

GM Toolkit
bill, Bill Heron

Copyright -- 2012

Acknowledgements

With thanks to all members of the Open Roleplaying Community Edinburgh (<http://orcedinburgh.co.uk>), past and present.

Table of Contents

GM Toolkit	1
How to GM without going insane	1
RPGing on a budget	4
The World is not enough: RPG Settings	6
Building a city (Part 1)	8
Building a city (Part 2)	12
PC groups - how PCs meet in RPGs	16
Joining the Dark Side	18
GM Burnout	21
Writing a Script	24
The Art of "Winging it"	34
RPG Meta-plot: is it needed?	35
Edinburgh Gaming	37
Edinburgh Gaming - Gaming in Auld Reekie	37
Gamer Friendly Venues in Edinburgh	40



GM Toolkit

How to GM without going insane

I've been running RPGs for a long time. Without sounding too pompous, over time you begin to appreciate that there's a certain way to running games and preparing for them. So here's my thoughts on running a campaign or even just a one-shot game.

I'll use the phrase GM for Games Master, but it also means Judge, Referee, Keeper, or DM (Dungeon Master). Players are the real world group of people that you'll game with. PC, or Player Character, refers to their character in-game. NPCs, or Non-Player Characters (the beings and people that PCs interact with) are the province of the GM.

Preparing a game

Okay, so you're pretty certain that you can run a few games and somehow fit it into your schedule. Here's some suggestions:

Leave yourself some time to relax! Whilst RPGs are fun they can be hard work, and can be pretty taxing mentally – make sure that you are not living and breathing your game. It shouldn't run your life, and you should definitely make time for friends and family (even if they don't game). Also, a break will probably help you gain a clear perspective too.

Don't overload yourself. This means both physically and mentally! RPGs are notorious for large heavy rulebooks: make sure that you're not carrying more than you can comfortably carry. Remember that some players will likely bring their own books too, so you may not need to load up. No game should require you to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of every single rulebook; and nor should the players!

Advertise your game. There's a number of ways to do this: at its simplest, put an ad in your local game shop asking for players. However the power of the internet may be your best bet. Nowadays most gaming clubs/communities have their own websites (such as ORC and GEAS in Edinburgh) so they're the best places to visit, either online or personally. Alternatively, large scale global forums such as ENWorld.org can assist in the search for new players. If it is a new system, run a one-off game, and see what interest you get. Make sure you've got enough players before you begin running. If you're new to GMing, 1-4 players is a good start if you are all unfamiliar with the system. 7 or more is only for very experienced GMs, likely with player rules help! 4-6 is usually comfortable enough for most GMs, space-wise and organisation-wise.

Create stock NPCs. You don't need to create stats for every Innkeeper and grunt, but a stock set of stats can be very handy, like when the PCs start a bar fight or do something involving a large group of people! Having generic stats on hand, maybe in your **Campaign Book** (see below), can be useful. It also helps if you suddenly find yourself "Winging it" – you can throw in a random encounter. Also keep a list of names that might be handy if you need to come up with a name quickly! For a fantasy RPG, I'd suggest: watchman, tavern brawler, magic user, bodyguard, cultist/cleric, assassin, thief, and adventurer of all classes (similar to PC party of same level or lower). Also, give your NPCs accents or mannerisms that PCs remember – e.g the tavern brawler often runs a hand over his broken nose when he speaks.

Pace yourself. If you are a player AND a GM, then you may quickly find yourself short of time. This can be for a number of reasons. Many campaigns fizzle out after a few months – the GM has lost interest, players can't make it, or the GM has run out of ideas. Give everyone time for players to do other things – either run weekly on a



particular night (midweek is good), or stagger your game to run every fortnight. However, a GM will likely spend at least one night a week planning their game. Don't try and run several campaigns at once – it can be done, but it is very hard work as I know only too well!

Manage your time. As mentioned above, you're going to need to spend at least a few hours preparation before you run a game. It's not much fun trying to come up with an idea 30 minutes before the players arrive. Also avoid GMing when you're ill or hungover: you won't enjoy it, and you'll suffer more! In regards to alcohol, GMing when everyone is a little squiffy is all right, but you don't want to run anything too serious! At the end of the day, do you have time to run a campaign? Ideally most games should run 3-6 hours, at which point a GM's voice will likely give out and their brain will go pop 😊 .

Expect the unexpected. Players always throw GMs a bit of curve – they do something that the GM didn't plan for during an adventure or miss the Significant Clue(s). It's usually more common in published adventures, where the writer doesn't know the group that the GM runs for, but still can happen in a self-created game. There's a few options that you can take, and it depends on the game: you can go with it (see **Winging It** below), or use an NPC or event to bring them back on track. Winging it is usually more fun for everyone, GM included, and can often help pad out a fairly linear adventure. However, rail-roading the PCs can be useful if you need to get them to a specific place – but be subtle. Forcing the PCs into a course of action can be a fine art!

Winging it. If the players kill a major NPC, then have that NPC come back as undead, a vengeful family member, or clone. If they miss a clue, an NPC mentions it in passing. Improvisation (winging it) is a very useful skill for GMs to have. NPCs are often used to impart information but rather than read out a passage in a flat monotone, try reading it in an accent or declamatory fashion (or military speak for more modern games). Keep a few ideas for sub-adventures should the PCs choose something that jars with your current adventure. If the party splits up, spend equal time on each party (see **Pick no favourites**). It's actually quite easy to wing it – especially if you have stock NPCs.

Keep a Campaign Book. This may not be a book as such, but ring binders are very handy for this, as are spiral-bound notebooks. Ring binders can also be used as a GM screen. It's a good idea to have the following:

- A copy of the Player Character Sheets, as players can forget theirs.
- Maps that you have created, for both player and GM.
- Notes on your campaign.
- Stock NPCs.
- Floorplans.
- A plot summary.
- Notable NPCs and their stats.
- Monsters and creatures that you need for the adventure.
- Scribble pad where you write down events that happen in the game and what could lead to further adventures.
- A folder/ring binder that you can stash the above and use as a GM screen, if you don't have a separate one.

Running the game

Righto. Your game is planned, your rulebooks and campaigns notes are all stashed in your rucksack, now you're actually going to run the game.

Be on time. If you are running a game, try and be there early so you can answer any questions players might have. You can also organise the playing area. Although this doesn't sound like much it can save time: having the floorplans and maps laid out, the miniatures and handouts all ready means that when the players are all there you



can started. If you are running late or can't make it, let your players know as soon as possible.

Be a player. As stated above, it's a good idea to step back from running a game. It's very easy to "burn out" creatively, but having someone else run a game can be therapeutic. It also give you a much better opportunity to interact socially with your players.

Don't panic when it goes wrong. Adapt. Even the most skilled GM will find themselves surprised by their players occasionally. See "Winging it", above. If the game isn't going well, take a break for a 15 minutes – clear your head, get some food and figure out what's going wrong.

It's not a competition. Despite what console games and computer RPGs encourage (as well as some RPGs), it's not Players vs. DM (see **Don't abuse your power** below). Remember that RPGs are a cooperative effort: if you act like it's you vs. your players, then you should probably be playing a wargame and not an RPG.

Be fair and pick no favourites. Always tough this one: some players get overexcited and believe that the loudest voice is the one that carries the most weight. Others are easily distracted. However, the most important thing is that everyone enjoys the game. If you have a very quiet player, make sure that they are included in the discussions. if a player is new to the game, take some time-out to explain things to them (it can be about the setting or the game itself – another reason why you should **Be on time**). New RPGers do need some "hand-holding", but one of the other players can often help with this (ask them first though). Either way, try and spend equal time on all the players.

Don't abuse your power. One of the first mistakes that new GMs make is to get heady with power. Don't kill PCs for no reason other than they messed up your plot. A lot of players invest considerable time in their characters, and it's pretty bad to waste a PC just because you are having an off-day. Don't hold grudges: as GM you're supposed to above such things 😊 – and if a player has killed your PC in the game they run, then you shouldn't invoke *Kanly* (vendetta from Herbert's *Dune*), and kill off their PC.

Don't get carried away: both yourself and your players. No matter how excited people get about their PC or game, there's no excuse for invading people's personal space. RPGs are a non-contact game and no one should feel uncomfortable while they play a game. No hitting, OK? Also, if you are gaming in a public place, remember that you need to keep in mind that other people are nearby. Keep the noise manageable and don't be a nuisance.

Don't lose your temper. Remember that it is just a game. Always be civil and considerate of your players as they should be with you. Don't swear at your players unless it's in-game as an NPC. Even so, remember that some people can take things personally so make it clear that's not you as GM. Addressing them by their character's name in an accent (see **Create stock NPCs**) usually helps. If the game is going badly, don't throw a tantrum, scream at everyone then storm out after throwing all your books in a bag (this goes for players too).

So that's it really. I may come back to add to this article in the future, but I hope it's given folk some food for thought.

RPGing on a budget

With everything that's going on at the moment, we're all feeling the pinch financially: so here's some suggestions to help you save some cash when it comes to RPGs.

In the suggestions below, many involve the internet: if you are using Mobile Broadband, you may want to check your Mobile Broadband Terms & Conditions as downloading lots of material may quickly expend your data transfer quota.

Recycle your adventures, and reuse maps when you can. If you run games for different groups you can likely re-use maps from another game. One of the maps from the **Call of Cthulhu** adventure "The Haunting" has put in an appearance in both my games of **Ashes of Freedom** and **Cthulhutech**. I found a load of old school jotters that I ripped up for scrap paper. If you've got a pile of old games and miniatures, get rid of them on eBay. Metal miniatures can make a lot of cash for you especially if they're the old lead ones and are unpainted.

Raid your boardgames for dice and tokens: the dice you and your players can use and the tokens you can use for monsters and NPCs, especially if they are in a variety of colours.

Miniatures can be expensive if you're strapped for cash. Players may want to bring their own figures anyway – you can always use counters to represent monsters or NPCs.

Use squared paper for floor-plans and draw them so that they can be reused. The backing paper from tackyback (the plastic used to cover books in libraries) is very useful for this. Again, old school maths jotters are useful for these.

Borrow rulebooks from anyone that already has them. Nowhere is it written that a GM must own all the rulebooks! If they're playing in your game so much the better – they can bring the books with them when they come along. Just make sure you ask permission before you borrow them 😊.

