

Play Your Character



like a
**FUCKING
BOSS**

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Play Your Character Like a Fucking Boss

NO ES FACIL

It's not easy being the Game Master. By comparison, playing a character is a cake walk. But that doesn't mean everyone gets it right every time.

There's always a chance that this isn't for you, that it's the wrong approach. Think about it - only a select few were born to play their characters like a fucking boss. Born or chosen? Perhaps it's a higher calling that beckons us to awesomeness. Either way, this'll give you something to ponder.

A long time ago, I hardly ever put myself out there. I was the guy who didn't make waves, not too sure about speaking up, more comfortable in the back, and so on. It wasn't much fun. I could've been having a blast, but instead I was a socially awkward geek - well, I'd say deeply self-conscious rather than socially awkward. Anyway, that's how I was as a player and my characters followed suit. Adjacent characters became the prime movers, and every once in awhile, no one stepped out of the shadows. Those were extremely lackluster games.

Thankfully, that never lasted long because it just wasn't me... it wasn't how I wanted to present myself or what I wanted for my character. I was fortunate enough to get over my shyness, usually after a few hours or sessions. That's when the real fun began - when I was roleplaying in living color.

BLOWING OFF STEAM

My life is unbelievably awesome. Sometimes, I forget that but it's true. Nevertheless, even an awesome life has a few things here and there that suck - annoyances, irritations, and bullshit that can occasionally wear one down.

The point is, everyone has frustrations and those frustrations must be dealt with... somewhere, somehow. Hopefully, we don't take it out on friends and family - though it is incredibly easy to transfer our frustration to our loved ones.

I don't participate in roleplaying games in order to "blow off steam." And yet, it's still a release valve for much of the pent-up energy and emotion built up over days and weeks of living in the real world.

We should be mindful that while roleplaying games are not therapy, they can help us deal with our issues, with life. Roleplaying takes our mind off our problems, allowing us to channel ourselves into a mutually beneficial and creatively cooperative endeavor.

The Game Master is a lion tamer, and players are the lions. Some lion tamers may think they want the lions to actually be tame - that is, domesticated, gentle, harmless, and trained to jump through flaming hoops on command. But if the lions were actually tame, there would be no need for a lion tamer. And far fewer people would come to watch the lions. Might as well watch a silly cat video. It is the ferociousness, the danger, the unpredictability, the chaos, and the savagery that keeps the game interesting; and it is the tension between lion tamer and lions that commands our attention.

For that reason, players should not be well-behaved little automatons. Their mission in life should not be to follow orders. Players should not be meek, timid, or afraid. Instead, they should kick ass, take names, and fuck shit up!

Players, I want you to play your character like a fucking boss! Can you do that for me? Can you?!?

PIT OF MAN'S FEARS

I've got good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first? Too bad, we're starting with the bad news...

Game Masters are usually confident, authoritative leaders presenting a world for the player characters to engage and interact with. Truth be told, Game Masters, in their deepest, darkest Game Mastering heart, are terrified. Yes, they, too, have insecurities. Beneath layer after layer after layer of experience and training and encouragement squirms that scared little thing who's afraid that he's not good enough, that his game's going to suck, the players are going to eat him alive, that failure is right around the corner.

The Game Master is human, just like the rest of us. Luckily, human beings are masters of self-deception. Players almost never get to see that side of a Game Master, and with good reason. A Game Master without confidence in his ability to run the game is like a pick-up artist with the same fucking problem!

So, what's the good news? You can help. In fact, Game Masters can't properly run the game without you. He needs your active participation or else he cannot succeed.

MASTERING THE PUPPET MASTER

Game Masters run the game, but clever players run the Game Master!

You know what he's thinking. You hear him describe the town, its people and borders, the outlands... there's a key buried somewhere in there, beneath the story, amongst his description of things, what he chooses to focus on, what he leaves out. That key unlocks the inner self.

Every Game Master is looking for something in the games he runs. But what is it? What is he emotionally invested in? If he's searching for awesomeness, then you're at the right table, exploit his desire by being awesome. If he's searching for something that's downright not awesome because he's a sadist, an asshole, or just enjoys his petty power trip, then you have two choices - find a different game or stick it out and see what happens.

A few of you may be saying to yourselves, "How can I be awesome?" The list of ways is directly below this section, but here's another way of looking at it...

