

2018 NST Election Member Questions: Dain Geist, US2002023664

1) A big part of the NST office is managing the big ideas for the org, including staff decisions for volunteers needed to implement. Some ideas are bad (read: more costs/harms than gains/benefits). But even good ideas can suffer flaws in implementation, which can make good ideas seem bad in their outcome. With that in mind, please assess 2 of this current chronicle's big ideas - VIP point spend review / approval and DPotM / Worldbuilder review/approval/publishing.

- * Are these good ideas? What do they cost/gain the org?
- * If implementation of them is a problem (e.g., backlog), please explain why, to the best of your knowledge.
- * As NST, would you intend to keep/remove/revise/replace them?
- * As NST, how would you address implementation of these for improvement of the game?

So the VIP system is a pretty good thing, as it provides an incentive for volunteering while, simultaneously, provides a cost system for many non-mechanical setting items. The DPotM/Worldbuilder system is also a pretty good thing, as it provides a mechanism for historical background ties. If National wants to put a plot into play that affects multiple PCs, it can go to the DPotM/Worldbuilder and find an appropriate through line.

I think the sole problem with both of these is timely implementation. I remember once I, as a player, asked National about a particular region in Europe and it took a month to get a solid answer back. This was due to RL issues on the part of staff, which is fine. RL happens. But it's also easily avoidable by building in redundancies. If multiple staff have access to a given system, then they should be able to address incoming issues twice as fast. Plus if the ANST Chief of Staff is tasked with handling complaints and issues, then they can focus their attentions on identifying (and rectifying) jams in the proverbial pipeline.

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2) Will anything be done to address the cliques / super friends team ups that seem to repeat through the chronicles? IE - The same people tending to be in charge and major powers IC. High MC privilege.

MES is a gaming club. It's designed to have collaborative aspects, and competitive aspects. But we forget sometimes that this is also a social club. We encourage folks to play together, to spend time together, and to build friendships. This isn't about MC. Folks of all MC levels have had their moment in the sun. What drives those moments has less to do with how much prestige earned and more to do with how much time that person can commit to the club on a daily basis. Folks who can commit more time tend to be more active, and activity tends to generate those aforementioned cliques.

Now to be fair, there's nothing wrong with that. But this is also why it's important to do what we can to curb the 24/7 gaming cycle. In a chronicle like ours, with games running every weekend, dialing that back completely isn't going to be possible. That said, the NST office should be a

leader by setting an example and perhaps consider the implementation of gaming holidays to give staff and players recharge time (which I'll explain here a little later in the Q&A).

There's also a certain obligation on the part of cliques and high profile characters to make sure players who haven't been in the limelight before have an opportunity to shine. We do this by creating more player agency in our chronicles. It's hard for the NST office to know about a player in far flung domains that is ready to step into a moment, but the local VST and playerbase likely does. Empowering local high profile characters to make IC things, offices, and structures offers a way to lift these folks into the National spotlight.

Lastly, one of the things I would really like to see and will encourage is that circles of friends who often play on the same team, play on opposite sides and compete against each other. I know the frustration of the 100 person versus 15 person killbox. I ran it during my last tenure as NST. Group player limits like Company and Lineage caps have been a positive addition to our games to help prevent this. And yeah, I'd like to see some of those powerhouse players have real IC beef with each other so that we can create opportunities for new faces to shine.

When we do that, we expand our own individual circles, create a new generation of role-players, and above all, we can start to treat each other more like actual friends, rather than gaming competitors.

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3) It is a widely held consideration (or observation for some) that our flagship/well-attended metaplot games have a tendency to seriously suffer in quality or attendance when a NST changeover happens, so continuity of vision and response is a concern. Is it your intention to retain the sitting Masquerade and Apocalypse staffs if they wish to stay on during your administration?

I'm not planning on any immediate changes to the ANST staff. My goal is to speak with individual ANSTs and RSTs to determine if a given venue is headed in the right direction. If it is, then I'm not going to change anything in terms of personnel. If it's not headed in the right direction, then I'm going to see if course corrections can be made with the current ANST, and if it still can't, then I'll put out an all-call for that specific Venue.