Go shopping for second hand games. Conventions like [Compulsion](#) and [Claymore](#) usually have a lot of second-hand stuff for sale, including miniatures. You can also check eBay for old games and supplements, but watch out for the delivery costs that can be levied by unscrupulous sellers – a 128-page softback supplement should cost less than £3 to send in the UK – check the Royal Mail [website](#) for some idea of basic prices. If you order from overseas it can cost considerably more. You can also get cheap RPG materials in PDF form from places like [DriveThruRPG](#), rather than shelling out for a dead tree edition.

Be frugal with your printing. Avoid printing in colour, especially if you have an inkjet printer: they expend cartridges so quickly that you'll shell out a small fortune. If you're lucky enough to have a laser printer with a duplexing unit, make sure you print both sides. Print in draft mode which will save ink/toner. You could also email/PM your maps to your players rather than printing them. Finally you could photocopy, rather than print, your maps, handouts, character sheets, etc.

Free PC tools and adventures are out there, from PC generators to mapping tools such as [AutoRealm](#). Of course, you need to have an internet connection although you could use a library. The internet is your friend when it comes to finding materials for your games. For instance, the [ProFantasy](#) mapping viewer will allow you to view and print the large number maps in their archive. There's also various collections of adventures and other materials created by the RPG community online, such as my own [wiki](#).

Use Skype or other IM tools if you can't get your group together to play. One of my friends runs a weekly RPG

session using Skype together with a mapping tool/virtual whiteboard and it has been working well for quite some time. With Skype allowing you to make free VoIP calls, it probably works out cheaper than a subscription to *World of Warcraft*.

Use SRD documents rather than expensive rulebooks if you can't afford it. Both D&D and Pathfinder have their own SRD documents that are at least usable – they may not be pretty, but who cares? Many games also provide quick-start rules that you can use to run the first few games, usually along with pre-generated PCs.

Write your own. Either write your own adventures or come up with your own system. It's a lot of work but may not cost you anything, except time. You can also pad out published adventures with your own encounters and NPCs.

Host your game. If you're really skint, host the game in your own home, saving you the travel costs. You might even get free snacks from your players!

And finally, *SIGH* there are PDFs out there of scanned books. I DO NOT CONDONE THIS. In fact I strongly discourage it – and it is the reason Wizards of the Coast no longer distribute their D&D books in PDF format. Go figure.



The World is not enough: RPG Settings

My recent planning for the new [Against the Odds](#) D&D setting got me thinking: I've created so many settings now that I'd like to think that I'd developed a certain flair for it. It's pretty straightforward really: creating a decent setting takes some thought, but it's fairly easy to do. I'm going to talk about a pseudo-medieval setting here but it applies to any game.

Summarise it. Get a basic idea for the setting in your head – think about the style of game you want to run. It's easier for some people than others, but give it some time. Your setting will be different no matter how long you take.

Write down your ideas. You've got some ideas – write them down, then think about how they relate to each other. Sometimes they don't work, so discard any that don't. It's a good idea to carry a little notebook around, then you can write them down: it's amazing how easy it is to get random thoughts and inspiration!

Who are the bad guys? This is one of the major stumbling blocks for a lot of people creating a setting. If you're wanting to start a campaign where the major antagonists are demons, undead or other powerful beings, then your 1st level PCs are going to find it hard to survive. On the other hand, even epic level PCs can be swarmed by Kobolds... customise the challenges accordingly.

Sketch it. Draw a rough map: you don't want to be too detailed, but you want mountains, coastlines, rivers and any cities. You can add the smaller settlements later along with other terrain like deserts, hills and forests or jungles later. This also gives you a chance to create adventures sites later such as dungeons and ruins.

We're all friends here. Given the variety of PC races available, think about the different races and how they may react to each other. For example: if dwarves and elves have been at war with each other for years, they will react very differently to parties containing their enemy. Tieflings are unlikely to be welcome in a city where Paladins rule.

Get political. Now you've got a rough idea as to what the country is like, you can start working out who the major political factions are – remember that neighbouring countries should also be considered: a warlike empire on your doorstep is very different to a benevolent kingdom. How fortified are the borders?

Movers and shakers. Create a list of the major NPCs – don't necessarily stat them up, all you want is a list of them and their motivations (and their "demon" if you use my idea from my previous blog).

Add a twist. What makes your setting different? For example: is magic illegal? Is the kingdom run by vampires? Think about clichés and how to reverse them or twist them. Dungeons ruled by Red Dragons are unlikely to be situated under the capital city – unless the city is the dungeon!

Apply logic. Take a step back: if there's anything that doesn't feel right, or seems far-fetched, ditch it and go back to formula. Think about where everything is – most cities are built near water (or a water supply of some sort), for example. How does the country finance itself? Do they have a state religion?

Bend the rules. It's all too easy to consider stereotypes as canon. Paladins may not be as strait-laced as they appear, tieflings aren't evil. By modifying an existing race you can create a truly memorable nemesis. For example: the [Orogkz](#) in [Ashes of Freedom](#) have a few more hit dice and slightly better saves than normal Orcs, but they proved a lot tougher than the players thought! The Lizardfolk of the [New World](#) became a lot more formidable when their civilisation was fleshed out.



Create a pitch. You should be able to describe your setting in a few paragraphs. If you want folk to play, you need to sell it: how is the setting different from any other pseudo-medieval one? What do they actually know?

Don't micro-manage. You can't predict what your players will do, and should avoid creating the kind of campaign where you lead them around by the nose. You don't need to create a map of every single area. Keep areas free to expand upon in future games – sometimes players can give you ideas for future games without even realising it.

Don't give it all away. So you've got a cool setting: resist the temptation to give it all away! Don't give away the secrets too early: make the PCs peel away each layer of the onion slowly.

Pace yourself. Make sure you end a game with a bang – or a cliffhanger! If your players are discussing the game when they go home, your job as a GM is done. A game should end with an epic fight or a new twist. In my experience, it's good to leave the players wanting more: ending just before the epic fight, or when the villain unmasks his/her self.

So those are my thoughts: hopefully they've provided some insight into what went into the ideas for my settings.

Building a city (Part 1)

Building a city for an RPG setting is quite a challenge, even for those GMs that have been running games for years! I've split this article into two parts, as it is pretty lengthy. While I've described much of a mediaeval-style city or settlement, the ideas here can easily be applied to any setting.

Defences

This is the easiest place to start for many GMs. Depending on the environment and ruler-ship, a settlement may have a number of possible defences. Whether it is a castle in the mountains or a village in the wilds, the importance of security is the same: keep the people safe and enemies out (whether they are animals, opposing countries, whatever). If a settlement is constrained by the walls, there will be an overspill of the population into the surrounding land – perhaps needing further walls to be created as a city grows.

The most basic defence is the wall, whether it is made of stone, living plants, wood or adamantium. This may be simple stockade where a village is concerned, or a huge stone construction with battlements and guard rooms. Magic, if available, may have been used to strengthen the walls with wards and other augmentation. If you're feeling really nasty, the wall itself could be alive...

Depending upon the regime in power, access to the city may be restricted to only one or a few gates. Do all visitors have to produce identification papers or sign their names? Does a cleric cast *Detect Good/Evil* on all visitors? Does the city have only one heavily-guarded gate?

However, there is more to the defence of a city than just walls – does the city have a standing militia? Do all the citizens get some military training? Are there muster points and choke points throughout the city? Are the streets narrow? Do magic users regularly train with troops?

One final point: strongholds and castles. Every city will have some form of reinforced area: a castle, fort or armoury where the ruler can feel safe. Whether they allow the citizenry to shelter there during times of war is largely dependent on the ruler. If you can find it on eBay, the old AD&D **Castles** Supplement is a marvellous source for designing and building castles.

Housing

Everyone needs somewhere to live: from a palace to a hovel, every city will have its own distinctive architecture. Are the city streets clean? What are the buildings made out of? How many storeys are they? Are the streets narrow and dark with closes and alleys or are they large buildings with open grounds? Are they built with mud/marble/wood/mortar? Are the roofs flat or thatched?

Most cities have a variety of zones that correspond to social standing – the nobility and priesthood usually remain close to the positions of power, be they palaces or castles. The poor and disenfranchised usually end up in slums. Those in between comprise the majority of the city buildings – shops, inns and other dwellings.

Depending on the regime and climate, the houses may be large and airy or small and cosy. They may be built to fill the visitor with a sense of wonder or terror, or they may be functional and stark. If you pick up a book on architecture you'll find a number of styles that may be of use.

Economy

Cities don't spring into being overnight – usually they form where business is conducted, or for strategic military reasons. Either way, it brings money to the settlement – and those seeking money.

The economy of a city may be as simple as a market for livestock or goods, or a garrison town. A livestock market town is likely to have large open areas where the beast are sold and auctioned. Crops are stored in large silos and warehouses. If the city is as administration centre or capital, there will also be academical institutions and temples/cathedrals/mosques, etc.

Even when the city has one source of income, there are still support mechanisms for this. In a livestock market town livestock needs transportation, the beasts need fodder, and the farmers need to stay somewhere. Large sums of gold may change hands and both banks and thieves may flourish in such an environment.

Garrison towns usually have a large military presence. Blacksmiths and weaponsmiths may be commonplace, fixing soldiers gear, horse traders selling mounts to officers and the army, seamy bars and other establishments catering to the soldiers vices. At the end of the day, apply a little logic: try and make something stand out about the town; even if it is just “the finest pipe-leaf west of the Misty Mountains”.

Magic

First off, decide whether magic is legal – this in itself can provide you with a few ideas. How are those who practise magic viewed? Are they valued as professional members of the community or burnt at the stake?

If they are valued, are there academies? A wizards quarter? An Unseen University? Do they have any power within the city itself (see **Guilds & Power Brokers** in part 2)?

If wizards are a power bloc of their own, what magic is permitted? Demon summoning and necromancy may well be frowned upon, but spells that damage property or goods may also be banned. Do the wizards have their own process for dealing with rogue spellcasters? For instance, from the PC game, [Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn](#):

“Spellhold is an insane asylum located on the island of Brynnlaw, one of the Nelanther Isles, off the western coast of Amn, under the command of the Cowled Wizards of Amn. They use the asylum to house the ‘deviants’ they have found in Amn, practicing magic without an official license.”

