SMIRKING DRAGON

Running Role - Playing Games in Youth Work

Running Role-Playing Games in Youth Work

A book on using ERA (European Roleplay Approach) in youth work to train and develop skills while having fun

Authors

Rasmus Pechuel

Tuul Mall Kull

Sigurður Ingi Jóhannsson

Alexander Kever

Breki Bragason

Ívar Haukur Bergsson

Salómon Smári Óskarson

Kaisa Telve

Georg Winkens

Mario Weißkopf

Layout

Rasmus Pechuel

Cover

Nicoleta Stavarache

Contents

ERA in Youth Work

In 2014 a group of youths started to use role-playing games on an international level as a way of connecting with each other. It was an experiment which took on a life of its own, leading to high motivation to learn, immersion and an amazing development of personal skills. The experiment worked so well that the group decided to actively develop the approach further, finding out what lead to the positive results.

From this effort ERA was born. It was quickly discovered how good characters, engaging storylines and immersive atmospheres can motivate youths to try things out in the game and thereby practice a variety of skills. The most obvious skills were language skills, especially since everything was done in English, a foreign language for most of the participating youths. However, it quickly emerged that you could also improve social skills, a number of useful soft skills and intercultural skills. Since then ERA has grown and is now used in different youth houses in different fields, suuch as working with socially withdrawn youths.

We have seen that ERA works really well if the game is engaging, which is why we saw the need to train youth workers. This book is a major milestone in collecting all the experiences and knowledge we acquired and make it accessible to others. We are hoping that it will give mnay youth workers the opportunity to use the ERA approach for their own purposes and help their youths grow.

Part I

This part introduces the benefits that youths gain from playing RPGs and it outlines approaches to using RPGs in youth work.

What are RPGs?

Training skills with RPGs

Training Social Skills with RPGs

Training Soft Skills with RPGs

What are RPGs?

Most people have encountered role-playing games as a genre of video games in which players create a hero and experience an adventure. This might give you a good first idea what role-playing is but we are not talking about video games here. The kind of role-playing we are talking about is much older than video games, the so-called "pen and paper" version. A pen and paper game allows players much more creative freedom in where they go, who they meet and what they want to do.

There are no artificial boundaries on the map and the options you can choose for overcoming challenges and solving problems are only limited by your imagination.

A role-playing game is essentially collaborative storytelling with a few added rules. For young children this comes very naturally. If you observe children play you will often see them adopt certain roles and pretend to be someone else. Not only do they think of themselves in a different role, they also imagine their environment to fit in with their game world.

Imagine the Game Like a Movie

The easiest way to explain a role-playing game is to think of it as a movie. Just like in a movie you will experience a story that starts with a challenge or problem that needs to be overcome and ends when the heroes have saved the day. However, in a role-playing game the movie plays out in the heads of the players, not on a screen.

Just as a movie has a director with a film script, a role-playing game is run by a game director (also called 'Dungeon Master' in the world's best known role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons or 'Game Master' or 'Judge'). Usually the game director also has a script which could ei-

ther consist of detailed scene descriptions or just some quick notes that are helpful for remembering what should happen in the game scenes. The job of the game director is to describe what is happening in the scenes.

The other players take over the roles of the main heroes, so they are like actors in the movie. However, the big difference is that they get to decide what they do and say and don't have to follow a script. Instead, they picture their hero in the situation described by the game director and come up with actions and dialogue suitable for the situation. The heroes in a role-playing game are often called "Player Characters" (PCs) because they are controlled by the players.

Of course, a movie has more roles than just the heroes and so does a role-playing game. All supporting roles and the main adversaries are played by the game director. In role-playing games they are usually called "Non-Player Characters" (NPCs).

An exciting role-playing session is driven by action and interesting dialogue, just as great movie scenes are. The more the game director and the players get into their roles, the better the game becomes, just like good actors can make a movie great.

So How do I Win the Game?

The term "winning" isn't quite right because the game does not define winning or losing conditions. The point of the game is to successfully overcome the challenges as a team so one could say that all players win if they bring their story to a satisfying end. However, groups could also have a lot of fun in stories in which their player characters fail.

Since game directors play all the bad guys it might seem that they are the opponents of the player group. However this is a misconception because just like the job of a film director it is the game director's job to make the game exciting and introduce challenges and problems which

let the heroes shine. It's not a good idea to think of the game director as an adversary anyway because game directors have all the power in the game, they can make the final decision and their word is law.

Role-playing is about creativity and creating the most memorable and exciting stories in your head. If all participants have fun you have achieved the optimum result from a gaming point of view.

So How do You Play as a Player Character?

Being a player in a role-playing game is easy. All you do is get into a role like an actor would and make decisions based on what the character you play would do. Sometimes you will have creative ideas of handling situations in an interesting way, and you are absolutely encouraged to try them out. Good scenes are created by doing something that people will be talking about. When you declare an action your game director will tell you what happens. Sometimes you will need to make a check (we'll go into more detail on this later) to see if your action succeeds or not but your game director will let you know. In general a scene becomes much more exciting if you speak as the character you play. Instead of saying "My character asks the stranger if he will let us stay there overnight" you could also use direct speech to add to the scene's atmosphere:

"We have been traveling for days and have braved storms and terrible creatures trying to devour us. Will you grant us shelter, friend?"

In order to understand your character better you have a character sheet during play which contains some basic information and describes the strengths and weaknesses of your character.

How do You Decide if an Action Works or Not?

When players decide that their characters take certain actions it would be boring if everything they do succeeds. It would also be problematic if the game director just decided if something works or not because it would quickly feel like the game director is unfair to some players. That is why role-playing games use checks to determine if an action works or not. Checks most commonly use dice to determine the outcome of an attempted action. But there are role-playing games that use cards, coins or even runestones drawn from a pouch. The details about how checks work are always explained in the rules of the role-playing system that you decide to play. If characters are skilled at something they have a higher chance of a check to succeed, so in general it's a good idea to mostly attempt actions that your character is good at.

How Could You Possibly Handle the Duties of a Game Director?

Being a game director requires a little more work than being a player. Since there is no video screen to watch a scene unfold you will have to describe everything to your players. Think of what the player characters could possibly know and describe it. Any information that they couldn't know (such as the motivation of the main bad guy) should stay secret until the players come up with a way of discovering it.

Remember that you aren't competing against your players, rather it's your job to create an exciting scene for them. You also have the final word on all decisions, so make sure you are fair and flexible enough to accept ideas your players come up with. The point is for everyone to have fun.

After describing the scene, give the players time to react. Remember that they are the heroes of the story so give them the chance to shine. Sometimes players come up with actions that you don't anticipate and instead of just saying "you can't do that" you should let them try things (maybe with some sort of check) if their ideas aren't totally unrealistic. If you think that what they are attempting to do is really difficult, just ask for a very difficult check and see if the players are lucky enough. It's easier than you might think. If you know the scene well enough you can improvise and decide which consequences their actions might have. If you know the motivation of your non-player characters in your scene you know how they would react to the actions of the players. Just try to imagine yourself in their situation and then decide what you would do and what is logical. You will get better and better at this with more game experience but don't be afraid to try it because you can't really do anything wrong here. Remember: Whatever you say, happens in the scene.

Finally, just as the players should try to use direct speech when speaking as their character, you should try to speak as the different non-player characters. Maybe you can even give them a distinct voice (just don't exaggerate this too much). If you are immersed in the non-player character you are playing it makes it easier for the players to become immersed in their characters as well.

Training Skills with RPGs

In this section, we aim to show why RPGs are very valuable as an activity to focus on in youth work. Based on an analysis of different components or aspects of RPGs, we will show how they provide multiple opportunities to learn and improve social (so-called soft skills) and practical skills (so-called hard skills).

The following consideration is certainly not complete and the categorization is not absolute. Many topics inevitably overlap. However, it provides a solid framework for a practical elaboration that can be adapted to the specific youth activity/group composition and size.

Let's start by first talking about roleplay. Roleplaying is the act of stepping into the shoes of a character other than yourself. As the title would suggest it is the quintessential part of what makes a role-playing game tick. We'll tell you a little about how role-playing works and what the job of the Game Master (GM) is.

In essence, this act of roleplaying is what we spend most of our time doing whilst playing. At its very core role-playing is essentially a social activity. The largest part of which is the (mostly verbal) interaction with characters played by other players characters (PCs) as well as the person running the game (The GM)

The character the player is portraying is called a Player Character or PC

Everyone else, as portrayed by the game master is called a Non-Player Character or NPC

Each and every player steps outside of themselves during the course of play and focuses on the goal of seeing the world, not as they would normally but how their player character. Watching an RPG session unfold often feels like viewing an improvised play. The PCs and NPCs often have their own unique way of speaking making it seem like the players or GM are performing an off-the-cuff impression of someone

they know. Which is in a sense true. When portraying their PCs players try their best to step out of their normal egos and take on a much different point of perspective that they develop with the help of the Game Master

Many of the great soft-skill benefits of RPGs spring forth directly from this process. Players need to take it upon themselves to leave their pre-conceived notions at the door and go through a journey of character growth. Their characters change and evolve as play sessions pile on top of one another.

For some youths, this can be a whole new experience. Seeing the world through the eyes of someone that is not at all like them can have the effect that the youths start to look for these differences of viewpoints in their actual lives. Meaning that as their characters grow so do the players as people.

A skilled Game Master serves as both storyteller and personal consultant to the players listening intently and helping them with how they would like their characters to tackle the problems that they are presented with. Helping them figure out who exactly they are in the greater narrative of the world that is being put together by both GM and players.

When working with youths a GM can also focus on tackling common problems that youths deal with in their everyday lives. Letting them live out all manner of different situations that apply to a wide slew of different backgrounds. In this way, the story can serve to teach the player about anything. Prejudices, politics, social structures, even gender identity, and everything else in between are topics that can be brought into play as long as each topic is handled with the care and respect it deserves.

As mentioned before most of the time we spend in a role-playing game we talk to our fellow players. Meaning that throughout the game players are focusing on honing their group interaction skills. Players are rewarded for presenting their points in a clear and concise manner by

making choices that further the story.

Clear communication between teammates is also key to making good processes in-game as each player is usually tasked with a specified role, such as, thief, mage, healer, warrior, etc that makes up a larger whole. In order for everything to go according to plan, the players need to be on the same wavelength about what they are doing as well as knowing what function they serve within the group as an entity.

So how do these group conversations basically work? It's quite simple actually. The players tell the GM what they want to do in any given situation and the GM responds with what happens.

Example: PC: "I want to open the door" GM:"The door is locked"

Players also speak in character to each other as well as to any non-player character (NPC) played by the GM

A follow-up to the example we just saw could be something like.

 PC: "Mikael, I know you're a thief and are good with locks. Think you could pick this door open so that we can get through?

The conversation jumps back and forth between longer conversations between PCs or between PCs and NPCs as well as the players sometimes stepping out of their roles momentarily to ask the GM any question that they might have. About the mechanics of the game or for any sort of general knowledge about the world they desire to know. Answers are then given based on whether the PC would know the answer to the question or not.

The reason most RPGs stick with having some sort of moderator in the game (The Game Master) is manyfold. Having a separate party present that is not directly tied to the player characters means that said party will be less likely to choose sides when and if conflicts are to arise within the group.

In fact, it is a GM's duty to keep the story flowing as naturally as possible while keeping player content. He is a judge jury and executioner

and serves to be a mostly impartial party to the game as it unfolds. A GM has to know the rules better than any of the players and if there is any uncertainty on how the mechanics of the game work his word is final. The reason we say the GM should be "mostly impartial" is that it is also the GM's job to secretly work behind the scenes. Making sure the story can work as a whole via, subtly leading the party around by giving them clues, background information, planting thematic seeds for the story for the players to ponder as well as keeping the game fun during the entire time play lasts.

It is for these reasons that most RPGs are played with some kind of GM to facilitate the story, combat, puzzles, and so on. The GM also serves the purpose of motivating the players to play in a way that ends up being both fun and informative for the players. He facilitates the character growth of players and makes sure they don't stagnate. GMs also act as a coach in every aspect of the game. It is their job to reward creativity, good reasoning, compassion, selflessness, a keen understanding of social concepts just to mention a few of his duties.

So where do these soft-skills come into play? We are getting to that.

Empathy is very important to RPGs as players not only learn to love the personas they portray but also those of the larger world around them. A throughline in most RPGs and something that should be focused on when working with youths is strengthening individuals as a part of a larger whole. In a sense, since you belong to a group of players but also have abilities and quirks that are unique to your character. The end goal is for the disparate parts to come together as a united whole. We've all heard the phrase "team building" but in RPGs building, solid bonds with your teammates, learning to lean on them, and giving as much as you take is directly tied into success in-game. In this way learning to work well within a team is one of the earliest skills players need to master while playing RPGs

Players will need to stop regularly and assess their characters' strengths and weaknesses. Knowing when to rely on a teammate better suited for a task rather than venturing it alone is something players will automat-

ically learn to do as play commences. They will ask themselves questions like "what is it that I excel at? Where am I useful? When should I ask for support and when is it a good idea for me to go the loner route? This constant self-assessment needs to be happening at a constant rate subconsciously as well as consciously when the time comes to level up. A process where you look thoroughly through your PCs skills and abilities and get to pick and choose from a list of something to add to your metaphorical, sometimes literal, toolbelt.

As mentioned above the GM serves the players as a helpful hand when conflicts arise within the group of players. In time players learn to settle their differences by finding a middle ground. Conflicts also regularly arise between PCs and NPCs. Often the GM will willfully play an NPC in a brutish, headstrong way in order to pose a challenge for the players. Young players will often immediately go the combat route: choosing to attack the NPC but as their understanding of RPGs grows they learn to pick up on various ways to deescalate situations without raising their weapons.

It is by presenting these conflicts of interest in the form of a game that players learn various forms of conflict management. Leading to them being able to better make their feelings known while actually listening to what others have to say in real life. As long as the GM makes it clear that action isn't always the best solution to deal with every situation these skills will, like most other skills picked up while playing RPGs, come naturally to players with time.

Dealing with resistance and criticism is also something players will need to learn how to do. There will undoubtedly come a point where a player will rush headstrong into some situation without thinking and his co-players will have to suffer the consequences of their hasty action.

There need to be preestablished rules of etiquette at the table, especially when playing with youths so that they don't berate their fellow players too harshly. But some degree of criticism is always a part of the dialog. This is not a negative thing since it ties into what we already touched on, conflict management. With the GM's guidance players

will learn to give and take constructive criticism, as well as develop a nonchalant way to poke fun at their friends without wearing into the territory of being rude to one another.

When learning from their mistakes players will also start to develop a better sense of when it is best to be assertive and when they need to compromise for the greater good. RPGs can be a great deal of help for youths who struggle with speaking up for themselves in an appropriate manner. The stakes are low. It's a game, meaning you get plenty of practice in all these social aspects that can be painful to fail at in real life.

The Game Master also litters the game with various problems and puzzles that the player party must take on and makes sure that the solutions to them are manifold. Sometimes a player will come up with an incredibly creative solution that the GM had never anticipated and win the day. Other times the solutions are fairly straightforward but designed in such a way that each player will be equipped to deal exceptionally well with certain problems. Sometimes players will start pointing out to each other where their powers could be of great use. It is this act of solving problems together that makes players appreciate one another and more often than not starts to transform players from strangers into fast friends.

Making friends both with other players and NPCs played by the GM is such an integral part of RPGs that you could say it lies at the heart of collaborative RPG gaming as a whole. The reason why the lessons that GMs try to impart onto players tend to stick is that the players don't see them as lessons. They look at their time playing RPGs as precious memories of them adventuring with their friends.

Now that we've covered some of the positive soft-skills RPG players tend to pick up through their time in-game it is time to look at some hard-skills.

Even though a great deal of RPG playing is spent socializing, talking is not the only thing players will have to do. There are plenty of practical problem-solving strategies players will need to think up while they

solve puzzles and engage in combat (the simulated fighting portion of RPGs)

Often times PCs will venture into unknown territory having to navigate deadly mazes and solve tricky puzzles. These puzzles come in all types, there are word puzzles, physics-based puzzles, logic puzzles, navigation puzzles just to name a few.

A lot of these puzzles aren't very different than the types you would find in various IQ tests or brain training apps but because they serve as intermediate stepping stones in between heroic deeds that hinder PCs access towards their goal. Players will rarely if ever get sick of them or feel like they are being made to do actual work.

How heavily or lightly you lean on puzzles in your dungeons or other areas of interest is entirely up to the GM but don't be afraid to throw them in every now and again even if players seem to gravitate more towards the social aspects of gaming. Critical thinking in order to solve intricate puzzles has been tied to dragon slaying since the very beginning of RPGs and players will often find themselves far more ready to tackle these problems when equipped with the PC of a wise and mighty Wizard than they would in any classroom.

Navigation through tricky areas such as castle mazes or twisted cavernous dungeons serves to help players exercise their spatial awareness skills. Oftentimes players will find themselves lost in the wilderness, at this point survival knowledge and navigation often comes into play.

Now let us touch on combat. Most RPGs have some sort of combat system. They vary in complexity as well as in usefulness from system to system but what almost all of them have in common is that they serve to greatly encourage both logical and creative thinking. Sometimes games will be played using a grid-based system where every PC is represented by a corresponding figurine or token as well as the monsters. This turns the usually turn-based combat of RPGs into a chess-like game where players ponder their every move and act in ways where they can synergize their abilities.

Some players will have access to various spells, being able to deal damage in different creative types of ways, they can change the terrain around the fight causing friends and foes to have to deal with their actions. Some PCs focus more heavily on keeping their party's health points high, acting as healers or support to the more damage-heavy PCs. Players need to familiarize themselves with a bunch of different abilities and spells learning how their characters work inside and out to become truly successful at combat. And while all this teamwork, chess play, creative and critical thinking is going on players find themselves doing math.

Yes, really maths. Simple maths most of the time, to begin with at least and depending on the system. But even still there is a great deal of on-the-fly calculating that needs to go on during your typical RPG combat session. Players will need to roll dice to see if they hit their targets, adding various bonuses causes by their environment and statuses onto their rolls. They will also roll for damage adding and subtracting away as more and more skills pile together into a single action.

Players also need to have a keen eye for risk management in combat while keeping an eye on their health points and status effects (sometimes characters can be weekend if certain conditions are met, halving their movement or giving them disadvantage on roles for example) knowing when retreating is a good move and when it's time to risk it all and go for a blow that leaves the player wide open if it doesn't hit is something that each and everyone will have to keep in mind each time they enter a combat scenario.

Combat and the immense complexities that different systems serve to trick players into doing maths, formulate strategies, learn risk management, focus on the dimensions and geography of the battle arena when deciding where to move and what ability to use and where. In short, combat is probably the most devious way those of us working with youths have to teach players hard-skills without them even realizing it.

The final lessons we want to touch on in this chapter are those of victory, and more importantly, defeat. When players achieve their goals

they feel great. Especially if the road towards the finish line was an arduous one. For an RPG player, there are few feelings greater than being greeted as heroes by NPCs who thought their days were numbered. It's important for the GM to make sure that the players realize how momentous their victories really are. GMs, go into details on who the players saved, what becomes of them, what the fate of the villain of the piece is. How this victory has changed the PCs standing in the world they inhabit and so on. When people reminisce on their time spent playing RPGs they are often thinking of these moments. Celebrating a hard job finally finished and rewarded with their close friends. So yeah, making sure victory feels good is very important.

However, what really facilitates personal growth faster than anything else in-game is the exact opposite of this joyous occasion. The bitter taste of defeat. What makes failure in RPGs special is the fact that players get to experience the brutalities of feeling real lows without any of the real-world consequences that tend to follow. Getting to see your entire party of PCs trampled by a group of undead knights can serve to teach players a great deal about the highs and lows of life. Sometimes you win, sometimes you don't. Players learn to gradually deal with the crushing feelings of defeat as they play and in time will even start to see these momentary lapses as inspiring.

Players will realize that they can do better. That they aren't untouchable, a lesson that is so important to learn we have no problem stressing it here. Sometimes they will use defeat to reflect on what they could have done differently. Were they partially responsible for this crushing blow to the team? And if so, how can they approach the situation differently next time.

Directly tied into defeat is the concept of loss. RPG players that have been playing for a long time can all attest to moments in their recollections where an NPC that had been a fast friend with a playgroup fell in battle alongside them. They will have bittersweet memories of getting duped out of a magic item that they valued greatly. They will even remember the worst moments when they gave their PCs lives to defend

their friends in an all-out blaze of glory. Death, defeat, loss. These are all concepts that you should not be afraid to touch on with your players. Going through this pain serves to get the players thinking about how they could have spent their time with characters that passed away better. Players will learn to deal with their emotions in a healthy way by experiencing some amount of sorrow on a regular basis in the game. Don't be afraid to get nasty. It really helps in the long run.

These are just some of the hard and soft skills that can be taught through the playing of role-playing games. There are many more concepts we haven't touched on here that will come up later in this text as well as more even that you might discover on your own. RPGs are a fantastic tool to subtly teach a plethora of various skills and concepts to players that might not have the chance to learn them in a safe environment otherwise. Remember that while running the game you should never stop picking up new techniques that make for grander lessons. The more we teach players without them realizing it, the deeper a connection they form with the game, the more fun they have. It just works.

Training Soft Skills with RPGs

Details on how RPGs can be used for soft skills training purposes

Roleplaying and games are an essential part of growing up and wether we realize it or not we put ourselves in all sorts of roles over our lifetime. Using roleplaying games as a teaching tool is the first step in training all the soft skills that are involved.

There are several soft skills that are involved in roleplaying games and can be trained through playing with a group of peers in a controlled environment. Skills such as teamwork , problem solving, and organization can be used by getting the group to work together on a common project. Social skills like empathy, stress management, active listening and interpersonal skills can be trained through playing out a roleplaying scene of talking to other characters and NPC's in the game. These skills can then be discussed and developed in a safe environment with the guidance of the game director, who may be a teacher, social or a youth worker for example.

Teamwork

One of the most important aspects of roleplaying games is teamwork. There are several situations where players must put their faith in their fellow players and they must help each other with that challenge.

Most situations in roleplaying games call for the group to work together on common projects and or dangers. This allows the players to think of their characters strong points and with the help of each other solve that situation, for example: "The group is in a dark corridor of some forgotten keep, the ranger scout of the group spots a trap on the floor and points it out to the rogue character of the group, who has the skills to disarm the trap and let the rest of the group to pass". And there are

several other situations, both social and physical, that can be played out by using team work.

Time management

Time management can be implemented into roleplaying games by putting a time frame on what the players must deal with. For example setting up a plan of attack against a band of goblins. The players will have limited time, in game, to plan out and do their attack. So they must decide on how they are going to manage the time they have been given. It is all right to give them some time out of game to make their plans before putting them into action.

Another method of practicing time management is to put an hourglass on the table and give them a set timeframe to go through a puzzle, riddle or a skill challenge.

Emotional intelligence

When roleplaying games are played properly, they are a method of improvisational acting. There is the story teller that tells keep track of all of the extra characters and the world, while the players each play one of the main characters. By treating the game that way there is a lot of options to teach emotions look like and how to deal with them, by putting the players in situations where they need to deal with fear, anger, grief and such emotions in a controlled environment with the game master as a guide. This can be done through gameplay or the game master can show the players by letting them witness such a scene in game and letting them absorb the situation.

A good way for this to really set in with the players is to have a talk

after the game and discuss what happened. That way you can see if they understood what happened and help them understand it if they were unsure.

Organization

The main organizer in roleplaying games is the game master. They are the one that need to keep track of the story, characters and manage the players during the game. But there are several ways for the players to practice organization during the game.

The main method for training this is to let the players really learn what their characters can do and to encourage them to keep track of and manage their abilities. For example if a player is a wizard and has a certain number of spells per day, it is their responsibility to keep track of what and how many spells they can cast. Another is the resources the group has, whether it be gold, food, ammunition and such. By making these things important in game, they will learn how to manage and understand when they must reserve and restock on their resources.

Collaboration

Roleplaying games are collaborative in nature. They are a game where all the players, both game master and characters, must work together to tell a story that everyone enjoys. While the game master is in charge, it is also the responsibility of the players to make sure that the story keeps going and is enjoyable for both sides. Contrary to what has been said about rpgs, the game master is not playing against the players. The game master wants the players to keep going and work their way through an interesting story. It happens that a player character dies in combat, due to a trap or other methods, but that is usually not done

intentionally, but is a part of the challenges the game master has had to put on the board to keep things interesting and not done in a malicious way.

Creativity and Problem-solving

A key feature in roleplaying games is situation that need to be solved. Weather they are social, political, combat, riddles or puzzles, they usually require some creative solutions. Through practicing with these situation this skill can be developed.

A sample of this kind of problem can be seen in the first Lord of the rings book and movie, where they are stuck outside the gates to Moria and face a simple riddle or situations from the Hobbit, where Bilbo meets Gollum in the cave. There is always the possibility of them seeming overcomplicated but with some creative thinking they can be solved.

Roleplaying games have the benefit of there being a group of players that can bounce ideas off each other and find the most creative solution to their situation.

Decision-making

Making snap decisions in difficult and even in, in game, deadly situations

Some problems in roleplaying games come down to situation where things take off and need to happen fast. These situation are usually combat situation or ones where the characters lives are somehow on the line, like traps. In these situations the players are forced to quick thinking and snap decisions which can change the course of the ad-

venture.

Another method of getting the players to make quick decisions is to create challenges that have a real time timeframe. The way to do such a challenge is to use something like an hourglass and put it on the table to create a real life timeframe the players need to keep track off and do their actions quickly so the next player can do what they need to do.

Stress Management

Combat in roleplaying games can be stressful, especially in boss or plot battles. There the stress levels can get quite high and need to be managed

There are moments of importance in roleplaying games that can create a stressful situations. Situations like boss battles, dangerous skill challenges and tense roleplaying sessions with important nonplayer characters.

The good thing about these situation is that the game director can be there to help the players with the stress they are experiencing and help them manage that or even attempt to reduce it through the game, with levity or similar methods.

Active Listening

By having in game conversations with NPC's you can train the youth to exercise active listening. Most adventures start with a conversation with a person, or a monologue prepared by the game director, which will give the players the key information they need and there might even be some clues that will make their journey easier. Therefore active listening is very important during roleplaying games and is a powerful

tool in training that.

Empathy

Some adventures require the players to deal with npc's in difficult emotional states and that may force them to use empathy to get more information from them.

Social skills are one of the most important things to learn when you are young and roleplaying games are a good platform to learn those with guidance. In most games there are situations where the players must interact with another character, which may be be controlled by the players or the Game Director. Communicating with another player character is something they must do throughout the adventure and talk to other NPC's controlled by the game director, which may vary from game.

These interactions can be very important for training social skills such as empathy, conflict resolution, and respect. When the player characters are speaking to other characters they may be of a higher importance or rank then they are, and therefore they may need to show some modicum of respect to that NPC. In other situation they may be dealing with people in need, refugees, repressed, or people in danger, and need to show some empathy for the situation they are in. But in the end they must always rely on their skills in conflict resolution to find a way to assist and resolve the situation that was set before them.

Public Speaking

Roleplaying games are collaborative games between several players. That kind of playing forces the players to speak in public with the

members of their play group. This form of public speaking may not be in front of many people, but it does help getting used to speaking in groups.

With social anxiety on the rise in modern times, it is very important to work on and train our social skills. Using roleplaying games can be a very empowering tool in for this skill and can help a person to go from being closed off at their computer to becoming a productive person teaching others.

By training all of these skills you can help a person that may be dealing with several types of mental disorders become a stronger person and all of these skills will aid that person becoming a better person when they get out into society.

Training Social Skills with RPGs

In this chapter, we aim to show you how RPGs are intrinsically linked to socializing.

How the games we play can help shape the people we become and how a person running these games can try to ensure that every player is getting as much as possible out of their playtime socially.

We've already seen how RPGs can help people pick up on and train new skills. Now let's go into a little more detail on one of the most interesting aspects of RPGs: socializing.

Right off the bat, it is important that you make all players aware of the fact that they are not competing against each other in any way. RPGs are a group activity and the only way to get far is to work with your fellow players towards common goals. It can be helpful to set up some rules for younger players about what they can't do while stressing that there is not a lot that is off the tables. Working against another player, making overly selfish decisions, not listening to the input of your fellow players. These are a surefire way to make sure you get your character eliminated or worse, strip the game of fun for the whole. Sometimes players of all ages will need gentle reminding of this.

RPGs are an excellent tool for developing social skills as well as testing out the waters when it comes to how others may react to the actions you take, and how you present yourself. Many can attest to the benefits of being able to put on the mask of someone else for an RPG session. When the game is working as intended It can youths see the world from a different perspective. Make sure you celebrate diversity in character creation as many players may even be using this chance to learn more about cultures different from their own, players can play as any gender they see fit. Come from any background, make sure not to con-

done stereotyping while nurturing the spirit of exploration.

What makes RPGs especially good for this type of social experimenting is the fact that since the player is stepping into the shoes of a character instead of acting solely as they would in real life, it gives the player certain freedom to try to do things that they normally would not do.

Stepping into the shoes of a character is a great way to see things through the eyes of someone else. For all intended purposes the player and the player character are two different entities. Much like how an actor and the character that actor portrays are not the same. The difference is that while in most cases an actor reads lines prepared by a writer a PC steps into the role of writer, performer, and the external viewer all in the same activity.

These days the word improvisation is often linked with improv comedy. Where the sole purpose of the performance is to garner a laugh from an audience.

There also exist other types of improvisational performance that are not comedic in nature but the thing that separates the improvisation of playing an RPG from this more audience-heavy type of improv is that firstly, the flow of conversation is far more natural than in performative improv.

Most of the time when you play an RPG the story does not strike one note. The tempo of the narrative sways and bounds with the actions of every being in the universe of the game. Much like real life, things can be funny one moment, tragic the next, horrifying, heartwarming, etc.

The feelings of RPGs are almost always all over the place. Much like real life, how we react to the actions and words of people around us is relative to the situations we find ourselves in.

This serves the purpose of immersing players in their character in a way that not a lot of activities can. This depth of immersion means that the social skills you pick up in-game can have a profound effect on how players act socially outside of the game.

To put it simply, the skills you pick up in-game, carry over to real life.

Another great asset RPG social improv has over many other types of activities is the fact that even in the direst of circumstances, when you the player are all that stands between neighboring kingdoms going to war, the stakes of failure are relatively low. At the end of the day, it is a game. Games give us a certain room to move around and experiment with problem-solving. If the player fails at making their point clear there's always next time.

The player gets plenty of chances to practice how they deal with problems and it is through this type of improvisational experimentation that players can begin to pick up on how social norms work and when it might be a good idea to try something a little riskier.

In real life, bad reasoning can be costly. While gaming, making decisions that are poorly thought out will of course result in some effects on the story, the PCs relationship to other characters and NPCs but most of the time, the game goes on and the player, having received immediate feedback on their action can think about what they did wrong. Should they maybe not have rushed into battle so quickly? Was calling the Mayor of the town a dribbling idiot a bad move on their part?

It's these questions that pop into the players' minds that stick with them. If the game is running well the players will be having fun even while failing, the story goes on and the negative feelings that can follow unfortunately handled social interactions in real life are smoothed over by the fact that they are having a good time and when they look at the picture, It's only a game.

These factors apply to RPGs at all levels but they can be even more effective when working with youths. The fact that children and teenagers are oftentimes already working on who they are as people means that having tools that let them experiment with how they socialize in a safe and fun environment can really have a great impact on how they come to view the world around them.

An important part of role-playing is putting yourself in the shoes of

others. Sometimes first-time players will feel they need to make their character as close to themselves, or how they see themselves as possible. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, a problem can emerge where a player acts so much like themselves in real life that they develop tunnel vision, only seeing things from their perspectives.

This is why it's important for the GM to emphasize how fun and interesting it can be to try new things when creating a backstory for a character or even forcing the player to make hard choices that they themselves would never have to make in real life. At a certain point, the player will begin to start seeing things not only from their own viewpoint but from the viewpoint of their character.

It is this depth in seeing many sides to the same situation that is an invaluable social lesson to be learned. A player might start to empathize more with conflicting viewpoints, be they from other PCs, NPCs, or eventually, even people that they know in real life. A youth from a well-off family can learn a lot from playing a character that grows up in squalor. No social topic needs to be off the table as long as it is handled with care and respect.

The GM can also contribute to the players seeing things from different viewpoints by introducing NPCs with conflicting goals and opinions than the players. If their reasoning is sound and their emotions understood the players will be driven to find solutions that can satisfy all parties. Sometimes that might not be possible, sometimes the players will completely flip their opinion around and side with someone that they once considered a foe.

