

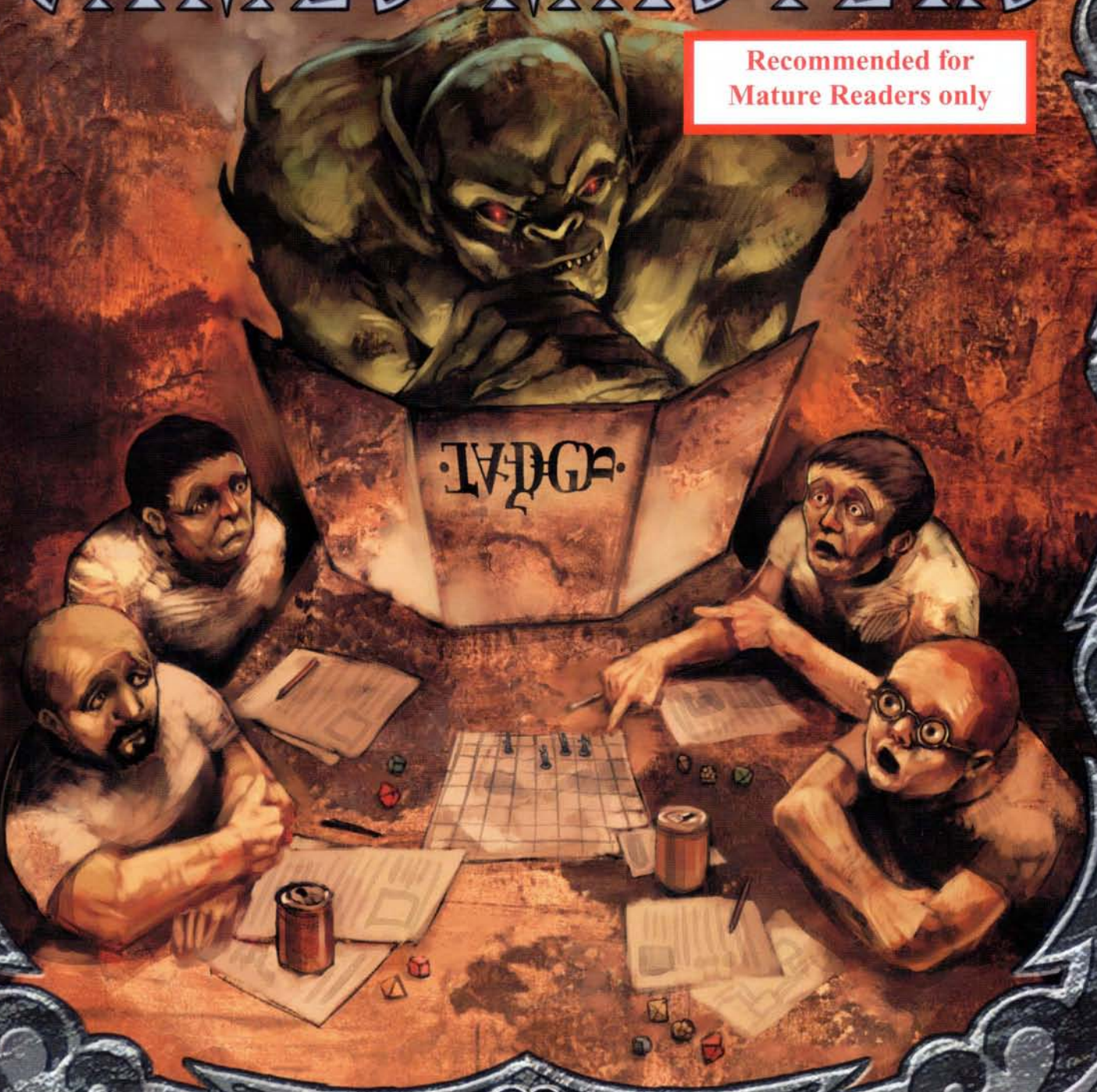
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THE
SLAYER'S
GUIDE
TO

GAMES MASTERS

Recommended for
Mature Readers only



The Slayer's Guide To Games Masters

Jonny Nexus

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Credits

- Editor**
Matthew Sprange
- Line Developer**
Paul Tucker
- Cover Art**
Jon Hodgson
- Interior Illustrations**
Sarwat Chadda
- Production Manager**
Alexander Fennell
- Proof-Reading**
Ashley Tarmin

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MONGOOSE PUBLISHING

Mongoose Publishing, PO Box 1018, Swindon, SN3 1DG, United Kingdom

info@mongoosepublishing.com

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INTRODUCTION

For a day and a night and another night, we fought our way up a cloud-wreathed mountain and across a rainbow bridge. Our enemies attacked, again and yet again, wielding flame-flicker swords that spat balls of screaming hellfire. Great boulders vaulted down the rocky slope, carrying away strings of packhorses in long crying chains.

The battle was already a score hours old when the sun peeked above the horizon, surveyed the scene, thought better of it, and beat a hasty retreat, plunging our world into a second night.

Now the skies themselves conspired to defeat us. Hail cut at our faces and tore at our clothes. Bolts of lightning arced down from sky to ground, leaving the night illuminated by a trail of burning moss. Still the realm's defenders attacked, in wave after furious

wave. But we could not be stopped, for even gods could not stand against men such as we.

With magical hammers we broke through the doors of the gates of heaven and advanced into its hallowed halls. Inside were glittering tapestries, which we looted, and thick shagpile carpets, which our dogs shat upon. We found a minor god of healing hiding beneath an upstairs table, and gave him a good twatting. Our backpacks bulged with plunder. That afternoon we feasted in the great hall. That evening we played skullball in the crypt.

By nightfall we'd reached the final chamber, and it was there we encountered our greatest nemesis. He appeared in the guise of a kindly old man, but we knew him from before, and knew him to be much, much more. He was the God of gods, the creator of all. He'd been there at the start, when the universe bigged and banged, and he'd be there at the end when it fizzled and died. Our lives were his, to play with as his whims desired. He could hurl lightning

from the sky, make the sun retreat from day back to night, stop our hearts with the merest flick of a finger. We slaughtered gods. But we were helpless before him.

He was the greatest opponent we would ever face.

He was our Games Master.

Understand this. The Games Master is your enemy. He may come under different names - Games Master, judge, referee... friend - but he is always your enemy. It's a different game he's playing, with different rules and different objectives.

His game is about control and dominance. He might dispute this, may use words such as 'storytelling', but ask yourself this: Whose story is it he wants to tell?

His.

Now contrary to what certain 1980s animated series might have had you believe, Games Masters are not in the habit of descending from the heavens to walk the earth, for the very good reason that within five minutes they'd find themselves with a knife to their throat, and a voice whispering in their ear: 'Tell the dragon to back away slowly...' (Or perhaps end up nailed to a tree, depending on the genre).

But don't get despondent, for Games Masters can be defeated.

And I'm going to tell you how.



SLAYER'S GUIDES

Books in this series of supplements are normally intended for use in fantasy based D20 game systems and settings. This one isn't. If you didn't know that when you bought it, then we're sorry. Though not, you understand, to the point of admitting any legal liability. This is, in short, a joke, a wind-up, a parody, a work of attempted humour, a piss-take, and quite possibly a mistake.

The more observant Slayer's Guide fans among you might also notice another difference between this and your standard Slayer's Guide. A standard guide aims to teach you about the subject creature. It will be packed full of information about the race's physiology, habitat, society, and methods of warfare. (I think the idea is that after reading all of that, you'll be able to figure out for yourself how to kill the bastards).

Well quite frankly, bollocks to that. I can't be arsed to spend 31¹ pages detailing the mating habits of Games Masters, and I don't figure you could be arsed to read it. So I'm going to give you a brief discussion about Games Masters, a few bits of useful info, and then go straight to the meat of the issue. How to kill² them.

Now some of you might be saying at this point: 'Gee Jonny, that doesn't sound like a proper Slayer's Guide.' And you know what? You'd be right! It's not a proper Slayer's Guide. It's a parody. What part of the first paragraph of this section did you not understand?

If any of you still have a problem with that, then I'd suggest sending all moans and whines to Paul Tucker of Mongoose Publishing, because he's the poor misguided fool who hired me.

Note:- Throughout this book I have used the male pronoun 'he'. Unlike other publications, this is not because I'm a misogynistic git who despises women. I like women, and

hope one day to sleep with one. I just don't figure any women are going to be reading this. Which is a pity, because if they did, and liked it, they might want to sleep with me.

IMPORTANT:- This book is intended as a humorous work of satire. Failure to comprehend this relatively simple fact could leave you confused, friendless, and quite possibly convicted.



¹Yes, this is a 32 page booklet, but the 32nd page contains the open gaming license, which Wizards of the Coast have kindly written for me. Hey Paul, do I still get paid for that page?

²Parody, guys, parody. We've all had bad convention experiences, but this isn't actually a guide to going postal at a games con with a rusty knife and a 'permanent' solution.

PSYCHOLOGY

The Chinese general Sun Tzu wrote in 'The Art of War' that you should 'know your enemy as you know yourself' and that, broadly speaking is the purpose of this chapter. We're going to tell you why otherwise decent people choose to become GMs, what weaknesses they might have, and what they're hoping to gain out of it.

But we won't be banging on about it. We'll stick to just what you need to know to defeat your GM. As former British Prime Minister John Major declared, it's time to 'understand a little less and condemn a little more'.

Some of you reading these words might think they're a bit strong. You might think that there's nothing wrong with people who choose to Games Master. You might

even trot out the old line about how 'it's wrong to hate GMs, because without the GM you wouldn't have a game!'

Yeah? Well I don't seem to recall that bit of logic ever stopping sixty thousand football fans from chanting 'the referee's a wanker!' for twenty minutes.

So it isn't going to stop us either. These people chose to Games Master, nobody forced them, and now they're going to have to face the consequences. They've been pushing us around for too long and this is where it stops.

TYPES OF GAMES MASTER

It's always difficult to categorise people in any walk of life, and regardless of which scheme you adopt you'll always find exceptions, such as prison officers who aren't right-wing, or popular kids at school who didn't get to be popular by being snide shits. But here's my take on the types of GM you might encounter.

THE STORYTELLER

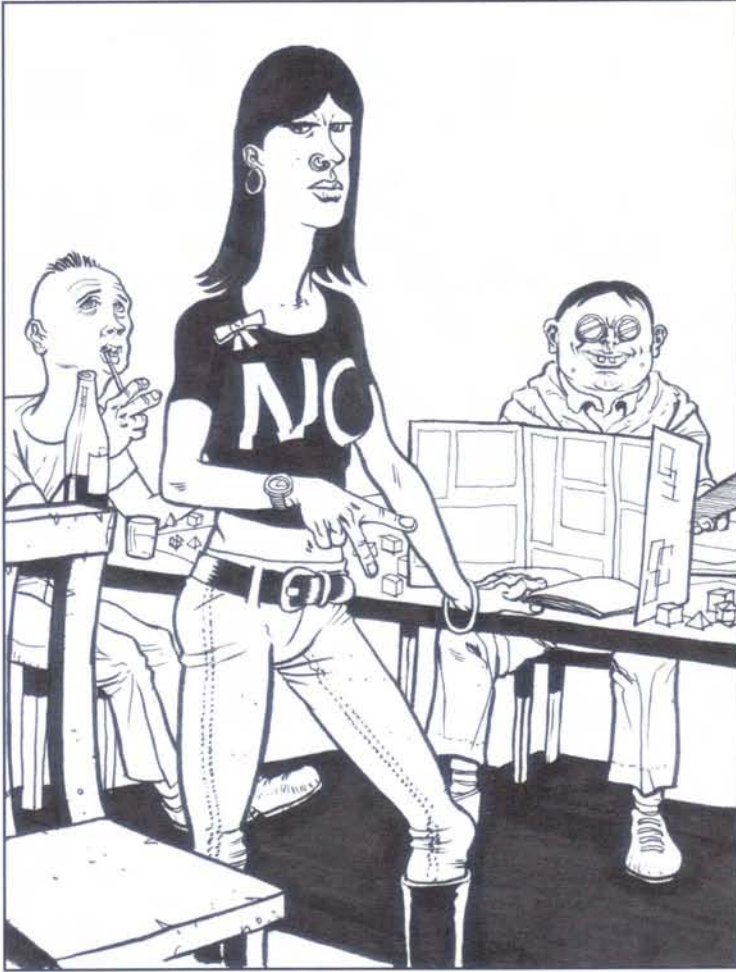
Storytellers are really frustrated writers. They probably have a novel they're writing, and it's most likely crap³. The big problem with storytellers is that they've already written the story before you begin play, and moreover, it's probably going to be an angst ridden tale where a bunch of losers (that's the part you get to play) get overwhelmed by the forces of the universe. Storytellers are like the New Testament of the Bible, all touchy-feely and peace and love.

