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2 hrs · 

Now, a small special report from GenCon, and why this hobby is so amazing.

Ryan Lyle. He's just a dude I met. We meet a lot of dudes, and a lot of dudettes, because meeting people is kind of the whole point. The night before, mid-panel, [Robert Woford](#) had said he was a little worried about trying to help four would-be Shadowrunners make characters, so while Bobby and Cliff were giving good advice and Opti was being Opti-mistic, I just offered to help.

"What time's the session? Cool. I can be there. How 'bout that? I'll just crash it tomorrow, hang out, and if you feel like you need the help, I'll take some of 'em off your hands for you."

As it turns out, those four would-be Shadowrunners no showed. It's GenCon, it happens. But we did have a leftover sitting at the table, Ryan, who was putting the finishing touches on a character he'd made the session prior. He was busy writing most of the time, so I didn't interrupt, but eventually he said he wouldn't mind me looking over his character sheet and just seeing if he'd missed anything big. I helped him spend the last of his nuyen and karma, we shared a few Shadowrun stories, and then we got to just CHATTING-chatting.

Ryan Lyle is a good guy. He's a teacher. He's a teacher in a super rural school, one that has something like 105 kids, total, from K-12. Ryan isn't just the sort of friggin' SUPERHERO who tries to teach math to middle-school and high-school kids (ugh, let that sink in, would'ja?), but he runs an after-school program. The school is so small that basically anyone who wants to be on a sports team gets on, but there are still kids who'd rather do something else. Those 'something else' kids get basically stranded after school with nothing to do, waiting on their more athletic peers.

Ryan and a coworker? They run a gaming club for those kids. For three years -- missing just TWO sessions in all that time! -- he and a second-grade teacher have been running a gaming club for the kids at this school, on their own dime, on their own time.

"The rule is no electronics," Ryan told me, nodding his head a little like someone, well, someone reciting a rule.

They play board games, card games, RPGs. They have to read. They have to do math. They have to imagine, and socialize.

Think about that, for a second. Older geeks, can you IMAGINE this? Some of your teachers running a club for you, instead of D&D getting you picked on, lectured for being 'Satanic,' or whatever? How awesome is this. HOW AWESOME IS THIS?!

But the awesome doesn't stop, because Ryan and his buddy -- I really do feel awful I forgot the guy's name -- also came to GenCon with a purpose. Their two graduating seniors were here with them, because the gaming club had fundraisers to gather the cash, and they took two students here to GenCon for their senior trip. Driving from rural Michigan with two recent grads, being psyched about all the games they can play, about the scope of GenCon, about the 63,000 or so geeks all slinging dice, flipping cards, telling stories. What a great senior trip!

But the awesome still doesn't stop, because I felt like trying to encourage this behavior. I dragged Ryan -- with his permission, hoping it wouldn't make him uncomfortable -- over to the Catalyst Game Labs booth, to talk to Shadowrun dev [Jason M. Hardy](#). I put Jason on the spot, hell, I opened with "Boss, I know this puts you on the spot, but..." and I asked Ryan to tell his story, and then I asked Jason what we could do to help.

So he helped. When they left on Sunday, they had a couple new boxed sets (including the Beginner Box, custom-tailored to introducing new players to the game) with them.

It's just a little swag. It's just a small thing. It's just a few more boxes of GenCon loot going home with four happy geeks, but it -- no joke -- it almost chokes me up. Thinking about how far the hobby has come that we've got teachers doing after-school programs, thinking about how far from Satanic Panic we've gotten that a rural community will all pitch in to send two of their kids off to a gaming convention, and thinking about how small and tight-knit the gaming community still is, even amidst the corporate displays and ad banners and professionalism of GenCon, that we could hook these guys up with some swag (what little swag they were certain would fit in their

over-packed car).

I love this hobby. I love how time has changed it, smoothed over the rough edges, normalized it. I love how many female gamers I saw, how many rainbow ribbons I saw on badges, how many "gaymer" t-shirts I saw. I love that a major US city gets turned into a geek mecca for the better part of a week, and that Indianapolis welcomes us back home every year.

I love the guys like Ryan Lyle out there bringing the hobby to the next generation, and the guys like Jason Hardy who will encourage it, given half a chance.