The Prepless Game Master

DRAG N DROP GAMES

The Prepless GM

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Welcome to the Prepless GM, your guide to running any tabletop roleplaying game without any preparation whatsoever. These tools will help you to effortlessly deal with the unexpected in a way that is exciting and drives the story forward. If you like preparing your games, the Prepless GM will allow you to generate ideas quicker and better deal with situations where players do not follow your carefully laid plans.

Playing RPGs Without Preparation

Let's address the oliphant in the room. The world's most popular RPGs such as D&D, Pathfinder, Vampire, and Warhammer weren't created to run without any prep work. There are other RPGs, like Fate core and Apocalypse world, that have been specifically designed for prepless play and do it very well. So why would you want to go completely prepless with games that weren't designed for it?

The answer: Because you love these games and so do your friends. You own all the books and know the system inside out. But also because these games just become a much easier, spontaneous, and more cooperative experience if you run them prepless.

But in order to make them work as prepless games we are going to have to come at them from a different mindset. That means changing some of the ideas you are familiar with. But hey, it's your game and you can play it any way you like. My advice: Adopt the ideas that work for you and ignore what doesn't.

In this first chapter I've laid out the general principles of running a prepless game. And we'll look at the question system, which is the core tool for improvisational GMing.

The Principles of Going Prepless

Most RPGs revolve around following a predetermined storyline. This requires a lot of preparation on the GM's part. With improvisational GMing the players and GM don't follow a predetermined storyline. The object of the game is **to find out what happens next.** Everything happens at the table and players are free to take the story into whatever direction they find most interesting. It is a much more cooperative style of play where everybody shares in the surprises the game has to offer.

Of course, elements like game balance, plot, and creating a relevant story arc are still important. The tools in this book will help you create these elements on the fly as well as any other story elements you might need. Before we discuss tools, we'll look at some general principles.

1. Cooperative Play

Regardless of your GM style - players should be at the heart of any role-playing game. One of the core principles of going prepless is shifting some tasks and responsibilities to the players. Why should you have to do it all, when there are creative, excited players at the table who can help speed up the game and are your best resource when you feel stuck? No book will tell you what your players like, only they can.

Not having to do it all means that instead of rummaging through stacks of papers GMs can really focus on the players. If there are five people at the table, the GM should be taking the spotlight about one fifth of the time. Nobody likes being a spectator to a ten minute monologue. Try to make every situation about the players and their characters. Then, let them roll with it.

2. Serve the Story

This is a very easy but profound guiding principle for both players and GMs. Ask players to think about the story as if they were collaboratively writing a great novel with their character as the protagonists. Their actions should serve the story and be fun for everyone at the table.

So if your parties rogue gets her shining moment climbing a tower undetected and a player yells 'look a thief' just because his character has a chaotic tendency, that's not serving the story. Players should be free to do and explore as they please, but not at the expense of everyone else at the table. **Ask players to think about how their characters choices affect the overall story.**

The best players think beyond what their character would do and consider the entire story. For instance, characters can bicker or even not be on speaking terms. That could provide some interesting role play. But they'll serve the overall story better if they don't allow the conflict to escalate into a player versus player fight.

In my experience, 99% of problems and discussions can be quickly solved by simply asking *"Does that serve the story?"*. It is a fair question because everyone has taken time out of their busy schedule to play a game. And it makes both players and GMs aware of more helpful behaviour. Once players start asking themselves this question the story improves. They will police themselves and give you helpful nuggets that drive the story forward.

3. Originality is Overrated

Some GMs feel they have to come up with complex and original storylines. But is that really what players want? Ask your players about the best moments they've had at the gaming table. It's usually not something original the GM made up. Most players will talk about an unexpected situation nobody planned for or about defeating a giant or red dragon. Not very original, but clichés work, use them.

The bar for having fun and creating an engaging story is much lower than a lot of GMs believe. Stories don't have to be super-complex or even original. They do have to be well told, immersive, and exciting. The tools in this book will help you focus on engaging players and making their world come alive.

4. Ideas are Cheap

When I talk to GMs about creating entire campaigns on the fly one of the most common responses I hear is that it is simply impossible to generate all the content needed to provide players with a rich world. What if you don't have any inspiration?

In the words of Stephen King: *"Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work."*

Generating story ideas quickly is a skill. It isn't something that you have to sit around and wait for. Using the tools in this book, it really only takes a minute to generate a bunch of ideas on the fly easily.

Consider this: Your mind is brimming with ideas for great storylines. You've watched countless of hours of tv shows, read books, and played many a roleplaying game. All your life you've been absorbing stories. And now, all you have to do is stir up the information you already possess to generate story ideas. In short, the story ideas you seek are already in your head. You just have to activate them in ways that serve you. And that's what the tools are for.

Generating story content is easier than many people believe. But there are tricks to it. For instance, Stephen King does all his writing on the fly. No predetermined plot, no hours spend building an original word. He just sits down, asks himself an engaging question, and writes. And his stories are fast-paced, inventive, and engaging. Just the qualities that players want their game.

5. Ask for Help

Even though you can create everything yourself, you really don't have to. Players also have a well of ideas that they are willing to share. They can offer a suggestion without breaking character. This'll give you an opportunity to respond. For instance:

> GM: *The name of the shopkeeper is... Uh... Help me out here...*
> PC: *Bert Haggelflagel? Are you Bert from my hometown of Flugelstrumpe? You certainly look like Bert. But are you?*
> GM: *Ah sure. Bert recognises you. Ivo, is that you? You owe me money!*

When players know helping is allowed, they'll start helping you out whenever they can. No amount of great GMing improves a game as much as players working together to serve the story. Your players are the best resource for great ideas and should be invited to get involved. And the best thing, they are guaranteed to be excited about their own ideas. Inviting players to cooperate also lets you know their preferences. Avoid spending hours of prep work on storylines that they might not be interested in.

Of course, as a GM, you are still responsible for the way a story unfolds. You can regulate player input by the questions you ask. Which brings us to the next part of this first chapter; the question system.

The Question System

If you're GMing without any prep work, you'll need a basic core system for improvisation and moving the story forward. The question system will help you do that.

> **- The Question System -**
> *"Think of a story as series of questions to be answered."*

You can think of a story as a series of questions to be answered. Questions drive the game forward. They immerse players in the story. Whenever you're reading a book you just can't put down, it's because the writer posed engaging questions you want to learn the answer to. Questions also divide a story into manageable chunks. If you feel overwhelmed, just ask a question and things will start falling into place quickly.

You can handle questions in four different ways. They work best when used evenly:

Tell the story: Answer the questions yourself.
Ask the players: Have players answer the questions.
Randomize: Answer the question by generating a random result.
Create a mystery: Pose the question, but leave it open for players to explore.

Tell the Story

When you are improvising, you're constantly asking questions and answering them yourself. What kind of world do the characters find themselves in? What danger lurks just around the corner? Some answers are shared with players, while others are not. You choose which parts of the story to tell. Answering questions yourself gives you maximum narrative control.

Dangers of overuse:

- The GM must come up with the entire story.
- Players may feel like spectators.

Ask the Players

Asking players lets you share the creative load. It gives players limited control over their world and allows them to integrate their preferences and background stories. You can manage how much control you hand over to players by choosing the right questions. For instance, the question 'what colour is the tower?' gives a player much less influence than the question 'what does this part of the world look like?' Ask questions that match player development. If a player seems overwhelmed, ask simpler questions.

Types of questions you can ask are:

Description questions: *What does it look like?*

Speculation questions: *Why do you think that is? What could be the reason?*

Lore questions: *What do you know about this?*

Action questions: *What do you do?*

Character questions: *Who are you? What drives you?*

Choice questions: *What do you choose?*

Dangers of overuse:

- Players have trouble getting into character if they have to come up with the entire story.

Randomize

GMs can consult a bunch of tools and tables for generating random ideas. The upside of using randomized results is that it will help you avoid getting stuck on the same ideas. Everybody shares in the thrill of not knowing what happens next.

Dangers of overuse:

- Randomly generating results sometimes yield weird outcomes that don't fit the overall story. Don't be afraid to ignore results or change them to fit the story.

Create a Mystery

Unanswered questions to be solved are what drives a story forward. They draw players in. You create a mystery when you pose a question to the players and leave it open to be explored. For instance:

- What happened to the lost people of Ta'al?
- Where is the Ruby of Return?
- Who killed the king?

Dangers of overuse:

- If you pose to many of these questions the story will lack direction. Have the players pick a couple they find most interesting.

An Example of Play:

How do you come up with questions? When you're playing to find out what happens next, questions will come naturally. A lot of times you'll have more questions than you can discuss. Just pick the ones that seem most interesting and try to divide the four ways you can handle them evenly. For instance:

Let's say you want to start a new story by dropping the players right in the middle of the action. A good question might be 'what dangerous situation does the party find themselves in?' You choose to ***tell the story*** *and explain to the players they are all dangling from a rope.*

The next natural question that comes to mind might be 'what is this rope attached to?' You ***ask the players*** *and one of them answers the rope is attached to an airship that is flying high above the city.*

You might wonder 'which city?' and roll a ***randomized*** *result to find out. After consulting a random table you tell the players they're dangling above the sprawling capital city of Middleburg. Someone has stolen the imperial ship with the emperor's daughter - who the players were assigned to protect - still in it. Players ask who would dare such a devious act. You decide to* ***create a mystery*** *by leaving that question open for now.*

The question system can divide any story into manageable chunks and lets you move the story forward. The system also lets you deal with inconsistencies in the story in an interesting way. When you 'play to find out' inconsistencies are more likely to occur. Maybe you accidentally use an NPC that died three sessions before, or a PC survives a fall that should have killed her. Don't think of these inconsistencies as problems that slow down the story, but ask questions. That way, discovering how that NPC came back from the dead, or how a PC miraculously survived a fall could be the next chapter of your story.

