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## Ignorable Theme: Pacing

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Pacing is a very important issue to me. Bad pacing can suck the fun right out of a game. It is said that in comedy, timing is everything and I think it holds true for drama, action, and everything else you find in a typical roleplaying session. When I GM, I try to keep a close eye on the pacing. My general rule is that so long as there is meaningful or interesting (which need not be the same thing) conversation between PCs, I will not move the scene along. Once it seems as if a scene should end, I will segue, sometimes asking for the players' confirmation (especially when there is still uninteresting discussion going on). How one makes the transition depends completely on the scene you are closing and the scene you are entering.

If there is any scene I would not want to watch if it were on television, I try to condense it as much as possible. This includes shopping, traveling, and anything else that does not involve meaningful or interesting character interaction. I even try to keep strategy sessions (mentioned in comments the last two issues) brief and to the point. Since much of such discussions are out-of-character anyway, I will often interject feedback and make clarifying statements to help move things along. This is especially true then matters of rules or genre conventions come up. In my Truth & Justice campaign, I have twice told the PCs that so long as they defeat the bad guys, that they do not have to worry about transport and storage of same, that leaving them for the police with a note from their "Friendly Neighborhood Zetas" (or equivalent) would suffice.

The players also have a responsibility for the pacing of the game. This ties into the issue of limelight as well, since anyone hogging the scene is probably making the game drag for the others. Players should not sweat the minute details of a scene if no one else cares. On the other hand, players must yield to each other and allow a scene to last a little longer if it involves meaningful

or interesting<sup>1</sup> character development. The last thing a player wants is to rush through an important scene and feel robbed of a dramatic (or comedic) opportunity.

Ultimately, I cannot think of any guidelines or words of advice that would not be so vague and generic as to be pointless to mention.<sup>2</sup> There certainly is an art to pacing, but not necessarily a science. It takes practice and feedback to find the right balance. But unlike balancing combat, bad pacing is easily corrected and forgiven.

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## Comments on #376

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### Myles Corcoran

Dungeon Squad sounds like fun. After downloading the rules, I immediately wanted to house rule the target numbers for adding penalty or bonus dice. Instead of rolling a 2, roll twice and take the best (essentially getting two tries). Instead of rolling a 6, roll twice and take the worst (essentially having to succeed twice). The odds are different for d4 and d6, but are surprisingly close for the rest.

I have not checked how it would affect ranged weapons, but then I'm not sure I understand why they require an even number to hit. I guess it is to avoid having range modifiers, but it sounds... odd.

Standard Method (Target Numbers)						
Difficulty	Target #	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Easy	2	75.00%	83.33%	87.50%	90.00%	91.67%
Average	4	25.00%	50.00%	62.50%	70.00%	75.00%
Hard	6	0.00%	16.67%	37.50%	50.00%	58.33%
Really Hard	8	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	30.00%	41.67%

Revised Method (Multiple Rolls)						
Difficulty	Die Rolls	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Easy	Two (best)	43.75%	75.00%	85.94%	91.00%	93.75%
Average	One	25.00%	50.00%	62.50%	70.00%	75.00%
Hard	Two (worst)	6.25%	25.00%	39.06%	49.00%	56.25%
Really Hard	Three (worst)	1.56%	12.50%	24.41%	34.30%	42.19%

### Robert A. Dushay

Perhaps the easiest way to get an all-player in in Cosmic Encounter is to have everyone with 4 bases. Then, everyone allies with the attacker and the defender, who is Judge and declares "loser gains a base in the winner's system" and then proceeds to lose the encounter, and thus win a

1 I keep coming back to that phrase...

2 Though I look forward to others' suggestions.

fifth base and the game along with everyone else who landed in Judge's system. You can also do it with sufficiently altered winning conditions via Schizoid.<sup>3</sup> And yes, there are flares and moons that can do it as well (but I'm too lazy to dig through them).

### **Lee Gold**

If moving up the deadline for awkward 21sts makes it more convenient for you, then I approve. I also do not mind if you would prefer to send out the issue a week (or more) late to work around the dates.

The magic item auction is an idea that I had never seen before. Thanks for mentioning it; I'll suggest it the next time opportunity presents itself.

Saving against a magic sword's bonus to hit just adds another roll to slow down combat without any real benefit. Saves in D&D 3.x are Fortitude, Reflex, and Will. Only Reflex would seem to apply, but in combat, your dodge bonus to AC is more appropriate and already factored in.

### **Spike Y Jones**

Rather than limit Guard Watch to five consecutive castings, I would have the target make successively difficult Fortitude saves against falling into an irreversible 8- to 12-hour sleep.

Never underestimate the ability of corporations (and governments and people in general) to ignore long-term savings with short-term expediency. Multiply the cost of immediate replacement times the likelihood of a failure and this may be lower than the cost of an emergency replacement.

I see you pulled out the "peers" humor gambit. It's good for a chuckle, but not a serious legal argument. If we equate "peers" to mean "private citizens who are not agents of the court," then you can see my problems with professional jurors.

### **Louis La Mancusa**

Working with veterans has less red tape? My step-daughter, Linda, can tell you her horror story dealing the Army and the VA that has her unable to drive or keep a job because of the seizures caused by her spinal injury. It took months to approve her treatments and get her VA benefits in order. Over two years on and still no corrective action. For nearly a year before she left on a medical discharge, they didn't even tell her what was wrong while sending her to private doctors (forcing her to pay for the cab rides from base into town). Good luck to you.

<sup>3</sup> e.g., "3 exterior bases with a foreign base on the middle planet of your own system."

### **Brian Misiaszek**

I live in the same state as Marco and I've never handled or fired anything more dangerous than a paintball gun. Nor do I want to.

Regarding your comment to Spike, how about if we set up a "books for prescription drugs" trade? : )

### **Lisa Padol**

I never understood why indie games spent so much time on mechanics to solve social, meta-game issues. In "attempting to find a mechanical way to guarantee fun for all," many of their rules actually get in the way of some kinds of fun. I'll take a page of GM (and player!) advice over game mechanics any day and twice on Sunday.

### **Brian Rogers**

I would have a very difficult time playing in a Throne War game. I, personally, am ill-equipped to deal with politics and would have to play the servant, the student, or the disinterested outsider. I could play characters who had ambitions, but I have no idea how to realize their goals. I am far more interested in the metaphysics and adventure of Amber (or any setting) than the politics.

I feel obligated to give feedback on two pages spawned by one of my comments. : ) I am glad you pointed out that the GM should provide some certainty to the players (which I touched on with regard to pacing). I think what you have screams out for a treatment similar to that of *Prime Time Adventures* or similar game that tackles the game from a scene-setting and storytelling point of view rather than direct character immersion.

Unfortunately, I lack the social savvy or subtlety to pull off the high school social conflicts effectively and that angle of the Generation Zeta campaign as essentially withered on the vine. I would love to be able to pull off an anime (or manga) high school drama feel, but I just cannot seem to do it. My introversion really limits my GMing.

### **Marco Subias**

I'm glad the Weight Watcher system is working for you. 50 lbs ago, I simply counted calories (without much worrying about what kind, but that will change soon, I suspect). I followed what I call "weight loss for introverts" which means not telling anyone and not even admitting to it until I was a year in. Interacting with others and group discussions is just not my thing (and a way to ensure my non-participation), but I realize that it is critically important for some.