How do the local temples view magic and clerics of other orders (see **Religion** in part 2 of this article)?

In a city where magic use is commonplace, the citizens are less likely to react in fear to a magic users powers. However, in those where magic is outlawed or feared, there may be literal witch hunts – and a strong religious doctrine.

Food

According to some literature, civilisation is only a few meals from anarchy.

Unless the city is under siege, food will vary depending on climate, as will the abundance. A city will often buy in their food from nearby market towns, or acquire it from the sea. If the crops fail, it can be a famine disaster on a national scale.

As a GM, you can actually have some fun creating local delicacies and foodstuffs such as vegetables. Consider the humble potato – it didn't exist in Europe until it was brought back as a curiosity in the 16th century. Just by altering some of the basic ingredients you can give a city a whole new flavour (if you pardon the pun!). In the [New World](#) for example, there are no cows or pigs: the local meat comes from dinosaurs. Spices also are a good way to enrich the setting: they can be expensive and can be used as an alternative treasure.

Cities also need to keep grain and other staples usually in granaries or similar storage. There may be large cold-stores for keeping meat but remember that there are no hygiene standards or refrigeration facilities (unless magical).

Water sources and drainage

Water, like food is critical to the survival of a settlement. It is also one of the settlement's greatest vulnerabilities: it can be poisoned and contaminated, either by intent or accident (see **Sewers** below). No siege can be withstood without the defenders having access to fresh water.

In most fantasy settings, fresh water will likely come from subterranean wells or nearby sources of water. Wells would often be located in communal areas, such as market places. In many desert cultures, large catchment pools or cisterns will be created to collect water from the rare rainfall. More advanced civilisations may have large underground cisterns, and will also have drains, leading to the sewers (see below).

In a high-magic environment, gates to the Elemental plane of Water provide water sources, bound Water Elementals sweeping the streets clean on a nightly basis. One of my favourite monsters, the Cistern Fiend (from the **Dark Sun** D&D setting) actually purifies the water it lives in – it is a big bad-ass guardian monster and water treatment plant in one. Also, imagine the value of a *decanter of endless water* to a desert nomad.

One final thing to consider: does the settlement get flooded in heavy rain? Do the rivers burst their banks? If the undercity floods what are the ramifications – what gets driven to the surface?

Sewers

It's almost a cliché now, but any city adventure will likely see your PCs in the sewers. Which just happen to be tall enough and wide enough for them to walk, fight and spell cast in. At some point one of your PCs will fall in the sewer where they will likely get munched upon. Don't forget the luminescent moss in case the players haven't brought illumination.

Oh, please. Unless you're running a modern or Steampunk/Victoriana game, the sewers are likely to be much smaller. For those games, subways are also cool – see the film [Mimic](#) for some ideas on how to create these kind of tunnels.

All is not lost though – many city areas are often built on the ruins of others (Mary Kings Close in Edinburgh for a real life example), post-apocalyptic or not. These forgotten buildings and ruins can easily be turned into their own city below, may be leading to the Underdark or other buildings long-forgotten. [Neverwhere](#) is also a good source of ideas for an undercity (London Below).

Subterranean sewers aren't new. The Romans used them, but in fantasy they're often far too elaborate (often based on a modern point of view of what sewers are like). Sewers are probably only a few feet wide and likely tall enough for however much water is expected – PCs will likely be stooped over with standing water in low areas, possibly with some nasty critters living in the muck that lies everywhere. In most cases the channels will empty



into a nearby river, possibly contaminating a water source. Most sewers may flood during heavy rain or if the city has expanded without taking account of the drainage (see above).

What you want to go for with sewers is claustrophobia. There's barely room to fight. It is dark, wet and cold. It stinks and you don't want to touch the walls or be fall over in the filth. When the players emerge, they should be tired, wet, and stinking – and longing for a dungeon crawl.

One final point, consider how other fantasy races may deal with refuse: Elves may recycle theirs, as fertiliser where possible. Dwarves may burn it their forges. Orcs throw theirs in the street 😊 .

Building a city (Part 2)

A continuation of my previous article, Building a City (see [part 1](#)). Hopefully this article will help add a few more distinctive touches to your city!

The Regime

Many fledgling GMs find that it's very easy to come up with the city of the Dark Lord: human sacrifice is common and everyone lives in fear. However, there's only so far that a ruler can push his city – and a city is the sum of its parts, notably the people. If the ruler is an evil despot, the people will find a way to work around them.

In a city where law is valued (whether good or evil), there are likely to be levels of bureaucracy that require paperwork for everything. In chaotic cities, gang warfare and whichever faction has the greatest power rules – overtly or otherwise.

Consider how your city is run: is it a democracy? A theocracy? Ruled by a Prince? A dictatorship? How much power do the guilds and other factions have?

Port Blacksand, Ankh-Morpork and Lankhmar are all very different cities but they are all Lawful Evil when you consider the city's "alignment". Think about how your city is ruled: are the citizens taxed to the hilt? Do they love or hate their ruler?

Religion

Many cities have more than one religion. Usually the primary deity is the patron of the state, with other religions having a presence because of circumstance or environment: military garrison towns may have more warlike deities as their predominant deities, but any religion with healing powers is likely to be well-regarded as well. The people tend to worship whatever gods are relevant to them at any time. If it is a large city, there may be many local religions if a large number of races dwell there.

The best way to approach religion is to consider the regime in power: if it is strict and unforgiving, certain religions will be persecuted. Whether this persecution takes the form of paladins or the Inquisition is up to you: the end result may be the same!

Try looking at real life examples: for example, Christians were a persecuted cult in Imperial Rome, and the Romans deified their Emperors. However they also had the habit of integrating religions into their own, such as the sun god Mithras: it also allowed them to absorb local religions into their "state" religions as it were.

In my own settings ([Ashes of Freedom](#) and [Against the Odds](#)), [Volkraad](#) and [Thulemar](#) are very different: Pelor and Bane being the state religions. They may tolerate other religions so long as they are not inimical to their god's goals, within certain parameters. Thulemar tolerates Undead (in the form of the Gheribeian Legion), whereas Volkraad destroy undead and rule their creation as blasphemous.

The Dead

Most settlements will dispose of their dead in a certain way, according to the appropriate religion. Do they cremate, bury their dead? Is it carried out with a celebration of the deceased life or a sombre occasion? Do they practice sky burials or mummification?

In warmer countries, bodies are more likely to be cremated due to the possibility of pestilence. A city that fears undead and necromancy (whether state sanctioned or otherwise!) are more likely to burn the bodies than inter them in the ground.

In those cases where a body is buried, are they buried in a catacomb, tomb or graveyard? The graveyard is pretty much like the sewers in fantasy RPGs – they are usually home to so many undead and necromancers that graves are pretty much like revolving doors.

A large city may have many graveyards, but if it only has large one then you can really go to town (if you'll forgive the pun). Undead have a society of sorts – Ghouls feed on the dead and may construct tunnels so they move around unseen beneath the surface. Vampires may rule sections of catacombs, patrolled by their minions – not necessarily zombies or skeletons either, vampire spawn may be trusted with their own areas. Carrion crawlers nest there, close to a plentiful food supply. It can also be a hiding place for necromancers and also thieves and other ne'er-do-wells.

Even those cultures that practice sky burials can have beings haunting their grave sites – predators such as werewolves and ghouls seeking an easy meal. More mundane creatures such as bears may also smell carrion and come scavenging if the site is in the wild.

Finally, cities are often built on older sites – not all undead may be of the modern era as it were. A human city built on an elven ruin may have some very old elven undead still resident.

Climate

Whether the weather has changed or not, most cities are built to withstand whatever weather is common to that area, be it broiling sun or icy winds. Cities provide shelter to their citizens, and unless the weather has changed vastly, will be built along those lines.

Cities that are in colder climes will likely be constructed of thick walls (stone or wood, whatever is more commonplace), with many fireplaces and chimneys to keep the citizens warm. Smoke from torches on the streets likely hang over the city, and stain the walls. Floors are likely to be cold stone, with rushes or sawdust on the floors that may or may not be changed regularly. Richer homes may have rugs or drapes (often imported at great cost) to remove the chill, or fur rugs. Doors tend to be thick and sturdy.

Warmer or more humid climes may tend towards whitewashed open buildings to reflect the sun. They may be larger, more open-plan buildings with water features such as fountains and mosaics. Internal doors may not exist, with curtains or veils used to separate rooms. It may be that there are no buildings as such – just tents or marquees in some cases.

Also consider the water table – does the city have a high water table and have canals like Venice? Does it flood regularly – if so, the more wealthy will likely live on the higher ground – and how bad do the floods get? In warmer climes, large cisterns are likely to be used to catch some of the water for later use. Are there such things as tidal bores or hurricanes that regularly hit the city?

Law & Order

No matter how chaotic or anarchic a city, there are always those seeking to impose order, be it for their own good or that of the city. They may be an organised police force like the Watch or a gang of street toughs protecting their territory. Either way, they maintain a form of *status quo* within the city.

When designing a fantasy city think about how the population react to their rulers. If the city is occupied by a foreign military force, soldiers will likely patrol the streets, with a curfew imposed to restrict those plotting sedition and rebellion. If riots and fires are common place a city Watch likely exists.

Watch members may be paid or not. They may be volunteers with some training that allows them to be militia in times of war. Depending upon the regime, some may be corrupt while others work to the book. The justice system may not exist – the City Watch may be similar to the Judges in Judge Dredd: judge, jury, and executioner. This sort of system, “The Judge” usually requires a certain strength of character as well (not necessarily a moral one) – such characters are usually far better trained than the militia. Judges should be pretty dangerous to normal PCs – from Judge Dredd to bounty hunters like Boba Fett!

Think about how the legal system works in your city. Does the nobility get away with murder? Are trials by combat permitted? Does the legal system permit lawyers or legal counsel? Or do local magistrates administer justice at the rulers whim? Does it use bail?

At the end of the day consider the flip side of the coin: in a town where the Thieves Guild holds a lot of power, many of the Watch will be on the take. How does crime and punishment work in your city: do pickpockets lose their fingers if they are caught? Do murderers get executed? Where are criminals incarcerated?