What's Next?

While the Question System provides a basis for improvisation, asking the right questions might still seem a little daunting. There are a lot more tools and tips to get the most out of this system. Many of these we'll discuss these in chapter 2: Cooperative Storytelling

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In the previous chapter we discussed the core principles of going prepless. We also looked at the question system as a way to divide your story into manageable chucks and drive it forward. The four different ways to answer questions are: tell the story yourself, ask the players, use a randomized result, and create a mystery by leaving questions open. In this chapter we'll look at cooperative storytelling.

What is cooperative storytelling anyway?

We've already discussed how you can think of any story as a series of questions to be answered. Cooperative storytelling, therefore, is **a Q&A** between the GM and the players.

The GM poses a question and players answer. The GM then uses the answers to drive the story forward, and players ask their questions in return. Within this dialogue players and the GM are constantly trading ideas to create a story together. For instance:

> GM: *You come to a chasm a least fifteen feet wide.*
> Player: *Do I see any way across?*
> GM: *Sure, there is one object lying across the chasm. Can you describe it for me?*
> Player: *A fallen tree.*
> GM: *A hollow tree trunk bridges the chasm. Its flaky bark still swollen with rain.*

With most classic RPGs, players only control their characters and the GM controls the world. Cooperation is more limited with the GM bearing the brunt of the creative responsibility. But with prepless GMing you shift some tasks and responsibilities to the players, allowing them to become more involved in the story. It also makes their characters and background stories central to the story. Finally, it allows them to become better players.

In many books and on online forums, you'll find lots of information about the skills a good GM should possess in order to run a great game. Oddly, there is usually much less information about what makes a good player.

And since players are the most important part of the game, having a skilled gaming group brings much more to the table than having a good GM. Skilled players add to the story in countless ways. So the better your players become, the better the story, and the less work you have to do.

The conclusion? Invest in player development! The little effort you make in helping your players become better storytellers and think beyond their characters will pay itself back many times over.

What Makes a Good Player?

Many players develop their skills more or less along similar lines. Player development generally flows from passive to reactive to pro-active and finally to cooperative. This next table shows the four phases of player development:

Player development	Questions to ask
Passive: - Usually only play human characters. - Don't role play or play themselves. - Play the strong, silent type to avoid speaking. - Avoid making decisions. Let others decide. - Avoid the spotlight. - Often don't know the rules or what they can do.	**Ask easy questions to get players involved:** - What is your age? - What colour is the tower?
Reactive: - Only react to the GM. - Make no plans. - Take no initiative to interact with other PCs. - Prefer combat to social interaction. - Avoid character flaws or making mistakes.	**Ask questions about action and description:** - What do you do? - How do you react? - What does your action look like? - What does the tower look like?
Proactive: - Think about the PC perspective. - Describe PC's thoughts and feelings. - Do not play themselves. Make plans and have ideas but: - Don't cooperate with other players. - Steal the spotlight. - Don't think about the effect on the overall story. - Go off and do their own thing.	**Ask questions about ideas and feelings:** - What's your plan? - How will your plan affect others? - What are you thinking? - What is most important to you? - How do you plan to enter the tower? Encourage ideas, even if they don't serve the story. The players that are hardest to deal with because of their crazy ideas, often develop into the best cooperative roleplayers later on.
Cooperative: - Share the spotlight. - Think about and add to the story. - Cooperate with other PCs. - Elevate other players. - Think ahead and help out the GM. - Add interesting contrasts and play flaws.	**Ask questions about the story:** - What's up with this tower? - What's your story? A group of skilled players hardly needs a GM. Sit back and hand over the reins.

It's certainly not the GM's job to tell players how they should play their game. But you can facilitate player development. Share the four phases of player development and discuss how they see their part in cooperating to create a great story. Ask questions that match player development and occasionally throw in a question that matches the next stage of development.

As a GM, I don't believe you should blindly hand over all control to players. But you can hand over as much control as players can handle. For some players that is very little. Just playing their character is challenging enough. For others, being able to have some say in the world allows them to be more cooperative, making your job a lot easier.

Delegating specific tasks to players

While it is not strictly necessary to delegate specific responsibilities to players, it can help you take a load off so you can focus more on the story. Here are some specific roles you can shift to players at the beginning of a game:

- The **Chronicler** keeps a journal of the storyline, quests, NPCs and party loot. Whenever you need to recall something, consult the chronicler.
- The **Cartographer** draws maps, dungeons and any other artwork that may be required based on the GM's description.
- The **Challenger** gives basic statistics for challenges.

Players often roll the dice to determine success of failure. At the start of each session, the challenger calculates what makes an easy, medium or hard challenge for the party at its current level.

- An easy challenge has roughly a 75% chance of success.
- A medium challenge has roughly a 50% chance of success.
- A hard challenge has roughly a 25% chance of success.

You can use this method to determine easy, medium, and hard: health, attack, damage, armor, speed, powers and so on of PCs and monsters for whatever gaming system you choose to play.

Difficulty	**Health**	**Attack**	**Damage**	**Armor**	**Speed**	**Powers**
Hard	12	+6	1d12	17	50 ft.	15
Medium	8	+4	1d8	15	30 ft.	12
Easy	4	+2	1d4	13	20 ft.	6

If you want to create a check of medium, you can just consult the table and see the player needs to roll a 12 or higher. The challenger provides the GM with an updated list when the party progresses.

This table also allows you to create a monster on the fly. Just pick a combination of stats that fit the monster best. An ogre might have hard health, attack, damage, and speed, but easy armor, and powers. Of course, you can always pick a monster from a sourcebook or just steal their special abilities, but having these stats ready is really helpful if you want to create a quick, unique encounter. In short, a challenger helps you to quickly create well balanced simple challenges.

Getting Players to Interact

Sometimes player do not talk to each other in character and only speak with the GM. Most of the interaction at the table should be between PCs. Circular questioning is a simple technique designed to stimulate people to talk to each other. Instead of answering players' questions ask another player to react; preferably in character. An example:

> Mike: *"Can I climb that tower?"*
> GM: *"Willibrord is considering climbing the tower. Sandy, how does your character you feel about that?"*
> Sandy: (turns to Mike) *"Seems like a bad idea with all those guards around."*
> Mike: *"Can't you draw them away?"*
> Sandy: (turns to GM) *"Can I draw them away?"*
> GM: *"The party wizard hears you talking. What does he have to say about it?"*

In this example the GM deflects questions back to other players. This stimulates conversation between players. It will help them act as a team and they actively create the story content for you. Of course, you can always provide information when it is needed, but players should talk to each other first whenever possible.

The Art of Storytelling

Telling an engaging story is an art. Some GMs believe they need to be very talented to even tell a story. But, as any artist will tell you, talent isn't everything. Artistry largely comes down to technique and having the right tools for the job. In the next paragraphs we'll dispel some of the misconceptions around storytelling and introduce some tools and tips that will make storytelling a breeze.

Focus on the Here and Now

When trying to tell a story on the fly, the number one mistake GMs make is trying to think too far ahead. Thinking ahead is a sure-fire way to take you out of the story and away from where the action is.

Think of it this way: If you always focus on what is going in the story right now, your descriptions will be richer, your players more engaged, and the story more rewarding. But just as important, by focussing on the here and now, your storytelling will inspire within you the content needed create the next scene.

GMs who are new to improvising sometimes fear they won't have a storyline ready so they rush through their scenes without fully exploring them, hoping it will buy them a bit more time to come up with a storyline. But that's counterproductive. It is the very thing that keeps you from naturally progressing to the next scene. If you immerse yourself in the current scene instead, the next logical part of the story will reveal itself naturally.

For instance, you want to do a dungeon crawl. But how do you come up with an entire dungeon on the fly? You have to think about the dungeon history, its reason for being there, reasons for characters going there, occupants, traps, lore, factions, look, treasure, and plot hook to continue the story.

There's no way you can come up with all of that all at once. But you don't need to. Just focus on the here and now. Also, ask questions.

> Where are the players now? *Wandering through the woods.*
> Okay, what do they encounter? *A set of mysterious foot prints.*
> Where do the tracks lead? *To a dungeon entrance.*
> What does the entrance look like? *A giant snakehead is carved into the side of a rock face. In its open mouth sits a metal door.*
> What do PCs find when they inspect the door? *A ring pull of a serpent biting its own tail.*
> What do players know about this symbol? *It is the sign of the Ta'al; a lost tribe renowned for their skills in alchemy and poisons.*

Just by staying in the moment and answering questions about the current scene, the content for the next scene evolves naturally. Go too fast and you won't have generated enough story content to progress to the next scene.

Another tip is to recycle what you've got. If you have gone through all the trouble of establishing an NPC, town or noteworthy site, give players a reason to return to that site. This way you can build on what you've got.

The Alphabet Method

Of course, you have to start somewhere. For generating story content I like to ask small questions about details. Small questions are easier to answer and conjure images. For instance, the question: *'What does the dungeon look like?'* is a lot harder to answer than: *'What does the door handle look like?*' And once you have generated a story detail, your mind will fill in the blanks.

Even coming up with details can be difficult sometimes. For those situations I use the Alphabet Method. How does it work?

With the **Alphabet Method** you simply answer a question by picking a random character from the alphabet first. For instance:

What does the door handle look like?
S = Snake = Pull ring of a snake biting his own tail.
P = Pinecone = Brass pinecone door knocker.
R = Rope = A complex rope system of pulleys.

