

# Setting and GM Forum 3 Minutes

21/11/2015 at the University

## Led By

Judith O.

## Attending

Warren J., Ruth S., Dave S., James G., Hannah M., Alicia W., Adrian C., Lee Z.H.

Note: As this was a fairly informal meeting, items have been grouped in the minutes to make more sense.

## Volunteer to run next meeting

As Judith would rather not have to run (and minute) every GMing Forum there was a request for a volunteer to organise the next one. Dave S. stepped up, and will try and arrange the next one for June.

## Actions from previous meeting

### Dealing with IC (not OOC) darkness and light

Due to not having any appropriate games since the last meeting there hasn't been an opportunity to test this.

### Dealing with OOC darkness

The suggestion of "white lights for OOC, coloured for IC" has been tested and works pretty well as an easy way to mark OOC safety lights/avoid blindings IC.

A suggestion was to use real or LED candles and similar at 24/36hrs or other games with a stationary aspect as a much 'friendlier' way of providing IC lighting than using electric lighting.

### Sightless call

Sightless as an addition to a damage call has been tested and agreed to be extremely useful, especially in large fights.

A variant on the same thing has been 'undead' to signify what things Bless works against.

### Armour sashes

These have been tested and deemed very useful; there's enough colour contrast between them to be easily recognisable in anything other than full darkness, and it's a massive boost both to spellcasters and the people wearing the sashes (as a reminder that they have armour).

The only issue is getting people to remember to use them; while it's likely that with time and practice they'll become a normal feature of games, one suggestion is making up enough that the average monster crew can carry a sash of each colour (or even two) in a pocket at all times during a game.

### Newbie Support

As part of the run up to the Fresher Intro Claire arranged for a full set of Guild Primers to be written - this led to a few other newbie documents being written as well, such as spotter guides for the Pathfinders and Humacti.

This led to a follow-on activity of reworking the Information Architecture (i.e. how things are grouped with other things) of the website entirely, due to be completed around Christmas. The content is intended to stay roughly the same but be laid out in a far more friendly way for newbies and oldbies alike.

There was a quick demonstration of the updated website layout in its draft form, and the following suggestions made:

- Add first aiders to the Roles page
- Add information on how characters without Guilds can learn restricted skills - this would help balance out Guilds.
- Add what's considered appropriate behaviour for non-Temple priests and followers of Paths (e.g. not accepting opposing Path miracles) and giving the Paths more flavour text
- Add explanations of what's needed to get a culture/religion/nation/Guild onto the relevant pages

## Guild Videos

The old Guild videos have been dug out, cleaned up and added to the website. Judith would like to redo them at some point, probably once the weather improves, so that each and every Guild gets its own video.

There was a request for a YouTube channel to be set up, not least because there's scope for other member-shot videos to be added, but Judith wasn't sure how to set up a channel that would allow multiple users to upload videos without sharing passwords.

**Action:** Dave to investigate multi-user YouTube channels.

## Monster Manual

The rejig work was started, sort of, but ended up being lower priority than other jobs going on in the same period.

It was reaffirmed that this is purely meant to be something that the Character Refs can take away and use to rework the existing Monster Manual to cover all 'standard' monsters, 'standard' templates, and provide the basis of a 'how to build your own monsters' section for GMs to keep things consistent (while still interesting and surprising).

In some cases this should be more along the lines of statting and roleplay notes, in particular in the cases of Druids, Amazons and Barbarians who exist as playable character types but can and often do behave differently when they appear as monsters.

It was also suggested to include a 'standard stats layout' template for GMs as part of the 'building a monster' guide, with the following as a starting suggestion:

### **Name** (rank)

Life: L (H/C)

Armour: A (Armour type/skill + Toughness + Buffs + Dex)

Damage: D (Weapon type/skill + Strength + Buffs)

Willpower: W

Standing: S

Miracles: Either a) a full list of all miracles or b) the top level miracle plus the levels involved.

Mana: M

Spells: Either a) a full list of all spells or b) the top level spells plus the levels involved

Other: Any other skills, grouped by type.

Optionally this can be in a two-column format, with castings and power in the right-hand column.

