RPG with No GM

http://story-games.com/forums/discussion/19938/my-new-style-of-gm-less-play-10-steps

So, this is how I currently enjoy playing RPGs (freeform games?) and intend to do so more often in the future.

1. Play with **no GM**, be a **player who is also game facilitator** instead.

2. Discuss and agree on **setting, mood and style of game** you'd like to play.

3. Together, use **Palette** from Microscope RPG to agree on a list of elements you want to see or not want to have in your game (i.e. "awesome car chase", "no aliens"...).

4. Choose any **rules-light game system** (generic or setting-specific) you like (here: *SchoolGirl RPG*), possibly stealing character sheets from your favorite setting (here: character creation from *Magical Burst*).

5. For **setting scenes and basic game-play**, use the Mythic GM Emulator as the basic framework (see *Fate Chart* and *Scene Setup* on pic).
Use your rules-light system for specific actions (combat, magic...) and the Mythic GM Emulator for general events.

6. To spice up **random NPC generation**, use Rory's Story Cubes with this instruction on Creating NPCs with Story Cubes.

7. To spice up random events (random items, random skills... random anything), use tons of **Random Tables** (here: event tables form *Maid RPG* used).

8. In each scene, **decide first** what will happen using the tools above, **then roleplay** the scene.

9. Enhance roleplaying with **Freeform approaches**. Feel free to get up, improvise, act out scenes. Generously give away "your" character to another player for a scene, so you can incorporate an NPC. Use props if you like (see some props on pic).

10. Encourage **collaborative storytelling** by involving all players: what would be a cool thing to happen in our story? what would we enjoy roleplaying in the next scene?

NPC Creation with Rory's Story Cubes

https://yotesgametime.wordpress.com/2014/08/01/creating-an-npc-with-story-cubes/

The story cubes are nine different dice that each have a different symbol on them. The symbols and images are what you use to tell a story. The idea is that the image on the die can be used in any way to spur an idea for the character. By using the dice with three sets of three questions you are able to put together a random character for the player characters to encounter. You could also do this for a player character or for a writing exercise. You also don't need Story Cubes. You could do this with any sort of randomizer. For instance, you could use Magic the Gathering cards, Tarot cards or even "Random page" on Wikipedia.

Directions: You roll three of the Story Cubes, one for each question in the sets below. You can mix and match those three dice with any of the three questions. Once you roll those three dice, you can't use

those particular dice again for the remainder of the exercise. IE: grab another three for the next set of questions. Easy, right?

I love this kind of creativity and decided to give it a go with my own set of dice.

It's easier to first decide the setting of the game world. For this run I'm going to create a NPC in a fantasy adventure setting. I'm not sure how they will turn out but with a little tweaking I'm sure the NPC could fit into any setting. A random 50/50 die roll tells me the character is a female.

The first set of questions —

Obvious NPC Story Elements

1. The NPC's role in the world: discerned by clothes, demeanor, initial introduction, etc.
2. The NPC's current home or home-base: learned through initial introduction, casual conversation, etc.
3. The NPC's signature/unique talent: learned through casual conversation, simple getting-to-know-you questions, etc

Taking three dice I roll the symbols for a cane, a rainbow and a single die (dice).

1. Role in the World – Rainbow. This character is particularly cheerful and pleasant most of the time. The demeanor is not meant to be offensive or rude. She is just a positive person with a happy, cheerful attitude. Her clothing tends to be brightly colored and stylish. Though not always carrying a smile she is almost always in a good mood.

2. Current home or home base – Cane. (Here I decide to use the cane as a symbol for something older.) This character lives in an older side of town known for its antique homes and architecture. Whether they live in a well-to-do heritage house or an older run down antique home is not known. She is known, however, as someone who comes from the "old" side of town. This could indicate an old family lineage with some wealth or someone that was lucky enough to buy one of the older, run down homes.

