

Panty Explosion Actual Play: Festival of Terror

By Jake Richmond

Panty Explosion published by Atarashi Games

Available at www.atarashigames.com



Panty Explosion is a psychic schoolgirl adventure game. Each player takes the role of a normal Japanese student. One of you, perhaps more than one of you, is a psychic with devastating and terrifying powers. You can find out more about the game on the Panty Explosion site (www.atarashigames.com)

Right before Gencon I got together with my younger brother Nick and some friends to play Panty Explosion. Nick had helped play test the game

and was eager to take the role of Superintendent and set up a game. I was happy to take on the role of a Student, as were Woody and Gabe, who had never played before.

I've been telling people that a game of Panty Explosion can be played in just 2 hours, and for this game I wanted to put that to the test. Nick was also doubtful that Panty Explosions conflict resolution system could work well for a hard-core combat scene, so he decided he would try that out as well. We played just one session before I got to busy preparing for Gencon. We picked up the game again the week after I got back from Indy.

Creating Students

First off we sat down to create some Students. I've found that PE works best with 4-5 players (plus a Superintendent), but when our 4th player failed to show we decided to make do with three. Here's who we came up with.

Chio Maeda Chio is well liked and athletic. Her highest Godai element is Air and her lowest is Fire. Chio chose Yumi as her best friend and Yoko as her rival. The agendas she chooses for this game are "get revenge on Teacher", and "steal a carton of cigarettes".

Yumi Endo Yumi is quiet and reserved. She comes from a rich family and is allowed to indulge in her interests in clothing, games and doujinshi. Her highest Godai element is Water, while her lowest is Earth. Yumi chose Yoko as her best friend and Chio as her rival. The agendas she chose are “wants to get Yoko a new boyfriend” and “wants to kiss a psychic”.

Yoko Nakamura Yoko is tougher and stronger than her friends, but is often teased because of her weight. She’s on the championship winning girls softball team and isn’t afraid to stand up to bullies. She’s also a psychic, but doesn’t know it. Her highest Godai element is Fire, while her lowest is Void. Yoko chose Yumi as her best friend and Chio as her rival. The agenda she chose is “wants to get payback at Teacher for getting her suspended from the team”.

Character creating in PE was designed to be fairly fast and simple. Gabe and Woody breezed through creating their Students very quickly, but it took me quite awhile to decide what I wanted to do.

Nick had us draw to see which one of us would be psychic. The identity of the Psychic is supposed to be secret until it is revealed during the game, but it took us only a few minutes to realize that Yoko was the groups psychic.

After we finished our students we voted for popularity. Yoko was most popular and Yumi was least.

Creating the School

Nick described his ideas for the school to us, telling us that there was a big school festival coming up where our club (we had decided we were all in the board game club) had challenged another to both a cake eating contest and a 3-legged race. Nick also mentioned that a few girls from the swim team had gone missing over the last few days. We took this to be our first hint at the Demon that we would confront later.

We didn’t want to clutter up the school with a lot of characters, but we made sure to include our homeroom teacher, Ms. Kuji. We decide that Ms. Kuji was a real bitch, and openly despised all of our Students. We also create the Canadian exchange student Mark, the only male member of the board game club.

