

## Story Games Discussions

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# Muse vs. Geiger Counter



Demiurge

September 2011 edited September 2011

A few days ago Jamie Fristrom challenged me to sell my storytelling game Muse a little harder. He mentioned that Geiger Counter, Archipelago II and Universalis are all potentially similar games that he might want to play instead.

This post is an answer to his first challenge: I compare [Muse](#) with [Geiger Counter](#). First I'll show some of the major similarities and differences, and then give a summary at the end. Feel free to skip to the summary if you don't care for the details.

The purpose of this comparison is *not* to bash Geiger Counter. It seems like a really neat game. I'm just trying to convince you that if you like Geiger Counter, then you might like Muse even more.

Side-by-Side Comparison: Muse vs. Geiger Counter

- Both games cost \$0.
- Muse is playable with any genre or type of fiction, Geiger Counter is for survival horror only.
- Muse is a pure Storytelling Game (STG) where players do not directly play the roles of characters. Geiger Counter is an RPG where players rotate between being GM or playing a role.
- Muse plays best with 3–6 players, Geiger Counter with 5–7.
- Muse requires no unusual materials to play (1 deck of cards, tokens), Geiger Counter requires 20–30 d6 of which 8 need to be a different colour (tough for non-gamers to acquire).
- Both games require no pre-preparation.
- Both games run about 2–4 hours, work well for one-shots and have potential for follow-up sessions.
- Both games move clockwise around the table with players taking on the role of Narrator/Director.
- In Muse the Narrator tells the story unilaterally (within well-defined limits), whereas in Geiger Counter the Director is a GM and his role is cooperative with the other players.
- In Muse rules-arbitrated conflicts occur only between players. In Geiger Counter rules-arbitrated conflicts are character vs. character or character vs. menace.
- Muse is very structured, from the setup phase through to the ending. Geiger Counter's trailer and prelude phases are very freeform, it seems to me like a crapshoot as to whether or not they'll consistently produce good results. Furthermore, achieving the right ending seems freeform and tricky as well.
- In Muse, the game ends with the main protagonist either achieving or not achieving their goal. In Geiger Counter, the game's goal is to end up with the menace defeated and 1–2 characters still alive.
- Muse has winners at the end of the game, Geiger Counter does not have winners or losers.

Summary: Muse vs. Geiger Counter

In summary, if you want to play the very specific genre of survival horror in which 1–2 characters survive, and you have 5 players available, then Geiger Counter is probably the better choice. I would try it! Geiger Counter is probably also the better choice if you feel that you absolutely *must* play a character role during the game.

In all other cases I think Muse is the better choice:

- It's easier to start a game because you need easily-obtained materials and only 3 people to play.
- Muse allows you to play *any* kind of fiction, giving you total genre/style flexibility with only one

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set of rules.

- You can have happy endings, sad endings, even total tragedies where every character dies, and still have a really fun time playing.
- Muse's highly structured yet easy-to-learn rules support the players and help ensure that every game session is fun.
- Muse has a touch of something still relatively rare in story games: pure storytelling with no direct role-playing--and it creates living stories that don't seem like plot synopses.
- Muse is also a great choice for introducing non-gamer friends to gaming, because non-gamers are often more comfortable with narration (story-telling) than they are with acting.

I hope I've convinced you to read [Muse](#) and try it at least once. If yes, I'm very eager to hear about your experience. If not, then I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have, or listen to your comments and constructive criticism.

Sincerely,

--Jonathan

## Comments



Paul\_T

September 2011

What an interesting breakdown!

This part is well put, Jon:

Posted By: Demiurge\* Muse has a touch of something still relatively rare in story games: pure storytelling with no direct role-playing--and it creates living stories that don't seem like plot synopses.

\* Muse is also a great choice for introducing non-gamer friends to gaming, because non-gamers are often more comfortable with narration (story-telling) than they are with acting.

I'm looking forward to seeing how this conversation develops (if it does), and hope that no one takes offense at anything said here!



ivan

September 2011

I for one am going to try it. 2-3 players GMless is actually my typical situation and not many games cater for it.