You can pick random letters by:

- Choosing the first letter that comes to mind.
- Landing your finger randomly on a page of text.
- Asking a player to pick a letter.
- Creating a random table of the alphabet.

With the alphabet method you always have a starting point from which to build. Creativity is not so much about inspiration, but about tickling the parts of your brain just right to generate story content. Anybody can come up with great immersive and original story content if they use these tools.

As the famous fantasy writer Brandon Sanderson said: 'Ideas are cheap'. You could generate ten different door handles in under a minute using the alphabet method if you wanted to. About as much time as it would take going through your notes trying to find where you had written it all down. But often, you won't need to come up with multiple ideas. Your first idea is usually engaging enough.

What's Next?

We've talked about cooperating with your players to tell the story and about how you can easily generate story content on the fly. In the next chapter we'll focus on how to weave that content into a dramatic adventure. We'll also talk about using formulas, plot, and evocative storytelling.

Chapter 3:

Plot and Drama

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In the last chapter we discussed cooperating with players and easy ways to generate story content by: Focusing on the here and now, asking small questions, and using the alphabet method. But how do you turn the content you've generated into an engaging story? And what about plot? That's what we'll be discussing in this chapter.

Losing the Plot

Let me start off with the part of this book that GMs in general have the most trouble excepting: Great adventures and campaigns do not always need a predetermined plot.

No predetermined plot? Have I lost it? Impossible! If you have been dutifully plotting out your campaigns and believe that's the only way to go, there is probably nothing I can say to change your mind. So instead, I'm going to quote Stephen King who - ironically - is famous for his highly original plots.

"I won't try to convince you that I've never plotted any more than I'd try to convince you that I've never told a lie, but I do both as infrequently as possible. I distrust plot for two reasons: first, because our lives are largely plotless, even when you add in all our reasonable precautions and careful planning; and second, because I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible.

A strong enough situation renders the whole question of plot moot. The most interesting situations can usually be expressed as a ***What-if question:***

What if vampires invaded a small New England village? (Salem's Lot).

What if a young mother and her son became trapped in their stalled car by a rabid dog? (Cujo).

These were situations which occurred to me - while showering, while driving, while taking my daily walk - and which I eventually turned into books. In no case were they plotted, not even to the extent of a single note jotted on a single piece of scrap paper."

- Stephen King, the Guardian, Oct 2000 -

Stephen King is what is known as a discovery writer (as opposed to an outliner). Which means he doesn't come up with predetermined plot. Instead, he lets the plot develop naturally while he is writing. This is similar to how GMs can let a plot develop during a prepless game.

But he doesn't just sit down to write whatever comes to mind. Where would you even start? He starts with a super-engaging what-if questions that challenges the characters in unique ways.

And isn't that what all players are looking for in an adventure? To be challenged in ways they haven't been before? And to be free to deal with those unique challenges in ways they see fit?

A great what-if question can launch an adventure or even serve as the inspiration for an entire campaign. Some examples:

- What if the world will explode in ten days, and even the most powerful wizards are fleeing to other planets?
- What if a sentient prison has taken the law into its own hands?
- What if people who fall asleep don't wake up?
- What if no more children are born?

These questions affect characters and invite players in. Rather than a creating a plot, think of a great question to drive your campaign. It doesn't have to come to you before the first session. My best questions tend to evolve from the first few gaming sessions.

Of course, you can create a predetermined plot if you want to. There is no rule that says you have to let plots evolve naturally from the situation. But the point is that you don't have to in order to create an engaging campaign.

Drama, Challenges, Schemes, and Character Goals

There are four elements in cooperative storytelling that are so intertwined, they must be considered together. These are:

- Drama
- Challenges
- Schemes
- Goals

Drama

You don't want drama at your table, but you must have it in your story. Players are automatically drawn to dramatic and problematic situations. Without drama there is no reason to take action. Something must be wrong in the world in order for characters to make it right.

Of course, not every scene needs to start out with drama. Even Bilbo got a moments rest before Gandalf knocked on his door. And in between the action there should be some scenes without drama.

No drama, no story. It's as simple as that. Now drama can come in all shapes and sizes. It doesn't have to always be a monster attacking. A political conflict, disease spreading, being lost in the woods, or a moral dilemma are all forms of drama. But how do you create drama?

The answer: *"Create a difference between the desired situation and the current situation."*

If your story is feeling stale, blow something up, kick the anthill, let the goblin doo-doo hit the fan.

Of course, you can only create drama if PCs have preferences and desires about their world and themselves. Look at your PCs needs like safety, health, wealth, friendship, honor and so on. Then threaten those. But be careful not to overdo it. Many players play orphans just because the GM always does something horrible to their characters' family. And now the character is supposed to avenge them. That is not a good way to use drama. Don't take away everything characters care about or they will end up caring about nothing.

When used well, drama creates some threats that characters can still do something about. They're hard to beat, but certainly not impossible. Those types of threats are called challenges.

Challenges

A challenge is a threat, looming danger, or some kind of drama the PCs wish to change. Characters always want something in the world, and it is the GM's job to make it challenging. Which is to say; possible, but not easy.

Whenever players want something, they will ask you a question. There are two types of answers you can choose that help you create challenges. These are: *"Yes, and/but"* or *"No, but"*. An example:

> Player: *"Can I lift the stone statue?"*
> GM: *"**No, but** the scrapes on the floor suggest it can be moved."*
> Player: *"Do I find something if I follow the scrapes to where they start?"*
> GM: *"**Yes, and** that something also finds you."*

Both of the answers create a challenging situation for the PC. A second and very important aspect of challenges is that they **aren't resolved immediately** and **give the character a fair chance** to do something about them.

Schemes

With most challenges PCs have to respond to the dangers the GM presents. In many adventures those dangers are introduced through a villain who employs complex schemes which the PCs have to foil. There are a couple of disadvantages to using these type of scheming villains.

1. Creating a scheming villain entails a lot of work for the GM who has to keep track of the scheme and all possible complications.
2. The players feel railroaded because the villain always stays one step ahead of them. And the game is rigged. No matter how clever the players are, the villain always gets away, because the plot demands he can only be confronted in the final scene.
3. Using scheming villains puts players in a reactive mode. They are only reacting to the dangers around them, instead of pro-actively seeing to their needs.

Reactive players don't really participate in cooperative storytelling. They just sit back and wait for the GM to throw the next challenge at them to react to. As a result, they take very little initiative and give the GM less to work with. These are the passive en reactive stages of player development. And unless the GM creates a more pro-active experience, it is the level of development most players will stay at.

Luckily, there is an easy way to change this. With prepless GMing, the players become the schemers. They have to come up with a plan to complete an **open-ended task**. It's the GM's job to add challenges to their plans.

Open-ended tasks always have:

1. Multiple solutions.
2. Multiple steps which the PCs must formulate themselves.

Possible open-ended tasks:

- Overthrow or destabilize a government.
- Create an alliance.
- Create mistrust within an alliance.
- Plan a heist.
- Free a prisoner.
- Start a war.
- End a war.
- Make two people fall in love.
- Secure succession to the throne.
- Create a secret society, guild.
- Govern a town, college or country.
- Build a library.
- Con someone into...

None of these open-ended task have a predetermined plot. The GM just presents the task and lets players figure out how they are going to accomplish it. This way, all the scheming is done by the characters and happens at the gaming table. And if players start to formulate a plan, the GM just says "Yes, and" or "No, but". Simply make whatever the players are scheming difficult, but not impossible.

Character Goals

With schemes players take on a much more proactive role. They have to come up with their own plans on how to achieve goals. The next step is to focus on character goals. All characters want something out of life:

- The party rogue wants to start their own thieving guild.
- The paladin wants to create an outpost on the edges of Hell.
- The wizard wants to gain immortality.
- The barbarian wants to end the blood feud he was born into.

These character goals are really open-ended tasks characters assign to themselves. So, not only are players coming up with the drama. They are also coming up with the schemes to solve them. What is left for the GM to do? Very little. Just make their journey as challenging and exciting as possible. You can often find character goals in the background story players have written. If characters don't have goals, ask them what they want out of life.

Characters can also create goals based on the world and events they encounter as a party. Maybe they decide to adopt a cause, become the political power in a region, or build a flying ship from scratch. Ask questions that encourage the party to think about what they want to achieve in the world. Your players are guaranteed to be excited about their own ideas and the story will write itself.

In the previous paragraphs we've discussed how to use plotless, pro-active storytelling. The next paragraphs will discuss how to present story content to your players.

Offering Description

You can think of a story as a series of questions to be answered. But it is also a conversation between players and the GM. Good conversationalists know how to engage listeners through offering rich and exciting descriptions. They also watch their players carefully to see if they're still engaged. That's very hard to do if your nose is buried in a book.

Offering descriptions is a skill you develop with practice. Just like writers develop their prose, GMs can improve upon their descriptions. Pick a few things to describe every day, and notice how your descriptions will improve quickly. You don't have to be a perfectionist. You're not writing a novel. Here are a few tips that will help you improve your descriptions:

Take Your Time

One of the most common mistakes with offering descriptions is not taking the time to picture it in your mind first. It really isn't a problem if players have to wait a few seconds for you to get a clear image. If you're not getting a clear image, focus on the here and now and start out by being vague. Something will usually come to you if you just start talking. For instance:

(Alphabet method: V = valley) *"An eerie stillness hangs over the valley. Dark clouds cast their shadow over a scattering of broken trees. Their trunks snapped just above the root by an unseen power. What force could have done this?"*

If you can't come up with the next sentence immediately, don't worry about it. Your players will think you're adding a silence for dramatic effect.

Go General First

Give a general description first. Then add a few details that stand out. Don't describe everything. Just set the mood.