Now this specific question is going to be asked a couple of times in this Q&A, and will yield the same answer. So I just want to take a minute to step out of this to clarify some of the big things that I believe are essential to our growth as a club. Beyond encouraging player agency and being more transparent in our decisions, I think National can and should do three big things:

1) Create an actual ST education system. A mechanism for finding new talent, encouraging that talent, and teaching people how to handle this incredibly difficult job. This would include a single living document, highlighting what works and what doesn't, and drawing on the experience of STs at each and every level. This would be coupled with workshops at conventions, ranging from acting classes to ST seminars. Finally, I want a pilot program which would allow less experienced STs to shadow the National staff and allow them to peek behind

the proverbial curtain. That way, when the next NST election comes, there are more than just four old (male) veterans vying for the job.

2) Use US-General to have actual conversations and to share player experiences. On top of a monthly address, I want to pick a topic every month and give players a chance to discuss it in an open forum. How do you go about building a pack/lineage/company? What can high MC players do to rope in less experienced players? What was the best scene you were ever in and why? What problems do you see facing the club and how would you fix them? These are the kinds of questions I want us to discuss.

3) Implement gaming holidays. Days each month where we allow storytellers and players to take a break and step away from the 24/7 gaming cycle. Days when the entire club is aware that no business will be conducted. Now, as someone who recalls taking a few staff-related calls on my honeymoon back when I was NST, I recognize that this may be a little difficult. But I firmly believe this would help lessen our general fatigue as well as prevent ST and player burnout.

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4) Where do you feel we are at in our different venue chronicles (using whatever narrative structure terminology you favor) and roughly how much longer do you think they should run?

So Space and CoD-X are coming along pretty well. And having run a niche venue like Accord, I strongly recommend that they run for a full three years, but not much longer than that. Accord ended up being five years long, which was really 18 months too many, and by the end of it, we had lost a good chunk of players from general fatigue. So for Space and CoD-X, my recommendation would be to end them in sometime between late 2020 and early 2021. Apocalypse and Masquerade are slated to end somewhere between the summer of 2020 and the summer of 2022. But the question of three years vs. five years will need to be determined in consultation with the BOD, the ANSTs, and the RSTs.

Personally I prefer four years for Apocalypse and Masquerade, which would put our end during the summer of 2021. That would allow me, as the prospective NST, to focus exclusively on this ongoing chronicle. And it would allow the NST after me to focus exclusively on the next chronicle.

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5) The list of candidates for NST is all men. The RSTs are currently predominantly men, with 7 of 8 identifying as so. Historically this trend continues back to the clubs founding. A) Why do you think this is? B) Is this a problem; if so, what are your thoughts on how to solve it?

The reason this happens is because there are and remain unfair biases against women. Women tend to be viewed as coordinators and men tend to be viewed as storytellers. So on the local level, with a popular vote, it's hard for women to be given a chance. Then, as you move further up the chain, fighting for Regional and National positions, we tend to go with the person with the

most experience. And that experience is mostly held by men because women simply haven't been given as many opportunities.

We have to change our thinking about women as coordinators and men as storytellers. From there we need to include in our staffs people who have the energy and desire to do a job even if they don't have a wealth of experience. This includes women, non-binary, minorities, and transgender individuals and this means officers should actively seek them out and ask them to serve in assistant positions, both at the national level, and at conventions. I want to help everyone who wants to volunteer gain some on-the-job experience not only so we can break down stereotypes, but also acquire more diverse applicants in the future.

I've done this in my national positions in the past, and I'll continue to do it in the future.

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6) D&D is in many ways about problem solving, with that what is your favorite D&D/Pathfinder class and why?

I tend to lean towards Elf Rangers. Characters who can lead the way through rough terrain, or scout an area and provide information, or apply ranged combat support in a fight. Mostly because I like to help out, without needing to be the leader.

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7) Course corrections can be difficult but are sometimes necessary for the health of the game. Do you foresee a need for a course correction and if so how would you implement the correction?

