

THE COMPLETE GAME MASTER'S GUIDE TO RUNNING EXTRAORDINARY SESSIONS

FOCAL POINT



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In memory of Aaron Allston, who taught us how to create amazing worlds, and Robin Williams, who showed us how to bring them to life.

A special thanks to John Stavropoulos for his insight and feedback on the draft of Chapter 15: Safety on the Set. – Thank you for helping me understand the complexity of such an important topic, and to find the right words to convey it clearly. – *Phil Vecchione*

Dedications

For Paula - Who was not in my life for my previous book dedications, but who will be in my life for all of the rest. – *John Arcadian*

To my father-in-law, Col. Richard Poch, who always encouraged me to reach for the skies. – *Walt Ciechanowski*

A special thanks to Martin Ralya, who started this whole thing years ago when he took a leap of faith with us and asked us to write with him, first on Gnome Stew and later at Engine Publishing. – *Phil Vecchione*



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How to Use this Book

FOCAL POINT: The Complete Game Master's Guide to Extraordinary Sessions highlights the most common activities involved in running a game, categorizes them by role—entertainer, storyteller, and facilitator—and provides techniques and advice to improve in those areas. It's intended to be read away from the table, reflected upon, and acted on later, during sessions.

As in *Never Unprepared* and *Odyssey*, in *Focal Point* we'll break each role down into discrete activities and then deconstruct those activities to understand why they're important and to explore the various ways to accomplish them well. *Focal Point* is complemented by *Never Unprepared* or *Odyssey*, but you don't need those books in order to take full advantage of this one—it's designed to stand on its own as a resource for running extraordinary sessions.

Why a Book about Running Game Sessions?

GMing is a craft that benefits from constant improvement. Whether it's a new GM just trying to run a session without panicking or a grizzled veteran working to master a specific aspect of the craft, no one gets better at GMing by accident. And at the table, during play, is where all that hard work pays off—when you're actually running sessions.

Play is the focal point of roleplaying, and by extension it's also the focus of GMing. We believe this topic more than merits a book all to itself, so we wrote one. In so doing, we tried to capture the universal elements of GMing—the things which, no matter what style of game or particular system you run, are common to virtually every GM and virtually every game.

While it's impossible to document the multitude of activities a GM must manage while running a game, *Focal Point* sets out to define and describe the major activities that we all perform. The most common tasks that a GM performs break down into three major areas, or roles: **entertainer**, **storyteller**, and **facilitator**.

The Three Roles

Being a GM requires constant mental juggling. During the course of running a game, you must balance a multitude of game elements while monitoring the status of your players and making real-time adjustments to the game and/or story, all the while being entertaining and engaging. It's a job for the ambitious.

Understanding the three key roles involved in GMing is critical to getting the most out of *Focal Point*, so let's look at each of them in turn.



Entertainer

As the entertainer, the GM takes on the voices and mannerisms of multiple NPCs. She uses interesting maps and miniatures during combat. She creates props to hand out and playlists to help set the mood of the game. The entertainer gets everyone into the game, helping them immerse themselves in their roles.

The entertainer represents the parts of the GM that are projected outward to the players: the voices you use, the props you employ, and the soundtracks you play. A strong entertainer is captivating to watch and enhances the story and the game through their contributions.



Storyteller

In his role as storyteller, the GM doesn't literally tell his players a story—but he does tell stories during the game. Some GMs create the framework of an engaging story and then hook the group into the plot, making adjustments, often on the fly, as the players' actions create unexpected and exciting changes. Other GMs tell “small stories” in the moment, when they introduce a new NPC or location, but don't come to the table with a plotted adventure for each session. But all GMs are storytellers in one or more ways (just not in the sense that they dictate stories to their players).

This role encompasses the elements of GMing which are involved in facilitating the collective story that the group tells at the table: the creation of dramatic tension in a horror adventure, aggressive scene cutting to bring about a frantic pace, and the ability to quickly move a scene back into the path of the player characters (PC) if they passed it by. A strong storyteller creates tension, making hearts pound with anticipation, and helps to create drama that can move people to tears.

Facilitator

As facilitator, the GM creates a safe environment in which everyone in the group can let down their guard and relax their inhibitions. She helps to create harmony at the table, and she eliminates distractions. When there is conflict she helps to bring it to resolution. She softens the loudest voices and raises up the quietest ones. The facilitator helps to bring the group together to make it more than the sum of its parts.

