Grunting

The Race for Fire!

A 24 hour role-play game

By

Jennifer Spencer

Introduction

It is a time before time. When men and dinosaurs roamed the earth together, and the wheel had just been invented. Men and women roamed the plains in their loincloths, hunting mammoth, and creating the first communities. Language is just starting to find its feet, and some bright little cave-sparks have begun to harness the power of the landscape and the animals around them to produce higher standards of living for their fellow men. However, one thing is missing, FIRE! With fire, men can have metals, heat, better food, warmth, stronger, deadlier weapons, and command the fear of the animals around them. Fire is indeed mighty, and it's what you need to get to survive.

You do not have FIRE. But someone nearby does, or knows how to get it. The FIRE must be yours...

Welcome to Grunting: The Race for Fire.

Setting

The world!

Grunting is set in an alternative prehistoric world. The default game setting has cave men and women, living next door to at least one other cave-tribe. Dinosaurs roam the earth alongside great woolly mammoths, sabre-toothed tigers, huge big-teethed reptiles, and cute little prairie dogs (or whatever other animals you believe could be around at the time!). Weather conditions can range from howling blizzards to searing heat and drought. The landscape too varies from areas of dense lush rainforest and jungle, with huge man-eating plants, and surprisingly strong vines, to barren deserts, where the cave-tribes fight for any form of vegetation or water.

Making your world

When you are deciding what sort of world your cave people are going to be in, it is a highly recommended idea to discuss this with your players during character generation. The reason for this is because of the unusual approach to communication between players and the GM that Grunting takes, and so the more you and your players share in the creation of your landscape and your cave tribe's world, the easier the game will be later.

For the first few games, it is probably best to stick to a very simple cave-man world, where technology hasn't really got past the wheel, and most things come in their natural forms. However, again it should be stressed that the best plan is to always discuss the setting with the PCs during character generation, this is especially relevant for more complicated settings.

Cave Tribes

Even before monkey became man, he knew the value of living in a group. Numbers provide strength, solidarity, and breeding options! Cave tribes range anywhere between just a caveman and woman, to groups of several families, numbering as high as twenty, or even more! Your cave tribe, however, is only as big as the number of players you have.

Traditionally, cavemen are the hunters, and cave-women are gatherers and protectors of the young. However, in the quest for FIRE, every caveman and woman must do their utmost to secure a future for their tribe!

Cavemen and women vary in how they conduct relationships, and organise family units. If you want a tribe who keeps their women locked in cages, or one where children are sent out into the wild to learn to fend for themselves, then decide it amongst your group and go for it!
.

The Game

All players in Grunting are either cavemen or cave-women, and together the group forms a single cave tribe. The object of the game for the tribe is to achieve FIRE! However, this is never as simple as finding a bit of flint and some dried timber, oh no. This is a game of caveman espionage, and so FIRE will usually be in the possession of another tribe, or it will require some quite extraordinary action on the part of our brave cave-tribe to attain. Before man could speak, he knew how to get what he wanted. Now he wants FIRE, and will do anything to get it...

What you will need:

Every player will need:
- 2 6-sided die (d6)
- A character sheet
- A cave-speak sheet
- A pencil
- A pad of paper

How to play

This game is unusual in that, as language has only just been invented, players can only communicate to the GM via written notes, and can only communicate to the other players in cave-speak (see Language) and drawings (which cannot include any words or letters). The GM can communicate normally with the group (or not, as they see fit!).

Because of the extraordinary system of communication in Grunting, the system is very simple, and the focus of the game should definitely be on the narrative from the players, rather than on multiple dice-rolls to complete unimportant actions.

The system

This is explained more in the following chapter, but essentially you as a player have four stats, and two skills. When you wish to do something, communicate your intended action to the GM (either through a written note, saying it in cave-speak or via a drawing), and the GM will tell you which of your four stats to roll on (unless you have the relevant skill in which case your action succeeds automatically). Roll two d6 and add your stat to it. If the end result is above 7, you succeed and the GM will describe your action.