Demiurge

September 2011

Posted By: ivan

I for one am going to try it. 2-3 players GMless is actually my typical situation and not many games cater for it.

Thank you, Ivan. I'll warn you in advance that the game is more challenging with only 2 players because each player does have to provide comparatively more creative output.

Please let me know how it goes!

--Jonathan



J\_Walton

October 2011

Hey, so it's cool that maybe you're aiming for an audience that might like Geiger Counter, but this is kinda like comparing apples and oranges, isn't it? It's not really like we're competing for people's time and attention. Either

they're excited to play Geiger or they're excited to play Muse. Probably not both, since they're so different. It also feels a bit weird to be pimping your own game by criticizing another ("crapshoot," "tricky," etc.). You're not hurting my feelings; I'm just not sure what the point is.

(I'm also not sure everything you say about Geiger is exactly true, especially because it's not actually finished. The version I'm working on now is the "gamma" or semi-final version and the game's changed quite a bit between versions.)



**zircher**

October 2011 edited October 2011

Not that I'm trying to fan a flame war or anything, but I'd love to see a counter comparison when gamma is ready. One way to look at it is that GC is a known baseline for comparison. My take on it is having both tools in your kit is a win-win.

--

TAZ



**jessecoombs**

October 2011

This kinda sells me on Geiger Counter! It sounds fun.



**ivan**

October 2011 edited October 2011

JWalton: I can't speak for Demiurge, but Geiger Counter is probably one of the best known free GMless games. It seems natural to compare to something that most people know and like.



**UserClone**

October 2011

@ivan: I can't speak for JWalton, but I don't think it was the comparison he found fault with necessarily, but more the unnecessary critical remarks made towards GC in an (uncool, IMO) attempt to make Muse look that much cooler.

Not that I don't think Muse is cool in its own right, but why he felt the need to make a few offhand disparaging-sounding (to me) remarks towards GC is a mystery to me. They both seem cool IMO, but I haven't played either, only perused(look that word up, it might not mean what you think it does :P) them.



**ivan**

October 2011

@userclone:

right, I see what you mean. I didn't read the comments the way you guys did, but more as a statement of freeform vs mechanical resolution for the finale.



**Demiurge**

October 2011 edited October 2011

Posted By: ivan

Geiger Counter is probably one of the best known free GMless games. It seems natural to compare to something that most people know and like.

Right. The name was suggested to me by Jamie Fristrom, who challenged me to explain to him why he should take the time to read Muse when there are other great free games out there like Geiger Counter, and I decided to read the rules and compare with Muse. I genuinely like Geiger Counter and would give it a try if given the opportunity.

Posted By: J. Walton

Hey, so it's cool that maybe you're aiming for an audience that might like Geiger Counter, but this is kinda like comparing apples and oranges, isn't it?

Yes, to an extent it *is* comparing apples and oranges. In a sense, I'm selling Muse by showing that it really is a different sort of game--and not just a clone of what's already out there.

It's not really like we're competing for people's time and attention. Either they're excited to play Geiger or they're excited to play Muse. Probably not both, since they're so different. It also feels a bit weird to be pimping your own game by criticizing another ("crapshoot," "tricky," etc.). You're not hurting my feelings; I'm just not sure what the point is.

I wasn't trying to put down Geiger Counter, but I do see how my inline comments (e.g. "tough for non-gamers to acquire") could be interpreted that way. I had just read through the rules and was essentially writing a review for Geiger Counter while simultaneously comparing with Muse.

I hope you found the comments constructive, if not, then I apologize.

(I'm also not sure everything you say about Geiger is exactly true, especially because it's not actually finished. The version I'm working on now is the "gamma" or semi-final version and the game's changed quite a bit between versions.)

I have no way of reading rules that you haven't published yet... my review only applies to the most recently published version at the time of my post.

Sincerely,

--Jonathan



**Demiurge**

October 2011

Posted By: jessecoombs

This kinda sells me on Geiger Counter! It sounds fun.