The Game

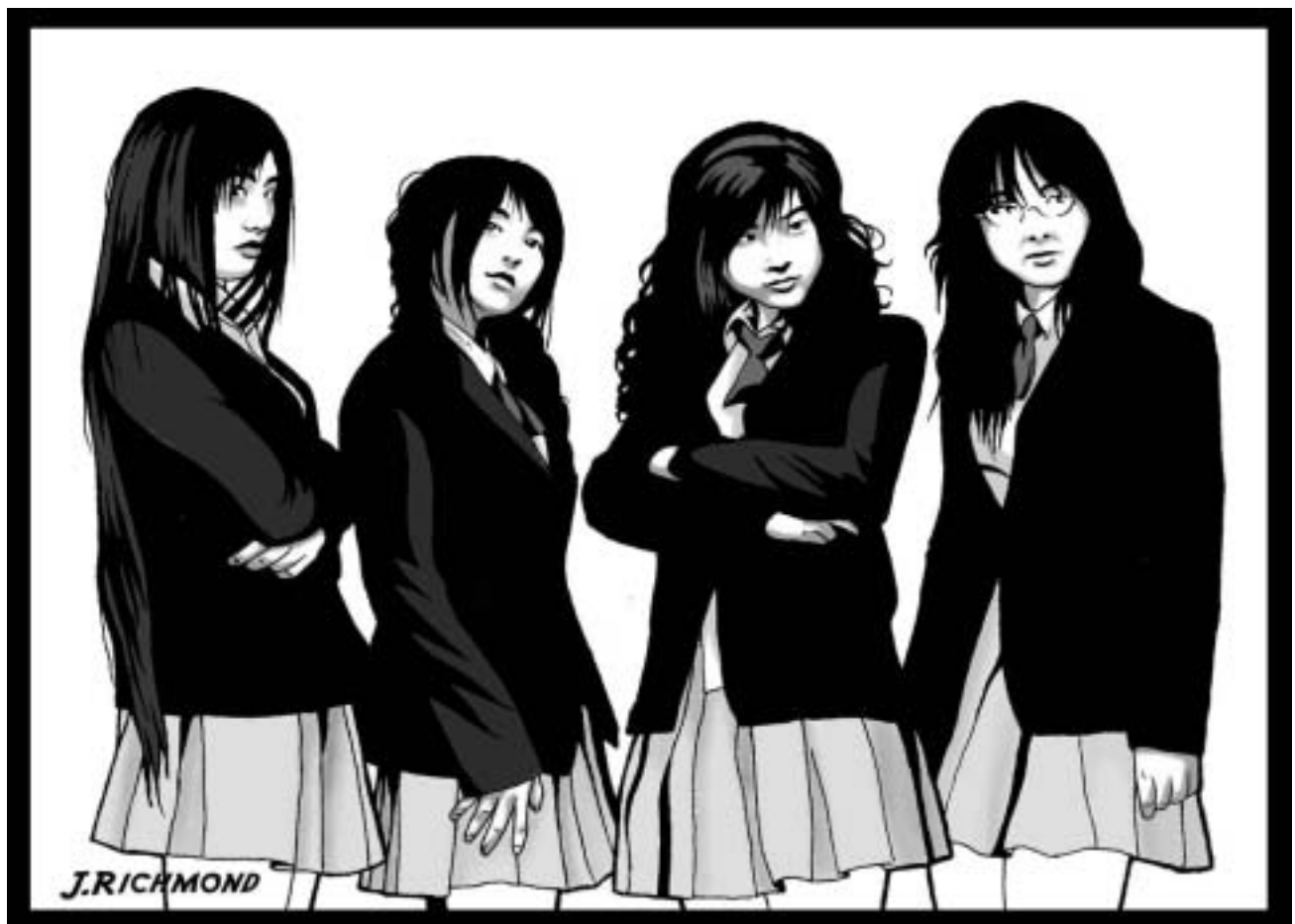
The game started just before the school festival. We discovered that the board game club needed to recruit some more members or we wouldn’t be allowed to compete in any of the festivals contests. Running around the festival recruiting members (often stealing them from other clubs) gave us plenty of opportunities to use both our Air and Void dice to convince Students to join our club. Chio failed at her role to recruit an attractive young man, and her rival described how Chio’s boyfriend Rafu spotted her talking to the good looking student and in a jealous rage came over and started yelling at her in front of the entire school. Chio had spent all her Air and Void dice convincing students to join the club, so she didn’t have any left to try to reason with Rafu. Instead of spending her one Fire die to try to argue with him Chio spent some Earth dice to ignore him and walk away. She failed, and her rival got to describe how Rafu yelled at her some more and slapped her hard across the face. This is when Yoko decided to enter the conflict. With her softball bat in hand Yoko pitched a softball to herself and took aim for the back of Rafu’s head. She decided to use her Psychic powers to enhance the action as well. She succeeds and her best friend described how she hit the ball out of the air and slammed it right into the back of Rau’s head. Because it’s a psychic action we also described how the air sizzled with static electricity and a ghostly trail of light followed the ball as it impacts

against Rafu's head. The crowd is stunned at this blatant display of psychic powers, as are our Students, who had no idea their friend was a psychic. Yoko herself is confused and disturbed by this first ever manifestation of the psychic powers she didn't even know she had. Later that day we would participate in and win both the cake eating contest and the 3-legged race, but the students from other classes were wary of us, and we could here mutterings and rumors going around about Yoko being a psychic.

