Get the powers checked by the GM

Coming up with a character concept

While it's entirely possible to come up with a character concept out of thin air, it's recommended to use a character from a show or movie you like. This makes it easier for you to have a personality and a set of power in mind and, hopefully, the GM will also be somewhat familiar with the character too. If not, at least a quick google search will give some idea of what to expect.

Due to worries of copyright complications, here is a fake show that hopefully sounds somewhat familiar to you that all examples will be used from.

ChaWiOh has young, spiky haired protagonist with an ability to transform into an older mysterious version of himself. The character is able to place cards onto a machine that extends from his wrist to summon monsters according to many (often arbitrary and seemingly made up) rules.

What makes up a character?

In PRPG, a character has 4 things that need to be tracked. Health, Protagonist Points, Powers, and Focus.

Health is a measure of how much damage the character can take and how badly injured the character looks. Every character starts with 10 points which can be increased later on with focus (10 focus to one health) or a power. When the character reaches 0 health, the character is unconscious. Despite being unconscious, the character can still mumble important and mysterous sounding things in the manner of many a protagonist.

A character's Protagonist Points are a measure of how many times the character can use powers. Just like health, every character starts with 10 points. The points are all recovered anytime the character has had a chance to get a good night's sleep in. Points can also be recovered anytime the character acts particularly 'protagonist-y' (GM's discretion). The amount of points a character has can be increased with focus (10 focus to one point).

Powers are things the character is able to do that the average person cannot. Most of these powers cost points to use, although each character will have one that does not from the start. The one that requires no points is assumed to be the character's most commonly used power. Because powers are made by the players, the GM should double check them to ensure nothing is too powerful (according to the GM). Powers can be gained by spending focus later on. The GM decided how much a particular power costs to aquire. More powerful powers should cost more.

Focus represents what the character spends their time improving. Points are gained for particularly 'protagonist-y' acts, accomplishing tasks, and by the GM at the end of any game. Charaters start out with no focus points.

Focus is mostly important for games that will extend beyond more than one session.

Coming up with powers

Each character is able to start the game with 4 powers: 1 innate power that either costs no points or is always on, and 3 that cost protagonist points to use. The player comes up with powers that fit the character, and the GM decides how many points the power should cost. Avoid horribly complicated and detailed powers if possible.

GM Review

It's important that the GM at least glance over the powers to ensure they are a good match within the game planned and the power cost is adequate. A player shouldn't have to spend 6 points on a power that lets her summon a small blue light. Conversely, neither should the player be able to spend 1 point to summon Galaxar, destroyer of worlds and eater of souls.

Character Creation Example

Let's create the main character from ChaWiOh: Chawi.

Chawi has one extremely notable power: the ability to summon and duel with his deck. Because this power will be used so frequently, this will be the power that has no cost to it.

In addition to this power, other powers that Chawi seems to have because he is a main character in the show are

1. Picking the right card at at improbable times

2. Playing multiple cards despite that being a violation of all rules

3. Ignoring the rules of the card game

The GM looks over the powers and decides that the first one is worth 1 point, the second is worth 3 points, and the third is worth 2 points.

With that, Chawi is ready to play.

Chapter 4

GM Guide: How to GM

Being a GM is both incredibly hard and incredibly fun. You are in control of the world around your players, and it is through your words that you breathe life into the world for your players.

You are responsible for letting the players know what their characters see and know about about the world around them, and how their actions and the actions of the NPCs affect them. Here are a few examples of things you might let the players know.

"Dr. Eeevil appears to be brewing a strange concoction"

"After Dr. Eeevil threw the concoction at your feet, you start to feel really tired".

At times, it might be necessary to have the player roll their dice to see what happens. When this happens, determine the difficulty of the task and tell the player what their target number is. Remember, if you want to have something happen, and there is a chance the rolling might cause that not to happen, it might be better not to give the opportunity to make that roll. Bypassing a potential roll is usually better than setting a super high threshold.

Here are some examples of things you would have the player roll on.

