

## The Craft of Novel to Game

By Jay Libby

The process of taking a novel and converting it into a Role-Playing Game is complex. You need to be able to strip down the text and organize it in a way that is free flowing in all directions and allows for creative freedom. When you do this, the rules of continuity vanish and historical events can change. In the following pages I will show you how to take your piece of fiction and make it a game yourself, using *Xenomorph Invasion* as a template. It is important to remember that this is a pen and paper game, one that uses dice, not game controllers. The RPG (Role-Playing Game) is probably one of the most sacred Easter Eggs in the field of education. So buckle up and get ready. It's time to get into the craft.

So what is a Role-Playing Game?

Did you ever imagine yourself hunting Indians in the old West or on a ship in the Pacific fighting the Japanese during WWII? That is role playing, you are assuming the role of an imaginary person or maybe pretending to be someone famous, but the fact is you are acting out like the person you want to be. In RPGs you do the same thing. You roll up a character based on your wants and needs. You pick skills and buy gear that best fits what you want to be. If you want to be a cowboy in the Wild West you'd pick skills like Horseback Riding, Pistols and Rope Tricks. This would help define your character. You wouldn't take a skill like Pilot: Jet in a cowboy game, would you? RPGs have been around for ages in one form or another. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson released *Dungeons & Dragons*<sup>i</sup> in 1974.

The Concept

The novel *Xenomorph Invasion* was spawned through many years of science fiction and horror fandom. The book itself is like a *Robotech*<sup>ii</sup>, versus *Aliens*<sup>iii</sup>, meets *Transformers*<sup>iv</sup>, with a touch of Cthulhu<sup>v</sup>. The central theme of the book was based around conspiracy and mistrust. A military in ruins after a coupe, the children of the coupe leaders being manipulated by a shadowy figure, and religious blindness that would

spell the end for an entire world. The novel had all of these. The game would have to take it all a step further. If people were going to play characters in this setting, they would have to be mistrusting of their fellow gamers. No one could have sides, because anyone could be a spy, anyone could be contaminated. As for big guns and bigger robots, it didn't matter, because you can't hide inside a cockpit your entire life, and who isn't to say that your wingman isn't zeroed in on you?

There were several different pieces that went into the novel. I wanted to have transformable space fighters, much like you would find in the *Robotech* series. There needed to be an alien threat that was as menacing as the creatures in *Aliens*. Considering how slow technology has progressed over the last fifty years, even with such innovations as the microprocessor and wireless internet, I wanted a technological advantage. The Hbots, my race of robots would be the ones to give humanity their technical edge. Last but not least there had to be some type of link. In several stories by H. P. Lovecraft<sup>vi</sup> we are introduced to the Old Ones<sup>1</sup>. What I have done is connected the Hbots and Xmorphs at their source, although it is not explained in the novel.

The next big step would be putting it all together in a pen and paper game format. That meant having a solid setting. Players need to feel like they are right there on that planet, in that space and flying around that system. Setting is very important to any game. The plot would need to be deep. A simple "Mankind fights aliens" has been done so many times it's boring, both to read and play. What I had to do is come up with a plot so thick that it would make tar look watery. The theme of the game is simple: Trust No One! Then you also must have a supporting cast of characters. In novels characters make things happen. Without them there wouldn't be anything. In pen and paper games, these characters are called "Non-Player Characters" or NPCs. The NPC is used to help players gain direction in some form or fashion. The NPC can be anything from a bartender to a rival fighter pilot who has a serious issue with the player's character (called a PC). Pen and paper games also have characters called "Generic NPCs." These Generics are no-named people who take up space, but are important enough to mention. These could be a large crowd of rioters, police, hordes of alien monsters or a robotic crew. Your generic is

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<sup>1</sup> An ancient race believed to have created mankind and the universe.

usually falls into the category of the “Red Shirt.”<sup>2</sup> They have a great smile, but a greater death scream.

### The Creation Process

Making your novel a Role-Playing Game is not as easy as it may sound. There are serious things to consider when getting out your legal pad and jotting down ideas. You need to be able to pull the setting apart, the plot, the theme, and the characters. It’s not enough that your novel takes place in a quite dwarven village in the kingdom of Kal. People want to know about government, religion, weather, geography and other things that we as writers do not always consider. While most novels touch base on these things, they do not go in depth enough like a game requires. Short stories suffer even worse. You have to create some of these core components from scratch.

The plot is important, because people want to know what is happening and why. If you are a crusader looking to free the Holy lands, people want to know why you are doing it. A game MUST have purpose. In classic RPGs the plots were more or less epic campaigns with a group of heroes questing in hopes of saving their homeland or family. But the plot is always based upon the setting. Without a proper setting, the plot of the RPG is left undefined.

The theme of games tends to be: Good versus evil, with good always being weak in the beginning and evolving into the heroic form. Each character has their own theme, however. In some games that is defined in the alignment, demeanor, or disposition. Players who chose a theme for their character must live and die by this. Any deviation can result in horrific events. In some cases that themed character can change, but there is always cause and effect. A vile hero (yes vile) could decide that his many years of butchering the peasants to fund his crusade to help the king, is not going to send him to heaven. The character then starts sparing peasants and soon he is redeemed, but will always have the reputation of being a butcher. To his peers he will be considered an outcast and a coward, making the player a target for anyone who feels like taking him out like an old dog and killing him.

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<sup>2</sup> Red Shirt is the theory that everyone on Star Trek who wore a red shirt was killed. This was mostly true since the ensigns had red shirts and they tended to be the first to die every time Kirk went down to a planet.

