

No Gods, No Masters

An Overview of Unfacilitated “GMless” Design Frameworks

Ben Bisogno | 美園 勉 (ビソノ ベン)

Kyoto City University of Art | 京都市立芸術大学
benbisogno@gmail.com

Abstract

Answering the call of social justice movements, in particular *Black Lives Matter* marches, to critically appraise power structures that shape how we live, role-playing game designers, both in live-action role-playing (larp) and tabletop, have responded by casting a critical lens on the narrative systems that shape how we play. Just as these movements have challenged enduring inequalities that limit the realization of minority members’ agency in the public domain, many new games insist that it is not merely troubling content that may give people pause from engaging in the role-playing hobby. Rather, many of these games reconsider the structure of conventional play itself, in which one individual holds asymmetrical power to influence the narrative, echoing other asymmetrical (and even unjust) hierarchies at large in society. These games demonstrate that this central figure is not necessary for evocative play and a group’s imaginative capabilities. Games without a Game Master, “GMless” games, often aim to expand avenues of creative input and liberate a table from the aegis of a single member’s directorial aesthetics. This essay claims that social justice movements have had an influence on the outpouring of GMless game designs in the last half-decade. Further, this essay identifies several conventional responsibilities associated with the role of the Game Master, illustrating how a variety of published GMless designs in both, larps and TRPGs, reimagine, remix, and reincorporate these responsibilities, making possible more egalitarian and – for many – more welcoming roleplaying experiences.

Keywords: Liberation, Anarchism, GMless

要約

2013年に始まった「ブラック・ライブズ・マター」(黒人の命は重要)の行進をはじめとする分散型社会正義運動の高まりと同時に、ロールプレイングゲームデザイナーは、LARP(ライブアクションロールプレイング)とTRPG(テーブルトップ・ロールプレイングゲーム)の両方で、私たちの遊び方の物語構造に批判的な視点を投げかけてきた。これらの運動が、アウトサイダーとされるアイデンティティを持つ人々、つまり人種的マイノリティのメンバーや、他の人々よりも機会や発信力が少ない人々が、社会の構造的不平等に抗議するのと同様に、従来のゲームの構造的な不平等を批判がある。例えば、異なるバックグラウンドを持つ人々にロールプレイングゲームへの関与を躊躇させる一因に「ゲームマスター」ありきの従来のゲームの構造にあると考える。ゲーム体験を調整し促進する「ゲームマスター」は、当然ながら他のプレイヤーと比較して、物語に影響を与える大きな非対称の力を持つ。これは実際の社会における他の非対称(さらには不当な)構造に似ている。こういったゲームは、この役割が常に必要とされるわけではなく、プレイを阻害する可能性に言及している。これに対してゲームマスターのいないゲーム、「GMなしゲーム」は、しばしばプレイヤーによる創造的な道を拡大する可能性を持つ。一人ひとりのプレイヤーの想像力の制限を、ゲームの支配者たるGMから解放するからだ。本稿では、まずゲームマスターの役割に関連する従来の役割・責任を明らかにする。またLARPとTRPGの両方において、公表されているGMなしのデザインが、それらを再構築、再ミックス、また再解釈されて、より平等で、多くの人にとって魅力的な遊びを可能にしていることを論じる。

キーワード: 解放, アナーキズム, GMなし

1. Introduction

In the last decade, designers have increasingly been experimenting with game systems that provide all participants an equal say in the flow of play. New tools have rendered models of play that place a referee in the center of the action, like a dealer in a casino, coordinating the play experience. Meanwhile, a political context saturated with social activism has given designers both impetus and inspiration to

consider the appeal of these egalitarian play frameworks. This essay does not make the case that these egalitarian frameworks are somehow “superior” to games with a central facilitator, nor that they are entirely novel, but rather this essay notes that these frameworks introduce compelling techniques and perspectives that may enrich our play. Even for players who are primarily engaged in facilitated play, these frameworks are worthy of notice, something to consider when choosing what and how to play.



This essay provides two accounts by which a reader may think through this egalitarian movement in system design. In the first part of this essay, “The Political Context of GMless Game Designs,”¹ there is a brief historical and theoretical account of the social movements that have driven a burgeoning rise of new games with decentralized narrative models. There is also a practical overview of the techniques and “tricks” through which games without a central referee, the individual calling balls and strikes – often referred to as a Game Master (GM) – adapt, in the second part, beginning with “Deconstructing the Role of the Game Master.” The GM has a variety of conventional responsibilities the role is assumed to perform, and GMless games delegate these responsibilities through democratic models, where responsibilities are distributed to the other players and even to game texts themselves.