Shining a compelling and human light on different perspectives is one of the most valuable tools in the GMs toolbelt.

We want our players to act with empathy and making sure they know what's at stake is a good way to nudge them in the right direction. That NPC that they don't like will suddenly become far easier to sympathize with if you explain their reasoning for doing things. Use the game to spark players' interest in the struggles of others by making sure many

of the NPCs have understandable human motives. Show them the value trust can have by making

NPCs helpful to their cause if they extend a helpful hand.

To create a believable world that helps youths develop both tolerance and critical thinking in equal parts you should make sure not to fall into too much of a routine with your NPC alignments. While it should be commendable when a player realizes they are being duped by a malevolent NPC going into situations off the bat with a cynical eye should not be what you look to train your players to do. Make sure around every corner there are as many friends, as well as foes.

When creating friendly characters make sure not to make them all too similar. Creating a world full of helpful and good-natured people and creatures that nevertheless have differing outlooks on the world around them helps youths see potential in everyone no matter what their background might be.

Do the same with your villains. To only show one side of evil makes for uninteresting baddies as well as your players developing assumptions, something you want to avoid. This is not to say that there can not be traits that the good and bad portray regularly. Just that you should be careful with your stereotyping of these NPCs and concepts as they can lead players down the wrong path.

Do not be afraid to make socially challenging conflicts for your players. The real world is not always black and white. This is not only an important lesson for players of all ages to learn but it makes for more engaging stories. An NPC that starts of with evil intent should not always be a hundred percent set in its ways. Make sure to encourage moments of redemption as they will help your players look for the good in both fantasy creatures and real people.

Take inspiration from real-life groups and people. It's fairly easy to get players thinking about politics if you drop them into a new town that has an entirely new way of thinking. You want to show players as much variety in the NPCs you portray as well as the societies and customs

they encounter as possible. Prompting players to take stances on certain matters and then throwing a twist into the mix helps justify why a society or an NPC might take the actions they do.

That being said sometimes you want your players to feel utterly betrayed. It's all about striking the right balance of good and evil to get your players comfortable with the idea of people not being one-note. The older your players are the more you might want to incorporate this type of thinking but players of all ages do benefit from experiencing some sort of duality in their thinking process.

If players are showing toxic traits either as a part of their backstory or without thinking about them it can be helpful to show friendly NPCs overcoming similar traits or even to empathize these traits have led villains down dark paths. For example, if players are acting greedy with gold you might want to have them fight a once-revered dragon-king whose lust for gold has left it a distrusting husk of its former self

An RPG can not be run successfully without respect: respect for other players, respect for the GM, respect for others' time. When playing with young people, or anyone really it can be helpful to go over some ground rules ahead of time to ensure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to rules of etiquette.

Establishing a hand signal for silence, making sure players don't interrupt the GM or other NPCs while they are talking, and setting ground rules for language use. Are just some things that you should make clear to your players before starting your session, and if these rules are broken reminding the group or individuals that play can not continue without these rules being upheld.

You should aim to reward players for thinking individually and taking initiative. Often times a PC or several PCs will slide into leadership roles which are great and should be commended while at the same time trying your best to present opportunities for the players to all have their say in the events that are unfolding in-game.

A good way to give opportunities to different players to assume a lead-

ership role is to change up the structure of your adventures regularly so the players will begin to see when the expertise of each of their PCs and own personalities will best serve the team as a whole. Nuding players towards leadership with words can also be helpful. Going "All right Melissa, you are well versed in magical artifacts so you would probably have the most insight into this crystal ball heist. Do you have any ideas on how best to proceed?" can be all the motivation a player needs to take charge. And if the player still is not comfortable with leading the way do not worry. As they grow comfortable with themselves and the group they will start to offer more input as long as you keep presenting them with opportunities to do so.

Stressing the power of teamwork in every situation to the players should be a priority. So that even if one or several players are feeling inclined to take a more backseat approach they will feel motivated to help in any way they can.

It is often smart to design scenarios where each player will have to man their own station in the mission. As we spoke of earlier to give the players ownership of their role and try to make sure that every mission has at least aspects that would be best handled by each PC.

Try to avoid creating adventures that rely only on a certain aspect of play. And always be open to hearing ideas from your players on how a situation could be approached in a way that you had not thought of earlier. It's this type of problem-solving and teamwork that you want to encourage at all costs.

In order for these lessons to take hold as best as possible, you need to encourage clear and positive communication between players. If your players seem stumped by a problem get a dialog going. Ask them how they feel about the situation at hand. You can do this both as the person running the game but if you have the opportunity it is better to have an NPC ask them what they should do now since it will encourage them to make their plans while still role-playing as their characters. If they have any ideas on how the predicament might be solved and if anyone else in the team might be able to lend a hand.

Prompt your players often enough with these sorts of discussions and they will start to take it on themselves to get the conversation rolling on its own. At this point, it is the GMs job to sit back and listen to the discourse unfolding only chiming in when spoken to directly or if you feel the players might need a little push in the right direction.

Make sure that you are stressing the rules of etiquette (players treating each other with respect while discoursing) but take care not to get to involved in nudging their decisions unless you feel your players are stuck going in circles. At this point, it is often a good idea to pick certain options that were well presented and say "Oh, poisoning the guard seems like a clever idea, maybe you should give it a shot"

On the subject of listening it is very important that the GM listens intently when a player talks. Sometimes GMs feel they need to keep the story rolling at all costs when the players are often perfectly capable of doing so on their own.

It is clear that the players look to the GM for guidance so if you show irreverence and don't respect your own rules of conduct they will follow suit. Why should they give everyone room to talk if you do not. Why should they show you respect if you do not do them the same courtesy?

It's impossible to stress how important it is that players get the sense that they belong to and in a sense own part of the world they are playing in.

Don't be afraid to let your players help you flesh out the world. Both in-game by making on-the-fly changes to how you had imagined the world. For example, when a player asks "So wouldn't I find a broom in here? We are in a broom closet after all" the logical answer would be yes. Even if you had not planned on the players finding or using a broom in the adventure. But also by listening to what your players want outside of play.

Something that can be really helpful in getting players to exercise their creativity is to have post-game discussions with the group.

If you talk to the players for five minutes about how they felt about the session you often find out what it is they were hoping to find or if they had ideas for how things might turn out differently.

Listen to how they feel and incorporate their wants and desires into your world-building. Doing all this helps give your players a sense of co-authorship over the world they play in as well as showing them they don't need to be afraid to be creative and think up outlandish ideas and concepts while playing. While it is fun for you the GM to stretch your creative muscles it is even better to encourage your player group to help take part in the process

It's part of the GM's job to ensure that clever thinking and good reasoning goes rewarded. Making sure the players get chances to talk themselves out of sticky situations, that generosity and the building of relationships is shown in a positive light. This is not a hard thing to do. It always pays to have friends, especially when you might need them to guard the entrance to a giant spider's cave.

Try thinking of all the times your friends and loved ones have helped you through a tough situation. This spirit of comradery can be a valuable asset to the players, make sure they know it.

Know that actions speak louder than words. Having NPCs battle alongside players, using various skills to boost them in the fight can show them how helpful teamwork can be in battle. Show NPCs picking up items that would be better suited to one of the players and giving it to them.

Who knows maybe next time they pick up a weapon they can't use the players will remember this gesture of kindness and decide to share the weapon with their teammates. Having NPCs in play that your players can look to for support and guidance is a great way to impart positive values on how they approach both life and play. Never underestimate the impact of showing a good example to your players.

In the same vein, it is good to get into the habit of taking the time to describe how negative aspects of a villainous NPC help lead to both

pains for the PCs and others inhabiting the world of play as well as the villains' eventual downfall.

Make sure to regularly propose

Never stop encouraging your players to push boundaries, to try something new to experiment with the world of the game. Make sure to ground players in both the elements of the fantastically creative as well as the mundane. Fun and fear need to be used in equal parts to make the players feel like what is happening in-game is real.

And the more real it feels to them the more powerful the social lessons learned within the confines of your fantasy world will be.

Keeping in mind everything mentioned above should help you better run a game that hastens player growth and facilitates a smooth and fun experience for everyone involved. The only prerequisite for using RPGs actively as a tool for growth is to always keep an open mind and encourage your players to do the same.

Part II

This part teaches beginners how to run game sessions. It provides an easy introduction and guides new game directors with advice.

Organizing a Gaming Session

Preparing for a Gaming Session

Making the Game Fun for Your Players

Creating Your Own Adventure

Organizing a Gaming Session

Where to Gather

The first thing one needs to figure out before running a tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) is to find a place to run the game. The location can vary greatly, as some like to host it in their own home while others use public spaces such as a game shop, a library or a community center.

Communicating with your players is essential, try speaking with them and find out where they would feel the most comfortable to play. When running a game for students as a staff of school, using a classroom could be very beneficial as picking an environment that the students are familiar with gives them a sense of ease and comfort.

There are a few essential components one needs to keep in mind when picking a space to host the game. Firstly you will need a table large enough for you, your players and whatever components you'll need during the game (be it dice, papers and/or a map). Secondly you will need a semblance of privacy, having a closed off area or room where people will not disturb the game will help your players become immersed in the story. Thirdly, lighting is something to be considered, if the lighting is too low it might make it difficult for some players to read their character sheets while too much light might ruin a certain ambiance.

As of late, running TTRPG sessions has become ever more prevalent in the online space, there are many great websites, tools and apps that make playing most TTRPG systems online a breeze. Keep in mind that while using online tools can be very beneficial, one needs to spend some time to familiarize themselves with whichever method they choose to be the best for their group. This space is recommended to

people more familiar with TTRPG's in general but anyone is encouraged to look into it to see if it would fit their gaming group better.

Time Management

After finding a suitable location to host the game of choice, you will need to figure out when a game will be hosted. Doing so may be more tricky than expected, especially with students that have extracurricular activity.

Communication with the players is key here. Talk with your players and figure out if and when they have extracurricular activity going on, be it sports, instrument lessons, etc. Once you figure out everyone's timetables, find the most suitable day of the week for your players and yourself. When running a game for students it is encouraged to try to host games during the week, but if the schedule does not allow for it, hosting a game during a weekend will be fine.

It is up to you and your players how often you want to play per week, although it is recommended to keep to once a week or every other week to avoid burnout and running out of material too quickly.

Once a date has been set you will need to figure out a playtime. It is very much dependent on the group for how long you will play. Some TTRPG groups might play for an hour or two while other groups might go as long as eight hours in one day.

When starting out it is highly recommended to start off with an hour to two hour sessions as it gives the game director (GD) enough time to delve deeper in the story within that timespan.

After figuring out for how long you will play for you will have to set a set start time. This will be determined by you and your player's schedules. Find a suitable time that gives your players enough time to get home from school/work if they need to and then to the hosted loca-

tion. It is recommended to try to host the sessions between the end of school/work and before it gets too late, around 19:00-20:00. This time frame gives players a chance to get supplies from home (if need be) and get back home around dinner time. Again, this is all subject to change according to your group needs, this is but a recommendation.

Time Delays and Missing Players

Do keep in mind that your players or even you might run a bit late from time to time. Communication is key here, if you yourself are running late try to contact your players to inform them of the time that you will be arriving, if not communicated properly your players might think that you will not make it for the session and might leave prematurely.

The same goes for your players, it is highly encouraged to communicate to them that you would appreciate it if they were to talk to you about any late comings.

If a player forgets to inform you and you are missing one or two players it is best to engage with the ones that have arrived on time. Try to talk to them about the game, what they wish to achieve this session, what they plan to do next or even go into more details about their characters. With that they will not feel like they're waiting on someone but rather are already getting into the game with discussions.

If a player can not make it to a session and lets you know in advance, it is up to you what to do with the week's session. If you feel that all the players are required for the next bout of your adventure or if you prefer to play with everyone, then you may of course call off the session for that week and try to reschedule it for the following week.

But you may of course continue on with the adventure while missing a single player, just be mindful to inform them and keep them up to date about what happened in the previous week. If you decide to play

without a player present, try to figure out a reason why their character might not be with the group at the time, maybe they feel under the weather and decide to stay back? Perhaps their character is just extremely quiet in that session. It helps the other players become more immersed if the absence of one player is also incorporated into their character.

Necessary Materials

Once you have established a location, date of the week and time of day to play you need to figure out what you need to play whichever TTRPG you plan to run. Familiarize yourself with the system you plan to run and take note of what you will need.

Note: Not all TTRPG's require all of these components, these are only the most common, your TTRPG of choice might use all of them or none at all, be mindful to do your research on your system of choice beforehand.

What you need first and foremost are the books that accompany your chosen TTRPG system. Most TTRPG systems such as Dungeons & Dragons, Pathfinder and Warhammer Fantasy have numerous books attached to them. These books are the life-blood of any TTRPG system. It is good to familiarize yourself with what books you need, usually in each system there is one "core" book. The core book usually holds most rules and teaches you how to play the game itself, these are usually known as rule books. Alongside the core rulebook there can be books made specifically for game directors, these books go into detail on how to run a campaign/game within your desired system. A vital book to have is a campaign book, these books lay out the story/adventure your players are going to go through. Make sure to familiarize yourself with the setting of the world you have chosen as well as the book itself, as you will rely on it while directing the game for your players.

These books are usually all you need to get started with your game, but do keep in mind that some systems may require more or less books.

Also noteworthy: A lot of TTRPG have "starter sets," These sets are accompanied with a core rule set and a short adventure to get to know the system through play.

A core of most TTRPG's are dice. It may differ from system to system which die you will need and many require more than one 'type' of die. In TTRPG terms dice are often denominated by a 'D'. So if your system requires 'D6' they are referring to six sided dice (regular dice.) So a D4 is a four sided dice, D8 an eight sided dice, D10 a ten sided dice ect. Figure out which dice you will need for your system, if your players are already familiar with TTRPG's it is likely that they themselves might own a 'set' of dice on their own, but if they are not familiar with TTRPG's then it is likely that you will have to supply them the dice. Dice such as these can be bought in most hobby stores/game stores and they usually come in 'sets' meaning they will contain a single die of each dice except for a D10, which usually come in pairs. (e. 1d4, 1d6, 1d8, 2d10, 1d12 & 1d20) you can also purchase individual dice in most hobby stores/game stores. If a system uses a "percentile dice" it means that the system is referring to two d10's rolled together. (e. Harold rolls two d10 dice, the dice lands on a 70 and an 8 that means that Harold rolled a 78 for his percentile dice.)

Another very common component of TTRPG's are 'character sheets'. These sheets are usually paper and are often supplied within a box of whichever system you're running. If they can not be found within the box a quick google search may yield what you need, simply search "[TTRPG of your choice] character sheets" and you will likely find a printable copy of said character sheet.

If you can not find a character sheet online which you can print, a simple A4 paper would suffice, just make sure to find a reference of the character sheet in question and copy it down onto the A4 paper, this can usually be found within a core rulebook of the system of your choice. Some players like to create custom character sheets that fit their

character's aesthetic so this method would work best for them.

What is integral to almost all TTRPG's are pencils and erasers. Make sure to supply each player with a pencil and at least one eraser for the table. These go in tandem with character sheets as players will need to record their statistics, abilities and items onto there. It is also highly advised that you supply your players with a single blank A4 paper for them to keep notes on the current adventure and encourage them to write down information that they learn in character.

Food and Drinks Arrangements

It is very common for TTRPG groups to have food and/or drinks arranged for the players but this step is optional and completely up to you.

Game Directors may opt to purchase snacks and drinks for their players to have during a session. This all depends on your budget and what you're willing to spend on it. If a game director is a staff at a school or a community centre they might ask for a small fund from their respective entities to purchase foodstuffs.

If you opt in arranging food and drinks for your players, be mindful of who your players are. Take note of any allergies that might be present within the group, especially if a deadly allergy is in question, peanuts for example. Do keep in mind any dietary restrictions as well, if a player within your group is vegan or vegetarian take them into consideration and make sure to bring something for them as well.

What you bring for the group is entirely up to you, be it chips, candy or soda, but we encourage bringing healthy snacks and drinks for your players. Such as fruits, vegetables, assorted berries and nuts (if no-one is allergic.) or even some home-baked goods and for drinks consider something low in processed sugars, such as fruit juices.

Another method of food and drink arrangement is to change it up every week with 2-3 people bringing food and drinks for the group and then switching the people out for different 2-3 people. This is dependent on the group itself though and is more prominent in older TTRPG groups as younger players may lack the funds for this method.

Yet another method and a very common one at that, is letting the players bring their food and drinks of choice for themselves. The players may opt in sharing what they bring but if this method is the one chosen it is advised to not pressure players into sharing as they brought it for themselves.

If your desired playtime is longer than 2 hours it might be worth considering a proper food break. If you are running a 4-5 hour session we recommend taking a 15-30 minute break in between and having a meal as to avoid hunger for you and your players. If opt in this method the same advice goes as listed above. You may supply the players with the food, be it some sort of take-away for a quick meal or a home cooked meal. If arranged it could be that 2-3 people bring different parts of a meal each day, splitting up the work equally or your players may be encouraged to bring their own meals to have during your break.

Preparing for a Gaming Session

How Game Directors Can Prepare

When running a game of tabletop roleplaying, there are certain methods a Game Director may use to ensure a smoother running game. These methods are not set in stone and it is up to every Game Director as individuals to come up with their own methods of preparing for a session, but these are the beginning steps to finding your own method and speed.

Familiarize yourself with the rules of your chosen system.

When you are directing a game, make sure to understand the system that you and your players are playing. You need not know every single rule within the given system, but having a basic grasp of the ruleset is vital in every game director's arsenal.

Prepare all components

Make sure to bring all necessary components to play. Have a talk with your players beforehand and learn what they can bring themselves. What you need to bring depends on your chosen TTRPG system. It

is good to bring an assortment of dice, preferably enough dice for all the players but if not possible, then 2-3 players might share dice. Bring whatever books/manuals you need for the session along with a campaign guide. If you play with maps or grids be sure to bring those as well.

Read/write the adventure in advance.

When deciding to take on a group as a game director it is vital that you read the campaign book in advance. Get to know the locations, what characters your players will encounter, what secrets there are for them to discover. The more you learn about your chosen campaign, the more in depth you get with your players. It may break the players immersion if you have to constantly check the book for all their questions, but it is understandable if you have to refer to the book every now and then.

Counter to using an adventure book, a game director may opt to create their own story, in their own world. This is called homebrewing, as you're brewing your own home-made world. Homebrewing should only be done by more advanced game directors that have a grasp on TTRPG already. If you decide to "homebrew" an adventure, make sure to write it out well ahead of time and give yourself time to flesh out the adventure that you wish to take your players on.

The campaign book can be looked at like a script, the more you familiarize yourself with it, the smoother the dialogue between you and your players will go.

Keep notes during sessions.

Keeping notes for yourself during sessions can be a life saver. While directing, try having an open notepad to your side and noting down

anything that you feel is noteworthy, be it players initial meeting with an NPC (non-playable character), what route the players decide to take or when they arrived into a certain town.

Having all of this written down can help you remember what has happened in previous sessions and thus making it easier for you to run a smoother game.

It can be especially handy for you to keep notes on what has transpired when the situation arises that your players ask about details regarding previous sessions.

Be prepared for everything and nothing

While playing a TTRPG, you can never really know what to expect. That is why you must prepare for the unexpected. Being a game director relies a lot on improvisation, if your players decide to take a complete U-turn and go somewhere where you did not expect them to go, you must be able to roll with it. There is no way for certain to know what people will do or how they will react to certain situations so the game director must be ready to take on anything the players decide to do.

On the opposite, there may come a time where your players are unsure of what to do or where to go. They might become hesitant or even docile in play, this is another situation that you must be prepared for. If such a time arises, don't be afraid to nudge your players in the right direction. This may be done subtly, by reminding them of clues or locations that might be connected to their current predicament or it can be done outright by reminding them that they had a task ahead of them and needed to take care of it. Just remember to be polite about it.

How Players Can Prepare

Although most of the burden of preparing for a gaming session relies on the game director there are certain things that players can do to ease the process for the game director. Communication between players and the game director is a key element here, the game director must talk to their players and let them know what is to be expected of them and what they can do to prepare for a game.

Create a backstory

The first step for a good player character is creating a backstory. Some TTRPG campaign books come with pre generated characters that already have written out backstories, while these do come in handy, players are encouraged to create their own. These backstories do not have to be six pages of intricate backstory being fully fleshed out. Creating a simple, yet believable backstory for their own characters helps the players better delve into the mindset of their characters and thus, immersing themselves within the story. Creating a backstory may be hard, especially in a setting/world you're not familiar with, you may speak with your game director and get their help in creating your backstory.

With the backstory, figure out the character's motivations. What drives them on their path, find some short-term and long-term goals for them to achieve.

Keep notes during sessions

This step is as important, if not more important to the players then the game director. Keeping notes and going over them will help the play-

ers keep track of the story, as they do not have access to the campaign guide like the game director does. Players may opt to share notes with one another, which is a good way for them to keep track of the story on a larger scale. Although some players may want to keep their notes private, as they might note down things only privy to their character and backstory. Giving each player two separate pages to write down public and private notes may then incentivise co-operation between the players.

Decide what you want to accomplish

This step is for a player character that has played at least one session. With your notes, figure out where you and your party left off during the last session. Then decide on your next course of action, it can be very beneficial to think about what you want to achieve during a session beforehand to ensure that it runs smoothly. It can be difficult for a game master to constantly try to push players into action, so as a player try to differ from inaction and opt for action, be on the move to advance the plot. Even if your pre-thought out actions/plans fall through, do not hesitate, players are expected to be able to improvise on the spot as they never know what may come next on their adventure.

Get to know the world and lore

Before the first session, try to read a bit about the world that you will be immersing yourself in. It can give you an edge in play if you know what to expect of the world. Get to know a bit about the history and lore of the world. As your player character lives in the world, they would not go into the world completely blind to everything, they would probably know who rules the neighbouring kingdoms, so learning that might

help you immerse yourself in the story the game director is taking you through.

Give your character a unique voice

This step is completely optional. Some TTRPG players tend to create a new voice for their characters. It makes it easier to engulf oneself in a different persona if it does not share one's own voice. The voice does not have to be an entirely new voice, but a different accent, a slight tonal shift might be enough to help with the immersion. Feel free to play around and experiment with this in your spare-time.

How to Prepare the Room

Before a session starts it is optimal for the game director to arrive earlier than the players to prepare the room. It's recommended to arrive 15-30 minutes ahead of the player. During this time you may clean the room up if it is messy, clear the table of any unwanted/overbearing items. Then lay out all the necessary components needed for play, be it maps, grids, dice, pencils or miniatures. It's a good idea to try to create a calm ambiance so the players walk into a welcoming room. You may do this by dimming the lights slightly or if that's not possible, set up candles. These are not necessary steps but do bring out a certain aesthetic that may fit your setting/system.

You may also use this time to set up snacks and/or drinks if you have opted into bringing such for your players. You may have an extra table in the room, use that to set up the snacks so the players can grab what they would like from the table. If you brought anything that comes in a bag, it is recommended to bring bowls and place the snacks in the bowls to avoid scrunching from the bags as it may disrupt play. The

time that this process takes varies from game director to game director so be sure to test how long it takes for you to set up the room and aim for that time-frame in future sessions.

Preparing the Adventure

When preparing the adventure for your players, be mindful and fully read the chosen adventure guide. It is recommended to take a glance over the adventure as a whole to know where your players will travel and who they will meet. There is no need to memorize the whole adventure before the first session but do read and try your best to memorize the chapters that your players are on or are about to go to. For a smooth running game, it's optimal to be very familiar with the NPC (non-player characters) your player characters will meet as well as the locations they will be traveling to.

It can also help your players remember each NPC they encounter if you give them a distinct personality and different voices. This is a fully optional step as many people do not feel comfortable trying out different voices but practicing on your own time might help overcome that fear. If your players veer off from the scene or even the adventure as a whole, do not panic, it will be addressed later on.

How to ensure that the game runs faster

If time is of the essence and you only have 2 hours to play with your group a week or even every other week, then joking around and not advancing the story for an hour might become frustrating. Some TTRPG groups prefer that type of game and that is of course valid, this is why communication with your players is so important. Before your first session starts, talk to your players about what their expectations

from the game is and what your expectation of them is. If both parties (Game director and players) agree to have a relaxed game where goofing off and not worrying too much about the plot then that is the style of play that group should opt for.

If however your group would like to try to stay on task and get as far as they can each week then there are some precautions you can take to ensure that the game runs faster.

Firstly, if your players forget themselves and start joking around, don't be afraid to remind them that you're in the middle of the game. If the group already decided to try to avoid goofing around, then they should get back on track with a small reminder.

Secondly, have a small break in the middle of the session. This may sound counter-intuitive but giving your players a chance to stand up and stretch, use the bathroom and talk for 10-15 minutes helps them release energy that has been building up in the first half, giving them more focus on the latter half. Some players find it difficult to sit and play for 2-4 hours straight so giving them a chance to get some energy out of their system can be extremely beneficial.

Thirdly, this has to do with combat specifically. When in combat or 'initiative' make sure to keep your players on their toes. This goes for the lax and the focused groups, as sitting through a single round of combat that lasts one hour can be frustrating to many. When in combat always be mindful of who's turn it is next and make that person aware. Ask the players to think about and plan their turn before their turn comes up, this will ensure a faster pace of combat so it does not drag on.

Do be mindful as to not put too much pressure on your players, some players may handle stress poorly and thus can not think fast or freeze up when too much pressure is applied. Make sure that everyone knows that you are playing for fun and that you only wish to advance the story.

Consider What Could Go Wrong

TTRPG is a very freeform and open way to express oneself. Unlike video games, where every path is determined by ones and zeros and ultimately you do not have total freedom over your actions.

When running a game of TTRPG you must expect the unexpected. When players make a choice, try your best to go with that choice and encourage their freedom to explore whatever idea/path they wish to take. It can be difficult when that path veers away from the pre-written adventure, but you must remain calm and pretend that that was the way it was intended to go. Improvisation is a highly sought after skill within TTRPG, both for players and game directors.

(e. Your player characters are investigating the disappearance of a horse from a local ranch. The players miss a vital clue that would lead them directly to the perpetrator, a man called Johnson but they decide to go to Abraham, the man they think stole the horse. There are many different ways to handle this situation, you could for instance move the clue from the ranch to Abraham to have for the players or you could simply have Abraham tell the players about Johnson.)

There are countless examples and scenarios where you may find yourself at a spot that is not covered by the adventure guide, but by simply nudging the players towards the right path, with subtle hints or whatever you feel fits will get them back on track. Or better yet, explore that path a bit, see what you and what they come up with on this newfound, unexplored territory.

Making the Game Fun for Your Players

In this chapter, we will go over the most crucial thing needed to keep your players hooked: fun.

As we've established Role Playing Games can be a great way to subtly impart many lessons to young players however, all of the hidden benefits of RPG playing will fall on deaf ears if your players are not having a good time. In order for the benefits of play to really take hold, it is crucial that players do not feel like what they are doing is work.

Below we will ponder what makes games fun, give you some pointers on how to spice up your game, and talk shop on how you can run your game in a way where even failure can become something to look forwards to.

While there are a lot of universal tips and tricks on how to make games more engaging the most important thing is to know your players. You can't very well determine how best to engage a person if you do not know what it is that they enjoy.

Find out what makes your players tick; what aspects of RPGs do they enjoy the most? Do they want to master the intricacies of combat? Are they more interested in the role-playing aspect of the game? What kind of storytelling do they enjoy? Do they prefer to tackle problems head-on or are they the methodical type?

Getting to know your player's preferences is holly important to all aspects of play, keeping their preferences in mind and modifying your adventure when you feel like your losing them is a good way to keep them engaged. That's not to say that players that enjoy one side of the game will not experience the other aspects it just means that you the

GM will get to build your adventure around what they want.

Sometimes you can even use your knowledge of preferred play in a way that circumvents expectations. A good example of this would be to make players that always pick the combat route feel outnumbered, goating them on to maybe talking their way out of a situation or even to find creative solutions to distract or dwindle down enemy NPCs before a battle can take place.

Getting to know your players is an ongoing process that takes place both in and out of the game. A good rule of thumb is to use your first session, the one where you will be setting up the world and creating characters to get to know your players.

Before starting play try having a relaxed chat with your players. Ask them about their hobbies, ask them what they enjoy in stories, what kind of movies or games do they like? Are there any topics that they feel strongly about? Do they enjoy it when situations are light-hearted and humorous? Or are they more into heavy and serious situations?

Using the information you glean from these chats is key to making an engaging adventure for your players and getting to know them as individuals.

Some groups are similar in thinking and will give you copy-paste answers while others run the gambit on what they like and or expect from stories. Taking notes on each of your player's preferences is also a good way to keep tabs on how best to engage each player. It's good to find the similarities that players share in wants and expectations and keep them in mind so that your story will hit in a real way for each of them.

It's natural that some players will be more outgoing than others. This is why it is important for the GM running the game to periodically single out players and shine the spotlight onto them. If you feel that one player is playing passively try forcing them into situations they can not avoid.

Let's say the party is having fun at a tavern but you start to notice that one of them isn't engaging with anything, maybe a barmaid knocks into that player character, maybe someone attempts to pickpocket them. It is your job as the GM to keep the story going, both as a whole and on an individual level.

Once players get more comfortable with their group and the act of playing RPGs they will loosen up and start taking more initiative but the fastest way to expedite that process is to regularly ask for their input via things happening to them in-game or characters outright asking them for their opinions and input.

Players will appreciate getting their own moments to shine. They will start to love their characters as well as the characters of their fellow players as they get to do incredible things. In a sense, you are showing the players each character's worth by singling them out to do something that's right in their wheelhouse.

In the future when the group starts to develop a defined idea of what their specialties are, the group will start to rely more heavily on each other for these different aspects of play.

This type of spotlighting can be done in any number of ways some of the most obvious would be to layer an adventure with activities that each player's character specifies in.

Make sure there are plenty of locked doors and opportunities to sneak for a more stealthily inclined player, making sure to point out magic items for the Wizard of the group to inspect and get insight on, putting a heavy boulder in front of a door that is perfectly suited for the groups barbarian to push out of the way, making sure there are plenty of gullible people that a silver-tongued PC might be able to dupe to help the group, etc.

These are some of the more practical ways you can let players carve out their own moments in the story but there are also more subtle ways of doing this.

Encouraging players to spend some time and thought on their characters' backstories is an instrumental part of keeping players engaged throughout their time playing. Knowing what their goals are, who is important to them, what their shortcomings are. All these things help the GM more easily focus on player characters giving them their time in the spotlight.

This backstory and personality of the PCs can even feed directly into the narrative of the story. Was one player betrayed by his mentor in the past? Why not have that mentor come back as a villain.

Is one PC notoriously cowardly? Try setting up moments where that PC gets to overcome his fears and through a single act of bravery saves a village.

This type of personal growth invests the players in their PCs far more than gold or trinkets do. Items can be helpful in the moment for players but stories stick with them as memories.

That being said, traditional rewards can also be a lot of fun for players. It's important that the rewards players earn in their adventures feel important and personal. Most RPGs have players collecting some sort of currency that they can spend on items. Money is fine as long as you have something exciting to spend it on.

Try making sure the vendors of your world are brimming with personality and sell interesting, specialized equipment.

Items are not only bought and sold in RPGs oftentimes players will also find all manners of items, weapons, clothing/armor, and magic artifacts throughout their journey. Try to make sure that you set scenarios up so that players find items that are not too powerful, as that may break the game but powerful enough so that they get excited to unearth them.

A nice way to do this is to make sure each item serves a very clear and specialized purpose,

one that might work especially well with one of the players' already

established skillset. A cloak of silence might be perfect for a rogue, An animated warhammer that tells you one fact about your enemy would fit well with a more combat-focused PC, and so on.

What we've been talking about all feeds well into the idea of taking ownership.

Taking ownership in an RPG is some of the most fun you can have with these types of games. Ownership is a large idea. Each character "owns" their role, for instance, the thief, the brute, the mage, the minstrel all of these different types of PCs are good at different things.

Getting to show off to each other in a way that you can help your players feel proud about their contributions to the larger whole. Helps exhibit both individuality and unity to become an important member of a group of heroes.

Another great way of letting your players take ownership is to let them directly influence the world around them through their decision-making. Make sure to never let the outcomes of your adventures be set in stone.

If your players feel like they can influence the fates of not only themselves but also others around them (NPCs) they will grow more fond of the world that they are inhabiting.

Try letting your players move up in the world

Have they done enough heroic deeds that they should probably be known and respected by now? Make sure to reflect that in how NPCs talk to them.

Did they save the King's son from a terrible fate in the past? Maybe this deed could help influence his decisions on whether or not to wage war on the Elven people.