> *"You enter a seaside tavern, the Merry Maiden. Intricate designs of hundreds of sea-monsters, shells, and waves have been lovingly carved into every wooden surface. The place smells of wood oil. An elderly man looks up from waxing a table. What do you do?"*

When you give a general description first (a seaside tavern) the players' minds are already filling in the blanks with obvious details like the fact that the tavern has tables and chairs. So there's really no need to describe those. If you describe unusual details that stand out later, it will add depth and make descriptions more memorable. Also, engage the senses and go heavy on the adjectives. Describe sounds, smells, colours, textures. Then, end with a question. So in short:

- Go general first.
- Unique, memorable details.
- Engage the senses.
- End with a question.

For instance, if you're making up a monster on the spot, take your time to describe how it looks, it's behaviour and how it is a looming thread. Taking your time to improvise will help you come up with ideas for the powers and mindset of your monster.

> *(General) "Tiny bubbles of air appear on the surface of the lake as 'the thing with a thousand faces' rises from the deep. (Unique) A huge ancient crustacean made of white pearly seashell slowly turns its featureless head towards you. It has no mouth or eyes and yet it perceives you. (Senses) The only faces you see are the ones in agony, lying just below its gleaming shell. Their souls a high pitched scream just beyond hearing. Strands of slimy tentacles like those of a jellyfish start to wrap around your little boat. (Question) What do you do?"*

Make a habit of ending descriptions with a question. It drives the story forward and lets players know it's their turn to act. Asking question also puts you, the GM, into the role of listener which is of course key to having a good conversation.

What's Next?

In this chapter we've covered plot, drama, challenges, schemes and character goals. We've also discussed how to offer better descriptions. In the next chapter we'll take a look at using formulas to create specific story content like an NPC, mystery, uncharted territory, dungeon, riddle, battlefield, magic item, simple quest, prophecy, puzzle, plotline, and villain.

Chapter 4:

Formulas

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Formulas

The previous chapters help you create story content in a general way. Using the alphabet method you can generate just about any element on the fly. You can then combine these elements into more powerful formulas. A formula is a series of small questions or story elements that help you generate something more specific like an NPC or a battlefield. A formula for creating an NPC might be:

Generate a NPC:

1. Pick a first name.	*Adoren*
2. Pick a last name.	*Wanderlust*
3. Pick a physical trait.	*Tall*
4. Pick a personality trait.	*Absentminded*
5. Pick a class.	*Bard*
6. Pick a goal.	*Running from something*
7. Pick a contrast.	*Stage fright*

An example of play:
"GM Luke needs to come up with an NPC on the fly. He uses the alphabet method and points at random letters on a page. The first letter he points at is an A. He names the NPC Adoren. He also needs a last name. The next letter he points at is a W for Wanderlust. Adoren Wanderlust is born. Luke picks a T for most noticeable physical trait and an A for most obvious personality trait. He asks the players and they come up with 'tall' and 'absentminded'.

The last story element is a contrast. A **contrast** is something that is unique, memorable, and unexpected, that creates drama.

Formulas help you pick the right story elements. You still have to combine them into a coherent whole. If an element doesn't fit, change it. I encourage you to create your own formulas that fit your world and style of play. Here are some other useful formulas.

Generate a Mystery

Sherlock Holmes type of (murder) mysteries are a lot of fun to play. You might think they require a lot of preparation on the GM's part. There are clues that need to be cleverly connected, multiple suspects, and a logical conclusion pointing towards the villain that players need to reason out. That's impossible to do on the fly... Or is it?

Generate a mystery:

1. Describe a situation and oddity.
2. Let PCs speculate.
3. Use *"yes, and/but"* and *"no, but"* to reach a conclusion.

An example of play:
GM: "*You find a dead woman lying in a damp room. Oddly her dress is still dry."*
Player: *"A dead woman in a damp room? Drowned maybe? Is there any fluid in her lungs?"*
GM: *"No, but while you are checking, you do find her neck is at an odd angle."*
Player: *"As if from a fall? Is there a chair or object she could have fallen of?"*
GM: *Yes a fall is likely, but there are no objects in this room she could have fallen of."*
Player: *"I check the ceiling. Is there a trapdoor or something?"*
GM: *"Yes, but it appears to be locked from the inside."*
Player: *"I investigate. Is it a sliding door with a false lock? I roll a 15!"*
GM: *"No, not a sliding door, but it is a false lock, and you find hinges."*
Player: *"I pull on the lock."*
GM: *"The door has a spring holding it up but hinges downward when you pull, revealing a dark hidden path above."*
Player: *"I conclude that she sneaked through this hidden pathway without any light and fell to her death. She obviously didn't know about the trapdoor. What was she after I wonder?"*

In this example the GM just presents players with an oddity and then uses their speculation to expand the mystery to its logical conclusion. With a couple of players speculating, you'll have more than enough ideas to choose from. As a rule of thumb; only use 'no, but' answers if you see another possibility. I hope you see just how powerful formulas can be when used correctly. Even murder mysteries are relatively easy to do prepless if you know the right formula.

Generate a Puzzle

Over the years I've developed a prepless tool for just about every task a GM faces, except for puzzles. It's the one thing that is very difficult to do completely on the fly.

I love puzzles if they are done right. A good puzzle should be immersive, challenge both the player and their character, engage everyone at the table, and be challenging enough while avoiding players getting stuck. To get all of that right requires preparation. There's just no way around it.

My players also love puzzles. That is why I've created hundreds of them. I've designed these puzzles so they can be instantly dropped into any prepless game. You can find them on my DungeonVault website.

Generate Uncharted Territory

Uncharted territory is an area the PCs haven't mapped out. It might be a maze, swamp, jungle, cave system or any piece of wilderness. The following formula turns this territory into a exploration challenge.

Generate an uncharted territory:

1. Draw squares.
2. Give each square a unique description.
3. Draw connections and pick a goal square.

An example of play:
"GM Elsa tells players they are about to enter the 'Foreboding Forest'. She quickly draws 25 squares in a five by five pattern. Then, she chooses one square to represent the first area PCs enter. She writes down the description of that area in the square and tells the players: 'Moments after entering the Foreboding Forrest, you come to a small clearing where a tiny tent has been erected. Deep claw marks mar its side. Two pathways lead away from this site'. Elsa draws a connection to two other squares. She also picks a goal square that - in this case - represents a way out of the forest."

As players explore the forest, she creates a unique description of each square they come to. This way, if PCs are going around in circles, they will know by the descriptions the GM uses. Clever players map out the squares and connections for themselves to find a way out of the territory. If players strike out through the wilderness into a random direction, lead them to the square they had found already.

Generate a Dungeon

A dungeon is a collection of rooms, hallways or caves. Creating a dungeon on the fly is very similar to creating uncharted territory. You start out with one room and add a description. But the connection between rooms are usually simple doorways, so there is no need to hide your drawing from the players. In fact, you don't even have to draw at all. If you give players the dimensions of the room, the cartographer can draw out the rooms on a battle mat or piece of paper.

Generate a dungeon room:

1. Describe the shape and dimensions.
2. Describe unique features.
3. Engage the senses and maybe hint at challenges.
4. End with a question.

An example of play:
"A ten by eight room lies before you. Wooden pillars and crossbeams barely hold up a stone roof. The eastside has completely collapsed. Oddly, the floors are covered in what were once beautifully woven carpets. They now lie rotting in an inch of water covering most of the floor. What do you do?"

Of course, some rooms need to contain challenges. The rotting carpets might hold a clue to a secret door. Or they might obscure some kind of trap. Besides the obvious monsters, there are lots of other challenges PCs can encounter.

Generate a Riddle

Riddles are a staple of fantasy. Most riddles are also terrible. Why? Because often the GM comes up with some cryptic sentence that could have a thousand correct answers. If players come up with the wrong answer that would still work, the GM must either choose to accept the wrong answer, or tell players that wasn't the answer they were looking for. Both options don't make for a good gaming experience. And if you search the internet for riddles you'll find that most of them suffer from this problem. Here's how you fix it.

Generate a riddle:

1. Combine two words that also mean something on their own.
2. Think of a cryptic description for each word.
3. Say: *"The two secret words in these lines won't easily yield. Find them, combine them, and the answer will be unsealed."*
4. Then give the two cryptic descriptions.

An example of play:
"GM Jacob wants to create a riddle on the fly. First, he thinks of a combined word like 'land-fall'. Next, he thinks of a cryptic description for each word and comes up with: Land - 'it is always beneath you'. Fall - 'where liquid goes over the edge'. He gives his players the rhyme in step three and then gives the two cryptic descriptions."

If players were presented with just one line, the riddle would be just as vague as the ones I criticized before. The sentence: 'It is always beneath you' could refer to your feet, shoes, land, the underworld, and so on. And the sentence: 'Where liquid goes over the edge' could refer to your mouth, a bathtub, a fall, and a whole host of other things.

But there is only one combination that makes up a combined word. 'Feet-bathtub' or 'shoes-mouth' just don't make any sense. Only the combination 'land-fall' actually means something. Because of this, a cryptic riddle suddenly only has one very specific answer, making it much better than ordinary riddles.

Here's an easy list of words you can combine.