Characters are also an important ingredient. While players will be the main characters, they will not be the characters from the book. Characters from the book always fall into the category of Non-Player Characters, unless the person running the game wants to redefine your entire piece. As a writer, we don't need to always come up with complete histories for our characters, especially ones that appear on and off throughout our pieces. In RPGs every character must have a full history behind them. The Game Master (GM)<sup>3</sup> needs to know what makes interactive NPCs tick. Was Fred the dwarf involved in the ten decade war against the king? He is old enough. Every little piece of information on characters is vital to a successful game. I like to call it "The Collateral" because anytime there is some way to connect players with NPCs I do it. Players who are playing your game are doing so must likely because they have read your book. If they can meet the characters you have created and interact with them then there is going to be a better chance that they will come back for more. In addition to all this players need some type of occupation. Are they journalists, medics, soldiers? The occupation helps define the direction in which the player must go throughout a game. Also, while you compile a list of occupations, make a long list of skills that each occupation has. Then beside each skill, write one or two lines defining them. This will come into play later.

The best way to form the start of your game is to follow these steps:

- 1) Define the setting: World, country, town, home. Religions. Geography.
- 2) What is the plot? What is happening to make the players get involved?
- 3) What type of theme? Good vs. Evil? Weak vs. Strong?
- 4) Full write-ups for every character. Make sure that you make a list of all your characters and write at least a half a page of history to go with them.
- 5) Make the occupation list. Include a list of skills that each occupation requires with one or two lines about the skill.

The very last thing you need is a game mechanic. In the RPG industry there are plenty of game systems to go around. Everything from Wizards of the Coast's™ D20 system, to Steve Jackson Games'™ system GURPS™ is available. In some cases you

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<sup>3</sup> Game Master (GM) is someone who runs the game. They act as a story teller and control the generics and the NPCs. A good GM can run a single campaign for years.

need to get permission to use a 3<sup>rd</sup> party's mechanics. Dilly Green Bean Games offers The Basic System©, a free house system that is designed for easy use for both GMs and players. For *Xenomorph Invasion* we will be using the Fuzion™ system owned by R. Talsorian Games™ out of Washington state. This system requires a low royalty fee for the use of the mechanic, but it has spawned classic games like *Bubblegum Crisis*, *VOTOMS*, and *Sengoku*<sup>4</sup>. My development crew has taken R. Talsorian's *MEKTON* rules and converted them to the Fuzion system for use with XI. We'll get more into rules and mechanics later.

### Setting

In all fiction we have setting, but in the RPG we have the campaign setting. This is where a writer who wishes to make their story into a game must really work. It's not enough to just say you are somewhere. The campaign setting includes all aspects of writing. The who, what, when and where all apply. Without it, the RPG campaign setting would make for bad entertainment. The setting of XI is comparable to Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* setting. XI takes place in the distant future with many worlds to explore. XI was partially influenced by the *Starship Troopers* movie, which offered vivid imagery that was essential to my novel version of XI. The overall setting of the game would have to be expansive. While my novel took place on ships and three worlds, the game would have to allow for people to go further. In RPGs this is important. People who read the novel might not be willing to take missions for certain officers, go to certain worlds or even leave their cockpit. It is important to entice a player to explore beyond the boundaries of the novel. In the game we have offered up places like the Pegasus Prime proving grounds, which get mention and maybe two pages of actual time in the book. In the game, every pilot must go here to learn to fly the Stingray transformable fight or more commonly known as the SR. We have Russian Liberation Force construction worlds for players who might want to do some piracy or saboteur missions. There are hundreds of colonies just waiting to be harassed and conquered. Last but not least, there is the outer frontier. This place is where all the mystery lies.

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<sup>4</sup> *Sengoku* is property of Gold Rush Games™.

As you can see, I have pulled apart the *Xenomorph Invasion* novel and placed on the table different places that make up the larger setting. But the timeline is also important. XI takes place in the distant future, but players and game masters will want to know what happened before all this. In RPGs, the past is vital to any long lasting game. Disasters, enemies, events all play an important role in the RPG. Sometimes the GM might run a game set in the past. XI mentions the Fourth Colony War in the history of the UEU flag officers. Something that a GM would have to keep in mind would be that a lot of the technology from the XI game did not come until after the Fourth Colony War.

Let's take a look at the basic timeline for XI:

2040: Luna City is established on the moon.

2060: Man lands on Mars

2080: The first colony is established on Mars

3000: California sinks into the Pacific Ocean.

3012: Lava emerges in Yellow Stone National Park, a volcano soon forms.

3016: Russia builds massive ironworks across the country in hopes of revitalizing their nation.

3020: Russia is declared an environmental disaster zone caused by their ironworks.

3042: The Russian Liberation Force is form. They close down the ironworks and evacuate Russia, taking their citizens on colony ships into space.

3050: The First Great Outbreak. Hundreds of nations reach to the stars as colony ships race to far off worlds to claim planets for themselves.

3052: The RLF sets up shipyards near Jupiter and begins building bigger and better colony ships for the nations of Earth.

3067: A Chinese colony ship *Mao* is lost while attempting to leave the solar system.

3072: Explorers and scientists discover a hyperspace jump point near Pluto, near the site where the Chinese ship vanished.

3075: Several colony ships are lost after entering the hyperspace jump point at Pluto.

3078: A science ship enters the hyperspace jump point at Pluto and returns with loads of data. Several lost ships are found.

