



No More Damsels

BECOME THE GAME MASTER

24.11.2019 | 1-5 PM

Schedule for the day

13:00 - 14:30: GM Skills: Basic Game Development and Table Management
Run by Naomi Clarke, No More Damsels

14:30 - 15:00: Break

15:00 - 16:00: Theatre Skills for Game Masters
Run by Chloe Mashiter and Chris Hislop, Adventurers Wanted

16:00 - 17:00: Making an Immersive Game World
Run by Janet Forbes, World Anvil

GM Skills: Basic Game Development and Table Management

Naomi Clarke, No More Damsels

Game Pacing

As a GM, we want to construct a cinematic plot. A continuing campaign would be a box set and a one shot would be a film. Like a director in a film, we have to ensure we set the right pacing for the game to be fun for players. If a scene drags on for too long, players will lose interest and get bored. If a scene is too rushed, players will miss out on opportunities to develop their characters contribute to the story.

To help control the pacing of the game, we can write it as scenes. For a 2.5 - 3 hour game, aim to have written six different scenes

- Setting
 - This is your introduction scene, showing who the players are and their relationship to each other. You are giving your players a sense of the genre and where the story is taking place.
- Problem
 - We introduce the problem or mystery that the players will spend the session solving.
- Investigation
 - The player characters have an opportunity to find out more about the problem. They can talk to non-player characters, find lore, or discover clues. This is also a good place for interpersonal scenes.
- Complication
 - The problem gets worse. It is no more complicated and harder to resolve. You might complicate things by introducing a puzzle to solve, minions to fight, or by introducing difficult consequences to the player's actions.
- Resolution
 - The conclusion of the problem. The players may face and kill the dragon, or they may realize that the apocalypse is coming and they can't stop it. A resolution doesn't have to be a win; an epic character death can be equally as fun!
- Epilogue
 - "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time." (TS Eliot, *The Little Gidding*).
 - We see the aftermath of the adventure including how the world and the characters have changed.



Exercise

In teams, write a game using the six scene format.

Setting

Problem

Investigation

Complication

Resolution

Epilogue

Game Pacing, Part 2

You've planned out each scene, but things aren't quite going to plan. Scenes are dragging out and your players are looking bored. What do you do now?

Fast Forward or Cut a Scene

If the scene is no longer adding to the story, you can fast forward or cut a scene completely. It's ok to move a scene along if your player's aren't enjoying it. A good scene to fast forward might be restocking supplies or traveling from one location to another.

Use a Montage

Rather than stretching out a scene, you can make it a series of actions the players can take turns in overcoming. For example, to get to the resolution, the players have to break into a heavily guarded castle. You can decide to montage the break in by doing a series of skill checks. One player can roll to create disguises for the party, another to distract the guards, etc. until they have all contributed to breaking into the castle.

Use a timer

If players are arguing about what to do next, you can put out an hourglass or set a time. It will help hurry up indecisive players and create a sense of impending doom. Alternatively, if you have a GM screen, you can roll some dice. The players will assume you are up to no good and act more decisively.

Yes and

Once you have the pacing down, the next thing to think about is getting the players involved in adding to the story. One method is “yes and:” you agree to a player’s suggestion and then build on it. It is an alternative to saying no to player suggestions and can help them push their creativity further.

For example, your players have just boarded a spaceship. You ask one of the players “what do you see when the ship doors open?” They reply: “I see... the Zorgons!” Your reply can be “yes, and they are heavily armed!”



Exercise

Each member of your group takes a turn to make a “yes and” statement about the following prompt:

“Once upon a time, there was a witch”

After everyone has made a “yes and” statement, pick your favorite from the table. At the end of the exercise, we’ll ask you to share your favorite statements with the rest of the room.

No but

“No but” is the sister of “yes and.” We can still respect the choices of players but keep the logic of the game sound. For example, your players walk into a room, and one says “hey look, its Naomi Clarke’s mom!” You can respond with “No, but it is the rogues' mom and she’s just found out they’re doing crime!”

It is more fun for players to try and fail than to not try at all. “Yes and” and “No but” allows for constructive interaction between the GMs and the players. Players can contribute to the story and you can retain narrative control. Rather than shutting down players with a flat no, we can be flexible with the game setting and encourage positive game play.

Table Management

Table management is about encouraging teamwork between your players. You want to make sure they act like an ensemble cast rather than supporting characters for the most confident player. You want to tone down the loudest player and lift up the ones hiding in the shadows. But more importantly, you want to do this kindly rather than making individuals feel bad.

There are five types of players you will find in a game

- Drama Queen
 - Great at role playing, but can take up too much of the spotlight
- Rules Lawyers
 - Very invested in the setting and the system, but can put rules over the story progression
- Murder Hobo
 - Really good an inventive and effective methods of combat, but can struggle with alternative roleplay options
- New and Shy
 - Very keen to play, but can be a bit scared and uncertain of what to do
- Over-Competitive Paladin
 - Versatile player who can help move the story along, but can take over the space of other characters



Exercise

Each group is going to be assigned a player type. Discuss what you think would be good methods of managing the players. After the exercises, we will discuss it as a group. You can use the space below to note down anything you think would be helpful.