The facilitator role involves everything that helps to keep the table focused on the game: managing the rules, resolving conflicts that arise, and helping the group to collaborate. A strong facilitator creates a strong table of players who work well together and help each other have a memorable experience.

Three Sections and a Metaphor

In keeping with the division of GMing into three roles, we've divided *Focal Point* into three sections, one for each role. We've used the metaphor of moviemaking as a framing device, both in the division into sections and throughout the book, because it offers some excellent parallels to game mastering.



Scouting the Location

In movie-making terminology, scouting a location is the act of finding the perfect place to shoot a scene. For our purposes, it is determining what space is best for you to play your game. You won't always have the perfect space, but if you try to find a space that eliminates as many issues as possible you'll have a much better gaming experience.

There are a slew of questions you can ask yourself when scouting for the best location possible:

- **What is my dream space like?**—If you had phenomenal cosmic powers or all the money and tech of Tony Stark or Bruce Wayne at your disposal, what would your ultimate play space be like? Take a few minutes to dream about it. Think of the challenges you have in your games and what kinds of solutions the space could provide. Figure out your ultimate play space and then work backwards from there to more realistic options, noting the underlying ideas that are most important to you.
- **What elements benefit the game I'm going to run?**—Having the ultimate no-holds-barred play space is one thing, but how can your play area benefit the specific game you're about to run? Do you need a big table for miniatures and scenery? Would a few chairs in a circle help your players interact with each other and roleplay? Would the basement actually be a more atmospheric play space for a dungeon crawl than the living room? Focus your thoughts on the game you're running and determine what works best for that specific game.
- **Is the space a place where you can be comfortable acting?**—Is the space too public? Are the other people there making you feel embarrassed when you stand up to swing your imaginary broadsword? Being able to be unrestrained in a gaming space is incredibly important. Some people like performing for an audience, though; for them, a public space can be a benefit.
- **What is the best space we actually have access to?**—All other questions aside, what space do you actually have available to you? Gaming anywhere is better than gaming nowhere. If the space you have available to you is mediocre, maybe one of the players would be willing to host the game or a better space might be available at the local game store.
- **How can I make the space I have access to more viable for gaming?**—If you've found the best space available to you, what can you do to make it work better? Can you bring in a new table or change the wall decorations? What about the simple act of changing where people sit to emphasize character connections? Look at what you've got and see what you can do to make it better for your game.



Stage Design 3: Raise The Stage

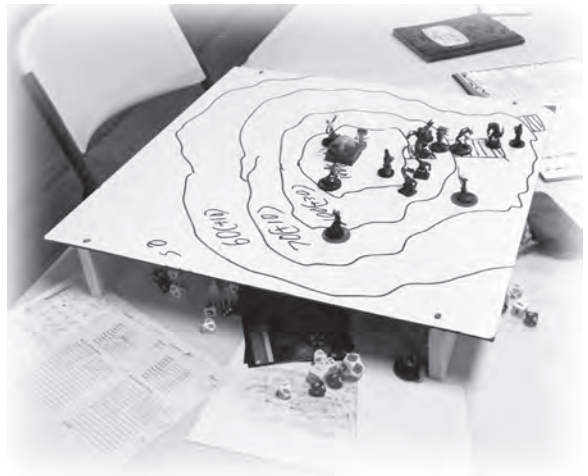


Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard or dry-erase panels approximately 2' x 2'
- Option 1—Aluminum pizza stands and one roll of duct tape
- Option 2—One “furring strip” of wood approximately 8' long by 1" tall by 4" wide cut into two sections (a 2' long section and a 1' 4" section), and 2-4 small screws

Let's set aside the movie set analogy for a moment and think about stages for live theater. All stages have one thing in common: They are higher than the area around them. That small distinction puts them in a physically different space, and it's a great psychological trick that we can make use of for gaming.

This is an incredibly easy build with some impressive results. Start by going to a home improvement store to find dry-erase (whiteboard) wall panels. These generally cost about \$5 for a 2'x2' panel or \$10 for a 2'x4' panel, depending on what the store stocks. One side is covered in a dry-erase paint that is perfect for gaming. The other side is usually dark brown, and you can add a grid for miniatures to that side with a silver permanent marker. This gives you a two-side mapping surface—now to raise it up off the table.