3. Signature/Unique Talent — Dice. This character can see the odds and gamble like nobody's business. She has an uncanny ability to be lucky for herself and others. Of course, she's also a gambler. She knows how to play cards, dice games or any other wager that is designed to take your money. She also knows how to look at a situation and weigh the odds successfully most of the time. It's her gift and a bit of a curse.

I've got a decent picture of her so far. I'll grab three more dice and give a roll for the second set of questions. This time I get the Moon, a Fountain, and a Clock.

Personal NPC Story Elements

4. The NPC's special knowledge about others: requires a bit of trust, shared view of the world, things in common, etc.
5. The NPC's special item/tool/useful possession: requires a bit more trust, shared view of the world, things in common, etc.
6. The NPC's ally/allegiance to a group or organization: requires the certainty that the PC is not an adversary to the ally or   allied group or shares their POV.

4. Special knowledge about others – Clock. She has a very special knowledge about the timing of not only important people but important matters in the city. Not only does she know the coming and goings of important officials to and from the casinos and taverns she frequents but she also seems to have an uncanny ability to know the progress and timing of events about to happen.

5. Special Item/Tool/Useful Possession – Fountain. From living in the city or area for so long, she knows a great deal about the city/village itself and more importantly a secret network of tunnels that

connect all the parks in the city. This also works nicely with #6 below.

6. Ally/Allegiance to a group – Moon. She is an ally with a group of female mages and witches that often come through the city called the Order of the Alabaster Moon. Matter of fact, she is one of their agents and she reports to them what she can glean from her time around the taverns and casinos of the city (which, with her ability, tends to be quite a bit!)

Time for the final round of dice, Round Three! For this final roll I roll the last three Story Cubes and get… A Foot, Smiley Face, and Chaos Star.

Intimate NPC Story Elements

7. A past experience that has shaped the NPC's current self.
8. A present situation that the NPC is embroiled in that could affect the PC directly or indirectly.
9. A future goal the NPC is hoping to attain…could the PC help?

7. Past Experience — Happy Face. In the past she inherited her current home and resources from a relative. It was a favorite uncle, aunt, grandparent who she loved dearly. It is a great happiness and honor to her to own and care for the home and her place in the city. Up until now, things have been very good for her.

8. Present Situation — Chaos Star. Troubling and chaotic times have fallen on her. She has lost connection to her sisters in the Order of the Alabaster Moon as well as hearing troubling news coming from the taverns and casinos of a new, thieves guild based gambling ring which wants to run out all contenders. Chaotic times have appeared in her life.

9. Future goal — The Foot.   She would like to travel, perhaps to a far-away famous landmark or city. Perhaps she could journey for a short time with the PC's and help them with their luck? Of course, before she could leave her home she would need to settle this problem with the thieves guild gambling ring and/or make connection to her Sisters again. Perhaps she has a trip planned and the only thing standing in the way is her disconnection to her Sisters. Surely the PC's could help find out what is going on?

And, done. What we have is a really good NPC which only needs a moderate amount of fleshing out to be done and perhaps given stats based on what system you would like to use.   Since it's a fantasy setting we haven't really chosen race or age yet. You could do that with more random die rolls or just go with what feels right.

For instance, in this case, I would have to go with a human or, possibly, a half-elf. Depending on her age she could become a love interest for a male PC or an adventuring pal for a fellow sister. Perhaps one of the PC's have a connection to or is one of the sisters of the Order of the Alabaster Moon and they need to contact this NPC regarding an issue or for information?

And to think, I don't even have a name for her!

NPC Creation with Tarot Cards
When I ran through this the first time, I used Rory's StoryCubes to generate an NPC character for roleplaying. This time I'll use a 78 card tarot deck for each of the 9 items below. I will go through each set of three elements and draw three cards. With those three cards I'll assign them to whichever element seems to work the best. Once used, those cards will not be placed back in the deck. For meanings I'll not only use the creative imagery of the card but also the "traditional" meaning of each of the cards as I know them. (Important – credit where credit is due. This set-up is not mine. I found this as a post on Solo Nexus which I recommend you check out!)