Guilds & Power Brokers

Even if your city’s ruler is Supreme Overlord of the Life, Universe and Everything; he’s not alone. Whether it is the Galactic Empire and Rebel Alliance, or Mordor and Gondor, there’s always going to be more than one faction in politics.

It should be the same within your city: there’s always someone wanting more power. Consider how the city’s economy works. Merchants do have power and they always want more power and wealth. Money flows: whether it is called bribes, grants or incentives – it can buy nobles and influence, even kings given time.

It is not just merchants that cultivate power: thieves may have their own power bloc, whether crime is organised or not in the town. They may also have access to assassins and other skilled killers, along with a great deal of information – including some that can be used for blackmail. They may also know the homes of the Nobility better than the nobles themselves.

The Nobility jockey for position at court and elsewhere: it may be outright warfare between Noble House (like in Herbert’s [Dune](#)), or more genteel where a cutting or barbed remark can cause a House to lose face. Read Machiavelli’s [The Prince](#) for some ideas about how to bring this level of intrigue to a court. Vendettas and blood feuds can add to the mix.

When it comes to creating power blocs I find it useful to create a sort of mind map which shows how each bloc relates to another. Sometimes you can have a lot of fun with your players as they try and figure out just how they are being manipulated into something larger than themselves...

Current Events

No matter how strong a city walls are they can’t keep out time and chance: a fire in a bakery caused the Great Fire of London. Some people believe that it helped stop the Black Death. This brings us to the last part of the article: whether it is costumed vigilantes tearing up a city block or the bar room brawl that became a riot, there are always repercussions: rebuilding or repairing.



Has the city been involved in a siege? Or a military *coup d'etat*? Does something stalk the streets like Jack the Ripper? What rumours are there of foreign lands? Has the city had a large influx of new visitors?

However you do it, there should be something that makes the city feel more dynamic: that it is alive. Whether your PCs get caught up in a riot, the city comes under siege, or plague breaks out, you need to breath life into it. It is all very well to read a dusty history book; it is something else to live it!



PC groups - how PCs meet in RPGs

A human thief, dwarf fighter, and an elven mage walk into a bar. The barman goes: “What the hell is this – a cliché?”

I was recently asked by an ORC member about how I thought groups of PCs (Player Characters) should get together. To be honest, it is a lot easier than people think. Consider your own situation: how many people do you know (let’s leave Facebook out of this, OK!) and how did you meet them?

Anyway, here’s a few suggestions for how a group of PCs may get together. It is perfectly possible for some of the PCs to be acquainted with one another using these methods, but at the end of the day it is down to your players. Note that some of these suggestions place the PCs in a hierarchy – these can also be used to springboard the PCs into adventures as well – they’re ordered to reconnoitre a nearby cave system for instance.

- Defence – maybe the PCs are part of the local militia, or even a military unit, fresh out of basic training.
- We are the law – the PCs are part of the city watch/local law enforcement, perhaps all based in the same station, fort, etc.
- School friends – the PCs know each other from school or university or an orphanage.
- Faithful retainers – the PCs work for a sponsor or employer (an NPC, or even a PC), as bodyguards, servants or similar. Whether or not they are still employed is up to the player.
- Street gang. The PCs are part of some group that has banded together for mutual protection – they may also have come from rival gangs (which can make for some interesting situations).
- Guild members – the PCs belong to the same guild, be they merchants, thieves, or similar. Remember that magic users and fighters are also valued in Thieves Guilds as muscle and magic, so they may not necessarily need to be members of a rogue character class.
- Secret society – the PCs are members of the same cult or society, e.g Knights Templar. This can either be openly admitted to, or something darker. Such details are best worked out between the players and the GM.
- Conscripts/press-ganged – the PCs have been forced into service, possibly as part of a levy or local navy recruitment drive. It is also possible that some of the other PCs may have been responsible for their indenture.
- Prisoners – the PCs have been imprisoned together. Their escape may make an adventure in itself. I used this myself in the first few games of [Against the Odds](#).
- Friends through adversity. The PCs face a common threat: the place they are staying comes under attack, e.g. the dead rise and lay siege to the manor; the Orcish forces attack the city, etc.
- Employees – rather than faithful retainers, the group is employed to carry out something, such as a specific task. This works well in games like Shadowrun, but can easily apply to fantasy RPGs. It’s also one of the easiest ways to get a group together: be it assassination, theft, or simply mapping a dungeon
- Meet in an Inn. Possibly one of the more clichéd ways of getting a group together: the group meets for the first time in a pub, possibly during a brawl. However, it can be used with any of the other methods given here.
- Relatives – the PCs are members of the same family. This can work well in intrigue-intense games. The PCs may be part of a criminal family e.g. the Corleones in the Godfather series, or the nobility e.g. Borgias or the Medicis. If the PCs are non-human, they may belong to the same clan or Noble House e.g. the Drow in Menzoberranzan, for example.
- The enemy of my enemy is my friend – while some of the PCs may be of different and opposing viewpoints (or even alignments), they work together to a common end, usually the defeat of a specific enemy.



To summarise: as a GM, your best plan is probably to let your players come up with some ideas before the game starts: it might save you some work but can actually give you some ideas for adventures!

Joining the Dark Side

The shadows just got a little darker. Evan “Diamondback” Hogan is a Shadowrunner in the Bangkok of the future. He’s what they call a Street Samurai in the Shadowrun RPG, a cyborg that makes their living as hired muscle and enforcers for Shadowruns. They usually have a lot of cool upgrades, such as cybernetic limbs, smartguns and other techno-wizardry. Evan is not a nice person; he is cold-blooded, experienced and thoroughly without remorse or much of a conscience. He’ll do whatever it takes to get the job done. And he’s my new Shadowrun PC.

And that’s what this article is about – being the Bad Guy in an RPG. From the outset, I’m not extolling the virtues of a life of crime or violence. Let’s be clear on that.

For years, alignment has been a tool in games such as D&D. More often than not, it is also used a blunt instrument. Unfortunately for some GMs, there’s also a high incidence of munchkin players who think being evil means killing everything, including other party members. In 4th edition D&D the alignments concepts are largely revamped from earlier editions, making them less of a strait-jacket.

It’s very difficult to apply alignments to populations or countries: a cruel and unforgiving nature god may still be worshipped by good communities for example. A lawful good society may have oppressive rules and regulations, along with a harsh regime for crime and punishment.

Here’s some suggestions for evil characters, be they PCs or NPCs.

It pays better

Sometimes people are in it for the money: they’re paid hirelings, or otherwise employed in the service of evil. They look upon it as a source of income, be they a hitman or spy. They can turn good for a price, and are likely to swayed by cash incentives – they are more likely to be mercenaries than zealots.

These characters often treat others as assets or obstacles. They may kill out of hand, but to them it is just a business, and rarely let their emotions colour their perceptions to this extent.

Evil has the best tailors

Sometimes, evil is just fashionable. Maybe its the uniform, or the fact that everyone else is doing it. Maybe the character’s friends have all joined a cult, one that proves popular. They may have been brainwashed or willingly complicit, and may or may not be aware of their actions. They may not be morally bankrupt, but they’re quite willing to further their own ends.

Some characters with this aspect may be living their lives in fear of discovery – others may openly flout the fact that they’re evil. Everybody loves a villain.

Society’s fault

“I’m not bad. I’m just drawn that way” – Jessica Rabbit, Who Framed Roger Rabbit

As we know, sometimes society has its underdogs. It may be a vocation, caste, or class, or even a community – but for some reason these underdogs are despised, or persecuted. Naturally, this makes them want to hit back – and the underdogs may see themselves as justified in their actions – they are only defending themselves after all. Half-orcs, for example, are often the subject of race hatred by both humans and Orcs; but they are quite capable of hitting back!

These characters may see themselves as freedom fighters or liberators, or blame a corrupt or unfair society – they may be pacifists, demagogues, or ruthless terrorists.

Whatever it takes

Sometimes the end justifies the means. These characters are convinced that no matter what happens they serve a greater good. The Imperial Inquisition of wh40k (Warhammer 40,000) is a very good example of this: they wipe out whole worlds to prevent them falling into enemy hands (such as the Tyranids or forces of Chaos), and ruthlessly hunt down psykers (beings with psychic powers) – those they catch are then turned into Astropaths, recruited, or drained of their life energy to fuel the Astronomican. However, if they did not do this the Imperium would have fallen to Chaos and all warp travel would cease.

Twisted by technology

“He’s more machine than man now, twisted and evil.” – Obi-Wan Kenobi, *The Empire Strikes Back*

In *Shadowrun*, the more body parts you replace the larger the Essence cost. Magic users need high Essence scores to use magic. With more machine parts it seems likely that some of your humanity would be lost, including the ability to feel emotions or to relate to other beings. Maybe the character is/was a brain in a jar and something got lost in the transition, or the technology amplifies certain emotion like hunger or hate.

Note that by technology we don’t just mean cyborg enhancements: magic weapons (such as *Stormbringer*), or even the atomic bomb can make people act in ways contrary to their nature, or intensify certain elements (like the *Go’auld sarcophagus* in *Stargate*). Certain characters may welcome their changes; others may regret it every single day.

Power corrupts

“You don’t know the power of the Dark Side.” – Darth Vader, *Return of the Jedi*.

Sometimes, the path to evil is taken in tiny steps. You turn a blind eye here, justify a decision there. When the character is in a position of responsibility, there may be that temptation to use that power to serve themselves, or enforce their will upon others. After a time, it may become second nature to use their power, never quite noticing the stains on their character.

For instance: the planetary governor who chooses to allow a Chaos cult to flourish in return for an extended lifespan in wh40k? The D&D liche whose quest is to triumph over death? The monster hunter who becomes a

worse monster than those he hunts?

Because it is FUN!

“Because he thought it was good sport. Because some men aren’t looking for anything logical, like money. They can’t be bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn.”
– Alfred Pennyworth, The Dark Knight

Chaotics or anarchists, this is the sort of character that fills most GMs with worry when a player says they want to play an evil PC 😊 – they do everything at a whim or follow some grand scheme of their own making. They may be completely unaware that their actions have consequences or know exactly what they are doing. Either way, they are unpredictable and may have their own twisted code of honour, morals or quirk (Batman villains, I’m looking at you!).