There are two simple ways to raise this set:

- **Metal pizza stands**—These are metal brackets about 6" or 7" inches high that restaurants use to hold pizzas. They're cheap and can be taped to the dry-erase panels for stability. Using two at the edges of a 2'x2' panel will raise your set while also creating a space underneath for books and kibble.
- **Wood**—Get an 8' furring strip cut into three pieces (two 2', one 1' 10") and screw them together in an “H” shape. Set your dry-erase panel on top of this frame to raise your set above the table. It won't be as high as the pizza stand option, but it does still offer a bit of storage space underneath the panel.

Working with Wood

In two of these stage designs, I mention doing a bit of woodworking. If you aren't the woodworking sort, don't panic! These are in no way complex builds and are easy to achieve even if you don't own any truly dangerous tools, but there are three things you should know before you get started:

- **Wood doesn't have to be expensive**—High-quality wood is expensive, but for our purposes a cheap piece of wood called a “furring strip” is perfect. They generally cost \$2-\$4 for an 8' length of wood (the width varies). Ask someone at the store where they are and then paw through the pile for one that suits your needs. Make sure you get one that isn't treated with chemicals—raw wood is your friend, and it can be stained if you want to go the extra mile.
- **Lumber sizes are not exact**—It's an oddity of the lumber industry, but a 4" wide piece of wood is usually 3.5" or 3.75" inches wide, but it is sold as 4" wide. And even if the stated measurements are accurate, cutting will change the length. A board that's 8' (96") long can't be cut it into four 2' sections because the saw blade is about 1/8" wide—you lose about 1/2" from the overall length of the board, if not more. If you aren't cutting it yourself, ask whoever is to cut it to length, but overall to *make sure the pieces are equal*. It's better to have two 1' 11" boards than two boards of different lengths.
- **Hardware stores can make cuts for you**—Many hardware stores have a saw sitting around in the back and will make simple cuts for you. Usually this is free, but sometimes they charge a small fee to avoid having to cut complex projects. They can only make simple cuts (like turning an 8' board into four pieces or cutting a 2'x4' panel into two 2'x2' panels) and sometimes you're better off marking off your cuts with a pencil and ruler before asking them to fire up the saw. Make sure to describe exactly what your end goal is to the person doing the cutting. (Also, a word of general advice: Be nice to the person who is trained in the use of industrial-grade powered cutting tools.)

Challenge - Achievement: Set Designer

1. Put a central, focusing element into the game space that fits the theme of your game, and encourage your players to interact with it if possible.
2. Put on your assistant director hat and compact all your GMing materials so they fit into a small storage container.
3. Find three props that fit the theme of your game and introduce them into the central area at different times during the night (whenever there are significant scene changes).
4. Build a raised set or create a “box theater” for your next game that uses miniatures.
5. Institute a kipple reduction plan as a rule for your game, and reward your players with an in-game benefit for following the rule.
6. Sit back and look at your table for a few minutes. Write down three things you could add to your setup that would improve it or remove distractions.

Getting Foam

Polystyrene foam is available from most big-box hardware stores and can be found in the insulation aisle. It is sold in varying thicknesses and width/height combinations. You can also find it in old coolers and packing material from shipping boxes, but these sources won't usually yield nice big sheets that are easy to cut. Hunt around to find the cheapest ones you can and avoid foam that bills itself as having been treated with special chemicals.



Cutting Foam

Polystyrene foam cuts well with a serrated knife, such as a cheap kitchen steak knife or a large bread knife—the kind you can acquire from any thrift store. Some people use hot wire cutters to carve out shapes, but I've found serrated knives often work best. If you want to use a power tool for the job, an electric kitchen knife can save your wrist from some pain if you're cutting large sections of foam. I've also been known to use my scroll saw to cut out large shapes when making big props, but I usually default back to the kitchen bread knife.

Getting smooth cuts in polystyrene can sometimes be difficult, but it's usually just a matter of pressure and a steady hand. Waxing the sides of your knife can help it move through the foam smoothly. If you want to smooth or "sand" the foam, get a piece of scrap foam and rub the smoothest edge you can find against the area you want to smooth. A slightly damp cloth can also work well to clean rough edges.