Word	Riddle
Fire	Bad thing to be under.
Water	Poor man's wine.
Wind	Whispers without speech.
Earth	It is always beneath you.
Lightning	First a flash, then a bang.
Light	At the finale of a tunnel.
Storm	Angry skytraveller.
Spring	Season of life.
Fall	Where liquid goes over the edge.
Spirit	Both 'lively' and 'ghostly'.
Weather	What everybody talks about.
Trade	Give and take.
Tongue	Both in your shoe and mouth.
Ball	A set distance in all directions.
Death	End of the road.
Love	Blind when you're in it.
Line	Thinnest path.
Blood	Life's liquid.
Leaf	In a book and on a tree.
Sword	Knife's big brother.
Shield	Plank that protects.
Chain	Iron rope.
Whirl	Round and round.
Ship	Waterhouse.
Bow	Harp of war.
Cloud	Lined with silver.
Tree	Bearer of wooden rings.
Mountain	Home of the bearded.
Forest	Timberland.
Heart	Roomy organ.
Shadow	Light's brother.

Generate a Battlefield

Every combat encounter needs a great battlefield. Whether your PCs are fighting on the slopes of an active volcano, or on the deck of a sinking ship. Battlefield should be both immersive and provide tactical advantages or dangers. While there are limitless possibilities, on a tactical level, you can break them down into five categories:

Generate a battlefield:

1. Pick elevations: (*hills, balconies, ladders, bridges, branches, crates) d6*
2. Pick difficult terrain: *(slippery, steep, rubble, mud) d4*
3. Pick hard cover: *(walls, pillars, trees, stalagmites, statue, crates) d6*
4. Pick soft cover: *(foliage, smoke, washing lines/curtains/tapestries, shadow) d4*
5. Pick dangers: *(cliffs, pits, fire, traps, geysers, gas) d6*

An example of play:
"The sun sets over the five barrow hills casting deep shadows from the standing stones. A ripple moves through the high grass and it is moving against the wind. What do you do?"

This simple description provides elevations, hard cover from standing stones, soft cover from shadows and high grass, and maybe even dangers if PCs fall through the top of a barrow, wake the dead or a standing stone topples.

You can roll the dice for each step, pick what fits your scene, or use the suggestions for inspiration. It certainly isn't necessary to pick one option from every step. Add a few to your description and draw a battlefield or have your cartographer draw one.

Generate a Magic Item

You can just pick magic items from the GM guide or generate your own. Here's a simple formula for magic item creation.

Generate a magic item:	**Example:**
1. Pick an object.	*Earplugs of...*
2. Pick a verb.	*Hearing...*
3. Pick a power.	*Prophecies.*
4. Make a sentence.	*The wearer hears prophecies, but nothing else.*

Simple, yet effective. I find that creating magic items in this way often yields more fun and original items.

Generate a Simple Quest

Imagine. Your party is looking to do some adventuring. They're asking around for jobs at the local guild and the mayor's office. And you need to come up with some simple quests fast. Here's a quick formula for doing so:

Generate a quest:	**Example:**
1. Pick a verb.	*Race.*
2. Pick an object.	*Cloak.*
3. Pick a person.	*Adoren Wanderlust.*
4. Make a sentence.	*Race Adoren for the 'Cloak of time'.*

Generate a Prophecy

Some of the greatest fantasy stories in history revolve around a grand prophecy. A well written prophecy adds mystery and depth. But while prophecies are a great tool for writers, using prophecies in RPGs is a lot harder for GMs.

There are three main problems with using prophecies in RPGs; railroading, player engagement, and the single, grand prophecy.

1, Railroading

The fact that prophecies must come to pass means that GMs limit their freedom to change the story on the fly. Players are unpredictable and might take the story in directions that make a prophecy less meaningful or obsolete. And if a GM forces a prophecy on players, they might feel railroaded. Instead of drawing players into the story, it pushes them out. In short, using prophecies in RPGs works different from using them in books.

2. Player engagement

Using prophecies doesn't challenge players. If a prophecy is destined to come true anyway, why make the effort to see it come true? Unless a prophecy aligns with a character's motivation, there is really no reason for players to invest. Also, if a prophecy singles out one character as being special, other players might feel left out.

3. A single grand prophecy

Many stories revolve around one singular, grand prophecy that dominates the entire narrative. But in many RPGs divination represents an entire school of magic. It would be odd if it only produced a single prophecy. For players, a big part of the fun is finding out what the prophecy means. It simply isn't as much fun if there is only one prophecy in the game.

Generate a prophecy:

GMs can get more out of their prophecies by using them in ways that work better with their gaming system. In order to do that we have to turn the concept of prophecies on its head. Instead of using a single grand prophecy that dominates your entire campaign, I would like to suggest using multiple smaller prophecies. From a RPG standpoint this makes more sense. Soothsayers, fortune tellers, and diviners can be found in every market. And characters pray for prophecies or use divination spells.

When turning the concept of prophecies on its head, it is no longer the GM's job to decide what a prophecy means or how it should be weaved into the story. Instead, just give characters a prophecy and let them wonder about what it all means and how it applies to them. This ensures player engagement, because players will spontaneously try to find personal meaning in a prophecy. (Ever opened a fortune cookie with a vague prophecy? You can't help thinking about how it applies to you.)

Players will start to look for events that fit their meaningful, personal interpretation of the prophecy. And if they do, they can play out how their character evolves through their actions in the game. For instance:

> *"Mark is playing a young half-elf named Elharil. He receives a prophecy that says: 'In the eye of the storm, it's best to stay centered'. Mark decides that this prophecy is a great metaphor for the mistrust between humans and elves. During the next gaming sessions he plays out how he is internally conflicted about his double heritage. And the GM, seeing this, decides to put him on the spot by making him choose between elves and humans. Can Elharil find a way to stay at the centre of that storm? If so, his character will achieve personal growth. If not, he might take a darker more radical path."*

Using prophecies as a means of character development allows for a much more personal experience for players. Because players get to decide how they wish to incorporate the prophecy into the story, they will never feel railroaded.

Also, much of the responsibly for making the prophecy come true is shifted from the GM to the players. If they want their prophecies to mean something, players must bring them to the GM's attention through role playing. It is no longer the GM's job to keep the players focused on the prophecy.

Generate a Trap

Most Game masters like to put traps in their game. Who doesn't love the suspense of the ever increasing danger as the party edges closer to your malicious pit trap, or even the good old Ooze-in-a-hallway trap? Watching PCs squirm to see what is around the next corner, is just sheer fun.

But is it fun for your players? A lot of players don't enjoy traps. Sure, they want their dungeons to be dangerous, but they also want **a fair chance**. And traps are about as unfair as it gets. An example:

> *"Twig the Tree-elf skips nimbly along a hallway and misses his perception check, having eaten one lembas to many, his weight triggers a pressure plate and a fireball erupts. Twig manages to avoid halve the damage, but it's not enough to save him."*

And just like that it's over. The problem with this scenario is that Twig didn't get to CHOOSE anything. His faith was sealed when he ate that lembas. Poor Twig. But it doesn't have to be that way.

In order to create a better trap GMs need to slow things down. Yes, a trap can still spring suddenly - surprising your players - but the effect should never be instant death. Take some inspiration from Indiana Jones movies. The rolling boulder was potentially deadly and hard to escape. But the danger was not immediate. And Indie could take several actions to escape.

Generate a trap

1. Obscure: How is the trap hidden?

   Challenge the player: Smart players will listen carefully to GM descriptions and pay attention to what stands out.

   Challenge the character: Characters can roll a die to notice how a clue is obscured.

2. Clue: What clue reveals a possible trap?

   Challenge the player: Smart players reason out how the clue could relate to a trap and trigger.

   Challenge the character: Characters can roll a die to see how the clue relates to a trap and trigger.

3. Trigger: How is the trap activated?

   Challenge the player: Smart players reason out the location of the trigger and how to avoid it, disable it, or set it of harmlessly.

   Challenge the character: Characters roll a die to achieve the same thing.

4. Danger: What happens when the trap is sprung?

   Challenge the player: Smart players use quick thinking to get out of the sticky situation before they take massive damage.

   Challenge the character: Characters roll several die to see if their quick thinking pays off.

An example of play:

The GM answers the four questions to create a quick trap so follows:

Obscure: *Cobwebs cling thickly to the hallway walls and ceiling.*

Clue: *A broken arrow hangs tangled in the cobwebs against a wall. (Retracing the path of the arrow reveals a tiny hole in the opposite wall.)*

Trigger: *A pressure plate lies in the path of the arrow.*

Danger: *When someone steps on the pressure plate, arrows start shooting out of two rows of holes along the walls in a wave that is closing the distance to the PCs fast.*

This looming thread will give PCs a bit of time to come up with a plan. Smart players might choose to stand against the arrow in the cobwebs, hoping nobody reloaded that part of the trap. Others might place shields against either wall and hide in between. Whatever players choose, reward quick thinking, and allow slower players to shine through rolling dice.

Check out 'Dice and Tables' in chapter 5 to find a trap table for generating of 65,000 trap ideas.

Generate an Escape Room

Imagine PCs being locked in a room or dungeon. They have just one hour to find a way out. The rooms are filled with a myriad of objects revealing keys to unlocking other objects, finally leading to the key that opens the exit. Here is my formula for doing escape rooms on the fly.

Generate an escape room:

1. Object:

    An object holds a keyhole. If unlocked it reveals a new key.

2. Keyhole:

    A keyhole is a condition that must be met to unlock an object and reveal the next key. It may be as simple as a real keyhole. But it can also be entering a code, playing a melody, fixing something broken, or finding a piece of a puzzle that is missing.

3. Object key:

    An 'object key' is the key, code, melody, etc. that is needed to meet the condition set by the keyhole.

4. Next key:

    This is the key that will unlock a new object.

TIP: When PCs first enter an escape room, I usually name about ten random objects that are in the room. Then I use the formula to connect the objects in some way during play. You don't have to use every object; some can be red herrings. Having these objects gives the players a sense of realism and helps you come up with ideas.