Character generation

Character generation in Grunting has four easy steps:
- Pick your character's gender, age, and relationship to the other members of the tribe, and age.
- Number each of your stats from one to four to show your relative strength in each one (5 being the highest/best).
- Pick two skills. Skills are things your character can just do, and so you do not need to roll a dice if you do something you have a skill in. If you want to do something that is covered by a skill but you don't have it, then the GM will tell you which stat to roll it under.
- Design your loincloth!

You're done!

Stats:

The four stats that every cave-person has are:
- **Ug** - Speech/persuasion: a high Ug score means a cave-person who is good at persuading other cave-people about things, whether this is through a charming tone of grunting, an excellent hand at cave-drawing, or a voice so sweet it can sing a mammoth to sleep.
- **Bash** - Fighting/strength: a character with a high Bash score is a good fighter, and/or a tremendously strong person. Bash is used for physical feats that primarily require strength and stamina, such as wrestling a crocodile, or tipping a sleeping mammoth.
- **Run** - Speed/dexterity: Run gives your character speed, agility, balance, and co-ordination. This is very useful for tying tricky knots in snares, walking over a narrow log bridge, or out-running an angry woken mammoth.
- **Mmmmm** - Appearance/smell: Mmmmm represents how good your character looks or how nicely they smell. High Mmmmm stats represent a lack of smell, or even a pleasant one, and good looks in your cave-person. Low Mmmmm stats represent very ugly characters, and/or characters that smell like they've just been shat on by an angry mammoth.

Skills:

Your cave-person may have two skills out of the following list (it's often a good idea to make the tribe has a range of skills!):
- **Murrr-arg** (talk to animals)
- **RAAAAAR** (intimidation)
- **Snoo-snoo** (seduction)
- **Uk-uk** (make/use tools)
- **Ploosh** (swim)
- **Nyraaagh!** (climbing)
- **TROAH** (throwing)
- **Shhhhh!** (listening)
- **Tip-tip** (sneaking)
- **Mmmmm-har** (cooking)
- **Palik** (knowledge of herbs)

Equipment:

Players have nothing bar a loincloth and a piece of chalk to make drawings with. Whatever equipment they want, they have to make or find or hunt from the surrounding landscape, or steal/barter from neighbours. GMs should make sure players have lots of options of things to use in their landscapes, unless it's going to be a central feature of the game that they don't. Players should also be encouraged to make strange uses and combinations of equipment, objects, and even animals!

For example: Grug wants to scatter a pair of Triceratops away from a sacred stone circle. So he weaves a basket from nearby grasses, and goes for a quick hunt. Returning with his quarry of two skunks, he stuffs them into the basket and rolls it at the dinosaurs. Grug grunts with satisfaction as he watches them flee from the mighty orgy of spraying!

Injury and character death

Cavemen are human beings, and thus are liable to get injured. Fortunately, they are very sturdy things, and thus only serious injuries will register with them. However, there is a limit to the amount of punishment even a caveman can take. Thus every cave-person can withstand five wounds, or *grunts* before he will be dead or incapacitated. These are noted on the character sheet. When a player receives a wound, he should grunt, and fill in one grunt space on his sheet.

Times when a cave-person receives a *grunt* could include such things as:
- Failing to make the jump across a mile-deep chasm;
- Being stabbed with a spear, or impaled on a rock;
- Wrestling with a crocodile and losing
- Losing an arm

The cave-person will be relatively unhindered by any kind of wound (because they're tough little things), but on the penultimate would they will start to slow down, and the last wound will take them out completely, be this through unconsciousness, extreme pain, shock, or death.

Language

Cave-speak.

Cave-speak is the universal language of all cave-people everywhere. There are no dialects, although some tribes may have come up with new words depending on their situations, or inventions.

Pronunciation guide:

Cave-people speak in a very rough, grunting manner (surprisingly). Thus whenever you speak like a cave-person, try to be as gruff and deep/low as you can. If a word contains several identical letters, such as "Mmmmm", then the pronunciation should be as a breathy M-sounding grunt, rather than the sound you might make if you smelled a particularly nice meal, for example.

Any words spelt out in capitals are shouted, or emphasised in cave-speak, regardless of the context in which they are being uttered, and any words followed by an exclamation mark should be uttered in a more emotive way. This is very important as it reflects the proud ancient traditions of cave-people language (for example, the caveman who invented climbing dubbed it "Nyraaagh!" as he fell off the cliff he'd just ascended).

