

# GM's Playbook

This playbook is a bit different. I'm a GM, you're a GM. It's chill here. We both know your experience of an RPG is not the same as your players—before, during, or after your sessions. You're not bitter, cause you love it, but let's be real.

I assume you're willing to read a bit more than the players. I'm going to give you advice like commandments and expect you to ignore me when it's cooler to do so. I expect you know what's cool—at least what you and your players will think is cool.

This game is intentionally terse and dense, packing a lot into a few pages. As a result, I've made a lot of compromises in terms of omitting philosophy, definitions, and background information. There's so much general RPG information available online that's applicable to every system, I don't see the need to repeat it.

If this is your first time with an RPG claiming to be fiction first, watch some people on YouTube play *Blades in the Dark* or *Scum and Villany*—or maybe this game someday. It's a lot closer to telling a campfire story than it is to tactical simulation.

Don't get out the minis. This game isn't about minutiae.

**Love the PCs** - You've gotta love the PCs. You've gotta be their biggest fan in the whole world. You've gotta be curious about them. This is a matter of attitude, and it's *your* responsibility; this isn't about your players making cool enough characters.

**We're mediators and facilitators, not auteurs** - If you want to have an epic quest line plotted on a 3-act structure with predetermined encounters and maybe branching results, you're better at plot than I am, and I encourage you to write a book.

Our role as a GM in this game isn't to carry the PCs through a plot. Our job is to provide problems to solve, NPCs and scenery, suspense, and consequences for failure. Otherwise the PCs should be writing as much of the story as you can get them to. The more of the story you've got them writing, the more epic your contributions feel when you do come in with something you've been working on.

**Plan to improv** - Instead of spending your prep time plotting out intricate storylines and nuanced recurring villains that your players often ignore, just write down cool ideas you have in a notebook. One of these could be an NPC concept, a neat item, an idea for an adventure hook, or a location. Just put down a few key details that distinguishes this corner bar from that corner bar, and move on to the next idea.

Then when your players decide to go off to wherever on their own agendas, you can deftly slip in these fragmentary ideas like you've got a whole world meticulously prepared. They won't even notice you've only got 8 words written down about Tobias Trim because you've got them doing all the storytelling and inventing fiction anyway, right?

**Just give them the problem** - Don't bother trying to balance story problems so that they're "solvable". First off, not everybody can fix every problem. But more importantly, PCs in this typically game have larger than life powers in-world, and players have ridiculous amounts of narrative control. They typically can find a solution to most problems—often awesome and shocking solutions you'd never predict.

Failure's also always an option. Since you don't have any plot planned, you don't need the PCs to overcome that challenge just to keep the plot on track. You can always just let them take the loss and try something else.

**Name (almost) everybody and everything** - Go online and get a name generator and just make a huge list of names. Print it out, bring it to the table, and whenever the PCs interact with an individual NPC, give that NPC a name from the list. You don't have to be dogmatic about this—sometimes the bouncer's just "the bouncer"—but I find it adds a lot for nearly everybody to have a name.

Oh, and just tell the players. Part of the point is to make the players see the NPCs as people, which doesn't work if you hide the name. If an NPC's identity is secret, give them an alias.

**Read a PC playbook** - Read one of the PC playbooks. It defines a bunch of this game's terminology, and I'm not going to repeat myself. It

also gives you an idea of the sorts of things your players will be asking you to mediate.

**The symbols are different here** - In the rest of the playbooks, the symbols  $\triangle$ ,  $\circ$ , and  $\bullet$  have one meaning. In this playbook they have another.

Make moves with a  $\bullet$  whenever you think it'd be cool, or whenever another move suggests it.

Moves with a  $\circ$  are called co-moves. They have the same name as a move in a PC's playbook. When a player makes a move, play the appropriate co-move (if there is one).

Moves with  $\triangle$  are optional moves. You should decide before you start playing a new series whether or not you want to use the move, as these typically have big impacts on the story. If you decide you're going to use one of the optional moves, fill the  $\triangle$  so that you remember your choice and stay consistent.

# Template Playbook