Make sure the world feels dynamic and responsive.

Now that we've gone a little into how to reward your players it is time to look at the other side of the coin. Let's say your players' PCs decided

the King's son was a prick and left him to his fate, well that would affect how the King looks on the players, this might mean war.

The interesting thing about punishment in RPGs is that since the story is so responsive most of the time you can make failing fun. And a lot of the time doing exactly that is encouraged. Let's say someone veers out of their role and makes some bad skill checks. Describing a stout dwarf trying to sneak around a castle in full plate mail getting noticed immediately can be funny.

Not being able to trick a guard into letting you past him might lead to a fun combat scenario.

Failure can be one of the most entertaining parts of the game if done right. It's important that you make players feel like failure is oftentimes okay since it leads to experimentation that leads to growth. However, this does not mean that all stakes should be thrown out the window.

The risk of something truly negative happening can build up excitement and you don't want to get rid of that. Barely making it out of a tough situation that only seems to be getting tougher can be a lot of fun once you finish.

Sometimes failure means pain and it's the GM's job to distinguish between when and how severely to punish his players.

If the players act foolishly the entire time they are playing it makes sense that things might turn bad for them.

Often this serves as a valuable lesson in itself.

There are many reasons why people play role-playing games but the role-playing itself is a fairly large draw for a lot of players. When a scene is played well it can become super entertaining no matter what is actually going on in the story. A scene where players squabble with a shopkeeper can be the moment of the session if both GM and players are giving the role-playing their all.

For first-time players, especially youths, putting on a voice and acting

in a way that you normally wouldn't act can seem to be a somewhat daunting or scary task.

This is why it's important for the GM running the game to not be afraid to act their heart out when playing an NPC. Whether you are good at making voices or changing your syntax according to who you are portraying is not that important.

What is important is that your players observe your willingness to portray the character to the best of your ability.

Make sure to reward your players whenever you notice them role-playing exceptionally well. Maybe they do something that is incredibly out of character for them as people, but right on the money when it comes to what their PC would do.

Maybe they make an empowering speech to rally an army. Or improvise a poem on the spot. Whatever it is, make sure that they realize that good role-playing does not go unrewarded.

There are many ways you can do this. You can let the player make skill checks with advantage, sometimes you might decide that a player did such a marvelous job of convincing someone of something they don't even need to roll to see if they succeed. Some games have built-in systems for rewarding players for clever thinking or great role-playing, make sure to utilize them.

Don't be afraid to get utilize gimmicks.

Fun is fun and if you feel the game needs more oomph anyone running a game should be encouraged to throw things at the wall to see what sticks.

Get crazy with your descriptions, make props or costumes for use in-game, have the players interact with objects other than dice to determine outcomes (for instance having an NPC challenge a PC to an arm-wrestling fight to prove their mettle and having the fight in real life). Add a town management system, have scenarios go in real-time to add suspense.

Make homebrew content: where you add your own classes, monsters, and locations to the game. Try everything you can possibly think of and see which parts speak to your players.

Make sure your players can understand the rules without having to do too much work. When working with youths something that can be a big turn-off from RPGs is having to flip through large books of rules to realize what they can and can not do. If your PCs have special abilities try preparing additional materials that show the player exactly what the properties of their abilities/spells etc are.

Make sure to show NPCs in the world using skills similar to them so that they will start to realize how big an effect on the world they could have if they managed their PCs skillsets with care.

Finally with rules. Don't be afraid to change them or throw them out if it seems more fun in the moment. We've all played classic board games where your family plays according to a whole other set of rules than what is written in the booklet. The reason for this is usually simply "it's more fun this way".

When running a game the GM's word is the law. This means that if you decide it would be more fun to do something in a different way you make it happen.

Try to be well prepared and know the rules by heart so that you only bend them when you feel it is right. But if you realize you have a blind spot in any given situation really evaluate which would be more fun, for you to make up a rule for a mechanic on the spot or to stop for 3 minutes as you flip through a manual to see how wrestling a goat would actually work.

Remember that RPGs are supposed to be creative so always go the route that you think will be the most fun in any given situation. Maybe adding figurines and a battle map will make your players more engaged?

What if your player wants to play as a type of creature, not in the source

material? If you can make it work, go for it.

Create little audio plays or songs to play alongside your campaign.

Give the players physical keepsakes to take home with them and reflect on their adventures.

If it sounds fun, it usually is. Make sure to always be trying something new and just seeing what works.

Of course we should keep in mind that rules are rules for a reason, sometimes changing things around too much can have negative effects on the flow of the game so make sure to take into consideration the balance of things when bending them or even asking someone more knowledgeable on how best to implement an idea you or your players have something you would like to try

Study how others run their game and pick up traits you want to exhibit in your own games.

There is no one way to run an RPG. Learning to run a game is an ongoing process. You always want to be looking up interesting games online as well as playing under other GMs to see how others' methods differ from your own.

Since people are unique each game is different and we all play into our strengths when we can. If you have a background in arts try creating your own illustrations. If you have a good ear put together your own playlists or original songs for use during play. Make maps. Develop your voices beforehand. Use your real-life knowledge to delve into the intecressess of certain objects in the world. Whatever talents you have make sure to use them regularly as well as always keeping your eyes open for something in other games that you might be able to try for yourself. Even if you are not artistically inclined players will appreciate every bit of extra care you put into your game.

While your main goal should always be to make the game fun for your players you should also aim to keep yourself entertained throughout. While playing the GM is the person the players look to for guidance

and affirmation. If you are having fun with everything you are doing players will take note of your enthusiasm and follow suit. The game is an extension of you. Putting in all the personal touches you can and feel would be fun in the moment.

All it takes to make a game memorable for your players are some choice moments that stick out. Not everything you try to make different or fun will pan out. There can be lulls in the game but do not let them deter you from continuing on trying different things.

If you try new ideas and they don't work out just move on to the next one, and the next one until you start to figure out what really makes your players tick.

Like we touched on before getting to know your players is key and since they are people they don't stay static. People change, so make sure to not fall into a routine for to long as we are all naturally drawn to the new and the different.

The most important takeaway from this chapter should be to always prioritize creativity, no matter where it comes from. Never let a novel idea slip your grasp no matter where it comes from. See what inspires you in your real-life and ask yourself if any aspects of those things could be crammed into your adventure.

Make sure you reward creativity in your players. If they come to a solution to a problem that you didn't see coming roll with it and see how it pans out.

Is always better to let the flow of the moment dictate where things are going.

A problem some GMs run into is getting to set on the "correct way" of doing things. When in reality what we are all aiming to do is create a memorable experience for our players. All of the lessons we wish to impart on youths through play sticks way easier if your players have fond memories of their time playing with you. I

If your players are enjoying themselves and you are helping them cre-

ate moments that will stick with them long after you leave the table you are doing your job correctly and don't let anyone tell you you're not.

Have fun.

Creating Your Own Adventure

Let's say you've been playing for a while now. You find adventure models online and in books and use them when playing with your group but you start wishing they would focus more on the issues and interests of your particular group.

Maybe you find yourself modifying the adventure modules to an extent they come out as something completely different to what you started with. Why not make your own adventure; with your own monsters, cultures, towns, etc? Why not indeed

Creating your own adventure in an RPG is an immensely useful way to make sure that your players experience something that is tailor-made for them. Since it is a story of your own creation you, the GM are no longer bound to have to justify your players' backstories in the context of content that might not account for them.

Now that you are both GM and architect of the setting that your players inhabit you are welcome to let loose of whatever twisted fun you can come up with.

The first thing you need is an idea. It does not have to be fully fleshed out when you start working on your NPCs, locations, and enemies but the more solid your concept is the easier time you will have working on the rest of the aspects of the adventure.

Let's say we get an idea for an adventure. A relatively simple one at that. Our heroes have been staying in a town for quite some time now and now the looming threat of bandits poses to attack the town and its inhabitants.

At this point, you can start dreaming up different scenarios in how players could tackle these problems. They could help the town defend against the bandits. They could try talking to some knowledgable people in town and figure out why the bandits are so hell-bent on decimating the town, maybe even managing to strike up a peace between the

bandits and the town's inhabitants.

The players could take a more proactive approach, finding out where the bandits have their camp and sneaking in there during the night to eradicate the problem before the battle takes place.

It is by asking yourself these kinds of questions that you start to realize what locations, NPCs, and themes your story will play host to. If in doubt ask yourself "what if"

When you've figured out where you'd like the story to go it is time to move on to the locations and NPCs of your module. A lot of the time coming up with locations and the people that inhabit them takes place at the same time but for clarity's sake let us split them up here below.

All right so where will your adventure take place? Knowing this helps when we, later on, need to come up with believable inhabitants in whatever town, dungeon, island, cave you are trying to set up.

Firstly we need to think big picture. Where in the world are we? You can use preexisting worlds and pick out locations or come up with your own. It's entirely up to you.

Once you pinpoint where you are you should ask yourself how life would be in a place such as you have picked.

Did you pick a desert? Probably wouldn't be a lot of cities there, maybe some wandering caravans.

Did you pick a forest? Stands to reason there would be a lot of wildlife in the area, maybe some poisonous plants.

Before delving further into your adventure you need to decide where you are, what the culture or cultures of the area might be, how the landscape might pose a problem to your players, and so on

It's best to prepare for wandering, your players might be naturally a curious group so preparing lots of places for them to wander off to is very important. It also serves well as a choose your own adventure type structure for when players are not sure what to do. It always pays to be

able to, of the dome, offer your players a plethora of locations to check out while they adventure.

Example: "Well you could try scouting the wildlands where you know there has been some bandit activity. Or you could go directly to the mayor, maybe he has some insight on why this aggression is happening. You could also check out the local tavern to see if you can sniff out any rumors about the bandits. Maybe try checking out the local mortician since there have been townsfolks slain by bandits on the outskirts of town and he might have insight into their ways, etc.

Of course a lot of the time it is a GM's job to come up with these types of locations and side characters on the spot as well but the more preparation you do the more confidence in your adventure you will feel. Giving you a little more leeway to focus on the role-playing itself, instead of constantly scrambling for new locations and areas for your players to wander towards.

How much or how little you detail each location is up to you the GM but like with anything else when making your own adventure the more details you can provide the better prepared you will be for delivering a stellar story once the play has begun. It's important to have some idea of how many areas each location has.

Making maps and outlines for areas is the best way to make sure you, the GM are fully aware of the dimensions that your players will have to navigate.

Something that is also helpful is marking down anything that you feel might be of interest on your map or on a corresponding list. Ideally, you want to see how many creatures will inhabit each location and mark them down on your map. This also helps with remembering where their starting position is so you can better answer the common questions players throw out in RPGs "So where am I relative to this creature? Can I reach them from where I am standing? How do I get over to them"

Once you've finished putting together detailed maps for areas you

think will need as well as rough outlines for areas that players are less likely to wander too it is time to decide what characters live in the confines of your adventure.

Each area you come up with needs to be inhabited by suitable creatures if the story calls for it. A tavern would probably have some low lives hanging about that might have ties to the bandits. There would probably be an entertainer there that listens to gossip as well.

And a bartender, of course, we all know they hear more than anyone else.

Much like how we asked ourselves what if earlier we now need to go through each location and ask ourselves "Who should be there?"

The mayor would probably have some sort of protection around him, a bodyguard maybe, he might even have someone running the desk at his office.

What about the bandits? Who are they?

How many are there? How does their company structure work? It's at this point that we've all but completely delved into asking questions.

It is by asking ourselves these questions that we can come to interesting and often hidden conclusions about our NPCs.

When creating NPCs it's very important to keep their motives in mind. Maybe the bandit leader is attacking the town folks to retaliate for a purge of the nomadic clan that the Mayor ordered some time ago. Maybe the coroner is just framing the bandits for attacking people on the outskirts of town. While praying on these victims himself and using their bodies for his experiments.

All of your important NPCs (and that's quite a number of them) need to have their own wants, desires and motives. They don't all need to be as shocking or malevolent as the examples above but giving an NPC something more to work with than "He's a dwarf" is the best way to start fleshing them out and making them feel more like real people,

which is what we're aiming for.

But don't just ask yourself "who needs to be in this story" also ask "who would it be interesting to have in this story". Fleshing out your characters is never a waste of time. A lot of materials and ideas can be repurposed for later games if they don't end up mattering in the one you are planning.

Make sure to know every detail about your NPCs, what do they look like, what do they do? Where are they from? Who do they like? Who do they despise? What type of personality do they have? Try basing them on people you know or know off to add an extra flair of reality.

It's also important to have some sort of rudimentary stats on all of your NPCs, and more detailed ones for the important ones. How strong are they, are they smart?

These factors play into how you role-play them. A smart character would not be easy to fool while they might let their good nature get the better of them and overextend their help.

Try to make the world feel organic through this process of asking yourself questions.

Just as the players have to ask themselves what their PCs would say and how they would react in any given situation you also need to have that same understanding for your NPCs. Treat them like your very own personal PCs while making sure they don't hog too much glory from the players.

Now we're really getting somewhere. At this point, you will start to have imagined possible outcomes for your story. Maybe your players unearth the secret of the nomadic bandit massacres and turn on the townsfolk. Maybe they manage to broker peace between the two factions. They might even play everything very straightforward and not even realize there's more to the story than meets the eye.

Keep in mind that a part of the GM's job is to try to lead players towards interesting tidbits of information without forcing it down the

players' thoughts.

Something that we can not gloss over is this, you will need to come up with an inciting incident for your story. What is it that gets your party to go on this quest you're about to pour so much work into?

There is no single answer as depending on the group, different hooks will work well to get players interested. For a very proactive group simply showing an injustice going on might be enough to spark them to fight for what's right. Often it pays to make the stakes of success or failure very clear. An example would be "if you do not take action the town will be burnt to the ground".

Often it helps to have a direct quest giver, an NPC that pleads with the party to help them or others and gives sound reasoning for why their cause is something that the party should lend their strength to.

Making this character interesting and relatable is a great way to make sure the players listen to them intently. Since it is your own adventure you can even tie them directly into the backstory of the group. Maybe the players themselves are responsible for attracting the attention of the bandits set on burning the town to the ground, as before their arrival the town was hidden to the outside world.

Maybe they are an old friend with whom the players have had positive exchanges in the past. Maybe they are even someone tied directly into one of the PCs backstories, a family member or a member of the same order of knights.

Whatever the case it is important that the players feel a connection to the quest giver be it an already established one or someone that speaks to their sensibilities.

Coupled with this you of course have the promise of rewards, gold, items, renown, and such. But it is very important to make sure that the players have a non-monetary incentive to take on the quest since the most powerful incentive to keep your players engaged should always be the story itself.

Some younger players start off very gold and are experience-focused. However, with the right amount of thought and preparation, they can be swayed to act more selflessly. Often it helps to point out how taking the quest will further the motive of the player.

An example would be saying to your player "Well Granthar, you set out to be the world's strongest warrior right? Well, wouldn't taking on these bandits with the help of your friends be the perfect way to test how far you've come?"

A caveat to this is dealing with problem groups. If you are dealing with a group that has a hard time committing to anything sometimes it pays to directly rope them into adventures.

Let's say the adventurers take a pass on defending the town, instead of spending their time playing cards at the tavern. Well, this is why it's good to tie the threat directly to the group of players themselves. Whether they take the quest or not the bandits are coming.

If they dally around the town the attack will commence leaving them to fight/figure out the situation or perish.

Even when trying to run, the bandits may have set up an ambush for them, attacking the group and maybe even dragging them back to their bandit camp.

The adventure we've been setting up is a mix between linear and non-linear in nature. For those who do not know linear stories or games take you down a single path and often serve to guide you considerably through your journey.

While non-linear narratives are the exact opposite. Where you go, what you do, who you meet or don't meet is entirely up to you.

An example of a linear adventure would be your classic dungeon. You start at one end of the dungeon and make your way deeper down into the depths where monsters and friendly NPCs might be waiting for you at every turn. There isn't much room for maneuvering outside of turning around and going back the way you came.

On the other hand, a totally non-linear adventure might place you at the heart of a vast forest. The forest holds untold monsters as well as hidden caverns, secret lairs, an undead army's keep, and so on. Oftentimes missions with a more non-linear structure will be open-ended, for example, bringing peace to the forest. While the more linear types of stories will often have a very clear goal, for example, robbing a train.

Players will each have their preferred types of narratives but oftentimes it pays to blend the two into a single type of superstructure.

Non-linear hub (town, forest, cave system) with linear set pieces (dungeons, houses, castles, bases).

This is what we would try to do with our bandit story. Give the players a lot of freedom to get to know each faction, the townspeople, and the bandits, show them some areas of interest here and there, let them decide who they will side with or if they will pick sides for that matter. Once we get closer to our end goal, switch to something a little more planned and linear.

Attacking or infiltrating the bandits camp could be set up in a far more linear mode of play than wandering through town looking for clues for example.

In general whichever way you lean as GM or if you prefer to try to strike a balance it's important to keep in mind that variety in player choice is what makes RPGs different than any other type of game.

For this reason as a GM you need to let go of any predetermined ending to your adventure. Playing an RPG is a collaborative effort so you need to be ready to give your players as much room to tinker with your world as possible. If players feel like they don't have any agency, if they just slide from one encounter to the next automatically they will quickly lose interest in your game.

Preparing some choices beforehand can be useful especially with a more inexperienced group of players that might not be as inclined to grab the wheel and force the story to where they want it to go.

Do not put down the choices of your players. If your players go in a totally different direction than you expected your job is to roll with the punches and try to weave a compelling narrative out of it. This is why it pays to prepare as much as possible for your adventure since you can switch locations of things, skip or add encounters and be ready for most possibilities that might incur.

If we decided that the Mayor in our adventure was a bloodthirsty tyrant the players could just as well decide to attack him directly. At this point, our preparations have paid off. We might not have seen it coming but we've already made the arrangements needed to quickly go into a fight. We have the Mayor's stats in front of us so we know how he'll act in battle. We drew up a map of his office so we know what the battlefield will look like and we decided on his temperament and backstory already so we know how he'll react to aggression and the players constantly plying him for information.

To put it simply, we're prepared for almost anything. And the rest we'll improvise.

Hopefully, you are now a little better prepared to start creating your own adventures. It is highly recommended that you study some of your favorite adventures made by other people and try to see how they keep their information organized. Different authors have different ways of presenting the information but once you've taken a closer look at a couple of your favorites you will start to see similarities between how adventures are organized.

Also stop to think of some of your favorite stories. Movies, novels, games, what is it that ties them all together? Do they have a similar structure? Are they filled to the brim with twists and turns or is the wording of everything just so immensely flamboyant that you can't help but smile.

Stories don't need to follow any one structure but knowing some of the structure can be helpful. Focusing on: character, setting, conflict, plot and theme. Once you have all of these down you can move on to

a more accurate timeline

A lot of times stories will follow this basic structure:

Back story: What happened before we got to where we are? What do we need to know before getting started?

The Inciting incident: How are our PCs roped into the events that are unfolding? This is often where you will introduce the threat of the story and present a mystery

The Big Event: Something happens that convinces our PCs to get serious. Often accompanied by a twist.

The MidPoint: The meat of the story takes place at this time and often culminates in an event that shows that the threat we've established is far greater than previously thought.

The Crisis: A reason for our PCs to spring into action quickly. Stakes have gotten as high as they will ever get at this point.

The Climax: Our ending, how will our PCs end the conflict once and for all? Are there complications? Good place for a twist in the narrative.

The realization: What is it that our heroes realized upon finishing their task? This is a perfect place for a third twist or setting up future events via a cliffhanger.

If you keep your eyes open you will see hundreds of different ways to tell a story. This chapter has just been one example on how you can approach creating your own adventure. So go out. Try to create something you yourself would like to play. Don't hesitate to borrow ideas from sources you love and remember to think about stories critically on a regular basis.

Good luck on crafting your next great adventure.

Part III

In this part we offer very detailed advice that is focused on different topics so that game directors can master their craft.

Creating Amazing Heroes

Creating Interesting Challenges

Making Battles Memorable

Making the Cast Interesting

Pacing

Dealing with Problem Players

Preparing to Improvise

The Art of Creating Engaging Storylines

Creating Amazing Heroes

Player Characters (PCs) are vital for filling your game sessions with life. They are essentially the heroes of your story, and just like in any good movie or novel an interesting hero will make the story engaging, exciting and fun. Creating PCs is of course in the hands of your players, however, there are a lot of things that you can do in order to help players develop their characters. Making this effort at the beginning of the game will improve your game and the immersion of the players drastically.

Players can make their characters memorable by considering a few aspects that we will look at in greater detail:

- Character Background
- Personality
- Skills
- Character Connections
- Appearance

Character Background

To create a character who feels real, having a past for that character is a must. A character's background doesn't need to be multiple pages, or even more than one paragraph, but knowing a few key details of what went before the start of the adventure can really bring a character to life. Some people are good at coming up with these things on the fly during role-playing, but for many of us it helps to start by asking ourselves a few basic questions.

The following list is meant to be a starting point that can help your

players discover more about their character's background. Players are not expected to answer everything, the list is supposed to inspire them to think about certain background issues of their characters. Players may also come up with additional questions that they find useful to answer.

Consider the hero's starting level. Try to avoid having events in the backstory that don't fit the current level of the hero, such as a 1st level hero who has "conquering a kingdom" as part of her backstory.

Background questions

☐ Where was the hero born?

☐ What kind of family was the hero born into?

☐ How was the hero's childhood?

☐ Did any big event have an influence on the hero's life?

☐ Did the hero have any friends or enemies while growing up?

☐ How did the hero become what he is today?

☐ What are the hero's motivations?

☐ Does the hero have any goals?

☐ Is there a secret the hero doesn't want anyone to know about? Are there people who know about it?

☐ What strengths and flaws does the hero have? (every hero should have both strengths and flaws to feel real)

☐ Is the hero afraid of anything?

☐ What are the current relationships of the hero (regarding friends, enemies, love interests, etc.)?

If you have some experience with this you can develop it later and add

the appropriate information at the right time. Sometimes situations will come up during the game that will inspire you and demand further development of your character.

Personality

People's personalities are mostly experienced in how they interact with others. Their thoughts, feelings, and actions are all expressions of personality. Some of the things that constitute personality are inherent and some are acquired through experience or effort. In either case, a personality is the most interesting way to differentiate between one person, or in this case, character from another. Is your character outgoing and interested in talking to new people, or is he quiet and reserved? Does your character always tell the truth, or is she inclined to lie? Playful or somber?

A quick way of defining your character's personality is using a personality scale. There are always two opposite personality traits on each of the scales. Quickly go over them and mark the place on the scale that represents your character best. In most cases you'll want to find some kind of balance, very few characters have extreme personality traits.

Personality Scales

introvert	☐☐☐☐☐	extrovert
thinking	☐☐☐☐☐	feeling
impulsive	☐☐☐☐☐	methodical
thrill seeker	☐☐☐☐☐	risk averse
aggressive	☐☐☐☐☐	agreeable
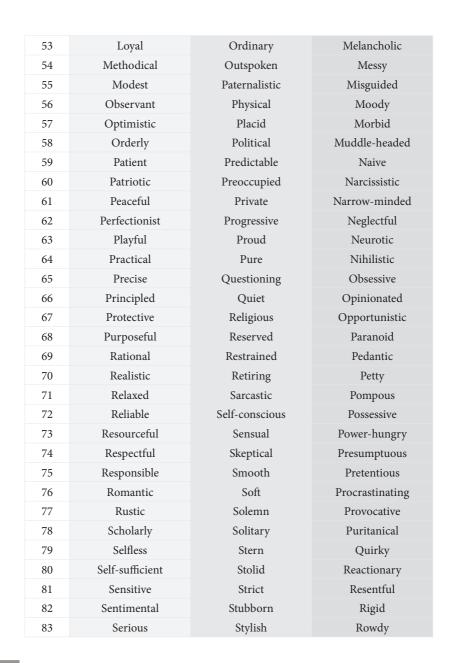
Personality Traits

Another way of defining a character's personality a little more is to pick personality traits that define the character. Personality traits could be positive, neutral and negative. Interesting characters often have a mixture of good and bad personality traits. Let yourself be inspired by the list of personality traits below. If you like you can also roll percentage dice (d100) to generate personality traits randomly.

	Positive Traits	**Neutral Traits**	**Negative Traits**
1	Adaptable	Absentminded	Aloof
2	Adventurous	Aggressive	Amoral
3	Alert	Ambitious	Anxious
4	Articulate	Artful	Argumentative
5	Calm	Ascetic	Arrogant
6	Caring	Authoritarian	Blunt
7	Charming	Breezy	Brutal
8	Cheerful	Circumspect	Calculating
9	Compassionate	Competitive	Charmless
10	Confident	Complex	Childish
11	Courageous	Confidential	Coarse
12	Courteous	Conservative	Cold
13	Creative	Contradictory	Compulsive
14	Curious	Crisp	Conceited
15	Daring	Deceptive	Conformist
16	Dedicated	Determined	Cowardly
17	Dignified	Dominating	Crass
18	Disciplined	Dreamy	Cruel
19	Dramatic	Driving	Cynical
20	Dutiful	Dry	Deceitful
21	Earnest	Earthy	Demanding

22	Educated	Effeminate	Dependent
23	Efficient	Emotional	Devious
24	Elegant	Enigmatic	Dishonest
25	Eloquent	Experimental	Disloyal
26	Empathetic	Familial	Dogmatic
27	Energetic	Folksy	Domineering
28	Enthusiastic	Formal	Egocentric
29	Fair	Freewheeling	Envious
30	Faithful	Frugal	Fanatical
31	Farsighted	Glamorous	Fearful
32	Firm	Guileless	Foolish
33	Flexible	High-spirited	Forgetful
34	Focused	Hypnotic	Greedy
35	Freethinking	Iconoclastic	Grim
36	Friendly	Idiosyncratic	Gullible
37	Fun-loving	Impassive	Hateful
38	Gallant	Impersonal	Haughty
39	Generous	Impressionable	Hesitant
40	Gentle	Intense	High-handed
41	Good-natured	Irreligious	Hostile
42	Gracious	Irreverent	Ignorant
43	Hardworking	Maternal	Impatient
44	Helpful	Mellow	Impulsive
45	Honest	Modern	Inconsiderate
46	Humble	Moralistic	Indecisive
47	Idealistic	Mystical	Insecure
48	Individualistic	Neutral	Insincere
49	Insightful	Noncommittal	Irresponsible
50	Intuitive	Noncompetitive	Lazy
51	Leisurely	Obedient	Mannerless
52	Logical	Old-fashioned	Meddlesome

53	Loyal	Ordinary	Melancholic
54	Methodical	Outspoken	Messy
55	Modest	Paternalistic	Misguided
56	Observant	Physical	Moody
57	Optimistic	Placid	Morbid
58	Orderly	Political	Muddle-headed
59	Patient	Predictable	Naive
60	Patriotic	Preoccupied	Narcissistic
61	Peaceful	Private	Narrow-minded
62	Perfectionist	Progressive	Neglectful
63	Playful	Proud	Neurotic
64	Practical	Pure	Nihilistic
65	Precise	Questioning	Obsessive
66	Principled	Quiet	Opinionated
67	Protective	Religious	Opportunistic
68	Purposeful	Reserved	Paranoid
69	Rational	Restrained	Pedantic
70	Realistic	Retiring	Petty
71	Relaxed	Sarcastic	Pompous
72	Reliable	Self-conscious	Possessive
73	Resourceful	Sensual	Power-hungry
74	Respectful	Skeptical	Presumptuous
75	Responsible	Smooth	Pretentious
76	Romantic	Soft	Procrastinating
77	Rustic	Solemn	Provocative
78	Scholarly	Solitary	Puritanical
79	Selfless	Stern	Quirky
80	Self-sufficient	Stolid	Reactionary
81	Sensitive	Strict	Resentful
82	Sentimental	Stubborn	Rigid
83	Serious	Stylish	Rowdy

84	Shrewd	Subjective	Sanctimonious
85	Skillful	Surprising	Scornful
86	Sober	Soft	Secretive
87	Sociable	Tough	Selfish
88	Spontaneous	Unaggressive	Shallow
89	Stable	Unambitious	Shortsighted
90	Stoic	Unceremonious	Shy
91	Studious	Unchanging	Single-minded
92	Sweet	Undemanding	Sly
93	Tasteful	Unfathomable	Submissive
94	Tolerant	Unhurried	Superstitious
95	Trusting	Uninhibited	Timid
96	Understanding	Unpatriotic	Treacherous
97	Upright	Unpredictable	Uncaring
98	Vivacious	Unreligious	Undisciplined
99	Wise	Unsentimental	Unfriendly
100	Witty	Whimsical	Vindictive

This is just a partial list to get you started. There are many more personality traits and characteristics; if you search the internet you'll find dozens of sites that discuss these traits for both the real world and for creating fictional characters.

Keep in mind that this is just your initial idea of your character. Significant events in the game can certainly change how your character acts or sees the world. Or, during the first sessions of playing, you might discover that the personality traits you picked are not letting you or the other players enjoy the character. While it's best to try to keep the character consistent, changes, especially during the first parts of the campaign, can be made where they need to be.

Player characters often evolve during the game. Your players might not know a lot about their character's personality to start with and that is

perfectly acceptable. However, as their characters are confronted with different challenges in the game they might start to flesh out their character's personality more and more. Sometimes when players develop a feeling for the character the personality traits will suggest themselves.

Skills

While skills often are dependent on the rules of the RPG you are playing, most have some flexibility on what things your character knows how to do.

It's particularly interesting to think about the non-combat or adventuring oriented skills or interests your character has as another building block for making her seem real. If the game system has non-combat skills and allows you to choose them, this is a good place to bring the character's background and personality into view to help choose a few skills that bring out those aspects. If your character grew up on a farm, perhaps she knows how to grow crops or take care of goats. If your character likes to always have something to do with his hands, perhaps he knows how to carve wood or sew.

Skills can also form a backbone of who your character is when not engaged in the exploring or monster fighting that is the focus of many RPGs. A character who has a set of skills that create a profession becomes much easier to relate to. If your character knows how to cook and how to preserve foods, perhaps he is able to earn a living cooking for a tavern. Think about what the character does when there aren't any dragons or zombies attacking the town. These are also things the character could care about and give rise to great role-playing episodes with the other characters.

Character Connections

As Game Director, of course it's important to give the players some latitude on how to bring their characters to life. However, it is important that you help make sure that a newly created group has enough reason to travel or work together to create the shared story and experience. One of the ways you can do this is to suggest connections between characters.

This is actually something that is often overlooked during character creation. A group doesn't need to harmonize perfectly but all characters need reasons to stay together. Sometimes characters can even have secrets that they don't share with each other at the beginning of the game or secrets that only two of the characters share.

When connecting characters look for possible nodes in your character background. Nodes are points to which other stories can be tied. In other words, nodes are open stories that other stories can be connected to. Think of enemies, friends, past events, rivalries, challenges, family relationships, bets, contests, mysteries, etc. Nodes are mostly events that had an impact on your character's background but also people who played a meaningful role. If you actively look for nodes you will train your mind to recognize them quickly and it will become easier to attach other character backgrounds to it.

Pay attention to conflict between characters. While intra party conflict can make for really good role-playing, too much can make it unreasonable for characters to want to work together. Every player should take into account that she is engaging in a cooperative venture, at least as far as the out of character parts are concerned, so creating a character who can interact with the other characters is a must.

Appearance

Naturally any character has to have a physical appearance, so that everyone has a way to imagine. If your hero is a human this is pretty easy. Just imagine all the billions of different ways people look in the real world, and apply that to your character. It's a good idea to consider your characters backstory when doing this. If the character comes from a peasant background and grew up doing hard labor, she'll have a leaner, more muscular look, and her skin might be weathered and calloused. Someone who grew up in the lap of luxury might have a softer appearance. Most game worlds have notes about what the various thinking species look like, so if you're playing a non-human, you can use that information.

Of course any species can have interesting extras, like scars from battles or accidents, tatoos, particular tastes in clothing. Try to choose things like this that make sense for the hero, not just because they "seem cool." Or if you choose something for the cool factor, think of a good reason why the hero looks that way. Memorable looking characters are interesting, but keep in mind that if they are too strange (a human in a fantasy setting with neon orange hair) that will come with both good and bad consequences. So try to have appearance make sense in the context of the setting.

Practical Suggestions

When creating a great character remember to consider various points of views. If your character isn't interesting for your fellow players you won't get much opportunity to play out your character at all. Let's take a look at what makes a character interesting. We'll start with the player's point of view and move to the point of view of the other players.

Method A:

Start with the class. Ask yourself what sort of person or what set of circumstances would cause a person to become that class. This works with any genre, whether you're playing a wizard in a fantasy game, a researcher in a modern game, or a spaceship captain in a science fiction game. If your genre isn't modern real world, think about analog professions to the one your character will have, and think about the real world people who become those things. This can start to give you an idea of a personality, perhaps even a background.