Great! I agree.

--Jonathan



**Demiurge**

October 2011 edited October 2011

Posted By: UserClone

I don't think it was the comparison he found fault with necessarily, but more the unnecessary critical remarks made towards GC in an (uncool, IMO) attempt to make Muse look that much cooler.

No malice was intended. If I do post another comparison in the future, I will be more careful to be more neutral in my appraisal.

Sincerely,

--Jonathan



**UserClone**

October 2011

My bad, it looks like you've basically apologized insofar as was necessary for an error in wording on a review made in good faith. It looked worse that it was, it seems. In any case, I'm interested to try Muse, but it may be a

bit too far removed from traditional for my group to swallow. OTOH, so is Geiger Counter, probably...



**NCLivingBrit**

October 2011

Posted By: jessecoombsThis kinda sells me on Geiger Counter! It sounds fun.

Super fun.

We used the index cards mapping thingy and it really made the game awesome. Much easier to enjoy the ever smaller circle of safe places (on a train!) with the horrible flesh-eating smoke monster closing in!



**Demiurge**

October 2011

Posted By: NCLivingBrit

We used the index cards mapping thingy and it really made the game awesome. Much easier to enjoy the ever smaller circle of safe places (on a train!) with the horrible flesh-eating smoke monster closing in!

Woah! That's really creative.

--Jonathan



**Jason\_Morningstar**

October 2011

This is so, so the wrong approach to getting people excited about your game. Regardless of your intentions this thread casts you in a very negative and unproductive light.

Here's a better approach: Play a ton of Geiger Counter and help JWalt develop and finish it. Then ask him to try out your game. If he likes it he will champion it. If he doesn't he'll still provide great feedback to help you improve it.

Here's a better approach: Find another game looking for playtesters and jump in to help out. Be excellent, become part of a community, contribute and don't expect reciprocity. You'll learn a lot and find that people you've helped will most likely be eager to help you in turn.



**J\_Walton**

October 2011

Jonathan: We're cool, no problem. When I first started talking about indie games online, I wrote a lot of posts trying to pimp my games and ideas and a lot of times I went about it the wrong way, just because I didn't really have an "in" to the community or have a better idea about how to do it. It can be tough, so I definitely sympathize. This is probably, like Jason says, not the best way, but, oh well, live and learn. It's definitely about reciprocity in this community and the more you play and get excited about other people's games, the more people are excited to play and talk about your own games. It can sometimes seem like you have to "put in your time as an apprentice," in a sense, because in the beginning nobody has any reason to pay attention to you or your games (since there are a billion other things to look at on the internet), but -- assuming you have fun, smart things to say, and I'm sure you do -- it does happen eventually. If Muse is really super awesome, you'll gain fans in small but consistent numbers for a year or two and then, sooner or later, a bunch of folks will be playing it (see: Red Box Hack, Lady Blackbird, Geiger Counter, Archipeligo, TSOY, Fiasco, etc.).



**jdfristrom**

October 2011

I apologize if I incited a throw-down!

Posted By: Jason MorningstarHere's a better approach: Find another game looking for playtesters and jump in to help out. Be excellent, become part of a community, contribute and don't expect reciprocity. You'll

learn a lot and find that people you've helped will most likely be eager to help you in turn.

Wish I'd heard that advice a year ago...



**Demiurge**

October 2011

Hi Jonathan,

Posted By: J. Walton

We're cool, no problem.

Thanks for your understanding. I was trying to be insightful and provoke discussion, and I ended up making people upset... I'll find a different way to approach advertising Muse.

For starters, I've been asked to run a Muse game at a mini-convention in Montreal in a few weeks (it's called [Roludothon 5](#) if you're curious). I'll post the play report here on Story Games and see what you all think!

Also, I've bought the Universalis PDF (which seems to be the most similar game to Muse out there) and will give it a good read.