The following page should be printed out and handed to each player prior to the game. It's a good idea to try and get them used to some of the more common words during character generation, just to ease the transition.

NB The following table does not include the cave-speak we've already met in character generation, as it is included on the character sheet.

NBB The following vocabulary list, as you can probably tell, is nowhere near exhaustive - feel free to add your own group's cave-speak, especially if you notice words you tend to use often. Put them in the 'New words' section.

As Cave-speak is so restrictive, you will often find that there are concepts you need to express which the language has not yet managed to cater to. If drawings and gesticulation fail you, then the best idea is to combine words to make new ideas. So, for example, a forest could be *Ra-ta-ta ten*, or 'many trees', or a leader of a tribe could be *How-hur*, or 'big man'. The challenge for everyone in Grunting is communication, so this is where people should try to get the most involved, and definitely where they should try and have the most fun!

A note on counting: string the syllables of the numbers together, in order of largest first, much like roman numerals. So, for example, 2 is Ta-ta, 7 is Tat-tat, twenty-one is Ta-ta-taaaaaat-ta, Sixty-eight is Tat-taaaaaat-tat-tat-tat, one hundred and ten is Bu-Taaaat.

Identifying people and their bits

I/mine: Muh
You/your: Yu
He/she/it/their/its: Huh/shuh/ih
Plural of the above: Muh
We: Muh-muh
You (pl): Yu-muh
Them: Huh/shuh/ih-muh
Man: Hur
Woman: Sha
Child: Ni-ni
Name: Gwah

Elements

Wind: Shuuush
Water: Glub
Earth: Blub
Metal: Shing
Stone: Bam
Light: Hee
Dark: Nurrr
Fire: Ahoo!

Adjectives

Good/yes: Ha
Bad/no: Nuh
Big: How
Small: Mih
Danger: (a low growl)
Shiny: Ooooooh

Numbers and counting

Zero: Nug
1-5: Ta (repeat required number)
6-9: Tat
Ten: Taaaat
Multiples of ten up to 50: Ta-Taaaaat
(repeat Ta for required number)
Multiples of ten from 60 to 100: Tat-
Taaaat (repeat Tat for required
number)
Multiples of 100: Bu
Many: Ra-ta-ta
Few: Rat

Nouns

Classifier for animal: Huff-huff
Classifier for bird: Kaw-kaw
Classifier for dinosaur: He-Maar
Classifier for fish: Ploop-ploop
Classifier for reptiles: Raaaash
Classifier for stick-like object: Jhit
Classifier for cave: Mo
Classifier for trees: Ten
Classifier for rocks: Bo
Classifier for rope-like things: Siii-la
Classifier for mountain or hill: Hon
Classifier for bridge: Grag
Classifier for person or people: Hoom

Verbs

Go/do: Rar
Stay/wait: Hap
Kill: RAAAAAAAAAAR!
Sleep: Zzzzzz
Laugh: HA HA
Have sex: Snoo snoo
Make: Dap
To want: Man

Time

Night: Lo-lo
Day: Fri
Morning: Maak
Midday: Sun
Evening: Murn
Later: Pa (repeat to emphasise)
Now: MMN

New words

GM notes

This section is for GMs if they want a bit more guidance in running a game of Grunting, which isn't unreasonable given its probably one of very few cavemen-espionage games in existence!

First questions any GM should ask themselves:
- Where are your cavemen? What sort of landscape are they in? What time of year is it? What is the weather like, and what effects does this have on how fire could be achieved?
- What kind of animals/birds/fish/dinosaurs inhabit the area, and how numerous are they? Are there great sweeping herds of buffalo roaming the plains, or is the one Triceratops who lives around here looking a bit sickly these days?
- Have the neighbouring tribe already discovered fire? If they have, are they going to keep it secret? If they haven't, might they lie about it, to lure the PCs in, possibly to a trap?
- What is the neighbouring tribe like? Are they peaceful? War-like? Diplomatic? Do they want something in return for fire? Could they provide assistance?

Bear in mind, fire is a dangerous and powerful tool in the caveman world. Any tribe who possesses it is likely to be powerful and dangerous. Thus, some NPCs will be very eager to stop PCs attaining fire.