3081: The Second Great Outbreak. Humankind is able to travel to far off galaxies using hyperspace.

3093: The First Great War. As colonies are being established, countries go to war over planetary rights. This war is fought on a ground level, with rival nations sending in soldiers to reclaim colony worlds.

3095: The First Great War ends. The Earth Command is established in order to maintain peace on the colonies.

3099: The Second Great War begins. As supplies run short, colonies are forced to raid supply ships, setting off a massive space war. The E.C. sends ships to stop the fighting.

4003: The Second Great War ends. Millions of colonists have been killed and the E.C. has a military presence on the outer colonies.

4010: A Christian missionary ship discovers New Eden and ancient ruins.

4023: The Galactic Church of Christ is formed and using alien technology, the GCC creates planetary shields to keep out unbelievers.

4036: The Third Great War begins after pirates destroy an E.C. frigate.

4039: The Sting fighter is built by the RLF. The E.C. uses these fighters to end the Third Great War. The Banshee power armor, the Prowler and the STUB are all in production.

4056: Genetic engineers grow Mars for military application.

4060: The Fourth Great Wars begins. Colonists, tired of being ruled under martial law, overthrow the local military. Several colony worlds amass a large fleet at the outer frontier. In the first year, several E.C. ships are destroyed.

4067: The Fourth Great Colony War ends. The E.C. makes massive technological advancements after one of their scientists receives data from deep space.

4068: The Pluto Research Facility is established on the site of an old science post. The facility is assigned the mission of developing new technology and weapons. Alpha is brought online.

4069: Mars goes insane and kills dozens of doctors and military personnel, before escaping from the laboratory where he was grown. The Stingray Fighter, a transformable jet, is produced. The Bulldog follows. Both of these machines use the Q-Chip.

4072: Mars emerges with a large army of colonists and a bigger fleet of ships.

4073: The MORDUM War begins. The Terror Guard are let loose on New Africa and a E.C. ambassador is killed. The E.C. orders the Terror Guard put on ice. An E.C.

contingent sets down on a GCC planet only to be attacked by Crusaders. The E.C. declares GCC worlds off limits.

4075: The E.C. is overthrown by military officers and the United Earth Union is formed. Mars loses part of his fleet to a warp bomb. This same bomb destroys a hyperspace jump point leaving hundreds of colonies cut off from their supplies. The Warp bomb is banned by the UEU.

4079: The MORDUM War ends with billions dead or missing. A faction of the GCC declares war on the UEU. They infiltrate the RLF shipyards.

4082: The *Calisto* is commissioned and sent on a deep space exploration mission.

4083: The *Calisto* encounters the Xmorphs in deep space and is consumed. New Eden is attacked by a massive Xmorph and the planet is infested after the planetary shields are destroyed. First contact is made with the Hbots. Marduk appears, causing chaos across the human empire as the second in command of MORDUM.

4084: The Xmorph exodus begins at the cost to the Hbots after their flagship is sucked into a wormhole after a warp bomb is used near New Eden. Mars is thought to have been killed, but his body is put on ice. Marduk assists the UEU at New Eden, but vanishes after detonating a warp bomb. The UEU regroups and makes a peace treaty with the Hbots.

4090: The game today.....

With the timeline in place game masters will have an understanding of why things are the way they are.

Next we have to move onto places within the campaign setting. It's not enough to say that a game takes place on a planet. When developing a game, the writer must also include items like: geography, politics, population, religion and weather. Now take a step back and look at the big picture. For every world that you include from your book you must have these items included. Some people use basic information, while others go so far in-depth one might consider moving there. If a player is on one world where it might be ruled by a Senate and then travels to another ruled by a dictator, they could find themselves in direct conflict. This conflict would cause the player to question and

possibly get involved in other sub-plots. When a game takes place on a space ship, still ask the same questions as you would for a planet. Geography would cover the layout of the ship. Politics might include the chain of command and the loyalty factor. These items all play out well in Ben Bova's novel *Mars*. In XI that is a very large part of the theme. Religion is vital because death is around every corner. Will the crew act if they are faced with something that is unholy? Weather does play a part. Is the ship old and lacking decent environmental controls? Is it cold all the time or is it extremely humid like we see in the film *Alien*? Is the ship sweating? Is the inner hull frosted? If you haven't answered these questions than you haven't really done enough to catch the location. Writers should always look at the detail from the story and make sure you can explain it in the game format.

## Plot

The plot of a story helps move things along. Without plot you get a senseless Hollywood action film with all the action, but nothing behind it. When first working on *Xenomorph Invasion* I had no real plot, at least not defined. Although, in the long run there was a plot, but at first the book was more of a bloody battle between aliens, religious fanatics and the military. When pulling from a story to make a game, the writer takes on a daunting task. Your main character is now no longer the only focus. Every character that has a name needs to have a sub-plot. The main plot must use these sub-plots to intertwine with one another. It is vital to look past the story and dig deeper. Why would a madman want to kill Bobby? Why would Boddy want to sleep with Jill? Why does Jill not like condoms? They all connect. Connecting the sub-plots in XI was chaotic. I will discuss some of this in the Character section. The sub-plots work like this:

- The Shadow Guard commander (Admiral Paqui) wants Brad Hogan and Lisa Mariner dead because he considers their parents 'in the way.' Mark Redford gets sucked into it because he knows it will cause pain to both Brad and Lisa.
- Mark Redford/Marduk is in love with Lisa. He rarely shows it, but there are scenes where you get the hint. As Marduk he is forced to fight against the UEU and it causes him mental trauma. Marduk is determined to make Admiral Paqui and Mars pay.