When I first started talking about indie games online, I wrote a lot of posts trying to pimp my games and ideas and a lot of times I went about it the wrong way, just because I didn't really have an "in" to the community or have a better idea about how to do it. It can be tough, so I definitely sympathize. This is probably, like Jason says, not the best way, but, oh well, live and learn.

I guess it's strange for me because I'm jumping back into the gaming scene now after a 6+ year hiatus. Before I left, I was a published RPG author and frequent contributor to the Fudge RPG (e.g. I wrote often for the Fudge Factor online magazine and wrote the Fudge Vehicles chapter in the 10th Anniversary Edition of Fudge). During my hiatus, I was never really dormant. I was working on Muse the whole time with Paul T., and playing the occasional game session here and there. I tried some of Paul's experimental games and also played some published indie games like Dogs in the Vineyard and Lady Blackbird. So from my perspective I don't really *feel* like I ever left the community. But obviously I did since I haven't written much for so many years.

If Muse is really super awesome, you'll gain fans in small but consistent numbers for a year or two and then, sooner or later, a bunch of folks will be playing it

Muse is really awesome, so I hope you're right! 😊 Since it's a free game my goal is not to make money, just to create a bit of community and get some feedback and hopefully some cool new ideas that I had never thought of. I've been working 6 years on the game, I guess spending a few years community-building is not so bad.

Thanks again for your post,

--Jonathan



**UserClone**

October 2011

[cite]Demiurge[/cite]Also, I've bought the Universalis PDF (which seems to be the most similar game to Muse out there) and will give it a good read.

Be forewarned: You are not going to think it's awesome until you actually play it. Nature of the beast and all that.



**Matthijs**

October 2011

Hey, Jonathan B,

If you want to write about Archipelago, in whatever form or fashion, go right ahead. I like to see other people's opinion of my game.



**Demiurge**

October 2011

Hi Matthijs,

If you want to write about Archipelago, in whatever form or fashion, go right ahead. I like to see other people's opinion of my game.

Thanks. Archipelago II is next on my reading list after Universalis. I'll be happy to offer my feedback.

Sincerely,

--Jonathan



**zircher**

October 2011

Posted By: Demiurge I was trying to be insightful and provoke discussion, and I ended up making people upset... I'll find a different way to approach advertising Muse.

Next up! MUSE vs FATAL :-)

[I jest, but that might be fun to read as well.]

--

TAZ



**Paul\_T**

October 2011 edited October 2011

I might do one of these comparisons, too.... look out! 😊

Edit: I would LOVE to read a Muse vs. FATAL comparison article. That would be a pretty amaaazing piece of journalism, no matter how you approach it...



**Demiurge**

October 2011

Woah, what kind of game is FATAL?



**Paul\_T**

October 2011

Well, here's one classic source:

[An RPG.Net Review](#)



**walkerp**

October 2011

Clearly, you still have much catching up to do about the hobby.



**Demiurge**

October 2011

zircher wrote:

Next up! MUSE vs FATAL :-)

Hmm, a rules light narrativist storytelling game vs. a juvenile D&D clone. I've already been accused several times of comparing apples to oranges! Here it's apples to perverted, rotten oranges if the review is to be believed.

Paul wrote:

I might do one of these comparisons, too.... look out! 😊

Oh? I look forward to seeing it. BTW I've almost finished reading Universalis. I'm debating whether or not to do this kind of comparison again. It would be as neutral as I could make it...

Conan wrote:

Clearly, you still have much catching up to do about the hobby.

Clearly! So many D&D clones! Gotta read 'em all! 😊

--Jonathan



UserClone

October 2011

edited October 2011

RPG RAP!

Vampire has sex appeal!

Mouse Guard's based on burning wheel!

InSpace, Ashen Stars, Diaspora, even Mars,

In Lady Blackbird, Space is Gas!

Try the hacks, they all kick ass!

Fuck. Now I want to make a full-length parody of the pokemon rap...



Demiurge

October 2011

Pokemon are much more interesting than D&D clones.



UserClone

October 2011

Pokemon are not very different from one another, in the same way that D20 games aren't, and Evanescence songs aren't.

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