Method B:

Think about the first things someone meeting the character would notice. Not just physical attributes, but personality quirks, habits, mannerism, expressions.

Notice what makes your favorite characters in books or movies fascinating and compelling. These will typically be characters who feel real or believable, even if they are an alien from another planet or a mutant superhero. If you strip away the external things that make them fantasy or science fiction you can feel like you could meet such a person in a local cafe in the real world.

Method C:

Consider personalities from myth as a jumping off point. Mythological persona are fascinating to us because they reveal important truths about our viewpoints and our lives, and thus are easily recognizable to most people. They are also usually very heroic types, so they are a good place to start when thinking about your own hero.

Your Character from Different Perspectives

It is often a great idea to think about the strengths of your character from different perspectives. Not only should you be aware of why the character works for you, you should also think about why others might enjoy your character.

What you find interesting

There are three main aspects most players are interested in when thinking about their character:

- Interesting skills and special abilities

- Character development

- Interesting personality / fun behavior

Most players first look at their characters as a collection of stats, skills and special abilities. For many players it is interesting to optimize the character and make the chosen skills and stats work together well. This might lead to maximizing the character which a lot of role-players would frown on. Still, a lot of players find this interesting and depending on the groupo they are playing in this might be perfectly acceptable. Other players might find it interesting to explore unusual combinations of skills and abilities and they weave a story around this. Just always be sure that whatever skills and abilities you come up with have a decent story behind them so they make sense and add to the immersion of the overall story.

Another way many players get interested in their own heroes is delving into character development. This allows is more akin to what a writer does when creating characters for a book or movie and can be high-

ly satisfying. Thinking about who this hero is, how his life story has changed him, and how those changes impact his current behavior is a fun, creative endeavor that really allows you to show your artistic side.

Some people like to create a character with an interesting personality, or with certain behavioral quirks. They choose things that really allow them to sink deep into the role of the character, and to keep the hero memorable, not only to themselves, but to the other players. This is also a place where you can step outside your normal self. For example, if you are normally shy and reserved, you can play someone who is outgoing and warm.

What others find interesting:

There are four general things that make your character more interesting to other players:

- Interesting/fun behavior
- Useful skills
- Background/knowledge that is relevant for their own hero background
- Background/knowledge that is relevant for the adventure

Most of the time, the other players are going to be more interested in your character if she has interesting personality quirks or fun, engaging behavior. These are things that can help them become immersed and give them a chance to really role-play their own characters. Of course at the end of the day, RPGs are games, so other players will also be interested in a character who has unique and useful skills that assist the group in accomplishing shared goals. It never hurts to think about how your character's skill set fits into the general group. Players also react positively to a hero who has a complimentary background to their own, or who has information or clues that relate to their own

hero's background. This requires a bit of cooperation during character creation with other players, which can be a fun session or two in and of itself. And finally, something that most players will be happy about is if your hero has a background or knowledge set that relates to the overall adventure or campaign. This is where the GD can help out, offering each player a stake in the campaign by offering to drop tidbits into the heroes' backgrounds or things that happen to the hero just immediately at the start of the campaign.

Creating interesting Challenges

As game director, you want to create interesting and immersive challenges for the players in your game. "Challenge" in this case means "a problem that requires the players' attention along with action or reaction". The most effective way to approach this is on a scene-by-scene level.

So what are things that make a challenge interesting?

Making the challenge meaningful

The challenge has to be meaningful for the player characters. There are several things you can do to give the challenge greater meaning.

Connect the challenge to personal goals of the heroes

Figure out what goals the hero has. Hopefully your player has created a small background and character synopsis for you with some of that information. If not, try asking the player a few questions to get some ideas about a few things the character wants. These can be items ("find the sacred jewel of Antioch") but it's even better if it's a condition or situation ("figure out who killed my parents" or "become the pirate queen").

Put something the heroes value at risk

If your campaign has been going on for a bit, hopefully the heroes have come to value or care for something, or someone. If they have built up a fort near the wildlands, have a natural disaster threaten the fort. If they have developed a friendship with the local tavern owner, put her in some kind of danger (either physical, such as an attack, or maybe even just another tavern is trying to put her out of business). Because these things are important to the heroes, they (and more importantly their players) will care a great deal about them.

Make it a matter of the heroes' life and death

Of course placing the heroes themselves in mortal danger works well. You will want to make the peril feel real for this to work, and we'll go deeper into that later.

Make it relevant to the storyline

The best challenges advance or impact the main storyline. Perhaps the heroes have to build up an army to repel the invasion of cursed undead being created by the primary antagonist they clash with, or they need to cross a burning wasteland to find a clue to save the poisoned king. Anything that tends to help or potentially harm the main goal of the group is going to have a huge impact. Creating compelling storylines is detailed in other parts of this book.

Adding time pressure

Think of some of the better movies or books you have experienced. Frequently, the heroes are under a time constraint to accomplish their goals. Make the heroes feel a sense of urgency by building into the adventure a deadline (save the prince before he is sacrificed at midnight, defuse the bomb in three minutes). Another way of doing this would be having adversaries work on the same goal so that the player characters constantly fear that the other group will achieve their objective first (steal the fabled jewel, discover the powerful magic weapon before it falls into the hands of the antagonist, etc.)

Adding mystery and puzzles

Mysteries and puzzles engage the players more than their heroes, since they require the player to think about and solve the problem rather than rolling dice. Many players enjoy these sorts of challenges, and they can really stimulate thinking. Even outside of role-playing games millions of people like to solve puzzles and mysteries, so adding them to your game can really spice things up.

Puzzles

As mentioned above a lot of gamers enjoy puzzles, so it's easy to see why they are such a big part of almont every game, from magazines devoted solely to various kinds of puzzles, to video games which often have some puzzle solving. However, while puzzles are frequently a part of RPG challenges, both "homebrew" and published, they are a bit of a tricky thing. Since role-playing games are both game and story, you sometimes will see them used in a less than sensible way. For example,

It's difficult to justify why an ancient mummy would secure his treasure vault with some sort of puzzle that anyone could solve, since that would not be very secure at all, which is kind of common to see.

A better game design process is to think about a good reason why a puzzle would be present in any particular situation. Ask two basic questions: Who and Why. The person who created or placed the puzzle needs to make sense, and there needs to be a good reason for the puzzle to be there that is realistic and consistent. This keeps the puzzles immersive and interesting for the players.

Avoid adding a puzzle just for the sake of having a puzzle, but puzzles are good for relaying information or letting only certain people find something if the puzzles are designed in such a way that the people who are supposed to do it have an info advantage. For example, a puzzle lock that requires the user to speak the name of three holy people from the sacred texts of the cult to open the lock. These should be texts that it isn't expected everyone in the world knows about.

Another good use of puzzles is for specific tests. The classic example is the three quests given by the princess to determine which of the princes is worthy of her hand. It would make sense for one of these to be a puzzle (the princess wants to know if her future partner is clever enough to help her rule her kingdom). If your puzzle placement meets these criteria then your players are more likely to enjoy them.

Mystery

Mysteries are probably easier for GDs to include in their designs. They can also be easier to create in the first place. In fact, we suggest that beginners stick with mysteries at first. While there are complicated mysteries, you can easily design one that is something like following a map.

Intriguing Situation

Start with the solution to your mystery, the thing that the players need to figure out. Then have the heroes discover an intriguing situation. Maybe it's the dead body of someone they know, possibly in a strange place that the person shouldn't have been able to get into. It could be an unusual and fascinating item that has strange powers, or they know it has powers, but not what they are. Maybe someone familiar to them is acting strangely, or they find a strange and curious creature. What is the key information they can discover immediately?

Design notes

Make a list of the questions that are likely to be asked in the situation you've set up so you have ideas of how those questions could be answered. Then answer them in your notes, but don't just take the first answer that comes to mind. The most interesting answers are the unexpected ones, the ones that will inspire more investigation. The typical questions are "Who, why, when, how?" Explore the more unusual answers to those questions.

Once you have an idea of the answers to these questions, start allowing the heroes to gradually discover clues. You don't want to do an info dump with all the possible clues at one point. In fact, if you let each clue lead to the next clue, it can be very satisfying for the players, even if they haven't actually done much to solve the mystery. Just following the clues like breadcrumbs, providing the timing is right, can give the players a lot of enjoyment.

Confronting heroes with their weaknesses

Like in the first Indiana Jones movie ("why did it have to be snakes?") placing the heroes in situations where they have to deal with a personal weakness in order to beat the challenge creates a special kind of tension. Whether that is an ingrained fear, or a physical weakness such as lack of strength or agility, or even a social weakness, such as a a famous and notable hero having to blend into a crowd to make it to the palace entrance, figure out scenes where the heroes either have to work with their flaw, or get creative in getting around it.

The challenge arises due to the heroes' own actions

Things that the heroes do in the world should have consequences, and sometimes those consequences are a challenge in and of itself. If they do something unwise (insulting a powerful witch), or if they choose the path of least resistance (burn down a building to get rid of the monsters instead of going in and fighting them) then there should be challenges that come about because they have to solve that problem they created.

Connecting interests of NPCs into the challenges

This is a fairly typical source of challenges for hero groups, as they are often directly hired by important NPCs to perform tasks for them that are important to them. However, they could also hear about something that interests an NPC and take it upon themselves to solve a problem

in order to gain favor with the NPC without being directly hired to do so. Smart heroes will try to be seen as reliable and problem solvers, and if the challenge relates to something that matters to a king or a mayor, or even a bandit chief, those challenges can be compelling.
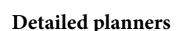
Mixing social/mental/physical tasks

Challenges which test the heroes in multiple ways are some of the most interesting. If a challenge is strictly fighting, or strictly problem solving, it can become boring pretty quickly. But if the heroes have to use a mixture of skills and abilities, the challenge will feel more realistic and more interesting. The challenge is also less likely to be a slam dunk or a complete failure, since several qualities are being tested at the same time.

Typically you will design challenges taking into account not only which types of heroes are in the group, but what sort of storyline you have, plus the styles of the players. Of course each player has an individual style, but groups typically lean towards a certain type.

Classifying the group

Keep in mind that you are designing these challenges for a specific group: your gaming group. It's a good idea to think about what kind of players they are. While individual players will have different desires and play styles, groups often generally fall into one of four categories. Finding out which category will give you a solid foundation when thinking about the challenges you want to place before them.

Detailed planners

These groups love the planning phase and can spend hours discussing different plans and backup plans to carry out a mission. For instance, they might draw up detailed plans for a heist and assign clear duties and tasks to everyone in the group. Planning is often done out of character and involves a lot of strategy. Adventures that allow for this level of strategy need to offer a lot of freedom and no pre-determined order of events in order to make the players happy.

Action heroes

These are the players who are looking for maximum excitement. If there's a chance for their heroes to perform heroic and splashy feats, these players jump right in with both feet. Cinematic situations make the gaming experience most enjoyable for them, with high stakes action that bring along commensurate high rewards.

Character actors

These groups really enjoy the role-playing aspect more than anything else. They like to really immerse themselves into the personality, background, and social interactions of the hero they have created. Situations that let them explore their heroes' motivations and create friendships/rivalries/partnerships with non-player characters or with the other heroes are their cup of tea. Adventures that give them more role-playing opportunities keep these players satisfied.

War bands

This style really enjoys the combat side of adventures and challenges. Players with this style spend a lot of time creating tough heroes who can exploit their fighting abilities to the max. They probably don't want the fights to be too easy, and combat that pushes the limits of their character or require a lot of creativity to win tends to make these players very happy.

Failure is always an option

Just like in real life, heroes in role-playing games should always have the chance to fail a challenge, so always consider failure a possibility. For some challenges, the difference between success and failure is life or death. For others, there are less extreme results from failure. Different challenges have different likelihood and level of failure than others. When preparing difficult challenges, it is helpful to have a 'back up plan', that is, know what potential consequences there are for the heroes failing to accomplish their goal.

The risk of failing a challenge can be described as high, medium, or low. If the chance of failing are low, and the consequences would be trivial, a back up plan isn't needed, and adds too much of a burden to design work. However, if there is a good chance of failure, and the consequences are great, planning for what happens in such a case is a must.

What happens if heroes fail a challenge?

Death, or the inability to continue playing are usually not fun consequences for failure (except perhaps in tournaments or one-shot/limit-

ed campaigns). So a wise GD prepares for a way for the adventure to continue. The story has to be complex enough to let the failures happen and still come to a logical conclusion and keep the challenges and events consistent. During the design of the challenge, the GD should already plan what consequences there are to the storyline.

Meant to Fail

Keep in mind that it can be interesting to have a few challenges that are designed to be failed. This will be covered in more depth in Adventure Design, but in short, the GD should keep in mind that a realistic world is not designed specifically for this particular group of heroes to conquer. This means that there should be challenges in the world that the heroes can't realistically currently engage with. So the "solution" to some challenges could be to walk away from them and return when the heroes have learned something or become stronger.

Furthermore, sometimes a failure is great for character or story development. A hero who has never lost lacks depth. These kinds of moments are particularly interesting to Character Actors described above. Failure is especially relevant if it is caused by choices the heroes have made. Such failure can become motivation for the heroes to set things right again. It helps to understand the personalities of your group when creating these challenges, though, and be certain to give them a lot of thought when designing them.

Optional/side quest challenges

It can be fun to have a few optional challenges, the so-called "side quest" that you often see in video games, or might be referred to as a "random encounter" in some RPG game systems. These are challenges that are

not deeply embedded into the primary storyline, and are introduced to let players and their heroes experience situations that might otherwise be difficult to include as part of the main story. For example, in a political intrigue heavy game, maybe the players are craving a bit of excitement, so you have them enter fighting tournaments at a festival, or have to fight bandits to get the queen's favorite wine delivered.

However, these encounters don't have to be completely unrelated to the main story. Side quests, while optional, can have some impact on the main story.

Example:

The heroes are on their way to a city they've never been to where they need to hire a ship to take them to a mysterious continent where the avatar of their god is being held captive. They have no contacts in the city, so getting a captain to go along with their scheme will be difficult and expensive, though not impossible. On their way towards the city, they stumble upon a clue that some bandits have attacked some merchants on the road. If they ignore the clue because they are in a hurry, nothing really bad happens to them. However, if they follow the clue and go to the bandit hideout, they find a merchant who was being held captive there. If they rescue her, it turns out she is from their hitherto unknown city, and can introduce them to a few ship's captains, maybe convincing a few to help the heroes out for less coin than they would normally ask. Maybe she has some contacts at court in that city, which can be of a big help to the heroes primary quest of saving the avatar of their god. But if they skip it, it's not the end of the story, they just might have a harder time of things. No big loss. But little things added to their adventures can be extra satisfying for the players.

As hinted by the name, side quests are always optional, with little hints of these missions given to the heroes along the way through simple story hooks. If the heroes find the hook interesting, the GD can flesh it out and it could lead to a different kind of challenge.

Choosing difficulty of the challenges

Challenges could be classified as easy, medium and hard tasks.

Medium Challenges

Most of the time challenges will fit in the medium category. Meaning that if the group works together there is a good chance that they will overcome it well. Of course as mentioned before, there's always a chance of failure, particularly if the group fails to plan or use good tactics, or clash with each other rather than focus on the challenge.

Easy Challenges

These challenges should not be too common, as they can feel less engaging than harder challenges. However, it can also be satisfying for the heroes to be able to succeed easily sometimes, and an easy challenge works really well in response to a great success on a previous challenge. This can serve as a sort of reward for a job well done. For example, if the heroes need to get information from a member of the king's court, that would ordinarily be a difficult challenge, but if the group has already succeeded greatly at something difficult for the king he can tell them which courtiers they need to speak to, and the courtiers will be much more inclined to answer the heroes' questions.

Hard Challenges

A hard challenge generally has a higher failing rate than success rate,

and the consequences of failure are generally more dire.

A challenge should be really hard if there hasn't been a hard challenge yet, and the players and their heroes seem ready to take on something more ambitious.

It's an optional challenge where success would give a lot of benefits, so the risk/reward ratio is high.

The heroes have engaged in actions that realistically would cause the next challenge to be extremely difficult (insulted a king to his face, attacked peaceful civilians, walked into an obvious trap, etc).

Categorizing Challenges

Challenges can fit different categories. And this categorization is often not binary, black/white. A given combat encounter for example can fit into different categories.

This categorization is not intended as a « as is » list, but rather a toolbox. Categorizing challenges should help the GDs realize that there are a lot of different approaches to a given situation. It makes the game more interesting if you achieve diversification then challenges for the players.

If possible, adapt to player preferences, without abandoning variation. If you notice a certain style in the player group, try to include more elements that give them the opportunity to use this style further on.

Think in advance of the consequences of failure. Have a plan B.

Challenge Types

This is a way of looking at challenges based on how the challenge is solved or approached. Not everything can be resolved in the same way, not every encounter will even use dice. It's a good idea to have a mix of different challenge types to keep things fresh and avoid monotony. Mixing things up also allows players who enjoy different things the chance to have challenges of the kind they like sometimes. It also helps create a kind of rhythm in the game.

Social

Social challenges usually involve talking to people or interacting with animals or beasts This can include persuading people to support a particular effort or cause, or alternatively convincing them not to do something, questioning NPCs about what information they have regarding a story goal, or even planting information to subvert an opponent. These usually involve role-playing as opposed to using dice, though some systems have skill checks and the like for resolving these kinds of challenges.

Combat

This sort of challenge is probably the most obvious: fights. The heroes can take various roles in these challenges. They can be the aggressors, for example ridding a village of the goblins which harass it, killing the grandmaster of the thieves guild, or capture an important NPC alive who is protected by bodyguards. They can be defenders, protecting a town from an undead raiding party, or defending themselves against attackers while exploring.

Exploration

These kinds of challenges typically don't involve interactions with NPC, but are more "man vs nature". These can include natural hazards, such as a surprise ice storm while the group is camping in the wilderness, or a rockfall while climbing a mountain. There are also obstacles, such as having to cross a deep, raging river, or navigate around animal traps in a forest.

Challenge Resolutions

This is a way of looking at how the challenge is played out from a game mechanics point of view. The question here is which rules become relevant and how the challenges are resolved. Your group will probably have a preferred way but it might be worth trying out alternative resolution approaches once in a while.

Checks

Most rpg systems have rules for determining success or failure, and degree of said, using dice. These checks usually are individual, meaning each hero rolls a die, adds any bonuses or subtracts any negatives, and then the GD uses the number generated to figure out success. In some cases, there is a range, and in other cases, there is a table. However, in some cases you will want to have the entire group make a check. This is likely the best method when the entire group is working together on a single project, say the heroes are all helping to build a bridge. Most players like rolling dice, and getting to take advantage of whatever choices they made during character creation, and these sorts of resolutions are often satisfying. Outrageous good luck, and spectacular bad luck in die rolls can become fodder for tales told about the game session for years to come.

Acting it out

Sometimes the best way to resolve a challenge is by role-playing, rather than simply rolling dice. You are playing a role-playing game, after all, and this method of resolutions allows the players to indulge in a bit of character development. You can also just allow the player to explain logically how the hero solves the issue, laying out the plan of action and the steps being taken. You can easily combine these with a check. You base the difficulty, or any bonuses or negatives, based on the quality of his proposed course of action, adapting the threshold for success.

Other resolutions

There are countless creative ideas for using out of game materials such as board game pieces, miniatures, real-life physical challenges, real-life mind challenges, etc. The results of these challenges could then have a direct impact on the game.

Challenge Impact on the Story

Challenges can range from big milestones/turning points in the story arc of the whole campaign to totally random encounters without any relation to other story elements. In general you should try to mainly put together challenges that move the story forward. However, in a more complex adventure you could add challenges that drive side stories, create atmosphere or show how the world reacts to the events that happened or to the deeds of the PCs. Challenges that are simply random encounters with no connection to the story should be used rarely because they can quickly make the game boring.

Making Battles Memorable

Most GDs and even players think that it's the powers and abilities of the enemies or monsters the heroes are fighting that make battles memorable. While a uniquely designed creature, or a foe can add spice to a fight, there is a lot you can do to make seemingly mundane battles unforgettable.

Location, Location, Location

If you think about some of the most exciting battles you've seen in movies, you'll notice that the best of them utilize the fighters' surroundings as much as the skills and weapons of those fighters. Locations don't even need to be strange or otherworldly to have a big impact on how the fight is seen and remembered. All that's required is a bit of forethought and creativity.

The heroes shouldn't be the only ones taking advantage of the features of the location. Clever enemies will use every advantage they can to win, giving the heroes a run for their money.

Even in actual historical battles locations have shaped how a battle plays out, and your RPG battles are no different. Don't just have all the battles happen in a flat plains, or a bare cavern with a solid stone floor. Think about how high grass could be used for concealment, how ambushers at the top of rocky cliffs would have advantage, how narrow valleys can be used to create choke points, and the inherent dangers in a crumbling building. You can also have really unusual and dangerous locations. Think of a swaying rope bridge; this is both narrow, and the heroes have to contend with swaying, and of course falling is probably fatal. A fight on a sheet of ice in fridge waters presents its own hazards that can be exploited. A raft floating down a roaring river heading to-

wards a waterfall, fighting on a rock or a shipwreck near a riptide can all offer interesting opportunities to make a battle more dangerous and give combatants additional resources to win the fight.

The Enemy

The enemy is of course a very important part of why a battle can become memorable. The obvious thing that comes to mind when designing enemies for memorable battles is to make them unique. This means that they could have interesting powers or interesting items they can use. Interesting does not necessarily mean powerful.

They might also have interesting strategies they use. If they can do something unexpected you can create moments to remember.

Enemies could also turn out to be not who the players believed they were. Maybe the enemy assumes a different shape at the beginning of the battle and changes later or the enemy turns out to be someone they thought was on their side.

Increasing the Difficulty

Inexperienced GDs often try to make battles more memorable by using tougher opponents or giving the opponents better skills or better equipment. However, a more elegant way of making a battle more difficult would be giving the opponents a tactical advantage, such as putting the opponents behind protective walls while the PCs are out in the open, making the PCs fight in water or having small, or weak opponents overwhelm the heroes with sheer numbers.

Another elegant way of increasing the difficulty and at the same time making a battle more memorable is to create a situation which does

not allow the PCs to just attack the way they are used to. For instance, innocent bystanders might be in the way, so that an otherwise effective attack like a fireball can't be used. There are countless other situations that can make PCs rethink their normal fighting strategies and require a different approach: The enemy might have taken hostages, certain enemies might be needed alive, the person the PCs are trying to rescue is fighting on the side of the bad guys.

Having to overcome this extra difficulty that you are throwing at the players could feel very rewarding when the PCs eventually achieve victory.

Surprise!

Surprises are a good way to keep your players and their heroes on their toes. Consider having opponents behave in unexpected ways, such as changing shape, or summoning more dangerous allies. Perhaps the enemy has the ability to change the environment in some manner, either through magic or technology, to give himself an advantage. He should also be able to change up his tactics, particularly if they have proven unsuccessful. There could be multiple armies around the battle that the heroes didn't account for, or perhaps a dragon or other flying creature could come along and add to the danger. Depending on the location, things like rocks or plaster could fall from above randomly.

The PCs could also be surprised by the terrain, especially if it is changing during combat. Maybe some of the terrain is really a part of a giant creature that wakes up or there are magical activities that warp the land.

Surprises could also be related to the story. Maybe the enemy turns out to be not the person the PCs thought he was. Maybe someone betrays the PCs in mid combat. Maybe it turns out that the enemy the PCs are fighting is really an ally who has been tricked to see the PCs as the

enemy.

Paint a picture

Some of the most memorable battles will have great descriptions. Engage all the senses when describing what's happening and the surroundings. Describe the acrid smell of blood, the sound of swords clanking against armor, the sensation of sweat trickling down the back of the neck as the battle rages on. Instead of simply saying "The bandit's club hits you for 6 hit points" try describing it like "You feel the impact of the club as it hits your arm, jarring your bones, bruising you - take 6 hit points". Encourage your players to describe their attacks similarly, or if they are not comfortable, come up with some descriptions yourself.

Background music and ambient sounds can really add a lot of atmosphere to battles. Be careful here, as too much repetition, or loops that go on for too long can create a sort of audio fatigue.

Use catchy dialogue during a fight. Just like in some of your favorite action movies, the villains can taunt the heroes, or make scathing comments, or drop hints. They can even beg for mercy if the battle is going poorly, or offer terms of surrender for the heroes if the villains feel they are winning.

Making the Cast Interesting

The people within the game world that the heroes interact with are nearly as important as the heroes themselves. Unless your heroes are stranded on a deserted island with nothing but animals and monsters to interact with, there will be plenty of non-player characters, or NPCs for short, for them to engage with. While of course you will want to encourage the heroes to interact with each other, their world will be tiny indeed if there are no NPCs to talk to.

There are lots of different roles that NPCs play in a game. There are the big roles, like the empress who rules over an entire continent and might need to either be helped or stopped depending on how she rules, to a traveling merchant who sells meat pies to the heroes when they are hungry. In essence, the NPC is every person who is not portrayed by a player whom the heroes might see or interact with.

Much like the heroes themselves, NPCs should have realistic motivations and individual goals that don't revolve around the heroes. The more realistic NPCs seem, the more immersed your players will be in the scene where they interact with them. NPCs shouldn't "power down" when the heroes are away, there should be a sense that they have other aspects to their lives while offscreen. This doesn't have to be terribly complicated, it's just a good idea to think about what else besides the conversation with the hero an NPC might have on her mind. Maybe the merchant selling the hero some rope has a sick child at home, and if the hero takes too long picking out the rope, she gets irritable, or anxious, wanting to be on her way to check on her child. If the heroes roll up into town at midnight, in most towns there won't be many, if any, NPCs to interact with, save perhaps unsavory types like burglars breaking into homes, or drunks passed out on the sidewalks. The most memorable, immersive NPCs seem to have their own goals and reasons for being in a particular scene. Even a simple beggar child can become a rich interaction if you give a short amount of thought about

what his life is like, and what he actually wants.

Visuals

The first obvious thing to consider is a physical, visual description of your NPC. It's a good idea to develop a few physical characteristics ahead of time if you know your heroes are planning to talk to anyone. Hair length/color, eye color, age, clothing style, and sex are all good starts. It doesn't have to be anything too wild, though occasionally having an NPC with a radically distinctive feature can make the world more interesting. You can create a table of possible physical features for your own use and either choose or roll randomly on it if you are stuck for inspiration, or look online to find such lists that you can use. Such a table can also be useful if your group decides to talk to someone that you didn't plan on ("hey, we want to find a fortune teller in town!").

Personality

In addition to physical description, one or two words about the NPCs personality is helpful. If the NPC is not meant to be recurring or isn't terribly important, you just need some broad ideas: surly or cheerful, energetic or tired, focused or vague, for a few examples. This is another category where you can find lists online, or you can create a list for yourself and either pick or roll.

Long term relationship?

More important or recurring NPCs require a deeper dive into their

description and background, and this can develop along with the campaign depending on the NPC. If you know the group is going to have a particular patron, say a countess who will hire them or help them out, you should have a good idea beforehand about her description, personality, and a brief history or background, something like the ones that you ask the players to develop for their heroes. However, even an innkeeper can be important if this character is one that the heroes encounter often, and any NPC whom the heroes develop friendships or family bonds with will need a more complete background/description.

Stay on your toes

As we have mentioned in other parts of this book, your group of players and their heroes will often surprise you, and you need to be ready for that. In this case, sometimes your heroes will decide to forge a long term relationship with an NPC you think of as a one-off character, like a random stable hand. They will decide to have repeated interactions with the NPC, so you should be prepared to expand on an NPCs background and motivations when this happens.

It's a good idea to take notes during the game if you notice that the players are really enjoying interacting with a particular NPC so you know which ones to spend more development time on. This is another place where having a prepared table of some sort ahead of time can save you some headaches, should the heroes start asking questions of an NPC you haven't fully developed.

The Role-play's the thing

Well developed NPCs are a great way to help the players work out the personalities and motivations of their heroes. These "supporting cast"

characters that you create can also be used to help encourage the role-play skills of your group if any of them are newer players or struggling with that part of your game. Some players might have an easier time talking to you as the moderator than they do the others at the table. Furthermore, in a group which is a bit awkward with each other, your NPC can help jump-start conversations between the player heroes, which can be important for immersion and group cohesion.

Another benefit is that well developed NPCs allow for the GD to have fun and interesting interactions with players/heroes besides having a monster-of-the-week attack them. They allow you, as the moderator, to stretch your role-playing and improve skills. They can be some of the best parts of a game for both players and GD.

Pacing

As a GD it is important that you learn to control a game through pacing. This will help you understand when to keep the players at the edge of their seats or when to give them a little breathing space,

What is Pacing?

Simply put, pacing refers to the "speed", either fast or slow, that the game or story is going. Like in physical races, you use pacing to make sure you keep enough energy to finish the game and keep interest throughout. Pacing can add to immersion to the game and it can also intensify the atmosphere.

The Importance of Pacing

Pacing has a big impact on how engaged players are in the game. If your speed is slow people lose interest, if the speed is too fast and non stop action people get exhausted. Pacing is basically the art of adjusting the game speed to the needs of your players. Pacing lets you finish a game in a planned time period, which may not be that important for home games, but is vital for tournament or convention settings, or any game with limited available time.

Understanding Scenes to Apply Pacing Strategies

Different types of scenes offer you different opportunities of pacing. We will explore linear scenes, open scenes and event driven scenes and what you can do to control these scenes.

Linear scenes

Linear scenes are scenes in which the PCs are expected to do things in a linear fashion. In other words, they need to get one thing done first before starting the next action.

Example: The heroes are chasing a villain who tried to poison a knight. They have to cross a burning bridge, make their way through a forest while avoiding traps he set for them, and finally face him in a small cave.

In linear scenes, you don't worry too much about too fast pacing, because these kinds of encounters are mostly driven by the actions of the heroes. If they are racing around at breakneck speed, they probably are enjoying it and want it that way. Just be sensitive to any clues the players give that they want things to slow down a bit by allowing their characters to engage in any slower paced actions. What you should be paying attention to is that you throw offers or chances at the group, such as an interesting role-playing encounter or npc that allows them to choose to slow the pace.

Open scenes

Open scenes are scenes in which the PCs can act freely and in no pre-

determined order. These scenes often offer a lot of role-playing opportunities and are harder to prepare and often require improvisation.

Example: For their heroic deeds the group has received an invitation to King Arthur's court. They are planning to warn him of dangers they discovered but some courtiers are trying their best to keep them away from the king.

Controlling the pace in such scenes can be a lot harder than other types. Slowing down is a bit easier because you can insert more activities for the heroes as needed. Speeding up can be difficult. You don't want to have iron fisted control over the actions of the heroes, but a danger in such open scenes is that the heroes end up burning a lot of time doing pointless things, for instance if they just want to steal things when they need to be investigating clues to a murder. To determine the best course of action, ask yourself whether or not you have something important they still need to do in the current scene. If not, there are a couple of things you can do. You can move the scene naturally towards the next scene. Using the above example, you can start a speech or the king could start his audience so that people are no longer standing around talking. Or if it's a festival outside, you can have a sudden thunderstorm to drive people indoors or to another location. However, if the players still need to accomplish something in the current scene, things are a bit different. Say that during the festival you wanted the heroes to talk to a particular merchant of exotic spices. However, they seem to be wandering around talking to anyone but this merchant. You can have something happen that draws attention to her, for example, perhaps a thief steals from her, and she shouts for help. Basically, in each instance, you need to find a way to draw attention to whatever is the important part of the scene and entice the heroes to go in that direction. An example at King Arthur's court, if you have someone who has some important information and the heroes have ignored this person, he could get into a fist fight with someone, and have one of the brawlers turn to the heroes for support.

Event-driven scenes

Event-driven scenes are scenes which are running regardless of the actions of the PCs. In other words, even if the PCs don't do anything the scenes will happen and play out. This doesn't mean that the PCs have no impact, it just means that events will force the PCs to react.

Example:The heroes are attending a local festival when a boy suddenly tries to steal something from them. Just a short moment later there is a commotion because the knight and protector of the village has been poisoned. While everyone is still gathering around the dead knight a group of bandits attacks.

Keep in mind that if you sense that the players are having fun with a current set up you can wait to introduce the next event. If you need to speed things up you can trigger an event sooner than you had anticipated.

