



The Players Strike Back

(A Minor Prelude: Thank you to everyone who found me at Origins and said, "I love your column and use your techniques all the time!" Big thanks also go out to the people who said, "I really like your column. I don't use the ideas, but they give me different ideas to use." Thanks also go out to the people who said, "I like your column. I disagree with nearly everything you say, but its fun to read, so I try to catch it every month. "

(Thanks guys.)

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All along, we've been discussing dirty tricks the GM can use to make sure his players are on their toes, jumpy, and unsure about which way the story will turn next. Well, you guys get a break this month. It's your turn to go rent a movie, pop some popcorn, and watch TV.

(And who knows, maybe the readership will pick up. I hear there's more players than GMs, ya know.)

So, all you GMs: get lost! It's time your players and I had a little chat.

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Right, now that we've gotten rid of the fat, let me tell you a little secret about your GM.

Despite all the perils he puts you through, despite all the traps and deadly poison needle triggers, despite the beasts and evil barons and blunderbuss bearin' bugbears, deep down inside. . . he wants you to have a good time.

Don't you think you should be doing a little of the same thing for him?

He wants you to be entertained by all of his shenanigans. I've got some dirty little tricks for you to play that not only make sure that you stay one step ahead of that GM, but also keep a smile plastered on his face. That way, he never knows just how hard you're workin' him.

Breaking the Rules

I've mentioned my *Vampire* character before. You know, the super-duper killing machine Assamite nobody can stop?

Well, just recently, he went through an entire police station. Yeah. True Arnie moment. He didn't use a single gun. He didn't kill anyone. He broke a lot of bones, pulled a lot of tendons and threw a whole heavin' lot of nerve punches, but he didn't kill anyone.

The reason? We needed to get into that cop station and get one of the other players out before the sun rose.

Now, I have to admit, my assassin fully abuses nearly every combat rule in the Storyteller System, making him the most dangerous thing on the planet (player characters are the center of the universe and don't let anyone else tell you any different).

But that police station was the first time he ever used any of those combat skills. The first time in more than a handful of sessions. Why? Because that's when the party needed him to use them.

The moral here? GMs will let you get away with murder if it helps the party. Murder, or at the very least, a whole lot of broken knee caps.

Player and Character Knowledge

Let's get rid of one assumption right quick. This whole "Player vs. Character Knowledge" hoo-la has got to go. The reason we use this rule is because naughty players use it to their own advantage at the expense of everyone else.

"I open the door from the left side, carefully avoiding the poison dart trap, stepping on only every third tile, putting 60% of my weight on my left foot while singing The Yellow Rose of Texas. . . what's that? No, I haven't read the adventure."

Yeah. That guy.

The fact is, a player sharing knowledge with his character can aid the group and make the whole roleplaying experience a lot more fun.

For example, let's say your character has the Intelligence of bantha poo-doo. Yeah, he's not supposed to know that opening the Black Book of the Dead is a bad idea. He's not supposed to know that (accidentally) catching the pages on fire is an even worse idea. And he's not supposed to know that spilling the sacred wine on the pages is the worst idea in ten thousand years.

The mummy comes to life, attacks the group, and you all run for your lives.

That's player knowledge in the character's head. Breaking the rules. And you just helped out the GM by kick-starting his campaign.

Good-Player-You. Have a Hershey's Kiss.

Another example.

Your character knows absolutely nothing about nuclear fusion. You, on the other hand, are the God-King of Nuclear Physics. How many movies/comic books/novels have you read where the guy disarming the Big Bad Bomb has no clue what he's doing, and he disarms the thing anyway because he gets lucky?

If you make it entertaining, if you make it fit the plot, if you don't abuse the power the GM has given you, he'll let you get away with it. Trust me on this.

It's because he's a sucker who wants to make sure his players are all having a good time. As long as everyone is laughing at the end, you're in the clear.

Let's try another one.

A Little Psychology

It doesn't matter how long you've been playing with your GM; you should know him pretty well by now. You know the kind of books he reads, the movies he watches and the TV he lets rot his brain. You should also know the kind of games he runs. That is knowledge, and knowledge is power, my friends.

Let's abuse it.

The Wife is a great example. She knows I like to run big, mythic games, full of symbolism, heroism and little victories. Because she knows that, she's nearly always fairly certain she won't get killed until the dramatically appropriate time. . . if she gets killed at all. So, she pulls off all kinds of daring stunts, daring me to whack her character.

She knows me too well. And she abuses that knowledge with the same kind of joyful glee the Grynch stole Christmas.

My buddy D.J. also knows the kind of game I run. I have nasty NPCs. They spend a whole lot of time plotting against the players. Well, in my *Amber* campaign, he and another player (The Wife, again) ganged up on one of my NPCs, shunting him into a Shadow (parallel world for you non-Amber literate folks) that was an endless sewage pipe. That got rid of my chief villain NPC, forcing me to change plans.

As soon as I was off balance, they started implementing their own plans. They made sure my chief foil was in a sewer Shadow, and they took advantage of it.

If you know your GM doesn't flesh out NPCs, start getting conversational.

If you know your GM doesn't run good combats, get into fights with important people. (This works especially well if you know how to fight and he doesn't.)

If "keeping you on your toes" is good for players, it's good for the GM, too.

(However, intentionally going against the grain of the GM's plans is just rude. Knowing he wants you to save the princess and you just blow her off kills the game. We're not talking about that here. We're talking about keeping the GM unsure about which way you're going, not killing the entire evening for everyone.)

"You Just Did What?"

You want to really give your GM a hard time? Expand your character.

Groosome the Barbarian, the biggest, baddest, dirtiest, rudest, horniest barbarian this side of the Iron Spine Mountains just found God. He's had an epiphany. He has to serve his God. He throws off his barbarian leathers, tosses his axe and breaks his bow across his knee. Then, he rushes into the church and explains that God wants him to do the Good Work.

You can hear the GM's jaw dropping, even as we speak.

Spikey the Thief, the most clever, conniving and cunning pickpocket this side of the Bloodwash River, just fell in love with a barmaid. The most beautiful barmaid he's ever seen. Spikey pulls out all the gold he's pilfered over the last few days and tells her he's on his way to buy a wedding ring. Right the hell now.

Of course, Groosome and Spikey don't derail the campaign with their newfound faith and love; they're just adding spice to the stew. Groosome goes out on the adventure without a single weapon in his hands, hoping to win over the kobolds, giants and ogres with the Good Word. After all, if it was enough to convert him, it should be enough to convert them, too. And Spikey's still going down in that dungeon, he's just gotta make sure all the gold and silver he gets go toward that ring. And wouldn't his new bride like those tapestries? And those boots? And those chests. . .

A Terminal End

It's a bit short this month, but I've been busy. I had to get *Orkworld* to the printer, pack up my house, get galley copies of *Orkworld* for Origins, pack for Origins, fly to Origins, fly back from Origins, supervise movers, pack up road trip stuff, drive from San Bernardino (LA) to Petaluma (San Francisco) and get ready for a New Job with Totally Games. Very busy this month, but I've got one last Player Trick for you before I go.

Tell your GM how you want your character to die.

Be very specific.

Then, when the opportunity arises, snatch it and hold on with both hands. Wrap your legs around it, sink your teeth in and don't let go.

Go with a bang and a smile.

Take care, and I'll see you all in thirty.

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