Shaping and Joining

Polystyrene foam can be stacked to create terrain that rises high and covers a large area. You can join foam pieces with wood glue and use toothpicks to hold it together while it dries. You can build square or angled buildings by cutting the foam and connecting pieces together to form walls and a ceiling. Foam pieces that have been stacked high can be carved as if they were a single piece to create a tall prop with a specific shape (e.g., a mountain).



A custom Foam Board bunker with wire ladder and blue foam turned into terrain make a cheap but impressive scene.

Using Foam Board

Many pieces of wargaming terrain incorporate foam board to create smooth structures or additions to more rocky pieces of terrain. Depending on what you are making, using a piece of foam board will provide a thinner piece of foam with a paper coating on each side. This paper can be peeled off of one side to provide a foam-like surface (wet it first for an easier time). Foam board crafts much like cardboard, but cutting it is best done with a box cutter or a rotary tool.



GRASP OF THE
BLOODY SKULL!

CAMERA...

Artist: Avery Liell-Kok



Artist: Matt Morrow

Why Is Having a Good Shooting Script Important?

A script provides the blueprint you'll use to guide your players through the game session. "Guide" doesn't have to mean "railroad," and "script" is just the term that fits the movie metaphor we're using throughout *Focal Point*. For our purposes, even if you walk into a session with no adventure notes whatsoever, there's a script—or something like one—involved in some way.

Scripts come in all shapes and sizes, from highly detailed pre-packaged adventures to broad outlines (like the ones in Engine Publishing's *EUREKA: 501 Adventure Plots to Inspire Game Masters*) to hastily scribbled notes to simply winging it. All of these are valid "scripts" and whether they work for a particular GM is a matter of taste. Whether a script is a good "shooting script" is another matter. A good shooting script should have the following elements.


- It works within the boundaries of your campaign.
- It interests the PCs.
- It holds together and lacks obvious plot holes or exploitable plot elements.
- It suits the PCs and has appropriate challenges.



House Rule Assumptions

While you shouldn't usually need to put common mechanics on a rules cheat sheet, be sure to refresh your memory on how they work from time to time anyway. It always amazes me when I discover that my gaming group as a whole interprets a rule a certain way that is clearly wrong and has been doing so for quite some time. It can come as quite a shock when they learn that they've been doing it wrong.

When this happens, be prepared for some resistance. Often these unofficial "house rule assumptions" get started because there's a clear advantage for the PCs, and they may have relied on this advantage when designing or upgrading their characters. In these cases it's entirely up to you whether to enforce the original rule, but if you do then you should give your players some leeway in adjusting their PCs accordingly.



Storyboarding—Designing a Flowchart

In film, storyboards are essentially "comic books" that illustrate how scenes should play out. They enable directors and others involved in the film's production to understand what's supposed to happen during a shoot. You can't apply this concept to gaming in its entirety because of the unpredictability of player actions—and other things—that can, and usually do, send sessions off in unexpected directions.