If you have the chance to grab a crimson dragon by his balls until he hands you the legendary demon-slaying sword known as Kalthalax, and then make him apologize for getting in your way... do it. Those balls might be proverbial or crimson and scaly, doesn't matter.

When you see two roads that diverge in the woods, you can take the road everybody uses (the brash instigator), take the one less traveled (strong and silent), or you can forge your own goddamn path (the oddity). As long as it's done with a sense of greater purpose and iron will, thou shall be thy own fucking boss!

7 WAYS TO AWESOME

As a player, your character only has so many lines. Not that it's scripted, but there are other players competing for "screen time." Additionally, the Game Master is breathing life into the world and various non-player characters, dice are being rolled, jokes told, food and drink consumed, etc. Even if your character is the focus of a particular game session, he's still limited to how much he can say and what he can do.

Time itself constrains us! Let's say, you've got three hours of game time and four other players to share the limelight with. You might get as many as a dozen opportunities to shine, to make your presence known. And each of those dozen or so opportunities is comprised of several moments. They don't last long, and when they're gone... they're gone.

You're going to want to make the most of those momentunities (yeah, I just wrote that). Below is a list of qualities that should be incorporated into your character's speech, movements, thoughts, and anything else you can think of. If it's your turn to speak, player, make it count! No one is going to favorably represent your character if you don't do it yourself. Put in the effort!

- **Brevity:** As I said above, you don't have endless time to verbalize how your character struts around, munches on a pocket dog, and philosophizes about everything under the sun. The GM and other players have stuff to say,

too. Don't use fifteen words when seven will do the job.

- **Moving Things Forward:** The game can drag when someone doesn't have their foot on the gas pedal. Not everything has to be fast and furious, but when your fellow players are going back and forth about standard accounting practices while there's a swirling portal of magical energy that's just begging for experimentation, someone's got to step up and make things happen!
- **Humor:** The ability to laugh at ourselves, at others, at the world we live in is one of humanity's best qualities. Everyone loves to laugh. Taking things deadly serious all the time gets tedious. That's why even thrillers and hard sci-fi stories include lighter moments. Without turning everything into a joke, get your point across with humor.
- **Adherence to Genre:** Breaking the mood is easy. What's hard is keeping the immersion going, deepening the experience. Any time you can make it seem like your character is really there - in whatever world has been provided - that's a gold star on your chart, my friend.
The GM is busting his ass to fire up everyone's imagination, helping convince players that their characters are really there. Help out with mentioning small, genre-adhering details whenever possible.
- **Creativity:** Think outside the box. Come up with innovative ways to dispose of an enemy, disable the omnitron 3000, or get invited to the Prince's dinner party.
Express yourself with more creativity, as well. Don't just say, "I shoot" every time. Vary it up! Tell us, "I put a few rounds in his brainpan" or "I unholster my blaster and fade the sass off that alien's mouth." Instead of saying, "I check the floor for traps," make it more interesting, like "I tap the 10' pole on every part of the stone floor we'll be stepping on."
GMs, don't penalize players for being creative or specific. Just because a boring answer seems to cover more bases, doesn't mean it should be rewarded!

- **Badassery:** You've heard of the rule of cool? Well, this is the decree of badassery! Your character may not be a loudmouthed braggart or demolitions expert with a mile-wide mean streak, but that doesn't mean he can't be a badass.

In your character's mind, he's the star of the show. Even a reserved introvert has goals and ambitions. Everyone who isn't a sociopath (or outright psychopath) is background noise. They exist solely to help make your character look fucking awesome!

If your character is more of an oddity, you may want to substitute badassery for bizarre behavior, extreme curiosity, and doing your own thing.

- **Stay in Character:** Decide who your character is. Maybe you need a full session before you know, but sooner rather than later make a determination and run with it. Once you know who your character is, you can start acting like him.
Pick a word he uses frequently, come up with a catch-phrase, tone, hang-ups, vices, virtues, likes, dislikes, favorite color... does he hate desserts with lemon in them? Sometimes, these decisions have to be made on the fly, but that's all the more reason to solidify your characterization as soon as possible. Know thyself!

THE COMMAND TO LOOK

Anton Szandor LaVey was a mentor in my formative years. From reading his (auto)biography *The Secret Life of a Satanist*, I learned about one of his favorite books on photography. It was called *The Command to Look* and spelled out what captured and held people's attention, visually.