How to prepare for pacing

Good pacing is a lot easier when you prepare well. When you have a written scene or notes for a scene in front of you, the first thing you should do is dividing the scene into blocks. Blocks could be actions of the PCs or actions of NPCs or events that are happening. In any case a block should be game content that belongs together. Once you have identified your blocks, you should:

- **Determine how long you give the players to play out the block**
  When you know your players it is not too difficult to have an idea of how much time they will spend on a certain block. However, the time you choose for a block should be determined by how long you think the players will enjoy playing the block.

- **Identify critical blocks**

Critical blocks are those that could be significantly faster or slower than what you have planned. You need to be aware of a block that could easily differ from your initial planning.

- **Identify elements that can be cut or used to speed up/slow down the scene**
Inside your blocks you might find elements that are not crucial for the adventure. Mark them as elements that can be cut out. You should also find elements that could be used to expand the scene, such as interactions with NPCs.

Speeding Up the Scene

There are several things you can do to speed up a scene and you will have to find out what works for the scene and what you are comfortable with. Some of the methods let you speed up the scene without the players noticing, some rely on the cooperation of your players. Ideas for speeding up the scene are:

- **Give players only seconds to make decisions**
Consider using a stopwatch or the second hand of a clock and telling the players they have limited time to decide. Say you've given them 2 minutes to make a decision, countdown each 30 second point to add to the sense of urgency.

- **Let them feel that time is passing**
As the heroes dither, or the players engage in too much discussion, remind them how much time is left for them to accomplish their goal. If they are supposed to meet someone in an hour, but the players are spending a lot of time discussing their plans, remind them that as they talk, time is passing, and they might miss the important appointment.

- **Push players into action through events**

If the heroes or players are taking too long to decide on a course of action, have events crop up that force their hands. Something catches fire, a guard notices them while they are trying to hide, sudden lightning storm, anything that will spur them to action.

- **Reduce the number of checks (give players some automatic successes)**
In games that have checks, it's tempting to diligently have the players make die rolls for anything that ordinarily requires one. However, to speed things up, base success or failure on the description of what the hero is doing, and when failure would stop the story dead in its tracks, just tell the players they are doing it ("Thrognar climbs up the wall easily because there is a trellis there, and gets to the roof.")

- **Tell the players to speed up**
This doesn't mean you nag the players out of character that they are taking too long: this is a game, not chores assigned by their guardians. Hower, you can subtly remind them that time for their characters is of the essence both in or out of character. It's best if you can have an NPC talk to them about time crunches, but if that's not possible, you can say "Remember, your heroes don't have so much time to wander around the city, there are guards searching for them," or "are you sure you want to take the time to discuss your plans while the town hall is on fire?".

Cutting the Scene

Sometimes cutting the entire scene is the most elegant option of speeding up the game. Of course, this can only be done if the scene is not a key moment in your adventure.If it is, you can often cut elements of a scene to take the PCs forward in the game at a faster speed. Ideas for cutting the scene are:

- **End conversation by summarizing**
  If a role-playing conversation between the heroes and an NPC is dragging out, you can simply switch to summarizing the information they heroes need and end the conversation. Then indicate that the NPC doesn't really have anything more to say to the heroes to let the players know it's time to move on.

- **Leave out flavor elements or entire blocks or summarize them**
  You'll want to do this sparingly, because good descriptions add to immersion, but if things are dragging, you can limit some of the descriptions, or cut some of them out. For example, instead of the full paragraph describing the creepy forest, you can simply say that it's dark and foreboding.

- **Reduce the number of enemies**
  If battles are taking too much time, reduce the number of enemies, as many enemies creates complexity that takes time. If the battle is already underway, and you already told the players how many enemies there were, you can either have some of the enemies run away, or if that doesn't seem feasible, secretly lower the health of the enemies so the fight ends more quickly. If you do this, be sure to reduce any awards (experience or treasure) proportionate to how easy the fight ended up being

Slowing Down the Scene

There are times when you need to slow down the pace. In general this is a lot easier if you can improvise well. Be careful though, slowing down a scene can quickly lead to making the gameplay more boring. Be sure to make whatever you choose to stretch out the scene fun and engaging for the players. Ideas for slowing down the scene are:

- **Involve heroes in conversations**
  Role-playing opportunities can often engage the players and give

the PCs the opportunity to shine. They also generally take up a lot of time.

- **Throw a side-event at the heroes**
  Be careful about throwing completely unrelated random events at the players because players often don't care about them. Side events could be simple complications though or an additional challenge the PCs need to overcome in order to reach their goal.

- **Make blocks more challenging**
  Think about making the blocks you have identified in your scene more challenging. You can do this by providing less informa-tion, by making the opponents tougher or by not giving away the required information so easily. It often works well if you make PCs earn the information they want.

- **Increase number of enemies**
  This is the reverse of the previous. If it looks like the heroes are barreling through a combat encounter, and things need to be a bit slower, have more enemies show up. It could be allies of the cur-rent enemies they are engaged with who have come to help their friends, or perhaps the two groups fighting have attracted monsters or bandits or some other mutual enemy that causes chaos in the battle.

- **Encourage players to plan and talk**
  This is a good idea especially if you already are under the im-pression that the group of heroes isn't well prepared for whatever comes next. Point out that things are likely to be difficult, and ask them to make sure they have exactly the plan they want. If you have NPCs nearby, they could ask relevant questions of the heroes and spark conversations between the heroes as well.

Dealing with Problem Players

Ideally a gaming group is composed of people who have more or less the same goal as each other (having fun) and are mature enough to work at getting along in order to accomplish that goal. As with any kind of relationship, be it work ,school, or interpersonal, being part of a gaming group requires flexibility, empathy, consideration, and most of all cooperativeness. Unfortunately, just like other life endeavours, you are likely to run across gamers who are lacking in some of these qualities, or who are downright toxic. As the game director, the burden falls upon you to try to manage these issues and even figure out when it is time to ask someone to leave the group. However, there often are strategies you can use to improve participation without having to "fire" the problem player. In fact, ejecting a player should be among the last options, especially when dealing with someone who is a friend outside the gaming group, or obviously when within a youth work setting.

Before getting into the types of problem players you might run into, it's a good idea to consider having a group discussion with your players BEFORE the beginning of the campaign to discuss expectations and desires as regards to the type of campaign everyone wants. Make sure everyone understands what you as GD want, and find out what your players want from you. Find out what kind of game everyone wants. For example, if everyone wants a light, frothy joke game, and you're fine running that, then the Joker type listed below probably isn't a problem. Communication is always the key to success!

We describe a few of the possible problem player types below. Keep in mind some of these cases aren't completely bad, like the rules lawyer, it's how the player applies their "gamer personality trait" to the rest of the group or towards the GD that causes the problems.

Power gamer

The power gamer always seems to need to have the most powerful, strongest, and all around best character possible, and often prefer to be better than the rest of the heroes (though not always). They don't generally care as much about the storyline or role-playing so much as being at peak effectiveness, and will often become moody if their character fails in some manner. They usually see the game as some sort of competition, whether it's their character against the other heroes, or against the GD. These players will exploit every possible advantage, whether it's in the rules as written (RAW) or various interpretations, or even coming up with variant home-brews that are almost never properly balanced.

Solution

Create challenges that are harder for the power gamer to exploit with his character's strengths. Set up situations where the player can see others in the group having fun dealing with their characters' weaknesses, or where role-playing is more important than having the best stats or skills.

Metagamer

This player will exploit things she personally knows, but that her character would have no way of knowing. Say one member of the group has discovered something, the metagamer will have her character use that knowledge despite her character not having it. The way this often happens if the group has split up in character, but all the players are still at the table, and one hero has fallen victim to a trap, unable to warn the

rest of the group about it. Your metagamer's hero will move around in the encounter as though she knows exactly where the trap is and what it does. This is usually a problem with inexperienced players, though not always. Some experienced players will allow their heroes to know about the weaknesses of a unique monster that their characters have never encountered.

Solution

The most obvious solution is to pass notes or otherwise keep secret information secret between the players. If one hero is isolated and experiencing something the other heroes can't sense, it might be worth the effort to take that player aside and explain the situation to her, or send her a note. If you have a particular player who has a hard time with this, try talking to her in private and explaining that such behavior makes running the game difficult and less fun for everyone else.

Rules Lawyer

Rules lawyers are very interested in the exact rules as written in any game system. Being good at the rules isn't bad in and of itself, but a rules lawyer becomes so obsessed with the rules that they end up being disruptive. While it's important for the GD to follow the rules correctly as much as possible, in the middle of a game session obsessing over them can be a problem. Rules lawyers are constantly challenging the GD about rules interpretations in the middle of the game.

Solution

Talk to this player in private and explain to her that while the rules are important, and you are doing your best to follow them, at the end of the day the rules are guidelines to help us have a good time. Remind her that the GD has the last word, particularly in the middle of a game session. You should also give the rules lawyer the chance to talk to you outside of game time, so she can bring up issues and concerns regarding the rules. After all, the rules lawyer is often a font of knowledge, and you are only human, and can always use as much help as you can get. Just make sure to insist that the conversations are respectful (going both ways) and that your rules lawyer can accept that after the discussion, you are the final arbiter of how the rules are to be used and interpreted.

Disruptor

Some players seem to like to cause as much havoc in the game as possible. They have their "heroes" attack fellow party members, or they have their characters do dangerous or chaotic things that disrupt the plans of the heroes, often justifying it because "That's how my character would act." They are a lot like a kid at the playground who knocks over other children's building blocks, seeming to take a lot of joy in the act of being disruptive.

Solution

This might be a good one for a group discussion, where everyone can explain to the disruptor that his actions are making the game less fun for everyone else. As GD you can also talk to the player to try to find

out what other things besides destruction would be fun for him. In some cases someone is a disruptor just because they've never played a cooperative tabletop RPG before, and might need a bit of guidance on how to create a character who fits in, and what makes cooperative RPGs fun. It's often a problem where they have trouble getting into character and don't feel immersed in the game. Helping this player figure out how to get into character and create a character they like can go a long way towards solving this issue.

Spotlight Seeker

The spotlight seeker, or attention hog, requires that everything revolve around her character, and that everyone pays attention to her hero at every point. She will often talk the loudest, and longest, and if the focus lands on another player, she will find ways to disrupt the scene and cause focus to come back to her hero.

Solution

First of all as GD you have to work hard to make sure all players have a chance to act or engage. That means turning your full attention one at a time to each player, particularly the quiet ones, and make sure you've noticed when they want their heroes to do something or talk to someone. If the spotlight seeker tries to interrupt, gently ask her to wait her turn while you deal with the player you are talking to. It's also a good idea to figure out ways the spotlight seeker's hero needs the other heroes, depending on them for success. If the problem gets too out of hand, of course you'll need to have a conversation with your spotlight seeker, explaining to her that her behavior is causing the other players not to be able to have the chance to shine. Remind her that this is a

group, cooperative game, and everyone has to be able to contribute and be heroic.

Cheater

This type of player is most often seen in face-to-face games rather than online games, where die rolls usually are done via computer, though they can try to cheat during character creation and rules interpretation. The most common form of cheater is someone who rolls his dice in such a manner that no one can ever see what he actually rolled, and of course his rolls most of the time are high and successful. Keep in mind we are talking about a pattern of repeated behavior here, and not a one off or occasional thing. It's normal for a player to occasionally make a mistake in adding his bonuses or to misread the tiny print on the die. If it's only happening sometimes, it's probably better to not make a big deal out of it, since the chances that the player is intentionally cheating are low. Another form of cheating happens during character creation, where, depending on the rule system, the player will lie about attributes rolled, or how many health points the character legitimately has or the like.

Solution

Dice cheating: The most obvious solution is to have everyone at the table roll dice in the clear. That means all die rolls have to be where the GD and others can see them. Perhaps have a communal die rolling tray near the center of the table.

Character creation/updating: The best way to deal with this is prevention. Consider starting the campaign with a session 0, that is, have an initial game session where you don't plan to run any challenges,

you and the players will simply deal with character creation together. Watch die rolls, double check maths, make sure everything on the character sheet is correct. In any case, make it clear to the players before the campaign starts that you, as GD, reserve the right to reject any character sheet if it doesn't meet with your standards. If the game system offers something like a standard array or a point-buy system, consider using that as well, since that lets all the players start out on a more even footing and reduce player anxiety about their character being "good enough".

Control Freak

The control freak description is on the tin - she needs to be in control of everything. This player will often be seen telling the other players how to play their characters, always operating from the assumption that her way is the better way. She might even try bossing the GD around. She usually thinks she is a mastermind of strategy and tactics, and will become visibly angry when the rest of the group doesn't follow her prescribed tactics.

Solution

Have a talk with this player, explaining that it's one thing to make gentle suggestions to other players, but telling people what to do is not going to make for a fun game. Suggest that she wait for people to actually ask for her advice, and let her know that even if other players are making mistakes, that's all part of the fun.

Murder-Hobos

This type of problem player is the subject of a lot of discussion as well as joking around the gaming community. This player views the game world much as she would a video game world. Her "hero" tends to kill every and anything that comes into her path, either for the loot, or just "because". Her hero will kill ordinary towns folks, merchants, city guards, orphans - you name it. And she will then strip the bodies of whatever goods they have on them.

Solution

The best way to handle this is in-game. Make her hero experience consequences for this violent, murderous behavior. Have the town guards come after her when she murders a shopkeeper, and make sure they are strong enough to take her in. Toss her hero into prison, or have the local lord place a magical ward on her, or in a science setting, a shock collar, that causes her to have to perform dangerous jobs for him to make up for her crimes (think "Suicide Squad"). Depending on how badly the hero has behaved, she may even have to suffer the ultimate punishment, and the player has to make a new character.

If in-game punishments don't seem to be helping, you'll have to take the player aside and explain to her that this type of character won't work in your game. It's not fun for you as GD and generally isn't fun for the rest of the group. Ask her how you can help her get more immersed into her character so she can actually care about the world around her.

Complainer

This player spends most of his time complaining about pretty much

everything. From how the GD runs particular adventures, how the GD interprets the rules, negative things happening to his character, or something good happens to someone else's character. With this guy, it's pretty much a non-stop cavalcade of whining. This player will often accuse the GD of being unfair, and it's true that constant complaining like this can drain the fun out of the game for everyone.

Solution

The first thing to do is examine your own GD practices to make sure you are actually treating this player fairly. It can be easy to fall into a pattern of favoring one player over another, and it's important as GD to be able to take legitimate criticisms and reflect accurately on your own actions. Always be sure that you apply the rules impartially,

Once you've figured out whether or not the complaints are legitimate, the next step is to talk to the complainer and find out what would make the player happier with the game. Find out what they enjoy and see if you can't have more stuff in the game that they find fun.

Jester

The jester is always joking around or playing pranks, either in or out of character. She will do this even when it's not appropriate to the mood of the scene. Everything is subject to cracking a joke, even during an important or tense encounter. Her hero tends to be one-dimensional or gimmicky and can be pretty disruptive when other players are trying to engage in the game in a deep, immersive way. Whether or not the Jester is disruptive, of course, depends on the group, but keep in mind that the GD is supposed to be having fun along with everyone else, so if this behavior bothers you, don't be afraid to speak up.

Solution

Try to help her feel more immersed in a character. Help with the background of her hero, and give her tips on creating a realistic persona for her hero. Maybe talk about characters she enjoys in books or movies that have more than a single dimension.

Barely There

This player is often brought along to the gaming session and has no real interest in what is happening. This is often a friend who just doesn't want to lose out on what the group is doing and in some cases a boyfriend or a girlfriend who tags along. Sometimes players are too distracted by other things to focus on the game. A common problem is that players are playing around with their mobile phones or they are distracted by other things, causing them to miss out on what is happening in the game. They are often caught off guard when it is their turn to do anything.

Solution

This is another instance where asking the player what sorts of things would help him feel more connected to the game can be helpful. It's ok to tell this player that you have noticed that he is easily distracted, and that you want him to enjoy the game, as well as not cause delays because he's not paying attention. Some people just need a gentle reminder. If things like phones or other handheld devices continue to be a problem, talk to the group about "banning" them at the game table, with some sort of agreed upon penalty for bringing them to the table. If players use electronic devices for the character sheets or dice, discuss

putting them on airplane mode.

In either case, be clear with the Barely There player on how his disinterest or distraction negatively impacts the game (such as how in fights, everyone has to wait around for him to react, or the time wasted restating what has been going on in the scene since he checked out).

When to call it quits

Sometimes as a GD, you'll try all the various solutions to help integrate a problem player better into your game, but your efforts don't yield results. Sadly, this might mean that a player has to be asked to leave the group. While it's normal to be reluctant to do this, the GD is responsible for making sure that the non-problem players don't end up quitting due to the one who is causing the problems. Your first focus is on making sure the game is enjoyable for those who actually contribute. It's difficult for an outsider to say exactly when this point has been reached. As GD you should be aware of the general mood and attitudes of all the players, and don't become so focused on "fixing" a problem player that you forget about the others.

If the issues with the problem player have gone on long enough that either the other members of the group, or you as GD are not having fun, it is definitely time to politely ask the problem player to no longer attend the sessions. This is especially hard if the player is a mutual friend, but it's usually best to couch it in terms of a lack of "fit" rather than just saying "You are a big problem." It might be a good idea to practice what you plan to say, and try to remain calm and objective. You should expect the problem player to get upset; no one likes being kicked out of a group activity, but don't allow yourself to be verbally abused. Just state that there are issues with the game, and that the player might find more enjoyment or a better fit with a different group. It's not always about who is "right" or "wrong", because differences in playstyle are

definitely a thing.

You and the other players in your group have a right to have an enjoyable time in a hobby that you spend so much energy on, and the problem player has the right to go find a group which fits her temperament more.

Preparing to Improvise

What at first sounds contradictory is actually a key element of cooperative storytelling. Game Directors should always expect the unexpected and be prepared to react to it. It's not a question of if the player group will come up with unexpected behaviour or approaches to some challenges, but when and how.

There are two types of improvisation which will be needed at some point :

- Narrative improv
- Mechanical improv

Narrative Improv

Narrative improv is focused on the story and we will take a closer look at the following three aspects:

- Going where no one has gone before
- Adverse behaviour towards NPCs, especially story-critical ones
- Failures at (story) critical challenges

Going where no one has gone before

Sometimes groups of heroes will wander off of the parts of the map that have been carefully designed and fully charted. The key point in improvising a new setting or environment is a strong understanding of the world you play in. Presenting the players a new and ad-hoc created surrounding is easy if it is totally random and isolated. Where it gets

more challenging is to connect it to the rest of the world and getting the players to accept it as such. Credibility is key here.

The better you know your setting, the easier this will be.

Aspects which are key for the credibility of the world in which you play when creating ad-hoc environments:

- Global social and political structure of the world

- Backstory: (recent) big events at regional level, notable deaths, references to prior events of the main plotline of the campaign. Example: town gossip about some prior actions of the heroes

- Relationships with other (known) NPCs: A town guard, for example, talking about his missing former guard colleague, one which the PCs met in the last scene

- Natural environment: Weather, landscape, terrain, fauna and flora etc

- Art and style: Buildings, clothes, food etc.

You have to be aware of these elements or at least make a quick decision now and then and stick to it and adapt the rest of your scenes accordingly.

If possible, have a map of the region(s) and be prepared for coming up with details about 1-2 recurring elements of each campaign : notable NPCs, towns, buildings, pubs/inns, roads, lakes/rivers. You can prepare them in advance and simply assign them to precise locations visited by the PCs as you see fit.

There are some tools to help you: character or even world generators from which you can get inspiration. Look online for these resources. It's best to use them primarily for inspiration then doggedly following whatever is generated.

It is fine to reuse older well designed elements (i.e. from another campaign with other players) or recycle unused material. Example: you designed a dungeon for an encounter and the players decided not to

enter it. You simply can use this dungeon later on in the campaign at some other point where it fits.

Try to get the players back on track as soon as possible without letting them be aware that you adapted the storyline (but be sure to avoid "rail-roading").

Example : You created a dungeon in which the final encounter should happen. This dungeon is placed beneath the local cemetery. When approaching the edge of the cemetery, one hero claims he can't enter it because of some backstory element of which you were not aware when designing the encounter.

A good solution could be to interject a little scene in which the PCs get clues about the sewers and ad-hoc place the prepared dungeon beneath the sewers rather than the cemetery.

In that way, you have circumvented the issue without the players noticing the shift in story and without needing a big adaptation of your setting.

Adverse behaviour towards NPCs, especially story-critical ones

Sometimes the players and their heroes accidentally "break" important aspects of the campaign without meaning to. Due to a misunderstanding, they might end up killing the NPC who has the information they need instead of interrogating him, or they are rude and abrasive towards him in a manner that would permanently harm their ability to realistically talk to him. What do you do now to continue the story arc?

You have to think about how unique this NPC is and how you could plug in a credible replacement. A wealthy merchant or even the head of the assassins guild can be more easily replaced or substituted than the tyrant queen of your whole world.

If you can't easily or quickly come up with a suitable improvisation, it's a good idea to announce a 10 minute break to give you a bit of breathing space to come up with something fitting. If it gets really complicated, you could throw in a side-quest not related to the incident with the important NPC to finish the actual game session (prepare such a plan-B side quest in advance and possible story-hooks for it) so you have time to think it through for the next or game session.

It is really important that the world reacts to the PC behaviour in a credible way. Don't mess with expected, natural behaviour in your world just to streamline the story back on track. Playing fast and loose with consequences ruins the sense of immersion and makes the world feel less real.

Failures at (story) critical challenges

Sometimes you might set up a series of events that elegantly lead to a particular conclusion so that your group of heroes can accomplish their goals. Maybe they are supposed to win a jousting tournament in order to speak with the queen, or follow the footprints in the dust to the engine room of the spaceship to find the pirates.

But as the saying goes, no plan survives contact with the enemy; or in this case, the heroes and the dice. Perhaps the players roll really poorly, and end up losing the joust, even though their opponents are all squires. Maybe they decided to open up the plumbing in the ship during a fight, and now realistically there could be no prints to follow. What happens then?

Mechanical improv

Mechanical improv applies to the rules and game mechanics. We will take closer look at the following three aspects:

- Adapting the challenge level of encounters
- Adapting the rules when confronted with unexpected actions
- Creating new rules when confronted with actions not covered by the rules

Adapting the challenge level of encounters

Challenge levels in this case refers to the relative difficulty of a challenge or encounter vs the mechanical (rules-based) strength of the heroes. Even in rule systems where the designers give guidance on this topic, balancing an encounter against the strength of the heroes is an inexact science. While it's good for the heroes to have encounters that are hard or even impossible for them to beat, there are times where it's important that they "win the day" even if they do so by the skin of their teeth.

Adapting the rules when confronted with unexpected actions

Sometimes rules get in the way of the narrative or they get in the way of the gameplay. As a GD you should always be willing to change the rules in order to make the game fun. For instance, if the players develop a plan with a good idea that sounds realistic to you but a strict interpretation of the rules make it impossible in game terms, you might

want to change the way the checks are handled for this situation. It is important that the players don't feel like you are just changing the rules arbitrarily to make everything work the way you want it. They need to be safe in the belief that the rules will guide their actions. So when you change the rules it is important to be transparent about it.

Likewise, if the players take advantage of the rules and you feel like the results are unrealistic, feel free to adjust the game mechanics accordingly. It is often a good idea to pause the game and explain how you want to handle the situation. In other words, you could explain to your players which checks you will ask of them if they want to carry out their plan and which risks they are facing. This will give the players a fair opportunity to adjust their plans and actions accordingly instead of arguing about the rules.

Do not be afraid to change or modify your plans during the session if the players decide to do something unexpected or when you personally feel that things need to be changed. The players won't know that you planned something else to happen.

Creating new rules when confronted with actions not covered by the rules

As a GD you should have an understanding on how the rules work and how they interact with each other. But you should not if possible interfere with the story with game rules as that makes the flow of the story break and removes immersion. If there are rules that none are sure of, make a note so you remember it and agree on a temporary rule that works for you and the group. Then during one of the breaks or during the talk afterward you look up what the rule actually says and use it like that the next time.

That said, don't be afraid to add or remove rules so that they fit your story and play style better and make it easier and more fun for you to

GD. The players are not the ones that decide this, you are. This way all GDs create their own gaming style and that makes their games unique from each other.

Other Tips for Improvising

We have listed a few other tips that are relevant for improvising during the game. Keep these in mind when you start your game sessions and you will get used to improvising like a pro.

Improvise with Aids

Do not be afraid to improvise but it can at times be hard to do while not breaking the flow or removing yourself from the mental state of the adventure. One way to do it and the simplest example is that of names of actors. Making a list of names for improvised actors added during the game. Pick a name that fits from the list you prepared beforehand.

Take Notes

Take notes on names and events. The players often expect the GD to remember names of characters they meet, what they look like and what events have happened as well. Taking small notes during a session also has the added benefit of making the players worried about what is going to happen.

Don't be afraid to say No

As the GD you are the one to keep the story flowing and the session ongoing as well as to try to make everyone interact with something during the session but not necessarily in every scene. That being said sometimes there will be an action with widespread consequences that needs to be explored by the GD. Then the GD can go in and say that if you want to do this then you need to stop the session now and prepare for the next session because you need to prepare the concupiscences of those actions.

Don't be afraid to say Yes

The GD should be open and flexible to the Players ideas and plans. You can warn them that it might be difficult or almost impossible, but remember you are there with them to have fun and to interact. The players do not know what you have planned and changing the scene and outcome depending on player interactions are always a possibility.

Allow Mistakes

Allow players to make tactical, dramatic, political or other mistakes. If the character does something they should be responsible for their actions. Maybe not in this session or scenario absolutely at a later state.

Stick with it

A key point when it comes to improvisation is that it must have a pur-

pose, and once it has been improvised it is now a part of the world, and must be treated as such. Otherwise you risk harming the credibility of the world.

The Art of Creating Engaging Storylines

Creating role-playing adventures and writing stories are very closely related. Stories are the foundations of good role-playing adventures and when an adventure is played it becomes a story. The biggest difference between writing a story and writing an adventure is the interactive element that role-playing adventures offer. Since you need to give players choices, you are essentially writing several stories when writing an adventure or you are writing a story in which individual scenes have several possible outcomes.

This makes writing an adventure sound difficult, however, just like stories, adventures need a solid structure in order to work well. And just like in a story you define this structure in a storyline or plot.

There are certain elements of a storyline that are essential, such as the protagonist, a goal, obstacles and an antagonist. A story needs to have stakes, the rewards to the hero and the world for completing the goal, and the complications that arise if the hero fails.

Without these elements, you don't have a story or adventure. There's more, though. Stories and adventures have scenes, and while you can play around with their content and their order to some degree, some scenes have to happen before others, and they have to accomplish specific things. This helps the audience follow the story and understand what's happening. The familiarity of structure creates resonance with the experiences and expectations of the readers or players, fulfills their emotional needs, and keeps them hooked.

Character-driven storylines and plot-driven storylines

In an extreme case a character-driven adventure could be defined as an adventure in which everything revolves around the player characters. They decide what they want to do and their actions become the focus of the plot.

The other extreme would be a plot driven adventure in which the events determined by the plot drive the story and player characters can only react.

In game terms the first example is often referred to as sandboxing and the second option is referred to as railroading. Both styles could be interesting but come with major drawbacks. The sandboxing approach makes it difficult for the GD to prepare which often leads to boring adventures if the interaction between the player characters doesn't carry the scene. Railroading often leads to frustration with the players because it can easily make players feel like their actions and decisions don't matter.

Good adventures strike a balance between the sandbox and the railroad, to walk the line between a purely character-driven story and a strictly plot-driven one. The characters have goals and objectives, but it's up to them how they choose to pursue them. They can wander a bit, but they do so with a purpose. There will be obstacles, serving a thematic purpose and connected to the goal of the story; characters will still have agency in determining how to overcome those obstacles. Most importantly, there will be stakes. It will be clear what the characters stand to gain or lose in the pursuit of the story's goals, making the entire story much more emotionally engaging and meaningful.

For the GD, this means a little more preparation than a railroad, but not nearly as much as necessary to pull off a sandbox. It requires some improvisation to accommodate character agency, but within the scope of what's likely and possible in the story rather than a wide-open, uni-

versal realm of possibilities.

Using a Three Act Structure

The three-act structure divides a story into three parts. Act I, the beginning, is about exposition. It introduces the characters and establishes the goal of the story. The way the world is, or used to be, is shown, and the event that sets the story into motion happens. The challenges the characters face seem harsh in comparison to the status quo that they're used to, but are not particularly difficult in the context of the later parts of the story. Throughout this act, the protagonists are mostly reactive to the things that are happening to them and around them.

In Act II, the middle, the stakes increase. We learn some more about the characters and they begin to understand the ramifications of what has happened. The obstacles become more difficult, and what the characters need to do becomes clearer. Throughout this act, the characters become increasingly more proactive and begin to make more choices which direct the action of the story.

During Act III, all of the elements presented in the first two acts fall into place. The most difficult obstacles must be faced, the stakes will be at their highest, and the characters will need to bring every resource at their disposal to bear. The goal will either be achieved, or the characters will fail spectacularly. This act is entirely about the characters being proactive, developing and carrying out a plan to the end.

Premise

Try to sum up the story in a single sentence. Who is the protagonist? What are they trying to accomplish? What's the obstacle that keeps

them from doing that? "A band of adventurers seeks a fabulous treasure, but they have to slay a dragon to get it" is a premise. "Homicide detectives try to catch a serial killer before he strikes again" is a premise. "Young lovers struggle to be together as their families work to keep them apart" is a premise. It doesn't have to be complicated, but it does have to be accurate.

Goals

What is the objective that the protagonist has to fulfill for the story to be complete? In a love story, the lovers are finally able to be together. In a quest story, the hero returns with whatever objects he set out looking for. In a payback story, the main character exacts revenge against someone who has wronged them. The ultimate goal is how you picture the story ending. Everything else has to build to that.

Obstacles

What is stopping the protagonist from achieving the story goal? There are physical challenges, mental tests, and antagonists working against them. Come up with about five, from minor and annoying to the worst possible thing that could happen, and order them by severity. The one or two least challenging will go into your first act, the worst won will be your finale in the third act, and the rest get shuffled into the second act.

Stakes

What happens if the protagonist overcomes all of the obstacles and fulfills the story goals? What happens if they fail anywhere along the

way? Knowing the stakes allows you to create tension, hooking your audience in and keeping the story interesting.

Rewards - What does the protagonist get for succeeding? Are the rewards intrinsic, meaning the character gets to feel good? Are the rewards extrinsic, in the form of money, stuff, and general accolades? Do the supporting characters benefit in any way? How will the world become a better place if the story goal is met?

Consequences - What happens to the protagonist if they can't overcome the obstacles ahead of them? What happens to them if the story goal cannot be fulfilled? Are there bad things that will happen to supporting characters? In what ways will the world be worse off if the protagonist fails?

Act I

The beginning of your story sets up everything that comes afterward. There will be a lot of exposition and description as you establish the main characters and the world that they live in. You'll anchor the audience in the genre, time, and place of the setting. The first act will create a baseline against which later change will be measured and compared. This is where most of the worldbuilding happens.

The stakes within this act will be low compared to what happens later. The obstacles will be relatively easy to overcome, and only seem rough compared to the status quo that's established. The consequences will have far-reaching implications, and the only real rewards may come in preventing things from getting worse. The form of the action means that the protagonist is in a reactive mode, dealing with things as they arise and struggling to catch up.

In addition to laying the foundation with details that will be used later in the story, this act is where you need to create an emotional invest-

ment. The audience needs to be interested enough in the characters to care about what happens to them. The questions asked here need to be compelling enough that people want to see them answered. Everyone needs to be hooked in, so that they want to see what happens next.

If you don't have the necessary foundational elements established in the first act, you don't have a story. You will find yourself backtracking to explain things that should have been made clear here. The audience will be confused about what's happening and why they should care, and you'll begin to lose them.

When you do incorporate these elements into Act I, you'll be off to a solid start. The audience will know who the main characters are, be interested in learning more about the setting, and know what the goal of the story is. They'll understand what's at stake, and be primed to root for the protagonist as your tale unfolds.

The following things have to happen in Act I:

Opening Scene

The very first scene needs to convey a sense of the setting. It has to establish the time and place of the story, the genre, and the general tone and atmosphere. The audience has to be hooked from the very first image.

Introduce the Characters

The main characters in the story need to be introduced to both the audience and each other. A little bit of each person's back story has to be revealed, with some mystery, as well as their personal goals and aspirations.

State the Theme

The overall theme of the story, what it's really about, has to be presented early on. This is either the overt central conflict, or what the overall conflict of the story represents.

Establish the Goal

Before the end of the first act, the goal of the story has to be established. The characters need to know what's at stake, and what needs to be accomplished. All of this also needs to be clear to the audience as well.

Reach a Turning Point

For most of the first act the characters will be reacting to what's happening as they figure out what's going on. Before moving into Act II, the need to have reached a turning point where they are committed to achieving the story goal.