Potential ways players can steal fire!
- Finding/stealing the neighbouring villages map to a volcano
- Bartering with the neighbouring shaman to produce it in his ritual
- Finding dry kindling and sparking it using a piece of flint and the beak of a pterodactyl

Final notes
This game focuses primarily on narrative from the players, thus, try to keep situations requiring actual dice-rolls to a minimum, as they require communication between one player and a GM, where the focus should be on inter-player communication as much as possible. Ideally the players will spend most of their time talking, and coming up with a plan. This puts an awful lot of importance on how well you describe the surrounding world and the situation to the players. Your description should be full and involving, so people all share a very clear idea of what they have to work with. This is why joint-world creation during character generation is a very good thing. This is especially relevant if you decide to make the cave-world more fantastical by including such things as cavemen riding on the backs of dinosaurs, or great cave-metropolises, full of simplistic technology such as waterwheels, moving bridges, and gas vents. Such things will complicate the language issue for the PCs, but can make for a very fun imaginative game for the PCs if they have lots of options in terms of ways to get around places!

So, that's it! Have fun!

Grunting Character Sheet

- **Name:**

OW!

◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯
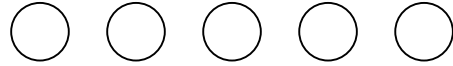
- **Age:**

Stats:

UG ☐

BASH ☐

RUN ☐

MMMMM ☐

Loincloth:

Skills:

- **Murrr-arg**
  (talk to animals)
- **RAAAAAR**
  (intimidation)
- **Snoo-snoo**
  (seduction)
- **Uk-uk**
  (make/use tools)
- **Ploosh**
  (swim)
- **Nyraaagh!**
  (climbing)
- **TROAH**
  (throwing)
- **Shhhhh!**
  (listening)
- **Tip-tip**
  (sneaking)
- **Mmmmm-har**
  (cooking)
- **Palik**
  (knowledge of herbs)

Equipment:

Loincloth

Chalk

Examples

If after reading all that you feel a bit lost and are stuck for inspiration, here are a few examples of player drawings, and plans to attain their goals. If nothing else, they prove you don't have to be a good artist to communicate what you want to do!

The tribe need to get past some guards. They come up with three plans.

The first involves one of the cave-women using their high "Mmmmm" stat to lure a guard into "Snoo-snoo" so the others can sneak past. She declines, politely.
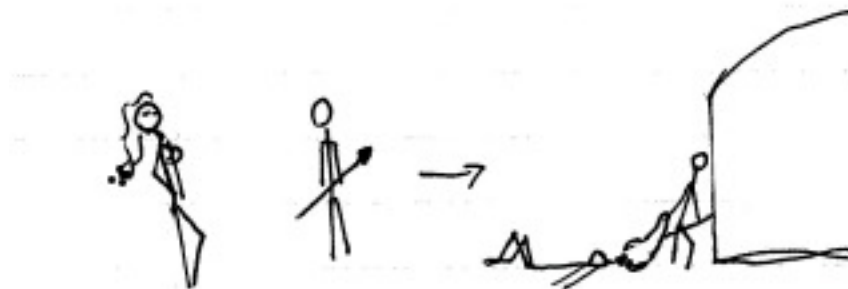