Drama Queen

Rules Lawyer

Murder Hobo

New and Shy

Over-competitive Paladin

Safety Tools

While rare, occasionally you may come across a player who is introducing elements into a game that makes one of your player's upset. Or, the game that you've written touches on something that a player is experiencing in their everyday life, therefore upsetting them and removing an element of fun.

Tools like the X Card allows everyone at the player to say "I am not comfortable with this" in a non-aggressive or confrontational way. Once someone uses the X card, you move on from a scene or you tone down the descriptions. It's mostly used for situations like:

- Overly detailed descriptions of gore
- Inappropriate jokes or innuendos that go to far
- Phobia, such as overly detailed descriptions of spiders
- Sensitive topics introduced to games such as suicide, death of children or babies, racial discrimination, and sexual assault
- People using overly sexual or racist language to talk to player characters, non-player characters, or other players

Ultimately, a player's enjoyment is more important than the game itself. Often times, you will not know the tragedies or difficulties that your players experience in your day to day life. If some of your players decide to kill an evil changeling baby, they will not know if someone around the table has recently experienced a miscarriage. And rather than forcing someone to divulge a painful element of their life, an X card will force game play along.

Positive Game Experiences

When running games, keep in mind that the players enjoyment is often unrelated to the amount of prep you do. If you manage the pacing and encourage them to contribute, you've done a lot to ensure the players will have a good time.

When ending a session, ask your players for feedback. Start with positive feedback: "What did we like in the session?" And, if you are feeling confident enough, ask your players "What could we have done differently?"

Most important of all - have fun.

Theatre Skills for GMs

Chloe Mashiter and Chris Hislop, Adventurers Wanted

Using Voice for Performance in RPGS

- Small vocal changes can make a huge difference to how NPCs are presented in RPGs.
- As well as offering variety, voices increase engagement and roleplay, encouraging players to respond “in character” and making even the most mundane encounter a roleplay opportunity.

The Matt Mercer Effect

- Players often now expect NPCs to be performed like Matt Mercer – detailed accents and excellent vocal performance,
- This is not a negative – and making it an “issue” or “problem” turns it into a point of contention, where we should be celebrating what an example like Matt offers to DMs.

Voice Acting Basics

- It doesn't take a lot to make a huge difference! Small changes often have the greatest impact.
- There are no rules! You're not trying to make a world where accents “make sense” or need to be recognised as “good”.
- Do what you do best! Finding a couple of things that you can do to create your style is better than trying to emulate someone.

Different Ways of Adapting Your Voice

- Imitate a celebrity.
- Imitate a regional accent.
- Find your timbre and adapt it.
- Find your rhythm and adapt it.
- Some basic biology.

Using Representation in Performance in RPGs

- The world you are creating is an opportunity to showcase the world that you want to present to your players – which may not represent the world we live in.
- RPGs have a potted history with trying to showcase “historical accuracy” or “the world we live in” - we are not bound by this.

Race, Sex, Gender, Class and Sexuality

- These topics are common areas of contention – points where the world we live in falls short in terms of representation and acceptance.

- The world you present is something you live in, your players live in, and people who watch what you are doing see and hear about. You need to consider areas of contention in relation to everyone you play with.
- You are everything in your world that your players are not – so how do you play people that you would struggle to represent?

Methods of Discussion/Course Correction

- These are difficult topics to discuss, and even with the best of intentions it's entirely possible to miss the mark.
- Open Discussions/Session 0s
- Consent in RPGs
- Mediation and Course Correction

Physical techniques

Creating or developing character through physicality

Magic Circle

Imagine a circle that sits directly in front of your face that you can draw in the air with your nose by moving forwards/up/down/backwards. Pick a point on the circle for your nose to stop, and you have an instant distinctive character physicality.

Habits

Repeated and habitual physical actions will often give an impression of a character. This can be used to add to a character's personality, or be a starting point to help guide how you role-play them. For instance:

- Constantly nodding (insincere or try-hard)
- Fiddling with piercings, jewelry, glasses, earlobes (nervous or absent-minded)
- Constantly changing focus/moving eyes around (paranoid, distracted or disinterested)
- Drumming fingers (impatient, expectant)

Experiment with picking random physical actions and seeing how they make you feel and what impression they give.

Tension and frequency

You can give a strong sense of character by picking a body part where a character holds their tension, and choosing their 'frequency' of movement.

A character who holds their tension in their eyes might be constantly squinting; in their forehead, might be constantly frowning and nursing a headache; in their shoulders, might be hunched over and small; in

their jaw, might be constantly grinding their teeth. Try out holding tension in different places (and unexpected ones - what does it feel like in the knees?) and what kind of character and attitude it creates.

'Frequency' of movement is how often someone moves - someone with a high frequency of movement will almost constantly be fidgeting, shifting, clicking fingers. They have a lot of physical energy and have to expend it somehow, through lots of small movements. Someone with a low frequency of movement will have low energy and conserve it by moving little and slowly. Experiment with different frequencies of movement and the kind of character and attitude it creates. Then combine this with different tensions too!