This type of character is far more difficult to play in a structured game, and may quickly wear out the patience of GMs and players. Unfortunately many new players tend to drift into this chaotic-evil PC archetype as it gives them a chance to kill other PCs and then justify it: games where PCs are killing other PCs quickly lose their attraction for players and GMs. If you want to do that, go play Mortal Kombat or WoW.

Doing the right thing

For whatever reason, the character believes that they are doing the right thing – they may be under a some form of compulsion, have been deceived, or simply believe that they are right. Unfortunately at some point they lost their way: their cause became all-consuming.

For instance, in the wh40k universe, the Primarch of the Thousand Sons Chapter, Magnus the Red, believes his sorcery has expunged the genetic taint from his Space Marine Chapter. Although warned against using sorcery by the Emperor himself, Magnus becomes aware of the imminent treachery of Horus and the Horus Heresy. While attempting to warn the Emperor, Magnus accidentally destroys the Webway that the Imperium would use to take the fight to the Eldar. The Emperor fails to heed the warning of Magnus, but the Primarch’s use of sorcery and the Warp leads to the destruction of Prospero and the fall of the Thousand Sons.

GM Burnout

“It’s better to burn out than fade away!” The Kurgan, Highlander

I think there comes a time when everyone “burns out”, creatively speaking – be it storytelling, writing or GMing. I feel it every few years when I’m running RPGs, and I reckon I’m not alone in experiencing it. Creativity isn’t like a tap – you can’t turn it on or off as needed. I’ve often found myself in the position where I’m completely stumped for an idea, only to have an epiphany later on – sometimes its better to take a step back from a problem or project and just rethink things – I’m not just talking about RPGs: sometimes in IT you can create additional problems by over-thinking something (a PC may not be connecting because of a dodgy cable not a TCP/IP stack)! I’ve also found that my mental state also has some bearing – unsurprisingly, if you’re under a great deal of stress or feeling down, your problem-solving and thinking processes tend to suffer as a result. At the moment, I’m thinking of just taking my time and not rushing things: I’ve a lot on at work and it can be difficult to concentrate on some of the other stuff I need to sort out at home, gaming or otherwise.

To be honest, RPGs are a good way to relieve stress. In the past I’ve had what one of my friends calls “Black Moods”, where I feel pretty rotten, and depressed. That’s depression with a small D: clinical Depression is no joke – however I think it is too often abused as an excuse (often misdiagnosed and drugs are over-prescribed by GPs who can’t be bothered). I’m not denying that at some point I may have been Clinically Depressed, but that was a long time ago. Sometimes these moods hit me (not for a few years though) but I’ve learned to ride them out – if you look back through my blog entries you’ll spot some of the times when they hit me! RPGs and the creative process help considerably with these moods I’m not one of these people who post their mental status on social networking sites (at least I hope I’m not!), seeking validation through cryptic comments; or playing for sympathy, so that everyone is compelled to ask what’s wrong.

Enough of my psychobabble! The main focus of this RPG article is the phenomenon known as GM Burnout. I’ve been an occasional victim of this, as mentioned above.

Recognising GM (and player!) burnout

Once you reach a certain age, or level of experience as a GM, it becomes difficult to find the time to either create new adventures or settings. Certain game systems become too advanced, or too simplistic. You just go through the motions sometimes. This is what happened with me and D&D: I don’t like 4th edition as it’s just somewhat basic and seems geared towards using a battle map and miniatures. 3.5 is too munchkin now: there’s very little “role” involved in what is essentially a paper version of a PC game (feats, etc.).

As a GM, you’ll spot the signs of burn-out in yourself by these:

- You’re having trouble coming up with new ideas.
- You regard the game as a chore rather than a leisure activity.
- You’ve lost your enthusiasm for the game.
- You become annoyed at the slightest thing during your games.
- Player/PC antics no longer amuse you.
- You find yourself cancelling games as you have other things to do.
- You want to run another game but don’t know which one.

- You have to regularly cancel games because players can't make it.
- You're running multiple games and are finding it difficult to concentrate.
- The game just doesn't work for you.

You can usually notice it in players too, with much of the same “symptoms”, for want of a better word. Often they're committed to two or more games – possibly as a GM too.

“Case Studies”

Here are some of my own cases of burnout, or other failures (and what went wrong!).

[Against the Odds](#): I used D&D 4e for this. Looking back upon it this was a mistake – I didn't think about how the game would pan out using a system that focuses heavily on combat, rather than investigation or intrigue. Consequently I got frustrated and ditched it.

[Ashes of Freedom](#): again D&D, but 3.5&4e this time. However, the first time I ran AoF (when 4e came out), I got a bit sick of the system (and one of the players threw a bit of a hissy fit too when he couldn't get his own way), plus I had two groups and one lot changed nearly every week. However a little later I returned to AoF using D&D3.5. I did overcommit myself to creating a 3.6 version as well, but it WAS a popular game. It reached a natural end, with some pretty good action sequences, and I was needing a break anyway – I realised I was getting close to burnout.

[Babylon 5](#): great idea, crap implementation, rotten PR. The d20 edition of the Babylon 5 RPG doesn't work as it stands. Unfortunately, I thought I could craft this great campaign, with a story arc that could match JMS. Unfortunately it was not to be: other popular games were on that day; the setting required too much metagame knowledge/series background; and the system was pretty poor and didn't really run well. Looking back, I could have done something with it I guess, but I was feeling a little restless: wanting to run an RPG, something other than D&D. I think I was definitely burned out as a GM at this point.

[The New World](#): despite this setting being incredibly popular since, the first outing proved to be an unmitigated failure. In its first incarnation, it was designed to be an ORC shared campaign. A group of DMs worked over several months to hammer out a setting and plot line, and on D&D day we had three different DMs running a game. Then the other GMs lost interest (or couldn't be bothered), and I was left carrying the game – I got pretty sick of that so the New World was put on ice for a few years – it's still used frequently by other DMs at ORC and elsewhere (including some of my ideas 😊 so its not a total loss. After this event I didn't run anything for a while, as I was pretty hacked off. I felt vastly disappointed. It was a game where there were plenty of folk wanting to play, but few willing to run.

PBM games: I definitely suffered GM burnout with these. [Shadows Lengthen](#) took so much of my time that despite the fact that it made some small amount of money that I just got tired of running it. [Ties of Blood](#) looked really good on paper, but failed to garner enough interest. I just gave up on it as a result.

What to do

The best thing to do is take a break – the time involved depends upon the individual. If you're running an existing game, tell your players that you want to take a break for a while. Maybe let someone else run, and you can relax and actually be a player for a while.

Try running a different game and keep it to a short series i.e. a mini campaign. If you're short of ideas, it can be a

good idea to carry a small A5 or smaller notebook everywhere. You'd be surprised when (and where) you can find inspiration!

If the game itself isn't working, that's more difficult: it's best to give some serious thought to if you can see it continuing in its current form. If you can't, give your players an ending to remember! If there's no way you can see the game going on, be as dramatic as possible in the game's conclusion – all the gloves are off: PCs die, NPCs change loyalty, the villain(s) die(s), the world ends, etc. Aim for a whammy!

NOTE: I know this is kinda written like a medical crib sheet, but I thought it might be fun to write it like that. Obviously RPGs are a leisure hobby – treat it that way!

Writing a Script

Writing a Script is an article originally part of a presentation I made years ago at College: most of it holds true today.

Introduction

Every programme needs a script, even if it is a simple animation with no speech at all. The script is the basic foundation upon which a programme is made – be it audio, video or film. It is a guide to the sequence of events that transpire during the programme – without this the production would quickly fall apart.

Script writing is one of the most undervalued abilities in the audio-visual industry, yet it is probably one of the most vital. Many of the large – budget Hollywood films of today utilise scriptwriters to a greater or lesser extent. It is important to define the roles of the writer and director from each other.

- The writer is the creator of the idea, the one who forms the characters and the environment. It is he who originally formulates the plot, and forms of speech. He also has to deal with any rewrites of the script that might be necessary.
- The director, on the other hand, is responsible for transferring the written text into the chosen media i.e. Film, video tape, audio etc.

It should be pointed out at this stage that many Hollywood directors write their own films (For example, James Cameron and Quentin Tarantino). Compared to this, many TV productions have a separate writer who collaborates with the director. Many first time directors will find themselves in this situation.

What this presentation is intended to illustrate is the best – and easiest – way to create a script, from its inspiration, to it's final rendering onto paper.

What is a script?

Script writing can be a nightmare for some people. They find the interaction of characters, scene details and plot construction to be incredibly daunting. This is a perfectly reasonable reaction considering that the script for a ninety minute production runs to between 100-130 pages. To create a script of this length requires a great deal of creative thought and a careful attention to detail. It is of little surprise that even proven scriptwriters occasionally suffer the famous, "Writers block," while creating two hour programmes.

As mentioned previously, a production needs a script. The script is in essence a guide to events, speech and the characters. A poorly thought out script can lead to a poorly produced programme.

In the following pages, visual dramatic programmes will be used as the subject medium. However, the presentation can easily be used for other subject medium such as audio-only, animation, and documentary-style programmes.

A script should consist of the following components:

Plots and Sub-plots

Theme

Mood

Characters

Action

Scene

Dialogue

Interest

It should also follow a rule known as the, “Three C rule.” This specifies that a good script incorporates the following:

CLARITY - CONTINUITY - CONSISTENCY

It is important to understand that it is the variations of characters and, Ingredients,” within a script that make such scripts individual. However, before a script can be written, the idea for a plot is needed. This takes us neatly into the first item on our list of script components, “Plots and sub-plots.”