- Tubi Mariner and Sgt. Reynolds are old war buddies. They stick together because they can trust each other. Trust is a hard thing to come by. The one thing that these two men share in common is the dedication to the mission and the people under them.
- Admiral Hogan has become a family man. He does the formalities with the UEU because it was agreed upon during the coupe. He doesn't care for how Admiral Paqui gets free reign, but doesn't want to put anyone at risk by speaking up.
- Admiral Wentworth struggles to make the right choices, but always has Paqui over his shoulder. Wentworth actually fears that Paqui might assassinate him. When the Xmorphs arrive, he thinks that he can rely on Paqui's reserve fleet to deal with it. He is wrong and now he must make up for his mistake.
- Lisa Mariner never really knew her father. She spends her life being perfect, but letting her cockiness get in the way. She ultimately would like see her father again.
- Brad Hogan always felt like he had to make something of himself. He was jealous of Mark because his own father always talked about the rogue pilot. Brad was determined to show everyone up. In the end he paid for it with his life. Or did he? This sub-plot will lead into the next book or game.
- Admiral Tanaka is a proud man. So proud that he has determined that he alone should run the fleets of the UEU. At the same time, he admires Admiral Hogan for his dedication and misses Capt. Mariner's wit. Tanaka is set in his mind to take out Admiral Paqui, even if it means another civil war. Tanaka isn't foolish, and knows what is best for humanity and won't do anything to jeopardize it.
- Major Zorn is the tight SR pilot who follows Paqui around to make sure he isn't up to any good. Zorn is a seasoned pilot. His instinct in space battles make him invaluable. Behind his cold demeanor is a man who wants to see peace. Wars have scarred him and the threat of the Xmorph has made him grow tired of killing. He is waiting for the chance to either leave Paqui's side or kill him.

Theme

The theme of any story or novel is critical. There should always be some underlying theme to any piece of work. Theme offers some type of direction for the plot. In a story the theme of 'taking one for the team' could help drive the plot. An example of Billy spraining his wrist during the last two minutes of a game, mixed with the rival coach telling his players to hurt Billy no matter the penalty helps drive plot. Billy staying in the game helps drive theme. All of these are mixed together. Now in XI, the theme is survival. One could argue Good versus Evil, but the plots in the novel make it hard to tell who is really good and who is really evil. As a writer we do that to make people think. In a game you need to have those characters defined. In the previous section you can see how character subplots drive a game. The theme of survival is a strong one for a game. Players have to use their intellect to make it through each situation. It's not enough to go guns blazing into a room full of aliens, because there is always more to it. In the novel *Aliens: Earth Hive* by Steve Perry, the aliens have acidic blood. Running into that room and tossing a grenade would not only be messy, but it could be a deadly mistake. Or players could be trapped on a alien world like in Lois McMaster Bujold's novel *Cordelia's Honor*, where not only the situation is hostile with an enemy officer, but the environment is dangerous too. The greatest threat to human survival in XI is not human greed, although it plays a big part, but the Xmorph gene. One cell from an Xmorph entering hyperspace can grow into a creature the size of a small moon. Players are forced to stay 'clean' in the game. One wrong shot, one splotch of alien blood and it could spell doom for an entire ship. That is why 'survival' is the theme of XI.

## Characters

When writing a novel there is always freedom to make suggestive hints about characters without having to come right out and define them. It allows for character development. Usually a whole novel is spent helping define the one or more characters without spelling it out. When you take your piece over to the Role Playing Game, you then must throw aside your creative fluff and turn your character into a complete person. No stone may be left unturned. This piece of the process can be hard for the die hard writer. The temptation to leave something out, to offer that taste of mystery is too tempting. At the same time, a game writer who tries to write fiction tends to give you the whole character

in one paragraph, dedicating the rest of the novel to action. That was my greatest flaw with the XI novel. I was so used to writing static character write-ups that I didn't offer at first that mystery behind the men and women of the book. Of course, after rewrites it began to take more mysterious shapes. A good example of the static writing style is in Steve Perry's *Aliens: Earth Hive*. His representations are so static that you already know how the characters are going to act before you get past the first two chapters. There is no mysterious development. In XI, I used the character of Mark Redford/Marduk to offer up my mysterious character. Mark Redford was a crazy pilot who happened to be friends with two other supporting characters; Brad Hogan and Lisa Mariner. When Mark became Marduk, his fate and personality became uncertain. He felt for the refugees he was living with, and was serving the needs of MORDUM. At the same time he kept having flashbacks of a former life. In the end it is the flashbacks that make Marduk realize that Mars was truly a bastard and needed to be killed. And he does just that. But all these things we learn through reading the book, or at least the chapters dedicated to him. But now take a look at how I took all that information and made it into game format:

Marduk

Real Name: Mark Redford

Title: Leader of MORDUM

Age: 23

Sex: Male

Hair Color: Black

Eye Color: Grey

Planet of Origin: New Canada

Base of Operations: Mobile

Mark Redford was born and raised on New Canada. His parents were revolutionaries during the Fourth Great Colony War and served MORDUM during the MORDUM War. Hoping to protect their son from the life they were living, Mark was sent away to the Earth Command Flight School. His parents died shortly afterwards in a battle that not only killed them, but Admiral Paqui's brother. Mark was considered an outcast. Most of the pilots in his class were from the upper levels of society. Still, Mark pressed on and

soon became an ace pilot with a nasty reputation. Instead of blending in with his fellow pilots, Mark began fights with anyone who looked at him wrong. His piloting skills caught the attention of Capt. Hogan, who took it upon himself to oversee Mark's future. Shortly after his eighteenth birthday, Mark was kicked out of flight school for one too many violations. The exiled pilot was stuck on Earth with no friends and no family. When the UEU began the annual fighter races, Mark scavenged junk yards and got himself a pit crew. In his first race, Mark gave the pilots a run for their money and actually won. At that first race he met Brad Hogan and Lisa Mariner. The three of them bonded. While Brad didn't like Mark and the two bickered constantly, they were both on the same page. In the middle, was Lisa who liked Brad, but had a crush on Mark. The next couple years that followed put the three together in the UEU Flight Academy on Earth. Capt. Hogan sponsored Mark secretly. In his last race before the real trouble began, Mark rigged his fighter with a jump system prototype. His hopes of getting the attention of the UEU brass did just that. Mark ripped open time and space in Earth's atmosphere and set off global alarms. Only with the help of Brad was Mark able to escape death and shut down the jump drive. Mark was thrown in the brig and put on trial. During his hearing, Admiral Paqui and Admiral Tanaka got into a fist fight. Tanaka demanded Mark be shot while Paqui had other ideas. Mark was set free under Admiral Paqui's care. But the cost of freedom was high. Mark had to carry out a mission for the Shadow Corps. Not knowing what he was getting himself into, Mark piloted a freighter to the planet Dyphin with a team of Terror Guard onboard. While waiting for the Terror Guard to return back to the ship, Mark let curiosity get the best of him. He activated the freighter's scanners and took a peak at the intended target. Mark was horrified. The Terror Guard were heading for a forestry township. Feeling betrayed, Mark grabbed a crate with anti-mech rockets and proceeded to the attack site. Watching from a distance, Mark could see flames and smoke. The echoes of screams pierced his ears. Mark intervened. Rocket after rocket made short work of the Terror Guard attackers, but Mark was too quick to inspect the combat site. When he arrived he was greeted by one angry Terror Guard who survived the betrayal. Mark tried his best to kill the Terror Guard soldier, but was mortally wounded in the fight and blacked out from the pain. Mark woke up days later in a hospital on Dyphon, surrounded by MORDUM guards. He felt

differently and had no recollection of his past. Mars, the leader of MORDUM, sat with Mark and called him Marduk. During his time unconscious, Mark was injected with a DNA concoction that mimicked Mars' own genetic structure. The end result was the creation of Marduk. Still confused, Marduk broke out of the hospital and fled into the forest where he encountered refugees. Mars soon followed and told Marduk he could stay there as long as he needed to. Marduk rested, but soon a mind began to reach out to him, calling for help. Marduk asked one of the refugees why Mars had come to Dyphin. She told Marduk about an ancient temple and a Galactic Church of Christ Keeper who had been kidnapped by Mars. Hoping to create a new army, Mars tried to use GCC ancient technology to make a new form of human. That human was Marduk. Needing to know more, Marduk went to the temple where he found a brutalized Keeper. While talking to the Keeper, Marduk realized that it was this beaten man that had been reaching out to him telepathically. The Keeper needed Marduk to open the temple doors so the Crusaders could be released. Marduk fled the temple to warn the refugees. Shortly after the refugee camp was evacuated the Crusaders arrived. Only using their human sized form, they made short work of the soldiers left behind. Marduk couldn't understand why Mars would leave everyone to die. At the landing platform, Marduk was forced to fend off the Crusaders. The battle was bloody and when all seemed lost, Mars appeared like an angel and rescued the refugees and Marduk. It was this moment that made Marduk join MORDUM. Two months passed, as Marduk made a name for himself as the second in command of MORDUM. It wasn't until his final MORDUM mission with Mars, that Marduk came to see who he really was. During the raid of the *Devastator*, Marduk came face to face with Admiral Hogan. Caught in a massive flashback, Marduk got his memory back and turned on Mars, who was pressuring him to kill the Admiral. Marduk drove his combat knife into Mars' skull. The battle was far from over. That same battle also brought to light a new threat, the Xmorphs. Marduk traveled with Admiral Hogan to New Eden, the origin to the Xmorph threat to the human empire. On the way there, the ship's doctor discovered a way to genetically halt the evolutionary process of the Xmorphs. Marduk volunteered to deliver the antidote as a way to redeem himself for all past crimes. During the Battle of New Eden, Marduk struck the Xmorph hive with the antidote and

then vanished. Days later, Marduk was spotted leading a fleet of MORDUM ships out of the Milky Way galaxy. His current whereabouts are unknown.

#### Development:

Mark was originally going to be my throw away side character, but the more I thought about it the more it made sense to do more. Why not make Mark the key character to the book? The problem I had was how to do it? I decided that making Mark a sympathetic villain worked best. He'd carry out a war against his old friends, maybe Kill Lisa and them turn good only to find out how deep his crimes really went. The book ends with Marduk seeing Lisa being killed and not knowing it's her. He then apparently drops the bomb with the serum into the Xmorph hive. A warp bomb goes off sucking the Xmorph hive beast and the Hbot flagship into a wormhole. Good ending, but I thought about putting Mark in there too. Why? I considered making him the field commander of the next threat to humanity in the next novel. He still might be, but for now Marduk will be a possible adversary during the progress of the game. Maybe raiding colonies and pirating ships on his way across the human empire.