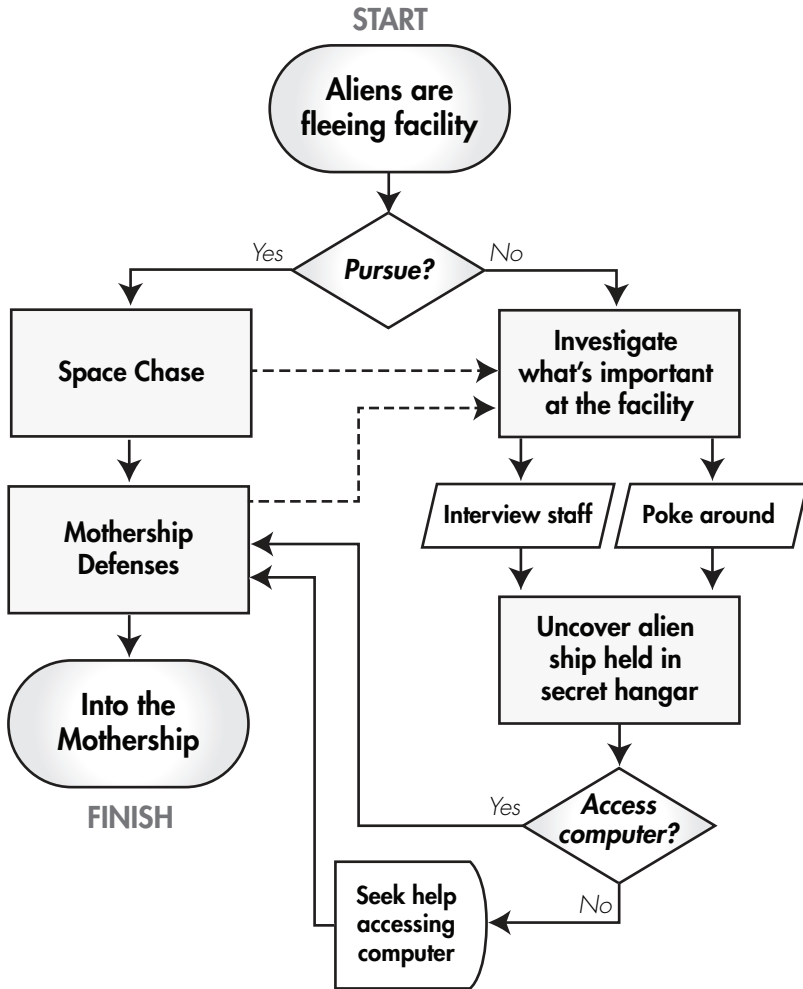
What you *can* take from storyboarding is the element of mapping out likely paths for the PCs. This gives you an idea of what you need to prepare (and which rules to highlight on your cheat sheet). To create a flowchart, simply map the decision points that you expect your players to make during the session and then draw lines to the next scene based on each decision.

A session flowchart is very similar to a dungeon map: On a dungeon map, each door and corridor on the map represents a decision point; on a flowchart, the scenes are the decision points. If the PCs entered Room 5 and there is a door to their left and another in front of them, chances are that their next moves will be to explore what's behind each door and then make a decision as to which one to go through. You can make similar guesses about what they'll do next on a flowchart.

Figure B1 provides an example flowchart for a supers campaign. In the last session, the PCs discovered an alien attack on a government research facility and they forced the aliens to flee. For today's session, the GM knows the starting point (the aliens' flight) and the likely endpoint, getting inside the alien mother ship.

While brainstorming the flowchart, the GM anticipates that the PCs will pursue the aliens, but it's also possible that the PCs will let the aliens go for now and try to figure out what attracted them to the facility. She's listed both options on the flowchart.

Figure B1



Following the flowchart gets the PCs to the mothership one way or another. They may do this by directly pursuing the aliens or by discovering an alien ship inside the facility that is transmitting a beacon. If the PCs break off their pursuit, then they may still get the information they need by going back to the facility. Simply following the flowchart gets the PCs to the session goal.

Let's take a deeper look at two things about Figure B1. First, the flowchart can also highlight the rules needed for the session. There's obviously going to be some combat, but if the PCs directly pursue the aliens then chase rules may be involved. Investigating the facility requires skill checks and social interaction, as well as possibly tapping a computer-specialist contact. You'll want to note page numbers on the rules cheat sheet (or even just jot them down on the flowchart).



Artist: Matt Morrow

Breaking “Thought Fatigue”

One of the problems with not having a break is that it can lead to tunnel vision or “thought fatigue,” which is when the players get tired and simply don’t consider alternatives beyond their initial impulses. They may race through a dungeon without considering traps or secret doors, they may decide to attack anyone who gets in their way, or they may continually beat a red herring into the ground because they “know” that it’s the solution to the mystery.

Thought fatigue is compounded when the players are feeling frustrated. Whether the dice seem to be against them, their attempts to follow a clue turn up nothing but red herrings, or the Big Bad just seems undefeatable, the players start to feel as though nothing they can do will overcome their problem. In this case, a quick break may be all they need to recharge their creative energies. (Another option is to offer clues to overcome the problem, but frustrated players tend to see this as a “cheat”—and it does little to end the fatigue).

Evaluating Your Shooting Schedule

Breaks are a good time to evaluate your session goal. If your break is in the middle of the session, is your group about where you expected to be by now? If not, then you may need to amend your session goal and ensure that the new “goal” offers a suitable ending spot to keep your players wanting more.

