

GM zero

GETTING ALONG

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words by jim pinto

This document is a free guide to helping players better understand how to get along with one another. This is all advice. Use what you can

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DISCLAIMER

There's a lot of bad advice out there. And I don't know you. So this document might be bad advice for you, too. Take it with a grain of salt. Just know that none of us are perfect and some people want to get better at being gamers and/or people.

For those who are already perfect, ignore this free PDF and trade it for some pogs.

Note: The language in this PDF is direct and there's even some foul language. I make no apologies for either.

BLANK SPACE

Look at all this blank space.

If you're still reading, congrats. That means you're open to the idea that we can all improve. As players, as storytellers, and as humans stuck in shared imaginary worlds. That's all this is. A nudge in the right direction.

PROLOGUE

Gaming with old friends is not the same as gaming with strangers. Old friends develop a shorthand of language, cultural tools, and unspoken agreements that take years to work out. Oftentimes, they come from the same region of the world, and have much in common outside of gaming.

But gaming with strangers, or in areas with transplants from other locations, can lead to sticking points on how people get along with one another.

The following is some helpful advice in just one page, to encourage gamers and gamemasters.

If you're interested, there are other free PDFs on the drivethrurpg.com site which may help gamers with nomenclature and GMless play. If you're into that sort of thing. Download whatever you like.

AUTHORITY

Some games place a single person in "control." What this means changes from group to group. Some sentiments invite the players to do whatever they want, treating the gamemaster like a video game A.I., reacting to their impulses. Other styles of play put the gamemaster fully in charge. Wherever you fall on the range, gamemasters share a brunt of responsibility other people at the table do not. Much of the work of making sure everyone gets along falls on the gamemaster's shoulders.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

"Who you game with is more important than what you play." No game publisher is going to say that to you. They want to sell games, not contracts and philosophies. But it's important to understand why certain games work and certain ones don't. Without a written or unwritten set of guidelines of acceptable behavior, you're going to run into problems with one another. The same goes for defining the parameters of the game.

SOME BASIC ADVICE

KNOW YOUR BOUNDARIES

Everyone has a different set of boundaries. You know your limits better than anyone else does. You have a right to voice your boundaries before, or after play. If someone tries to shout you down when establishing your boundaries, tell them to politely "fuck off" and walk out of the game.

Technically anyone can tell them to fuck off.

NOTHING IS PERSONAL

Unless someone actively makes it personal, most outbursts at a gaming table are about the people making the outburst and not necessarily about you. Things are never going to improve if people attack one another personally over a game. If possible, give people an opportunity to vent and react to what they are saying, not what you want to hear. This is active listening and it takes years to develop.

I didn't say this was easy.

SHOW TACT

There's a basic framework of behavior that people come to expect from one another. This advice gets lost when you're gaming in a basement with your friends. It shouldn't get lost when gaming with strangers at a convention or meet-up, however.

You may think baby killing jokes are funny, but most people don't. Rein it in.

TAKE IT AWAY FROM THE TABLE

Arguing in front of others is a *GRADE A faux pas*. Don't do it unless your goal is to ruin the session. When possible, argue after the game. And if that's not possible, ask to take a break and take it away from the game. People who are forced to argue in front of others rarely change their mind in front of an audience.

USE THE X-CARD

There's plenty of documentation about the X-card online. I'm not going to steal anyone's text and put it into my document. Just do a search for "x-card," and it's the first thing that comes up.

LISTEN. ACT. COOPERATE.

LISTEN

Actively listening to one another is key to getting along at the table. If someone has a problem, listen.

ACT

Behave like grandma is watching you. You don't get a pass on shitty behavior simply because you're "in character." If you can't respect this one, maybe stay home.

COOPERATE

It's not uncommon for strangers to sit down and play a game together. And players who feel uncomfortable with particular events and themes inside the game aren't going to have fun. And if you don't understand that ruining someone else's fun isn't okay, then no amount of advice is going to help you.

Don't abuse other people, their characters, their ideas, or their values. You really should have learned this by now. But just in case, there it is.

This does not mean other people should abuse the privilege, either.

THE FINAL GOAL

The real goal of any game is to have fun and people can't have fun if they are gaming with assholes.

Except maybe other assholes.

Don't be an asshole and spread the word.