An example of play:
A piano (object) misses an ivory (object key). If PCs find the ivory and place it in the open slot (keyhole). The top of the piano opens, revealing sheet music (next key). PCs also find a little music box (object2). They play the sheet music and nothing happens. Then they investigate the music box and find a message saying: 'sdrawkcab em yalp' which is 'play me backwards' written in reverse (keyhole 2). They play the sheet music backwards on the piano (object key 2) and from the music box a porcelain ballerina appears (next key2).

This example shows how you can easily create a linear set of objects that each hold a key to a next object on the fly.

To add a little more complexity use the following tips:

- An object might have multiple keyholes. For instance: Three piano keys are missing. Find all three to play the melody.
- An object can reveal multiple new keys. You can think of objects for those keys later.
- Add a danger when finding a key. For instance: You play a melody that opens a door, but it also alarms orcs.
- Introduce a mini puzzle, use the object key as a missing piece of the puzzle. For instance: PCs find the three missing keys to the piano, but must still place them in the correct order.

Adding more complexity obviously takes a bit more time. But it will usually take you less than a minute and players will enjoy your game a lot more.

Generate a Plotline

You really don't need plotlines to run a great game for all the reasons mentioned before. But if you do want to create one, here's a quick way of doing so.

Generate a plotline:

1. Pick a catastrophe.
2. Pick a villain.
3. Pick a motivation.
4. Pick escalations.

An example of play:
"A catastrophe is an evil coming to pass. GM Danny picks the following catastrophe: 'A demon is summoned and the capital burns.' Next, he picks a villain who desires to bring the catastrophe about. He chooses a coven of hags. Their motivation? They worship the demon who has promised them untold powers. Danny picks three escalations before the catastrophe occurs. 1. The hags gather and collect the hearts of animals. 2. The hearts are used to create the 'seven dark summoning candles'. 3. The summoning ritual is performed on the shortest day of the year."

For each escalation step along the way, Danny figures out some way to inform the players of what is about to happen, so they can try to prevent it. These type of plotlines place players in a reactive mode, but they do work. And beginning players sometimes feel more comfortable if the GM takes the lead.

You can also use this formula during combat. This way, players don't just have to fight enemies. They also have to stop a thread from escalating into a catastrophe.

Generate a Villain

Sauron was a Maiar, Voldermort a promising student and King Kong just a crazy monkey in love. Apart from being born inherently evil, most villains have had an experience that changed them into the person they are today. Creating believable villains isn't as hard as it seems. And there is certainly a formula to it:

1. A round character has wishes and dreams outside the plot.
2. Villains are not against the PCs, but for themselves.
3. Their actions cross what the PCs consider evil.

An example of play:
Ulrich Sagbottom - Goblin leader
Ulrich was the fourth son to his late father Gangly Sagbottom, destined to lead the Sagbottom Goblin Tribe when his three older brothers died in vendettas, as is to be expected in war tribes. Ulrich's rule should have been a short one. He was neither strong nor a natural leader, and he really wanted to be a farmer. But destiny had other plans. One thing Ulrich had going for him was that he was very afraid of dying, and because of this, would do anything to stay alive. Starting with ordering the death of his younger brothers. With no heir to the Sagbottom 'throne', the tribe grew more protective of Ulrich.

They attack at night, leaving none alive to avenge the fallen. And they cover their tracks well, often making it look like another tribe attacked. If there is one thing Ulrich hates, it's lose ends. Now more and more goblinkind are flocking to his tribe. And although he doesn't want that kind of attention, there's not much he can do about it.

What’s Next?

In this chapter we’ve looked at using formulas to generate more specific story content on the fly. In the next chapter we’ll take a look at creating a campaign setting, running your first game, splitting the check, and using more powerful tables in your game.

Chapter 5:

Running a Campaign

Chapter 5:

Running a Campaign

In this chapter we'll create a campaign setting, start our first adventure, and create PCs on the fly. We will also look at how to utilise dice rolls and tables in a more powerful way in your game.

Generate a Campaign Setting

Every campaign starts with a campaign setting. A campaign setting is not a story. It is the backdrop or world the characters inhabit. In order to create relevant characters players should have a general idea of what their world looks like.

When creating a campaign setting on the fly, it is important NOT to go into too much detail. Fleshing out the details and discovering places should evolve naturally during play. Give players just enough information to start building their characters, but leave the world open to be explored.

Here's my method for creating campaign settings on the fly:

1. Ask each player to write down one unique aspect of the type of setting they want to play in.
2. Use these aspects to create your setting. When trying to integrate aspects, many questions will come to mind. Answer the most general questions but try to leave some questions a mystery for the players to explore.

The benefit of letting your players have a say in the setting is that they are guaranteed to love the world and are more likely to create characters that fit into that world. A real problem with many campaigns is that players often create background stories that have nothing to do with the world they inhabit and as a result, are ignored by the GM. In my experience, doing your worldbuilding on the fly with players actually creates a more coherent campaign.

Creating a campaign setting should take about ten minutes. For example:

GM: *"Okay, we are starting en new campaign. I would like each of you to write down one unique aspect of the type of setting you want to play in."*

Lance: *Airships, floating islands*
Kim: *High magic*
Clarance: *Underground*
Ella: *Gritty realism*

GM: (thinking out loud) *"Hmm. Airships and underground don't seem to go together very well. But they have in common that they are not on the surface of the planet. So what's going on there? Let's say no-one can live on the surface of the planet and everyone is either forced underground or has taken to the skies. So tell me, why is life on the surface impossible?"*
Lance: *Maybe the rocks float up from the surface and crash down in rock falls as they lose and gain weight. And only the most upper rocks form rockclouds that become permanent islands?"*
GM: *"Sounds perfect. And to tie in the high magic, this is caused by a magical occurrence, which is also the source of arcane magic. How it*

came to be is still a mystery to be explored. Kim, how are magicians using this magical phenomenon?"
Kim: *"That is a closely guarded secret among wizards!"*
GM: *"Nice. Now for gritty realism. With the surface of the world uninhabitable, resources are scarce and life is hard. The Skybound have all the riches in the world. They can grow crops on floating islands and some even have wood, which is much more expensive than iron. They literally look down on the Earthbound who live in extreme poverty. Ella, how does poverty affect the earthbound?"*
Ella: *"Clans and cults defend their holds against others trying to steal what little food and water remains. Law-enforcement is weak at best. While elves, humans, and gnomes have taken to the skies, orcs, hobbits, and other races mostly live below."*
GM: *"Okay. That sounds like enough to start building a story to me. Does anyone have any objection to this campaign setting or shall we start the game?"*

A campaign setting can be created through combining preferences from all players and generating content. But it is also possible to create a unique world through limitation. With this method players and the GM state what options they want to scrap from the game. For instance, players could decide that only dwarves can become paladins or that elves no longer exist. The limitations you choose together can be as profound to your campaign world as the ideas you combine. Just make sure players are on board.

Generate a Character

When creating a setting, players usually get a lot of ideas about their characters' place in the world. Ask players to pick a name for their PC, and fill out anything they have already decided about who their character is.

For instance, Kim wants to play a wizard urchin who dreams of becoming Skybound. She rolls for stats and leaves the rest of her character sheet open for now.

Clarance, knows he'd like to play an orc called 'Odor' but beyond that he has no idea who his character is. That's okay. All his stats are equal to those of an average commoner until he decides who he is. He can still roll stats in advance and assign each score when it becomes relevant in the game.

Players can add aspects to their character during play. If elves start shooting arrows at the players and Odor decides he steps to the front and hides behind his tower shield, he fills out that part of his character sheet and his choices of classes are reduced to those who are proficient with tower shields. Later Odor lifts a heavy gate and decides that his highest score, a 17, goes into strength. With this method character creation flows naturally from the story events. And you can just sit down and start playing at any time. If you don’t like this method players can always create their prepared characters.

Don't be too strict about character choices. Leave players some room to experiment without having to regret their on the fly character choices. However, players should try to create a consistent character. There's no reason to change your name three times. Ask them to stick with choices if possible.

Rolling for stats should not take longer than 5 minutes. Players can develop their characters during the game.

The First Adventure

You are fifteen minutes into your first session when actual play begins. When starting your first adventure, try to throw the characters right in the middle of the action. Some good starting questions are:

- What are you holding on to for dear life?
- Why are you running?
- What have you just dodged successfully?
- Who in your party is in desperate need of your help?
- What is behind you?
- Why is everyone yelling?

These type of questions create dynamic story content and help develop a story. And with the campaign setting fresh in the players' minds, the story will immediately be a part of the setting. Start with a strong situation and make sure the adventure leads to a bigger adventure or question to be answered. Start small, and let events snowball.

Creating a Party

A group of random PCs is not the same as having a party. In many campaigns a situation throws reluctant PCs together who then come to rely on each other. This is a perfectly good story arc. But the GM must usually prepare reasons for the PCs to stick together. And that doesn't work very well with a completely improvised campaign.

Instead, players could also decide that their characters are already a team of some sort at the beginning of play. Perhaps they decide to be a band of outlaws, or maybe they all grew up in the same village, they are all dwarves or all belong to the same guild.

Starting out as a party helps generate story ideas and removes the need to force PCs together through a predetermined storyline.

The Rule of Fifty Fifty

With prepless GMing it is important to keep the creative flow going. And it really doesn’t help if the story grinds to a halt every time you have to look up a rule during play. That is why I like to use the rule of fifty fifty.

Imagine: A PC falls 10 feet onto a rooftop and should take falling damage. But the player argues that the rooftop is at a 45 degree angle. Because his character doesn’t instantly come to a complete stop, he shouldn’t take damage. What do the rules as written say? And how are the rules intended? What would be a reasonably ruling?