THE CONTROL FREAK

Control freaks become Games Masters for the same reason that other people become football referees (either soccer or gridiron, it doesn't matter which, because the referees are hated in pretty



³Obviously, there are exceptions to this rule, such as me for instance, because my novel's really cool. (Note:- Since I wrote that line I've been reading lots of 'how to write a novel' type books, and now realise that apparently my novel isn't really cool, after all).



much the same way). Control freaks don't really care what kind of story is told, as long as they're the ones who get to tell it. Their motivation is the imposition of their will upon the players.

In many ways, the Control Freak sees the Games Master's role as being that of the alpha male of the group, sees himself as the best candidate to be alpha male, and therefore wishes to use the game as a vehicle to demonstrate his occupation of the alpha male role. An extended confrontation with a control freak GM can therefore be quite aggressive, involving a lot of metaphorical crotch sniffing and marking of territory, and you must be prepared to respond in kind. Control Freaks are like the Old Testament of the Bible. They don't particularly give a shit if you like them or not, but by God they want you to fear them.

THE ACCIDENTAL GM

Occasionally, a gaming group will find themselves in an 'all Indians / no chiefs' situation, and will therefore be forced to select one of their number to act as GM. Theoretically, this could be by means of an election, but the process is usually more akin to a press-ganging⁴, involving prolonged silences and attempts to avoid making eye-contact.

Accidental GMs have no biblical equivalent, since Monty Python films apart, people never get declared the Messiah on the basis of peer pressure alone.

FEMALE GMS

Female GMs are much the same as male GMs save for the fact that they are more likely to be 'storytellers' than men. But in the end, all the advice I'm giving you applies just as much to women as to men, leaving you with only one ethical question: 'Do you have a problem with making a girl cry?'

THE GAMES MASTER AS OPPONENT

Opinions differ on whether Control Freaks or Storytellers make better opponents. A Control Freak will prove a more challenging opponent, but defeating a Storyteller can be more satisfying, since they have much more of an emotional involvement in their game. Accidental GMs however make very poor opponents. They're liable to just lose it, and say: 'Sod it, you GM then!'

Gaming is a time-consuming process which occupies extended periods of your time, so it's important to get the right group – one which you will be happy making unhappy. It may help to imagine GMs as dogs, with Control Freaks as Dobermans, Storytellers as puppies, and Accidental GMs as hamsters⁵. What you have to ask yourself is this:

Which one would I like to kick most?

⁴Caution should always be taking when press-ganging people, since it can cause a quite violent over-reaction, such as in 1812 when illegal British press-ganging of American sailors got the United States so wound up that they went ape-shit, and launched a full-scale invasion of Canada, leading to a two year war whose result is still argued over to this day. (Both sides agree that someone lost, but each insists it was the other).

⁵I bet you think you're really sharp.

HABITAT

Like many creatures, a GM draws power from his Habitat. This is especially so in those cases where the GM's the only member of the group to have a suitable venue to play in, either through having a place of his own, or by having understanding parents.

This is the classic 'my gaming table, my game' syndrome, and a GM so entrenched can be a doubly difficult opponent.

DINING ROOM OR LOUNGE (TABLE OR COMFY CHAIRS)?

GM habitats, whether living with parents or not, usually fall into two broad categories:

Those who sit around on a variety of comfy chairs, with nothing more substantial than a coffee table to separate the GM from his players (such as the group featured in the comic 'Dork Tower').

Those who game around a single large table (such as the group featured in the comic 'Knights of the Dinner Table').

COMFY CHAIR LOUNGING

I like comfy chairs. They don't cause 'numb bum syndrome'⁶, they promote a relaxed atmosphere, and best of all it's easier to catch a quick snooze when the game's boring you. Just lean back, close your eyes 'in thought', and away you go. Try that with a dining room chair and you'll wake up when your forehead collides with the tabletop.

Unlike the more formal 'dining table' scenario described below, your choice of seating in a 'comfy chair' venue is generally determined by non-game factors such as which chair is the most comfortable, and

which position gives best access to the kitchen and the toilets.

The obvious exception to this is any chair which grants an extreme-side on view to the Games Master (something which cannot happen in a 'dining table' venue) since this allows the possibility of catching 'sneak peeks' of the GM's notes and scenario.

SITTING UP TO THE DINING TABLE

Unless your GM has rather stupidly copied King Arthur⁷ in his choice of table design, it's pretty much certain that you'll be sitting at a rectangular table, with a chair at each end, and any number of chairs down each side. (Never trust someone with a round table - before you know it you'll be wearing white make-up and drinking Ribena from mock-medieval goblets, pretending it's blood.)

This means that unlike the 'comfy chair' situation, the seating positions are pretty standard, and I can give some specific advice based on game factors.

The GM will almost certainly be sat at the head of the table. Assuming this, there are three 'seats' that offer advantages when attacking the GM. These are:

- a) At the opposite end of the table from the GM.
- b) In the seat to the immediate right of the GM.
- c) In the seat to the immediate left of the GM.

Each of these has advantages.

You should sit at the opposite end of the table if you wish to directly confront the GM. This is a good position to take when combating a control freak GM because it takes away the advantage he gains by having the 'Dad' position, since to the other players you'll appear equally prominent. A classic example of an aggressive, dominant player fighting from the 'baseline' of the opposite end is Brian, from Knights of the Dinner Table.

⁶I once attended a talk at the Vegan Society (because I'm a vegan, in case you were wondering) where we were lectured for two sodding hours about the dangers of Vitamin B12 deficiency, which apparently causes numbness and depression. By the time they got to the end my backside was a distant stranger I hadn't heard from for an hour or so, and I was so miserable I wanted to cry - but it was difficult to tell if that was due to my crappy diet or the two-hour talk.

⁷A man who was, let's face it, a member of a race so stupid that they didn't even realise they were Welsh until the Saxons came along and showed them where they were supposed to be living.

⁸I say pseudo-rational because we have no interest in the truth and will use any mix of half-truths, exaggeration, and lies that happen to serve our purpose.

You should sit to the left of the GM if you wish to use pseudo-rational⁸ arguments to influence his Games Mastering, since any thing you whisper in his (left) ear will go to the left-side of his brain, which is the side which controls logical thought.

Conversely, if you wish to appeal to the emotional side of the GM, which would typically be through manipulation, intimidation and good old-fashioned whining, you should sit to his right, whispering directly into the emotional right-hand side of his brain.

An additional factor with dining tables, which you can take advantage of, is that they tend to be both more expensive, and more fragile, than the average comfy chair. This means that you can easily distract the Games Master by leaning your chair back on the two rear legs (because every time he sees you doing so, his brain will automatically perform a weight-stress calculation for the two load-bearing legs, and arrive at a possibly worrying answer – especially if you're a fat bastard, which, let's face it, many of us are).

There is one final problem with sitting up to the dining table. It encourages the GM to use a so-called 'GM's screen'.

And GM's screens are evil.

GM'S SCREENS

I'm going to tell you what GM's screens are for, but before I do, let's first examine some of the pathetic excuses the manufacturers of these sick items regularly trot out as justification for their manufacture.

Myth 1: They Are There To Display Commonly Used Information

This is a clever and convincing argument marred only by the fact that it's an utter lie. Yes, there are many pieces of rules information that we often need to refer to while we are playing. Yes, that information is sometimes scattered through the rulebook. Yes, it would be handy to have it collated into a single, easy-to-reference document.

So print a quick-reference charts and tables booklet! I mean come on, are we supposed to believe you made such a booklet, thought, 'Hey why not make

it a triple spine four-fold made out of stiff card!' and then, son of gun, it's like: 'Oh wow, it stands on end, like some kind of wall thing!'

What a surprise!

No, they made a portable wall, and then stuck some tables on it as a justification.

Myth 2: They're There To Hide The Scenario And The GM's Notes

Well there's really two myths in here, and they're both bollocks. Nobody attempts to lie the scenario flat behind the screen to read it for two very good reasons:

a) There isn't enough room behind a standard-sized screen for a Letter-sized scenario⁹.

b) If you want to read it you're going to hold it up at an angle rather than lay it flat on the table. It's much more comfortable that way since the page will be at a more perpendicular angle to your eye-line, and you will be looking straight ahead, which puts less strain on your neck.

No. Screens aren't for hiding notes or scenarios. They have only one purpose, and one purpose only. Cheating.

HOW GMS USE SCREENS TO CHEAT

GMs use screens to cheat in a way which is so simple and obvious that it scarcely needs explaining, but since I'm being paid on a per-word rate, I will. GMs make their dice rolls behind their screens, and report different numbers to the ones they actually rolled.

That, gentlemen, is lying.

That, gentlemen, is cheating.

I can sense a lot of spluttered 'but...'s at this point, so let's first examine the two ways in which they can cheat, by 'lying high' and 'lying low'.

A GM 'lies high' when he rolls a low number which would be good for a player - such as an NPC attacking and missing - but tell the player that he rolled a higher

⁹No there isn't! Look, the side panel on the screen is a letter-sized piece of card in the portrait position, so it measures 8 ½ inches across the base. If you lay your scenario flat behind the screen to read it, it will measure 11 inches from the top of the page to the bottom. Allow an inch around for spacing, and the bottom of the scenario will protrude 3 ½ inches beyond the edge of the screen's side panel. Right? So do we need a screen to hide our notes? No. Do they think we're so stupid that we don't know what a clipboard is, or where to buy one¹⁰?

¹⁰At a stationary shop! Dear God man, how stupid are you?





number, which changes the outcome (such as the NPC attack now hitting, when it should have missed).

A GM 'lies low' when he rolls a high number which would be bad for a player, such as an NPC rolling a high damage, but tells the player that he rolled a lower number.

Example: 'Bob - the orc's war-axe smashes through your desperate parry and hits you yet again, for... oh, only 2 points of damage... that's was a bit lucky, wasn't it?'

You might at this point be thinking that 'lying high' is the bigger problem, but you'd be wrong. It's true that 'lying high' is seriously out of order, and it's also true that even the possibility of this technique being used is enough to damn both GM screens and those who use them. However, in reality, this technique is used very rarely.

By contrast, 'lying low' is a plague that affects many, if not most, GMs. Many of them openly state that they perform this practice, and insist upon its acceptability as a GMing technique. And since some of you might, at this point, be agreeing with them, I'd better explain why it's so bad.

Mankind used to be ruled by superstition. We believed that the sun rose in the morning only because a god

willed it. We believed that a falling object fell because again, a god willed it. Crops would grow, because a god willed it. This superstition drove us to desperate attempts to please the gods, such as human sacrifice, public humiliation¹¹, and dragging four-ton slabs of rock all the way from South Wales to Wiltshire (doubly impressive when you realise that there's a Bristol Channel smack-bang in the way).

Now though, we (both the religious and the non-religious) know differently. Regardless of whether we believe that the universe was self-created, or created by divine means, we believe it to be a logical universe that runs on consistent principles. The sun rises in the morning because the Earth is spinning in accordance with Newton's First Law. Objects fall because of the force of gravity. Crops grow because of photosynthesis. We understand that we have free will. Take the right choices and we prosper. Screw up, and we die.

You could say that we've moved from a superstitious view of the universe to a scientific one.

But your GM wants to reverse this. He doesn't want to be a modern-day god, who triggered a big bang, created a consistent, logical, clockwork universe, and then sat back to watch it function. He wants to be a hands-on Greek god, for whom the universe is merely an abstract

plaything, in which the sun won't rise if the Sun-God's sleeping off a heavy night.

We want a universe where if Dave's fighter fell off the rope bridge, but your wizard managed to cling on, it was because Dave leaned a few millimetres further than you, and reacted a few seconds later.

Meaning you rolled a 17 and he rolled a 3.

But the GM wants a world in which Dave's fighter lived, and your wizard died, because the gods smiled on Dave, but not on you.

Meaning he secretly rolled a 3 for both of you, but decided to let Dave off.

Every time the GM says a monster's attack failed when it succeeded, or says it only did 5 points when it actually did 17, what he's actually saying is:

'In this world people die not through random chance, or through a failure of skill or judgement, but because I will it. You'll die when I want you to, and not before then.'