"You take a deep breath to use your super breath, but you inhale more of the concotion's fumes. Roll your die to try resist the effect of the potion. Your target number is 6."

Getting information from your players is just as important as giving your players information on their surroundings. Playing a tabletop game is all about playing out the actions the character would take, and a large part of that is player choice.

Player choice is often a double edged sword, though. With the ability to make choices freely, the players can and will often make a choice you could not have guessed they would do. This often leaves your plan in ruins. This is perfectly normal, and after the first few times it happens, you will get better at modifying your plans when you need.

GM: "As your friend falls face first on the floor into Dr. Eeevil's concotion, what do you do?"

Player "I want to use my power that gives me resistance to poisons and take a drink. Then I'll give Dr. Eeevil a thumbs up and spit some in his face."

GM: "Well, roll that attempt to spit the concotion in his face and let me reread my notes on it quick."

Before the Game

Before playing the game, it's a good idea to talk with your players and find out what things are ok and not ok to have in the game. Some players may be uncomfortable with adult, political, religous, or other topics and not want to see them in the game at all. Alternatively, they may be uncomfortable with a subject, but want to explore it in a manner that is not causing anyone distress. Knowing this beforehand is important to ensuring everyone is comfortable and having fun.

In addition to finding out what your players want in the game, it's important to find out what kind of game your players want to play. It's unfortunate when the GM spends a lot of time on preparing a game and no

one playing the game is interested in playing the game.

PRPG can be any kind of game the players are wanting to play. For example, do the players want to play a mystery game in a steam punk setting? If so, come up with a city to start the players in and give them a mystery to start on. If a setting and world is already available that the players want to play in, that could be used too. If you need help coming up with a world to play in, see chapter 5.

Make sure to talk about the characters your players are going to play as well. Understanding the motivations the characters have will allow you to present interesting choices to your players.

Setting up the game

Planning for and setting up a game can be tricky if you have never done it before. Thankfully, with PRPG, you have the freedom to plan any game very easily.

If your players have a game type they want to play, center your planning around that. For example, it doesn't make sense to plan a dragon attack on a village when your players want to explore the ancient mysteries of a long dead alien race on another planet. This way you plan for something your players want to interact with.

Knowing what kind of players you have is also very important. This lets you create things for specific players to do. You'll find that many players, very broadly speaking, fall into one of the following categories more than another.

Method Actors: Players who enjoy acting out exactly how their character would react to a give situation. Give them something their character finds interesting, whether it's choices, an item, or NPCs to interact with, and they will have a great time.

Tacticians: Players who enjoy coming up with a strategy and seeing it executed to perfection. Unfortunately, PRPG is not aimed entirely at

tacticians. It is still possible to provide situations for them to plan through. When doing so, provide them something concrete to plan with. For example, a map of a building, an artifact that has a particular use, etc.

Story Builders: Story builders are along to tell an interesting and engaging story with their character. Oftentimes they want to have small story arcs to go through with a fulfilling (or cliff hanging) conclusion. They enjoy looking back and seeing how their character affected the story. While giving all players choices that impact the story is a Good Thing, ensure that the Story Builder gets to make some choices.

Running the game

The GM is responsible for letting the players know what their characters see and, if applicable, know about certain subjects. It's always acceptable to have the players roll for something if you're not entirely sure. If they roll really well, maybe they do know something about what's going on. That said, don't roll for everything. Some things, like walking, eating, reading, and other simple tasks are considered automatic and do not require a roll.

In addition to letting the players know what their characters see, the GM is responsible for letting the characters know how the world around them reacts to the things they do. Does that blinged out hippy living in a spare compartment on a blimp react well to the character's attempts to rent out his house? It's up to you to find out and let the players know once you do.

It's possible to accomplish figuring out what happens with rolls, both by the players and the GM. If the player needs to roll, tell them the threshold they need to beat. The following table shows what various difficulty levels are in relation to a threshold modifier.

easy	-3, -2, -1
average	-0
difficult	+1, +2
very difficult	+3
nigh impossible	+4, +5

Chapter 5

GM Guide: Creating worlds

Coming up with a world from scratch can be very difficult. This chapter provides examples of several worlds you could use and walks through creating a world from scratch. If you already know what the world you are playing in is like, just skip this chapter.