Sometimes there's a gray area the rules aren't clear on. Instead of having a long discussion, you can invoke the rule of fifty fifty. The player rolls a d6. A result of 4 or higher favours the player. A lower result does not. In the end lady luck decides how the gray area is resolved and the GM can keep the story going.

Dice Rolls and Tables

Dice rolls are used to mechanically introduce an element of chance into situations like combat or skilfulness. How much variety a dice rolls yields, depends on what players are rolling for. For instance:

- Checks are the simplest in most games. They only yield a possible success of failure.
- Attack rolls offer a bit more variety. You can get a success, failure, critical hit, or fumble on a single die.
- Tables offer the most variety. Every result on a dice roll has a different outcome.

On each occasion players might roll just one d20. But the impact of that die roll can massively vary depending on the type of role they're making. Just having a possible success or failure on a check is pretty boring. It doesn't really give the GM much to work with, which isn't very helpful when you're improvising.

The solution? Supercharge your dice by adding more possible outcomes to every single roll of the die. These more specific outcomes produce a much more dynamic story and help the GM generate story content more easily. So how does it work?

In the first chapter we talked about how questions drive the story forward. You can also introduce questions mechanically by tying them to specific die results. For instance, when a player rolls a maximum score on a check, you might ask 'how are you awesome?' and choose an effect within reason. You could even use a table to tie a different question to each result on a die. On a d6 this might look like this:

Die result	Question
6	How are you awesome?
5	How do you succeed?
4	What does success cost you?
3	What have you learned that's useful from failing?
2	How do you fail?
1	What does your massive failure cost you?

Each die result adds something to the game. And even a question like 'how do you succeed?' challenges players to more specifically describe their action. This, in turn, provides you with more story content to build upon.

Of course, having 20 different questions on a d20 might be a bit much. But you can easily assign ranges to die results to allow for more dynamic play. This is called 'splitting the check'.

Splitting the Check

Splitting the check allows you to assign areas on a d20 that prompt specific questions.

Let's say, a player needs to roll a 15 or higher on a d20. Normally, there are two areas, success and failure. The GM splits the check by adding and subtracting a range of 2. Now, a result above 17 is a success, any result below 13 is a failure, and any result in between prompts a **choice question.** You can use this method with skill challenges, attacks, etc.

Succeed or fail	Split the check
...Success	..Success
19 Success	19 Success
18 Success	**18 Success**
17 Success	17 Choice question
16 Success	16 Choice question
15 Success	15 Choice question
14 Failure	14 Choice question
13 Failure	**13 Choice question**
12 Failure	12 Failure
11 Failure	11 Failure
...Failure	...Failure

When a player rolls a choice question ask the following:

Choice question: Which do you choose?
You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed at cost.

If the player chooses **you fail and learn something useful**, the GM must come up with helpful information in the player's current situation. It might be a monster's weakness, a way to improve their chances on a second try and so on. If the player picks **succeed at cost** the GM chooses a complication such as:

- Losing something valuable.
- Drawing unwanted attention to yourself.
- Hurting yourself.
- Creating a disadvantage.
- Expose your weakness.
- Putting an ally in danger.
- Escalating a situation.

An example of play:

Player: *I attack. A 16, do I hit the ogre?*

GM: *You're not entirely successful. You can either fail and learn something useful or you hit the ogre but lose your footing. Which do you choose?*

Player: *Lose my footing. I deal 12 damage!*

GM: *The ogre staggers from your blow and grabs your shoulder to keep itself upright, pushing you right of the cliff behind you.*

Player: *Drat, forgot about the cliff. I try to grab onto the ledge. A 14?*

GM: *Again, not entirely successful. You either fall of the cliff and learn something useful or you grab onto the edge but drop your sword. Which do you choose?*

Player: *I fail and learn something useful.*

GM: *As you go over the edge you see a river a few feet from where you're about to hit the rocks some thirty feet below.*

Player: *I push off as hard as I can. Is it enough to reach the river? An 18?*

GM: *You plummet down and miss the sharp rocks by inches landing safely in the water.*

Asking question creates a much more dynamic style of play in which players offer descriptions more readily. Introducing choice questions can spice up your game, but you can ask questions on any die result. Even on a success or failure, you can ask players how they succeed or fail.

In conclusion: The Question System divides stories into manageable chunks. There are two ways to introduce questions into your game. The first one is through using questions in the natural conservation and descriptions at the table. The second one is through tying questions to dice results.

Customizing Split Checks

You can split the check on any die roll on the fly. But it is also possible to create custom split checks for your game. These type of checks add more excitement and complications to any situation. I often use the following customized split checks for travel:

Wilderness travel

Success: You make good time, encounter no difficulties and are on track.

Choice question: Which do you choose?

You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but you...

- lose valuable time.
- lose valuable resources.
- veer off course.
- get the drop on a monster.
- find a site.
- take a different more dangerous route.

Failure: You fail to notice a dangerous situation or enemy.

City travel

Success: You make good time, encounter no difficulties and are on track.

Choice question: Which do you choose?

You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but you...

- lose an item to a pick pocket.
- veer off course.
- encounter a troublesome NPC.
- find a unique site.
- take a route through a shady part of town.

Failure: You fail to notice a dangerous situation or enemy.

Chase

Success: When being chased you avoid enemies, when giving chase you catch up.

Choice question: Which do you choose?

You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but...

- clearing the obstacle takes time.
- you hurt yourself, but barrel through.
- you take a different more dangerous route.

Failure: When being chased enemies catch up, when giving chase you lose sight of your quarry.

An example of play:

Fred: *I've lifted the Kings Crown from the pedestal. Let's get out of here.*

GM: *As you walk away, you hear something moving within the pedestal. Suddenly guards are flooding the ballroom from both ends.*

Fred: *They don't call me fast Fred for nothing. I run up the marble stairs.*

GM: *Guards are hot on your tail. Others are loading their crossbows.*

Fred: *I jump from the balcony towards the hanging chandelier. Rolling chase. A seven. That's a question right?*

GM: *You have two options. Either you cut your hand on the crystals, or you take your time to line up your jump. What do you do?*

Fred: *With guards on my tale? I'll hurt myself. Where can I go from here?*

GM: *You take 3 damage to your hands from the crystals. There's another balcony on the other side, leading towards a hallway that runs deeper into the palace. Also, a banner hangs from the ceiling beams. Where do you go?*

Fred: *I swing the chandelier towards the banner and dive. Rolling chase. A fourteen! Success.*

GM: *Excellent. You soar through the air and grab hold of the banner. Ignoring the pain in your bloodied hands, you climb like a cat and make it to the beams before any of the guards can get of a shot.*

Fred: *So they're aiming for me? Any exits?*

GM: *A round painted glass window sits just below the last beam. You see your flying ship, the Tradewind, hovering outside.*

Fred: *So it's a series of beams? I catapult myself to the next beam and try to run from one beam to the next in one go. I'll drop down grabbing the last beam so I can crash through the window. Rolling chase. A nine. Another question?*

GM: *Either jumping from one beam to the next safely takes a lot of time or you crash into the jagged shards of the window frame hurting yourself.*

Fred: *I'll hurt myself.*

GM: *Arrows hit behind you as you swing from the last beam and crash through the window, scattering glass everywhere. You take eight damage from a shard of glass in your leg. The crew of the Tradewind pull you aboard. In the courtyard you can see Radiant Knights mounting their Griffins. What do you do?*

The following examples can be added to any site, dungeon or situation:

Use Magic

Success: Your magic works normally with no side effects.
Choice question: Which do you choose?
You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but...

- the dead awaken by your use of magic.
- the magic also affects a random target.
- the magic is also transformed into a darkness spell.

Failure: Your magic fails and awakens the dead.

Sleep

Success: You have a restful sleep.
Choice question: Which do you choose?
You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but...

- nightmares or restless sleep prevent you from natural healing.
- nightmares or restless sleep cause concentration problems the next day.
- nightmares or restless sleep cause paranoia the next day.

Failure: You are unable to sleep.

Eat

Success: You eat a hearty meal.

Choice question: Which do you choose?

You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but you...

- suffer terrible indigestion.
- feel nauseated.
- must eat twice the normal amount to sustain yourself.

Failure: You are unable to eat.

Speak

Success: You speak and are understood as you normally would be.

Choice question: Which do you choose?

You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but...

- half your words are lost or misunderstood.
- you sound emotional, pick an emotion.
- you speak very loud and can be easily overheard.

Failure: Your speech is unintelligible.

Move

Success: You move as you would normally.

Choice question: Which do you choose?

You either 1) fail and learn something useful or 2) succeed but...

- move half your speed.
- move in a different direction.
- bump into someone or something.

Failure: You are unable to move.

You can craft customized split checks on the fly by asking your players for ideas as to what they fear might happen. Just make sure consequences are setbacks that are never as bad as a full out failure.

Crafting Better Tables

Tables offer a randomized result which is one of the four ways to answer questions in the Question System. Using a table offers more variety than using a simple skill check. But that's not all tables can do. In the next paragraphs we'll look at how to supercharge your tables to create thousands of options at a glance. And we'll look at using player input for generating table ideas quickly. But how do you generate a table on the fly?

Generate a Table

One very quick way to generate a table on the fly is by telling your players what kind of table you would like to use. Next, ask each player to come up with a couple of results using the alphabet method. To keep some suspense going, players should write their ideas on a post it and share it only with the GM. This way, no player knows all possible results. After you collect all the post its, number the results and presto, your table is complete.

An example of play:
"GM Lena wants to create a table for 'random desert dangers' and asks each of her four players to come up with three results. After a minute the players offer their post its, Lena numbers them 1 to 12 and rolls a d12 to see what the PCs encounter."