There are primarily three things that force people to wake up and concentrate (if anything can) - sex, sentiment, and wonder.

Sexual content commands attention. That should be obvious to everyone. Though, not everyone is sexually attracted to the same things (also obvious), and sometimes sexuality is such a powerful force that it attracts negativity.



Sentiment is something cute, adorable, endearing, sweet, nurturing, lovable, comforting, etc.

Wonder encompasses the fantastical, the deadly, the weird, strange, horrific, eldritch - that which cannot be easily explained or understood.

So, if you want to draw eyes towards yourself or what you're doing, use one or more of the three - sex, sentiment, and wonder. Once you have their attention, the ball's in your court. You have the power... Shemhamforash!

CHARACTER BACKGROUND CHECKLIST

Some RPGs already have backgrounds baked into their character generation rules. Regardless, Game Masters might decide to double-down on backgrounds or ignore them entirely.

No matter what the Game Master's opinion of background generation rules, there's no harm in thinking about your character's past and present, who is he really? If you come up with something you like, write it down. Just because it's down in black and white, doesn't mean you have to show it to anybody. This could simply be personal notes helping you get into character and stay there.

The following is a brief checklist of things you may want to consider.

- **Occupation:** What does he do for a living?
- **Family:** Does he have siblings, parents, kids, what kind of upbringing did he have?
- **Friends and Significant Others:** Who does he hang out with? Is he dating anyone? Fucking anyone on the side?
- **Hobbies:** Does he have any pastimes? What does he do for fun?
- **Political, Philosophical, and Religious Leanings:** Where does he stand on minimum wage, fatalism, and the existence of god?
- **Affiliations:** Is he part of any groups, does he hang out with an FBI agent, belong to a book club, or root for a local sports team?

- **One Unique Thing:** You should be able to come up with a singular feature that sets your character apart from all others. What makes him different?

If you want to get underneath the surface, that's fine, but not absolutely necessary. For those who have the extra time and feel the need to answer burning questions about their character like boxers, briefs, or boxer-briefs and ketchup, mustard, or ketchup and mustard, go right ahead. No one's stopping you.

WHAT KIND OF MAN ARE YOU?

There's an episode of *Seinfeld* called "The Secret Code." In it, Kramer is trying to guess George's password. Right from the start, Kramer dives into George's psyche, his essence, his very being. It's not long until Kramer has summed up what kind of man George Costanza is... weak, spineless, a man of temptations.

It's not easy to see right through a person, even one you know quite well. And seeing yourself objectively is nearly impossible. But it shouldn't be too difficult to come up with your character's chief feature (or flaw, if seen from a negative point of view) - the thing that drives him, that defines him, the thing from which everything about him emanates. What is the nature of your character's soul?

Once you've got that, the rest will eventually fall into place. But there isn't one right way to illuminate that character's chief feature. You can come right out and say it, bury it in a riddle, or use metaphor to get the point across. The following are suggestions...

- I killed a man in Reno just to watch him die
- Bosco
- Continually peeking behind the curtain
- I have a special plan for this world
- Failure is a fate worse than death
- Expansion of human knowledge
- Accumulation of personal glory
- I can't stand people because they remind me of myself

‘Kodarr the barbarian is my name and slaying demons is my game’

THE COOLEST BITCH IN TOWN

This is where I talk about the PC archetype known as the brash instigator.

There's a fairly recent *Saturday Night Live* sketch called "FBI Simulator." In it, there's a life-like robot (more like an automated target, actually) wearing a neon-orange suit spouting ridiculous phrases like, "My name's Kevin Roberts and I'm the coolest bitch in town. Where's the party?" along with the classic, "Can a bitch get a donut?"

The Kevin Roberts character in this FBI simulation is memorable. He's loud, obnoxious, provocative, confrontational, and borderline absurd. Now, I want to make this point crystal clear - this is not how players should act. These are notes for your character only! Do not make the mistake of acting like an offensive, albeit silly, jerk in real life. Unless, that's just who you are. In which case, you have my permission but not my blessing.

Having said that, the character you're playing should have more in common with Kevin Roberts than the subdued wallflower that you (possibly) normally play. Next time you have the chance, start the session with something along the lines of... "Kodarr the barbarian is my name and slaying demons is my game. Where's the nearest dungeon in this manure pile of a town?"

