Gut Reaction RPG

"You study long, you study wrong!"

By Emmett O'Brian

Thanks to Jason Tocci for inventing the "THINGS" acronym and categories.

Gut Reaction RPG makes each interaction in the game center around intuitive choices. This extends to the play being a conversation and the resolution mechanic being all about quick judgement calls.

Rules

Whenever a player says something that is challenged by another player (GM or otherwise) by saying "Roll for that". The player who has been challenged rolls a die, player's choice, go with your gut feeling.

The number result is either low, average or high. The specific number doesn't matter, only the number relative to what could have been rolled. Higher numbers are better, lower numbers worse.

The player will then consider their character description and based on that will declare a success or a failure. Make this a quick a gut reaction to the roll and their character's background. If you have to think a long time about the factors that influence the roll, you're not relying on your gut. Describe why you think they succeeded or failed.

If the player declared a success the challenger then considers the task at hand and the number rolled. They may describe one thing the speaker was not aware of that made the task harder than they expected it to be. If they think the die roll was high enough, they agree to the success. If they think the roll was too low, they declare "THINGS". (See THINGS below) The character succeeds but with a complication. The challenger should go with their gut reaction to the roll, not a lengthy accounting of different factors.

If the player speaking decides they failed the roll they may briefly describe the failure on their character sheet. At the end of the game session these failures will be used to amend the character sheet with what was learned.

THINGS

These are various complications that can happen. The character has succeeded in doing what they set out to do but with consequences. The player that was challenged chooses from Time, Harm, Impediments, Notice, Gear or Social. Remember to go with your gut feeling for your choice.

Time – The task takes longer than expected which makes things harder. If the player describes a time limit that the characters are up against, a quarter of it is lost. Travel might be slowed or the character has dropped behind.

Harm – The character, an ally or someone important to the character (someone they'd protect) gets hurt during the character's actions.

Impediments – A new obstacle is in your way. A fire starts, an advantageous position you had is now useless or you're cornered and unable to escape.

Notice – You draw unwanted attention to yourself, revealing you to people you didn't want to know you were there.

When it comes to Harm, there are no hit points or wound tracking here. Describe what makes sense and it is recorded on the page. Any harm should be considered when rolling for challenges. The player controlling a character can declare that they have died at any time.

Gear – Supplies have been drained or something the character uses is damaged. Maybe a bag was ripped open and a substantial amount of money fell out, a weapon broke or a tool bent when using too much force.

Social – You've embarrassed yourself, offended someone important or possibly now owe a debt to someone.

Once a category of THINGS is chosen, the challenger describes what the effect is. Any effects on the character should be noted on the character's sheet or on the setting sheet for NPCs.

These descriptions are not all inclusive, players can be creative in applying THINGS as consequences.

Setting up Setting

Play with a Game Master or without. This depends on the feel that is desired for the game. Setting up a setting can be done by a single player (most often a GM) or as a group effort. If playing without a GM and if desirable even if you're

playing as a GM, discuss the setting with the other players. Write down any uncontested elements.

During this conversation, if a player wants something for the game it should be included unless challenged. Run the challenge as normal using the written down aspects of the setting sheet.

If a challenge goes to THINGS, use the following.

Time – The setting element described is not currently true, it was either true in the recent past or is moving in that direction.

Harm – The setting element described is in danger of destruction.

Impediments – The element described is surrounded by problems, like the police always investigating an organization or it's impossible to get to that mountain that was described.

Notice – Anyone involving themselves in the setting element makes them stick out like a sore thumb.

Gear – Too much material and wealth has been spent on the setting element involved leading to ruin.

Social – The setting element is embarrassing or offensive to many.

The element and THINGS associated with it are then recorded.

The setting is done when everyone has contributed or has passed on contributing.

The Characters

Imagine a character sheet with no numbers, no stats, no values. Just backstory. You are in charge of your character so there are no challenges during this process, just some instructions to balance things out. However, your background may not be completely true and so saying you're the greatest that ever lived may just be hot air and the other players can call you on it.

Write out what your character has done in their lives so far. Make it as long or short as you like. Describe at least one triumph the character has had in their life and at least one terrible event. For every triumph there should be a terrible event.

If there are other player characters, work with at least one to describe a special relationship you have with them. Describe at least two people that are not player characters and why they are important to your character.

Now add any details you feel are missing.

You're ready to play.

Play Instructions

Challenges are used to add excitement to the conversation. Using them too frequently or punitively won't make the game more fun. Allow simple and necessary things happen easily.

Select a durable and distinct object such as a shiny palm sized rock or a singularly large die. This is "the token" and signifies who will lead the conversation. The player with the token talks and other players can respond to them or call for a challenge. If the token is set in the middle of the table or floor, it is time for a open discussion. While in open discussion, there are no challenges and no actions taken. When the token is picked up by one person, it should not be set in the middle of the table until everyone has had a chance to have it.

The first job is to set the scene. If there is a GM, then they will take this job. They pick up the token and describe the scene. If playing without a GM, one player takes the token and starts describing the scene. Any NPCs or locations that are established are recorded on the setting sheet along with who is responsible for their creation. Scene setting can be challenged using the setting sheet as a gauge. The more closely the scene matches the setting the easier it should be to pass a challenge.

Once the scene is set, the token is either placed in the middle for discussion or handed to the scene setter's left. Passing the token does not have to proceed directly around the table, but no player should ever be skipped. A player may take the token and then pass it if they desire.

Each player has responsibility over their own character. No player should say what

When having a conversation about in game events, challenges may not work exactly as players initially expect. For example, if a player says that an NPC is going to stab a Player Character to death, the first reaction of the player may be to challenge that. However, if it's done that way, unless the NPC's roll is clearly a fail, the player character is now dead. The NPC may have to suffer THINGS, but they still succeed. It's better to respond "I protect myself and pull the knife from his hand." Now that action can be challenged. The player may have to suffer THINGS, but they can now live.

another player's character will say or do. If a character is under an influence of someone or thing, they still retain control of their character but any action that goes against the influence should be challenged. This applies to player characters as well as NPCs created while setting a scene.

Ending a Session

Once a session concludes, the token is passed to each player, including the GM if there is one. The status of characters that are not dead are reviewed.

If there is an NPC that is no longer relevant the creator of that NPC may take them out of play and any further consideration.

Any characters that have suffered Harm and are not declared dead have all their injuries reviewed. The character's owner may decide that the character dies. Now each player gives a thumbs up or down for the character. If the setting has powerful healing effects, this should make it easier to recover. If half or more players give the character a thumbs down based on if they think the character could have survived, the creator must decide between death or grievous harm. If opting for grievous harm, the other players offer a description of the harm choosing different THINGS. The creator may ask for different THINGS from each player but they have to write down one of the responses.

Any living characters with failures are now considered. The creator asks what the character might have learned from these failures. Each player can offer a new insight or suggest strengthening an existing description in the character's description.