OPENING SCENE

There's a lot riding on the first scene in your story, so you need to put a lot of preparation into it. Start as close to the beginning of the story as you possibly can, leaving out trivial events and information that can be explained or clarified later; a bit of mystery to hook the audience in so they want to learn what's going on isn't a bad thing.

A good opening image that establishes the genre, time, and place will do a lot of the work for you. Show the audience when and where they are. You can very quickly establish the tone of the story with an opening image as well; will the story be grim and serious, lighthearted and fun, or silly and comedic?

The purpose of the opening scene is to show the status quo, and present the world in its current state. This is the way things are, before events later in this act create change. If things are good, the characters will be working to return the world to this status quo; if things are bad, they'll be trying to improve the status quo. The audience will get a general feel for the goal of the story, if not the specifics.

Either the protagonist or the antagonist needs to be established in the opening scene. They don't necessarily need to appear, but their presence has to be felt. Maybe we get to see the protagonist in action, without knowing who they are. The events in the scene might have been set in motion by the antagonist. We get a feel for the sorts of people involved in the story, even if we don't yet know who they are.

There are a number of techniques that can be used in an opening scene. It may simply be the first scene chronologically. It could be a prologue or flashback showing the status quo of the world, or a piece of the back story of a main character that's relevant to the overall story. You can begin in media res, smack in the middle of an action sequence. You might begin with a scene from somewhere in the second act, or the beginning of the third, making the rest of the story a flashback until the audience catches up. There are a number of possibilities to play around with.

The important thing to remember is that the opening scene is a promise. You're setting the audience's expectations as to what everything that comes next will be like. You're giving them information that they'll need to know later, without a lot of fluff or filler. It's about establishing what the story needs, no less, and very little more.

INTRODUCE THE CHARACTERS

The next essential function of Act I is to introduce the characters. We may have seen the protagonist in action in the opening scene, but we don't know anything about them yet. The outcome of the antagonist's

actions may have been felt, but we don't know their goals and motivations. Having scenes where the audience gets to learn a bit about the main characters keeps things interesting and deepens the story.

Every single character that's important to the story needs to be established in the first act. We must see the protagonist, learn what they do, and see what their relationship to other characters is. Their personal needs and motivations have to be established, and a scene might exist just to illustrate their personal problems and personality. There absolutely has to be some action in the first act that makes it clear that the protagonist is the hero of the piece, not just the viewpoint character the audience is following but the person who is going to be able to fulfill the story's goals.

We may not see some supporting cast members until the second act, or even the third, but their existence needs to be confirmed here. Their name can be dropped, or their existence implied by their handiwork being on display, but when they do show up the audience has to be able to connect the dots. You need to create context. In the first act it needs to be clearly established what the supporting characters can do. If they have an important role in the second act, it can't come out of the blue that they have some specialized skill; that information needs to be planted here, to be harvested later.

The same goes for the antagonist. Even if you don't know who the bad guy is or what their motivation could possibly be, you know that someone is behind the events that are occurring. The protagonist and the audience are clearly aware that an antagonist exists. If they appear in the first act, it can't be in a situation where they can be defeated. Their role may not be known, there may not be clear evidence, or the protagonist is in no position to take any sort of action.

By introducing all of the important characters in the first act, you're saving yourself time later. When you, and the audience, understand who they are, what they do, and why they do it, you won't need to justify or rationalize their decisions and actions later. You're settling what's "in character" for them up front, and establishing a blueprint for their

later behavior.

STATE THE THEME

Every great story, arguably, has a theme. It's what the story is really about, and it can change a lot of elements. It might be a doomed romance plot, in the science fiction genre, set in South Africa in 1863, but if the theme is friendship you'll have a different story than if it's about humanity versus nature, or good versus evil.

Unlike other elements of story and setting, themes are universal. They are things that everyone can connect with on some level. Theme transcends genre, time and place, and even plot archetypes. You may not be able to relate to the fantasy genre or have an interest in westerns. Knowledge about certain historical time periods or geographical locations might not be part of your education. Particular types of stories may be unfamiliar. But themes, like the power of love, or the importance of family, are things that nearly everyone can understand.

Personally, I don't believe in being subtle about it. You need to hit the audience over the head with your theme in the first act, and reasonably early on; you can ease off later, being more nuanced and delicate in the second act, and then come back a little more obviously in the third. The first major conflict in the story should highlight the theme. If it's not one of the protagonist's personal needs or goals, it should be the antagonist's. Nearly every obstacle in the story has to be adjacent to it, at least.

If you don't have a theme, your story is going to feel flat. Your audience isn't going to find as much resonance. They'll like the trappings of the setting, the characters, and the twists and turns of the plot, but it might not feel personal. It might not speak to them in a meaningful way. When you have a theme, though, you've got something they can connect with emotionally.

ESTABLISH THE GOAL

At some point in the first act, something happens that upsets the status quo. The change is obvious, and stems from a clear inciting incident. Nothing will ever be the same again. This sets the story in motion, and makes clear what the characters are supposed to do. This is where the story's goal is established.

Most story goals come down to three options, which carry nearly infinite variations:

fix it, which includes undoing or preventing the change;

stop the change from getting worse; or

accept it, and adapt to the changed status quo.

In addition to establishing the goal, the first act also has to establish what the stakes are. What does the protagonist personally stand to lose? What negative, undesirable changes will occur within the setting if the goal is not met? Conversely what, if anything, might the protagonist gain by attaining the story goal? How will the world benefit if the goal is met? And what does the antagonist get out of all of this?

The stakes at this point might be high, but the obstacles aren't. They should feel difficult, they can even be difficult because they're outside the protagonist's comfort zone, but they aren't insurmountable. The protagonist should be able to accomplish what they need to rather easily, without any major setbacks, defeats, or serious injuries. There's plenty of time to smack them around, physically, emotionally, and socially, in Act II.

REACH A TURNING POINT

The protagonist should be challenged enough to have some doubts about their ability to face what's happening. The obstacles felt hard

compared to the status quo, the stakes seemed high, and they didn't want to fail. By the end of the act, though, they need to reach a turning point. They need to make the decision to stop merely reacting to what's being done and go on the offensive.

Usually, something really big happens that makes the character realize that there is no going back. Things are going to continue to get worse, for them, for people they care about, or for the world. They can theoretically choose to do nothing, but it's clear that would be a bad choice.

In a tabletop roleplaying game, this is where things can go wrong. The player has to choose for their character to take action. If they don't, the whole story comes to a halt. Some people will be tempted to call this railroading, but it's not; the character doesn't have a single course of action that they need to pursue. They just have to do something. Hopefully something that insures their continued participation in the story, and the game.

When the protagonist makes the choice and answers the call to adventure, that officially ends Act I. We know who all of the characters are. We've seen the theme of the story played out. We've established the goals and learned the rules. We have all of the information necessary to move forward, and the protagonist has stepped up to lead the way.

ACT II

The middle of your story is where you start using all of the information you've set up in the first act. There will be less exposition and more description as you show more of the world that the protagonist moves through. The second act will show the changes from the status quo established in the beginning, and the impact those changes are having on the characters. People, places, and things mentioned in the first

act will be shown here. This is where worldbuilding will be reinforced, clarified, and slightly expanded upon.

The stakes within this act will be higher compared to the first act. The obstacles will be possible to overcome, but will require the protagonist to put forth effort and use their resources. There will be enough success to build up hope, but enough challenge to make it clear that fulfilling the goal of the story won't be easy. The consequences will become clearer to the audience, but by the end of the act some rewards will become available. The protagonist begins to move from a reactive mode to a proactive one, anticipating what may happen and getting ahead of problems before they can have an impact.

Building emotional investment in the characters is a large part of what the second act is about. The audience learns more about the characters, and hopefully cares about what happens to them and whether they succeed. Some questions about the story are answered, but more questions will arise in order to keep people hooked for the finale.

If you don't have the necessary elements established in the second act, you'll be struggling to find an ending that makes sense. You will find yourself backtracking during the finale, trying to explain things that should have been made clear here. The makings of a great ending are set up here in the middle.

The shape of the story is pretty clear by the midpoint of Act II, and is definitely locked down by the end of the act. The audience will have been reminded of the inciting incident, and what the goal is. They should be able to see that fulfilling the goal is possible, but still not be absolutely sure how things will work out. Everything should logically lead the protagonists into Act III.

The following things have to happen in Act II:

Introduce Subplots

Secondary stories involving the characters and their personal goals and conflicts provide breathers in the second act. This allows you to adjust the pacing of the story and give characters some spotlight time.

Have a Winning Streak

For most of the second act the characters will be challenged, but will experience a lot of small victories. This gives the audience a chance to cheer, and will make the emotional blows later in the act more effective.

Hit Rock Bottom

At some point the characters will realize that the obstacles they face in pursuit of their goal are much larger than they suspected. The only direction left to go is up.

The Antagonist Strikes Back

The earlier winning streak will not go unanswered. The antagonist will regroup and come back at the protagonists for vengeance. Along with hitting rock bottom, this will reinforce the notion that reaching the goal will not be easy.

Meet Death Head On

This is either a literal death, or the figurative destruction of a place, an ideal, or a plan. A main character or beloved supporting character will bite the dust. It has to be an emotional moment for the audience.

Face the Darkness

The characters have to feel that they can't win. They need to be demoralized. It has to be done in such a way that the audience doesn't know how things will work out, but still want to know what happens next.

Reach a Turning Point

Something happens that gives the protagonists a new chance at victory. They gain some resource, piece of information, or insight that makes them realize that they can still win. This sets everything up for the third act.

INTRODUCE SUBPLOTS

A subplot is a secondary story that runs parallel to the main story. The goals and stakes are usually personal for the individual characters involved. The function of a subplot is to provide the audience with a breather, a change in pace, and a bit of a break from the main action. It's also where you can reinforce your theme in more subtle and nuanced ways.

Subplots are a great way to fill in the back stories of the protagonist and key supporting characters. It provides an opportunity to learn about them, and allows them to pursue their other interests and tackle personal problems. A subplot can also help to flesh out relationships between major characters, by having them do things that are tangential to the plot.

If you have no subplots, the story can feel very plot-driven even if it's not. With no exploration of the character's needs and relationships, it's easy to come away with the perception that the story is on rails and the protagonist has no true agency. It also doesn't provide the audience as

much of an opportunity to bond with the characters and develop any deep emotional connections.

Subplots fit squarely in the second act. They can be foreshadowed or hinted at in the first act, when basic story information is being established, but they can't really be explored there. The third act is about resolving the main plot, so subplots only get resolved there in passing or with an acknowledgement in the epilogue.

HAVE A WINNING STREAK

Early in the second act, the protagonist will have a string of successes. The stakes won't be raised, the obstacles won't be much harder than in Act I, but the audience will have a lot of fun. In a movie or TV show, this is where most of the exciting stuff that makes it into the trailers and commercials happens. In a book, this is where the sample chapter or the teaser scene used for marketing and advertising is pulled from. The winning streak is where the hero gets to look cool, show off their skills, and build confidence in the idea that they are in fact the right person to fulfill the goal of the story.

The real shift is that the characters are able to become more proactive. They begin to understand what's going on, and don't just respond to things being done to them, at them, or near them by the antagonist. An increasing level of knowledge and awareness of the story goal makes it possible to get out in front of things. They begin addressing problems before they happen. While the protagonist isn't in a position to take out the antagonist just yet, they can work over their agents and proxies.

If you're looking to run a roleplaying game and you're looking for a "sandbox moment", this is it. The characters can wander around and explore things to their hearts' content. They can continue to pursue subplots and have side adventures. If they are intentionally or unintentionally avoiding the main story, let them do it for a while. Allow them

to get it out of their system. You'll start to pull them back on track a little bit later in this act.

While the winning streak is a blast, if you allow it to go on too long it becomes boring. Drama stems from conflict, and if the protagonist does nothing but win all of the time, you have no real conflict. You want the protagonist to become confident, but not necessarily over-confident or even arrogant. Not because you'll need to knock them down a peg or two, because in the next sequence of scenes you're going to do that to anyone. You need to not let them become cocky or conceited because you need them to remain likable. You don't want the audience to tune out because the hero is too much of a jerk.

When you properly utilize the winning streak, what you're really doing is building credibility. You're showing that the protagonist is capable, and worthy of being the focus of this story. You're letting the audience know that there will be upbeat moments in the story, following the disruptive nature of Act I, the gut-punches later in Act II, and the tension of Act III. You're also setting everyone up to want a change of pace and a little more dramatic tension, at about the point that the winning streak begins to get stale.

HIT ROCK BOTTOM

At the midpoint of the second act, you need to pull the rug out from under the protagonist. When everything seems like it's going to be easy, and the story goal can be achieved with little resistance, you have to knock them down hard. If the hero is starting to get a smug or even a bit lazy, they get a rough reminder that they need to take things seriously. Things get worse.

There are two ways to accomplish this. The first is to deal the protagonist the first big loss since Act I. It should be shocking, given that there was a nice winning streak going on, but while the stakes are raised the

consequences shouldn't be dire. It's an emotional setback, but not a serious logistic one. No one dies yet, but leave them feeling that the only place left to go is up.

The second way is to put a cherry on the top of the winning streak and let them think they've won. Then show them that it's a false victory, and make it clear that they've barely gotten started. Don't hit them with increased stakes just yet, but show them that there are obstacles and complications that they didn't even dream of.

If you don't knock the protagonists down, your story will get boring. You'll end up with a winning streak going into the finale in the third act, and it will feel as if victory is assured. The audience won't be as emotionally invested, and the stakes won't feel as if they really matter anymore. There have to be some changes in the dramatic tension.

The reality is, this isn't rock bottom. It only feels like it after the winning streak. It even feels like it in comparison to Act I, because things have gotten worse since the original disruption of the status quo. What this section of the story has to do is motivate the protagonist to work harder. It's where they get to remind us why they're the hero, because they don't give up when things get more difficult.

ANTAGONIST STRIKES BACK

Now it's the bad guy's turn. The protagonist had a winning streak, which meant defeat on some level for the antagonist. If it didn't impact the antagonist directly, they at least haven't enjoyed hearing about the protagonist's success. After delivering the message that achieving the story goal isn't going to be a walk in the park, the antagonist reaches out and smacks the protagonist where it counts.

What this section needs to be is a reminder of what's at stake, and why the protagonist started on this journey in the first place. If the protagonist is feeling defeated after hitting rock bottom, this is where they

strengthen their resolve. They may lose again, but it reminds them of why they have to win in the end.

Overlooking this section means you're not milking the emotional stakes for all they're worth. The audience needs to fear for the protagonist and worry about the story goal being achieved. They need to really learn to fear and hate the antagonist. There has to be a reminder of what the story is actually about, with a commensurate reinforcement of the theme. The relationship between the protagonist and antagonist is cemented.

The stakes are raised again here. If the enmity between the protagonist and antagonist wasn't personal before, it is now; if it already was, those feelings deepen. Those two characters are no longer just after the story goal or their personal goals, they're actively out to get each other.

MEET DEATH HEAD ON

Someone important dies. Not the protagonist or antagonist, obviously, because without them there is no story. They need to die to illustrate to show that there can be serious fallout from failing to meet the story goal. It needs to be shown that the stakes are a lot higher now than in Act I or the start of Act II. Most importantly, the death has to somehow reflect the protagonist's failure, or the antagonist's success. It should further the villain's cause in some way, and represent a major setback for the hero.

The key is that it has to be someone that the audience already knows and cares about. Remember when you were introducing the characters back in Act I? If you established some positive quality about the protagonist by showing how they treat a supporting character, or how a supporting character is somehow a rock or anchor in their life, that might be the character to kill off here. If you introduced a sick supporting character, their illness overtakes them here. If, in a tabletop role-

playing game, the players are relying a little too heavily on a supporting character for help, they might need to die.

The further away from the protagonist that the death is, the bigger it needs to be. Killing off an immediate family member, beloved mentor, or significant other is huge. Bumping off a character that didn't exist until this scene is nothing. If you're going to kill off strangers, there either have to be a lot of them, or it has to be someone famous or important. No mastermind schemes to assassinate a waiter, a grocery store clerk, or a single random bystander.

The death doesn't have to be literal; it can be a metaphorical death. A close relationship might be shattered for some reason. Something important, an heirloom, useful gadget, or McGuffin, is lost. A plan completely unravels and becomes unusable. A vehicle breaks down and leaves the protagonist stranded, unable to get somewhere in time. Whatever it is, the point is to hurt the protagonist, help the antagonist, or, ideally, do both.

FACE THE DARKNESS

This is the real low point of the story. After a long winning streak, the characters have been handed a significant defeat, seen the antagonist rise up even stronger than they were before, and encountered real or metaphorical death. They've got to be demoralized. The audience has to be wondering where the story goes from here, and even how the story can possibly continue.

In a tabletop roleplaying game, this is where the players are scratching their heads trying to figure out what to do next. Never end a game session here. This is a terrible breaking point, because this is where you can lose people and never get them back to the table.

This is the moment where the protagonist and their supporting character allies have to regroup. They need to review their resources, look at

the situation as it really is, and make a plan. Don't linger here too long. It's depressing. It's supposed to be depressing, but don't wallow in it.

Rock bottom was about reminding the audience what the story is about. The antagonist striking back and the death scene were about reminding the audience what the stakes are. This scene is about reminding the audience why the hero is the hero. Even though they don't know the way forward, they're still looking for it. Although they're feeling defeated and demoralized, they're still going. They might not know what the next step is, but they're not willing to give up.

REACH A TURNING POINT

At the lowest possible point in the story, when all seems lost, new possibilities for success present themselves. The protagonist has a sudden revelation. Pieces that have been set up throughout the story suddenly fall into place. A path to victory reveals itself, and the protagonist realizes they have no choice but to confront the antagonist directly.

The turning point is where the character develops new skills, or demonstrates mastery of the skills that they've been developing throughout the story. This is where the training montage goes. It's where someone gives the inspirational speech that boosts morale and convinces the protagonist that they can finish the story successfully.

The light bulb moment, where the protagonist figures it all out, should connect to the subplot somehow. The solution to the subplot mirrors the way the main story can be resolved. One of the supporting characters from the subplot returns, and they have the missing piece of information. It should also tie into the theme of the overall story, reinforcing the point.

What is difficult to avoid sometimes is committing a deus ex machina. The turning point can't come out of nowhere. It needs to be the logical extension of everything that has happened up to this point. No new

characters, fantastic gadgets, or incredible strokes of luck can fall out of the sky. It needs to have been carefully set up, and preferably foreshadowed, so that it makes sense in the context of the whole story.

Here at the turning point is where the accusations of railroading may come back. In a tabletop roleplaying game, the players might need to be nudged a bit if they can't put the pieces together or come up with a solution on their own. This might lead them to feel that they don't get to make meaningful choices, or that events must unfold according to some prepared script. Don't penalize them for not coming up with a plan on their own, or following your trail of clues. Go with whatever they attempt and work with it.

The turning point should leave the audience feeling as good as they did during the winning streak earlier in this act. The protagonist has gone through the worst and come out the other side. Everyone is confident that they have what it takes to fulfill the story goal. Now we all get to sit back and enjoy watching the hero win.

ACT III

This is the end of the story. The protagonist drives the action, faces down the antagonist, and completes the story goal. By following the path to its conclusion, the hero can end the suffering that began with the changed status quo in the first act. The obstacles the protagonist faces are the hardest. The possibility of failure exists. The stakes are nothing less than life or death, literally or metaphorically. They have to be extremely careful, use every bit of creativity they have, and call every resource available to them into play.

There is no new exposition in the last act. No new information is provided, and no new characters are introduced. It's time to use the elements that you've established in the prior acts. The worldbuilding is validated by making the hints and glimpses of things relevant to the

story. The character shows growth due to the journey they've been on, if only to display that they've adapted to a new status quo and learned to overcome all of the obstacles that have been thrown at them.

If you don't have these elements in Act III, you're not going to have an emotionally satisfying ending. The good guy wins — so what? If they don't win because of their own actions, it's a cheat. If they coast across the finish line, without some significant final challenge, it's boring. If the protagonist hasn't been changed by the story somehow, then what was the point?

When you set up the finale correctly, you'll build up to a thrilling climax. You'll resolve all of the issues the story has presented. Then you can slow things down to show how all of the main characters, and the world, turn out as a result of the events in the story.

The following things have to happen in Act III:

Finale

The protagonists gather every resource available and have their final confrontation with the antagonist. The story goal will be achieved, or the characters will fail spectacularly.

Epilogue

All of the loose ends from the first two acts are tied up. All of the stakes, both rewards and complications, are resolved. We get to see what happens to all of the characters as a result of the finale.

Final Scene

The last scene has to show what the characters and their world look

like now. The theme has to be reinforced, and change and growth in the world demonstrated. Any loose ends need to be pointed out as hooks for a potential sequel.

FINALE

The final obstacle is overcome. The antagonist is defeated. The goal is achieved. We've reached the big ending of the story.

The biggest obstacle of the story has to be overcome. It has to be the logical last step in the series of increasingly difficult obstacles the protagonist has faced throughout the story. You've set it up in the previous acts, so the protagonist more or less knows what to expect. The theme is repeated and reinforced in the final challenge, just to smack everyone in the head with the point you're making one last time; there's no subtlety or nuance here as in the second act.

Antagonists have to be taken down in order, from the lowliest lackey to the ranking mastermind. This is to not only to provide rising levels of tension, but to demonstrate that the protagonist's abilities have grown to the point that only the main antagonist presents any challenge. Think of it as a parallel to the winning streak in Act II, where the audience gets to have some fun and cheer the hero on before the dangerous confrontation takes place.

If you haven't structured your story correctly throughout the first two acts, no one is going to understand what's happening here. The audience will be confused about why the protagonist is doing what they're doing. The protagonist probably won't be clear about what they're doing either. It will very much feel like railroading, as the story rolls to a stop just because it's the end of the story.

When things are structured correctly, it will be clear what has to happen. It will be character driven, because even if there's only one option the protagonist knows it has to be done. The suspense comes not from

ambiguity about what happens next, but in waiting to see how the protagonist does it. The audience should be on the edge of their seats not wondering so much about whether the protagonist will succeed and story goal will be met, but what rewards will be gained and what sorts of sacrifices and complications the protagonist will be faced with as a result of their success.

EPILOGUE

The protagonist has completed all challenges. The antagonist has been defeated. The story goal has been achieved. Now you have to show the aftermath. The epilogue shows the new status quo.

Act III is really all about the stakes. Ideally, the audience wants to see that the protagonist gets their deserved rewards, and the antagonist has to face the consequences of their actions. It's not always that clean. The villain didn't completely achieve their objective, but that doesn't mean they haven't gallingly gained a little something. All of the major supporting characters have to be accounted for, to show who is okay and who's hurting. Certainly the hero is better off somehow for winning, but that doesn't mean they haven't suffered loss; this is where you show that.

If you don't include an epilogue, you're not acknowledging the emotional connection that the audience has hopefully built with these characters. It becomes a plot-driven ending; the story goal has been achieved, the end. We've reached the end of the railroad line, now you can go home. It's not particularly satisfying.

The epilogue reinforces the reality that the story was actually about the characters all along. It was about things that happened to them, but it was also about the choices they made and the changes that came as a result of those choices. It's a form of reward for the audience, thanking them for sticking with you throughout all of the ups and downs in the

story.

FINAL SCENE

The very last scene of your story presents the evidence that the story goal has been fulfilled. It is one last look at the world you've created. It might show that the antagonist has conclusively been defeated. You may want to assure the audience that the protagonist has ended up where they belong. It could be as simple as making it clear that all is right with the world once again.

If you're doing a series or campaign, you can do the opposite. Your final scene can shine a spotlight on that one loose end that hasn't been resolved. You can create a sense of ambiguity, that maybe the story goal wasn't achieved after all. It sets up the sequel by denying the audience complete closure and leaving them to wonder what's going to happen next.

The final scene provides the audience with closure. In the same way that the epilogue shows what happened to the characters, this scene makes it clear that the story goal really has been fulfilled. If you don't put at least a strong image here, you're leaving room for the wrong kind of ambiguity.

When you've got a strong, memorable final scene, the audience is going to remember your story as something incredibly cool. Think of the last scene in a great movie. You know exactly where the story stands, how things have ended up, and that it is in fact over.

Plots

There are a number of very typical plots that you can find in many

stories and adventures. Most stories and adventures follow at least one of these plots, often with some kind of variation. It is also possible to combine several of these plot types.

Use the plot types as inspiration to structure the storyline of your adventure.

Search

In the search plot, the protagonist is looking for something. It might be an object, a person, or a piece of information. The thing they're searching for might be real, or it could be metaphorical. It doesn't actually matter, because this is really a character- driven story. The journey, and what the protagonist experiences, is what's important. Over the course of their travels, the character grows, changes, and learns something about his- or herself. What they thought they wanted in the beginning of the story, they realize, wasn't what they truly needed after all.

Sacrifice

A sacrifice story finds the protagonist pursuing some noble cause or higher purpose. In order to accomplish their objective, they will need to give up something of great personal value. This might be other goals, a close relationship, or even their own life. They may survive, but it is the willingness to be selfless on behalf of others that allows them to succeed.

Romance

A romance plot features the protagonist falling in love with a supporting character or even a co-protagonist. The antagonist doesn't want this to happen, and conspires to keep the lover apart. There is often some misunderstanding or miscommunication that creates a rift in the relationship. Throughout the story the protagonist must overcome obstacles to finally be together with their one true love and live happily ever after.

Revelation

In a revelation plot something is discovered that has serious implications for the protagonist. It may also have a serious impact on a supporting character, or the world. The actual discovery could be something good or something bad, but it is startling and disruptive to the status quo. The focus of a revelation plot isn't about the discovery itself, but how the protagonist handles what it implies.

Rescue

A rescue plot is an action-heavy structure where a supporting character (the victim) is being held against their will by the antagonist. The protagonist's job is to locate the victim and escort them back to safety. There are variations possible, but the core of a rescue story comes down to finding and retrieving the victim.

Mystery

The word mystery carries a lot of cultural baggage. From a genre point of view, it's typically associated with murder. The story goal is to discover who did it, although more modern variations focus on figuring out how it was done, in order to prove who did it. A mystery doesn't have to be significant or serious. It doesn't have to be about murder, or even crime. The story can be centered on any type of question that needs an answer, or any problem that cries out to be solved.

Journey

In the journey plot, the protagonist travels and has an adventure. It's as simple as that. There's no deeper meaning or existential crisis underlying the trip. There's no hidden message, or a need for the character to experience personal growth. It's all about action: go to interesting places, see exciting things, face exotic dangers, and have a lot of fun.

Duel

In a duel story, the protagonist and antagonist are competing against one another. They may be fighting to obtain the same objective, or simply trying to insure that the other doesn't get what they're after. The rivalry might be a sports competition, a race to make a discovery, or a triangle where both characters compete for the same love interest. No matter what form the competition takes, only one character can win.

Curse

In a curse story the antagonist feels that the protagonist has done something wrong. Maybe they have, and the antagonist's actions are justified; maybe they haven't, and the antagonist's wrath is misplaced or unfair. As a result of the antagonist's need for justice, the protagonist is physically changed somehow. This does not have to be a literal curse; the changes can be the result of magic, medical experimentation, genetic manipulation, poison, radiation, or whatever else fits the genre, time, and place. The changes may offer some advantages, but they also bring significant drawbacks, and the protagonist will want the effects to be reversed.

Coming of Age

In a coming of age plot, the protagonist gains maturity. This is often literal as the character moves from one stage of their life to another, like from childhood to adolescence, or young adulthood to middle age. It can be metaphorical as they embark on a new career, learn to live alone after a long relationship, or discover how to function without some resource no longer available to them. By the end of a coming of age story, the protagonist has mastered some aspect of their life, taken control of their destiny, and come fully into their own.

Chase

In a chase story, one character is pursuing another. The antagonist may be after the protagonist, or vice versa. The person being chased is often in possession of something valuable or important, has committed a crime and is fleeing justice, or believes that the pursuer intends to

harm them.

A chase plot tends to have a lot of action but very little violence; when the pursuer and the pursued meet, the pursued tends to run away. When cornered there may be a small battle, but the pursued generally doesn't want to get injured or killed and surrenders without much fuss. Of course, they then do their best to escape, and the chase begins all over again.

Change

In a change story something upsets the protagonist's life in a significant way. The character then has to adapt and come to terms with that change. It can be something normal yet tragic, like the death of a loved one or being diagnosed with terminal illness. It can be a good yet scary thing, perhaps moving to a strange new place or winning the lottery. The change can be a physical transformation, such as gaining superpowers. The change might simply be a realization or shift in awareness, like discovering that wizards exist and you're one of them. The focus is on the process coming to grips with the upheaval in the protagonist's life, and settling into a new status quo.

Breakout

A breakout story involves a protagonist trying to escape from a situation that's not of their choosing, and possibly not of their making. Their captivity can be literal, like being locked in prison or stranded on an island. It may also be figurative, like an abusive relationship or an emotional situation they remain in due to guilt or fear. It's clear that no one else is going to break them free from their situation; they need to rescue themselves.

Part IV

In this part we will give you ideas for your own adventures.

Ideas for Adventures

On the following pages you will find ideas for storylines that you can use tto create adventures.

Idea 1

The player characters leave home on a journey to an unfamiliar and exotic place, hoping to find fortune and glory but encountering unexpected dangers.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. This is a perfect, if a bit generic, premise for new characters starting out on their first adventures. They have ideas of what they want to see and do, but have no concept of what's really out there in the world.

Story Goal

The objective is for the player characters to have new experiences and learn something about themselves. They need to see something they've never seen before and survive something dangerous. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will seem more dangerous than they actually are. The threat comes from the player characters having no context for what's happening. The least difficult obstacle will be extremely easy, and only escalate in difficulty by small increments with each subsequent encounter. The final obstacle should also be relatively easy and within the player characters' capabilities. The point isn't so much to challenge the characters as to present them with experiences they haven't had before.

Antagonists

This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist. Their goal is going to be something simple like greed, expressed as robbing or taking advantages of the player characters' naivete. Their motivation is nothing more than not being able to pass up what they see as easy targets in front of them.

Idea 2

The player characters are drawn toward something they should avoid, as the antagonist seeks to get them into trouble.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Their relative innocents works in favor of the premise, because they will be more likely to ignore good advice and follow bad counsel. The object of their temptation doesn't matter — it could be adventure, fortune, sex, drugs, anything they has

the appeal of the exotic and forbidden because it lies outside their current experiences.

Story Goal

The objective is for the player characters to avoid getting into too much trouble while figuring things out for themselves. There is something that they want to see or do, but they have no concept of how much danger they're walking into. They'll get to experience it, and on their own terms, but only with great difficulty. Once the player characters have accomplished this and survived, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve other people trying to talk the player characters into and out of things. People with their best interests in mind will try to keep them out of danger, or at least attempt to prepare them. The antagonist will try to lure them in deeper. The least difficult obstacle will be resisting the advice of people trying to convince them to stay home, and escalate in the difficulty on not listening to the antagonist selling the appeal of the forbidden thing. The final obstacle should come in not completely succumbing to the temptations presented by the thing they should have avoided.

Antagonists

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. Their goal is to get the player characters what they're after, which makes them seem friendly and helpful. Their motivation might be something nefarious, but could be as simple as wanting new customers or enjoying the sensation of corrupting the innocent.

Idea 3

A protagonist struggles with a tragic flaw (which the antagonist exploits) as they try to prevent the loss of everything they have.

Player Characters

This premise does require a protagonist to have some sort of significant problem that they have to cope with. While it could be something like a health issue or money problems, the root cause ought to be a character flaw. They're not perfect. They're vulnerable. This makes them a more well-rounded character, but it also means they have a weakness for the antagonist to leverage.

Story Goal

The objective is for the character to rise above their own tragic flaw and be the hero anyway. They stumble, but they get back up. When they make mistakes, they also make amends and try not to do it again. There will be some secondary objective that their flaw makes difficult to achieve, and that will need to be resolved, but it will be symbolic of the protagonist's mastery of themselves. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will stem from the protagonist's flaw. The least difficult obstacle will be having to cope with it under ordinary circumstances. It will escalate in difficulty as external pressure is put on them, making it harder and harder to manage. The final obstacle should be the antagonist pushing all of the protagonist's buttons, mak-

ing the flaw come out in a painful, embarrassing, and likely very public way.

Antagonists

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. It might be that a new antagonist has done their research, or is cunningly observant, and has figured out how to manipulate the protagonist's vulnerability. An established foe will know the protagonist well, and the relationship they already have will allow them to really dig into their vulnerability make it hurt.