We ended our session at that point. It had been about 2 hours, and we all felt that was a good place to stop for the day. We had gotten caught up in the school festival and recruiting new members to join our club, and had never gotten around to completing our Agendas or discovering the Demon. We decided to save that for our next session.

The next session started up a few days later with a commotion in the hallway that drew both students and teachers out to investigate. The bloody remains of a student were found stuffed into her small locker. Later that evening our Students snuck into the school to investigate the locker and see if it was connected to the missing girls from the swim team. We had decided that there had been some nasty rumors going around since Yoko's display of psychic powers the other day. Some of the students and teachers were blaming Yoko (and us!) for the disappearances. It was only a matter of time before the government showed up to haul us away, so we had to act fast and find out what was really going on.

This session had everything that makes Panty Explosion really exciting. A really scary confrontation with a demon possessed janitor in the dark school hallways was just a preview of the conflict that came later, an all out struggle in the locker room and showers with a dog like Yama-Inu demon that could travel between



lockers. To everyone's surprise (including my own) the fight with the Demon was incredibly rich and detailed, and the conflict resolution system worked very well for what was essentially an extended combat scene. Yoko used her powers to make the demons head explode, but that barely slowed the creature down, and its head quickly grew back. After suffering some truly terrifying wounds (the Demon locked its jaws around Yumi's head and tried to swallow her, and also chewed much of the skin off Chio's arm) we trapped the creature under a garbage can. It struggled for a while, but without a new body to possess and drag into a locker it eventually died and crumbled to dust. We called Chio's asshole boyfriend Rafu, who grudgingly agreed to come and pick us up at the school and take us to the hospital.

During the confrontation we got a few chances to resolve some of our Agendas. Both Chio and Yoko found clues that led them to believe that our homeroom teacher was somehow connected with the Demon and the disappearance of the swim team. In the next game we play they'll use that information to take their revenge on Ms. Kuji. Yumi was able to complete both of her agendas in one go. Now that she knew Yoko was a psychic she found herself very attracted to the other girl. In a quiet moment between the demons attacks she took a chance and kissed her friend. Yumi has decided to abandon her agenda to find Yoko a new boyfriend and now wants to become Yoko's girlfriend. We'll see how that goes over in our next game.

After

Over all I think the 2 sessions were a big success. Each was played out in about 2 hours, which I think is the perfect amount of time for a game of PE. We also discovered that combat in Panty Explosion could be really nasty and fulfilling, and I think we've forever banished the idea that PE is "just a relationship game".

This game gave me a chance to address some of my own questions about the game. In past sessions I've done a poor job of using the scene creation and traits rules, so I made extra effort to use them in this game. The scene creation rules were quick and easy to use (as intended), with each player contributing elements to the scene that they wanted to explore. If a scene wasn't creepy enough we made it creepier. If a scene needed another character we invented one on the spot. That was a lot of fun and a good reminder of how important those rules are to the game.

Overall I had a lot of fun, and I'm happy to have proven that you can play a fun game of panty Explosion in just 2 hours. Despite that, I think our future games may stretch a little longer. We're growing more comfortable with our Students and we have a lot of neat scenes to explore and Agendas to follow up on. I think we'll be playing these Students for awhile.

Here's a look at some things that came up during our game.

