

THE PUBLIC IS MORE FAMILIAR WITH BAD DESIGN THAN GOOD DESIGN. IT IS, IN EFFECT, CONDITIONED TO PREFER BAD DESIGN, BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT IT LIVES WITH. THE NEW BECOMES THREATENING, THE OLD REASSURING.

PAUL RAND

ACKNOWLEDGE UP FRONT THAT THE PCS ARE GOING TO WIN, AND NEVER SWEAT IT. THEN USE THE DICE TO ESCALATE, ESCALATE, ESCALATE. WE ALL KNOW THE PCS ARE GOING TO WIN. WHAT WILL IT COST THEM?

LUMPLEY

A DESIGNER KNOWS THAT HE HAS ACHIEVED PERFECTION NOT WHEN THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO ADD, BUT WHEN THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO TAKE AWAY.

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

DIVANDRA AND I HAVE NOW RETURNED TO FULL HEALTH, AND IT IS TIME TO GO ON: HACKING AND SLASHING, LOOTING AND ROBBING, OPENING EVERY BOX AND BARREL IN THE HOPE THAT WE MAY UNEARTH A CLUE AS TO WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT. GOD SEND THAT IT IS NOT A VAIN HOPE.

ERNEST ADAMS

CROMLYN GAMES

ESCAPE THE DUNGEON

PUBLISHER OF THIS BOOK

Copyright © 2017 Cromlyn Games

PUBLISHED BY PUBLISHER OF THIS BOOK

TUFTE-LATEX.GITHUB.IO/TUFTE-LATEX/

Licensed under the Apache License, Version 2.0 (the “License”); you may not use this file except in compliance with the License. You may obtain a copy of the License at <http://www.apache.org/licenses/LICENSE-2.0>. Unless required by applicable law or agreed to in writing, software distributed under the License is distributed on an “AS IS” BASIS, WITHOUT WARRANTIES OR CONDITIONS OF ANY KIND, either express or implied. See the License for the specific language governing permissions and limitations under the License.

First printing, April 2017

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

*Dedicated to those who appreciate \LaTeX
and the work of Edward R. Tufte and Donald E. Knuth.
And to the horde of goblins who died
defending them.*

Introduction

In this game you are in a typical fantasy dungeon. The overlord is dead ¹. You were one of his underlings. You were a monster. You still are, but for the first time in a long time, you're able to ask "Why?" So can all the other underlings. WHAT DO YOU DO?

¹ citation needed

We're going to start with the base outline of what the GM should be doing, then the core of what the player needs to know, then some playbooks of different underlings and then all the stuff the GM needs to show you an awesome time.

GM Agenda and Principles

THE GAME MASTER or GM is the referee. Master of Ceremonies in Apocalypse World, Dungeon Master in old-school hack and slash grid crawlers, they provide the stage, the setting, most of the background characters and the physics engine. They are here to make the game fun for you. If they're not doing that, either they're not running the game right, I've written it wrong, or you should both try a different game that suits what you are seeking.²

² this is a serious point really, it's worth taking the time at the start to discuss palette and previous games or stories you've enjoyed. This will be discussed more in the GM section

Agenda

- Agenda
 - Play to find out what happens
 - Make the players' character's lives not boring
 - Subvert that which is taken from granted

The Agenda is the key thing. If you, as GM, are in doubt what to do, choose the thing that follows the agenda. It's not a bad guide for players either.

Principles

- Principles
 - don't waste your players' time
 - the dungeon pressures to conform
 - take tropes to their logical, nonsensical extreme
 - sprinkle details of everyday fantasy everywhere
 - make the dungeon seem fantastically real
 - name everyone, make everyone rational within their role
 - build a bigger dungeon through play, not plot

- create interesting dilemmas not interesting traps
- address yourself to the characters not players
- make your move, but never speak its name
- ask loaded questions and build on the answers
- sometimes, reflect a question back upon the players

The Principles are what the GM should be doing if they have their mouth open. If she's chewing pizza instead, call her out on it. Exactly how they translate to the fiction will vary on the tone of the game. These rules are supposed to support a game with a strong undercurrent of pathos with the silliness. The situation is ridiculous, because a lot of fantasy is ridiculous, but a lot of the player characters should be sympathetic or relatable as they struggle in this crazy situation.³ Fundamentally, they are outside of the mainstream surface society and trying to retain a sense of identity when it'd be much easier to slide into institutionalisation. The Dungeon only wants to help, to protect them from the weird outside world where there's no roof and much less glowy rocks. The GM represents the dungeon.

³ A bit like most sitcoms

Player's core

You play as an underling, someone or something recently awoken from your role in the broader dungeon. The dungeon ain't to happy about that, by the way. You'll have a playbook with some moves unique to you, some stats to help define how good you are at different things, and probably some other stuff like a tribe or some mates or a hoard or a soul-sucking artifact of glowy evilness. You also have access to the basic moves. Everyone has them, and they should be pretty useful.

There are six main stats in this game.

- **WIZARD** - how good you are brainpower, thinking or arcane magic stuff
- **THIEF** - how good you are with cunning and delicate or precise skill
- **FIGHTER** - how good you are with violence or raw strength
- **BARD** - how good you are with charm and social connections
- **IDENTITY** - how good you are at remembering who you actually are beneath the stereotypes.