The second involves the tribe capturing a mammoth and using a rope and a tree to "distract" the guards with it. The group decide they'd rather not risk a mammoth-goring right now.
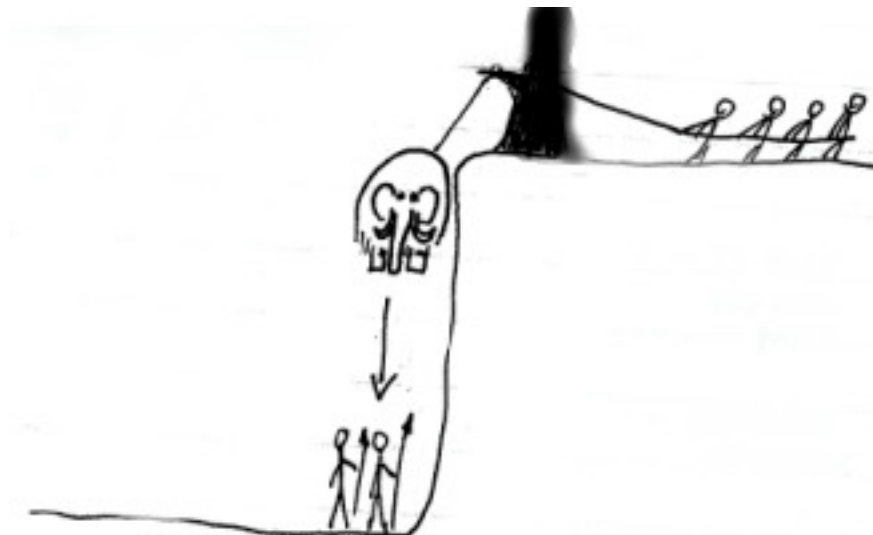
The third plan involves a brave caveman leaping onto the back of a T-Rex, and using a long pole and a big piece of meat to drive it through the blockade. No volunteers could be found.
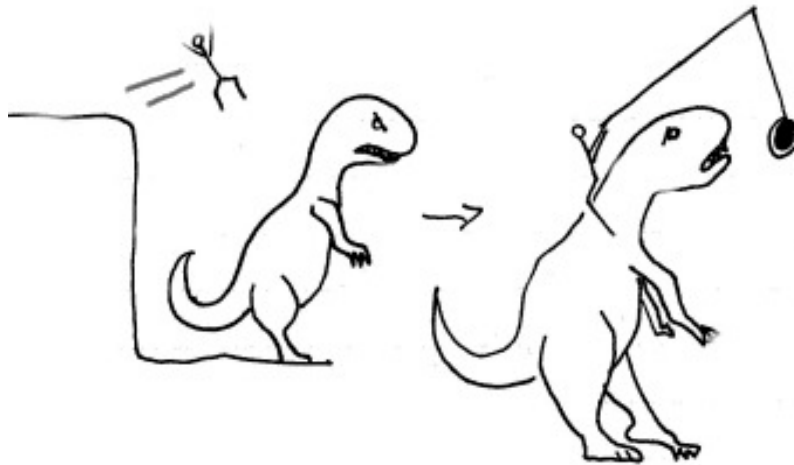
Once the group manage to get pass the guards, using a cunning pit trap and a caveman dressed as an insolent chicken, the group reach the lava flow that the other village have been protecting. Now the group need to figure out how to get lava back to the village to make fire from. The following plan is suggested by a player to another:
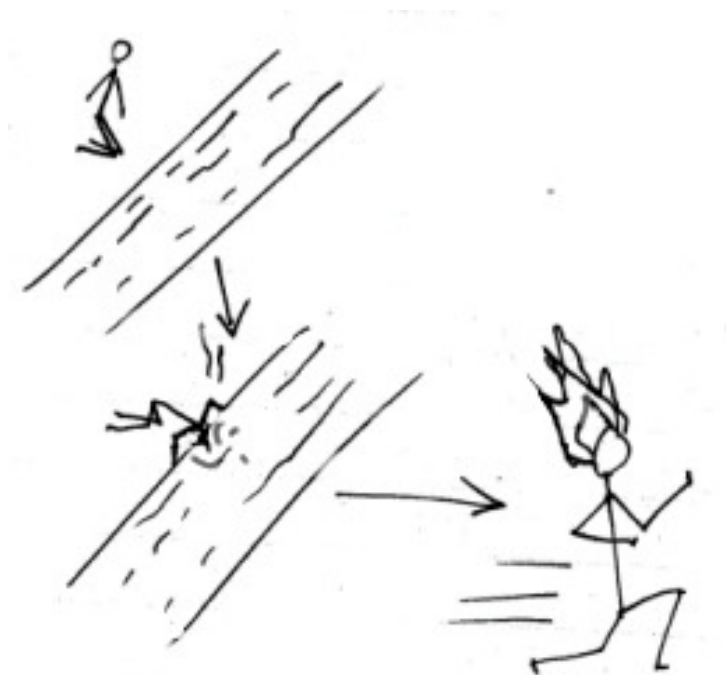
The other player declines, politely.