Fatigue

There are times when physical factors like hunger, lack of sleep, mental stress, or the onset of an illness can cause a person's focus to waver. A person who is feeling fatigue is not going to have the same mental acuity as someone who is relaxed and well rested. In times like these, **Taking a Break** or **Calling It** are the best ways to regain focus.

Story Pace and Flow

Often players start to disengage when the story bogs down, and this can usually be traced back to you, the GM, or what you prepped for the session. It's possible that you've created a problem that's too difficult to solve or stymied an investigation by allowing players to fail a check for a key clue. Or you may have presented a situation that requires extensive player planning, which always slows down the pace of the game.

When a story is well-paced and interesting it commands our attention, even to the point of shutting out everything around us. We've all had those moments in a game where we stop seeing the players and just see their characters. When a story goes too slow or it fails to engage us emotionally we become hyper-aware of everything else around us and distractions come out of the woodwork.

If you realize that the story is plodding along, then you need to make some corrections to speed it back up to recapture your players' attention. Consider **Ninjas Bust Through the Door** to add an element of unexpected action, or **Fast Forward Button** to speed up the conclusion of the current scene and get into the next (and hopefully more interesting) scene.

Moving the Spotlight Around

It's unrealistic to think that every scene can put the spotlight on every character. More often than not what winds up happening is that the spotlight gets stuck on a single PC because of the way the scene developed—which is great for you and that player, but leaves everyone else out.

While players will stay focused on the game when they're not in the spotlight, they usually won't do so indefinitely. If you lose focus and get caught up in a scene, or if an individual scene is followed by *more* individual scenes, eventually virtually every player's attention will drift. After all, they're not called "watchers"—they're called *players*, and they're here to play.

When you are running scenes where the spotlight is on one player, or just a portion of the group, you need to aggressively move the spotlight around from player to player. This will often require you to juggle several mini-scenes at the same time. Run one scene until you can find a logical gap and then quickly cut to the next player, and the next, until you have come around back to the first player. Do this until you have resolved all the mini-scenes and you can return the group into a single scene.

Creating Safety

The majority of the time, safety is compromised by accident. This means that we can mitigate the chances of someone being made to feel unsafe with a bit of forethought and planning. This planning often involves establishing boundaries so that everyone knows the comfort zones of each player as well as the acceptable tone and actions within the group. Once those zones have been discussed there are also ways to help to maintain them during play.



Understanding Comfort Zones

It is important for each player to define, or at least understand, his or her comfort zones. These zones encompass our reactions to different topics and situations that we encounter. Everyone has three basic comfort zones:

- **Comfortable**—These are things that we can see, discuss, and experience without feeling unsafe. We're fine with these being played out at the table.
- **Uncomfortable**—These are things that we can see, discuss, and experience, but only in limited amounts or when not described in detail. Taken too far, these things will make us feel unsafe.
- **Forbidden**—These are topics which make us feel unsafe no matter how they arise or how lightly they're present in the game.

These three categories will be different for each person at the table. One player might be uncomfortable with a plot that involves the children in harm's way, while another may consider that topic forbidden. It's important to discover and understand what topics are forbidden and uncomfortable for you and your players, and doing so is much easier than trying to list every topic with which people are comfortable.

Social Contract

The best way to establish comfort zones is to incorporate them into your group's social contract. Social contracts are a big topic and are outside the scope of this chapter, but in a nutshell a social contract is a written or unwritten understanding among the people in your group about conduct during gaming sessions. (Search for "social contract" on gnomestew.com, as well as other gaming sites, for much more information on this topic.)

As part of your social contract, create a list of the topics that are uncomfortable and forbidden for each person in your group. It's entirely possible that the same topic will fall into a different comfort zone for different people. If this happens, assign those topics to the most sensitive zone—for example, if a topic is comfortable for one player and uncomfortable for another, it gets flagged as uncomfortable for the group.

The resulting list will establish a set of boundaries for your group at the gaming table. For you, the GM, it also acts as a list of which topics are acceptable to include in adventures (comfortable), which ones you need to pay extra care and attention to when they come up (uncomfortable), and which ones to avoid entirely (forbidden).



Reaching a Collaborative State

When a group has the right attitude, a sense of teamwork, and good communication, it can reach that collaborative state where the sum of their ideas is greater than any individual idea. This collaborative state has three hallmarks.