They'll get set in your playbook. Different underlings have different stats. They may change over play too. Identity certainly will. Unless the move specifically says so, none of those five stats can go above +3 (or below -2, if you are a masochist). A move that uses a stat will state something like **ROLL + STAT NAME**. That means roll two normal six-sided dice and add the total to your stat. If you have **WIZARD** of -1, and you roll a 2 and a 5 the total is 6. Most rules use the format of get below 6 total and you've messed up, get 7-9 and you succeed, but at a cost. Rolling 10+ is a success, sometimes with a bonus. Try to do that. Sometime you'll see things like a +1 forward. That means you get to add +1 to your next roll. In the case above, that'd be enough to turn the 6 into 7 and the dangerous failure into a dangerous success.

HEALTH is the sixth stat and typically starts at nine and fluctuates wildly if you are playing hard enough. You heal up 3 health in a

In play, don't make moves. Do stuff, and keep doing stuff until the GM calls for a move. Dice should only hit the table when the stakes are interesting and the outcome uncertain. You don't need a **ROLL+THIEF** to use a doorhandle. You don't even need it to pick a lock when you've got all afternoon and someone making you cups of tea. When you're trapped in a corridor with fire elementals drifting towards you from both sides and your buddy is bleeding out all over your feet, yeah, then you need to roll.

LONG REST - which means a night⁴ in the fiction, or probably the gap between sessions in real life. Don't hoard your health, we'll cover running out under basic moves.

During play, or possibly starting out, you'll pick up items of various use. The 'item' is the basic unit of currency in the dungeon, those pesky heroes keep dropping them when they die and there's not a lot of other use for half the stuff it seems. The playbook is also a good place to record favours, debts and stuff you want to go back to later. It's also the place to record hobbies and Xp.

HOBBIES, in this game, are important. They keep you grounded and bolster your sense of identity. Every time you take the time to act out your hobby, you mark a little tick next to it. Every three ticks means +1 to your identity stat. xp stands for Experience and represents how far down the path to the extreme expression of your stereotype you've walked, lurched or slithered.

WIZARD: *basic move*

When you try to solve a problem with raw brainpower, knowledge or magic ROLL+WIZARD.

- On a 7+ you succeed at your objective AND deal one damage to someone
- On a 10+ you succeed at your objective. Forget the damage but choose two:
 - Deal one damage to all in the room
 - Expose a weakness, flaw or demon
 - You give good advice. You give an ally +1 forward.
 - Learn three words about the target
- On a 7-9 you succeed at your objective AND deal one damage to someone
- On a 6- you deal one damage to yourself or an ally

THIEF: *basic move*

When you try to solve a problem with cunning, treachery or precise and delicate application of skill ROLL+ THIEF ⁵

- on a 7+ you succeed at your objective OR deal one damage
- on a 10+ choose three from below
- on a 7-9 choose one:

⁴ how do underlings in your dungeon keep track of time?

⁵ This is the stat to roll for stealth, or dodging arrows too. When it comes to lies and blather, there is some overlap with Bard moves. The GM is encouraged to be relaxed about this, but keep an eye on the consequences of a miss.

- Deal one damage to some other target
- You do it quickly
- You can get away cleanly
- It can't be traced to you
- You don't use up an item
- Now the GM chooses a remaining option to move against.
- On a 6- the GM may choose two options.

FIGHTER: basic move

When you try to solve a problem with violence, strength or sheer athleticism **ROLL + FIGHTER:** ⁶

- On a 7+ you succeed at your objective OR deal two damage.
- On a 10+: that's it, you succeeded. Deal with the consequences.
- On a 7-9: the player chooses two:
 - Take damage as the situation demands
 - An ally takes damage as established
 - Something in the next room hears you
 - Click! next move by anyone triggers a trap
- On a 6 or below: no success, but choose one from the list anyway

⁶ This is the stat to roll for breaking down doors, taking blows on a shield or arm-wrestling in the ork canteen. There is some blurriness with FIGHTER. Stabbing someone in a fight is a fighter move, but stabbing them in the back is a thief. The GM is encouraged to be relaxed about this, but encourage thought about the consequence of a miss.

BARD: basic move

When you try to solve a problem with charm, social connections or distraction, **ROLL+BARD:**

- On a 7+ you succeed at your objective
- On a 10+: that's it, you succeeded. Deal with the consequences.
- On a 7-9 choose two:
 - You distracted an ally too⁷
 - The target becomes obsessed with you
 - Someone will come after you, later
 - They offer you a further opportunity, with a catch
- on a 6- the GM chooses another player who chooses one for you.

⁷ be careful with player agency here. It can be a fun running gag, but make sure the other player is on board

IDENTITY: basic move

When you draw on knowledge of the dungeon, or wake after a LONG REST, then say the thing you know because of your role in the dungeon. You get that statement free. Now ROLL + IDENTITY

- On a 10+ Describe a hobby⁸. Add it to your playbook. Gain +1 Identity when you have acted on that hobby three different times.
- On a 7-9 you keep a sense of identity but the dungeon presses on you. Choose one:
 - I loved that part of my job
 - I hate that part of my job
 - I had a fierce rival in my job
- On a 6- you slip back into your role. Mindlessly do what your job demands until obstructed or you fail a roll.

⁸ Ideally this should be something outside of your stereotypical job. It's something you value and think about in your spare time and makes plans for. 'Three different times' doesn't mean three cups of tea satisfies a 'tea party' hobby for a Brute. It has to cost something

Bibliography

Index

agenda, [15](#)

license, [4](#)

principles, [15](#)