



ADVANCED DM WORKSHOP

RUNNING HIGH LEVEL GAMES

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OUTLINE

- Leveling up as a DM
- Advanced DM Tips
- Q&A

LEVELING UP AS A DM

- As a DM, you have a responsibility to entertain, engage and excite.
- **You** are how the players see and interact with the world.
- In higher level play, where the stakes and **power levels** are high, it's even more important to work towards creating a consistent game experience.
- A DM can improve by brushing up on **game and rules knowledge**, as well as better storytelling techniques.



*T4, WHERE AH KONG EXPECTS
A VISIT EVERY OTHER DAY.*

UPPING YOUR DM GAME

- D&D is a shared experience. It's a game of heroic triumphs and challenges facilitated by the DM.
- Recognize that it's not a case of you vs. them. There's no need to salt when the PCs wreck your encounters, beat your BBEG, or go off script.
- Remember that you're rooting for the PCs to succeed (but they don't need to know that).



*CONFLICT IN GAME SHOULD NEVER
BE ABOUT PLAYERS VS. DM.*

UPPING YOUR DM GAME (CONT'D)

- Each DM has their own style, and that's perfectly okay.
- Recognize that it's important to **find your own voice**.
- Developing your cool DM powers comes with time and practice. Don't rush it.
- Don't force yourself to DM if it's not fun for you.



*HE'S A GREAT ROLL MODEL,
BUT YOU'RE NOT THIS GUY.*



ADVANCED DM TIPS

Players especially love Tip #3.

TIP #1: READ THE F*CKING MODULE

- If you're unprepared and are waffling, it shows.
- Take note of important story beats, characters, locations, and quest objectives. Expect players may ask you for all sorts of information.
- Pay attention to stat blocks and take note of story specific changes.
- You are empowered.

If something is not explicitly covered in the module, don't be afraid to give a thematically appropriate answer.



HOW DO YOU SET A SCENE LIKE THIS? :O

TIP #1: READ THE F*CKING MODULE (CONT'D)

- Sometimes, you will need additional research to create a more coherent gaming experience.
- In the case of AL, it is helpful to familiarize yourself with the history of FR, recent happenings and in-universe lore. FR Wiki is not a terrible resource.
- Dropping little snippets of information that paint a clearer picture of the setting and the context for the adventure can be beneficial.
- If you're not sure about something, don't be afraid to ask for a time-out to quickly devise a strategy or to check.

TIP #2: PLAN AROUND YOUR PLAYERS

- Ask the players about their characters and backstory, their Backgrounds and affiliations.
- Get them to pen down their character names, important stats, and details.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a character audit so you can get a quick glance at their character sheets.
- Modify the adventure to play to the strengths of the group, create opportunities for each player to shine, and challenge them to overcome obstacles by working together.



*OH NO! WE'RE IN TROUBLE!
WHATEVER SHALL WE DO?*

TIP #2: PLAN AROUND YOUR PLAYERS (CONT'D)

- If you are unfamiliar with the abilities of a PC, be sure to read up and check.
- Familiarize yourself with the spells enemies & PCs commonly use so you can adjudicate effects quickly and efficiently.



*BECAUSE THEY'D RATHER PET A DOG THAN
FIGHT THIS GUY*

TIP #3: ALWAYS ALLOW “IT”.

- Never just say “No” to your players. Ask them to describe what they intend to do, then decide if it would logically work in the narrative.
- Encourage and reward players for **thinking outside the box** or coming up with **interesting solutions** to a problem in the adventure.
- Don’t be afraid to **grant a player advantage** at your discretion, or to award inspiration for intelligent/creative plays.



*“I WILL ALLOW IT” IS AH KONG’S
CATCHPHRASE.*

TIP #4: IMPROVISED SKILL CHECKS ARE GREAT

- Sometimes, players may ask for something that isn't already covered in the rules. That's when Improvised Skill Checks come into play.
- Pick a Skill or Ability score that fits the situation and is logical for the game world.
- Reward your players if they come up with an especially intelligent or creative use for a Skill.