To create a world quickly when the players want to start a game, answer the following questions.

1. What setting is the world?

2. What is the world's name?

3. What country are the characters starting in?

4. What city are the characters starting in?

5. What brought the characters together?

Most of these are very simple to do. Naming the city, country, and world should be something that takes a few seconds. Likewise, finding out how the players ended up together shouldn't take too long. You can always have the players talk through how they ended up together while you work on the world.

The setting and technology level are a little more important to the game and are often linked together. Once again you can always ask your players what kind of game they want to play and have them discuss and decide on a setting.

Setting

The setting sets the overall culture and mood of the game. For example, a dystopian steam punk setting should feel different than a medieval fantasy setting. Here is a list of settings to spark an idea.

1. alien invasion

2. cultural renaissance

3. cyberpunk

4. high fantasy

5. horror

6. medieval fantasy

7. post apocalyptic

8. space fantasy

9. steampunk

10. superhero

11. victorian era

If you have trouble coming up with an idea, roll a die and choose that number from the list. Remember to subtract one and reroll if you had a 6.

The setting generally helps set the general technology level of the world. Having the players start in a city with a technology level that makes sense in

the setting is a good idea because it lets them explore the setting they wanted to play in. It's always possible to introduce higher or lower tech civilizations during the game if needed.

Example world creation

It's 17:00, your friends arrived, they're ready to play, but you haven't made the world yet. How will you ever survive?

You think back to talking with your friends and remember them mentioning the word "steampunk" a lot when you were seeing if they were interested in playing a game. Unsure what steampunk is, you do a quick goole search and find out that steampunk is a genre defined by incorporating technology and aesthetic designs inspired by 19th century industrial steam-powered machinery. While not a complete description, you feel confident that you can throw in a lot of steam powered tech into the game.

You decide to name the world Challac for no particular reason, and name the country the players are in Zigwan. You see one of your players boiling some water for tea and decide to call the city Hydronia. You call over to your players "Alright, so how do you all know each other?"

You listen while they discuss this for a few minutes. It sounds like a large dimensional portal showed up in their house one day. They grabbed a few things they though was important and then hopped through the portal. Now they've all ended up in the city of Hydronia. You decide they're in the boiler disctrict.

"Alright", you say, "After you all jump through the portal, you see a large flash of light. You all feel like you're falling both up and down at the same time, but you're not moving. You see a faint light on the other end, and suddenly, without warning, you're thrust out into an unfamiliar place. If you want to try land without falling over, make a roll." (Note: No threshold was specified, therefore it is safe to assume the threshold is 4.)

And the game begins!

Sample premade worlds

Sometimes having a simple world to extend makes things much easier. Here are 3 worlds you're free to use, modify, take parts of, etc. These have been expanded on a little more than any world rolled up in 5 minutes to provide some ideas for plotlines and problems the players may face.

Andania

Setting: Dystopian Medieval Fantasy

Andania is a world steeped in magic. Think of traditional fantasy tropes where elves live in splendid forest cities, dragons have large lairs filled with treasure, and the countries you find are usually under a fuedal ruling system. Kings and queens make royal decrees based on their Grand Vizier's advice (don't trust him!), and peasants work hard to make a living.

Andania's largest country, Li'talini was founded by elves over 7,000 years ago. Like any good country that's been around a long time, a fair amount of rot has set into the governing system.

The capital and seat of power in Li'talini is Hallah. The king makes his home here and employs spies and assassins from Arcanus Universitas, the university of magic, to constantly keep watch on the citizens and officials in his empire. Being an elf himself, the king is no stranger to using magic and has been ruling the empire with his queen in the marble palace since the founding of the empire.