A good RPG does this with every single character from the book it is based on. Smaller characters have less of a write-up, but they need to all have the same deep descriptions. In some games you see this and in others you don't. A good game designer puts as much time into his characters as they do their mechanics.

#### Mechanic

The mechanics of the Role Playing Game are what make it a 'game.' When RPGs first came out there were no generic systems that could be used across genres. In the more recent years companies like Wizards of the Coast™ have brought us generic game systems like D20. What we have chosen for a game mechanic for XI is the Fuzion™ system by R. Talsorian Games. This mechanic offers special forms of game play when it comes to mecha<sup>5</sup> and science fiction and it is also older than D20. Fuzion is one of the first generic mechanics to be offered to the public. The fan base is global with the current

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<sup>5</sup> Mecha: In this case it's referring to the use of giant war machines and robotic weapons.

mailing list having over 300+ members. Some people tend to shun Fuzion because of the license fee that you have to pay for profit products and the fact R. Talsorian requires that they give the products a one over before allowing use of the license. This can mean completing a whole book and then having it kicked back. That alone can be costly. At the same time, Mike Pondsmith<sup>6</sup>, is easy to get along with and loves to work with people to get their material up to speed.

Here is Fuzion in a nutshell:

Fuzion games have many different game styles. They are referred to as Campaign Styles. The Adjectives describe the exact style of game play.

#### **Determining Characteristic Points by Campaign Style**

<b>Everyday</b>	<b>20 CP</b>
<b>Competent</b>	<b>30 CP</b>
<b>Heroic</b>	<b>50 CP</b>
<b>Incredible</b>	<b>60 CP</b>
<b>Legendary</b>	<b>80 CP</b>
<b>Superheroic</b>	<b>90+ Cp</b>

You use these Characteristic Points to create your character, starting with Characteristics. You have 9 Characteristics so when you put points into them, keep it in mind.

When getting ready the GM should select a Campaign Style. This will help determine how many **Characteristic Points & Option Points** will be given out. Below are the different Campaign Styles:

#### **Characteristics**

<b>INT</b>	Intelligence: How smart you are.
<b>WILL</b>	Willpower: How you face danger and how cool you can be.

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<sup>6</sup> Mike Pondsmith is the current owner of R. Talsorian Games. He has been involved in the game industry since the early 1980s and has produced such classics as Mekton and Cyberpunk. After a stint at Microsoft, Mike has come back to the industry as a force to be reckoned with.

<b>PRE</b>	Presence: How well you impress other people. Charisma in other words.
<b>DEX</b>	Dexterity: The skill you use to dodge, shoot and be fancy with your moves.
<b>STR</b>	Strength: Just like it says.
<b>BODY</b>	Body: Your overall size and body type.
<b>CON</b>	Constitution: How Healthy you are.
<b>MOV</b>	Movement: How fast you can run, swim, and such.
<b>TECH</b>	Technique: This is the ability to use instruments, machines and other tools.

### Derived

<b>STUN</b>	BODY times 5. Tells how much punishment you can take from falls and punches.
<b>Hits</b>	BODY times 5. These are your hit points.
<b>SD</b>	Stun Defense. BODY times 2. How resistant you are to stun damage.
<b>REC</b>	Recovery. STR+BODY. How fast you heal from damage. You get back this much Stun when you rest and this many Hits back for each day of medical attention.
<b>RUN</b>	MOVE times 2. Just as it says.
<b>RES</b>	Resistance. WILL times 3. How much mental damage you can resist before taking damage from mental attacks.
<b>LUCK</b>	INT+DEX. Use these points to adjust dice rolls or damage. When you run out of LUCK points you're out of luck.
<b>END</b>	Endurance. BODY times 10. How long you can go before you

	run out of energy.
<b>ED</b>	Energy Defense. BODY times 2. How much you can resist from damage done by energy weapons.
<b>SPD</b>	Speed. ½ DEX. Initiative.
<b>HUM</b>	Humanity. PRE times 10. Your morality and humanity. Used when facing horrific scenes and experiencing worse.

Derived Characteristics come from your main Characteristics. Each one is explained above and does not cost any CP (Characteristic Points).

<u>Campaign Style</u>	<u>OP</u>
<b>Everyday</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Competent</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Heroic</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Incredible</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Legendary</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Superheroic</b>	<b>75+</b>

### **Option Points**

**Option Points** or **OP** are used to buy **Complications**, **Skills**, **Perks**, **Talents** and **Gear**. When doing character generation for **Fuzion** I tend to suggest buying **Skills** first and then moving onto other things. However, when you buy **Complications** you gain more **OP** to use in other places. For a quick start game, don't bother with them. Move straight onto the **Skills**.

### **Complications:**

If you want to round out your character and get your hands on more **OP** then buy some **Complications**. Each **Complication** can give you **OP** in increments of how bad it is. 5,

10, 15, 20. GMs are encouraged to limit **Complications** to keep players from cheesing their characters. Here is a quick list of **Complications**:

### **Complications**

#### **Psychological**

#### **Complications**

Absent Minded

Bipolar

Delusions

Masochist

Phobia

Paranoia

Split Personality

#### **Personality Traits**

Airhead

Bad Tempered

Coward

Obsessed

Shy

Stubborn

Berserker

Unlucky

#### **Physiological**

#### **Limitations**

Missing Limb

Reduced Hearing

Reduced Mobility

Reduced Sight

Uncontrolled Change

Vocal Impairment

Vulnerability

Susceptibility

#### **Social Complications**

Public Figure

Bad Reputation

Secret Identity

Poverty

Personal Habits

Oppressed

Distinctive

Outsider

#### **Enemies**

Capabilities

Extent

Intensity

#### **Responsibilities**

Code of Honor

Sense of Duty

Vow

Dependents

#### **Compulsive Behaviors**

Addiction

Honesty

Impulsiveness

Intolerance

Jealousy

Kleptomania

Lecherous

### **Skills**

Skills are bought with **OP**. The first thing you want to do is put the following skills on your character sheet at Level 2: **Perception, Concentration, Education, Persuasion, Athletics, Teaching, Local Expert (the area you're from), Hand to Hand** and **Evasion**. These are your everyman/woman skills. Pretty much everyone has these. If a character doesn't for some reason, then the two **OPs** gained may be placed in an area that compensates for it. Each skill costs one **OP** per level. The list below is a generic list of skills. If there is a skill that you want, make it up.

**SKILLS****Fighting Skills**

Evade  
Hand to Hand  
Melee Weapons

**Ranged Weapon Skills**

Gunnery  
Heavy Weapons  
Marksmanship

**Awareness Skills**

Clerecy  
Concealment  
Concentration  
Deduction  
Lip Reading  
Perception  
Psionics  
Shadowing  
Sorcery  
Surveillance  
Tracking

**Control Skills**

Animal Handler  
Driving  
Pilot  
Riding

**Body Skills**

Acrobatics

Athletics  
Climbing  
Contortionist  
Stealth

**Social Skills**

Bribery  
Conspiracy  
Conversation  
Interrogation  
Leadership

Persuasion  
Seduction  
Streetwise  
Trading  
Wardrobe/Style

**Technique Skills**

Bugging  
Demolitions  
Electronics  
Forgery  
Gambling  
Jack of All Trades  
Lockpicking  
Mechanics  
Paramedic  
Security Systems  
Weaponsmith

**Performance Skills**

Acting  
Disguise  
Mimicry  
Oratory  
Performance  
Singing  
Sleight of Hand  
Ventriloquist

**Education Skills**

Bureaucratics  
Business  
Computers  
Criminology  
Cryptography  
Education  
Espionage  
Expert  
Languages  
Medicine  
Navigation  
Professional  
Research  
Science  
Survival  
System Ops  
Tactics  
Teaching

**Talents**

**Talents** are those abilities that people were just born with. Each **Talent** costs **3 OP**. If the **Talent** can have levels then each level (X) costs an addition **3 OP**. Here is a list of

**Talents:**

Acute Senses (X)

Ambidexterity

Animal Empathy

Beautiful/Handsome (X)

Blind Reaction

Combat Sense (X)

Common Sense

Direction Sense

Double Jointed

Eidetic Memory

High Pain Threshold

Immunity

Intuition

Lightning Calculator

Light Sleeper

Longevity

Night Vision

Perfect Pitch

Rapid Healing

Schtick

Simulate Death

Speed Reader

Time Sense

## Perks

It pays to be you. There are certain privileges or advantages you have over others in the social arena. Each **Perk** costs one **OP** per level.

## Perks

Membership

License

Contract

Favor

Renown

Wealth

The final mechanic when playing is taking your Characteristic that fits your action and your skill level, adding that together and rolling 3d6 (three six-sided dice). Example: *Bob wants to shoot at a target in the firing range. His Reflex is 2 and he has a rifle skill of 3. He adds his REF (2)+Rifle Skill (3)=5. Bob then rolls 3d6 and gets a 9. His total is REF (2)+ Rifle Skill (3)+Roll (9)=14. In order to hit a non-moving target at medium range he only really needed to get over 10. He plants a bullet on the target.*

These are just the basics to Fuzion, but it's enough to help understand how the game needed to be set up. We had to make a list of Skills that were relevant to the *Xenomorph Invasion* setting. So you aren't going to see a Skill for Sorcery because there is no magic in the game. Instead you will see one for Mecha Piloting, something all Stingray Pilots need along with anyone who expects to drive a massive humanoid machine.

## Summary

This is the basic process of converting a novel into a Role-Playing Game. As you can see there is a lot of work that goes into this process. As a writer we must look past our advanced skills and go simple. As a game designer I must look past my basic skills and use advanced techniques. In the end is a beautiful product that teens can enjoy.

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<sup>i</sup> *Dungeons & Dragons* was written by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in 1974, after the success of Gygax's and Jeff Perren's previous wargame *Chainmail*. The original release was a boxed set. The box included 3 books used for play. Later editions of the boxed set included maps, dice and rule books along with an adventure. The enticing thing about *D&D* was the ability to advance. Players started out at low levels, but could progress until they achieved the ultimate level of immortal. In 1977, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* was released, expanding the old rules set. When the second edition of AD&D, even more new rules were added and carried the game to 1995, when the rules were revised yet again. For almost a decade, *D&D* was truly the best fantasy RPG and defined the genre for years to come.