Agendas: When you start a game of PE each player selects one or two Agendas. these are goals that the player works toward during the game. Completing your Agendas gives you the option of selecting a new Trait at the end of the session, while leaving your Agenda uncompleted empowers the Demon that you have to face. One of things I discovered with this game is that it's really important to let new players know that they should be working toward their Agendas. As a result of this I was very focused on my Students Agendas, creating scenes and situations that I could take advantage of to see them completed. The other players became wrapped up in chasing down the Demon and ended up putting their Agendas aside or forgetting about them. Which is okay. But I think I let my friends who were unfamiliar with the game down because I didn't explain why completing your Agendas is worthwhile. Because I was the only player really pushing their Agenda the game became very me-centric, with the Superintendent introducing his Demon stuff

as seemed appropriate. If Woody and Gabe had known to pursue their Agendas the game could have, and almost certainly would have gone in a different direction.

Conflict resolution: PE uses a simple success/failure die system to resolve conflicts. once success or failure is determined the result is described by the players Best Friend or Rival. In this game we were a little sluggish at this first. As our Students were hunting around and trying to convince their classmates to sign up for the board game club the descriptions of our successes and failures started to become more interesting. When Woody's character Chio failed at an attempt to recruit a popular student her best friend (Gabe) got a chance to invent her jealous asshole of a boyfriend. I think this was the point where the idea of describing other players success and failure really clicked with everybody. Woody's second failure, Chio's attempt to get away from her boyfriend), gave Gabe a chance to escalate the scene from an argument to a fight by having the boyfriend slap Chio hard across the face in front of everyone. The description of the action didn't just include the physical blow. Gabe went into detail about Chio's embarrassment at being struck in front of the entire school, and how many of her friends turned away or stood by and did nothing. Our group latched on to humiliation as a theme for our game, and almost every description covered not just the physical act that was being performed but also the emotional and social impact of the action.

We definitely went for a style of play where the descriptions of actions led right into brand new conflicts. When Gabe brought his Student Yoko into the same scene and used her psychic powers on the boyfriend I got to describe not just the action but the crowds fear and revulsion. Based on that description we decided that the entire school would become suspicious of Yoko and her alleged psychic powers, and start accusing her of killing the missing swim team. This gave us a sense of urgency and direction. We had to discover what had actually happened to the swim team and clear Yoko's name.

Best Friends and Rivals: For some reason in our first session we had a lot of trouble remembering who our best friends and rivals were. This led to a lot of confusion and a lot of bewildered looks when someone was asked to describe their best friend or rivals action. Early in the first session we had a lot of slow down because we kept having to check our notes to see who was supposed to be describing what. We chose new Best friends/rivals for our second session and almost immediately the problem went away. I know part of the confusion came from odd dice rolls. Woody kept failing at his roles and because of this the player playing his best friend never got a chance to describe one of his successes. When Woody finally did succeed we sat around the table for several seconds staring at the player who was supposed to describe his action before one of us had to nudge him and tell him he was on. Similarly, I kept succeeding at all my rolls and my Students best friend found himself describing my actions so often that he started describing every ones actions. I hadn't encountered this kind of confusion with the best Friend/Rival mechanic before, and I think if this becomes a problem in future games (it didn't happen in our 2nd session) then I'll make name tags or something.

Building scenes: This was something that I wanted to focus on in these sessions, and I'm really glad I did. In PE players work together to build the 5 aspects of a scene. This is supposed to be a quick and easy process, but it took us awhile to warm up to it. The first few scenes were mostly created by myself or Nick, but Woody and Gabe started contributing soon enough, and by the second game we had adopted an alternative system where each of us suggested an aspect of the scene based on our most powerful Godai Element. This was an interesting alternative to the normal method and one that I think we'll continue in future games. One of us (often the superintendent) would suggest a location for the scene. Woody would tell us about the people that were in the scene, Gabe would describe what was happening and I'd finish up by designating the mood. We would then decide as a group if there scene had any supernatural or strange

elements. By the middle of the second session we had become comfortable enough with the process as a group that we were able to create a scene in just a few seconds. This led to a number of interesting scenes, including the final confrontation with the demon that took place in the schools showers with the lights out. Scene creation very quickly became a series of attempts to out do each other, and as a result the scenes became more interesting, unconventional and bizarre. We also took advantage of scene creation to introduce new conflicts into existing situations. In one of the last scenes of the game, where the girls escaped from the school and headed for the hospital) we set the scene by having Chio's call her asshole boyfriend and have him pick us up in his car. We hadn't seen the boyfriend character since the first session so bringing him back in created a real nice conflict (Chio ended up breaking up with him in the hospital parking lot) and gave us a nice sense of closure.