Sometimes course corrections are necessary. When Josh became NST the first time around, he asked me to take over the ANST Accord position. The Venue was good, but was suffering from some major issues, mostly stemming from differing player expectations and an extremely top-heavy setting. It took awhile to examine the issue, but eventually, we were able to create a more transparent setting, acquiring greater player buy-in, and better player empowerment.

Right now I don't see any of the Venues in such dire straits. I think Masquerade has some issues which need to be addressed, but I'll also point out that Masquerade is the hardest ANST position there is. Anyone who takes up that position deserves a lot of credit, and a great deal of thanks. Any issues I perceive will require conversations with the current ANST staff and the RSTs. From there we can support what's working and rework what isn't.

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8) If elected, do you intend to appoint your assistant staff, or hold an all-call for members interested in applying for a national position?

Like I said previously, I'm not planning on any immediate changes to the ANST staff. My goal is to speak with individual ANSTs and RSTs, and determine if a given venue is headed in the

right direction. If it is, then I'm not going to change anything in terms of personnel. If it's not headed in the right direction, then I'm going to see if course corrections can be made with the current ANST, and if it still can't, then I'll put out an all-call for that specific Venue.

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9) Thanks for running! We are approaching halfway through the Apoc and VtM chronicles and the 2.0 ones are just getting started. Not every member has approved of every decision of our aNSTs, but they have been the architects of the current metaplots. With all of this in mind, is your intention to keep the current aNSTs or do you plan to reopen all-calls?

Again, I'm not planning on any immediate changes to the ANST staff. My goal is to speak with individual ANSTs and RSTs, and determine if a given venue is headed in the right direction. If it is, then I'm not going to change anything in terms of personnel. If it's not headed in the right direction, then I'm going to see if course corrections can be made with the current ANST, and if it still can't, then I'll put out an all-call for that specific Venue.

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10) How neutral can you maintain in the face of pressure from your significant other, friends, and family in the organization? How much influence does your significant other hold over your decisions? How do you plan to minimize your significant other's involvement with the office, and the decisions you will make if you are elected? Can you confirm and support that your significant other will not influence what you do as the NST if you are elected?

A couple years ago I was in a professional production of Othello. The title role was performed by a semi-famous actor and his wife was the director. What astounded me was their absolute professionalism. Their official rule was to only discuss the play during official rehearsal hours – the same hours that every other actor in the company shared. The lead actor wasn't privy to special conversations or considerations, and he was treated exactly the same as everyone else. This is the level of discipline I try to maintain when it comes to my obligations as a friend, a husband, and a storyteller. And to be fair, it doesn't always work out perfectly. I met my wife through this club of ours. She has supported me and my vision for many years. And like most significant others of officers in our club, she's also gotten shafted a little due to unfair perceptions.

But at the end of the day, the NST is not your friend. The NST doesn't have friends, and he/she can't play favorites. Decisions are made by talking to all of the principles involved, weighing the pros and cons, and making the call (which is sometimes far, far harder than it appears). And that call has nothing to do with who I'm married to or who my friends are. As for my wife, there's a firewall between everything she does as a player, and everything I do as a storyteller. If she does something utilizing mechanics, then it gets passed to a different storyteller. If she's applying for something in the database, then it's handled exclusively by an assistant. The key to avoiding a CoI is to make sure you're never in a position to actually have a CoI. And I can confirm and support all of the above because I've done it many times before. As a VST, as a

DST, as an RST and as an NST, I've maintained that separation between my personal life and my storytelling responsibilities. Which is, of course, as it should be.

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11) What are your thoughts regarding setting enforcement via NPC's? If game mechanics favor enough PC's and their ability to oppose the setting, should NPC's "bring the hammer" to reinforce the setting? Should player agency take priority and change the setting? Where do you strike a balance?