<sup>ii</sup> *Robotech* (1985) is an animated series that was made of up three different anime series from Japan: *The Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*, *Super Dimension Cavalry Southern Cross*, and *Genesis Climber Mospeada*. The series as a whole was based around a race known as the *Robotech Masters* and their brilliant scientist *Zor*. The first season introduced us to the *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* and the *Zentaedi*. Known as the *Macross Saga*, the season itself was filled with drama and action on a level not seen in children's cartoons. Characters like *Rick Hunter*, a daredevil pilot who was thrust face first into a war, learned that sometimes you have to fight in order to secure peace. Summed up the *SDF-1* crashes on Earth during a brutal war. Global peace happens only because people realize that something far worse than human greed is out there. On the inaugural launch of the *SDF-1*, a genetically engineered race known as the *Zentaedi* attack. The *SDF-1* ends up using fold technology to escape, taking *Macross Island* with them into space. The refugees from the island build a city inside the *SDF-1* and the rest of the series is a cat and mouse game with the *Zentaedi*. In the end a *Zentaedi* captain *Breeti*, defects and humankind is saved. Earth, however, is left in ruins and chaos. In the second season, *Southern Cross*, we are introduced to the *Robotech Masters* in all their glory. Looking for the *Zentraedi* and the *SDF-1*, the *Masters* find that humans have developed *Robotechnology* and the use of *Protoculture* (protoculture is designated as power source derived from a flower). This season introduces a new generation of pilots and characters, some who are related to the cast from the first season. Political intrigue makes up most of the conflict with the *Masters* delivering series damage to what is left of the Earth defense forces (the *Southern Cross*). Summed up, the *Masters* arrive, a war breaks out and no one wants to admit that humankind might actually lose this time around. Then when victory happens, it sets off a chain reaction that brings us to season three. *Genesis Climber Mospeada* is all about the *Invid*, a race or evolutionary creatures that live off of the flower of life. Called *The Next Generation*, season three brings us new mechs, new characters, and a deadly alien threat. Summed up, at the end up Season 2, the *Southern Cross* stopped the *Robotech Masters*, but accidentally caused the *Flower of Life* to bloom. This attracted the *Invid*, who feed off the flower's energy. Earth gets attacked and the *Invid* infect the planet. The *Invid* claim that *Zor* stole the flower from them and throughout the season the *Invid* just seem to trash any piece of *Robotechnology* that they can get their claws on. An attack force shows up at the start of the season to liberate Earth. The fleet gets destroyed and the lone survivor, *Scott Bernard*, is forced to rally what is left of random freedom fighters on the planet and head to *Relfex Point* (the *Invid* main hive). There are some great one liners and a transvestite rock star that just make this season the best. In the end the humans defeat the *Invid*. *Harmony Gold*<sup>TM</sup> later released *Robotech Sentinels*, which followed *Rick Hunter* and the *Robotech Defense Force* to the *Robotech Master's* home world. Of course the series only lasted as a pilot episode. We see the *Invid* invade the *Masters' planet* and kill just about everyone.

<sup>iii</sup> *Aliens* was written by James Cameron, David Giler and Walter Hill. This blockbuster sequel to the 1979 film *Alien* gave fans an adrenaline rush of firepower and hordes of deadly acidic blooded alien creatures. *Aliens* was released in 1979. The movie followed *Ellen Ripley* (*Sigourney Weaver*), the sole survivor from the first film, as she gets put through the grinder for destroying the *Nostramo* and then is asked to travel to a colony where aliens might have been found. After realizing that she has nothing left on Earth and her daughter has since died of old age, *Ripley* signs on as an advisor. Soon she is trapped on the very planet she fled from in the first film, with hundreds of aliens and a squad of very dysfunctional but effective marines. Corporate greed seems to be a theme in the *Aliens* franchise as the corporate council (*Paul Reiser*) for *Ripley* tags along so he can get an alien egg. Of course the marines get massacred, *Ripley* gets tough again

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and the aliens get blown up as an atmospheric processor goes critical. The end of the film has Ripley fighting the alien queen with a power loader as a little girl and the movie's android get close. The queen gets sucked out into space and the film ends. Follow-up films kill off all the survivors and a clone of Ripley is grown (*Alien Resurrection*).

<sup>iv</sup> *Transformers* (1984) was about a race of robots whose war brought them to Earth. The Autobots were marketed as the 'good guys' and could transform into cars and other less violent machines while the Decepticons were marketed as the 'bad guys' and could transform into guns, jets, and tanks. The transformers came from the planet Cybertron and were created by a race called the Quintessons. The series is still ongoing, with complete independent series in Japan and in the United States. Transformers has had one animated theatre release and a live action version coming soon.

<sup>v</sup> Cthulhu was the name of an ancient being from H. P. Lovecraft's story "The Call of Cthulhu." Cthulhu is a massive creature with a tentacle face, large dragon wings and a fat gelatinous body who was worshipped across the globe by small secret cults. Cthulhu was considered an Old One in the Lovecraft tales. It was thought that the Old Ones created the cosmos.

<sup>vi</sup> Howard Philips Lovecraft (Born August 20, 1890- Died March 15, 1937). H.P. Lovecraft was famous for his dark works of literature. From his poem "The Poem of Ulysses" to his short story "The Call of Cthulhu," Lovecraft generated a following of fans all the way into modern times. Born in Providence, Rhode Island, Lovecraft was cursed by deaths and mental illness. Lovecraft and his mother moved in with his grandfather. Taking an interest in science at age eight, Lovecraft created his own journals, *The Scientific Gazette* and *The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy*. When his grandfather died, Lovecraft and his mother were forced out of their mansion and into an apartment. Mentally distraught over the loss of his home, Lovecraft looked to end his life, only to have his desire for knowledge keep him going. Keeping busy with poetry, Lovecraft went back to fiction writing in 1917 with "The Tomb" and "Dagon." These two stories were the beginning of a streak of stories that would make Lovecraft famous. Lovecraft published many more stories and eventually died of intestinal cancer at Jane Brown Memorial Hospital.

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