Player 1 notes 1. Haboob 2. Quicksand 3. Mirage
Player 2 notes 4. Heatwave 5. Riversand 6. Undead
Player 3 notes 7. Djinni 8. Giant scorpions 9. Giant chameleon
Players 4 notes 10. Lightining storm 11. Lost civilisation 12. Desert worms

Supercharge Your Tables

Many games already offer awesome tables which are great sources of inspiration, but often they are also not as optimised as they could be. Just like you can supercharge checks though the use of tables, it's possible to supercharge tables to give thousands of results at a glance. How you ask? Simple, just add columns. If fact it is so simple you might overlook just how powerful adding columns to a table is. So let me give you an example.

Generate a Quest

1D6	We are exploring...	seeking the...	guarded by...	before...
1	*... a lost city...*	*...Pillars of Time...*	*...a band of giants...*	*...time unravels.*
2	*...a flooded forest...*	*...crypt of a hero...*	*...the undead...*	*...a demon breaks free.*
3	*... a wizard's tower...*	*...Tome of Return...*	*...magical constructs...*	*...magic dies.*
4	*...a hidden road...*	*...elven Hightree...*	*...dire beasts...*	*...the dead awake.*
5	*...a frozen dungeon..*	*...way out...*	*...mechanical traps...*	*...sun sets forever.*
6	*...a broken temple...*	*...bound devil...*	*...celestial beings...*	*...disease spreads.*

This simple table only has six rows and four columns. And yet, it yields 1,296 possible results. Now image how much space a single column table would take up to yield the same amount of results. And yet, most rule books only offer single column tables.

Taking this one step further, the table on the next page yields over 65,000 possible traps. You can use it with the formula for generating traps in chapter four.

Generate a Trap

	Clue	Trigger	Danger	Obscure
1	Dead body	Air pressure	Sticky (stuck, sinking, attract vermin).	Brickwork
2	Holes, ridges in surface	Wire	Blades (saws, axes) Multiple dodges.	Tapestry
3	Wire	Open, close	Blunt (boulders, hammers) Multiple dodges.	Darkness
4	Bloodstains	Consume	Crushed (cave in, walls move in, gravity increases).	Blinding light
5	Thieves' hand: warning	Sound	Falling (pit, grease, trip, slide).	Smoke
6	Counterweight	Magic use	Burned (fire, lava, hot air) Heat slowly rises.	Wooden planks
7	Creaking surface	Fail puzzle/riddle	Cold (ice, hypothermia) Cold slowly spreads.	Cobwebs
8	Loose mortar	Pressure plate	Sense (lose sight, hearing) Creates dangerous situation.	Vegetation
9	Hairs standing up	Being spotted	Natural (acid, lightning)	Fresco
10	Draft	Heat, open flame	Choke (drown, bury, gas)	Distraction
11	Sound	Touch	Disease (smallpox, dysentery, typhus)	Illusion
12	Physical discomfort	Emotion	Poison	Buried
13	Odd dust pattern	Good/evil	Lost (disoriented, confused) Creates dangerous situation.	Mimicry
14	Scent	Sight (as medusa)	Spikes (spears, arrows) Multiple dodges.	Mirrors
15	Shiny surface	Time of day	Alarm (alert monster).	Camouflage
16	Broken arrow, spear	No trigger, always active	Magic (go wild) Disadvantage in dangerous situation.	Magic

Generate a Name

Elven names

d6	Elf	Male	Female
1	El-	esar	beth
2	Fin-	omar	driel
3	Im-	in	lia
4	Ar-	lon	wen
5	Cel-	las	vella
6	Ead-	nath	da

Dwarven names

d6	Dwarf	Male	Female
1	Gi-	fur	ma
2	Ba-	lin	dura
3	Fa-	drum	vana
4	Bil-	bek	viel
5	Sto-	dak	mira
6	Bul-	ron	lona

Human names

d6	Human	Male	Female
1	Al-	dew	ine
2	Ro-	lic	etta
3	Dar-	win	lene
4	Chel-	son	da
5	Hil-	gan	nia
6	Ben-	fred	sy

Halfling names

d6	Halfling	Male	Female
1	Pip-	in	issa
2	Mer-	io	iëlle
3	Brem-	es	illa
4	Laud-	ius	elei
5	Bes-	ol	estra
6	Wen-	ian	anna

Orc names

d6	Orc	Male	Female
1	Fos-	kil	til
2	Doe-	rak	na
3	Bor-	mog	te
4	Ach-	sak	esh
5	Ru-	bad	amak
6	War-	onk	ima

For racial kingdom names, pick one from each column.

Last names

Roll 1d12 for each column

1	Oaken-	shield
2	Fire-	storm
3	Wind-	stone
4	Cloud-	hammer
5	Red-	star
6	Purple-	leaf
7	Green-	staff
8	Silver-	bow
9	Golden-	heart
10	Oath-	foot
11	Iron-	spear
12	Black-	beard

Inn names: The [last name] inn

Places: The [last name] hills, marshes, etc.

Town names

d12	Town	name
1	Apple-	burg
2	Bark-	wood
3	White-	field
4	Black-	deep
5	Ing-	stone
6	Castle-	ham
7	Day-	hurst
8	Dumble-	wick
9	Tee-	ford
10	Middle-	dale
11	Spring-	ton
12	Winter-	brook

These are also last names

Inn names: The [last name] inn

Places: The [last name] hills, marshes, etc.

Generate an Environment

d20	Outside	Town/city	Dungeon/castle	Interior
1	field of ...	market, park	dead end	alcove, balcony
2	pond, brook	back alley	storage room	pillar, pedestal
3	patch of trees	bridge, gate	cell block, stable	crate, barrel
4	hill, slope	docks	3-way junction	carpet, curtain
5	cliff, chasm	guild house	4-way junction	chest, closet
6	river, lake	tavern	stairs, chute	key, tools, bench
7	bridge	well	mine shaft, well	weapons, armor
8	wayside tavern	slaughter house	altar room	bed, chair, table
9	crossroads	temple	natural cave	manacles, mirror
10	fallen tree	brothel	bridge, rope	rubble, trash
11	shrine, ruin	city watch	kitchen	cauldron, tub
12	village, city	storage house	privy, dump	fireplace, forge
13	**unique site**	magic shop	concealed door	torch, candle
14	fork in road	craft workplace	trap, treasure	books, desk, ink
15	castle, hold	mayor's office	locked door	relief, gargoyle
16	marsh, bog	**unique site**	work quarters	winch, pulley
17	forest, jungle	outer wall	pit, cliff, pool	stall, pen, bucket
18	mountain	mansion, castle	great halls	rails, carts, lamp
19	waste, desert	house, ghetto	guard post	throne, tapestry
20	sea, island	river	living quarters	food, hay, cloth

Generate a Enemy

Animals

d12	Land	Air	Water	Extinct*
1	Goat, sheep, chicken	Eagle, owl, dove	Penguin, starfish	Dodo, mammoth
2	Horse, donkey, deer	Hawk, condor	Toad, frog, hippo	Ankylosaurus
3	Boar, bear, rhino, ox	Seagull, albatross	Eel, snake, snail	Allosaurus
4	Lizard, snake, toad	Crane, heron, falcon	Fish, tuna, salmon	Kronosausus
5	Wolf, dog, bison	Butterfly, ladybug	Whale, orca	Velociraptor
6	Mouse, rat, weasel	Bee, wasp, fly	Turtle, crab, lobster	Tyrannosaurus rex
7	Lion, tiger, cat	Mosquito, moth	Crocodile, alligator	Gigantopithecus
8	Ape, gorilla, chimp	Locust, mantis	Squid, octopus	Andrewsarchus
9	Elephant, giraffe	Raven, crow, ostrich	Shark, stingray	Anomalocaris
10	Spider, ant, bug	Hummingbird	Dolphin, otter	Hallucigenia
11	Squirrel, mole, fox	Bat, flying squirrel	Jellyfish, plankton	Smilodon
12	Scorpion, porcupine	Robin, duck, goose	Seahorse, shrimp	Quetzalcoatlus

(Animal or creature: roll 1d12 **Hybrid:** cross two results **Lycanthrope:** cross with PC race **Elemental:** cross with element **Aberration:** cross with creature **Giant:** enlarge size) d6 * Ask your cartographer to find an online picture.

Creatures

d12	Mythical	Good or evil	Fairytale
1	satyr, siren, dwarf	ghost	sprite, pixie
2	golem, gorgon	wraith	leprechaun
3	djinni, banshee	vampire	ogre, troll
4	dragon, cyclops	zombie	giant, hag
5	unicorn, dryad	skeleton	goblin, wyvern
6	rakshasa, griffon	ghoul	mermaid
7	golem, roc	devil	boggart
8	minotaur, naga	imp	drake, kobold
9	yeti, pegasus	deva	gnome, brownie
10	sphinx, cockatrice	demon	orc, halfling
11	kraken, medusa	angel	morlock, gargoyle
12	hydra, chimera	god	elf, troglodyte

Villain

d6	Dream/need	Plan/scheme	Catastrophe
1	Rest	Avenge/protect	War
2	Safety	Control/undo	Disease
3	Acceptance	Destroy/create	Famine
4	Power	Acquire/lose	Breach
5	Love	Avoid/find	Extinction
6	Redemption	Discover/forget	Loss

What's Next?

That concludes our final chapter of the Prepless GM. I hope you found this book of value. If you are excited about improvising more in your game, please consider picking up the Vault Bundle. It has a ton of value that will raise your game. And you can just drop these products into any campaign and gaming system without any prep work. Just print and play or upload to a VTT. You can check out the Vault Bundle here.

Have Fun!

- Paul Camp