

Running NPCs Using the CMG PROSE System

(From *The Whispering Woodwind* - Creative Mountain Games)

One of the most difficult tasks for any GM is to get players to suspend their disbelief. Doing so helps the players to roleplay their own characters and be absorbed into the campaign setting. In those brief hours, the gaming table seems to disappear and the world unfolds before them. There are few things more engaging than seamlessly introducing characters with which the players can interact. It is useful to have pre-generated statistical blocks, a physical description and some background for the characters that the players may encounter. It's of further help enriching each persona with a multifaceted perspective.

To help that become an easier task, the **CMG PROSE System** breaks down the attitude of primary NPCs with the approach they take to handle any situation. It prioritizes how they view the world in regard to **Politics, Religion, Others, Self** and **Economics**. Each of their **PROSE** ratings is gaged from one to ten and should be considered as an independent rating of how highly they regard each aspect. A high rating in one aspect does not disallow a high rating in another. High ratings in two aspects simply mean that both are equally weighed in decisions that are made on a daily basis. This can be a conscious or subconscious process. In addition, three **Key Words** (adjectives or adverbs) are given to help show how those priorities manifest themselves during interaction.

It should be noted that this system is meant to enhance both Alignment and Charisma. Alignment is still a strong determinant of one's attitude and Charisma is the ability by which one expresses oneself from moment to moment.

Politics can play an important role in how one views the world, and one's place within it. A high rating in this aspect doesn't necessarily mean that someone is active in politics, though they can be. It can simply mean that they are aware that politics affects their lives. To a person of noble birth, it might be a driving force causing them to pursue a high office or even the crown. To someone of common birth, it might be the axe they grind, always blaming their lot in life on the machinations of those in authority. Someone with a low rating in this aspect is likely to view politics as trivial, believing that in the long run the petty squabbling of those in charge means absolutely nothing to their existence.

Religion is often the guiding force in a person's life to the exclusion of all else when this aspect rating is high. They may view it as a calling or the means by which they need to govern their lives. They might even perceive daily life as inconsequential, thinking that come what may, their fate is predetermined by powers beyond their control. Someone with a low rating in this aspect is likely to view any religious views as mindless babble, preferring to believe

that daily life is much more pragmatic and less spiritual in nature.

Others is the aspect area where a high rating may indicate love for one's family or for their fellow man. Someone who prioritizes others highly will often go out of their way to ensure comfort for another or seek to redress wrongs in someone else's life. A low rating might mean that a person wouldn't even shout a warning if they saw immediate harm coming to another person, preferring to not get involved in situations that do not directly concern them.

Self is a high aspect for those with strong self-esteem and self-interests. Putting one's interests before anything need not be overt, though. It can also be something that is achieved through subtle manipulation. A low rating usually projects itself as self-loathing or as self-deprecation.

Economics is the aspect where financial goals, or lack of them, play an important role. A merchant with a high rating is often the wealthiest person in town. A high rating in someone without means may manifest as looking for a way to get rich quickly or always on the hunt for money. A low rating can be shown as someone who lives from day to day, without a care, even if they have money, or someone who sees no need to accumulate wealth.

Key Words (often adjectives or adverbs) are useful as quick guides to jumping into a character. There's an old theatre saying that "once you have the hat and shoes for a character, the rest falls into place." Interaction based on a few, easy-to-use tags gets the ball rolling and allows a GM to run with a character rather than trying and invent something completely new and interesting on the fly.

Part of the trick to making the most use of the **CMG PROSE System** is in knowing in advance who the characters are and using the ratings as a reminder of how they would interact with others. If a financial negotiation ensues from a meeting, a quick glance at **Economics** reveals the priorities of a character. If complimented, check the **Self** rating and see if they are easily flattered or view such praise with suspicion. Asking someone to assist in a rescue attempt, warrants a peek at the **Others** rating to determine if they are likely to help. Suggest that a ritual be performed to ensure safe passage and the **Religion** rating can tell the GM if someone finds this distasteful. Being friends with the magistrate may be of help if you're dealing with someone who has a high **Politics** rating. The combinations are endless, but that is by design.

The **CMG PROSE System** is by no means meant to hamstring a GM during play. It's meant to help GMs create three dimensional characters and to avoid having their many portrayals become similar. The GM should always feel that the game is more important than any individual component and not feel cornered by these guidelines.