So every Venue has those red lines. Those actions which, if taken, require National consequences. Those red lines need to be obvious to everyone, and those consequences need to be enacted according to a predetermined set of guidelines. The trick is to establish the rubrics ahead of time, and to apply them to all players, evenly, consistently, and publicly. So let's say a National document is released, stating that these X items, if violated and if publicly discovered, will result in direct National intervention. If that existed, then players would know where the line is. It will be my priority to have my ANST staff abide by the restrictions and red lines created for this chronicle so that they are applied fairly and equally across all the venues.

It's important to remember that in general, an individual Venue isn't about any one storyteller's vision. It's about all of our visions, working collectively. Five years from now no one is going to care about what one national NPC did to another NPC. But they will remember what players brought to the table. What they created. And I think it is imperative that National, when given the opportunity, does what it can to empower player created ideas. National can create the borders of the world, and should do what it can to protect those borders, but the players need to be able to fill and even change that world when the chronicle calls for it.

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12) Is there a place in the MES for one-shot games? If so, how should the NST's office approach such a task?

Historically we haven't been very good at one-shots. Mostly because, at conventions, they tend to get double-booked against other games. But if there was enough interest, and if there was a dedicated storyteller to run it, I'd be willing to give a one-shot a chance. And I'd make sure that it didn't end up competing with another venue.

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13) Given the primary role of leadership and management the NST position has over the varied venues; what are your plans for moving these venues forward? Are you planning larger setting changes? Are there plans to replace/adjust current ANST staff across the board, or any venue in specific? What are the aspects of each venue you enjoy and conversely which aspects (if there are any) that you would like to see changed?

One of my favorite periods in the club was in 2005 when Requiem launched. And what was so great about it was that it was the only venue in town, so it was the only game anyone was playing. Plus there was no canon to draw upon. No massive NPCs. It was almost entirely player driven. In that sense, CoD-X has a special place in my heart. So does Space, because it's a niche venue where having fun supersedes following a specific formula. It's driven not by history, but by creativity, on the part of the players and via the STs. As for Apocalypse, I'll be honest; it's never been my venue. I'm all for a PVE setting wherein we all try and save the world, but I only have so much time to invest in the day. And that leaves us with Masquerade, which is, of course, the classic venue I fell in love with. Ever since I saw Titus Welliver on Aaron Spelling's *Kindred: The Embraced*, I've been hooked.

And as for replacing staff, as I said before, I'm not planning on any immediate changes to the ANST personnel. My goal is to speak with individual ANSTs and RSTs, and determine if a given venue is headed in the right direction. If it is, then I'm not going to change anything in terms of personnel. If it's not headed in the right direction, then I'm going to see if course corrections can be made with the current ANST, and if they still can't, then I'll put out an all-call for that specific Venue.

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14) What will you (prospective NST) do to create a welcoming environment and accessible plots or NPCs for neurodivergent or neuroatypical players? We have a not inconsiderable presence in the club, and are not alone among folks who may have trouble processing auditory stimulus, recognizing body language or unspoken social cues, or face other hurdles in accessing plots. A specific example of this could be as recently as MEScon, where a national NPC was instructed to only speak in cryptic, vague ways to PCs, with no given alternative. We've come a long way in making the org more accessible to many people from many walks of life: what will the NST's office do with you in it to create an accessible game with regard to non-allistic players?

You're right – we have come a long way, and the club is comprised of people from various backgrounds, education levels, genders, and perceptions. I've always believed that was part of our strength. But if plots aren't getting conveyed correctly, then it really doesn't matter how good they are. The answer, I believe, is to be mindful of alternative perspectives and to make two key adjustments:

First, we need mechanically accessible NPCs. Different players have different challenges and different levels of individual comfort. But we all have the same sheets, and we all require the same mechanics. That means a given NPC should be able to be affected mechanically, regardless of a player's social aptitude. I actually think we can take this a step further and create plots that rely less on RP manipulation and more on raw mechanics. The Accord Tech Tree was a good example of this, as it allowed folks to contribute to the venue mechanically, rather than socially, by requiring certain numbers of downtime actions.

A second tool we can use is collaborative storytelling and negotiation. In such a case, we could take the time to actually communicate our desired goals OOCly and narrate a shared outcome. This couldn't be done in every instance, but we need to improve our use of positive

metagaming. Positive metagaming isn't appropriate or ideal in every situation, nevertheless, it can be an avenue for greater accessibility, especially if we educate the player base on when and how to use it.

