

unwilling to gm

To be willing to GM, you have to have the following things:

- **The Bug.** This is the single most important element. Many excellent players have no impulse to create scenarios or a game world. Even getting some players to write a detailed background for their characters is a chore.
- **The Time.** In college, this was always the showstopper—people wanted to play but did not feel they had the time to do the level of preparation required for GMing.
- **Comfort with the Rules.** Often, the best approach for a new GM is to use a game system that is new to everyone. This also helps with the next requirement.
- **Comfort with the Players.** Many neophyte GMs are intimidated at the thought of running a game for experienced players. Some players take advantage of inexperienced GMs rather than helping the GM make an enjoyable campaign for everybody.
- **The Guts.** This is inversely proportional to the comfort level. A would-be GM needs to have the self-confidence to tackle a campaign, risk failure, and to take criticism.

comments

#323

To Paul and Michael (and others who probably noticed but have yet to comment), who pointed out my incorrect usage of “Sir,” all I can say in my defense is that I am an ignorant American.¹ Now I know better.

viktor haag

Can Secrets reveal information not known by anyone? If not, then I would have disallowed his revelations in the combat with Sebathiel. In any case, the adventure should have ended on the first session if Secrets was used efficiently (and not just in combat).

joshua kronengold

D&D3's Rogues have too many thief-centric abilities (sneak attacks, finding traps, etc.) to make it a true “everything else” class. As written, it is clearly a thief-derivative.

spike y jones

RAE Dizwosina, except for the unnecessary first paragraph. It occurs to me that they are really just ghosts with a focus (for lack of a better word). I would like to see a more generic treatment of undead, especially spirits, that did not classify them into individual monster-types. I think of them more as characters with a background and personality than as “monsters”

brian rogers

This is how you set the points for commoners and other NPCs: write down the skills and abilities they have and then figure out how many points that is. :)

matt stevens

I like to go back and think about the roleplaying I did as a kid before I discovered D&D in the 6th grade. Those games of make-believe were unstructured, LARP-like affairs without a GM and without anyone trying to “tell a story.”

The GM evolves² out of two requirements: someone to make decisions when players disagree and, most importantly, someone to play the roles of secondary characters, including the setting. In creating adventures, the GM provides a scenario, but not a preset path. A scenario is simply a starting place and once the game starts, the players and GM play their characters until there is a good stopping point. This is the essence of a roleplaying session. It was this essence that first sparked my interest in Dogmatism 1.0. However, 2.0 seems to have lost its way by taking immersion to absurd levels.

Back when the concept of the GM was created and through the first decade plus of the roleplaying hobby, there were no “auteur assumptions” implicit in the role. This came later, I feel, when GMs wanted to become storytellers and directors. To the auteur director/GM, actors/players are simply tools to be manipulated in creating the artistic vision/story.

The classic adversarial DM of the dungeon crawl is not an auteur. Nor is the by-the-rules, let the dice fall where they may GM. Yet these were the types that dominated when this hobby was young. The auteur GM evolved once GMs started making decisions based on what would tell a better story instead of rules and dice. In its worst form, the auteur has already created the story and the players are just along for the ride.

¹ Though some would say that is redundant. :)

² Here I am using revisionist history rather than how GMs really evolved out of wargames.

In those childhood games of yesteryear, we often used crude props. When we turned that box into a spaceship, we drew on the controls so that when you turned on the shields, you flicked the shield switch. You said GMs should provide no visual displays unless of “reasonably high quality;” my experience indicates that props can help roleplaying, but realism is not necessarily a requirement. The goal is to spark the imagination, not replace it.

Yes, for the most accurate and deep character immersion, we should all play ourselves in the same activities we do every day. Whether or not character immersion is central to roleplaying, the characters must still have something interesting to do. The easiest way to achieve this is to have characters and adventures that are decidedly not mundane. As a kid, I remember playing “house” and “store.” These were interesting, extraordinary things for a six year-old to do, but not for someone in his thirties. Also, playing characters far removed from our everyday experience or simply playing an avatar of ourselves in a new and unusual situation often makes the roleplaying more challenging and involving.

LARPs are great from immersion, but practicality limits the types of scenarios available to a LARP. If the venue requires stretching the imagination behind a certain point, I would rather just play as a tabletop game. Sometimes the physicality of LARPS helps [the kitchen is a secret laboratory], but sometimes it does no good at all [this corner of the room is a secret laboratory] or even hurts immersion [this patch of grass is a secret laboratory]. Adding some LARP-like elements (props, physical mannerisms, etc.) to a tabletop game can improve the game without turning it into a LARP.

What I like with good, unscripted LARPS is the GM sets the scene and lets the players loose and only steps in to answer questions, play minor characters, and inject non-character-driven events as time passes. Again, this is the essence of roleplaying. The props, costuming, and physical nature of the LARP are less important than game structure.

daphne and bertwald

This is a summary of what happened during the face-to-face session at GenCon 2001.

Our heroes wander the city of Olden for a bit before finding banners advertising a magic show for The Great Germain later that day. Germain is a magician who travels with his assistant and performs live magic shows of sleight-of-hand and stage magic. He is also skilled in the arcane arts, but leaves it out of his performances, for the most part. The role of traveling performer is an ideal cover as an agent of Duke Cedric.

As the crowds gathered and final preparations for the show were underway, Bertwald notices that unsavory types are being excluded from the audience. There would be no cutting of purses during this performance. During the show, Daphne and Bertwald are volunteered to assist in a trick.

When they step on stage, Germain asks them to introduce themselves. Daphne goes first and then Bertwald introduces himself as “Dickwad” to the delight of the crowd. Germain asks from them a personal item, but Daphne misses the subtle clue and Germain is forced to whisper, “the message you are delivering,” in her ear. With the scroll in hand, Germain causes it to burst into flame and disappear. Once the applause dies down, he recreates it and hands it back to Daphne. He then sends our heroes off the stage and continues with the show.

Of course, the scroll they received was not the same one they brought. This new one included instructions to meet Duke Cedric later that night. The instructions lead them to a blind alley with a single, non-descript door. They knocked and were lead into a poorly lit, but very elegant and stately mansion.

The city of Olden has no castle. Cedric’s residence is a mansion hidden within the city, tucked away behind and between shops and warehouses of a particular city block. Only by taking a detailed survey of the buildings would someone discover the secret. Cedric is in the process of fortifying the city, but these things take time. In the meantime, he prefers to maintain a secretive profile as the “Shadow Duke.”

They meet Duke Cedric who thanked them for delivering the letter. In the letter, his cousin Duke Leopold recommended Daphne and Bertwald for service in Cedric’s domain.³ When told of Bert’s condition, Cedric insists that they take the appropriate actions and to return to him when they were done.

After leaving Olden, they return to Erdin’s home. He is relieved to see that Bert’s condition has improved. During their discussion, the heroes learn that the bridge troll had not always been there, as Erdin does not recall it from his youth. In fact, he remembers a small cave up river from the bridge that he used to visit as a child.

After they leave the village and head back the scene of the crime, they are ambushed by spear-wielding goblins. Both are injured—Daphne in the calf and Bertwald on the “fleshy part of the thigh.” While they were finally able to defeat the goblins, Bert’s horse takes a mortal wound.

³ Actually, the letter said that about Daphne. It said something completely different about Bertwald, but this has yet to be revealed in the campaign.