*CAN I TRY TO FIND A LEAD USING
INVESTIGATION (CHA) INSTEAD?*

TIP #5: USE PASSIVE CHECKS

- To speed up play, maintain immersion and reward players who have invested resources in Skills, don't be afraid to use Passive Skill checks.
- Typically, you apply this to Passive Perception, Passive Investigation and Passive Insight.
- You can also use $10 + \text{the value of other Skills}$ as a gauge to expedite gameplay as needed. e.g. Passive Arcana.



*WHAT DO I SEE WITH MY 27 PASSIVE
PERCEPTION?*

TIP #6: BE DESCRIPTIVE

- Describe the world as much as possible, while **avoiding mechanical language**.
- Tell the players what they see, what they hear, what they might immediately notice about their surroundings and the situation they find themselves in.
- Give the players information to work with.
- Don't withhold information from the players or deceive them if the adventure doesn't call for it.



*THAT SWAMP GAS IS NASTY... OR SOMEONE
ATE BEANS FOR LUNCH*

TIP #7: ALWAYS ASSUME CHARACTER COMPETENCE

- Always assume that a character has some degree of in-universe knowledge.
- A character exists in the game world, and has training, knowledge and abilities that matter.
- Reward players for their choices and their investment in resources, by offering them relevant information if it's thematically appropriate to do so.
- Remind players if their choices may be sub-optimal despite their character's knowledge.



*CHARACTERS SHOULDN'T ALWAYS PAY FOR
A PLAYER'S SINS*

TIP #8: DESCRIBE ACTION CINEMATICALY

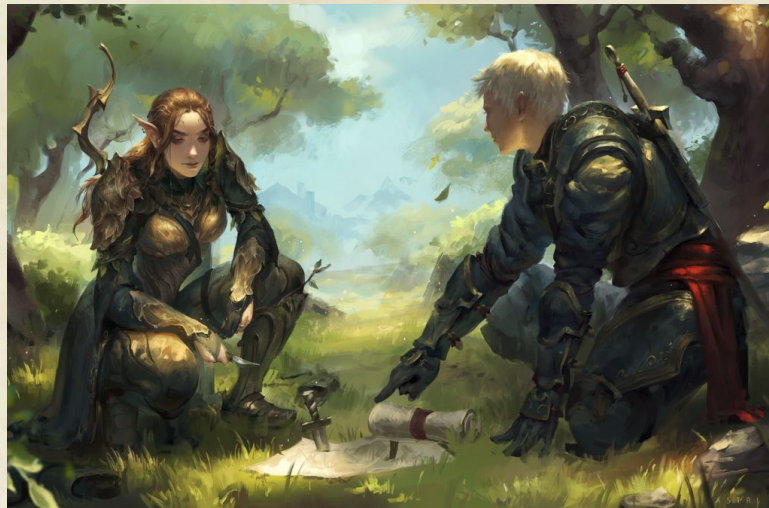
- In D&D, combat and action sequences are part and parcel of the game. Encourage heroics, and work with the players to draw them in.
- Combat is not a slog of rolling dice and hitting/missing. Learn to describe actions in a dramatic and engaging manner and make the PCs the stars of the show.
- Use descriptions in combat and action sequences to give players important cues and clues about the dangers they face. This can prompt better decision making and is integral to gameplay.



*“YOU SEE ORCUS STANDING OVER A BIG
BRAIN” DOESN’T REALLY CUT IT*

TIP #9: KEEP PLAYERS INVESTED

- Give everyone a chance to respond and to contribute at the table.
- Go around the table, and ask each player what they might want to do in a given situation.
- Give players enough opportunities to discuss, plan, and execute their plan in character.
- Draw players into the game by working their backgrounds, stories, and training into the adventure.
- Offer chances to each player to shine.



*ALL THIS PLANNING, JUST TO FIGURE OUT
HOW TO OPEN A DOOR*

TIP #10: THE DICE DON'T ACTUALLY MATTER

- Don't fixate on the dice.
- Sometimes, it is perfectly okay to fudge dice rolls to heighten suspense, or to reward players for their efforts.
- The dice are there to create an illusion, but the results that you call should always favor of a positive narrative and success on the part of the players.
- Focus less on the mechanics, and on telling a great story.



*THE DRAGON IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE
DRAGON!*

Q&A