Which is why rolling dice behind screens is bad.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Having decided that we want no truck with the GM rolling hidden dice and then ignoring the results, the question that must be asked is how we can stop him doing it. Well you need to put it in moral, aspirational terms that will convince not only him, but the other players – and since he can't have one policy for you, and another for the rest of the players, it's vital to get them 'on-side'.

I'd recommend making a speech along the following lines:

'Look, I need to feel this is all real. I need to feel that it really is a matter of life and death. The thrill of walking along a narrow ledge over a deep chasm comes from the knowledge that one slip, and my character's dead. I don't want a safety net - which is what I get if you roll behind a screen. Roll the dice in the open, and let fate take its course. Yeah, sure, if your Orc rolls a 20 to hit and then gets a maximum on the damage roll, I'll be dead - because he was better than me. But when I live, I'll know that it was because I was better than him! That's the challenge

and satisfaction we want. And that's what you take away when you roll behind a screen. We know you're trying to protect us, but don't. Let us stand on our own two feet, and live or die on our own merits.' Try to sound sincere when you say it.

VENUES WITH PARENTS (OR OTHER INHABITANTS)

When a GM shares his habitat with others (either family or room-mates) it offers you a variety of opportunities to take advantage of the situation. These generally break down into techniques which are visibly nasty, and techniques which are apparently nice (though are actually even nastier).

BEING NASTY

For start, you can do all the obvious things like stealing things, breaking things, reading through any bank statements you might find lying around, taking food (actually that's stealing too, isn't it?), trailing mud onto the carpet as you arrive and generally making a complete nuisance of yourself.

A former roleplaying friend of mine (referred to elsewhere in this book as 'Bill') managed to spread flaky pastry crumbs from a Cornish pasty over my carpet in a zone which we later measured at around one metre in length by thirty centimetres in width. I was especially annoyed at this because I'd specifically asked him, 'Do you need a plate for that?' and he'd specifically replied, 'No'.

Another good technique - which is especially good if his parents are old or conservative - is to swear loudly whilst roleplaying, as often as possible.

Tip: - A subtle way to do this is to never swear yourself, but to play characters who swear constantly. This is most effective if you portray yourself as a 'method roleplayer'¹².

'Okay, my character's a tabloid journalist called Danny 'The Sewer' Hanson. He's got a really low social status on account of being bought up on the wrong side of town by an alcoholic whoring mother, and I took the disadvantages Crude and Tactless. His typical quote is: "Hey, you scum-fucking son-of-a-bitch mother-fucker, what's with this fucked-up piece of shit article you just

¹¹Morris dancing, for example.

¹²I'll explain everything you need to know about method roleplaying in the 'Methods of War' section. I'll also talk about sex. You don't need to know about that - but it gives me a warm, fuzzy feeling when I type about it.



fucking gave me?" - I think he's going to be a very strong character that I can really enjoy roleplaying.'

BEING NICE

Getting back at the GM by being *nice* to his parents is a harder technique, which will require more work, but in the long run it can be more rewarding. The basic technique here is to suck up to his parents as much as possible. Be sure to greet them personally when you

arrive, and bid them farewell when you leave. You should engage them in conversation whenever possible and show interest in their lives and hobbies. You should drink beer with the dad and pay compliments to the mum (perhaps even flirt with her a little¹³).

Also, if he has a hot sister you should date her. (Not for any gaming-related reason, just because she's a hot chick and sex beats roleplaying any day).

By doing this you've gained three edges which make it much harder for the GM to do something stupid, like banning you from his house, or expelling you from the group.

Since you're personally friendly with his parents, it will feel to him like he's banning one of his *parent's* friends from *their* house.

If he tries to justify his decision to his parents he'll find it hard to convince them, since as far as they're concerned you're a 'nice, polite boy'.

Since his parents think you're great, for him to admit that he has fallen out with you diminishes him in their eyes. (Perhaps they've always secretly feared that he's a loser, but when he managed to get a really cool bloke like you as a friend, they started to relax. So if he kicks you out...?).

Where the 'other inhabitant' is a wife or girlfriend you can hugely unsettle the GM by flirting with her. (This does of course presuppose that you have a charisma score higher than 5, which - assuming you're reading this book seriously, and therefore most likely a 1st level neutral evil slacker - seems unlikely).



¹³But don't go too far and sleep with her - unless she's really hot of course. (In that case you might find the forthcoming *Mongoose Guide To Spectacular Sex: D20 Edition* handy).

In addition to unsettling the GM, flirting with his girlfriend may even persuade the GM to switch the game to someone else's place, thus forgoing all the power he derives from his habitat.

PARENT-FREE VENUES

It's true that if the GM has a place all to himself, there are many fewer opportunities for you to attack him. Some of the techniques we've already mentioned, such as stealing and vandalism, will work to a certain extent, but are less powerful when it's only his stuff you can get at.

But you can get creative.

DODGY INNUENDO

You could always try casually uttering the old cliché about how having your own place means 'being able to wank in any room whenever you feel like it' - and then looking meaningfully round the room you game in. That should make everyone feel pretty uncomfortable. This technique is especially handy if the GM is suffering from a cold and his waste bin is full of used tissues. (Make sure to pointedly stare at the bin).

'Hey You've Got A Spare Room'

I'm sure everyone who has a spare room has at some point experienced the creeping fear of listening to a friend telling you that they might be about to get kicked out of their current accommodation. When someone's about to book into cardboard box city, it's difficult to explain that you like living alone without sounding just a tad selfish.

This is something you can take advantage of in cases where your GM has a spare room. Make sure to frequently mention that the rows with your parents/flatmates/landlord are getting worse, and watch him start to sweat. Pretty soon, having you round his place under any circumstances will be something he'd rather avoid.

REMOVING THE GM FROM HIS HABITAT

I've previously mentioned that GMs often draw power from their habitat. So even if you're a complete chimp, you've no doubt grasped the potential usefulness of transporting the GM to a foreign habitat. It's like killing hamsters - easy when they're scurrying around the floor, sodding difficult when the little bastard's run through a hole in the skirting board.

Forcing the GM to use a neutral venue has a number of immediate advantages, such as:

He won't have access to his entire gaming library, leaving him more vulnerable to rules lawyering. He will be tired, having had to lug a backpack full of gaming materials across town.

He will have lost the 'moral authority' that comes when people are guests in *your* house.

If he runs low on drinks or snacks he'll have to rely on you, and you can use this to further weaken him. (If he's thirsty and asks for a drink you can go to make it, 'get distracted' and then 'forget'. Politeness may prevent him from reminding you for a socially acceptable period of time - twenty minutes say). And of course the potential biggy:

No table, which means - no screen! (Because it's bloody hard to balance a screen on your knees when you're slouched in an easy chair, and besides, you'd look damn stupid).

So how do we entice the GM from his lair?

THE BETTER VENUE

The key thing here isn't so much the finding of a better venue - after all, if you had an obviously better venue then your group would most likely already be playing there. What you need to do here is redefine your group's definition of what construes a better venue, so that other venues now score higher.

Let's say the GM has a place of his own with a large dining room, and a table big enough for you to sit around in comfort. You have to ask yourself: What doesn't this venue have?

Perhaps it's difficult to get to. Maybe some of the members have to take a couple of buses. Perhaps Joe's place, while not having a nice big table, is in a central part of town that everyone could easily travel to.

Once you've identified the criteria you need to apply for another venue to prove superior, you can then start campaigning. It's important to note that you shouldn't mention the 'other venue'. You should merely state your complaints about the current venue, and then - having got agreement on those - allow the group to 'realise' the superiority of the other site. In the above example, you'd start mentioning how difficult the journey was, how tired it makes you, how much better it would be for everyone if you had a more central location¹⁴. Then, when agreement is reached on that point, and the discussion moves onto alternative venues, you can steer them towards your chosen location.

¹⁴Be careful not to be too strident at this point. Whatever you do, don't say something like: 'Well if we don't move somewhere else I think I'll have to stop coming!' because if you're as much of a git as I suspect you are, the answer will most likely be: 'Okay.'

SOCIETY

GM's - with the exception of their more gregarious cousins, convention GM's - are generally solitary creatures. But they do have some rudimentary social structures, which you may be able to take advantage of.

We need to remember at this point that gamers in general often have quite limited social lives. They generally don't have wives or girlfriends, and those who do are often either lying, or hooked up with people who qualify as women only on the technical criteria of having two X chromosomes. I once heard of someone who'd got back into gaming (he put up notices asking for roleplayers in all his local libraries¹⁵) because he'd found himself totally friendless after a series of girlfriend induced rows¹⁶.

The point here is that gaming is often not a mere 'hobby' done in addition to the person's social network of friends. Instead, gaming *is* the person's social life, and since GM's tend to be among the more dedicated gamers, it stands to reason that GM's are more likely to be social inadequates - which makes describing their 'society' a tad difficult.

But let's look at what passes for 'society' among the Games Mastering crowd.

THE GAMES SHOP

Games shops are often referred to by the acronym FLGS, where the L, the G and the S, stand for 'local', 'game' and 'shop', while the 'F' is the source of continuing debate. ('Friendly' is the option favoured by one school of thought, I'll leave you to figure out the other).

Some GM's cultivate what could be termed a 'pseudo-friendship' with one or more of the shop workers. (When I say 'pseudo-friendship' I mean that the GM sees the shop worker as a friend while the shop worker sees the GM as a customer).

In these cases it's often worth cultivating the shop worker yourself. The benefits of this can include:

- Finding out which scenarios your GM has purchased, and purchasing a copy yourself.
- Not being grassed up¹⁷ to your GM, by the shop, when you purchase the above mentioned second copy.
- Planting rumours (to be relayed to your GM).

Rumours - such as 'I heard your game isn't going so well' - can be especially effective as long as the shop can be trusted to not reveal their source (you).

MESSAGE FORUMS

There are a number of roleplaying-related message forums on the Internet, notable ones being RPGNet and EN World. One thing that never ceases to amaze me is the posts you see that basically say something like:

'Hi. I'm running a game of [insert name of game]. In the last game the PCs hang-glided onto a giant Nazi airship to rescue a rich kidnapped heiress, but I have no idea what kind of defences, twists or plot hooks I can put in for the next session. Do you guys have any ideas?'

...And the thread then consists of a complete run-down of the challenges the PCs will face in the coming few sessions¹⁸. Now it probably has occurred to these GM's that their players might read these message forums, but they probably figure that:

¹⁵I can say this with 100% certainty because it was, in fact, me. Ha, bet you didn't think that I was once a complete loser! You did? Damn.

¹⁶I'm not one of those men who believes that blokes getting girlfriends will inevitably lead to the breakup of friendships, but I do now realise that a lot of problems can be avoided by the simple expedient of ensuring that the girlfriends are not all the same girl.

¹⁷British slang for informing on someone. (A related expression is 'Supergrass' and then derived from that: 'Astroturf').

¹⁸You think I'm joking? Well the day after I wrote that paragraph I read a post on RPGNet written by Mytholder (aka Gareth Hanrahan)¹⁹, one of the RPGNet moderators, which described how his entire PC group had managed to get themselves trapped in an armoured, airtight fire truck (i.e. a wheeled, road-going vehicle) which was currently in orbit around a planet. The truck had been in a cargo-hold of a spaceship, a spaceship that the group had sabotaged. They got away just before it blew up by shooting away the cargo doors with their fire truck's guns (don't ask) and then driving out into space. Poor old Mytholder was then left with the task of figuring out just how the hell to get them out of this mess. Hence his post on RPGNet. Do a search for the post if you don't believe me. I mean you just can't make this shit up.

¹⁹Just to prevent any possible misunderstanding, I should point out here that Gar, who I know personally, is a great guy, a great GM, and a great writer, and that he was clearly driven to this desperate action only by the gross stupidity of his players. My referring to his post to illustrate my point should in no way be taken as criticism of him, either actual or implied. However, the use of the phrase 'gross stupidity' to describe the actions of his players probably *should* be taken as criticism, both actual and implied, of *them*. Given that they drove a truck into orbital space, I think a certain degree of piss-taking is in order, and since I don't think I know any of them, I'm figuring 'what the hell!'

a) With hundreds of threads it's unlikely that any of their players will read that particular one.

b) Even if they do spot it, if the GM is posting under a 'handle', they won't know that it's their GM, and won't therefore take any notice of it.

So this is what you should do:

The first stage is to find out what message forum accounts the GM has. To do this, you need to get yourself a few minutes uninterrupted access to his PC.