Now, you may very well die from problems that arise from your character's gumption. If your character has the nerve to speak his mind, that's going to draw attention. And attention occasionally means a target on your back. As long as you have a decent chance of surviving, there's not much more you can ask for. Shit happens. Get over it. Sometimes, discretion is the better part of valor, but it's also better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven. Instigate!

If the GM at your table has a hissy fit over your boldness, well, he can either deal with it or find himself a new player. Not every table is going to appreciate

the way you play your character like a fucking boss. That's their loss.

However, you should also learn how to read the room. Every game has its own dynamic and mood. Perhaps, merely taking inspiration from Kevin Roberts is preferable to embodying his maniacal chutzpah.

Similar persona: Jack Burton from *Big Trouble in Little China*.

QUIET STRENGTH

Speaking of cool cats, I'd like to present a counter-archetype to Kevin Roberts - the strong and silent Steve McQueen.

What does it mean to use Steve McQueen as a model for your character? Rather than talking about it, you do it. And when you do have to talk, you don't beat around the bush. You address the situation matter-of-factly. A problem might upset you, but it doesn't get under your skin. You're in control... always. Even when it looks like you're out of control, that's just your way of building up internal pressure until that raw momentum propels you to victory.

What emotion you do show is intense and fleeting. You can see it in your eyes, but not your body. Let the other guy bark like a dog while you saunter up to the enemy and take a chunk out of him - ripping out his throat with your teeth.

So, if you want to portray a character like Steve McQueen, you're going to want to make brevity your bread and butter. For example, this line from *The Magnificent Seven*, "We deal in lead, friend." Saying all you need to say with a meaningful yet subtle facial expression is hard to do. It's mostly in the eyes; they need to convey your character's self-assured drive.

Unless you're a great actor like the legendary King of Cool, I suggest you communicate your character's stoicism by telling the table what you're doing. Like this: "Zeb eyes the woman in front of him, flashes her a

quick half-smile, and motions for her to approach. Looking deep into her eyes, I wordlessly express my barely contained lust for her voluptuous body."

The benefit of using such a minimalist approach is that the words you do say will be more powerful.

Similar Persona: Jason Bourne from all those *Bourne* movies, also Clint Eastwood in pretty much every western he's ever been in.

THE THIRD MAN

So, we've talked about the brash instigator and strong silent type. What else you got?

The third and last archetype I'm going to mention is colorful - but stylish, not garish. He gets things done but doesn't do them in a straightforward manner. No, this type of character is indirect, aloof, distracted... yet he's also clever and sneaky on occasion. He talks to a guy who talks to a guy who - seemingly by accident - helps the party circumvent the major obstacle.

This guy usually seems more interested in sampling the local cuisine than making progress in the investigation. He'd rather find out what makes this dungeon tick than charge into every room killing all the monsters. He interacts with alien species, spends time with lonely droids, and climbs the mountain just to see if it can be done.

I'm going to call him the oddity. Remember that movie *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*? An oddity is the character equivalent of Pee-wee's breakfast machine. It's a weird, convoluted contraption that's fun to watch. In fact, watching the interesting stuff going on is the whole point. Any actual breakfast that results is merely a bonus.

The oddity plays his own game his own way. He's not motivated by being center stage and he's not focused on the mission. If anything, the mission focuses on him. The oddity takes the world in and expresses both curiosity and zest for the more unusual aspects of life.

The only problem with this type of character is that not being goal-oriented occasionally puts him at odds with the more dominant personalities in the party. The Game Master's attention is pulled away from the main

action to spend time on the oddity. It can be a balancing act, and everyone else at the table will just have to be a little patient; the adventure wouldn't be complete without at least one oddity.

Similar persona: Ferris Bueller from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and some incarnations of The Doctor.

SANDBOX

For me personally, any form of play should be of the sandbox variety. You've got a toy soldier in your hand, you step into the sandbox and see a dinosaur, spaceship, and Dracula figure... from there, you just create your own adventure.

As a Game Master, I frequently have players ask me about what kind of choices and/or stories I want. What I want? I'm not a novelist or train conductor, and this ain't no third-rate fan fiction or railroad. That's for the players to decide, I invariably reply. If a player has a particular angle or avenue that he wants to pursue, I encourage him to push the game in that direction.

All Game Masters have to do is listen to the players while correctly interpreting their body language and non-verbal cues - which is difficult and can be misconstrued. That means players need to speak clearly and directly.