Before we go ANY further, a personal note on tarot cards – I've had tarot decks in my life for several

decades now. I know them quite well. I've collected a few decks and I enjoy not only the cards but their history. Here's the shocking statement. Are you ready?

Tarot cards are pieces of cardboard.

They are wonderful tools to spark creativity and story creation. When not drawing them for story and character creation they can also be handy in helping you look at a problem a little differently, changing the perspective a bit so you can see something you might have missed. Carrying a deck around with you will not get you struck by lightning or taken over by the Devil. (From what I know of the cards chances are good it will be just the opposite.) For this exercise I'm using a mini-deck of the Hanson-Roberts Tarot Deck that I keep handy for gaming.

Alright, that's out of the way.

I rolled the setting from [a chart over on Solo Nexus](#) and came up with Swashbuckling Fable. I modified this a bit to be a "Swashbuckling Fairy Tale." Maybe something like Snow White meets The Three Musketeers?

As before, I have no idea what kind of character/NPC is going to show up until I draw the random elements. That being said, Here we go!

Obvious NPC Story Elements — *Queen of Swords, Eight of Swords, The Empress*
(Looks like this NPC will be a female character just because two of these are highly feminine cards.)

1. The NPC's role in the world: discerned by clothes, demeanor, initial introduction, etc.
Queen of Swords – A learned swords woman, very skilled and experienced warrior. She will most often be wearing armor or a standard guard uniform when seen out and around. Her demeanor would be very too the point and, at first, terse.

2. The NPC's current home or home-base: learned through initial introduction, casual conversation, etc.
Eight of Swords – This was left over because the other two fell into place so easily. This one was tough at first. Eight of swords can indicate capture, being blocked, etc. For some reason I think of being captured or holding things at bay and I have to go with a city guard or a county marshal. Someone with the power to lock people up. I think this woman is a captain of the guard. This really doesn't go along with the image of the card but it's the first thing that jumped into my mind. The other idea would be someone held hostage or held against her will but it doesn't seem right.

3. The NPC's signature/unique talent: learned through casual conversation, simple getting-to-know-you questions, etc
The Empress – This is a bit harder to grasp but I think this just means that once past the initial outward appearance, the PC's would find her to be very caring and endearing. She would show that she deeply cares about the city and the people she protects daily. A softer side would show itself fairly quickly if the PC's got on her good side.

Personal NPC Story Elements — *Eight of Rods, Six of Rods, Three of Cups*

4. The NPC's special knowledge about others: requires a bit of trust, shared view of the world, things in common, etc.
Three of Cups – I decided to go with the image on the card a bit more. I see three women not necessarily dancing or partying (which is typical for the 3 of Cups) but standing close and perhaps talking or even whispering. With her Empress card above I'll say she knows a fair amount of secrets and rumors around the city. She is trusted by many and so they share information with her.

5. The NPC's special item/tool/useful possession: requires a bit more trust, shared view of the

world, things in common, etc.
Eight of Rods – This card usually stands for movement and travel. I would say she has a special item that allows her to move very quickly around the city. Perhaps a magic ring or her cloak with either teleportation or speed cast onto it? (I had thought about a flying mount but that might not be "secret" enough?) Regardless, she has the ability to be anywhere she needs to be VERY quickly.

6. The NPC's ally/allegiance to a group or organization: requires the certainty that the PC is not an adversary to the ally or allied group.
Six of Rods – Usually means victory or a parade. What struck me is the man and his red cape. I ran with it. The Scarlet Cloaks are the city guards and they work closely with the locals to maintain order and protection. She is quite successful at what she does, has the respect of most of the city officials and is a house hold name to many that call the city home.

Intimate NPC Story Elements — *The High Priestess, Five of Cups, Two of Swords*

7. A past experience that has shaped the NPC's current self.
Five of cups – Despair. Loss. This character originally started as an orphan, a poor street waif that had to struggle and live in poverty after losing her parents to either an accident or a violence. She was adopted in her pre-teens and as she neared adulthood she was given a chance to use her toughness and intelligence in the city guard. This is what powers her drive to care for those less fortunate. She has been there and understands.

