

GAMEMASTER CHARACTERS: Recruiting Followers AND Pets



SOME ADVENTURERS WANT to recruit every living thing they can to their side—collecting pets, building a veritable kingdom of their own, and more. While the core rules offer up allies, followers, and hirees, managing these characters effectively is another matter altogether. Unwary gamemasters can quickly find their

game slogged with action economy when too many companions are in play making handling and balancing combat a daunting task.

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GMCs. Companion NPCs are referred to as Game-master Characters (GMCs) to identify them as the gaming group's peripheral characters. Unlike standard NPCs, control of a GMC is shared between the gamemaster and players. Both sentient and non-sentient creatures (pets like dogs, horses, and other living creatures with an Intelligence of 5 or less) can be GMCs, but conjured creatures bound to their creator (like familiars) or crafted creatures (like golems) are not eligible to be GMCs.

NEW MECHANICS

Handling GMCs involves the introduction of additional rules and mechanics into gameplay: Morale, Goals, Recruitment, and Resolution. Whenever a creature becomes a GMC, the GM assigns it a Morale and a Goal. The rest of its statistics can be managed by either the GM or players.

MORALE

Morale is more than confidence, discipline, and enthusiasm, but also the general attitude that a GMC has towards the adventurers. Poor spirits can be partly overcome by the importance of a cause that the party are pursuing, or through positive feelings towards them.

Morale is measured on a scale of -10 to +10.

Whenever Morale is reduced to 0 or less, the GMC leaves at the next safe available opportunity to do so. They are unlikely to put themselves at immediate risk in order to depart, and they continue to defend themselves and their erstwhile allies if there is no other option.

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At Morale -10, the GMC attacks the adventurers at the next convenient opportunity. This does not mean that the GMC immediately turns on them and strikes, but may betray them mid-combat, try to turn them over to another force, or otherwise undermine the actions of the PCs.

At Morale +10, the GMC has advantage on all rolls that would affect its Morale.

During combat while a GMC has Morale +5 or more, they follow directions and instructions, willing to cooperate and follow orders. The gamemaster hands control of the GMC to the PCs until combat ends or their Morale is reduced to +4 or less.

Affecting Morale

Several factors can raise or lower Morale, but all of these are at the GM's discretion and should be considered based upon the goals and nature of the individual GMC. For example, a creature that does not need to eat every day does not lose Morale for missing a single meal, while a creature that is capable of regrowing limbs is less affected by the (temporary) loss of an arm.

Managing Morale is an important aspect of keeping companions and there are several ways that players can improve the feelings of a GMC, best expressed through roleplay involving their Goals and Alignment.

ALIGNMENT

Interactions between a GMC and PC with conflicting alignments are rife for complications. The GMC's Morale is immediately reduced by 1 whenever a member of the party takes an action that directly conflicts with their alignment. Similarly, the PC has disadvantage when making checks to change or otherwise manipulate the GMC's Morale if they do not share at least any alignments (for example, a chaotic good adventurer appealing to a lawful neutral companion). This represents how actions can speak louder than words and the difficulty in perpetually lying to someone about true intentions and morals.



ASSISTANCE

GMCs are only able to use the Help action on ability checks when they have a bonus of +3 or higher, providing all the advantages that a PC could

provide. When a GMC has a bonus of +2 or less they can still be of assistance, but not enough to provide a mechanical benefit.

TABLE: MORALE LOSSES

INCIDENT	SENTIENT GMC MORALE LOSS	PET GMC MORALE LOSS
Loss of limb	-6	-12
Untreated disease	-1 per day	-2 per day
Become frightened	-2	-4
Exhausted	-1 per level of exhaustion	-1 per level of exhaustion
Miss a meal*	-1	-2
Hit by trap	-1	-1
Ill-equipped	-3	—
Cursed	-5	-5
Loss of loved one	-10	-7
Acting against alignment	-4	-2
Getting lost	-3	0
Adverse treatment	-2	-4
An attractive bribe	-5	-6
Argumentation	-2	-0
PC purposefully frustrating a Goal	-10	-10
PC accidentally frustrating a Goal	-4	-6
Goal reaches completion and is failed.	-3 or more	-3 or more

* A GMC's Morale loss is doubled for each additional missed meal.

TABLE: MORALE GAINS

OCCURRENCE	SENTIENT GMC MORALE GAIN	PET GMC MORALE GAIN
Heartfelt plea	+5	+2
Night of carousing or play	+4	+6
PC assists in the accomplishment of a Goal	+6	+6
PC is indispensable in the accomplishment of a Goal	+8	+8
Upgraded equipment	+1	+0
5% of wealth worth of food/treats/gifts	+1	+2
Given a magic item	+5	+0
Healed instead of a PC	+2	+2
PC goes against their interest for GMC	+3	+2
Goal reaches completion and is successful	+5 or more	+5 or more

GOALS

Everyone seeks to accomplish something in life and find their own reasons for siding with others. Working and adventuring together has a purpose, and most people do not sign on just for the joy of it—and even when they do, they need that joy and excitement to continue or they'll be bored and move on.

