

Game Masters

This section of the book is for the player taking the role of the Game Master or GM. It describes the tasks a GM takes on and the privileges of doing so.

This section contains information about the game world that only the GM should have access to. Players should not refer to the stats, figures or story elements given in this part of the book.

Basics

For a player that has never been a GM before, the tasks that a GM takes on may seem scary. It is true that a GM will often put more thought and possibly more effort into each game but many players actually prefer to play as a GM.

Is It Fun Being GM?

In many games, the GM gets to do more than any other player. This can be fun and exciting but a GM has the most challenging job of any player. Some players fear this extra effort but nearly any GM that's had a successful game will come back for more because the experience is highly rewarding.

A GM is given unlimited resources to set the stage for a story. Any toy the GM would like to play with is available to them to use in their games. Although there are no restrictions on what a GM *can* do there are limits on what a GM *will* do and it centers around the other players having fun.

The greatest reward a GM can get from a game is to have their players have a great time and impatient for the next game. Because of this a GM's fun is directly linked to making it possible for the players to get what they want while making it difficult getting it. This is a balancing act, best kept simple at first and grows more rewarding as you learn the art.

What Does a GM Do?

On the surface a GM appears to be the player's enemy but that isn't true. A GM takes on the role of the world around the PCs. They take on the role of every person, every rock and every gust of wind. If the world was the player's enemy they could not survive a single game.

A GM's job is to place rewards in front of the players and give each reward costs for reaching for it. If the reward is too great or the costs are too great, the players will lose interest. If the cost or reward is not of the right type, the players may also lose interest.

Rewards do not have to be money, they can be experience, knowledge, friends or anything that the players find motivating.

Costs don't need to come in the form of damage taken. They can be any number of things, like proving one's worth with skill challenges, spending resources or losing the support of allies.

A GM knows their role has been fulfilled when they are able to exact the cost that they had set, the PCs were also able to get the reward and the players are happy with the results.

Making the cost and reward interesting and compelling is often a matter of making the process of reaching out for them interesting. There are a number of tools to do this already built into the game.

Tools

The tools a GM has, helps them to deliver rewards and their costs. These tools can all be used to deliver rewards or exact the cost of achieving a reward.

Story

This is the narrative that the game forms. The GM must not try to control the story, only to influence it so that the PCs must pay costs to get the rewards they want.

Control of the story is primarily the player's right. Each player controls the choices of their character. The GM can try to influence the player's choices by making some paths the the reward more costly than others but should never try to completely eliminate an option from play by making it so costly the players cannot realistically use it.

Story can be used as a reward by making a PC the focus of part of the game. An individual PC's strengths or personal story comes into center attention. This has to be balanced because if a single PC gets the focus for too long, the other PC's involvement will suffer. Each player should get a chance to be the focus of the game for a short period time and their actions to make a real difference in the story. Juggling the focus of the story can be difficult to master for a starting GM so it may be preferable to simply allow different players to take the focus for short periods of time and then turn your attention to players that

haven't had as much involvement after a few rounds.

Story costs can refer to losing ground on certain player goals. For example, if the characters are tracking someone down and have almost caught them, the GM may offer another reward that will temporarily put the characters off the trail for a while. That would be a story cost.

NPCs

NPCs or Non-Player Characters are anyone the player characters (PCs) encounter. Any allies they make, any enemies, any merchants they do business with are all NPCs. The GM plays all their roles. This will include the character's commanding officer.

NPCs can be a reward when characters make friends and allies. They may even be given the opportunity to earn the respect of an enemy, making them less hostile.

NPCs are often part of a cost when they oppose the PCs. This may even include NPCs that are supposed to be allies but that look at the PCs as competition.

Use of the NPC tool can greatly impact the players involvement in the story if used incorrectly. The GM must keep NPCs that are on the players side in the background. The players may call on their help from time to time but they should get out of the way as soon as possible. If an NPC is a reoccurring character, anything significant they do should happen in the background while the PCs are given opportunity to shine.

Rules

Rules often act as the delivery system for rewards and costs. They define what characters can and can't do.

The simplest way a rule acts as a reward or a cost is when an Advantage or an Impairment is applied to actions.