Players should follow the leads they want, talk to whichever NPCs they want, explore the part of the world they want. If they'd rather be a sailor, the GM can usually work with that - assuming he has some advanced warning. Don't wait until the last minute before you mention your character's dragon training background or that his uncle was killed by a mummy. I mean, if it suddenly comes to you, fine, but if you knew that information a week ago, you should have told the GM last week!

Following a player's lead makes everything easier - and more fun!

DO YOU TAKE THE BAIT?

Throughout the adventure, the Game Master will present a hook - this is an entry point for the player-characters to become part of the story.



While players should acknowledge what the Game Master has described, they're under no obligation to bite down on the first worm that's dangled in front of them. Passing on all the hooks presented, however, seems unnecessarily standoffish and perhaps a trifle obstreperous.

It is a wise Game Master who knows better than to assume his players will eagerly pursue every story angle he provides. That means encounters should be interesting in and of themselves. Furthermore, it would behoove players to take note of what's happening and roleplay reactions through the prism of their characters.

In other words, stay true to your character! If the Game Master continually offers hooks that have nothing to do with your character, say so. For example, the GM mentions that your character hears gunshots. You run the other way because your character is a congenital coward. To get that point

across, you might say something like "Since cowardice is my middle name, I hightail it out of there." Suddenly, the Game Master recalls that aspect of your character and quickly improvises a better way of involving your character in the action.

OLD SCHOOL RENAISSANCE

There are a lot of things to love about roleplaying games from the mid-70's to early 80's. Some even call it the Golden Age for RPGs! While there's a certain amount of nostalgia and looking back through rose-colored spectacles, I think that time period got it right most of the time.

However, there are a couple of old school elements that I don't care for. The first is overly-complicated and crunchy systems. Why make all the artificial, non-immersive aspects of a game so time consuming and difficult to use? We don't play games in order to

'I expect a fucking parade!'

simulate the air-speed velocity of swinging a battleaxe. And even if we did, a matrix full of arbitrary numbers isn't going to make it seem more realistic; assuming realism somehow equates immersion... which it doesn't.

Players, you have a lot more power than you realize. Banding together with common goals is the equivalent of forming a union. If I was part of this player union, my first order of business would be to find an easy, fun, rules-lite system that the majority will enjoy. I'm sure you can think of several off the top of your head, but indulge my blatant pimping... *Crimson Dragon Slayer*, *The Outer Presence*, and *Alpha Blue* are prime examples of simplistic yet awesome roleplaying games.

On the flip-side, strong unions - when thoroughly corrupted by power - deserve to be broken. By the way, I feel the same way about strong, corrupt corporations. That's all part of the fascinating push-pull dynamic between the Game Master and players. Neither side has absolute power, and thank the gods for that, as the game would lose its fun.

The second old school element I dislike is that player-characters were occasionally... what's the opposite of putting something on a pedestal? Don't get me wrong, I'm all for initiation - the risk of a quick, unceremonious death comes with the old school territory. However, when you beat the odds, make the right decisions, and lady luck smiles upon your character, succeeding despite all the nasty shit the GM throws at you... I expect a fucking parade!

It's called the Old School Renaissance for a reason. It takes the old and dresses it up in new clothing, giving it a bit of a face lift. The old ways may have been better than what occurred in the 90's and 00's, but it wasn't all roses. There's stuff that could do with some change. That's why I'm a firm believer in the OSR or O5R, if you prefer (as I do).

COMMUNICATE PREFERENCES

This is different than coming up with a neat detail of ice-elves fornicating upon your character's scabbard.

As a player, your preferences could range from "I enjoy dungeons," to "I can't stand descending Armor Class." If you like one thing and dislike another, I think it's always OK to mention it. The Game Master could be ambivalent about a point of order. Maybe he agrees with you, but didn't want to throw any surprises at the players. So, speak up if you think you'd be more inclined to play and enjoy yourself if the GM made an ooze race available for PCs or a special rule for using two-handed weapons.

But be warned that the Game Master is under no obligation whatsoever to indulge you. After all, it's his game.

Have you heard the expression, you'll catch more flies with honey than vinegar? When I visualize it, it doesn't make much sense to me, either. I thought flies liked poop. Anyways, this is what it means - you can usually get what you want more often by being nice than being a dick. Refrain from confrontational and demanding behavior. Ultimatums are more likely to get you booted from the game than anything else.