This can be achieved by:

Causing a knock on the door while you're round his house. A good way to do this is by calling for a pizza before you arrive. He will spend several minutes trying to persuade the pizza delivery boy that he didn't order anything.

Breaking in while he's out – assuming that you possess the appropriate housebreaking skills. (Remember - there's no Taking 20 in real life, not while picking a lock, not while fast-talking the police, and certainly not when attempting to convince a large convict called Bubba that your action of retrieving the soap was not intended as a come on).

Leaving a burning rag and a bottle under his car, then knocking on his door. When he answers, step past him, then say: 'Hey John... isn't that a burning Molotov cocktail under your car?' While he races screaming down the driveway, you can just continue on to where the PC is²⁰.

Once at his PC, you should look at the browser's history list to see which message forums he's been browsing²¹ and then visit each one in turn. Most people have their accounts set up to automatically log them on. So when you point the browser at the site it should say something like: 'Welcome DorkBoy'.

This is the account name you're looking for.

The second stage is to create your own account on the message forums that he's active on. You should (obviously) use a cryptic handle for your account name – not your real name!

The third stage – and this is the clever bit – is to use a feature that many of these forums have called a 'buddy list'. A buddy list is a list of other user accounts whose posts you're interested in. Whenever a user on your buddy list makes a post, an email is sent to notify you. So every time your GM asks for advice from his peers,

the forum software will helpfully grass him up to you via email.

Which means that when the session starts, you'll be the guy evading the black-shirted guards, and skipping over the hidden trapdoors; and while your party members are finding themselves leaving the airship on the way to an awkward, unpleasant and ultimately terminal introduction to Mr Ground, you'll be proving the old adage that every good adventure story ends with the hero (you) giving the heroine (the kidnapped heiress) a damn good shagging.

A Note On Communicating With Your Fellow Players

Communication between players is often carried out by 'twitch' which, due to the somewhat simplistic nature of that language, does have a number of drawbacks, chief among them being that in practice it ends up communicating no information whatsoever. You might be fully fluent in twitch, but unless you're Skippy the Bush Kangaroo it's unlikely that you'll be able to transfer any information beyond possibly some sense of urgency – and that at high cost to your neck muscles. It is important to bear in mind that the other players are allies against the GM, although I do of course mean 'allies' in the sense of people to use while useful, and discard when not. It can therefore be useful to develop methods that you can use to communicate with the other players. There are two basic requirements we should consider when evaluating means of player-to-player communication: The method must be secure from the GM. We certainly don't want him to know what is being said, and we'd rather that he was unaware that anything was being said.

The method must accurately transmit the information without error or ambiguity. In layman's terms this means that we need to be able to figure out what the hell we're each going on about. Remember that historically most military disasters were the results of communications failures (except for those caused by the bloke in charge being a total twat).

NOTES

Good old-fashioned hand-written notes are the most popular method of communication. While they are undeniably effective methods of transmitting information, they have a fairly major drawback in that it's difficult to conceal note-passing, and in particular, note-writing, from the GM.

²⁰In the present political climate I'd strongly advise you *not* to fill the bottle with anything flammable.

²¹You should also note the URLs of any porn sites he's visited, for potential blackmail purposes.

Secret note-writing can be greatly aided by the use, by players, of clipboards or similar to rest their character sheets on – in preference to simply placing them on the table. A clipboard can be rested against the edge of the table at an angle of around 45 degrees, thus providing a comfortable and private surface to rest on. You should make a habit of having a blank sheet of paper on the board upon which you habitually doodle, thus allowing you to write notes without suspicion.

When it comes to note-passing, we found – somewhat ironically – that tables (which in every other respect are bad) actually help us, by proving a shield to pass notes under. Players in a comfy chair environment will have to resort to creative means, such as inserting notes in the packaging of shared food items like crisps/chips.

Tip:- Make sure that you destroy notes after use, especially if you're playing in the GM's own home.

TEXT MESSAGING

It is possible to use text messaging to communicate, the sender pretending to be texting a friend or girlfriend while bored, the receiver pretending the text is from someone else. But unless you know that your network takes several minutes to transmit messages it will probably look a bit suspicious. I'd use it only when you want to intentionally wind the GM up by carrying on an obvious, but secret, conversation in front of him.

DICE CODES

Many players fiddle with dice when bored. I myself am so bad that I was banned from using dice for recording my life points in games of Magic: The Gathering due to my habit of absentmindedly playing with my dice and then asking: 'What life was I on?'

A pair of dice (say two sixes) could be used to represent a letter of the alphabet (i.e. 'one' and 'two' is 'L') while several pairs could make words. You could therefore transmit messages by pointing the letter pairs at the player you wish to send the message to.

But I suspect it would be horribly tedious, and by time you'd spelled out your message it would probably be out of date anyhow. A better system might be to come up with a set of numeric codes to represent particular messages. **For example:**

Two ones side by side: Be careful, I think the GM is planning something.

Two twos side by side: I think the GM's bluffing. Let's continue.

Two threes side by side: Take the left-hand corridor / track / door etc.

Two fours side by side: Take the right-hand corridor / track / door etc.

Two fives side by side: I'd like to have sex with you (only applies if she's female or you're gay).

Two sixes side by side: I don't trust this NPC. I say we waste him and get the hell out of here.



METHODS OF WARFARE

Now, Games Masters don't really have any methods of warfare, in much the same way that the German soldiers at the Somme in 1916 didn't have methods of warfare - they just sat behind their machine-guns and blazed away at the British soldiers who, rather obligingly, walked slowly toward them in neat ranks²².

GMs don't need methods, because they've got all the power. So I'm going to talk about the methods of warfare that we can use against them.

Let's begin...

TECHNIQUES TO USE DURING THE GAME

Rules Lawyering

For more detailed advice about rules lawyering, I'd recommend that you check out a copy of the *Slayer's Guide to Rules Lawyers*, which deals with this subject in more depth. But I will give you a few tips to be getting on with.

The two basic principles of rules-lawyering are knowing how to fight, and knowing when to fight. When I say 'how to fight', I'm referring to your rules knowledge. It's vital that you know the rules both inside and out. It's not enough to understand what the rules mean. You must know exactly what they say, because sometimes what they say is not what they mean, and exploiting this gap between the intended meaning and the actual execution is the fundamental technique upon which all rules-lawyering is built.

When I say 'when to fight', I'm referring to your understanding of which rules systems can be rules-lawyered and which ones can't. Simply put, the simpler the rules system, the less ammunition you'll have to work with. A crunchy, 300 pages of rules like *The Core Rulebook I* will inevitably include mistakes, omissions or unintended rules combinations that you can exploit. By contrast, a rules-lite game like *Nobilis* that relies heavily on GM fiat that will be near impossible to rules lawyer.

A sensible technique for the aspiring rules lawyer is to study those forums where rules clarifications are discussed and posted, such as 'Rules Q&A' pages in official game magazines, or 'FAQs' on official company websites. Whenever you see an interesting rules clarification you should store it away for later use. Then, if a situation arises where the new interpretation of the rule would be advantageous, you can bring it up.

Tip: It's tempting in these cases to immediately bring out a photocopy of the article concerned, but this is actually something you should try to avoid where possible, since you want to give the impression that you're acting spontaneously on something you just happened to have read. Only if the GM insists on arguing should you say something like: 'Actually... I think I might have a photocopy somewhere...' and produce the hard evidence. Don't ruin it by saying something crass like: 'Read it and weep, sucker!'

An interesting question is what to do when the new interpretation of the rule would *not* be advantageous to you. The obvious cause of action would be to keep quiet, but this is not always the best option. Once you have kept quiet on this occasion, it will be very hard to argue the new interpretation at a later date when it *would* be advantageous to you. Sometimes it is better to take the temporary hit now to ensure later advantage.

My final piece of advice is on how to present your rules-lawyering. In order to gain the moral high ground, it's best if you argue that you're merely standing up for a fair and neutral interpretation of the rules. The old line: 'What's the point in having rules if we ignore them?' is always a good one to use.

Tip: That's another good reason for sometimes arguing against yourself as mentioned in the previous section. Doing so adds credibility to your claim that you're acting not out of selfish reasons, but from a desire to preserve the neutrality and impartiality of the rules.

Power-Building

My first bit of advice when it comes to power-building might seem somewhat counter-intuitive, because it's this:

Don't cheat on your ability scores.

Now we all know the standard way of generating ability scores, and although I'm not allowed to mention what that is due to the restrictions imposed by the d20 system license, I believe I am allowed to mention that it's random. I believe I'm also allowed to mention that there is an alternative non-random points-based

²²At least on that occasion we didn't have to suffer a watching French general saying: 'C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre.'²³

²³Look it up on the net like I did. Oh all right. Tsk. He was watching the charge of the Light Brigade. It means: 'It's magnificent, but it's not war'.





system in one of the core rulebooks, although it's my understanding that I'm not allowed to say which one this is. (If the pages suddenly go blank by the way, it's probably because a team of ninja lawyers sent by WotC have burst in and grabbed me. If this happens please contact Mongoose Publishing and tell them that one of their freelancers has been kidnapped²⁴).

What you should do is suggest to the GM that this alternative non-random method be used. There are three main reasons for this:

- a) If the standard method was used, and the GM allowed the players to use it to generate the scores off-line, the other players would probably cheat as much as you, so you'd gain nothing.
- b) If the standard method was used, but the GM insisted on watching, there's too great a risk that you might end up with really crap stats - and besides, if you did end up with really cool ability scores it would be the result of chance, and where's the satisfaction in that?

c) The GM will assume that you're a non-munchkin, which leaves you open to do some rules cooking so extreme it will make your original ability scores pretty much irrelevant.

Once you've established your non-munchkin credentials, you can then go ahead and create a character like Mark from the Critical Miss team did: a Human (for the extra feat) 1st lvl Monk / 4th lvl Ninja / 1st lvl Cleric / 2nd lvl Fighter / 2nd lvl Tribal Guardian / 2nd lvl Iaijutsu Exponent who - by virtue of having permanent versions of the spells *Cat's Grace*, *Bulls Strength*, *Eagle's Splendor*, *Fox's Cunning*, *Owl's Wisdom* and a speed spell researched and then cast as enlarged and maximised versions by a 20th level Wizard - managed to achieve ability scores of Str 20, Dex 24, Con 20, Int 26, Wiz 24, Cha 20, and an unarmed armour class of 32 (and it was always 32, because he couldn't be caught flat footed due to some feat or other)²⁵.

We never did figure out just what the hell an oriental monk was doing traipsing round our campaign world

²⁴I'm not actually expecting them to do anything, but at least they'll know why I've missed the deadline, and it would probably give them a good laugh.

²⁵He also had a ninja death strike doing $1d10+(5d6\text{ to }9d6)+12$ damage if he attacked someone with his katana while they were flat-footed in the first round of combat, which given that he had Great Cleave, an Initiative of +24 and a movement of 90 feet on level ground, was pretty much all the time. We'd send him into a room, wait a few seconds till the screaming stopped, then go in and loot the bodies. It got a bit boring after a while.

with us, but with statistics like that, would you have asked him?

Information Laundering

One of the most effective weapons in the GM's arsenal is the concept of 'player information'. Simply put, this refers to things that you, the player, knows, but that your character does not. Many times you will attempt an action only to be told by the GM: 'You can't do that, that's using player information' meaning that he will not allow you to perform an action that would only, or could only, be done using the 'forbidden information'.

Which is where we come to the technique of 'information laundering', that is the transformation of 'dirty' player information into 'clean' character information. Information laundering is probably the most cutting edge research area in the whole field of munchkinology, and inevitably, in a book of this length, I won't be able to cover the field in much detail. But I will attempt to give you a few tips.

The classic 'player information' situation is where the PCs have split up, and one PC has uncovered some information – but with all the players in the room watching as this information is revealed. In a modern day setting which possesses mobile telecommunications this problem is easily solved. Your character just 'happens' to think, 'Hey, I wonder how Bob's doing?' gets out his mobile-phone, and makes a call. Although it was player information which motivated the making of the call, it's very hard for the GM to block the action – after all, it's perfectly plausible that your PC might have got curious about how Bob was doing.

This example shows a classic information laundering technique, converting a hard fact that the PC simply doesn't know ('there's a bomb in my car') to a random thought that could occur at any moment ('I wonder how Bob is?').

In a fantasy genre the above scenario is clearly more challenging, but a bit of creativity should see you through. For example, 'dirty' player information such as 'the next room is booby-trapped' can be converted into 'clean' character information like 'I'm a bit hungry, how about we stop here for a bite to eat and wait for Grodo to catch us up?'