Ideas are Built

A collaborative effort is one where an idea is built from a collection of smaller ideas. It's not collaboration when one person proposes an idea and the group agrees with him. Rather, in collaboration, someone poses an imperfect idea and others add their ideas to address the imperfections by using their expertise, experiences, and knowledge. The group then combines those ideas into a final idea that's stronger than the original idea.

There are No Stars

A collaborative group strives to be as inclusive as possible. When they build an idea or come up with a solution, they do so to utilize the skills of everyone in the group, not to rally behind one person, so that everyone has a chance to contribute and to share in its success and rewards. For example, in a fantasy game where the party's wizard and thief can both get past a locked door (the wizard by using a spell, the thief with lock picks), the group would decide to have the thief pick the lock and reserve the wizard's spell for later in the session, enabling both characters to shine.

Being Collaborative at the Table

Apart from being a good life skill, the ability to collaborate also has a direct impact on the game. There are many times during a session where the PCs will need to collaborate, and in order for that to happen the players have to be able to collaborate. Here are three common examples:

- **Combat**—In any life-and-death struggle, a group whose members have each other's backs will fair far better than a “group” of hot shots each going it alone. Players skilled at collaboration look out for each other, understand everyone's strengths and weaknesses, and know how to combine their strengths to defeat the toughest foes. Groups that can't pull together wind up getting picked off one at a time when they get in over their heads. The greatest challenge to collaboration in combat is when characters try to showboat and take on the biggest threats solo, rather than combining their abilities with the rest of the party.
- **Heists and ambushes**—Scenes where the group needs to come up with and then execute a plan are natural opportunities for collaboration. In these types of scenes the players need to combine their ideas to overcome a challenge that is greater than any one of them can accomplish on their own. The tricky part is including as many members of the party as possible so that no one feels left out.

Rules Lawyer Becomes Rules Expert

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I'm not the best at learning and memorizing "crunchy" game rules. They just don't stick well with me. I am blessed because I always game with someone who is a rules savant, who has a wonderful grasp of the core mechanics as well as a large number of ancillary rules. In the past I would struggle to study the rules over and over to gain mastery over them so that I could make sure that the players were not trying to skirt any rules, and that we were playing properly. I would also shut down the player who knew the rules well, labeling them as a "rules lawyer," when they noted things that I was doing wrong.

There's a limit to how well you can know the rules, though, and to how much time you can devote to rules mastery alongside all of your other GMing duties. So instead of taking offense at a "rules lawyer," put them to work for you. Make them the czar of the rules, the oracle that everyone in the group can turn to when they need to know something about how the game system works. Establish that if someone breaks a rule (likely unintentionally), the rules expert will politely mention it so that the rule can be followed correctly.



Artist: Elizabeth Porter

FOCAL POINT



The heart of roleplaying is the **gaming session**, that point when everyone is gathered around the gaming table—and exactly when so many of your game mastering skills are most needed. To the best of our knowledge, there's never been a system-neutral book focused on running great sessions. Until now. ***FOCAL POINT: The Complete Game Master's Guide to Running Extraordinary Sessions*** is that book.

FOCAL POINT is the third volume in Engine Publishing's "accidental trilogy" of game mastering advice books, which began with *NEVER UNPREPARED: The Complete Game Master's to Session Prep* and continued in *ODYSSEY: The Complete Game Master's Guide to Campaign Management*. You don't need those books to enjoy and make use of this one, although they do complement each other well. ***FOCAL POINT* is a standalone guide to running great game sessions.**

Each of *FOCAL POINT's* award-winning authors—Phil Vecchione, Walt Ciechanowski, and John Arcadian—is a veteran GM with years of experience, and each of them excels at a particular aspect of game mastering. John is an **entertainer**, a GM who loves props and drawing his players into the game world. Walt is a **storyteller**, an adventure-writer who makes his living in the RPG industry. Phil is a **facilitator**, an organized GM who specializes in helping his players work well together.

These three roles—entertainer, storyteller, and facilitator—are at the core of *FOCAL POINT*. From building "sets" for your gaming table, to using flowcharts to structure your adventures, to making sure everyone in your group feels comfortable during play, this guidebook addresses everything that goes into running an extraordinary gaming session.

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