Idea 4

The player characters struggle with bizarre personality changes and unfamiliar memories after using new magic items they've found.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The only thing that needs to be clear is that they are feeling compelled to do things that are out of character, so what's in character has to be established. Enough of their history has to be revealed to make it understood that the things they are remembering are not their own memories.

Story Goal

The objective is for the player characters to realize that the magic items are affecting them somehow, and to figure out how to resolve that.

They might be possessed, or cursed. Someone or something might be trying to communicate with them through the items. The specifics of what's happening and how to find closure with it is up to you. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will come from the distraction caused by the behavioral changes. There should be a secondary objective that needs to be accomplished, where the strange memories and odd reactions and decisions the characters make become obstacles. The least difficult obstacle challenges will come from mild confusion based on conflicting memories, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty. The final obstacle should involve characters trying to do things that they cannot do, or are not particularly good at, because they remember being able to do them.

Antagonists

This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist. They might be malevolent, trying to control or harm the player characters. They could also be benign and misunderstood, attempting to communicate, ask for help, or warn the player characters away from a greater danger.

Idea 5

At the request of the elders, the player characters return to their hometown for a celebratory feast day only to find people acting strangely.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to know where they come from, and have some sort of relationship with that place and its people. It can be good, bad, or mixed, but someone there thinks highly of them. If they do not have a detailed back story, be sure to include an appropriate supporting character who can ask the player characters for assistance.

Story Goal

The objective is to determine why people are behaving strangely. It could be as innocent as they're planning a surprise for the player characters. They might be up to something nefarious and are trying to keep dark secrets. It might be something they're afraid of, that is threatening and controlling them. Once the player characters have determined what's happening and resolved it, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be a lack of information. The least difficult obstacle will surprise that things are not as they seem, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as new answers lead to more questions. The final obstacle should be in confronting the root cause of their behavior, theoretically restoring things to normal.

Antagonists

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. An old foe might be doing something to the people in the player characters' home town as a form of revenge or punishment. A sup-

porting character from the player characters' past might have risen up to become an antagonist. Or, the villain could be unrelated, but tied to the town somehow.

Idea 6

After suspecting that a supporting character is involved with evil forces, the player characters investigate and make a startling discovery.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They should have enough of a relationship with the supporting character in question to notice something unusual is going on. Even if they don't care about that character, they should be concerned about the potentially spreading evil.

Story Goal

The objective is to discover what's going on with the supporting character and deal with it. The goal is to either help the character if they're in trouble, or put an end to their evil scheme if they've turned to the dark side. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be based on gathering information and obtaining proof of illegal, unethical, or immoral activities. The least difficult obstacle will be noticing that the supporting character isn't

their usual self, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include find out what the antagonist is hiding. The final obstacle should be foiling whatever plan, or stopping whatever malevolent force, lay underneath the web of secrets and deception.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to commit some evil deed, the scale of which will depend upon the capabilities of the player characters. Their motivation is nothing more than they're evil and self-serving, with no cares about who they hurt. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. If the supporting character has turned evil, or was secretly evil all along, use an established character. If some other force is behind the supporting character's behavior, it might be a new antagonist.

Idea 7

When the player characters explore a cavern hidden deep beneath a lake, they discover an ancient creature unlike anything ever seen.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have abilities related to dealing with water, operating underwater, and crawling around in caverns. They'll probably need some strong fighting skills. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to discover what's under the lake and deal with it. The assumption is that it is dangerous and poses some sort of threat to a nearby community, the people who live in and around the lake, or the environment itself. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be investigative. The player characters will find strange happenings, like disappearances or bizarre damage to buildings or boats. The least difficult obstacle will be narrowing down the location where the creature is hiding, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as the antagonist draws closer. The final obstacle should be fighting the creature, or otherwise subduing or appeasing it, so that it ceases to be a danger.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist might be to protect its territory, to find something to eat, or to intentionally spread terror. Their motivation is probably as simple as monsters gotta monster. They might have an agenda, awakening to fulfill some prophecy or purpose. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist in the form of the creature, or perhaps some evil wizard controlling it.

Idea 8

The player characters lose their spellcasting abilities, and struggle to discover who they are once that defining characteristic is gone.

Player Characters

This premise requires that at least some of the player characters have magical abilities, or at least signature magic items that they rely on. They have to be incredibly dependent on magic, to the point that they feel ineffective without it.

Story Goal

The objective is to find out what is preventing the player characters' magic from working. It may be that it only affects them specifically, and supporting characters can still cast and use magic items, or it may be that all magic in the area has stopped working. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will stem from having to do things without magic. The least difficult obstacle will be not having utility-type spells to make light or detect things, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to reflect a lack of protection and offensive capabilities. The final obstacle should be against an antagonist who uses nothing but magic.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to gather all of the magic for themselves, or at least to neutralize opponents who might use magic against them. Their motivation is some personal goal that they're trying to accomplish that requires either magic, like crafting a powerful item, summoning a major demon, or raising the dead. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 9

With a brutal monster stalking the town during a major holiday, the player characters get partnered with a strange specialist.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They might want to have some knowledge of the holiday being celebrated, to give the fact that killing are happening at this time more emotional impact.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the monster before it kills again. Then maybe everyone can go back to enjoying the holiday. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will holiday-themed and revolve around finding the killer. The least difficult obstacle will be finding a body and looking for evidence of the type of monster involved, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as they have to track it and try to catch it before it strikes again. The final obstacle should be battling the monster, capturing or killing it to make the holiday safe again.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill people for some reason. Their motivation might be because they're a monster and that's what they do, but

they might hate the holiday. Some aspect of celebration, like singing or the smell of special holiday foods cooking, might attract or enrage them. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 10

The player characters share a vision in which they witness a brutal murder, and must catch the killer before it claims the next victim.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Something will happen in the first act that causes the characters to have the vision. It could be the result of a spell or potion, happen while they're sleeping, or take place when they enter a particular area like a shrine or magical grove.

Story Goal

The objective is to prevent the murder. It hasn't happened yet, so the player characters have a limited time to keep it from happening. Once the player characters have stopped the killing from happening, or caught the killer if they fail to stop it, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will stem from having to interpret the clues within the vision. The least difficult obstacle will be in realizing that it hasn't happened yet, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty

as time runs out. The final obstacle should be at the potential murder scene, and preventing the killing from happening.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill someone. Their motivation is up to you, and could be a normal human thing like jealousy or a robbery gone wrong. It might also be a serial killing, a ritual murder, or the work of a cannibal looking for their next meal. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 11

The player characters set off on a journey to find a rare treasure, but learn something important about themselves that will change their lives forever.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. You should know where their moral and ethical centers lay, because this is an exploration of their stance on good and evil, order and chaos.

Story Goal

The objective is for the player characters to have their actions questioned and their beliefs challenged. They need to be faced with the consequences of their actions, whether they are good or evil, or support the law or promote chaos. Specific doctrine based on deities they

profess to follow should also be called into question. Once the player characters have been shown conclusively to fall under a specific moral alignment, whether it was their original professed belief of not, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around moral and ethical judgments. The least difficult obstacle will be justifying acts that are more cleanly good or evil, lawful or chaotic, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as gray areas are explored in greater depth and detail. The final obstacle should test the character's beliefs, forcing them into taking actions that go against their professed stance in order to solve a significant problem.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to create moral quandaries for the player characters. Their motivation might be to humiliate them and show them to be hypocrites. In this premise the antagonist might also be a good guy, testing the player characters to help them stay on the right path and make better decisions. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 12

The player characters are morphed into a new form as punishment for their real or perceived sins, and they need to adapt or find a way to change back.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. It's possible that the antagonist has transformed them for some deed they committed in the past, but it might as easily be something that they do during the first act of the story.

Story Goal

The objective is for the player characters to find a way back to their original form. This might be locating something, performing some task to appease the antagonist, or atoning for whatever sins the player characters may have committed. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be understanding what happened and determining what is needed to undo it. The least difficult obstacle will be finding out who is responsible, which should be easy. Difficulty will escalate as the player characters jump through hoops to find the remedy or fulfill a quest. The final obstacle should be taking the cure, performing the final task, or confronting the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to torment the player characters. Their motivation can vary, and might be to gain revenge, or to teach the player characters a valuable lesson. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. The relationship to the player characters will affect the motivation and the ultimate goal.

Idea 13

In an attempt to save their childhood home from being sold to a wealthy merchant, the player characters attempt to scare off the merchant's agents.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some sentimental attachment to where they grew up and where their family presumably still lives. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that does, and is willing to ask the player characters for aid or hire them to intervene.

Story Goal

The objective is to save the home from falling into the hands of the merchant. Presumably what is happening is legal, but there may be coercion and other illegal dealing going on. There might be some treasure located on the property, that will belong to the player characters' family if it can be located prior to the sale or seizure. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will face an increasingly desperate merchant and all of the forces he can afford to hire. The least difficult obstacle will be the legal threat, and some minor thugs using intimidation rather than force. This will escalate in difficulty and the challenges will become more illegal in nature and increasingly more violent. The final obstacle should involve either determining why the merchant wants the property, revealing some illegal actions the merchant is involved

with, or a huge battle with hired mercenaries.

Antagonists

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. The merchant might want the property for a specific purpose, with no care for who the player characters are. It could be some act of revenge for a past conflict, where the player characters got the best of the merchant or foiled their plans.

Idea 14

After discovering a magical item that can send and receive messages one day into the future, the player characters try to use it to their own advantage.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The instructions on how to use the magic item will be clear. If the player characters have personal goals, ways that the magic item can help to achieve them should be emphasized.

Story Goal

The objective is to keep the item from falling into the wrong hands, including the player characters if they intend to misuse it. They might utilize the magic item to fulfill some secondary goal, saving the day or preventing a disaster, bit that will require resisting the temptation to

use it for personal gain. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve exploring the way the item can be used, the rewards and complications that come with it. The least difficult obstacle will be determining how it works, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as other people try to get their hands on it using increasingly more aggressive tactics. The final obstacle should be keeping it from, or getting it back from, the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to acquire the item for their own ends. Their motivation is likely the same as the player characters, to make predictions that provide some advantages. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 15

The player characters witness a relative's kidnapping, and must rescue her before the kidnapper put her latest magical creation to ill use.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some relative that is a crafting wizard, magical tinkerer, or other sort of inventor appropriate to the setting. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can approach the player characters for help or hire them

to enact the rescue.

Story Goal

The objective is get the relative back safely. They should also prevent the antagonist from misusing the magic item if possible, because that's likely the greater threat to the world and the right things to do. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will locating the kidnapped relative and insuring her safety. The least difficult obstacle will be tracking down the kidnappers and gathering information, and escalating in difficulty to having confrontations. The final obstacle should be stopping the antagonist from using the magic item.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to use the magic item for some personal gain. Their motivation will depend on what the magic item does and the benefit is can possibly provide. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 16

The player characters awaken in a strange dungeon deep underground, being chased by unknown humanoids, and must figure out what's going on before they are caught.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have survival skills that don't require special equipment. They will, at least initially, have to fight empty-handed or with improvised weapons as well as locate food and water. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is for the characters to get out alive. Figuring out how they got there is an intermediary goal that will allow them to complete the main story goal. Once the player characters have escaped, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will include acquiring gear, figuring out how and why they're there, and making their escape. The least difficult obstacle will be fulfilling the player characters' basic needs, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as they are pursued by the human-oids and gain additional information about what happened. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist, ending with the player characters getting out of the dungeon.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to keep the player characters locked up. Their motivation might be to conduct some sort of experiment, to feed their pet monsters, or to gain some sort of payback for a past defeat at the hands of the player characters. This premise works with either a new, unfamiliar antagonist or a recurring foe. An old enemy will have

reasons for kidnapping the player characters that are far different than an original enemy will.

Idea 17

On the eve of having honors bestowed upon them by the king, the player characters finds their social and professional lives turned upside down by vicious rumors.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The rumors should be credible, but can be based on the events of adventures played out at the table rather than events from the player characters' back stories.

Story Goal

The objective is to have the player characters prove their innocence and worthiness, avoiding scandal and scorn. Their lives aren't necessarily in danger, but their reputations are. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around finding out who is spreading the rumors and proving that they are false. The least difficult obstacle will be discovering why people are suddenly treating them differently, and why the king is canceling the ceremony. This will escalate in difficulty as the rumors become widespread and the accusations

become more terrible. The final obstacle should be confronting the antagonist, getting a confession, or acquiring the evidence to prove that the player characters have been smeared.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to destroy the reputations of the player characters. Their motivation might be based on revenge for some past defeat. They might need to remove the player characters before they can perform some future mission for the king, which would mess with the antagonist's plans. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 18

The player characters struggle to prove their innocence when they are framed for a series of grisly murders.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They need to be in the wrong place at the wrong time to make the accusations against them credible. Skills relevant to avoiding arrest and hiding from the city guard will be especially useful.

Story Goal

The objective is to find the real murderer. This will result in the charges against them being lifted and things going back to normal. Once the

player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involved investigation and stealth. The least difficult obstacle will be avoiding arrest, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include not being recognized on the street as they try to find out who the real killer is. The final obstacle should involve capturing or killing the actual murderer, in a way the proves the player characters' innocence.

Antagonists

There are two possible antagonists here. The first is the murderer, whose goal is to evade capture for their crime. This could be a human, humanoid, or monster. The second type of antagonist is the person framing the player characters. This could be the same person as the killer, looking to cover their tracks with nothing personal about it. They might also be someone with a beef against the player characters, and saw framing them as an expedient way to get rid of them. For those reasons, this premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 19

The player characters get framed for the murder of a famous bard, thrusting them onto the main stage of an underground entertainment scene.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The point is that they should be thrown into a world that they know nothing about, and feel out of place and a little bit helpless. Even if a protagonist happens to be a bard, they will be of a different tradition or troupe than the victim's community.

Story Goal

The objective is to find out who killed the famous bard. A secondary objective will be avoiding the people who want to do them harm thinking that the player characters are guilty. Rather than fleeing the authorities, the player characters will have to deal with the people who cared about the victim and want revenge rather than justice. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve entering a community that is strange and different from what the player characters are used to. The least difficult obstacle will be avoiding angry fans, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include dealing with the friends and relatives of the victims, each of whom has increasingly greater means for exacting revenge. The final obstacle should be confronting the actual killer, capturing or killing them.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get away with murder. Their motivation

for the killing can be nearly anything, from professional jealousy to romantic rivalry. The true antagonist, arguably, is the need for revenge within the bardic community, after one of their own was killed. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 20

A protagonist suffers a head injury and wakes up under the delusion that he is the king, bringing him into conflict with the real monarch.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. If they physically resemble the actual king, have knowledge of his life, and possess a similar skill set, that helps the story but isn't necessary. Information that the protagonist possesses can be retconned to make this premise work.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonist to get his memory back before things turn tragic. The fake/personal goal will be for them to overthrow the real king, whom they believe to be an impostor. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve not getting arrested or killed by the forces of the king. The least difficult obstacle will be avoiding

notice, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as the delusional protagonist asserts his claim to the throne. The final obstacle should involve some plan to take down the real king.

Antagonists

There are a few ways to handle this. The first is to have the delusional protagonist act as the antagonist, as he works to overthrow the king. Another is to treat some agent of the king's guard as the antagonist, forcing the other player characters to run interference and keep the delusional protagonist out of trouble. The simplest solution might be to have an antagonist enabling and manipulating the delusional protagonist for their own ends. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 21

The antagonist goes to extremes to capture the player characters before they can deliver a vital spell component to a powerful wizard.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They don't need to understand what they're transporting. All they need to know is where to pick it up, where to deliver it, and possess some minimal ability to defend it.

Story Goal

The sole objective of this premise is to deliver a package to a wizard.

Stopping the antagonist is entirely optional. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will stem from the efforts of the antagonist to halt the delivery. The least difficult obstacle will be to stop them from acquiring the package, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include attempts to steal or destroy the package. The final obstacle should be a violent confrontation between the antagonist and the.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to prevent the wizard from gaining the spell component. Their motivation is might be personal or professional. They might want to mess with the wizard, or they might have a specific reason to stop them from casting a particular spell. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 22

The player characters face challenges in order to be accepted as members of a prestigious guild.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have the skills and abilities required for membership. It's assumed that membership in the guild will bring them some benefit, which will expand upon their existing back story.

Story Goal

The objective is for the player characters to be accepted into the guild, gaining all of the benefits that come with it. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around demonstrating the abilities required for guild membership. The least difficult obstacle will be basic skills, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include things the player characters aren't as good at. The final obstacle should be something designed around gauging their attitudes, and they may not be expected to succeed.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to determine whether the player characters are worthy of guild membership. Their motivation is to maintain the standards and integrity of the guild. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 23

After completing a job, the player characters are given the deed to a haunted mansion as their reward rather than the gold they were expecting.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. A lack of experience in dealing with the undead, particularly ghosts, can make this premise more fun.

Story Goal

The objective is to figure out how to turn a haunted house into profit. This probably means clearing out the ghosts, demons, or other creatures inhabiting it so it can be used or sold, but the player characters should be allowed to come up with other solutions. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will focus on dealing with ghosts and supernatural phenomena. The least difficult obstacle will be resisting fear and cheap scares, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include escaping physical harm. The final obstacle should be a fight with the most powerful creature.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to scare the player characters out of the house. Their motivation is to maintain possession of the house. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 24

The player characters must protect a school for wizards from arsonists in the local thieves' guild, who are demanding protection money.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. It can be assumed that the school has magical abilities covered, and that the player characters are expected to provide muscle.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the guild to stop shaking down the school. If it means shutting down the guild, that's a solution but not the actual goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around threats, intimidation, and actual violence against the people in the school. The least difficult obstacle will be verbal abuse, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include property damage and assault. The final obstacle should involve fighting a fire while engaging in combat with the thieves' guild thugs.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get paid for protection. Their motiva-

tion is to protect their reputation by not allowing the school to evade paying their "tax". This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 25

The player characters run into themselves, but both sides are convinced that they are real and the other group are doppelgangers.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They should have some notable features, in order to be able to call them out in the doppelgangers.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the doppelgangers from impersonating the player characters. Learning how and why they began the impersonation are steps toward the goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will begin with determining how the impostors got there. The least difficult obstacle will be determining if they really believe they're the originals, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include find out who sent them. The final obstacle should either defeating them in combat, or defeating whatever third party antagonist is deceiving or controlling them.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to mess with the player characters' heads. Their motivation might be because they were hired to do so, or because they have a beef with the player characters. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 26

The player characters have to protect a blacksmith from an evil warlord who wants to force him to craft a special magic sword.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They might know something about how magical weapons are made, or have information about the warlord, which will make it easier to come up with plans to meet the story goal.

Story Goal

The objective is defend and possibly rescue the blacksmith. Defeating the evil warlord is secondary and not required to meet the story goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around the safety of the black-

smith. The least difficult obstacle will mean defending the home and forge, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include a rescue operation. The final obstacle should fighting the evil wizard to save the blacksmith and prevent the creation of the special magic sword.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to gain a magic sword with a unique ability. Their motivation is to conquer the land, and the sword somehow makes their larger plan possible. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 27

The player characters try to take some time off to enjoy their treasure, but their enemies have other plans.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They should have recently completed an adventure that left them with a substantial amount of money, and there should be no loose ends to ongoing plots or subplots that require immediate attention.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist so the player characters can relax and enjoy their vacation. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will stem from having their peace and quiet disrupted. The least difficult obstacle will be interruptive, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include harassment, theft of money and important items, and the destruction of property. The final obstacle should involve a confrontation with the antagonist that is messing with their mellow.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to ruin the player characters' downtime. Their motivation is likely tied to an existing feud, possibly revenge for the previous loss to the player characters. They will not come at the player characters directly, and may use hirelings and other agents to disrupt things. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 28

The parents of one of the protagonist's romantic interests decides to secretly put them through a series of tests to determine if they are worthy.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities. The only specific background element necessary if for one of them to have an established romantic interests.

Story Goal

The objective is for the player characters to determine who is messing with them. Passing the tests is secondary and not required to meet the story goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, the antagonist will stop and you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around tests of character. Situations will be set up to see if one specific protagonist does the right thing. The least difficult obstacle will require them to help others, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to reflect challenges based on the antagonist's values. The final obstacle should involve rescuing the romantic interest from a fake situation that everyone, including that love interest, thinks is real.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to test one of the player characters specifically, as well as their "friends" the other player characters. Their motivation is to protect their child and insure they're not having a relationship with the wrong sort of person. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist in the form of the romantic interest's parent.

Idea 29

The player characters have to convince a community divided by racial tension to work together against an uprising of the undead.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They may or may not be members of one of the clashing groups.

Story Goal

The objective is to get two communities that are normally at odds with one another to cooperate for the common cause. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be built around the things that divide the communities. The least difficult obstacle will involve personal disputes, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include challenges based on cultural divides and clashes of belief systems. The final obstacle should be a battle where everyone should be fighting the undead rather than each other.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to destroy, kill, or eat the people. The undead remain the antagonists, and the arguing communities experiencing racial tension are not the bad guys. Neither group should be portrayed as or implied to be the antagonist. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 30

The player characters are hired to capture a monster hiding out in a small village, and are surprised to find the villagers rallying to protect him.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Not knowing anything about the village or the type of monsters will increase the level of surprise and make the player characters have to make an effort to learn.

Story Goal

The objective is to learn why the monster is innocent and find the real antagonist. Getting the monster because that's what they were hired to do does not meet the story goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be mainly investigative. The least difficult obstacle will involve discovering why the player characters were hired and why the village is protecting him. This will escalate in difficulty to include the challenges in finding the real antagonist. The final obstacle should involve defending the monster from the actual antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to destroy the monster. Their motivation is ideological, because all monsters are bad and should be destroyed no matter how nice they pretend to be. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 31

The antagonist goes to extremes to evade capture by the player characters before he can implement his evil scheme.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have abilities applicable to a chase, possibly including tracking and observation. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to eventually catch the antagonist. The pursuit is an excuse for the action, and doesn't matter; it is assumed that catching the antagonist will fulfill the secondary goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve things that interfere with a chase. The least difficult obstacle will be issues of transportation, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include challenges based

on tracking, physical obstacles, and distractions. The final obstacle should be the last big push to catch up to and capture the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to evade. Their motivation might be to avoid capture, or to arrive in a specific place to complete a particular task. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 32

The player characters seeks to fulfill some personal goals, while the antagonist embodies the greatest challenge.

Player Characters

This premise requires a protagonist to have personal goals. They have to be something that the antagonist can interfere with somehow. If the protagonist doesn't have some sort of subplot or issue to resolve, be sure to include a supporting character that does and can ask the player characters for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to accomplish the personal goal, whatever that may be. Defeating the antagonist is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will depend on the type of personal goal a protagonist has. The least difficult obstacle will be based on the logical steps to achieving the goal, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as the antagonist interferes with greater frequency and intensity. The final obstacle should involve the hardest step in completing the goal, in spite of the antagonist's interference.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to prevent a protagonist from achieving their personal goal. Their motivation will vary, but might be based on a rivalry to attain the same goal, revenge for a past defeat, or any other reason that makes sense in the context of the setting and characters. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 33

After a shipwreck, the player characters must defend the survivors from an island full of monsters until they can all be rescued.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. While knowledge of sailing and shipbuilding might help them get off the island, and knowing how to hunt, fish, and build shelter can aid in their survival, missing those skills makes the story more interesting.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive until rescue comes. There will be supporting character survivors as well, whom the player characters will need to protect. The player characters may or may not know when another ship is scheduled to come, so a set timeline is optional. Once the player characters have found a way off the island, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve survival. The least difficult obstacle will be in finding food, water, and shelter, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as animal life and monsters are discovered and need to be dealt with. The final obstacle should be the most dangerous creature on the island, which has to be defeated before it kills the survivors.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill and eat the survivors. Their motivation is nothing more than instinct, because they are an animal or monster. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 34

An over-the-hill warrior tries to relive his glory days, interfering with the mission the player characters are on.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They may or may not have an established relationship with the warrior, or have knowledge of who he or she is.

Story Goal

The objective is to keep the warrior from getting killed, or getting anyone else killed. There should be a secondary goal that looks and feels like the main goal, but it's an excuse for the interaction with the warrior. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around the warrior, who is effectively the antagonist, trying to help but interfering with whatever the player characters are trying to do. The least difficult obstacle will be the warrior as bystander in need of rescue, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as the warrior attempts to help more frequently and obtrusively, which will cause the player characters to make mistakes. The final obstacle should be saving the warrior after they almost get everyone killed.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to help the player characters. Their motivation is to relive their glory days, when they were younger and their abilities were sharper. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 35

A monster steals the player characters' magic items, and the player characters have to track it down to get them back.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have the skills required to track the monster to its lair. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to recover the player characters' stolen items. Killing or capturing the monster isn't as important. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve investigation and tracking. The least difficult obstacle will be figuring out what took their items so they no what to look for, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include determining whether or not the monster can use their items, and what it might want them for. The final obstacle should be confronting the monster in its lair.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to have many shiny magical things. Their motivation will depend on the context of the story. They may need them for something, or have a plan that requires them, or they may

have a compulsion to steal. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 36

A nobleman hires the player characters to retrieve some incriminating love letters before they fall into the hands of his rival.
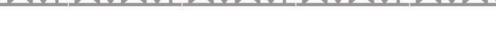
Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Knowledge of the relationship between the nobleman and the antagonist might be helpful, but isn't necessary.

Story Goal

The objective is to prevent the antagonist from using the letters. The nobleman wants them returned, but destroying them or killing the antagonist will have the same effect. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve investigation and probably violent conflict. The least difficult obstacle will be determining where the antagonist is, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include discovering what they plan to use the letters for, and finding where the protagonist is hiding them. The final obstacle should be confronting the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to harm the nobleman. Their motivation might be money, if they're blackmailing him. It might be to force the nobleman into some action, or to embarrass and humiliate him be revealing the information within the letter. They might also want to manipulate or harm the love interest that wrote the letters to the nobleman. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 37

The player characters come across a letter proving that another man, and not the one on the throne, is the true and rightful king.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have basic working knowledge of the royal family, so that the lineage and claim to the throne makes sense. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to place the true king on the throne and deposing the impostor. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve protecting the letter and determining its legitimacy. The least difficult obstacle will be preventing it from being stolen, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include fending off agents of the false king who want the evidence destroyed, and preventing the witnesses from killed. The final obstacle should involve a battle with the false king and his minions.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to retain the throne. Their motivation is power and greed, and all of the good things that come with being king. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 38

The protagonist are hired to protect a rich merchant's pet, which the merchant's rival is trying to have killed.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some animal handling skills appropriate to whatever type of animal or create the merchant keeps as a pet. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to keep an animal safe from harm. Defeating the rival merchant will do this, but isn't the actual goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve defense and combat. The least difficult obstacle will be securing the merchant's home against kidnappers, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include fighting mercenaries and assassins. The final obstacle should be against the rival merchant's top henchman, or the rival merchant himself.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to hurt their rival. Their motivation depends on the history between them, and could include revenge for some past defeat or to intimidate them into giving up territory. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 39

Something is murdering members of the city guard, and the player characters are deputized to lead the investigation and catch the killer.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some degree of investigative skills. They should also have a reasonably positive relation-

ship with the city guard. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to catch a killer. Determining their motive is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve investigation and tracking. The least difficult obstacle will be locating potential suspects, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include finding the killer's motives and locating the killer before they get away completely. The final obstacle should be a showdown with the killer.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to embarrass and weaken the city guard. Their motivation might be to strengthen the thieves' guild, to create opportunity for mercenaries, or to exact revenge. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 40

A vampire has set his sights on one of the player characters, at the same time the that player characters are trying to stop a pack of hungry werewolves preying on a town.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some knowledge of werewolves, but not necessarily of vampires. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the werewolves from killing everyone in town. The vampire is a distraction that has to be dealt with, but is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be the advances of the vampire. The least difficult obstacle will be basic seduction, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include preventing victims from being kidnapped and obstructing lethal blood-sucking. All the while, there are werewolf attacks as the pack expands. The final obstacle should taking out the werewolf pack in spite of the vampire.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to turn the strongest people in the village into werewolves. Their motivation is to expand the pack so it can go conquer another town. The vampire is an obstacle that makes the werewolf hunting more difficult, and is only a secondary antagonist. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 41

The player characters head into an abandoned temple to rescue a kidnap victim from the antagonist.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Knowledge of the deities of the temple is entirely optional but possibly useful.

Story Goal

The objective is to recover the kidnap victim and return them to safety. Defeating the antagonist and whatever their plans were is secondary to the safety of the victim. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be around locating the victim. The least difficult obstacle will be around identifying the cult the antagonist belongs to, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include finding the temple and overcoming angry cultists. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist and getting the victim to safety.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to complete an evil cult ritual. Their motivation is to gain favor and power from their deity. This premise will

work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 42

A protagonist meets the love of their life, but the antagonist conspires to keep them apart.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The relationship might be brand new, or with an established supporting character who is ready to take things to a new level.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonist and their love interest to be together. Once the player characters have cleared the obstacles in order to accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve anything that could drive a wedge into the relationship. The least difficult obstacle will be keeping them physically separate, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include slandering the protagonist in the eyes of their love interest, and presenting romantic rivals to give both lovers doubts about their faithfulness. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist over their interference.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to split the lovers up. Their motivation might be because they are a romantic rival in love with either the protagonist or their partner. They might be trying to protect one of the lovers from someone they feel is unworthy. They could want to hurt someone based on an unrelated feud. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 43

The player characters are hired to find an amazing magical treasure, but the mission turns out to be a trap.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have someone out to get them. The items they go after should be something they've wanted for a long time. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the trap that's been set. Getting the treasure, if it actually exists, is a bonus. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve the normal sorts of early adven-

ture things. The least difficult obstacle will be acquiring a map to the item, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include overcoming normal traps and monsters. The final obstacle should be an ambush by the antagonist that takes all of the player characters' abilities and weaknesses into consideration.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to defeat, possibly kill, the player characters. Their motivation is to gain revenge for some past defeat. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 44

Everywhere the player characters go they find freshly killed dead bodies, and have to figure out what is going on

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Some knowledge of necromancy and ways that people can be killed remotely by magic could be useful.

Story Goal

The objective is to figure out why people are dying around the player characters and make it stop. Figuring out why the antagonist is doing it is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve locating the antagonist. The least difficult obstacle will be tracking the cause of death, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include find the motives and identity the antagonist. The final obstacle should be the confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists
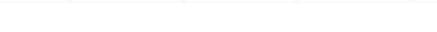
The goal of the antagonist is to make people fear and distrust the player characters. Their motivation to upset the balance of good and evil, drawing the life force of the victims to increase their evil power while undermining the player characters. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 45

The player characters are hired to collect a debt from a scribe with a gambling problem, who turns out to be an assassin hired to kill a high-ranking nobleman.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a relationship with the person hiring them to collect debt. Not knowing much about assassins can help the antagonist to cover his tracks. Having some knowledge of the nobleman who is the target of assassination can be useful.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the assassination. Collecting the actual debt is a secondary goal and not important to meeting the story goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve observation and investigation. The least difficult obstacle will be tracking down the antagonist, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out who the antagonist really is. The final obstacle should be a battle with the antagonist while preventing the assassination.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the nobleman. Their motivation is the amount of money they will make for the job, which will cover their gambling debt. They are working undercover as a scribe in order to get close to their target, but they cannot resist their gambling habit. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 46

Following a simple caravan escort job, the player characters get paid with what turns out to be stolen property, bringing down the wrath of the thieves' guild.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some knowledge of how dangerous the thieves' guild is. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to smooth things over with the thieves' guild. If this means getting them arrested or killed, that solves the problem. Peaceful solutions work as well. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve avoiding the thieves' guild. The least difficult obstacle will be talking to the caravan master who hired them, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include disposing of or returning the stolen goods. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the guild.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to make a point. Their motivation is to show the consequences of people stealing from them. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 47

At least one of the player characters' parents is a legendary adventurer,

shows up and is in competition to complete the same mission.

Player Characters

This premise requires one or more player characters to have an adventuring parent (or mentor, aunt or uncle, older sibling, etc.) in their back story. If it's never been mentioned before, it can be retconned.