Cheating

Outright cheating is something I would recommend only in exceptionally desperate cases. The problem with cheating is that while it can produce useful short-term results, in the long-term the fallout that will occur when – as will inevitably happen – you're caught, far exceeds the benefits.

I do though have to concede a certain admiration for a gentlemen who apparently went to a Gen Con with a twenty-sided dice which, while it did indeed have

twenty sides, managed to have a '20' written on two of them. They say that if you're going to cheat, cheat big, and by God that was big.

Method Roleplaying

The term 'method roleplaying' is inspired by the term 'method acting'. Just as a 'method actor' fully immerses himself in a role, arriving at his performance through a full understanding of his character's motivations, so the actions of a method roleplayer's PC are derived from the player's understanding of the PC's motivations and desires.

So why are we interested in method roleplaying?

Hint: It's not the roleplaying

We're interested because we can use 'method roleplaying' as a universal justification for pretty much any disruptive behaviour. For instance, method actors have got themselves a reputation for being awkward, annoying gits:

All that bastard had to do was walk into the bar and say: 'Pint of lager, mate!' But no, he's all, 'What's my motivation? Why do I want a lager? Why not a stout?'

So imagine you're a method *roleplayer*:

GM: Okay, you're sitting in the tavern supping your ales, when an old man in a hooded grey robe enters. You notice that he's wearing an ox-head pendant.

Player 1: So he'd be a priest of Yallon.

GM: Yeah. He approaches your table, and says: 'You look like brave and sturdy men. Do you mind if I sit with you?'

Player 2: I'll stand up and scream: 'Sod off nonce or you'll leave this dump in a pine box!'

GM: What?

Players 1, 3 & 4: What?

Player 2: My character hates priests of Yallon because one sexually abused him when he was a young altarboy.

Players 1, 3, 4 & 5²⁶: Eewwwww...

GM: Well could you not just make an exception, just this once?

Player 2: No.

GM: Look... This is a 256 hardback campaign book called 'Warriors of Yallon'. Can you guess what it's about?

Player 2: I'm sorry, but I'm not prepared to compromise my characterisation.



The key to using method roleplaying is to do it consistently from the start. You can't just 'turn it on' when convenient, because it will appear unjustified. As soon as you start roleplaying with a group you should let it be known that you follow the 'method' - and then make sure that you actually do a bit of 'method roleplaying'. It's vital that you actually make a good attempt to roleplay your character, so that when you attempt to abuse the situation you'll be believed.

Third-Party Splatbooks

One of the beauties of the D20 system is that it allows literally dozens of third-party companies to expand and modify the basic system in what are colloquially known as 'splatbooks'. Some of these companies (such as Mongoose²⁷) produce fine, well-balanced products which can greatly enhance your roleplaying experience by adding clarity and definition to your character.

You should of course ignore these and head straight for the companies who quite frankly screwed up. We're talking unbalanced prestige classes and ridiculous feats here. Like the old saying goes: If it ain't broken, give it a kick while no-one's looking.

Jumping Off The Train

Railroading - which is the term used to describe a situation where a GM is attempting to force the players to follow a pre-defined linear plot-line - is actually a sign that you have the GM on the run. Railroading is often a coping mechanism used by a weak GM to try to regain control over his game by drastically restricting the choices available to his players.

A good defence against railroading is to pick a specific object (obviously something other than the one the GM wants you to take) and then damn well stick with it, despite the GM's protests. Now it's important to realise that you won't achieve that objective, since the GM will almost certainly use his immense powers to halt you. But in forcing him to 'go nuclear' you'll have gained a vital edge.

An example of this occurred in a cyberpunk game I once played in. We were assigned to escort some bloke from the east coast of the USA to the west. Along the way we passed through Memphis, Tennessee. There we encountered a street gang who were distinguished by the fact that they'd all had cosmetic surgery to make them look like Elvis Presley. We called them the Elvi, and immediately began making preparations to attack

²⁶There's always one player who's half asleep, and in this case it was number 5.

²⁷Hey, you'd suck up to them if they were the people paying you.

them at their Graceland headquarters and wipe them out.

I can't remember now why we decided upon this course of action, but then again, how many reasons do you need to commit elvicide?

It was while we were at an out of town shopping centre purchasing supplies for the attack that the GM struck back. A blinding flash lit up the sky, followed a few seconds later by a mighty roar and hurricane-force winds. When we looked back we saw a massive multi-coloured cloud boiling up to an altitude of over 40,000 feet.

He'd dropped an asteroid on Memphis, causing an explosion several hundred kilotonnes in force, just to stop us attacking the Elvi. In the short term he won. We abandoned the attack (obviously, given that the entire gang and their headquarters had been vaporised, along with large chunks of the city and the surrounding countryside) and resumed our westward journey.

But in the long term, we'd won, by forcing the GM into a huge over-reaction that reduced his game to farce.

It was a pity though. I really fancied taking out the Elvi.

Going Off 'The Edge Of The Map'

Like God, the GM has created an entire universe, and like God, he can't do everything; but unlike God – who only fails to do everything on a technicality²⁸ – there's a shitload of things that the GM can't do, one of which is map everything, everywhere.

²⁸Someone who says 'God can do anything' is wrong, because he can't make a rock that's so heavy that he can't lift it. But he can create a rock that heavy enough to turn you into wafer-thin goo, so I'd recommend against making smart-arse comments about paradoxes whilst queuing at the Pearly Gates.

So the GM will have a map covering where he wants you to go, but not necessarily one that covers where he doesn't.

'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the overgrown one the NPC had specifically warned us against...'

A dedicated GM-hater soon learns to 'sniff out' the edge of the map, and will invariably head in that direction. You need to learn the 'cues' the GM will use to lead you in the right direction, and head the opposite way.

If the roads slopes - walk uphill.

If the sign says: 'Cheap quality lodgings and food this way' - walk the other way and camp in the woods.

You'll know when you've gone off the edge of the map, because you'll suddenly find yourself heading through Genericia, and making stops in Utilityville. Locations will be fluid and NPCs vague. Your GM will now be desperate for you to head back onto the map, which means that now is a good time to blackmail him for all the stuff you've always wanted (magic items and the like) but that have previously 'not been available'.

When 'God' Doesn't Know Stuff

The problem with playing the omnipotent creator of the universe - which is, after all, what the GM is doing - is that there's an awful lot of stuff in your universe that you don't actually know about - but that your players might.

It's always going to be easy to find something that you know, and that the GM doesn't know, and then use it to show him up. But if you just laugh at his ignorance it will just make you look like a smart-arse, and nobody likes a smart-arse²⁹.

The trick is to pick an area where both you and the other players are strong, but where the GM is weak, and then subtly use that to undermine his authority in front of them without him even knowing.

For instance, if I was GMing, it would be a good idea for you to play a martial artist, because unlike my friends - who practically grew up on martial arts films - I have no knowledge whatsoever of the subject. Hell, I thought 'Fist of Fury' was a gay porn movie)

A good example of unrealised ignorance occurred in the 1998 film Ronin, which starred Sean Bean and Robert De Niro as members of a mercenary team. De Niro played Sam, an ex-CIA agent, while Bean's character Spence claimed to be ex-SAS, but was in fact a former member of one of the British Army's various support corps.

Sam, who'd never met Spence before they were recruited, gradually realises that his colleague is a liar, and - when Spence is attempting to challenge him for leadership of the group - decides to bluff him into admitting the truth. It goes something like this:

Sam: You know... I don't think you are ex-SAS.

Spence: I know what I was mate!

Sam: [shouting] What colour is the boathouse at Hereford?

Spence: [flustered] I don't remember...

Sam: [shouting] What colour is the boathouse at Hereford?

Spence: Err? Err?



At which point Spence backs into a cup of hot coffee that Sam had placed behind him, and the other mercenaries realise that he's exactly what Sam said he was - a liar.

But if I'd been 'playing' Spence in a game - and I'm not going to use any knowledge that a former British Army cook wouldn't have had - I'd have played it quite differently. (I've spelt things phonetically, to let you know how things are pronounced)

Sam: [shouting] What colour is the boathouse at HEREford?

Spence: [with contempt] Where the hell's HEREford? It's pronounced HERRAford, twat! Now if you really were ex-CIA, I'd have thought you'd have known that!

The end result was that the emotions roused in a British audience watching that scene were about 180 degrees different from what the director had intended, and I think there's a lesson there.

Imagine it in the context of a game. Let's say you're a bunch of Americans playing a modern day espionage game. You know a fair bit about the UK, as do some of the other players - but you're pretty sure that the GM's knowledge is a tad shaky. So, you create a character who was formerly in the SAS. No-one can criticise you for that. You never mention Hereford, and if the GM happens to say it wrongly, you don't correct him. Which means one of two things will happen:

- a) One of the other players will correct the GM, making the GM look foolish, and with the other player taking the 'blame'.
- b) No-one will correct him, so he'll look foolish every single time he says it.

And there's no way he can possibly blame you!

As a final note, there is still the interesting question of why Sean Bean didn't just say, 'Actually Bob, it's pronounced 'HERRAford'' when they were rehearsing. I'd have thought he'd have known how to pronounce the town's name. Most British people do, just as most Americans probably know how to pronounce Des Moines, Iowa - and certainly would if it had been the headquarters of the most famous unit in the American Army for the last fifty years. But I don't want to piss any powerful movie-stars off, so I'll leave you guys to draw your own conclusions.

Embarrassing The GM

Remember, an embarrassed GM is a flustered GM, and a flustered GM is weak.

For example, if he's a bit of a homophobe then make sure to play a gay character. Put a butt-plug on your character sheet to emphasize this, and then bring in a real-life prop just to rub his face in it. (The situation, not the butt-plug).

Reading The Scenario

Strictly, speaking this isn't a technique to use during the game, for the obvious reason that the GM might get a bit upset if - at some crucial part of the session - you take a duplicate copy of the scenario out of your backpack and start reading through it. But you'll use the previously obtained information during the game, so I've included it here. I think you can all figure out why secretly reading the scenario before play is a good idea, so I'll skip straight to the meat of how you can get hold of it, the main issue of which is whether the scenario is a purchased 'pre-gen' or one written by the GM.

If it's a pre-gen then you can use the technique we've already mentioned of cultivating relationships at the local games shop. Or you could just go to a different games shop in a different part of town where nobody knows you (as you do when you're purchasing porn). But in the case of a home-written scenario it's clearly going to be a far harder task.

Your GM might be stupid enough to leave his scenario/campaign notes at the table when he goes to the toilet. However, although this does allow access to the scenario, it will be in full view of the other players, and is therefore only feasible if they are all 'on-side'.

Tip: If you decide upon this course of action, you can help bring on a toilet trip by giving the GM lots of free soft-drinks.

However, the most sensible course of action is to gain access to the scenario during a 'down-time' period. Clearly the first task is to identify where the scenario is stored between games, whether it's in a bookshelf in the lounge, a box in the spare room, or under a bed in a bedroom. A good way to get this information is to hang around after the game - perhaps chatting about what happened in the session - while the GM puts his things away.

Having identified the storage location, you need to actually get at the scenario. In the previous section I discussed ways of distracting the GM while you used his computer. These techniques are also applicable to the problem we face here, as are standard house-breaking methods.

²⁹I know that, because the people who used to beat me up at school told me so.

Finally, having gained a few minutes of access to the scenario, you'll need to quickly extract the salient details. Unless you have access to some kind of portable photocopying equipment you'll need to quickly speed-read the scenario and note down its important points. (I've not going to describe speed-reading and note-taking methods, because that would be very, very boring).

There is also one very daring technique that you could try at this point, for both home written and pre-published scenarios, although in the case of pre-published scenarios it does require a very steady hand and a high-quality technical pen. This is simply to alter the scenario, typically by marking down the capabilities of monsters or traps that will be encountered. For example, 9s can be turned into 8s and 1s into 0s. Names can also be subtly sabotaged, turning once elegant monikers into unpronounceable tongue-twisters.

TECHNIQUES TO USE OUTSIDE THE GAME

Bribery

There are a number of factors that you should consider before resorting to bribery, chief among them being your finances and those of your GM. You should only consider this technique if your spending power far outweighs his, meaning that you can bribe him with what are, to you, comparatively small amounts of money. To do otherwise would merely be degrading yourself, which defeats the whole purpose.