Motivation

Creating or developing character through their aims

General motivations

A bartender who's trying to get good tips will act very differently to one who's desperate to close up early and get home as soon as possible. Giving your characters motivations that are wider than their interaction with the player characters will easily help make them seem more three-dimensional. For instance:

- A healer who wants to win just one argument, no matter how petty (having recently been made to feel stupid)
- A criminal contact who wants you to ask about their new engagement ring (without having to bring it up first)
- A salesperson who needs to upsell or they might get fired
- A mage who wants to keep this meeting going until the next person they're seeing arrives (they don't want to awkwardly wait around here on their own in-between meetings)

To-do lists

For more concrete ways to role-play a character's motivation, you can write to-do lists. These are specific actions someone might take to achieve a certain aim. Firstly, think of a character's motivation (this can be their usual aim in interactions with anyone they meet, or their specific aim in their interaction with the player characters). Then think of specific ways you might try to achieve that effect. Some short sample lists:

Make someone feel small

- Consistently forget their name or call them by the wrong one
- Occupy yourself with other activities whilst they are talking

- Question their experience, knowledge or skill
- Deliberately reference people, places or things they don't know, and act surprised when they admit this
- Resort to talking slowly and plainly to them
- Compare them to unintelligent animals or children

Give everyone a good time

- Compliment them
- Provide them with home comforts like food and drink
- Express interest in what they have to say
- Ask about their needs and try to cater to them
- Laugh at their jokes
- Learn their names and refer to them by name

Be thought really intelligent

- Use words with a lot of syllables
- Make references to great thinkers, writers and academics
- Ask if others need you to simply what you're saying
- Use foreign phrases / demonstrate knowledge of multiple languages
- Analyze everything others say and do
- Speak in complex sentences



Exercises

- Occupation and trait
 - Pick an occupation, and an unrelated trait (most simply, something that a character likes or dislikes) for an NPC. Then describe an item that the character owns that combines those two things. For instance: a bartender who loves foxes, who always serves their best drinks in tankards engraved with images of foxes. Alternatively: a healer who hates noise, who has inadvertently invented the first in-world stethoscope that they wear almost constantly.
- Decompression exercises (possible techniques to help with character bleed)
 - Statements
 - Following the game, list off factual statements about yourself and your surroundings that place you back in the real world. State things true of yourself and your surroundings that are not true of your character and their most recent

surroundings. ('I am in London' / 'my name is...' / 'I can hear cars outside' / 'I am wearing green nail varnish')

- You can do this individually, or as a group, each listing off one thing in turn. You can keep doing this for a set amount of time, or list off a set number of facts - adjust to how much time and processing you need to help step back from your gaming headspace.
- Music
 - Choose a song or make a short playlist to listen to after games. Make a habit of listening to it after playing, to make it a familiar marker of a game ending and coming out of character. The music offers a period of time to focus on coming out of your gaming headspace, and changing your mood if needed.

Making an Immersive Game World

Janet Forbes, World Anvil

Worldbuilding BEFORE the Game

The Big Five questions

Motivation: Why are you playing? Why are you worldbuilding?

Genre & Subgenre: Scifi, Fantasy or Historical? Military scifi,

Scale: How long is your campaign? How big is your campaign scale/scope?

Mood/Tone: Grim-dark, Noble-Bright? What flavour?

Conflict: World Conflict & Campaign Conflict Formula

SOMEONE wants **SOMETHING** by **TIME** using **METHOD** but is unable to get it
BECAUSE

Worldbuilding DURING the Game

How do we create a full world experience for players?

- Avoid worldbuilders disease
- Sketch big, develop small
- Use unreliable narrators
- The Personal Touch, session 0 for collaborative worldbuilding
 - Where are they from?
 - Education and formative years? [double down on class & background]
 - Create three NPCs - name, description and role in their life
 - (For older characters, where have they been?)

How do we create good motivated adversaries/foils for our players?

- **SOMEONE** wants **SOMETHING** by **TIME** using **METHOD** but is unable to get it
BECAUSE
- **MOTIVATION**: Antagonists have feelings too!

How do you create epic storylines?

Plan your climax

Play to the edge of the field

Create consequences (sometimes related to scope)

Keeping things going

Keep track of everything you can (World Anvil is nice!)

Make your players help

About No More Damsels

NMD is an organization focused on advocating for gender diversity in the RPG community. It is currently run by Naomi Clarke, Sarah Pipkin, and Alex Pipkin. For more information about NMD, please visit: <https://www.nomoredamselsrpg.org/>

About Adventurers Wanted

Adventurers Wanted take tabletop roleplaying games and adapt them for live performances. The shows are made for both a gaming and theatre audiences. And they want to make them as accessible as possible, in all senses of the word 'access.' You can find out more about Adventurers Wanted at: <http://www.adventurerswanted.co.uk/home>

About World Anvil

World Anvil is the ultimate RPG Campaign Manager and Homebrew world building toolset. With it you can build our world, showcase it in all its glory, keep your notes and ideas safe and secure, collaborate with others, manage your sessions, and meet other GMs! You can find out more about World Anvil at <https://www.worldanvil.com/>.