Story Goal

The objective is to complete the mission before the parental team can. Teaming up to overcome differences might also work. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will stem from whatever the secondary adventure is, but will have the added element of stress and speed. The least difficult obstacle will be performing at least as well as the other team, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as the challenges and encounters get incfeasingly bigger. The final obstacle should involve a race to the final encounter.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to show their child they're still the best. No matter what the secondary objective is, the parent is the antagonist here. Their motivation is to do their job without the interference of the younger, less experienced player characters. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 48

While raiding the lair of humanoid bandits, the player characters find what appear to be ancient deities frozen in ice.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some minimal knowledge of what they have found. The humanoids do not, but still revere the frozen figures. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the deities before they gain their full power. They can't be destroyed while frozen, and at full power they will be too much for the player characters. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve stopping deities that at their weak point are already a match for the player characters. The least difficult obstacle will be defeating the humanoid bandits, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include finding a plausible way to stop the deities. The final obstacle should be an epic battle with the deities.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to reclaim their place in the world. Their

motivation is that they're deities and it's what they do. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 49

A merchant hires the player characters to help him give away all of his money before midnight on a full moon.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. There's probably a reason the merchant hired the player characters, but that could be based on reputation rather than an established relationship.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist that's messing with the merchant. They're being coerced to give away their money, or else something bad will happen to them, their family, or the community. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around learning the antagonist's plan. The least difficult obstacle will be getting the merchant to admit what's going on, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out the scope and details of the antagonist's plan. The final obstacle should be the confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to humiliate and destroy the merchant. Their motivation could stem from a professional rivalry, a form or revenge, or because it ties into some larger plan. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 50

A younger version of one of the player characters appears, warning them that they failed to kill an antagonist that they all clearly remember killing.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some enemy from the past that is very clearly dead. They need to be able to recognize their younger self, at least enough for the impersonation to be believable.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist again. Figuring out that it's not a case of time travel and that their heads are being messed with is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve figuring out what's going on.

The least difficult obstacle will be sorting out that the younger version of a protagonist is a fake, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include working out how the antagonist is still alive. The final obstacle should be a recreation of the original battle with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get revenge on the player characters for killing him. Their motivation is that they didn't enjoy being dead and being undead isn't that great either. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 51

The player characters must escape from a race riot, and get away from an antagonist who wants to keep them trapped there.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some knowledge of the fantasy races in the setting and the problems between them. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the rioting. If they can managed to stop it, that's a solution but shouldn't be construed as the goal. Proving that the antagonist incited the riot and is responsible for the injuries deaths, and property damage can be the premise of a sequel adventure. Once

the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be avoiding the rioting. The least difficult obstacle will mean hiding from an angry mob, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include avoiding two angry mobs, and dealing with the city guard as they move in to quell the situation. The final obstacle should be getting out of the riot area to safety.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the player characters by keeping them trapped within the riot zone. They incited the riot and are taking action to keep it going. Their motivation is to destroy the player characters in the most chaotic, violent, and harmful way possible. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 52

A protagonist must find a way to be with the person they love, even though their relationship is forbidden by society.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a relationship that is somehow taboo among the cultures within the setting. This might have to do with race, religion, politics, or any number of things.

Story Goal

The objective is for the romantic partners to find a way to stay together. Changing the social mores and traditions is probably unrealistic, so that's not the goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will have to do with keeping secrets and avoiding bigots. The least difficult obstacle will be strange looks, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include rude comments, threats, and actual violence. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist who is fanning the flames of intolerance.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to see the romantic partners punished for their relationship. Their motivation is the maintenance of their belief system. They will make sure that the relationship is public, and insure that everyone who will oppose them knows about it. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 53

When the mayor bans alcohol from the city following a series of drunken riots, the player characters must decide whether to support the bootleggers or the city guard.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some contacts and relationships within the city, as well as an opinion on prohibition. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can ask for help or hire them.

Story Goal

The objective is to reveal the conspiracy to drive up the price of alcohol. They want the ban so they can create a monopoly, which includes strong-arming the taverns that brew their own ale. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will come from violence flaring up on both sides of the issue. The least difficult obstacle will be personal arguments turning into fights, and escalate into discovering who is behind starting the drunken riots. The final obstacle should be with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get a monopoly on alcohol sales within the city. Their motivation is pure profit and control. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 54

When a priest is rumored to be having a love affair with a non- believ-

er, the player characters have to stop radical followers from destroying the city.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some working knowledge of the religion involved. They don't have to be believers but should be aware of the basic tenets and practices followers adhere to to understand why they're upset. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to reveal the antagonist who is spreading lies and whipping up religious frenzy. Keeping the priest from being lynched is a good secondary goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be centered preventing a riot. The least difficult obstacle will be convincing individuals that the rumors are false, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include locating the antagonist and proving that they're lying. The final obstacle should a confrontation directly with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to supplant the priest as the head of the religion. Their motivation is to gain more personal power. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 55

As payment for escorting a caravan through bandit country, the caravan master tells each of the player characters how and when they will die — and it's unfortunately, it will be tomorrow.

Player Characters

This premise doesn't require the player characters to have any special abilities or history. If there are any existing prophecies, or causes of death that tie into a character's back story, they should be incorporated with the caravan master's prediction.

Story Goal

The objective is to change the future and prevent the prediction from coming true. There may be a secondary goal that the player characters are pursuing when the near-death experiences take place. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be whatever the caravan master predicted. The least difficult obstacle will be exactly as describe, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as events slowly begin to vary from the original prediction and create new problems. The final obstacle should not happen the way that the player characters were told, because they have already changed their future.

Antagonists

The antagonist in this premise is the concept of the player characters' imminent death. The goal of the antagonist is to take their lives through a variety of means, including accidents, random events, and the sorts of fights the player characters normally get themselves into.

Idea 56

A group of young adventurers are pretending to be the player characters in order to capitalize on their reputation, but their inexperience leads to disaster.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some level of recognition and a reputation for being good at what they do. They shouldn't be so famous that people would recognize that the young adventurers are impostors.

Story Goal

The objective is to prevent the young adventurers from getting themselves and other people killed. There may be a secondary objective, which both teams are pursuing. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around mistaken identity. The

least difficult obstacle will getting blamed for something the impostors did, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include fixing the things that the impostors have messed up. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the impostors, possibly to rescue them when they get in other their heads.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to take advantages of the player characters' reputation. Their motivation is to make more money than they can as themselves. Unfortunately, while they can impersonate the player characters' looks, they don't have the experience and overall competence of the player characters. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 57

The servants of an abusive nobleman rise up during a party and take all of the guests hostage, including the player characters.

Player Characters

This premise requires there to be a credible reason for the player characters to be invited to a fancy party. This isn't a get hired and bring all of your gear event, so they should be prepared be dressed in fine clothes and have a good time rather than equipped for impending battle.

Story Goal

The objective is to put down the insurrection while protecting their

host and his guests. Putting the abusive nobleman in his place is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will come from not having armor, weapons, and other equipment handy. The least difficult obstacle will be fighting servants, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include saving the hostages and preventing further murders. The final obstacle should be rescuing the nobleman host from the majordomo who led the uprising.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonists is to take revenge on the rich people who have systematically mistreated them their whole lives. The nobleman is an abusive creep who has done reprehensible things to his servants. Their motivation is justified even if their specific actions aren't. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 58

The player characters have to pretend to join a cult in order to learn the location of a powerful magic item in the cult leader's possession.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a working knowledge of the cult and its leader. If they do not, be sure to include a sup-

porting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the magic item. When the player characters do with the cultists is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on passing as cultists. The least difficult obstacle will be following orders and knowing what to do, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include some icky things the cultist and their leader engage. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the cult leader to procure the magic item.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to use the magic item for some evil purpose. Their motivation is power, gained by pleasing the deity they worship. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist, because the cult leader shouldn't recognize the player characters.

Idea 59

The player characters are hired to guard a brewery from angry miners, after the brewmaster stolen the mining foreman's girlfriend.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have the need and reputation to do this sort of security work. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can ask for assistance or convince them to help.

Story Goal

The objective is to save the brewery. Solving the relationship problems of the brewmaster and the miner is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be standard guard duty. The least difficult obstacle will be chasing off angry miners, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include dealing with an angry mob and stopping arsonists. The final obstacle should involve the scorned miner and his biggest, baddest friends.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to take revenge on the person who stole his girlfriend. Their motivation is a sense of justice and closure. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 60

The player characters are hired to harvest crops in a local farming community, after many of the original farm workers were killed in a raid by hostile humanoids.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have enough sense of community to realize that people will starve is the crops aren't brought in. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that will appeal to them for help and explain the consequences.

Story Goal

The objective is rescue what's left of the farming community from the hostile humanoids. The actual harvesting of the crops is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will stem from protecting the farm. The least difficult obstacle will be doing manual labor, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include fighting humanoid raiders and defending the farmers. The final obstacle should be an epic battle with the humanoid chief.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to steal food, which include both crops and farmers. Their motivation is hunger. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 61

After being hurt by the antagonist, the player characters takes justice into their own hands in an attempt to even the score.

Player Characters

This premise requires that something unjust happens to at least one of the player characters. This can be an every out of their back story, or something that occurs early in the adventure. For some reason, they cannot find recourse through normal channels.

Story Goal

The objective is to get revenge on the antagonist. If a wrong is righted or some injustice is corrected, that's secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve making plans to get revenge. The least difficult obstacle will be avoiding detection by the antagonist and the authorities, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include setting up a plan for revenge and/or justice, and deceiving the antagonist long enough to execute that plan. The final obstacle should be the confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get away with what they've done. Their motivation is to avoid justice entirely if possible. This premise will

work best with an established antagonist.

Idea 62

The player characters need to sacrifice a beloved item in order to gain another item needed to defeat the antagonist.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some object that has value and meaning to them. It might be a magic item, or something with sentimental value. The point is that the player characters have to suffer a genuine loss to give it up.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the item the player characters need to complete a secondary goal. The act of sacrifice has to be made. Once the player characters have done this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve bargaining and searching for alternatives. The least difficult obstacle will be trying to find a plan that works without the sacrifice, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include facing the possoble complications that will arise if they fail the mission. The final obstacle should involve getting the item needed.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to force the player characters to lose something dear to them. Their motivation is to either help the player characters grow, to teach them a lesson, or to hurt them. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 63

While traveling, the player characters wander into the middle of a battle between rival armies.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to be moving through a war zone. They probably don't know where they are, and news of the conflict may or may not have reached them yet.

Story Goal

The objective is to avoid getting killed by rival armies. Both sides will assume the player characters are spies for the other side because they have no uniforms. Once the player characters have gotten away, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on avoiding attention. The least difficult obstacle will be hiding from patrols, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include crossing populated areas and getting

into fights. The final obstacle should be an epic battle between both sides with the player characters literally in the crossfire.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to win the war. Their motivation is based on their side's intentions. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 64

The player characters find a treasure map, but the location is on a farm owned by a strange family.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They might know that the map is old, in a more remote area, and that no stories tell of the treasure even being found.

Story Goal

The objective is to recover the treasure. Defeating the creepy degenerate antagonists, who didn't know that an ancestor had treasure buried on the property, is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on finding the treasure and getting away. The least difficult obstacle will be hiding their intentions, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as the antagonists figure out what's going on. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonists over the treasure.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get the treasure. Their motivation is their current poverty and the sense that they are entitled to it. They are willing to kill the player characters to get it, and prefer that to cutting any sort of deals. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 65

The player characters are hired by a nobleman to escort him to a diplomatic conference, only to discover he's not who he says he is.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have enough credibility and trust to be hired by noblemen. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help vouch for them and get them the job.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop an assassination at the diplomatic conference. They brought the fake nobleman/assassin in the first place, after all. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on stopping the assassin's plan. The least difficult obstacle will be figuring out he's an impostor, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include learning the antagonist's plan and finding out where he's hiding. The final obstacle should be the confrontation during the planned assassination attempt.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill a diplomat. Their motivation is that he's been paid to do it, to help break down relations between the countries and start a war. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 66

The player characters are hired by a student at a school for wizards, who is convinced that one of her teachers is trying to kill her.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a reputation that

would make a student reach out to them for help. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that would ask for their assistance or provide a reason to hire them.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the wizard-teacher's plans. Preventing the student's death is secondary, but should be done if possible. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be centered on investigation. The least difficult obstacle will be figuring out that the wizard is up to something, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include avoiding detection by the wizard and learning what his actual plan it. The final obstacle should be a battle between the player characters and the wizard.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to cast some powerful spell that requires the sacrifice of that particular student. Their motivation is to gain spells that no other wizard possesses. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 67

A wizard attempts to extort the player characters into undertaking a

dangerous quest.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some sort of dirt in their background that the wizard can use it as leverage. If they do not, he may have fake evidence that can be used to frame them for some serious crime.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the extortionist. The quest he wants to send them on is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult obstacle will be figuring out who the wizard really is and what he wants, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include preventing the release of incriminating information and figuring out the wizard's endgame. The final obstacle should be a battle with the wizard that prevents the leak or otherwise prevent damage to their reputations.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to force the player characters into undertaking a quest. Their motivation is the acquisition of whatever they're nominally supposed to go find for him. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 68

A shop owner hires the player characters to protect her from a local gang, but she turns out to be a retired assassin being targeted by her former guild.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The shop owner might hire them because they're good, or because they're less likely to figure out the truth than official authorities.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the assassins. Whether they do anything about the shop owner, if she is wanted for past crimes, is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will begin with protecting the shop owner. The least difficult obstacle will be defeating the assassins' first attempt, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out that the assailants are not a gang, and that the shop owner is more than she claims to be. The final obstacle should be an epic battle with the assassins.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the shop owner. Their motivation is that she betrayed them and that cannot go unanswered. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 69

The player characters are hired to protect an old wizard, who turns out to be a monster in need of protection from another band of adventurers.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They should be competent enough to take on the people trying to kill the monster.

Story Goal

The objective is to save the monster from getting killed. Defeating the other adventurers is secondary, because the goal can theoretically be accomplished without combat. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will focus on guard duty and protection. The least difficult obstacle will be overcoming the urge to kill the monster themselves before hearing him out, after which obstacles will escalate

in difficulty to include preparing defenses or moving the monster to a safe location. The final obstacle should be confronting the antagonists, the other adventuring party.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the monster. They refuse to believe he isn't evil. Their motivation is to gain the treasure the monster is supposed to have. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 70

Thinking that they've been hired to escort a merchant caravan, the player characters unwittingly help foreign spies get out of the country.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Knowing that there are refugees, migrant workers, or poor traveling foreigners in the land is a bonus.

Story Goal

The objective is to catch the spies before they get to safety. Whether this happens while they're still in the country or after they cross over doesn't matter, except in terms of obstacles. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be in outsmarting spies. The least difficult obstacle will be figuring out who they really are before they cross over, seeing through their disguises, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include tracking and pursuing them. The final obstacle should be confronting the spies and capturing or killing them.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to escape back to their homeland with the secret information they possess. Their motivation is to serve their country by doing their job well. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 71

The player characters have to find the cure for a magical disease, but the antagonist doesn't want that to happen.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some knowledge of the widespread damage the magical disease can do, and how difficult it is to treat. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can provide the knowledge.

Story Goal

The objective is to find and spread the cure. Stopping the antagonist in

any way other than foiling the plan is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will include travel and locating rare ingredients. The least difficult obstacle will be standard hazards on the road and in the wilderness, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include the antagonist intentionally obstructing the player characters' efforts. The final obstacle should include a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to spread the disease. Their motivation is to wipe out the population of the kingdom so their minions can more easily take over. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 72

An ancient book with long-forgotten spells has been discovered, and the player characters have to make a decision before the antagonist puts it to ill use.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have an awareness of what the legendary book is and what it may contain. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can provide that back-

ground information.

Story Goal

The objective is to keep the antagonist from using the book. What actually happens to the book or the antagonist is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on locating the book. The least difficult obstacle will be discovering its current location, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include a race against the antagonist to get the book. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they attempt to cast a particularly powerful and nasty spell.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to unleash terror and destruction upon the world, via a spell from the ancient spellbook. Their motivation is to increase their own power and influence. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 73

The followers of a lesser deity are disappearing without a trace, and the player characters are called upon to investigate.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have knowledge of the lesser deity, their followers, and their mortal enemies. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can provide the background information needed.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist who is kidnapping innocent people. Saving the kidnap victims is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will focus on investigation. The least difficult obstacle will be finding suspects responsible for the kidnapping, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include locating the victims and determining what the antagonist is planning. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to sacrifice the followers of a rival deity. Their motivation is to gain favor with their own dark master. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 74

In a remote village, the local priest harbors a dark secret that will cause

serious problems for the player characters.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a reason to be in the remote village, personally or professionally. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that will have hired them to travel there for some plausible reason.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist, the local priest. Getting out of the village, and dealing with the complications the priest causes, is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on annoyances that are part of a larger curse. The least difficult obstacle will be misplaced objects, bad luck, and minor illnesses, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include losing magic items and sustaining accidental injuries. The final obstacle should be a face-off with the priest once the player characters discover he's behind it.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to steal power from the player characters through an escalating series of curses. Every time something happens to them, the antagonist gains power. The final act will be to sacrifice the player characters, once they have been rendered too weak to fight

back. The antagonist's motivation is to gain power over the region. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 75

The player characters walk into a bar to discover it packed with old antagonists mysteriously back from the dead.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have to have a number of old foes, preferably notable and memorable ones. The harder they were to defeat, and the more annoying they were, the better.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist who has brought the old foes back. Once he is stopped, the other enemies will disappear. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on reliving old encounters. The least difficult obstacle will the most easily dispatched foe, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty as the player characters fight their way through their toughest foes. Along the way, other obstacles will focus on discovering how these dead antagonists have come back, and who brought them back. The final obstacle should be with the main antagonist responsible for the resurrections.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to destroy the player characters. Their motivation is that they are a minor old foe that the player characters never took serious and likely don't remember. This premise works best with established, recurring antagonists.

Idea 76

The player characters are hired to protect a pleasure barge, which sails into a bizarre fog bank and ends up in another plane.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have the sort of reputation that would make rich people hire them. Alternately, if the player characters are rich they might have bought a space and be there to party. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can get them invited or convince them to go.

Story Goal

The objective is to get back to the player characters' own plane. Saving people on the barge is a noble thing, but secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on figuring out where they are

and how they got there. The least difficult obstacle will be attacks by creatures native to this plane, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include battling increasingly bigger creatures. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist who brought them there.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get some powerful magic item that's on the barge. Their motivation is to use it for some goal here on their native plane. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 77

A merchant hires the player characters to guard a ship, but the crew scuttles it and flees, leaving the player characters aboard to sink.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a relationship of trust with the merchant. If not, they should have no reason not to trust them. It may also be that they are hired by a third party claiming to represent someone they trust.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive a sunken ship, which is a large trap and filled with angry, panicked monsters. Finding the antagonist who did this is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult obstacle will be basic monster fights, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include dealibg with the reality that they're running out of air, getting out of the sunken ship, and returning safely to the surface. The final obstacle should be a giant monster in the water outside of the ship, waiting to eat survivors.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the player characters. Their motivation is probably revenge for a past defeat, or possibly they were hired by someone else to kill them in an expensive and elaborate way. This premise works best with an established, recurring antagonist.

Idea 78

Someone or something is kidnapping babies, and the player characters have to discover what's going on before the next disappearance.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have keen investigative skills. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help out with those abilities.

Story Goal

The objective is to save the babies. Learning why they were kidnapped

and understanding the antagonist's plan is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on locating the kidnap victims. The least difficult obstacle will be narrowing the list of suspects, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include getting into the place where the kidnapped babies are being held, and doing so in a way that won't bring harm to the babies. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to collect a large quantity of babies. Their motivation is up to you, and will depend on the tone of your campaign. This can be silly, lighthearted fun, or dark and disturbing. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 79

A member of the king's guard comes to the player characters for help, claiming other guardsmen are out to kill him.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a relationship of trust with at least one member of the guard. If they do not, the guardsman might outright hire them rather than ask for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to uncover the existence of corruption within the guard. Stopping whatever plan the secret circle of guardsman have is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will focus on secrecy and gathering information. The least difficult obstacle will involve spying on the guard, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include breaking into their headquarters and getting into fights with them. The final obstacle should be all-out combat with the corrupt guards.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to take over the guard and eventually the kingdom via a quiet coup. Their motivation is power, and dissatisfaction with the current leadership. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 80

The player characters have to escort a group of children away from a town riddled with plague, to temple where healers can keep them safe.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a relationship with

the healers, and the compassion to want to help children. If they don't, then they can be hired to do that job.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the children to safety. Helping to cure the disease and stop the spread of the plague is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on protection. The least difficult obstacle will be avoiding the plague-infested areas, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include travel hazards like wild animals and bandits. The final obstacle should be with the necromancer who is responsible for the plague.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill people in large numbers. Their motivation is to gain favor with their death-based deity. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 81

The protagonist and antagonist compete to be the first to the location of a buried treasure.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. If there's a legend around the treasure that makes it interesting.

Story Goal

The objective is to beat the antagonist to the treasure. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around locating the treasure site. The least difficult obstacle will translating the map, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include wilderness hazards, wandering monsters, and traps set by the antagonist. The final obstacle should be a battle against the antagonist over the treasure.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get to the treasure first. Their motivation is getting whatever gold, magic, and other valuable or powerful items for themselves. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist, but a rivalry with a recurring villain can be more fun.

Idea 82

A protagonist suddenly inherits a vast fortune, and the antagonist draws them deeper into a dangerous world of wretched excess.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The more naive they are, the more interesting this premise plays out.

Story Goal

The objective is to test the inheriting protagonist's moral compass. How will the behave when they can have anything they want? Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on moral judgments and will-power. The least difficult obstacle will be doing something small that the inheriting protagonist knows they shouldn't do, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include committing serious breaches of morality, ethics, and the law. The final obstacle should be breaking things off with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to pull the newly-rich protagonist deeper into the depths of depravity. Their motivation might be to willfully

corrupt the protagonist, or they might like having a new friend. They won't like it when the protagonist wants to quit, because they've seen too much, know too much, and pose a threat to the antagonist now. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 83

The player characters discover an underground gladiator ring, where peasants are forced to fight monsters.

Player Characters

This premise does not require the player characters to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. Background elements that allow them to have sympathy for the peasants is a plus, as are any combat skills.

Story Goal

The objective is to break up the ring. This will save the peasants and handle the antagonist as well. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on fighting and investigation. The least difficult obstacle will be locating the ring, which may or may not literally be underground, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include getting captured and organizing an escape. The final obstacle should be a fight with the antagonist on the scene of the glad-

iator matches.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to turn a profit from people gambling on the matches. Their motivation is to fulfill their greed while entertaining themselves with the pain and suffering of others. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 84

The player characters investigate a claim made by a supporting character that the whole world magically changed overnight, and only he remembers it.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a working knowledge of the world. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that. This will help them to spot inconsistencies and changes.

Story Goal

The objective is to return the world to the way it was. Putting an end to the antagonist that did it is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will include spotting "continuity errors" in reality to verify that the supporting character is right. The least difficult obstacle will be dealing with paradoxes, like certain spells not working the way they should, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include fighting monsters with the wrong abilities. The final obstacle should with the antagonist who wished the world into its current configuration.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to make the world work the way they want it to. Their motivation is to always be right about things. Their wishes started coming true, so they began to abuse it to the point of breaking reality. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 85

A nobleman hires the player characters to kill a demon he made a deal with, before it can come to collect what it is owed.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some knowledge of how to deal with demons and similar forces. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can provide the necessary information.

Story Goal

The objective is to kill the demon. Addressing the repercussions of the nobleman is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will revolve around demon problems. The least difficult obstacle will be protecting the nobleman temporarily, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include gathering the items necessary to bind or banish the demon, and fighting the demon's minions. The final obstacle should be a massive fight with the demon itself.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to collect on a debt. Their motivation is to have the things they are owed, and to protect their professional reputation. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 86

The player characters become cursed and cannot use magical healing until they complete a pilgrimage to a faraway shrine.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have done something

that got them cursed recently. If they do not, then that should happen early in the adventure, perhaps as part of pursuing a secondary goal.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the curse removed before the player characters die. Any secondary goal they were pursuing isn't important, and probably not possible, until this objective is met, but it might add a time limit for some extra suspense. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on not getting injured, because healing is slow or impossible. The least difficult obstacle will be avoiding fights, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include wilderness hazards, traps, and wandering monsters popping up randomly. The final obstacle should be with the antagonist who cursed them, after they're able to use magical healing again.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to have the player characters kill. Their motivation is to get them out of the way of a large plan, or to get revenge for past defeats. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 87

The player characters arrive in a town to find that it is abandoned and

in ruins, and have to search for clues to learn what happened.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some knowledge of the town, even if they've never been there before. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to discover where the townspeople are and rescue them. Putting the town back together afterward is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will include investigation. The least difficult obstacle will be working out what happened, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include finding where the townspeople are hiding, and tracking down the antagonist. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to conquer the area. Their motivation is to amass more power. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 88

The player characters are hired to deliver supplies to a monastery only accessible by a dangerous river.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some wilderness survival skills. Knowing something about the monastery will be useful as well. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the supplies to the monastery. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be travel-based. The least difficult obstacle will be sailing on the river, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include weather, traps set by the antagonist, and ambushes by wandering monsters. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get the supplies. Their motivation is that there is nothing out here in the wilderness, other than what you can hunt and scrounge for. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar

antagonist.

Idea 89

A religious order is trying to build a hospital, and hires the player characters to protect it from the evil cult that keeps trying to tear it down.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a relationship with the order of healer. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can ask them for assistance, or offer to hire them for their services.

Story Goal

The objective is to guard the construction site until it's completed. Defeating the evil cult once and for all is secondary, but would meet the main goal. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will be general guard duty. The least difficult obstacle will be fighting off common thugs, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include thugs using magic, and battling trained or summoned monsters serving the cult. The final obstacle should be with the main antagonist, the cult leader.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to increase suffering by destroying the hospital. Their motivation is to appease their evil deity. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 90

A person the player characters meet in a tavern becomes a groupie, then starts making outrageous demands and stalking them.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have something of a reputation and impressive stories about them in taverns and by traveling bards. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to get rid of the dangerous groupie. Preventing damage to their reputation and cleaning up the mess the groupie has made is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on an obsessed person who wants to do them harm. The least difficult obstacle will be shouting and yelling, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include deal-

ing with nasty rumors and accusations, discovering acts of vandalism, and reacting to threats. The final obstacle should involve confronting the antagonist and whatever group of friends or angry mob they've whipped up.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to hurt the player characters. Their motivation is that they feel the player characters have hurt them by not accepting the antagonist as their new best friend. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 91

The player characters must face off against a band of rival adventurers whose abilities parallel their own.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have established their signature abilities. Having some basis for a rivalry, such as belonging to a guild or faction, or getting jobs from the same employer, can help reinforce the premise.

Story Goal

The objective is to be the first to achieve some superficial goal. That secondary goal is less important than being the antagonists to the punch. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will focus on direct competition. The least difficult obstacle will be races and chases, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include skill challenges and keeping count of who has beaten more opponents in combat. The final obstacle should end in a direct fight with the rivals.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to beat the player characters to a secondary goal. Their motivation is to complete what for them is the story goal. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 92

The player characters are given a quest by the king, which the antagonist does not want them to complete.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have either a reputation for reliability, a special set of skills, or a relationship with those who have the ear of the king. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with that.

Story Goal

The objective is to fulfill the quest. Defeating the antagonist is second-

ary to pleasing the king. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on completing the quest and appeasing the king. The least difficult obstacle will be following proper courtly etiquette, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include facing travel hazards, locating the object of the quest, and fending off the antagonist's attempts at sabotage. The final obstacle should be confronting the antagonist right before presenting the object of the quest to the king.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to foil the desires of the king. Their motivation might be political, personal, or part of a larger plan that requires the quest item. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 93

Children have been going missing from the city, and the player characters discover a portal to a magical wonderland.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have no special skills. They might have some connection to the children that have gone missing.

Story Goal

The objective is to bring the children home. Defeating the antagonist is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve exploring the magical land the children have been taken to. The least difficult obstacle will be getting the lay of the land, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include fighting the local bad guys and locating the children. The final obstacle should be a battle with the main antagonist in the magical realm.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to defeat the children who have been brought from another world to defeat him. Their motivation is to maintain their power base. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 94

The family of an old antagonist shows up, looking for revenge against the player characters.

Player Characters

This premise requires that the player characters have an old antago-

nist. That antagonist should credibly have family, whether it's children, siblings, or something else. They also need to be able to know that the player characters are responsible for whatever happened.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the new antagonists. There might be a secondary objective as well. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on surviving the attacks from the antagonist. The least difficult obstacle will be break-ins and theft, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include increasingly tougher and more violent attacks by the henchmen. The final obstacle should be a direct confrontation with the antagonist family.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to punish the antagonists. Their motivation is revenge for what the player characters did to their relative, the original antagonist. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 95

The player characters get caught up in a turf war between the merchants guild and the thieves guild.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have at least a little bit of knowledge about who the major players in the area are. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with information and useful contacts.

Story Goal

The objective is to not make lasting enemies. Any outcome that doesn't have one of both factions angry with the player characters completes the story goal. Their may be a secondary objective that the player characters are trying to accomplish in the midst of this. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will include having to make choices about how their actions will be perceived. The least difficult obstacle will be avoiding members of the factions, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include doing favors for the factions to keep peace, and helping to negotiate deals and truces. The final obstacle should be a fight between the two factions with the player characters literally in the middle.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonists is to take territory away from the other antagonist. Their motivation is to expand the power base of both their criminal activities and legitimate operations. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 96

The sun didn't come up today, and the player characters have to deal with panic, riots, and religious fanatics throughout the city.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have the abilities or equipment to operate in the dark. Any sort of magic or diplomatic skills that can calm people down will also be handy. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with those tasks.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist who has brought darkness to the world. Everything else is an obstacle keeping them from that task. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on frightened people doing dangerous and irrational things. The least difficult obstacle will be getting through crowds, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include getting caught up in riots and attacks by evil cultists. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the evil cult that's summoned up the darkness.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to generate terror. Their motivation is to

generate enough fear to be able to summon their dark lord. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 97

A cult is recruiting poor and desperate peasants and turning them into undead soldiers.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have the abilities needed to deal with large numbers of the undead. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help to fight turn, and destroy them.

Story Goal

The objective is stop the necromancer from exploiting the peasants. Dealing with the undead rampage is secondary to saving the innocent people who are sill alive. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will focus on determining hat the cult is really up to. The least difficult obstacle will be finding someone who has recently run off to join the cult, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include battling increasingly larger and tougher legions of the undead. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the necromancy leading the cult.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to create an army. Their motivation is to spread death throughout the land to increase their power and please their deity. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Idea 98

An ancient building collapses with the player characters inside, and it propels them back in time to when the structure was built.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some knowledge of local history. Some architectural and engineering skills wouldn't hurt either. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with those abilities.

Story Goal

The objective is fix the flaw that causes the building to collapse in the present. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story. and the player characters will return to their own time.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will focus on the antagonist's attempt to sabotage the building. The least difficult obstacle will be noticing the

weakness that will make it fall, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out what the antagonist's plan is. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to destroy the building. Their motivation is to make the chief engineer and architect look bad, so the antagonist can take their place at court. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 99

While traveling the player characters find the perfect place to camp for the night, but the location turns out to be haunted.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have some survival and camping skills, as well as the ability to deal with ghosts. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can help with supernatural creatures and the basics of outdoor living.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the night. Revealing the story of the ghosts and learning why the area is haunted is secondary. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on being haunted. The least difficult obstacle will be troubles setting up the camp, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include investigating weird noises, defending against telekinetic attacks, and engaging in terrifying battles. The final obstacle should involve clearing out the source of the haunting.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to scare the player characters and make them leave. Their motivation is to protect some dark secret at the site. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist.

Idea 100

A merchant's daughter hires the player characters to help her run away from home. Then the merchant hires them to find her and bring her back.

Player Characters

This premise requires the player characters to have a reputation as people who can help with these sorts of situations. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can ask for their help or hire them to do the jobs.

Story Goal

The objective is to do what's best for the daughter. You might decide,

based on the circumstances you present, that this is running away from home or being reunited with the parent. Once the player characters have accomplished this, you have reached the end of your story.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on travel and negotiation. The least difficult obstacle will be getting the daughter away undetected, after which obstacles will escalate in difficulty to include finding the daughter again, and convincing the daughter or the merchant on the best course of action. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the armed muscle hired by the person who doesn't get their way.

Antagonists

Either the merchant or the daughter is likely to end up as the antagonist. The merchant will be mad if he finds out the player characters helped her run off. The daughter will be made if she finds out the player characters sold her out. Both will hire other armed and dangerous people if the player characters aren't on their side. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Role-playing is an amazing method to activate youths and to help them develop a variety of essential skills. This book will give you a detailed look at how you can run amazing role-playing games and support youths in becoming active role-players.

Learn why you should start role-playing with young people and how you can focus on the development of specific skills. Find out how to make the game more interesting than any video game and achieve full immersion of your players.

This book contains a treasure trove of advice to make you an amazing Game Director.

SMIRKING
DRAGON