You see, when we bribe the GM our primary purpose is not the immediate goal that the bribe secures (i.e. 'I'll give you a fiver if you said I didn't fall off the cliff') but the psychological disadvantage that receiving the bribe will place the GM under. Our society prizes two things:

- a) Ethics.
- b) Wealth.

For a GM to accept a bribe marks him down on both those counts – as long as he really needs the money and you don't. If you bribe him money that you can't afford but which is trivial to him, then he isn't gaining from it, but is instead taking advantage of your desperation – which is degrading to you, not him.

A more subtle form of bribery is to pay for his rulebooks and scenarios for him. After all, why should the GM have to spend all the money? Shouldn't the players contribute too? Buying his books puts him in your debt and highlights his lack of spending power, but in a way which no-one can criticise you for.

Manipulation and Intimidation

Manipulation can be a powerful tool for those with charisma. (If you're unsure about whether or not you possess charisma, then trust me, you don't). Resorting to actual intimidation is a big step to make, and one you should consider very carefully before you embark upon it. In particular, you should ask yourself two questions: 'How hard am I?' and 'How hard is he?'

Only if you come to the conclusion that you're harder than he is should you continue, and it is important to remember that neither an encyclopaedic knowledge of martial arts films nor 'ten years roleplaying' will grant 'hardness'

One of the funniest things I ever saw was during a game of laser-tag, involving a former member of my gaming group who I'm referring to here as 'Bill'. Bill - who was convinced he was a real-life combat monster on account of once doing a few martial arts classes - tried to do a combat roll onto a raised platform a friend and I were firing from, and instead spectacularly kneecapped himself. As he writhed in agony we shot him once, then ran away. We could have shot him again and again, but that didn't seem like sport somehow.

Interestingly enough, this was an example where 'twitch' proved an effective means of communication. My friend and I were able to discuss the issue of how many times it was reasonable to shoot a crippled opponent who was both unable and disinclined to defend himself, eventually settling on the figure of once, all without any verbal communication whatsoever.

Bill would have been a good candidate for intimidation, because the gap between his high perception of himself, and the appallingly limited reality, was easily wide enough to facilitate the easy removal of his entire self-esteem.

Blackmail

Blackmail can be a very efficient and effective method of obtaining someone's consent to actions that they would otherwise not consent to. For example, when I was fourteen I told my friends they couldn't come round my house at lunchtime any more because they were being too rowdy. Unfortunately, a few months later they found out that I went to Church each Sunday (my parents are churchgoers) and informed me that if I didn't allow them to come round my house whenever they wanted they'd tell everyone at school that I went to church. Since this would've turned me into even more of a laughing stock than I already was (it wasn't a place where being religious was regarded as normal) I had little option but to conform to their demands³⁰.

³⁰When I tell people that when I was a teenager my friends used to blackmail me, they always seem to think I'm joking. Regrettably, I'm not, which might go some way to explaining my suspicious and paranoid nature.

However, you should be aware that blackmail does arouse deep feelings of resentment in those being blackmailed (twenty years later I'm still sitting here shaking my fist and thinking: 'Bastards!') and as such should only be used as a final option.

Put-Downs & Insults

I've mentioned previously how important it is to control and limit the self-confidence of the GM. You'll find that put-downs and insults can be invaluable in achieving this. My favourite put-down - which skilfully blended traditional politeness with cutting abuse - was delivered by Mark, a bloke in my gaming group, to the aforementioned Bill. It went something like this:

Mark: (Thoughtful) You're a bit of a c**t really, aren't you?

Bill: (Whimpering) I'm not a c**t!

Mark: (Polite) I think you'll find you are. (Although Mark claims it wasn't meant 'in a bad way').

Retaliation (Getting Even)

We've talked a lot in this section about forcing your will upon the GM, but you will find cases where the GM digs in his heels and refuses to budge. In short, where he calls your bluff.

This is clearly a good time for him to find out that you weren't bluffing. To help you prove this to him, I'm going to round out this section with a few techniques which are mostly legal, not too horribly unethical, and which should help to persuade him of the error of his ways.

The Message On The Lawn

This is a nice delayed action technique with a minimal level of risk, which makes it particularly suitable for our purposes. Simply go to his front lawn in the middle of the night, with a watering can full of weed killer, and spell out an appropriate word (might I humbly suggest 'wanker').

A few days later it's 'Hey Presto!' as the message is now displayed to the world in glorious dead-grass-ovision. You can opt to point the message to the road or house as desired. I would recommend pointing at the road to shame him in front of his community, unless he still lives at home, in which case you should point it at the house, so that his parents get an eyeful every morning when they open their curtains.

Tip: Some of you might have ethical objections to the use of weed killer. In this case, an eco-friendly

alternative is to spell out the word with mustard and cress seeds. These are a different colour to grass, making the word clearly visible, and sprout in only a few days.

The Junk Mail Gift That Keeps On Giving

In the age of spam email this technique might seem quaint and old-fashioned, but it does still have a certain charm. If you read though a newspaper or magazine you will see many adverts offering free catalogues, introductory booklets, samples of items like stamps or books and so on. All you have to do is to fill in a little form with the name and address of the person you'd like them sent to (technically you're supposed to put *your* name and address here, but let's face it, it ain't like they can check) and post it off. All it costs you is the stamp.

The beauty of this technique is that it will achieve results hugely in excess of the initial effort. This is because the companies concerned will not only reuse their mailing list, many times, but will also sell it to other companies. So your GM's going to spend every morning until he either moves or dies chiselling half a hundred weight of compressed paper out of his letterbox.

On the other hand, this technique does share the same disadvantage as biological weapons, in that it's a weapon that once deployed cannot be recalled. Use carefully.

The Porn Stash

Porn is easily available (embarrassment aside) and can have devastating consequences when placed in inappropriate places. Simply buy a suitable selection of magazines and hide them somewhere in his home, where he will not find them, but his girlfriend most likely will. (Women have a 'nose' for this kind of thing - check out the *detect pornography* spell in the *Slayer's Guide To Female Gamers* for more details). If you really want revenge, have absolutely no ethics whatsoever, and are prepared to travel into some 'interesting' parts of town to get the necessary items, then a truly devastating strike can be achieved by stashing gay³¹ pornography.

'Porn stashing' can also work well against girlfriend-less losers who still live at home, because while having a porn stash found by your girlfriend is probably the most embarrassing event the universe offers, having it found by your mum probably comes a close second. And having your dad find a gay porn stash probably beats both of those hands down³².

³¹Homosexual, as opposed to happy.

³²I probably shouldn't say 'hands down' in the context of a discussion on porn.

Screwing Around With A Mobile's Address Book

If you're able to get hold of the GM's mobile for a few moments, you can have a lot of fun by playing with the address book. One simple technique is to swap numbers, although this is only really effective if you can find 'interesting' combinations.

Let's say your GM has the numbers for both his current girlfriend Susan and his former girlfriend, and now platonic friend, Jenny. You swap their numbers over.

Susan phones, he looks at the address book entry that's come up, hits the green button, and says: 'Hi Jenny!'

I think you can see where it can go from there. But you probably won't have such a serendipitous combination, in which case you will have to start adding entries in the hope that his girlfriend will start looking through his address book. Good ones to add are the names of prostitutes (you should be able to find these on cards left in phones boxes), strip clubs, genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics³³, or anything else that comes to mind³⁴.



³³Doctor's jargon for a 'clap clinic'.

³⁴I once had a several hour row with a former girlfriend, when she looked through my phone's address book, and found an entry called 'gay chat' - which had been added the previous evening by my 'friend' Domonic. (As soon as she found it, I recalled him pissing about with my phone at a gaming session the night before). I tried pointing out to her that this was typical behaviour for him. No dice. In desperation, I tried pointing out to her that if I really was a secret homosexual, and if I really was calling gay chat lines, I would have called it something cryptic like 'Geoff', as opposed to the slightly less cryptic 'gay chat'. Still no dice. It was hours before we stopped rowing, all thanks to that bastard 'friend'³⁵ of mine.

³⁵This guy used to work with me, and he made my life a misery. I'd get into my office in the morning, hit the play button on my stereo, and be blasted back across the room by 130 decibels of the Beach Boys because 'someone' had turned it to full volume the night before, after I'd left. Or he'd set the temperature on my air conditioning down to about zero degrees kelvin, so I'd turn it on when I arrived in the morning, start working, and then about fifteen minutes later realise I couldn't feel my hands. Bastard.

GAMES MASTER CHARACTER CLASS

As I've mentioned previously, Games Masters are not in the habit of coming down to earth in the guise of a character, and facing the consequent risk of an unpleasant social and/or martial encounter. But if you do encounter one, this is what to expect:

Hit Die: d6

Requirements

Entry to this class is limited to characters who are the Earthly personification of the creator of the universe. It's a very prestigious prestige class.

Class Skills

All. If it can be done. You can do it. You're quite cool.

Class Features

Followers: You have followers who accompany and serve you. They do not require payment or reward. They can also act as protectors. They can sometimes get a bit over-enthusiastic (see Reattach Severed Body Parts).

Transmute Water To Wine: You can change a barrel of water into a barrel of the equivalent quantity of wine, or similar alcoholic beverage. Some rules lawyers have theorised that a Games Master character could similarly transform grass (as in the stuff from your lawn) into

marijuana. However, this is pure conjecture and has never been proved.

Heal: You can heal any number of hit points as a standard action. You can perform this action as often, and as many times, as you like. You do not have to touch the wounded character to perform this action.

Calm The Sea: You can cause violent storm-ridden seas to calm.

Mass Catering: You can feed thousands of people with only a small quantity of food (say a few bread rolls and a tin of tuna).

Walk On Water: You can walk on water. This isn't of huge practical importance, since you could just take a bridge or a boat, or swim come to that. But it looks damn cool.

Raise Dead: You can restore a dead character to life. This does not cost any experience points. You can perform this action as often, and as many times, as you like. You do not have to touch the dead character (a.k.a. 'the stiff') to perform this action.

Money In Animals: You can slit open an animal (or fish) and find money in its mouth or belly.

Wither Vegetation: You can cause vegetation (including trees) to wither and die.

Reattach Severed Body Parts: You can reattach body parts, such as fingers, hands, or ears which have become severed from a characters body. This can only be done if the severing was clean (such as where a body part was sliced off with a sword wielded by an over-enthusiastic follower).

Resurrection: You can die. Quite easily in fact, since you have only a normal level of hit-points. However, within 1d4 days you can be up, about, and causing a degree of confusion among your former followers when they discover that their former follower status was only temporary.

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+2	+0	+50	Transmute Water To Wine
2	+1	+3	+0	+51	Heal, 4 Followers
3	+2	+3	+1	+52	Calm The Sea, 8 Followers
4	+3	+4	+1	+53	Mass Catering, 12 Followers
5	+3	+4	+1	+54	Walk On Water
6	+4	+5	+2	+55	Raise Dead
7	+5	+5	+2	+56	Money In Animals
8	+6/+1	+6	+2	+57	Wither Vegetation
9	+6/+1	+6	+3	+58	Reattach Severed Body Parts
10	+7/+2	+7	+3	+59	Resurrection

SLAYER'S GUIDE TO CONVENTION GAMES MASTERS

Although Convention GMs share some elements in common with home-based GMs - the obvious one being that they both Games Master - there are many differences that you should take into account.

You might think you're pretty hot stuff. You might have reduced your own GM to a quivering mass of delusional flesh. But if you walk into a convention unprepared and attempt to reproduce that feat, you will very quickly find yourself to be unsuccessful. In fact, you might very quickly find yourself being escorted from the building by security (or a big bloke called 'Bubba').

Convention GMs are a very distinct 'sub-race' of standard GMs, and it's vital that you study them separately before venturing into their lair.

PSYCHOLOGY

Now some people, notably my friend Demonic, have stated that the people who go to conventions are losers. This is, of course, not true - at least they're no more losers than you or I³⁶. In many ways, going to a convention is like looking in a mirror. You ask yourself, 'Am I like that?' and the answer is of course, 'Yes!' So in the end, the only difference between people who go to conventions and the rest of use who, largely, don't, is that they go to the conventions while we, largely, don't. So what about convention GMs? Are they any different from home-based GMs? Well first, we need to ask why someone would want to become a convention GM³⁷.

TYPES OF GM

The obvious difference between GMing at a convention and GMing at home is that when GMing at home it's

³⁶I think I'll avoid discussing *our* loser quotient.

³⁷Which is a difficult question for me to answer given that I've never GMed at a convention, and don't really know anyone who has. So I'll just make a few guesses and see if I can bullshit my way to the end of this section.