Plots and sub-plots

Plot is essentially the story line, defining occurrences, character movements, and events that happen within the programme. Although it seems unbelievable, there are in fact only 36 known plots with attempts to find a 37th having failed so far. The 36 known plots are beyond the scope of this presentation, and will not be entered into in any great detail here. These plot archetypes (as they are known) consist of some of the following: mystery, hunt, escape, rescue, attack, defence, siege, guard, betrayal, jealousy, conspiracy, love and injustice. All of these 36 plot archetypes include some or all of the following aspects, to a greater or lesser extent:

- Emotional premise: Basically, this is what the programme is about tying in with the theme, which will be mentioned later. The key word here is emotion, if you can affect the viewer’s emotions in some way, you are halfway to success.
- Key situation: Early on, establish a problem, dilemma or challenge for the characters to face and overcome.
- Motivation & Threat/Intention: The key situation must be able to motivate the leading characters to take action, to have a target, aim or goal.
- Conflict: Without this there is no story. It does not necessarily mean violence, it could simply mean a man’s struggle with his own conscience. or even a personality clash.
- Reversal: Something happens to make the character’s situation worse. They have to change and adapt to new circumstances.
- Narrative question: In essence, “What will happen next?” The audience must be kept in doubt about the outcome of the story until the very end.

A script has three parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. Think of the plot as a kind of W-shape, with the points of the W representing climatic events. The strokes of the W are the build-up, or slackening of pace.

Paradoxical though it sounds, every plot starts with a conclusion. What do you intend for the script to say? Is it something you want to say to the world? i.e. do you have strong feelings about the subject? Will it be of interest? And finally, most importantly of all: Does it entertain and/or inform?

Plotting is a craft in itself, and getting the idea for a plot can be a struggle in itself. Carry a small notebook around with you, for you never know when you might get further inspiration for a scene may occur.

Setting is also a basic problem. Think about the time period or the place, since working the plot in with the setting could be prove to be a battle. For example, a plot that involves a battle in space between star ships would be difficult to create if the setting is Georgian England.

At the core of any plot is the idea of believability, or at least the suspension of disbelief. People shouldn't be able to fly unless there is some evidence in the script to suggest otherwise, such as through levitation, wings, or some kind of high-tech gizmo, for example. There is an old saying, "Write what you know," that still holds true today. If you don't know anything about a subject, research it and then write about it. Observation of real life can sometimes be the source of many plots, as the success of programmes such as "Neighbours," and, "Coronation street," can prove.

Sub-plots are an ideal way to sustain viewer interest, and again, soap operas are a good example of this procedure. Sub-plots are minor story lines within the plot that could range from a character's car being fixed at great expense, to several characters hating the sight of each other. Sub-plots enable a greater depth to be added to the programme, without affecting the conclusion in any great way.

Script planning

Before you start writing the script, consider the medium that you are writing for. An audio programme, no matter how good the script, will sound terrible if there are a lot of moments when characters are silent.

Many people find it helpful if they write a resume of the script. This normally consists of an outline of the plot, describing the course of events.

As previously mentioned, setting is highly important. Think about when and where you want to set the script and why. Define this early on, as it could cause a great deal of problems later. In certain cases, setting your script in certain time periods or area can prejudice the viewer. Write a script about Vietnam and most people will immediately think of the Vietnam war. Write a script set 1945, and most people will think of the end of the World War Two. Also, as in any drama, there is a summary of the characters, in order of importance. Their roles, personalities, appearance, and motivations can also be incorporated, as this can be a useful reference when writing the script.

Having done this, it is now possible to introduce the themes. The theme is a word or phrase that sums up what the entire story is about. Examples of themes are love, hate, chaos, morality, leadership, society, and so on. For instance, take Shakespeare's play Macbeth. Macbeth's themes are ambition, power and corruption. On the other hand, the ones in Hamlet are those of revenge and tragedy.

When incorporating the themes, remember that they should be subtle, rather than blatant. A viewer dislikes getting preached to.

Having considered the theme, the mood of the script is also important. The mood is a surface feature. It is the prevailing emotions that are going to be running through the script. It is the feeling you want to create, e.g. madness, eerie, romantic, mysterious, excitement, upbeat. Taking Macbeth as an example again, the mood running through this particular drama is one that is brooding and somber.

A sample script resume follows.

Sample script resume

Title: The Pick-up

Setting: 1970's New York

Theme(s): Corruption and Treachery

Mood: Gritty & Depressing

Characters:

CURTIS: A clumsy, but shrewd bruiser. A rough diamond who is liked by everyone.

MANSFIELD: A neurotic Mafioso crime boss, paranoid about his underlings trying to undermine his position.

LUPINI: An assassin with a liking for sharp suits. An old friend of Curtis.

Plot Outline:

Curtis receives a telephone call from Mansfield, his boss, telling him to pick up a package from the airport. However, unknown to Curtis, Mansfield has decided that Curtis has become too popular with his men. He has decided to have him killed, and sends an assassin, Lupini, to shoot him on the way to the airport. Fate intervenes however, when the assassin realises who his target is his old friend. Lupini reveals Mansfield's motives to Curtis, who immediately reports the treachery of his boss to Mansfield's superiors. In the ensuing fire fight both Lupini and Mansfield are killed. The film ends with attending Lupini's funeral, and the promotion of Curtis to Mansfield's former position.

Characters & Characterisation

Characterisation is a major stumbling block to script writing. Without well defined characters, even the most well written script can be brought low by stereotypical cardboard cut outs.

Characters bring the script to life, they are in effect, "Story guides." Although a plot needs at least one central character, they need not be human e.g. Lassie, Bambi etc. As long as they are somehow affected to a greater extent by events, and have an identifiable personality, their shape or form does not matter.

A character's biography and personality is important, when creating a character. Ask yourself these questions:

What does he look like?

What has he done?

What does the character want out of life?

Where has he been ?

What is his lifestyle?

What is his function in the scheme of things?

Does he have any distinguishing actions or expressions?

What are his likes and dislikes?

What does he do when he's angry or happy?

What are his talents and abilities?

Next, think about the following points:

Is he necessary to the plot?

How often does he appear in the plot?

How involved will he become?

How does get on with the other characters?

Is he likeable or not?

And finally, most importantly of all, consider this:

Are they believable?

Action

Action is central to plot. It says what happens in a given space of time, for example, a gun firing. Action can be defined as physical movement on the part of the characters, or the facial expressions, moods and vocal delivery and moods. When creating action it is important to remember about continuity. Characters shouldn't suddenly appear from nowhere, when the viewer knows that they are supposed to be dead, without good reason.

Another important aspect is that camera shots and movements are rarely mentioned. Zooms, tracks, and dollies have no place in the script at this stage. At the formulation of the script, you are doing only slightly more than writing a story, creating guidelines for the director and production crew.

Scenes

A scene can be defined as any environment in which action takes place, be it a busy street, the control room of a spacecraft, or a sprawling ranch in Texas. A scene change allows editing to become much easier. It also helps prevent visual fatigue on the part of the viewer, who can quickly become bored with the same scene.

When constructing a scene for the action, consider the following points. They all help to enrich the script.

What time of day is it? This can be used to heighten the mood – most horror movies take place at night, for example, playing on the fear of darkness.

What sorts of props are to be inserted? A busy street is all very well, but if you add burnt-out cars, graffiti on the

walls, gangs of youths, and the sound of police sirens in the distance, many people will immediately equate it with Los Angeles, or the Bronx in New York. Perhaps before any action is taken place.

When in a room, what sort of furniture does it have? Is it opulent, moth-eaten, or non-existent? Are the walls painted or are they cracked, with water running down them? They can help to enhance the mood, and enforce the themes. But remember it is possible to create a cluttered and claustrophobic room if it's appearance is such that the characters can barely move.

Think about the weather next, and how it relates to the characters. Is it pouring with rain outside? Or is it incredibly sunny? The weather can be used to reflect the moods of the characters. When angry, perhaps there is a thunderstorm crashing around. Depressed? The sky is leaden, dull, or cloudy.

Next, consider the positioning of the characters. Do they suddenly stand out in a crowd of people walking along a street? Do they enter the room, or are they already inside? Are they sitting or standing? What are they wearing? This is especially important for the first impression of a character.

Dialogue

Dialogue, or speech, is yet another script stumbling block. A poor use of dialogue can make a film, using the best actors in the world, die a death. Use of the voice and dialogue help put a character's status and personality across, so when writing speech remember that dialogue has four simultaneous functions:

- Establish characters.
- Provide information.
- Reveal emotion.
- Advance the plot.

These functions should be concealed in such a way that they influence another character's behaviour or intentions. It is important to avoid a great deal of nowhere talk without good reason, but try to incorporate a little. Most character's are human and tend not to talk about the same thing all of the time.

It is very important to try and vary the speech – try and make the vocal qualities of each character different. Think about the character's social class and status. Is he an upper class Victorian gentlemen? Or a cockney fruit-seller from the East end of London? Both would have far different methods of speech. Attempt to imagine your characters speaking, and remember dialect can be easily incorporated in to a script.

Setting is again highly important where dialogue is concerned, so it is wise to fit the speech around the setting e.g. New York, Victorian England, Ireland etc.

Try and avoid repetition wherever possible, most people do not use the same words over and over again. It makes them sound like a stuck record, while poor punctuation can cause them to sound like they have let their mouths run away with them. Finally remember that, ungrammatical construction, cliches, and slang are habit to everyone and as such should be contained where human speech is used e.g. Try and use, "I don't know about that.", rather than, "I did not know about that". Again, remember the setting.

Interest

Is your script interesting? Well, think about it. Now that you're writing it, is the script really going the way you want it to? Do you have enough plot hooks to make the viewer follow the story line? Be critical of your plot outline

and your characters. Are there any glaring errors in continuity? Do you have enough challenging situations for the characters? Check your script for the plot aspects, mentioned earlier under, “Plots and Sub-plots”.

Finally, would YOU want to see the final version of your script on your chosen medium? If not, and you find the script boring... Well, back to work you go.

Script Format

There are certain ways to writing a script that is unrelated to any creative ability. Two of the simplest ways of setting out a script are as follows, again using a famous scene from Macbeth as an example:

Act one

Scene 1

An open place. Thunder and lightning. Enter the THREE WITCHES.

FIRST WITCH: When shall we three meet again? n thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH: When the hurly-burly’s done, When the battle’s lost and won.

THIRD WITCH: That will be ere the set of the sun.

FIRST WITCH: Where the place?

SECOND WITCH: Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH: here to meet with Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH: I come, Graymalkin.

SECOND WITCH: Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH: Anon!

ALL: Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

The witches vanish.

Act one

Scene 1

An open place. Thunder and lightning. Enter the THREE WITCHES

FIRST WITCH:

When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH:

When the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH:

That will be ere the set of the sun.

FIRST WITCH:

Where the place?

