



The Dread Abbey



Some Observations on How to Build a Gaming Group

Thomas Rafalski

Roleplaying games are social activities with multiple layers and levels of appropriate decorum and attitudes. While some behavior which is appropriate in gaming is universal in society, some expected or even required behavior goes against social norms (A great example of this involves games in which players take the role of undead creatures and feed upon the living.) To further complicate issues, gamers generally have an over-active imagination and can take things a little too seriously.

The Banner presents the following suggestions solely as general advice and makes no claim as to their effectiveness

or appropriateness in each individual situation.

Suggestions for the Organizer

The Organizer is the person at the core of a gaming group. He or she who pulls the group together, makes sure that everyone knows when the game is being held, and makes arrangements for facilities. The Organizer helps to smooth out disagreements between the players when they occur (which they will) and is the one most likely to introduce new members. While it is common for the Organizer to also be the primary Game Master, this is not always the case.

Consider transportation requirements

If everyone's driving to the game, find a spot with plenty of safe, cheap parking. If half

of the members don't have personal transportation, make arrangements for everyone to get to the game well in advance of that day. When gaming in a city with a good public transit system, such as San Francisco, get a location near a transit hub and time your sessions to coincide with schedules. If people have to drive into a metropolitan area, game after rush hour or on the weekends and avoid clashing with major sporting events.

Gamer volume = Entropy

It is natural for gamers to increase their voice levels at various times during a session, particularly at the start and end of combat. If you are gaming in a location where noise can be an issue, notify everyone BEFORE you have to ask people to lower their voices.

Take Five

Unless you're in game group with very disciplined players and a tight schedule, make sure to have a break every two hours or so.

Fooooooooood!

Do not game in a location that prohibits food or drink. Make sure that newbies know what food is available locally, whether food will already be on-site, and whether or not the group will be ordering a collective meal or munchies.

Provide a center of tranquility

When you have a group of individuals who meet on a regular basis, it is inevitable that there will be disagreements. When things get heated, remain calm, force the group to take a break, and remind everyone that this is only a game and that the fate of the real world is not dependant upon whether or not Bargudah the Unwise should have gotten a saving throw.

Restrooms Required

It's something you might not think about until it's too late.

Keep Everyone in the Loop

Life happens. If someone can't attend a game, be sure to let him know when the next session will be. Keep him up-to-date on game events.

Suggestions for the Game Master

Threaten the PC's early. Kill the most arrogant one if they don't fear the gods.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure..." Unless the game genre is specifically non-lethal, make the players fear you from the outset. It will actually reduce unwarented character deaths later on.

Balance your Attention

While a group will naturally have a leader, it's best to get everyone involved in a game from the beginning and to keep everyone involved as the

scenario proceeds. Know your material or system well enough to tweak things in mid-game to bring in those players who start to get sidelined.

Roll Randomly

Keep your players guessing. Players pick up within fifteen minutes or less whether a GM will only roll when there's an actual reason.

Ask for Perception Checks When There Is Nothing There

As above, but make the characters roll for different senses. If you only ask for perception checks when there's something there, then they "automagically" succeed.

Pre-generated Characters

Unless you are certain that the players (or you) will show up on a consistent basis, don't waste the time and energy during a session generating characters.

Don't Hamstring New Players

While it would be unfair to the veterans to allow new players

in a campaign to run characters as strong as the old timers, you must allow the newbie to create a character which has the potential to flourish in the environment. It's very frustrating playing a character who can't scratch the opponents when everyone else cuts through them like a chainsaw through cream cheese.

Don't Handhold New Players, Either

While the new guy has to be effective, he shouldn't be able to match the current group. The veterans should be able to take down opponents much faster than the newbie, and the newbie shouldn't be 'the key' to the current scenario/campaign.

Take the Batteries Out of Remote Controllers

While 'munchkins' get a lot of bad press, what you have to really watch out for are 'munchkings:' they not only exploit the rules to create characters who could single-handedly clear the Normandy beachheads with a toothpick,

but they also attempt to run everyone else's characters by virtual intimidation.

Use non-lethal methods to constrain that character as much as possible, but be prepared to eliminate the problem character if it looks like there's going to be a PK ('Player Kill,' Where one or more of the other players finally take things into their own hands.)

Suggestions for the Players

Diversify Your Character a Bit and Help the GM in the Process

It's not easy for the GM to come up with plot 'hooks' every week. By taking a few skills and abilities that on the surface are not be directly related to core adventuring activities, you help to create a much more fun and memorable game for everyone.

Have Fun; It's Just a Game

If your character is zapped and resurrection/resuscitation/cloning is not available, then

try to keep in mind that it is a *game*. While most players get attached to characters (especially long-time personas), it is their function and purpose to take risks and to be pawns. Embrace it as an opportunity to try something different.

Get to Know Each Other

You'll probably spend a lot of time with your fellow gamers. If you share similar interests with others outside of games, consider occasionally replace a gaming session with some other activities once you are comfortable around each other.

Return on Investment

People look at the price of most gaming books and say, "That's too expensive!" It's best to keep in mind that even 'light' gamers will get more than forty hours of entertainment from a 'player book.' It's cheaper than the cost per hour of seeing a movie in a theater, attending most concerts, or even parking for an hour at a downtown parking garage.