³⁸Well they try to get good-looking women, but I'm told they frequently fail, and end up with dogs.

with people you know. You might not particularly like them, but you've met them before. By contrast, when you GM at a convention it's often with complete strangers. From this point, we can deduce the existence of the following types of Convention GM.

THE WINNER ('BRING ME FRESH MEAT')

The winner is someone who's already ground all signs of spirit or rebellion out of his home gaming group, and is now looking for fresh victims. He's clearly someone to be avoided, unless you're really spoiling for a challenge, in which case you might be heading for a certain amount of conflict.

THE LOSER ('MAYBE YOU GUYS WILL LIKE ME')

The loser is someone who's already been 'defeated' by his home gaming group (basically, he's met someone like you) but is currently in denial about the reasons for this. Rather than admit that it's his weakness that's at fault, he's laying the blame at the feet of his gaming group and, in an attempt to prove this both to himself, and to his group, has headed for the convention in search of people who'll be his friend.

In short, this man is a victim waiting to be mugged, and you're just the man to mug him.

HABITAT

There are several types of venues commonly used for roleplaying conventions. I myself have attended cons in hotels, holiday camps, specialised convention centres and universities. But they tend to be organised in much the same way, regardless of what type of venue they have.

THE TRADE HALL

A convention will generally have a large room filled with various trade stands at which you can buy a variety of roleplaying products. Occasionally, they will try to tempt you to purchase items by employing good-looking women clad only in chain-mail bikinis to serve you³⁸.

The trade hall is a great place to shop, and it enables you to purchase items without risk that the FLGS³⁹ owner will grass you to your GM if you're purchasing a scenario you're supposed to be playing. But since convention scenarios are usually custom written for the convention, the trade hall will offer no help whatsoever in your fight against the convention's Games Masters. I've mentioned it here only for the sake of completeness⁴⁰.

THE ACCOMMODATION

Conventions can be categorised as either residential conventions, where accommodation is provided on-site, or non-residential conventions, where you're either expected to make your own arrangements, or where the convention is only for a single day.

The relevant point here is whether the convention GMs will be staying in the same, or similar, location to you. Obviously this is more likely in 'campus' style conventions, such as those held in a hotel or university. If you do have access to the location where the GMs are staying, there are a number of ways you can take advantage of it.

Note: How useful this can be depends on whether or not you can identify which GMs will be Games Mastering the games you intend to play. In some cases, where there is only a single GM per scenario (who will generally also be the scenario's author) this information will be available on the convention's website or programmes. But where a convention runs multiple instances of each scenario this information is much harder to come by – although we will discuss various techniques you can use in the next section.

SUCKING UP TO THE GMs

This is a simple technique which is especially useful where the accommodation features a bar, although you will need to be prepared to spend a fair sum of money⁴¹. The idea is to spend the evening buying the GMs drinks, chatting with them, laughing at their jokes and generally pretending to be their friend – in preparation for the next day when you will be really, really horrible to them.

Obviously, the GM will eventually catch on, but only after you get an hour's easy ride because he thinks *he* likes you, followed by another hour's easy ride because

he's upset at the realisation that *you* don't like him, (which will have made him distracted and confused).

Tip: The third hour – after he's got his shit together – might be a tad 'difficult'.

STEALING THE SCENARIO

I'm not sure I'd recommend this one, but I thought I'd put it in for the sake of completeness. Except in cases of extreme incompetence, the GM should have been given the scenario at least one day in advance, and unless he's the kind of sad sap that walks around with his entire life in a backpack, that scenario will, most likely, be somewhere in his room when he goes out for the evening.

The question is: how to get in?

The standard movie method is to slide a credit card into the crack between doorframe and door and push the bolt back. However, unless you're an expert housebreaker, this is unlikely to achieve anything other than an immediate reduction in your purchasing power. One technique you could use is to accidentally 'lock' your room key in your room. When you tell the hotel owner/manager what you've done, one of three things will happen:

a) He'll accompany you to the room and open the door for you. (It's important that you actually do lock your key in, so if he does let you in himself, he'll see you walk in and pick it up and won't, therefore, be suspicious).

b) He'll give you a second key to your room, and let you go and retrieve your own key yourself, asking that you return the duplicate key to him when you've done so.

c) He'll give you his master key (which opens all rooms) and let you go and retrieve your key yourself, again asking you to return his key to him when you've done so.

Clearly, for our purposes only eventuality C will be of any use, but it's a relatively low-risk technique since if either of the other two eventualities comes to pass no harm will be done.

You have the best chance of gaining access to a master key where:

³⁹Friendly Local Games Shop for those who weren't concentrating in earlier sections.

⁴⁰And for the 150 extra words I'll get paid for.

⁴¹Nothing worthwhile is ever cheap, except in the case of loose woman – but that's a very different kind of cheap.

It is a small 'bed and breakfast' style hotel.

You pick a time when the owner is very busy, such as at breakfast.

I'd advise you very strongly not to try this technique, and if you do get caught I'd be grateful if you didn't mention me.

THE GAMING AREA

This is the arena where you'll battle the convention's GMs, so it's important that I give you as much information as I can before you head into war. The gaming area generally consists of one big room with many tables, except for those conventions where it doesn't.

Some conventions spread over a number of rooms, perhaps to separate those who consider lung-cancer acceptable from those who don't, or some merely because they have lots of small rooms. (I've been to a convention where the gaming area was a university's classroom block, so they had one game table per room).

So, when you reconnoitre the gaming area before composing your plan of attack, the most important fact to ascertain is the layout in the room where your game will take place, which could be anything from one table in a small room to several dozen tables in a huge hall.

The Pros And Cons Of A Single Table Room

A single table room has an atmosphere very similar to standard home-based gaming. This makes the roleplaying much more private and intimate, and means that the GM is on his own, which will make it easier for you to victimise him.

There aren't really any cons as such, except that you won't have any of the advantages that a multi-table room can offer.

The Pros And Cons Of A Multiple Table Room

Multiple table rooms tend to be quite crowded and very noisy. There will usually be one 'loud' table, whose roleplaying is so enthusiastic that it overshadows the efforts of everyone else. The cruel irony is that while in

many ways they're the best roleplayers, the reality is that everyone else will swiftly conclude that they're wankers. (After all, a performance of Hamlet by Sir Lawrence Oliver would be bloody annoying if the old bastard was standing in front of your telly when you were trying to watch Friends).

You may be able to take advantage of the noisy atmosphere, especially if you can manage to get hold of a GM with hearing difficulties. You should cultivate a 'shy' persona, and – when talking to the GM – speak at a volume which is just a bit too quiet for him to easily hear. This will encourage him to avoid getting into long extended roleplaying sessions with you, which will protect you from any devilish sub-plots he might have otherwise had lined up for you.



Another possible technique to use in multi-table rooms is to eavesdrop on adjacent tables which are playing the same scenario as you. Given that you're actively attempting to ruin the GMs day, it's highly likely that adjacent tables may move through the scenario at a quicker rate, so when you listen to their present, you're listening to your future.

SOCIETY

In many ways, 'convention society' is incestuously linked with gaming organisations or societies such as [CENSORED FOR OBVIOUS LEGAL REASONS]. Now I have to be more careful when talking about these organisations than I am when I talk about abstract stereotypes for the very good reason that abstract stereotypes don't institute lawsuits.

Some conventions go as far as outsourcing the running of the entire roleplaying programme, with the convention organisers handling the venue and accommodation and leaving the 'gaming organisation' to run the games. There are many weaknesses in this approach, not least of which is the confusion as to just who the hell is in charge, and the consequent risk of enraged 5,000 word rants by embittered fanzine editors.

But it does offer a few additional avenues for you to explore.

THE FORUMS

These organisations generally have some kind of web forum, through which many of their day-to-day discussions take place. In most cases, registering to view and post on these forums is free and does not require you to be an actual member of the society. You should take advantage of this and create an account on the forum.

Account Names

It goes without saying that you shouldn't use your real name, but equally, you shouldn't pick an obvious handle. Nothing is more suspicious than 'DeadSkull57' asking cryptic questions about an upcoming convention. Instead, you should pick a pseudonym that sounds like a normal name, such as Keith Jackson, or Ricky Meads, because most people, upon reading such a name, will assume it to be true. After all, why would anyone make up a boring name like that?

This can of course get a bit confusing, especially when people like one of your 'identities', but dislike another⁴².

What To Do On The Forum

The main advantage of being on the forum is that it enables you to gather information about the GMs you'll be facing. You can learn who's outspoken, who's quiet, who doesn't take crap, and who most likely does.

'RUNNING' FAKE CONVENTIONS

These societies typically support a large number of conventions, many of them small, local affairs. Where the convention is remote, support may consist only of supplying suitable convention scenarios, with interaction between society and convention consisting of email contact only.

So all you need to do is the following:

- † Create several accounts on the forum of your target society.
- † Create a website advertising your convention. (You should use a free remote webhost and a web email address to ensure that you aren't traceable). The website should state that people must book in advance, and that places are limited.
- † If anyone happens to apply, reply telling them sorry, but all the places have been taken.
- † Apply for the convention scenarios.
- † After the date when the convention 'took place' passes, make several posts using your various accounts stating how enjoyable it was.

CYBER-STALKING

Convention GMs tend to have a more prominent net presence than standard GMs, which leaves them vulnerable to standard cyber-stalking techniques. Tapping their name into a search engine is unlikely to turn up anything particularly juicy, but it's free and only takes a moment, so it's worth doing on the off-chance⁴³.

⁴²It can be very disconcerting when someone compliments you on something you've said, and you think: 'Hang on a minute, you don't like me... no, that's right - it's [name of secret pseudonym] you don't like'. It gets especially confusing when, like me, your 'real name' is *also* a pseudonym. You find yourself saying: 'Okay, so-in-so likes me as xxx, but hates me as yyy, and such-and-such likes me as yyy, but hates me as xxx.'

⁴³I once tapped a bloke's name into a Usenet search engine and found a whole load of posts made by him to newsgroups such as alt.hacker, alt.personals.fat (seeking fat women to shag), alt.torture (touting 'rape pics') and alt.sports.soccer.sunderland. The last one said that he was driving up to Sunderland to watch them play, and asked if anyone needed a lift. (I'm not making this up, honest).

METHODS OF WARFARE

At first glance it might seem that a convention GM is all-powerful. After all, the techniques we outlined for use against standard GMs are pretty much useless when you go to a convention. For example, you can't munchkin your character, because the characters are generally pre-generated for the scenario. Worse than that, you'll be playing with a GM you don't know, who you may have met only minutes before the start of the session. How can you win in a situation that would have Sun Tzu shitting himself?

By turning a weakness into a strength.

It's true that you don't know the GM. But then the GM doesn't know you either.

FAKING A DISABILITY

This is probably the most powerful technique you can use against convention GMs, but it does require a fair amount of work ahead of time. The first step is send a letter or email to the organisers. You'll have to customise your letter for the country concerned, but to give you an idea of what is required, here is an example letter suitable for a British convention.

Dear Sir or Madam,

As you are no doubt aware, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) requires organisations to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities to ensure that they are not treated less favourably, either by providing them with extra help, or by making changes to the way services are provided. I myself suffer from a disability, and would like to know if your convention makes allowances for disabled delegates who wish to participate in the roleplaying games on offer.

Yours sincerely,
[Insert your name here]

Those of you in other countries will have to look up the appropriate legislation. It's not hard (it only took me about two minutes).

Now unless the people organising the convention are complete bastards, they should reply with something along the lines of this:

Dear [Your name]

We've received your email asking us about the policies our convention has toward people with disabilities. We are very keen to make our convention as accessible as possible to all persons, and so will make all allowances necessary to enabled disabled people such as yourself to fully participate in the roleplaying games being run. It would greatly help us to do this if you could give details of the nature of the disability you suffer from so that we can brief our Games Masters and

organising staff to ensure that you gain the greatest possible enjoyment from your visit to the convention.

Yours sincerely,
[Whoever]

They have now made a very important concession. They have said that they will brief the GMs about your disability and instruct them to make concessions to accommodate that disability. Now you have an edge.

It's very important to note that we did not give any indication as to the nature of the disability when we first wrote to them. This is because we want them to commit to making allowances for your disability before they find out what it actually is. Once that's achieved, you can then write back to inform them what your 'disability' consists of. Since they've already agreed to make allowances, it's very difficult for them to now withdraw that offer.

