CHAPTER

02

PART I

START HERE



protean

/prəʊˈtiː.ən/

ADJECTIVE

1. versatile and adaptable; able to take on many different forms or roles.

A Life of Story

"If there's one thing utopia brings, it's dissatisfaction guaranteed."

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02.01

It was about seventy years ago, during the heady "It's so great we didn't all die" days, that we learned how to do a lot of things nobody had done before. It had been two decades since doomsday was averted and there was spirited talk of holding hands into a bountiful future. We got a bunch of newfangled toys, abundant energy and food, and cured a lot of stuff that was trying to kill us.

But while optimism tried very hard to put a pillow on the face of boredom - boredom is a cockroach.

People became restless, and every utopia has its underground. Things weren't even particularly close to ideal at that point, a solid half marathon from perfection, but an unintended consequence of giving everyone a lot of free time and automation was that people quickly realised that 'everything under the sun' wasn't a very large list of things to do.

Where was the truly new, the different, the exotic, the mysterious? On inspection, humanity's cupboard of spices wasn't particularly spicy. So we disabled the smoke alarm, ordered the weirdest ingredients we could find, and decided it was time to cook.

It took less than twenty years to get to the New Cambrian, the very definition of off the rails.

Despite that period of chaos, carnage and tomorrow's new weird thing, people also found real excitement and joy and new ways of living, which turned out to be a hell of a lot more interesting than 'good times'.

Thus came the birth of Story. The idea that a life worth living is a life of interesting times. Nobody wants fine. Nobody wants flat. Everyone wants a good tale to tell at the end of their days.

Which, considering the way things are going, is probably a very, very long time.

02.02

You Play a Pro

Pro is short for Protean.

While Story means many things to many people, Pros are at the pointy end.

They are the adventurer, the detective, the courier, the guardian, the mercenary, the hunter, the hero. But also the medic, the rogue, the agent, the engineer, the trader, the diplomat, the chef, the entertainer...

Protean means versatile.

This invariably means danger, weird stuff and some casual use of heavy weapons, but that's exactly the way you like it.

The world has changed significantly in the last 100 years, and a major part of that is our sense of the edge of things. If you were born 1,000 years ago, "Here be Dragons" was a pretty accurate description of lands afar, but early last century was more "Here be Car Park". Mystery was something you found in books, not your maps app, so being an explorer made little sense.

That all changed with Eva, with the New Cambrian, with 10,000 Nations. Back came the dragons, back came the mystery box with a bona fide mystery inside. These days there are a multitude of places where few outsiders know or understand what is going on. Much of it is human shenanigans, but some is simply beyond our capacity to unravel, such as the Zones, the no-go areas under the edicts of Eva.

From the Phytomorphs and Mels to the Synths, from the Links and Hives to the Dulots, from the LarP layers and abundant Phyles to the machine intelligences and the Eoden. No person alive can claim to know everything that is going on. The boundaries are too many and the ground moving too fast for any such statement to be true.

While for some this is a source of concern, for a Pro, this is exactly what the doctor ordered, a shot in the arm of vitamin excitamin. A Pro thrives on an exhilarating life of adventure, and the world seems more than happy to provide, with seconds, and cake, and afternoon tea, and a slice of whatever that is behind the fruit platter.

While Pros commonly take on contracts, the Story-driven, freelance nature of their lifestyle means they will simply take on something they find rewarding or interesting. It's all about gaining new experiences, skills, relationships, gear, and very importantly, having a good time doing it. With experienced Pros, these contracts or other excursions can be self-funded: exploring remote areas, chasing hidden treasure, helping a community in trouble, smuggling biotech on the high seas.

Being a Pro doesn't mean you're good or even remotely ethical. A mercenary hit team or solo work is a well-paid gig, as is sneaking into places and taking things, although this type of work 'complicates access to certain phyles and networks' (you're banned). Reputation is an important part of the game and a currency you'd be wise to spend wisely, but best kept in savings.

You can choose any path you like but everything has a cost.

Due to the nature of this often surprising and dangerous work, Pros tend to work in teams that can complement each other's abilities. As a player, your character is a Pro, and you choose whatever actions you want them to take. You do this as in many tabletop games, by describing what you do (see Chapter 03.02). Through your character you take part in the experience, allowing them to advance: gaining skills, modifications, relationships and cool stuff along the way.

02.03

What this means for you

It means at the game table you have a wide variety of experiences to enjoy through your character. While you can always play the classics, going on combat missions or dungeon crawling*, there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy sessions that can also go just about anywhere. It could be somewhere much stranger, or simply a little different for some fun. LarP (see Chapter 16.03-05) and 10,000 Nations (see Chapter 01.05) are some of the features in the world that provide a broad scope for endless varied play sessions, some of which can be a little bonkers. The point of all this is that roleplaying is most fun when you have a lot of freedom to play different styles of game with your friends.

So it's mostly down to how wonderfully insane your GM is.

Although there are aspects of the world and elements of the game system that allow for a lot of play flexibility, it is also built on a core of real science and engineering that keeps things grounded.

Playing a Pro allows you to forge whatever path you choose, which is wonderfully free, but can also be daunting. This book is designed to ease you into the rules and the, frankly rather intense, level of lore, with tools to set yourself up for many sessions full of excitement and satisfaction.

A key feature of A7 is its LOD system (see Chapter 03.05), which allows you to play the game at different levels of detail, from simple and easy to follow, to quite complex. You will find each chapter and section is written as 'simple rules first, more detailed stuff later', so you can skip through the book and get going quickly, or dive deep. It's entirely up to you.

If you're an experienced tabletop player, you can think of LOD as dial-able crunch with universal rules, so sessions can be run with anything from simple narrative play through to full GURPish reality simulation from one set of rules.

A7 is also a classless system. You choose whatever path you want to pursue for your character. Later, as you progress, you will be given a moniker based on what your character becomes. This is just a fun way of capturing the essence of your character in terms of capabilities and quirks, with a name built from some rules. So your class is born from your actions and not the other way around.

Along the way you have the opportunity to improve your character while also improving yourself. The Resonance system (see Chapter 23.01-05) is built specifically for that, it's an important part of A7 that has been integrated into it from the very beginning. So give it a go, and have a bit of fun gamifying your own self-improvement.



** Our 'dungeon crawling' comprises a number of extensive areas containing abandoned and semi-abandoned underground cities and sites, with hundreds of miles of cave systems, all full of creatures and spoils.*