Obviously, if you love one thing and hate another, you should point that out. A need always trumps a want. If you can't stand story-games, then say so. Otherwise, you could be playing in one. Do you despise hack and slash fests? By all means, tell him. If you and the Game Master have irreconcilable differences, so be it. You weren't meant to be at the same table... at least, not now.

3D CHESS VERSUS PLANET EATING GOD

The GM might say something like, "Your character is in the bar. What is he doing?"

As the character's player, there are many different responses available. Assuming you provide an interesting detail, make it manageable for the GM. After all, he's giving you a small amount of creative control over the game. Cherish it. Don't repay his kindness with being an asshole.

For instance, you could say, "I'm sitting down with an alien that looks like a humanoid squid-giraffe playing three-dimensional chess." That kind of thing is helpful. It provides a nice visual while giving the GM something to hang his hat upon. On the other hand, you might reply with "I look out the space window to see a gargantuan, planet-eating god fast approaching the space station."

Unless the GM is quick on his feet, there goes the adventure. No one likes a ret-con... though, you could always end with just kidding and then say what you really intend to do. Roleplaying is similar to theater, but you don't get another take. 99% of the time, whatever was done, was done and there's no going back... only forward.

PLAYER IMPROVISATION

One may be forgiven for thinking that improvisation falls into the Game Master's domain alone. It's plain to see that the Game Master has to think on his feet - he's got an entire universe to manage. Even though the players' focus is limited to their characters, that doesn't mean they can't affect their immediate surroundings.

Players should attempt to interject little setting details here and there. Eventually, they add up. If a player can drive himself to create three details per session, that might be a dozen over the course of a month and over a hundred in a year. The chance of those small details altering the course of the entire universe is small, yet it is there. Furthermore, the player is putting in the creative work that will elevate the game for all.

Mentioning that an access crystal your character holds is pale blue, smooth textured, or unexpectedly warm isn't stepping on the Game Master's toes. On the contrary, he'll most likely believe you're doing him a favor - and you are. Taking just a little of the creative burden off his shoulders is extremely helpful. If he corrects a player's interpretation, then he probably has a good reason for doing so. Don't assume the GM is pretending at petty godhood.

Here are more examples. Let's say the GM has already described the ever-growing red pool surrounding your fallen foe. Now that he's dead, the GM asks you what you want to do. You might respond with, "I make sure he's truly dead by

decapitating him as blood sprays across the cavern wall. Before searching his corpse for valuables, I put my fingers in the crimson pool and run them down my face... as is customary with warriors of my tribe."

I've been in a lot of games where the players go around the table describing their characters. This is probably your first and best chance to not only make a lasting impression but to fashion a couple specifics that will set the right tone - for your own characterization and possibly an aspect of the game world. You never know!

Let's say you're playing a pseudo-medieval fantasy game. Your character walks into the tavern and you're asked to describe what others see. "As I've just returned from the marshland of Chay, I'm wearing brown leather boots covered in mud and matching gloves - but with far less mud, a loose white shirt with ruffled cuffs, and a ruby amulet - probably fake - hangs around my neck. My red beard is braided like that of a dwarf, learned from my closest friend Thorgrim Stonegore. The first thing I do is walk over to the bartender and say, "I'll have my usual."

Simply asking, "Do I see an access terminal anywhere?" might be the difference between life and death. It never hurts to ask, just remember to keep your questions logical and in keeping with the genre, environment, mood, etc.

Perhaps you're playing in a noir/pulp kind of game. It's fairly typical for characters to drink and smoke, but what if your character, when confronted with stressful situations, mutters a couple lines from W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming."

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned

That detail begs the question, why does he do that? And that question leads to others... Where did he first read that poem? What does it mean? Who is this guy? Does he know something we don't? Doing or saying something provocative - provocative enough that it demands answers - is the key.



BE APPRECIATIVE

If the Game Master has gone out of his way to provide you with an awesome session of roleplaying, do something special for him. Here's a list of ways to show your appreciation...