Tip: It's a good idea to write back as late as possible, to ensure that they don't have much time to debate your request (and perhaps realise that you're bullshitting them in a rather huge and unpleasant way). This is where you can get creative. You have a variety of options available to you, but here are a few suggested disabilities to claim, together with advice about using the 'disability' to overcome the GM.

Narcolepsy (Sleeping Attacks)

This is a simple but effective technique. Your second letter (informing the convention organisers that you suffer from narcolepsy) should explain that you're prone to suddenly falling asleep, instantly, at any moment, and should further add that it is extremely dangerous to wake you up if this occurs.

So assuming that the GM's been informed of this, and told that he must not allow you to be disadvantaged in any way by your condition, you have some useful options.

The most obvious one covers situations where something dangerous might be about to occur to your character. Simply flop your head down on the table and 'fall asleep'. Stay 'asleep' until the danger is past. The GM cannot allow anything bad to happen to your character during this period, effectively making you immune from any harm.

A second technique can be used in multi-round competitive games where the GM will score the players based on their roleplaying and / or achievements, with the winner going on to a later round. Some of these tournaments offer quite valuable prizes, so this technique can be very worthwhile.



The objective here is to get ahead early, even if your character is using up hit points, potions, magic points, or whatever. As soon as you think you've accumulated a good points total you should 'fall asleep' and stay asleep for the rest of the scenario. The GM is forced to judge you only on the period where you were awake, and since during this period you were the most successful, most active player, you'll be the man going through to the next round.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is a very broad, nebulous and frequently misunderstood condition, and is therefore something you can take advantage of. In your second letter, you should say something like: 'Due to my suffering from OCD, I may sometimes act in a way that in other contexts might be considered anti-social'.

This puts the GM in a very awkward position, since he will have been told by the organisers that you might behave in an anti-social fashion, and that he must make allowances for that to ensure that you aren't disadvantaged.

The basic technique here is to keep the GM constantly on the defensive through manic behaviour, attention grabbing antics and generally throwing your toys out of the pram at every opportunity⁴⁴.

'Anger Management Issues'

This is really a refinement of the previous technique. It is very much a high-risk strategy, since sensible organisers, upon reading that you suffer from 'anger management issues' may well say: 'Sod off! That isn't a disability!'. But if they don't, you've gained a huge edge, because as far as the GM is concerned you're a time bomb waiting to go off.

Let's face it, if you've been told that a player suffers from 'anger management issues', and one member of the party is about to get ambushed by a leaping velociraptor... well it isn't going to be his PC, is it?

Tip: A good technique to use here is to count to ten, slowly, taking deep breaths (as though following a taught anger management technique) whenever it looks like anything bad is about to happen to your character.

GM: Okay, John, you start to walk across the rope bridge, which starts to sway violently beneath you...

John (You): One... two... three...

GM: ...and then stops swaying.

The key thing here is to look like a time bomb, act like a time bomb, but not actually blow up like a time bomb (because then you'll get arrested).

REUSING 'DISABILITY' TECHNIQUES

The beauty of these techniques are that not only can they be used at multiple occasions, but that each time one of them is used it becomes stronger. This is because you can cite previous instances of conventions accepting your 'disability' as a precedent when contacting later conventions.

GETTING AN UNPREPARED GM

Amazing as it might sound, when gaming at a convention it's perfectly possible to get a GM who not only has not read the scenario in advance, but who doesn't even know the system concerned. This generally occurs because of some kind of scheduling / booking cock-up, and is often viewed as an unfortunate situation. However, I think this is a misguided conclusion, since such an eventuality offers great opportunities to GM-slayers such as ourselves. GMs in these situations generally follow the 'roll an arbitrary dice, make a snap decision' method, which clearly leads them wide open to some pretty aggressive rules lawyering. By now, the techniques you ought to be using should be well known to you, which leaves only one question:

HOW DO YOU GET AN UNPREPARED GM?

Well the best technique to use here is to book your game as late as possible. The organisers will then have to scramble to provide an extra table for the game, with a GM who mere minutes before the game was looking forward to a leisurely afternoon spent wondering around the trade hall, but who now finds himself at the head of the table having a scenario thrust before him. In this situation players are often happy to spend fifteen minutes or so chatting, while the GM reads the scenario. This will, of course, chip away at the 'edge' you've gained, so you should attempt to forestall such behaviour by being extremely enthusiastic to start playing as soon as possible.

⁴⁴I used to work with some Royal Air Force guys who had a lovely expression: 'Teddy takes an air-test!'

RUNNING DOWN THE CLOCK

Convention games tend to run within fixed time slots, typically three or four hours, and they are generally not allowed to run beyond this time by any significant amount. This puts additional pressure on the GM, as he is constantly 'watching the clock' and attempting to ensure that there is enough time for things to be completed. GMs will often run certain parts of the scenario faster than they would otherwise do, because they think that they're running behind schedule. It's therefore a good technique to deliberately slow down the early portions of the scenario. Not only will this increase the pressure on the GM, it will force him to 'fast-forward' through the latter portions of the scenario, which will obviously reduce the difficulty level.

SECRET TEAM-MATES

Any kind of verbal interaction, be it advice, criticism, rules lawyering or good old-fashioned verbal abuse, is far more effective if it comes from two separate sources. If one person tells you you're a twat, you'll assume that the twat in question is him. But if a second unconnected person makes the same such claim you might start to suffer some doubts.

This means that if you're playing in a convention game with a friend, you have nothing to gain by admitting to that friendship, and everything to gain by concealing it. You should arrive separately, and make sure that the other players and the GM see you introduce yourselves to each other.

Tip: You can add additional authenticity by getting one of the names wrong. For example, if your friend 'introduces' himself to you as 'Dan' you should call him 'Dave' throughout.

POSING AS AN 'ON-LINE PERSONALITY'

This is a fairly aggressive technique that's well suited for those who don't like having to 'hide' their intentions. The idea is that if you're someone well known for doing on-line reviews (particularly hostile ones) the organisers may well be scared of what you might say, and will therefore try to avoid upsetting you. You could try starting your own webzine, but quite frankly that's way too much work if all you're looking for is an on-line reputation.

A more efficient route is to start posting to web portals such as RPGNet and ENWorld that allow members of the public to post their own reviews. The plan is to do some pretty nasty, crappy reviews,

but on products that *are* genuinely crap⁴⁵, so that you come across as harsh, but reasonably fair. There's a lot of crap out there, so you shouldn't have any trouble finding targets. If necessary, do some 'historical' reviews of crap gone by.

⁴⁵I can't suggest any products here for obvious legal reasons. Swearing might be big and clever but libel never is.

Then all you need to do is contact the convention organisers in advance to let them know that you will be visiting their convention with the intention of reviewing it, giving them some URLs to the reviews you've previously done.

That should get them appropriately nervous. Getting 'In' With The Organisers

Pressure can be placed on lower-level convention staff if you've got friendly with higher-ranking members of the organising committee. In addition, you can enhance your reputation by casually name-dropping, either in conversation, or in published works. Personally, I think this is pathetic behaviour, and certainly something I'd never stoop to, but if you're going to the Irish conventions Gaelcon and Warpcn, just contact Fiki, Brian, Gar, Sadhbh or Colm, and tell them Jonny said hi.

CO-ORDINATED SHARED CAMPAIGNS ('CSCs')

This is a technical term for convention-based campaigns, such as those run by a popular worldwide association for roleplayers. I won't mention what these campaigns are called in case there are legal issues associated with such a disclosure, but let's just say that their titles implies that they're not about 'dying'.

I'd advise you to avoid these types of campaign games and stick to one-shots. The whole idea of what I've been teaching you is to try to avoid being tagged as a 'problem' player, and let's face it: playing the same 'difficult' character in the same campaign at every convention is a bit of a 'Hello!' marker. However, it could be said that defeating the team of GMs responsible for the overall course of a shared convention campaign is perhaps the greatest challenge a sociopathic player can take on. If you actually manage to destroy an entire 'not dying' campaign, then Sir, I salute you.

From a distance. I don't ever want to actually meet you.



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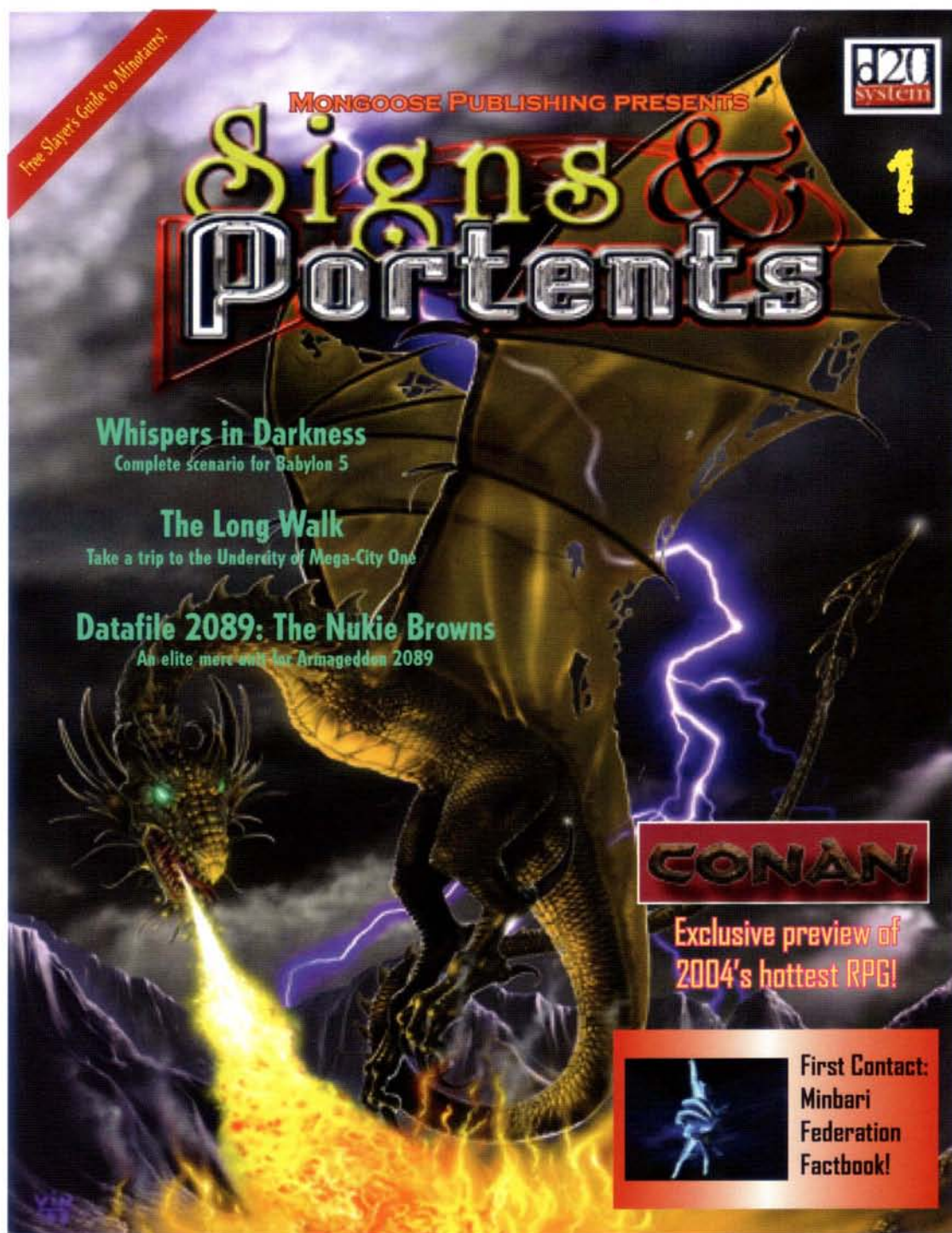
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THE
SLAYER'S
GUIDE
TO

GAMES MASTERS

The Most Dangerous Foe

Understand this. The Games Master is your enemy. He may come under different names - Games Master, judge, referee... friend - but he is always your enemy. It's a different game he's playing, with different rules and different objectives.

His game is about control and dominance. He might dispute this, may use words such as 'storytelling', but ask yourself this: Whose story is it he wants to tell?

His.

Now contrary to what certain 1980s animated series might have had you believe, Games Masters are not in the habit of descending from the heavens to walk the earth, for the very good reason that within five minutes they'd find themselves with a knife to their throat, and a voice whispering in their ear: 'Tell the dragon to back away slowly...' (Or perhaps end up nailed to a tree, depending on the genre).

But don't get despondent, for Games Masters can be defeated.

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