Roleplaying: This was the tough part. Gabe didn't actually want to play Panty Explosion.

The idea of pretending to be a 15-year-old Japanese girl does nothing for him. So it was kind of a tough sell. Fortunately he warmed up to the idea that PE is an adventure game, with Demons and psychics and all that. But we still had a bit of trouble getting into character (myself included) and any scene that brought our students gender or sexuality to the forefront was a little strained. Of course this got better as we went along, but we kind of hit a wall when I suggested that Yumi had become attracted to Yoko once Yoko revealed her psychic powers (kissing a psychic was one of Yumi's Agendas). This kind of situation can be difficult, and I didn't want to push it and make anyone uncomfortable. I decided to play the scenes involving Yumi's attraction to Yoko as comedy, and everybody seemed to respond fairly well to that. Woody didn't have much trouble playing out Chio's relationship with her boyfriend, which was mostly antagonistic. But as a group we ended up staying away from the "schoolgirl" part and stuck closer to the "psychic adventures" aspects of the game. Which is okay I guess. PE can be played a number of different ways, and certainly you want everyone in your group to be comfortable with the game. And there's definitely a... taboo(?) with some people (a lot of people) around playing girls, especially girls that do girly things. Or feminine things. Or express sexual interests. Or whatever. In future games I want to be able to show my fellow players that it's okay to explore these parts of their characters, especially since these aspects are very big parts of the traditional psychic schoolgirl genre.

Combat: Nick didn't think the PE resolution rules would work for combat. Or at least not for anything engaging or interesting. I've never taken a game in that direction myself so I was eager to see how it would go. A lot of people at Gencon wrote off Panty explosion as a "relationship game" (I wasn't even aware that there was a stigma there, but apparently there is). Gabe was concerned that our characters would just sit



around and talk to each other and nothing interesting would happen. Nick told us that he would be focusing on combat for this game, but I think we were all a little surprised when the entire second session became essentially two long fight scenes. This was very enjoyable. We very quickly took advantage of our roles as Best Friends and Rivals to either inflict horrible wounds on other players or have them perform incredible acts of bravery and desperation. Every description of a success became a daring last minute save or a lucky hit with an unconventional weapon, while every failure was a near death experience. I had suspected that a good combat would rely on the players realizing that their only limits would be what they could describe, and Gabe and Woody picked up on this almost immediately. We also put the scene creation rule to good use to create some really neat situations to fight the Demon in. For the final confrontation we described how a power outage had left the locker rooms showers in complete darkness. Water poured from both the shower heads and cracks in the walls as we stood in ankle deep water desperately waving our one flashlight around trying to spot the demon that was stalking us.

Of course the downside to combat was that in a life or death situation failure means death. It took a few minutes for everyone to see that improvisation was the key. Twice Gabe had the opportunity as my Students rival to describe how Yumi was brutally killed, but both times he chose instead to have her seriously wounded or thoroughly humiliated. Again, combat quickly became an attempt to out do each other in our descriptions.

Things we missed: We completely forgot about Traits. I think only one of us called on a Trait the entire game. This isn't a big deal, but Traits are valuable and we had plenty of chances to use them. We also completely forgot that a known Psychic could not be the most popular girl, and as a result Yoko remained most popular for much of both sessions. We only took two popularity votes, one at the beginning of each session. Normally a game will have 2 or three votes, but I think this was okay because each session took place over a very short amount of time. This did mean that I was stuck being least popular for the entire game, but I rolled remarkably well and didn't suffer for it.

Overall I am very pleased with these sessions. I think the other players enjoyed themselves, although I know Woody said he wished we had played longer. I like the simplicity of a 2 hour session. To me it gives the game a movie like quality. But I think most of the people I play with prefer a longer and more involved game. I've proposed that in the future we play 2 episodes a night. One before dinner and one after. That makes sense to me, although I think I may be working toward a personal aesthetic that no one else cares about.