SECOND WITCH:

Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH:

There to meet with Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH:

I come, Graymalkin.

SECOND WITCH:

Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH:

Anon!

ALL:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air.

The witches vanish.

If you manage to set your script out in these kinds of formats you are well on your way to getting a clear and ultimately readable script. Always check your spelling, using a spell checker if need be. When you've finished writing your script go through to check for spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and the like.

Conclusion

Although you may be happy with your script, it may not be of much interest to any one else. Get some one to read over it for you, as they may spot continuity errors, spelling mistakes and other errors. If they have any suggestions, don't explode – they're only trying to help. They may not know you've spent the last three days and nights constructing your script. As a final note, compare the following two scripts. Which of these would you prefer to

read?

Script 1

A man sits in a room. It is dark. Suddenly the telephone rings. The man picks it up.

Mansfield: Good. You are finally in your home. I have been trying to reach you on the telephone all day, asshole.

Curtis: Sorry, boss it was because I had some things to do. I have been collecting a few gambling debts for you.

Mansfield: Oh right. Now then, I have a job for you. I want you to pick up a package for me from the airport.

Script 2

Scene 1

CURTIS sits at a desk, in a darkened room with peeling wallpaper. He sits illuminated in a dim pool of light coming from a naked light bulb, and we can see he is wearing a rumpled shirt, tie, and trousers. An unmade bed lies in a corner of the room. Through the cracked window, we can see it is raining.

A telephone, an ashtray, and a packet of cigarettes lie on the table. CURTIS reaches for the cigarettes and fumbles in his pocket for a lighter. He struggles for a while, before producing it with a smile. He lights the cigarette and then the telephone rings. CURTIS picks it up. It is MANSFIELD, CURTIS' boss.

MANSFIELD:

[Speaking on telephone, sarcastically]

Good. You're finally in. I've been trying to reach you all day, asshole!

CURTIS:

[Scowling]

Sorry, boss. I had things to do. I been collecting a few gamblin' debts for ya.

CURTIS puts the cigarette out, and leans back in the chair.

MANSFIELD:

[Mollified]

Oh. Right. Now then, I've a job for you. I want you to pick up a package for me from the airport...

Bibliography

- "Scripting for video and audio-visual media." by Dwight V Swain. *ISBN 0240510755.*
- "Film script writing: A practical manual." by Dwight V Swain. *ISBN 0240509684.*
- "On camera: How to produce film and video." by Harris Watts. *ISBN 0563202688.*

- “Drama structures: A practical handbook for teachers.” by Cecily O’Neill & Alan Lambert. *ISBN 0091478111*.
- “Video production in education and training.” by Geoff Elliott. *ISBN 0709909306*.
- “Understanding movies: 5th Edition.” by Louis Gianetti. *ISBN 013945585X*.
- “The practical director.” by Mike Crisp. *ISBN 024051341X*.
- “Studio scripts: Communities.” by David Self (Editor). *ISBN 0091410711*.
- “The Storyteller’s Guide.” by Rob Hatch & Andrew Greenberg (Editors). *ISBN 1565040844*.
- “Hatching a plot.” ‘*Camcorder user*’ magazine article: March 1993 issue.
- “Scripted stories.” ‘*Camcorder user*’ magazine article: September 1992 issue.
- “Secrets of the masters revealed!” ‘*Dragon*’ magazine article: January 1992.

The Art of "Winging it"

Improvisation isn't *really* an art as such but it can work extremely well when your players go off on one of those tangents that they love to do so often... and I know some players love doing it to games. The secret is: don't let them know that you're winging it. Or give them enough rope to hang themselves. Whatever works 😊

Some of my most fun games have been run off a few notes and maps, and both myself and the players have enjoyed them immensely. It's actually quite straightforward to run an improvised game, although you paradoxically need to plan ahead to a certain extent. Make sure that you've got a pile of stock NPCs or monsters to use and that you've a few encounters that you can throw in to break things up.

Among the improvisation techniques I've used, the application of "imminent peril" is probably one of the best. It puts PCs in a situation where they have to keep moving as they are being chased or are up against the clock. It worked very well in my first game of [Ashes of Freedom](#) as the group are pursued across Volkrania by the Mandragora, trying to avoid their forces and warn the capital. Encounters with heavily armed patrols and unrelenting attacks meant that the PCs (and players!) had little time to rest. The game was almost entirely improvised – as long as you've got the stats for some stock characters/encounters you can have a great time!

Another of my favourites is the total improv(isation) campaign – all your plot is centred upon the PC actions and their consequences. This can be hugely difficult to plan for obvious reasons, so it's pretty heavy work for the GM and can be difficult to run. Take away the toys. PCs thrown in prison or going undercover are not going to have much more than their own wits to help them out. [Against the Odds](#) was built upon this premise, with the group being escaped prisoners: no armour, food, weapons, or gear. The players would have to rely on their wits and creativity – particularly since they escaped into an area known as the Hellswamp. I'd planned to make the campaign about toppling the ruler, and creating a resistance force/rebellion.

Superhero/spy games are a great fun to improvise in, where you can wing it freely and give the players free rein as it were. I remember playing in a Marvel Superheroes game many years ago that basically focussed on us opposing the robotic Sentinels (long before the X-Men movies!). Oh, the elaborate schemes we came up with...

Anyway here's some basic thoughts when improvising:

- Be consistent – treat anything you improvise as part of the game "canon" from that point on. Keep some NPC names and stats pregenerated.
- Let your players create their own encounter - "This looks like a great place for an ambush!" or "There's going to be undead" 😊
- Don't railroad the players – gentle encouragement is better than forcing them back onto the original plot.
- Keep your cool – don't get discouraged or annoyed when the players do something unexpected.
- Adapt the ideas into your game. In *Ashes of Freedom*, a chariot race originally intended as a background actually provided a number of sessions that were fun!
- Roll with it – enjoy yourself! If your players ignore the dungeon you've spent weeks designing and decide to go on an ocean cruise let them do so. Then maroon them on a mysterious desert island. With non-euclidean geometry.
- Don't be too "out there" with your improvisations – try and keep the flavour of your game intact. Humorous side quests can be fun – in moderation.
- Don't indulge individual players too much – remember, RPGs are social games. Give each player enough of their own air time, returning to individuals afterwards.

RPG Meta-plot: is it needed?

Meta-plot is one of those concepts that you either love or hate. Basically, the term is often used in RPGs and elsewhere to describe an over-arching plot-line or extended storyline. You can see examples of meta-plot in the media too – the Shadow War in **Babylon 5**, Lucifer rising in **Supernatural**. **Game of Thrones** is one huge example of epic meta-plot, with lots going on and not all of it related to specific characters.

Yet RPGs often have a problem with meta-plot. Sometimes, even the sheer weight of meta-plot material can kill a product line. This is roughly what led to the White Wolf “reboot” of the World of Darkness (**Vampire**, **Werewolf** etc.) – they had loads of supplements and source-books that had largely bled (for want of a better word) the creative opportunity for GMs. Wizards of the Coast had quite a history of doing meta-plot resets, e.g. **From the Ashes** and the **Greyhawk Wars** series that rebooted Greyhawk for A&D 2nd Ed. Sometimes it is easier to start afresh and might also generate fresh revenue and invigorate a product line I suppose!

Players only appreciate meta-plot when they are active participants to some extent. It also often assumes some prior familiarity with a setting on the part of your players – and that in itself can be hard work for someone new to a particular setting. Here’s some examples.

Babylon 5 RPG setting

Gods, where would you start with Babylon 5 for someone unfamiliar with the series? Even watching a couple of episodes wouldn’t really bring someone unfamiliar with B5 up to speed with 5 years of plot. You’d have to be really hard-core fans of the series to make it work, unless you set it before the formation of the ISA and coming of the Shadows. The sheer volume of plot and events make it inscrutable to anyone who hadn’t watched a season or more!

Cthulhutech RPG meta-plot

You could say that the whole setting of Cthulhutech is one big meta-plot. I’m eagerly awaiting **Dead Gods** and **Burning Horizons** for Cthulhutech. One is likely to be a Storybook that features meta-plot and the events of 2086, the other “splat” book for the Rapine Storm faction (a cult of Hastur that purges/scours the earth for the arrival of the Great Old Ones). The Storybooks are interesting in that it gives your players a chance to participate in some of the major events/revelations of the year as part of the CT meta-plot. However, there’s a lot going on across the globe and it’s unlikely that your players would be at the Fall of Juneau or Shanghai. In my own *Through the Looking Glass* games, I’ve hinted at what’s to come, but can’t really bounce the players across the planet (or space in the case of *Burning Horizons*!) to a new location every session!

Ashes of Freedom (D&D)

Contrary to popular belief at ORC, much of the meta-plot for the [Ashes of Freedom D&D game](#) at ORC did not come out of any long-term planning on my part as such. It worked as a result and I could tailor the plot toward the PCs actions. Yes, I did have a few ideas for the long-term, but fitting it around the players worked far better. Also as the world was my own creation it meant that I didn’t feel compelled to preserve it, or avoid any events. To be perfectly honest, some of the plot was derailed from the first session so I had to come up with some new ideas quickly!

To answer my original question: is meta-plot needed? No – never let it get in the way. If you want a simple dungeon bash, for instance, you might not need it. Live free, and only use meta-plot when you want to give the



game some flavour, or involve the players in some new conspiracy! Kill off a significant NPC? No problem. The PCs thwart the invasion that might have led to the founding of a empire of a thousand years of peace and prosperity? Oops! The whole party gets wiped out? GMs, it's your game: you can do what you want with it.

Edinburgh Gaming

Edinburgh Gaming - Gaming in Auld Reekie

Edinburgh Gaming

Edinburgh has a thriving gaming community, with three Universities and a fairly localised population. I spend most Saturday afternoons in Edinburgh gaming at ORC, the [Open Roleplaying Community](#), but also participate in a few games outside of there. Although Edinburgh is fairly small, there's a lot of Edinburgh gaming groups – and a lot of games/software companies. Computer gamers likely know that this is the home of Rockstar North, creators of Grand Theft Auto (their office is just up the road from me). I run my games at ORC on Saturdays. You don't need to have joined the ORC website to play, although I think it's worth joining (I'd likely say that anyway 😊), being the site admin).