One recommendation for this was to avoid, where possible, giving a list of “N castings to level M” to avoid the twin issues of monsters having to decide what castings those should be and monsters being too good at working out in combination what those castings should be.

**Action:** Judith to finish setting up the basic information gathering documents and open them up for the club to work on.

**Action:** Judith to set up the statting template for GMs to easily borrow and use.

## Assigning Rank Brackets

At the request of the Committee there was a discussion about the assigning of rank brackets to games in the hope of getting games at brackets to suit all players with active characters.

Although the sample size was small, the general agreement was that the GMs who would normally fill up odd game slots over the summer were largely suffering from GM burn-out or otherwise occupied. Attempts to get GMs to apply for multiple games were confusing, and largely defeated by natural politeness making applying over other people rather uncomfortable.

On the other hand, Tadeo's rank bracket analysis spreadsheet was considered very useful as a way for GMs to get an idea of what brackets were popular - and as a result get ideas for games. As a way to perhaps make it more useable, rather than a list of characters and ranks it could be split into a number of worksheets for 'high', 'medium' and 'low' rank games (or some other easy split) to make it easy to see what characters fall into what brackets.

The biggest spark for game ideas tends to be discussing them, so the following ideas were suggested as ways to help this in the immediate future:

- Add a new board purely for people to discuss games they'd like to run.
- Add a spreadsheet along the lines of Andy's 'games players would like to run' for GMs to wave ideas at the players.
- Add a spreadsheet for GMs to have 'games they can run whenever' for the committee to use as a pool, with GMs willing to be flexible on date getting priority on games being run when they need a specific date.

The following ideas for future website development were mooted:

- Add a better 'characters I would like to play' indicator (instead of active/retired)
- Add an 'other dates' field on applications, so GMs don't have to obviously apply over each other
- Add a way for the Committee to put 'preferred rank brackets' on game slots
- Add in an attend/not-attend option for game slots that aren't yet open to players to gauge interest
- Create a 'potential games' page that players could sign up for - GMs can use this to find out what games would be played by what ranks

Hiding applications was considered, but it was felt that GMs sometimes get more ideas for games from seeing the empty game slots.

One other thing that was causing GMs trouble is the turnaround time for Character Ref decisions, both pre- and post-game; the current set-up gets very frustrating as a GM. It was suggested that this might well be a good time to split out the current Character Ref role into separate Rules and Setting Refs to help split the workloads; this might also help GMs come up with ideas if there was more work done on the setting.

**Action:** Judith to take ideas to the Committee

**Action:** Warren to add code development requests to the BladesDb Tracker

## Freeform Discussion

### Statting for the 'generic party'

There was a discussion about how much it was fair to penalise a party for having basic toolbox castings like Mend and healing. On one hand people should be allowed to play their characters how they like within reason; on the other, it's very frustrating as a GM when characters are being built to statlines so specific that there's no changes made to meet the needs of a campaign nor room for useful castings.

In general it was tentatively agreed that for commonly needed, low level castings that could be picked up by non-priests - Mend, Remove Fear and healing variants in particular - it's generally fair for GMs to assume that the 'generic party' should have access over rank 20 and probably earlier, and it's fair for campaign GMs not to throttle themselves unnecessarily if there are characters that could pick up needed skills after a few games but have chosen not to.

However, healing encounters and similar are still a valid way for GMs to get around these issues, but potentially being less 'kind' about it (high cost, low benefit).

### Battleboards

There was a discussion around best practice and useful ideas when keeping a battleboard, with a suggestion of a common template being made available. Judith has since found a custom notebook printer, so this could become a fixed thing if the club were interested.

- Use two colours of pen/pencil and swap colour at each battleboard. That way, when the player inevitably goes 'oh hang on I forgot' you can easily see where you need to work back from - and it makes working out the life subtraction totals much easier.
- Add an extra column next to the armour column for starting Wounds and a similar blocked off starting total for Life - it makes it easier to see what 'full' is.
- Record Permanent Endurances and similar items on the battleboard, or if there's an Earth mage/Spellsworn then just write 'Endurance' or 'Mystic Life' as a reminder. It may save a character's life.
- If the character is a witchdoctor or shaman, use the back of their battleboard to battleboard their fetch or spirit guide.
- For mages with Steal Mana in particular, mark a p/m next to the standing/mana lists and cross it out when used - easier for the GMs to see where people are up to.