- Simply thank him in person or via email
- Give him a small gift certificate to a local or online game store
- Make him some game-related arts and crafts project
- Buy him something small and game-related like a laminated map, set of miniatures, dice, authentic-looking coins, polished stones, etc.
- Pay for his next pizza or buy him a 12-pack of his favorite soda or 6-pack of beer
- Offer to assist him in taking notes, remembering certain details, or keeping track of something elusive - who wouldn't want a GM's assistant?
- Help him promote his Kickstarter, buy his book, like or thumbs-up his most recent gaming post, recommend his blog, re-tweet something he said, etc.
- Create a write-up of that game session from either your perspective or that of your character.

Obviously, Game Masters should appreciate the players who sit at his table because that's also challenging. Many players occupy themselves with various technology when the spotlight isn't thrust upon them. When a Game Master finds that one or more of his players are just as attentive and ready to improvise as he is, then it's time to show the love.

Beyond merely singing their praises, there's the list above. But Game Masters have an additional way of showing their appreciation. I'm not talking about fudging dice rolls or blatant favoritism, but GMs have the ability to nudge the world in a certain direction. These days, small in-game bonuses seem to be the norm. Nothing wrong with bestowing a one-time advantage or extra d6 as roleplaying incentives.

THINGS EVEN OUT

This is going to be one of those RPG principles that also doubles as a life lesson. Basically, there's no reason to ruin the game with jealousy.

If you look at a person's entire life, there are ups and downs. Sometimes, an individual's life will have more ups while others will have more downs. And we can see things on an even greater scale if reincarnation is taken into account. Personally, I don't believe in "past lives" so much as recycled souls that haven't achieved transcendence, but that's for another time. Ups and downs or positive and negative are subjective because they're happening to us and we can't always see things clearly... or honestly.

Nevertheless, there's good and bad throughout our journey. The same goes for a character's life - which his player feels acutely because the player identifies so strongly with his character. If we take a look at a single day in the life of a character, it may be pretty rotten. Even if several rotten days (full of many rotten things) in a row befall one's character, should we feel jealous of those characters who walked away with the minor artifact, who got the girl, who didn't drink from the poisoned flask?

Maybe we can't help feel a bit jealous, perhaps that's just being human. However, I am convinced that individuals can override their envy. Instead of allowing jealousy to lash out at a member of the party, sabotage the GM's attempts to provide interactive situations, or halt the game due to whining and bickering, we can rise above.

I'm reminded of a session I ran about a decade ago where three players argued and argued over who should get to keep the magic item found in the dungeon. Things got so heated that it sickened the campaign and soon died.

I, too, find myself keeping score. Wondering when it's going to be my time to shine. Where's my good fortune? How come it isn't my turn? Why not me? Don't I deserve this, that, or the other thing? When I start thinking garbage like that, I know it's time to activate a greater perspective, to remember myself.

When we feel shorted because others around us are enjoying great success, we need to remember that

tomorrow's adventure may look favorably upon us... or tomorrow's character.

BE COURTEOUS

This is a different kind of appreciation, but it's even more important than high-fives, constructive criticism, or buying the table a slice. Be present!

As I type these words, we're well into 2017. I know how bad the temptation is to check something on your mobile device. I also feel the urge to text, look up trivial details, make calls, do homework (actually, not that one). The point is, that shit's distracting as all hell, and it's rude. Don't do it!

Instead, give the Game Master and your fellow players your full attention. It's annoying to have to repeat yourself just because the guy next to you isn't following the game; he's off shopping on Amazon or unnecessarily rolling the dice sitting in front of him. Take notes or sit on your hands if there's nothing else you should be doing with them.

If you feel the need to do something that will disrupt the game, excuse yourself to do whatever it is in another room (or outside). If you've been playing for a couple hours non-stop, ask for a 5 minute break.

GAME MASTERING WORDS OF WISDOM

It occurred to me that I should end this booklet with some advice for Game Masters who might see this as a curveball or some kind of affront to their divine right of Kings. After all, I did write *How To Game Master like a Fucking Boss*.

GMs, if you feel the need to take player agency as a challenge, then I hope you view it as the kind of challenge motivating you to up your own game. Those who play their characters like a fucking boss will certainly keep you on your toes; in turn, elevating the whole experience. It won't always be easy for you - at first. Certain GMing muscles may have atrophied from lack of use... or perhaps they were never there to begin with. Now's your chance to strengthen them.

If you sit back a little, awesome players will do the heavy lifting for you. Rather than penalize them for it, reward them. Celebrate such autonomy, such alter-

ego self-realization! Be thankful that you have players who give a damn about the game enough to bring the noise and swagger.

CREDITS

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