Despite the city's reputation as "The Shining City", Hallah has been steadily falling into a state of disrepair for the past 500 years. At first it wasn't so noticable, a street in need of repair here or some dirty water there, but now the city has fallen into desparate need of repair. Despite the need to fix issues in the city, the king refuses to spend any money on fixing issues. Instead, he spends his money making the surveilance of the population more complete and his magical enforcement squads more efficient and horribly

brutal.

The enforcement squads are often seen wandering the streets, usually patrolling to "keep the peace". Peace, however, seems very far away when they arrive. Citizens of the empire know well the explosive anger of the squads, and they never know exactly why they are there. With how many citizens are informants for the empire (not usually by choice), they can never know when something they said will prompt an unwelcome visit.

Most cities in the empire have reached a point of near perfect surveilance, magical or otherwise. A few towns near the border haven't yet had informants pop up in them, but it's only a matter of time before they do. Once an enforcement squad arrives in the town, informants will abound as desparate citizens try to placate the squads and provide information to protect themselves and their families.

Strangely, these towns and villages near the border don't seem to be in as bad a state of disrepair as the rest of the empire.

Yet.

ACX-19936 (Lindor)

Setting: Utopian, post-apocalyptic space fantasy

ACX-19936, locally known as Lindor, is part of the Sha-lorakkian divine theocracy. The Sha-Lorakian theoracy has been expanding through their corner of the galaxy for 75 years. They've acquired 6 planets that can support life and has had a boom of emigration from their capital planet to these new and exciting worlds. Due to their high levels of industrialization and easy access to building materials, cities spring up almost overnight as the population surges outward.

On Lindor, things started mostly the same. Large amounts of immigrants to Lindor created demand for housing and basic amenities, like running water. Resources were allocated to urban and economic growth on Lindor, and cities sprung up almost overnight.

Unfortunately for those on Lindor, the planet was not always unoccupied. Several digsites revealed that the planet was occupied by some manner of alien in the far distant past. Translation work on any recods of the civilization left were underway, and good progress was being made. Until a researcher translating an old military report found a terrible message.

The report contained references to a super virus that escaped military confinement. The report contains thousands of attempts to synthesize a cure, none of which were ever remotely promising. Towards the end of the report, there is mention of a containment chamber being built with large amounts of nuclear warheads placed around it and rigged to blow. The report does not mention a successful completion or detonation of these warheads.

Before a warning could be sent out to Lindor, a prospecting company following a particularly rich mineral scan drilled down and struck a cavern. A drone sent down to investigate found millions of corpses piled in the cavern, and a small team of investigators were sent down to look around. Unfortunately, they made it back out as well.

Reports of a plague of untold proportions began rolling into the capital. The brightest scientests and virologists began studying samples brought in from Lindor in extremely isolated and heavily decontaminated chambers. Everytime the virologists thought they were close, the virus would seem to change slightly and stop binding to the protiens used.

In desperation, a small group of diseased people re-entered the chamber to try find any secrets left behind. Instead of secrets, they activated the nuclear warheads the aliens had not managed to detonate. As the main explosion ripped apart many of the cities, spewing radiation and dust into the air, several smaller explosions further out spread the destruction even further.

Declaring the situation a disaster and contamination zone, the capital quarantined all traffic coming out off of Lindor and shut down all flights to the surface. For 5 more years the population of Lindor was mostly cut off from the rest of the Sha-Lorakkian theocracy, only receiving resources through orbital drops. Finally, a breakthrough occured and a cure to the super virus was synthesized.

The first shipment of the synthesized cure dropped down sparked massive riots in the streets as everyone tried to be the first to use the cure. Due to the riots, only a few people managed to use the cures before the rest were accidentally broken by those fighting desparately over it.

As production of the cure ramped up, riots over the air dropped cures became less frequent, disappearing altogether after 3 years. The capital has released the quarantine on the planet after 8 years, and cleanup crews to deal with the places of high radiation and devestation from the nukes are on their way to the planet.

Due to the devestation wrought by the nukes, it's just as common to see tall, beautiful, sweeping city scapes with areas of destruction here and there. Most of the technology is still functional, and the planet is on it's way to recovery.