As a result, each GMC requires a Goal that they are working towards. It can be very specific or relatively nebulous, ranging from 'to save my son from the tribe of goblins that kidnapped him' to 'spreading justice throughout the land'. The purpose of a Goal is to help create depth and motives for the being, encapsulating into a guiding light for the GMC. Pets naturally tend towards Goals that are simpler and more abstract, such as 'eat good food', 'enjoy hunting', 'find a mate', and so on.



RECRUITMENT

A gaming group presented with the opportunity to start collecting companions are likely to want to catch'em all—Recruitment is to help GMs keep each session from turning into an exercise of enlisting every possible GMC that crosses the party's path. While this could in itself make for a very compelling campaign, in other instances it can derail the larger narrative and have an adverse effect on the game.

Whenever a new potential GMC is introduced, the gamemaster should know in advance if they can be recruited or not. No matter the cause or results of the roll, it is reasonable for some NPCs to simply refuse. For example, it would make very little sense for a king to personally work alongside and for a group of unknown adventurers, and no matter how inspired a lowly crop farmer might be they are unlikely to abandon their cherished family to face almost certain death alongside epic champions of blade and spell.

Recruiting a GMC requires a minimum of three separate ability checks, increasing in difficulty the more prestigious and powerful the creature is (DC 10 + the creature's CR). For pet GMCs the adventurers must succeed on Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks and provide ample fresh, desirable food to give to the creature. For sentient GMCs, a range of different checks may be applied, at the GM's discretion. These may include social checks (using Deception, Insight, Intimidation, Persuasion), be contests of skill and strength (with Acrobatics, Athletics, Performance, Sleight of Hand), or the matching of wits (involving Arcana, History, Nature, Religion), and the GM may choose to have opposed checks instead of standard DCs. In addition, a sentient GMC requires a reason that the adventurers can help them accomplish their Goal.

Maintenance

One of the most important things to remember about GMCs is that they are not inanimate objects, nor are they merely tools for adventurers—they're beings with their own desires, needs, and objectives.

Sentient GMCs have a maintenance cost in gold and require an equal share of treasure the party finds, reducing their Morale by 1 whenever they receive anything less.

Pet GMCs require a weekly expenditure of gold equal to CR to pay for food, lodging, and upkeep (minimum 1 gold). At the GM's discretion, these costs may be higher in certain locations. For example, in an isolated village high in the mountains the housing and feeding of a Large lizard will be much more costly. At the end of each week a pet GMC's maintenance cost is not paid, its Morale is reduced by 5.

At the end of each game session that there is no action taken towards a GMC's goal, their Morale is reduced by 2 (in addition to any incidents that affect them). When the GMC's Morale is reduced to 0 or less, they make an ultimatum to the adventurers, pointing out their dissatisfaction and giving the PCs one more opportunity to rectify the circumstances.

Once per day, a PC can attempt to raise the Morale of a GMC with a rousing speech to convince them of the importance of the task that faces them all, a menacing warning to push them back into line, or something else entirely. The DC of an ability check to improve Morale is $10 + \text{the creature's Wisdom modifier} + \text{the creature's Morale score}$. On a success, the GMC's Morale improves by 2. When the check result is 5 points or more than the DC, or on a natural 20, the GMC's Morale improves by an additional 3.

Resolution

All journeys must come to an end, but just because the party's companions are not the main characters in the campaign doesn't mean that they aren't the main characters of their own stories! However a GMC's story comes to a close, their final fate deserves a measure of attention and respect to give their place in the game a lasting impact.

RESETTING

Some goals can be completed--the goblin-abducted son of the farmer can be saved, or he may already be dead by the time he's reached. Regardless of what ultimately happens to the boy, it simply doesn't make sense for the GMC to keep this Goal any longer.

When a Goal is completed successfully, a GMC increases their Morale by 5 or more. If the Goal is failed however, a GMC reduces their Morale by 3 or

more. After their Goal has been resolved, if a GMC seeks to continue adventuring with the party they need a new Goal to serve as their guiding light—without an objective to strive for there is no reason for them to go on more adventures.

LEAVING

When a GMC's Morale is reduced to 0 they give the party an ultimatum, and when reduced to -5 or less they leave. In these instances the GMC may make their exit peacefully and amicably, or it may be relatively antagonistic departure.

If a GMC no longer has a Goal they will similarly leave. This is most likely to be amicable and can be resolved relatively simply--a tearful and happy parting--or it can go many other ways. This can be an important moment for the gamemaster to remind the PCs that there are countless other stories going on around them, and invoking a sense of wonder can serve them well.

DYING

Ultimately some GMCs will die but unlike the adventurers, when their hit points are reduced to 0 or less they immediately die. They do not make Dying rolls and receive no second chances without the use of powerful magic (like revivify). Even at their most heroic, these characters are not PCs and thus the rules about their survivability are less lenient. 🐉



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