### Casting physreps

Some castings, by their very nature, should probably be made more visible, the main contenders being Radiate/Immolate and the Form spells.

Radiate/Immolate: Glowstick necklace or red fairy lights. Only issue is that it can be a Touch casting, so there's the need to keep supplies; Disguise in theory has the same issue (James G. admitted to keeping a supply of white masks in Monty's hat for this purpose).

Form spells: A red (Fire)/yellow (Air)/blue (Water)/brown (Earth)/white (Cloud) scarf, mask or armband - to be declared by the player at the start of the game.

As these are very much a case of best practice that would need to be club-wide to make sense it was agreed the most useful option would be to open up discussion to the club as a whole and decide a) what castings could use physreps and b) what physreps could be used.

There was also a suggestion of using sound effects as an option (crackling flames etc.) but this is a more technologically-advanced solution that might be harder to make available without risking mobile phone destruction.

**Action:** Judith to get this opened up to club discussion when appropriate.

## Spiritual influences

The main issues around Spiritual Influences - especially ones that come with attached effects - is the issue of either the GM stopping running games or the player wanting nothing more to do with that GM or plotline. As such, there either need to be limits on Spiritual Influences or ways to remove them. Attempts to research such as a casting have been made but have been rejected by the Character Refs.

As a best practice for GMs to follow, the suggestion is to have a three-tier system of Spiritual Influences:

- Lesser/Temporary: easily removed, no attached effect or low level only.
- Time/Usage-bound: harder to remove, but with a fixed expiry date (year and a day) or on use of attached affect. More powerful effects, but still limited.
- Greater/Permanent: requires a casting equivalent to the holy-symbol-destruction ceremony to be removed (not impossible, but difficult). Significantly more powerful effects but must have Character Ref sign-off.

The tier of influence should be included on a DSI check to avoid confusing characters too much.

Hero Abilities are somewhat different, and were always intended originally to be awarded for a character roleplaying things in a particular, stand-out way that exemplified who they were over a long period of time. Traditionally they were handed out by Tony at around rank 20+; the equivalent now would presumably be from the Character Refs at rank 50+. Based on the system above this would be the same as a Permanent Spiritual Influence.

Limiting the use of Permanent Spiritual Influences should balance out Marcus's fears around characters getting too many of them, thus fixing that issue at the same time. There was a brief suggestion of limiting Spiritual Influences based on number across all of a player's characters but this seemed somehow unfair.

**Action:** Judith to bring this discussion to the Character Ref Team's attention for consideration.

## The naming of monsters

Naming conventions around monsters was considered as a way to reduce confusion and make Rec Creature slightly easier to use. For example:

- 'Ghoul' implies the creature is Undead, regardless of what's appended to the name.
- Splitting out 'Shambling Mound' from 'Grove Guardian' as a way to identify Dark/Light Druidic constructs.
- Having a similar naming convention for Demons as per the Towers etc - so Imp, Demon, Archdemon, Demon Lord or similar.
- Specific other words being used to identify 'fae' versions, undead versions etc.

It was generally agreed this would need to go to the club to get a better list of ideas together, but once done it would be easy to run up a set of guidelines for GMs.

**Action:** Judith to get this opened up to club discussion as part of the Monster Manual re-vamp.

## Actions

Based on the discussions above, these are the actions that should be pursued for the next GM Forum.

- Dave S.: Organise the next GMing Forum (some time between April and June)
- Dave S.: Investigate multi-user YouTube channels
  
- Judith O.: Finish setting up the basic information gathering documents for the Monster Manual and open them up for the club to work on.
- Judith O.: Set up the statting template for GMs to easily borrow and use.
- Judith O.: Take ideas around rank brackets and games to the Committee.
- Judith O.: Open up casting physreps to club discussion when appropriate.
- Judith O.: Bring discussion of Spiritual Influences to the Character Ref Team's attention for consideration.
- Judith O.: Open up monster naming conventions to club discussion as part of the Monster Manual re-vamp.
  
- Warren J.: Add code development requests to the BladesDb Tracker