8. A present situation that the NPC is embroiled in that could affect the PC directly or indirectly.
The High Priestess – She is currently investigating some rumors that indicate a local female mage or priest could be involved in criminal activity. The card indicates that this woman would have significant power herself and so would need to be approached cautiously.

9. A future goal the NPC is hoping to attain…could the PC help?
Two of Swords – The captain is having to decide whether or not to pursue further investigation of the High Priestess character. She is torn over the woman's innocence but is unable to investigate with her guards directly. (Perhaps she has been ordered to "back down" by politicians in the city?) She could possibly want the PC's to check out the Priestess character and her operation a bit more closely. Can the PC's find out information that would help the captain decide to push forward or to ignore the High Priestess and her organization?

And, we're done. We have a Captain of the Scarlet Cloaks (or possibly higher rank) who is very good at her job but also takes a nurturing, caring stance as well. She needs a name and, of course, stats for whatever system you would like to use. One powerful NPC that could be a player character's best friend or worst enemy. Not someone to trifle with at the very least!

(Post edit – Also, I'm enjoying this process so much I think I'll continue to make NPC's when the mood strikes me. All NPC's will be placed under the Category of NPC on the right hand column. That way, over time, someone can check here if they need an NPC in a hurry! Feel free to use them if you need them!)

Ultra-minimalist, high-speed solo rpg

Wow! Twice in one day!

With some unplanned open time gracing me, I've given some more thought about my plight: that of having no time, but still wanting get some gaming in. The Nine Questions system has been a wonderful tool, but still tends to take me a long time to get through. I think I've been able to complete only one entire adventure once in a single three-hour session. Mostly, it's

been piecemeal.

I've tinkered with some of the essentials of John's 9Q's several times. The structure it produces is very satisfying. I also like some of the unpredictability of Mythic GME as well. Where the 9Q's often feels like a complete film or play, Mythic can wander it's way and feel more like a novel.

Today I picked up a very free-form GM-less system I've tossed around and tweaked it, and gave it a playtest. I call it the "Chapter System", a very loose and simple set of guidelines to create a novel-like play experience generating something like a chapter...which needn't be fully conclusive, and over time, can lead to some arcs.

Chapter System

This is a simple scene framing plot constructor that creates and connects simple chapter-like arcs.

1. Introduce an element. Use some cubes, draw a card, look at a picture. This is either benign, hostile, or completely neutral (but may pop up again later). Create a scene setup and run it.
2. Introduce a hostile element or obstacle unrelated to point #1. Create a scene setup and run it, or, if it makes more sense, attach it to the previous scene.
3. Introduce a twist of the elements above (substitute elements generated from previous chapters if fitting better). As always, this is a new scene, or attached to the previous one.
4. Conclude the chapter when the protagonist either resolves the threat or reaches a critical impasse (unable to proceed until aid or escalation intervenes). As always, this can be a new scene, or attached to the events of those established before. If it ends in an impasse, it forms a *cliffhanger*.

Note that the order of points 1 and 2 above may be freely interchanged. A list of elements that arise out of play may be useful for future "chapters". Repeat chapters until a clear threat to a character's personal or heroic motivation(s) arises. This could be story arc #1. The following chapters should gravitate toward a shocking twist, revelation, or betrayal and an escalation of threats, forming story arc #2. The final arc should begin when the road to resolution is visible and within grasp when it pertains to the overarching plot, and should conclude when all major threads are resolved. Freely use any random generator to create motivations of NPCs, which may be actual, or false. One may impose a 4-6 paragraph limit to the exercise of noting chapters.

Anyway, that's it. I tried a quick run through and it took about an hour to write out. While it can eventually lead to a good-length "novel", it is broken into fairly manageable bits. I'll post results later.