Some players will place great importance on the rules while others will be happy to let the GM handle them. Players that focus on the rules tend to play in a tactical manner and if the player and the GM's understanding of the rules differ it could lead to spoiling a player's planning effort. On occasion, even if a player's reading of the rule they are trying to employ to their advantage is wrong, the GM may want to reward the effort the player put into a plan.

Resources

Things like money, Hit Points, food, fuel, equipment and so on are all resources. They are usually of a limited quantity and when they are used up the player's abilities are greatly effected.

Getting more of a resource is an obvious reward while running out of a resource is one of the most common costs a GM uses.

Resources need to be balanced carefully. Giving PCs too much of a resource can make a game less challenging and reduce excitement in play and when the players get more resources. Limiting players resources can give a strong feeling of scarcity but this only works if scarcity makes sense.

Game Master Principles

These are guiding concepts that GMs work to develop in their games. Running a game can be complicated and sometimes a GM tries to make things work but makes poor decisions when doing so. Keeping these principles in mind will prevent the worst of these problems.

Fairness

The first thing a GM should try to be is fair. Giving each player the same opportunity to play effectively, applying the rules consistently and admitting when they've made a mistake are all ways of being fair.

Giving each player regular opportunity to play can sometimes be a challenge, especially when the action has been split in two locations or kinds of tasks. Some players are very energetic, making focusing on them easy while quieter players may not seem like they're ready to take action. Learning to check with quieter players periodically and encouraging them to participate is one way to make sure no one is left out.

Being consistent in use of the rules is vital to the players trusting the GM and feeling they can gauge their own abilities. The challenge to being consistent often comes into play when a GM misjudges the difficulty of a situation and tries to correct by altering stats mid stream.

When a GM has made a mistake, to be fair to the players, it's important to acknowledge it and correct the error. This falls under fairness because when facts and stats are incorrect they can put the players at a unfair disadvantage.

Challenge

GMs generate excitement when they put the players in a position where they are challenged to reach the rewards that have been set out for them or they have made for themselves.

At first it may be enough to challenge the player characters with straightforward tasks, like defeating a pack of Chezbah Hounds. As the players are better able to gauge their character's ability, they may learn exactly how many Chezbah Hounds they can defeat. Once the mystery is gone, the challenge is gone. A GM must look for new ways to make the obstacles they put in front of the characters interesting and not easily predicted.

Direction, Not Rails

When preparing for a game, the GM will offer rewards for the PCs. If the players are forced to take the reward, they lose some of their control of their character. If there is only one path the players can take in a game this is called railroading.

Players have different thresholds for how many choices they want their characters to have. Some will take up a challenge simply because experiencing it is a reward in itself that they enjoy. Other players feel their ability to effect the game is threatened when their options are reduced in any way. The majority of players feel that a GM is justified in directing where the story will go as long as their choices matter in the story and make a difference.

Starting players will often want some direction on what they are expected to do. The more they play, the more comfortable they will become with making choices for themselves. So a GM will start a new player by only offering a few options where it really matters. As the players progress they will want more open ended games.

The Social Contract

When starting up a game the players have certain expectations such as the tone and feel of the game. The GM should briefly discuss how the players want the game to be run. Important aspects like how likely is it that a PC can die in each game is can come as a shock to the players if they have different expectations than the GM. The contract may also include how the players are expected to behave to improve the play experience for all, how long a campaign will run and if any rules or supplements are not allowed. The contract is a tool to avoid problems where different players have different expectations. This can include anything that the players feel has to be cleared up before a game.

The Social Contract can be written or spoken dependent on how familiar the group is with each other. If the contract is missing something important, it should be discussed and amended.

A new contract may be made if the players are looking for a different experience. for instance, they may have enjoyed a gritty and grim survival game for a campaign but now want to play a lighter hearted heroic campaign. When the feel or direction of a game is changing, the social contract should reflect the change.

Character Skill vs. Player Skill

A GM has to decide to what extent they want a player's abilities to control what the characters can do. For example, a player may be a good strategist but their character has an IQ of 10. Who is coming up with the strategies at this point? There are many social and intellectual skills where the player's abilities may not match what the character is supposed to be able to do.