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15) What is the biggest challenge facing the club in your opinion? How do you intend to address that problem? Do you intend to be more hands on with the games or do you intend to delegate management of the games to your ANST? Would you rather have invisibility or flight as a power? Why? What is something you regret doing or not doing in your time in the organization? What was the lesson you learned?

So let me break this down a little bit.

I think the biggest challenge we face is an inability to adapt to the present circumstances and a severe lack of transparency. I think National has a habit of making sweeping declarations in the name of setting without allowing for alternative ideas, player agency, or open dialogue. This happens sometimes, and when players can't seem to affect a venue, and when they can't get a satisfactory answer why, they tend to bow out of the game. Right now, players are demanding an opportunity to contribute to the larger game. They want diversity in their stories, coupled with a safe playing space that represents their values. And I don't care if you have the greatest story in the world – if you can't present it in such a way that empowers individual players, no one is going to care.

The NST position is, hands down, the biggest job in the club. You need ANSTs you can trust to run the individual venues because you simply don't have the time to run them yourself. I think there are certain talents I bring to the table with my storytelling experience and my masters in theatre, which can only help. I want to assist the ANSTs in telling their stories not vice versa.

I know how to bring drama into storytelling and how to create a theatrical spectacle. I am a diplomatic person who believes in fairness. I know how to weigh differing perspectives, make executive calls, and then communicate why that's the call. That means I can help portray NPCs. Maybe that means picking up the slack when an ANST is spread a little thin. But mostly it means handling the day-to-day questions, concerns, and criticisms that get hurled at the National office with alarming regularity. I want to manage the office in order to give my staff the freedom to actual do the hard work of storytelling.

Invisibility or flight? Flight. I'm no thief and there's nothing I want to see without being seen in turn. Besides, I really, really hate traffic. And I think being able to fly would solve a lot of problems.

My biggest regret was during my previous term as NST. I had a number of ANSTs who, for legitimate RL reasons, weren't pulling their weight. This went on for a few months before I eventually had to let them go and hire fresh blood. But I should have let them go sooner, rather than wasting weeks of potential time and effort. So the lesson there is to not get sentimental. Like I said before, the NST doesn't have friends, and that includes staff. An NST has assistants,

but if those assistants can't or won't produce the necessary product, then for the good of the venue, they need to be replaced.

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16) If elected, how will you as NST deal/include/relate to the Regions of our club that you are unfamiliar with?

Over a long enough timeline you get to know folks from all over the country pretty well. There are MES relationships I have that are almost twenty years strong, but I think the question is how I plan on connecting with people I don't know, regardless of their Region. I think the answer is two-fold. First, to have a stronger dialogue with individual RSTs. That way I can get to know them and the needs of their respective players. The second answer is to have more regular conversations with the players at large. Maybe this takes the form of a monthly address, or maybe it'll emerge as a FB livestream, but the goal is to give players a chance to have their voices heard. And in turn, to give the NST a chance to really listen to individual players, regardless of how well I know them (or not), and regardless of where they come from.

17) Can you tell us how you'd deal with a situation where a majority of RSTs disagree with a decision of yours and how you think that situation should be handled by the NST's office?

The relationship between the National office and the RSTs is one built on trust and respect. It requires dialogue, conversation, debate and, yes, disagreements. Because we're not always going to agree on things. My particular style is to take a problem and consider it in the open, with the inclusion of the RSTs and the rest of my staff. And historically there have been times when I personally disagreed with the majority, and ultimately went with the majority anyway, because I'm willing to be proven wrong.

That said there have also been times when, after that open debate, I went against the majority. After everyone had an opportunity to have their opinion heard, I made the hard call, and explained my reasons why. That may not be ideal for some, but at the end of the day someone has to make the final decision. And that decision can't be based on majority rule. In that sense people may not always agree with me. But they'll always know where I'm coming from, and why I'm doing what I'm doing.