Edinburgh Gaming Shops

There's quite a few shops in Edinburgh that may be of interest to the gamer – whether they are visiting or have recently moved to the city.

- [Black Lion](#). Based at 90 Buccleuch Street, Edinburgh EH8 9NH (tel: +44 (0)131-667-2128) or via [email](#). A non-affiliated independent Edinburgh gaming store selling a wide range of miniatures, board games, card games and roleplaying games (RPGs). A map to the shop, near Edinburgh University, can be found [here](#).
- [Games Workshop](#) have a store at 136 High Street, Edinburgh, Midlothian, EH1 1QS (tel: +44(0)131-220-6540). They sell war games, miniatures, and board games, concentrating on their own brands – Citadel and Games Workshop. A map to the shop (near the Royal Mile) can be found [here](#).
- **Deadhead comics**. Independent comic and collectibles retailer (no RPG or miniatures), open from Monday to Saturday 10am 'till 6pm, Sundays 12am 'till 6pm. Found at . Tel: +44 (0) 131 226 2774 or by [email](#).
- [Forbidden Planet Edinburgh](#), the chain comic and collectibles retailer, can be found at , Edinburgh (tel:+44 (0) 131 558 8226).
- [Harburn Hobbies](#), 67 Elm Row, Leith Walk, Edinburgh, EH7 4AQ Tel. +44 (0)131 556 3233. “Well stocked with British trains '00? and 'N' gauge, railway DVDs, Scalextric, plastic construction kits, lots of various diecast vehicles and dolls house furnishings, many models are on display, each with a label giving their description and price in smart illuminated cabinets. Harburn Hobbies has been instrumental in commissioning a large number of limited edition models, many representing Scottish subjects”
- [Wonderland Models](#) (next door to Illegal Jack's). 97 & 101 Lothian Road, Edinburgh, EH3 9AN. Telephone +44 (0)131-229-6428 or +44 (0)131 229 0797 for mail order enquiries.

Edinburgh Gaming Groups

Most universities in Edinburgh have their own clubs, as do some of the colleges and schools too. While most of the clubs accept members from outside the universities, there may be age restrictions depending on the venue and a membership fee. That said, there's a lot of Edinburgh Gaming groups that have no web presence – sites like ORC are your friend here!

- [Open Roleplaying Community](#) (ORC, of which I am a member and run the website for) is more of a community than a club. It has a cosmopolitan outlook and runs a number of games, mainly RPGs. We usually run games on a Saturday afternoon in a local venue and at members homes on other days. Membership is free, and there are no membership age restrictions. We're always looking for more folk to run games.



- [GEAS](#) (Grand Edinburgh Adventuring Society) is the Edinburgh University club. They run [Compulsion](#) every year, a large gaming convention.
- [Watt Gamers](#). Heriot-Watt University's gaming club.
- [SESWC](#) is a war games club who meet every Thursday, from 7.00 pm until 11.00 pm in the Royal Navy & Royal Marine Association at 1 Broughton Road, Edinburgh. There's space for up to fifteen 6'x4' gaming tables and we have a good supply of scenery for miniatures games permanently stored on the premises. Other members play board or card games and there's a bar on site for those who take their socialising seriously.
- [Edinburgh League of Gamers](#). Age 18+, and a £2 entry fee after the first visit. They are "a group of gaming enthusiasts; people who meet, converse and otherwise occupy themselves with shared interests gaming, be that with 'toy soldiers', collectable cards, or board games". They meet on Wednesdays at [11 Hillside Crescent](#) and play 6-11pm.
- [FAQ](#) is the Edinburgh University Board games club.
- [Lothian Gamers](#). Livingston-based (West Lothian) group of gamers, not just RPGs.
- [Falkirk RPGers](#) – Falkirk based group.
- The [Edinburgh Gamers Guild](#) (EGG) is a place on Board Game Geek (BGG) which Edinburgh-based board games players can use to arrange games.

Live Action Roleplaying (LARP)

- [Isles of Darkness](#) (previously Camarilla UK) run World of Darkness games (Mortals, Created: Promethean, Changeling: The Lost, Forsaken (Werewolf), Requiem (Vampire), Awakened (Mage). All games run at the [RAF Club on Hillside Crescent](#) from 7pm. edinburgh.dst@gmail.com is the email address of the Edinburgh Domain Storyteller to find out more details on the games.
- [Embraced](#). An old World of Darkness LARP with multiple events each month.
- [Fools and Heroes](#) (FnH), is a "UK based Live Action Roleplay (LARP) Society, consisting of over 20 branches. Fools & Heroes is set in a medieval fantasy version of our own world (Scotland is re-named "Lirron"), where knights and warriors clash with hideous creatures, priests do the bidding of their gods and mages wield powerful magics (when they are not running away). In this kind of world, the actions of individual adventurers do make a difference. Throughout the year, Edinburgh FnH run adventures on the 2nd Sunday of the month. The adventures are medium/high fantasy and focus on a local plotline, but can contain aspects of national plotline. National plotline culminates in a large weekend fest every year."

Edinburgh Gaming Conventions

- [Compulsion](#). This is Edinburgh's regular gaming convention which is pretty big. It usually runs in mid-March. It covers a wide range of games from RPGs, CCGs and board games. It also runs a LARP (Live Action game), usually Vampire: the Masquerade.
- [Claymore](#) is a war games convention, usually held on the first Saturday in August. It is run by [SESWC](#).

Gamer friendly venues

- The [RAF Club](#), 11 Hillside Crescent, Edinburgh, EH7 5EA. [ELG](#) and variousLARPs meet there.
- The [Meadow Bar](#), current home to ORC and FAQ – this bar is currently closed due to a recent fire that originated in their function room.
- [Illegal Jacks](#), a bar and grill in Lothian Road that also hosts board game nights.
- The [Cumberland Bar](#) 1-3 Cumberland Street, Edinburgh, EH3 6RT, frequented by EGG.

Edinburgh Games Publishers



- [Box Ninja Games](#). The games of Gregor Hutton, creator of “Best Friends” and the award-winning “3:16 Carnage Amongst the Stars”.
- [Drunken Badger](#) is a joint venture set up in 2009 by Alan Hume, Benn Beaton and Marc Farrimond to find niches and gaps in the games market and offer quality products at very reasonable prices to the gaming public. Some gamer friends of mine have set up this company.
- [Rockstar North](#) is the award-winning developer behind Grand Theft Auto series, the (in)famous games.
- [Solipsist RPG](#) is a gaming company based in the heart of Scotland, owned by David Donachie, the creator of the Solipsist RPG.

The city itself

Just a few notes about the city itself:

- Edinburgh is actually quite small for a capital city, but is quite populous nonetheless. The skyline is dominated by the volcanic bulk of Arthur’s Seat, and the famous castle that sits atop the volcanic plug. It has a very high student population – there are three other Universities other than Edinburgh: Napier, Queen Margaret, and Heriot-Watt.
- Edinburgh was once heavily polluted, and known as “Auld Reekie”. It approximately translates as “Old Smokie”. Much of the soot still adheres to older tenement blocks although many have been cleaned, and older pictures often show Edinburgh swathed in smoke.
- Edinburgh is supposed to be one of the most haunted cities in the world. Mary King’s close, a subterranean complex under the city, is a popular visitor attraction. It is known for having strange events occur of the paranormal variety.
- One of the city’s biggest drawbacks is that there’s no Underground/Metro to get you around. However the bus service is particularly good – £1.30 can get you from one side of the city to the other (mainly Lothian Buses). On the downside, the Edinburgh tramworks (or TIE) are currently driving residents mad!
- House prices are pretty steep, somewhat more than the rest of the country, and most central buildings are large 3 to 5-floor tenement blocks.
- The Scottish Parliament building is an expensive joke to most Scots and it is less than impressive. It is situated at the bottom of the Royal Mile, at the foot of Arthur’s Seat next to Holyrood House (the Queen’s residence in Edinburgh).
- Edinburgh has areas of great deprivation like Wester Hailes and Pilton, and in contrast the palatial town houses in the New Town and Morningside. Paradoxically many of these areas are side by side: Dumbiedykes is next to Holyrood Palace, and Leith where I live has both areas of wealth and poverty (Trainspotting was set – not filmed – there). Morningside is where authors such as JK Rowling and Ian Rankin live.
- Most movies that feature Edinburgh are shot in Glasgow, although **Rebus** was largely filmed here. Only specific location shots (like the running scene in Trainspotting) are usually used.

For a different view of Edinburgh, why not visit the [Dark Edinburgh](#) Page or my [Through the Looking Glass](#) setting.

Gamer Friendly Venues in Edinburgh

The recent fire at the Meadow Bar has got me thinking: are there any pubs left in Edinburgh with free function rooms? Given the credit crunch, I'd suspect that there may be fewer centrally – although further out of town there may be more!

So far I've got a list of the following pubs/cafes that would perhaps be suitable for tabletop gamers, such as [ORC](#) or [FAQ](#):

- Meadow Bar (Buccleuch Street)
- Illegal Jacks (the current venue for ORC, Lothian Road)
- Jekyll & Hyde (Hanover Street)
- Espionage (Victoria Street)
- Cumberland Bar (Cumberland Street)
- Cafe RenRoc (Montgomery Street)

Note that this is all I can think of so it'd be nice if anyone can suggest others (or even if they are gamer-friendly cafés/pubs/clubs without a function room). What I'd like to do is create a proper list of Edinburgh pubs that have free function rooms or are gamer-friendly – it'd be pretty useful as a resource too for anyone gaming in Edinburgh. The list may be incorrect so it'd be useful if anyone can provide me with more info.


What would be useful to know is:

- Do they serve food, e.g. snacks or bar meals?
- Do they allow under-18s on the premises?
- What's the capacity of the pub or room?
- Is there a bar?
- Whether there is a function room or not.
- Gamer-friendly e.g. allows playing of games (board, card, RPG, etc.)?
- Is it any good, i.e. on a score of 1-5?

Obviously this will very much be an ongoing work – I'm focussing on the Edinburgh city centre as this is the easiest place for most of us to get to!



*This Document was Generated on
the 16th of February, 2012
using*

 Anthologize

The logo for Anthologize, featuring a blue decorative flourish icon to the left of the word "Anthologize" in a black serif font.

Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci — Horace