2. The Political Context of GMless Game Designs

This part of the essay explains from a theoretical perspective why GMless games have gone through a recent renaissance. The subsequent parts take a more practical approach, examining a warehouse of tools that designers have developed to make egalitarian play not only possible, but a joy. I would like to begin with a relevant historical moment that immediately inspired some designers to include non-hierarchical, unfacilitated systems in their games. In 2017 white nationalists marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the Unite the Right rally leading to deadly violence. Four years later, the city responded. The white nationalists at the time had been protesting the proposed removal of a statue of the white nationalists Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. The two figures are white power icons, “masters,” who held people hostage and enslaved them until the conclusion of the American Civil War. These symbols of racist hate were toppled.

The year after the rally, in 2018, two independent “indie” game designers, Avery Alder and Benjamin Rosenbaum, published an influential egalitarian system for tabletop role-playing games. They developed it in the duet game book *Dream Askew / Dream Apart* (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019),* which pointedly did not feature a GM. The authors called this system, fittingly, “No Dice, No Masters.” *Dream Askew** is a game where players play members of a queer (LGBTQ+) enclave surviving amidst the collapse of civilization. *Dream Apart* features an idealized Jewish shtetl, a village, in a

fantasy version of 19th-century Eastern Europe. They were published in one volume. Benjamin Rosenbaum describes in *Dream Apart* how writing about Jewish life was for him a way of fighting antisemitism, meaningful in an era in which nazi sympathizers are so prominent, as had happened in Charlottesville in 2017. He says, “after the chanting in Charlottesville, fighting anti-Semitism has never felt less frivolous, so there’s that” (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019, 139).

These were not the first GM-less games,² nor the first dice-less games. However, they were emblematic of the notion that designers could not just include political ideas in their games. Rather, they could design a game’s system itself in a way to embody these ideas, driving them home. In the book in which both games are published, the designers emphasize that in a “No Dice, No Masters” design, the gameplay is driven by the “choices that players make” rather than random chance in die rolls or through mediation and reactions of a Game Master. The games thereby encourage a heightened degree of consent regarding the direction of a plot. In these games, most choices, even those that are deleterious to their characters, are made by the players. Ideally, they in turn empower players to shape their narratives so that they may more actively consent enthusiastically to their play experiences.

Alder’s *Dream Askew* and Rosenbaum’s *Dream Apart*, which together established the “No Dice, No Masters” game engine, describe themselves as texts that center on a “marginalized group of people living together in a precarious community” (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019, 4). They aim to capture the experience of these groups that survives on the margins. Although fictional settings, through the games’ simple but dramatic rules, players may get the feeling that the games are bracingly real in how it makes them feel – the meditation on how we might live in a social context. This is to suggest that while the games are not “realistic” they do hold a degree of veracity. The games self-consciously reflect the struggles of marginalized people in the real world. In the same manner, in which they allow players to reflect openly on the game world and the story they tell in it, the games too open up the reflection on players’ live experience itself as well.

Avery Alder, who co-created the “No Dice, No Masters” system, was no newcomer to the disposition that design could advance ideas, political or otherwise. She wrote the following in 2019, implicitly claiming that many designers in her scene had been making works that actually aim to shape the

¹ A note on terminology: Throughout this essay, the author uses the following terms interchangeably. While these terms have overlapping denotations, their meanings do shift slightly depending on a given game text, and this will be noted when relevant.

- Game Master (GM) / Referee / Facilitator / Master of Ceremonies (MC) / Host / Guide

- GMed play / Refereed play / Facilitated play

- GMless play / Unfacilitated play

² The earliest GMless games I am familiar with are *Universalis* by Ralph Mazza, Mike Holmes (2002), and *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* by James Wallis (1998).

public sphere, to do good in the world. She states that the indie role-playing game (rpg) community, at least those involved in the discourse on Twitter, are often concerned with social justice.

When people talk about “the rpg community” I always find it helpful to take a few deep breaths and remember that there are many rpg communities. Usually they mean “the indie RPG design twitter discourse community centered on a certain subset of games and social justice concerns[.]” (Alder on Twitter, 2019)

Alder has written in one of her blogs in 2009 that for her, role-playing games “create experiences. Experiences that we haven’t had the opportunity to live through. They allow us to recontextualize our paradigms, challenge us to see things in a new light” (Alder 2009). For her, role-playing games enable unique experiences that might not otherwise be available to us.³ Five years later, in her keynote talk at *Possibilities*, a queer gaming marathon in Calgary, Adler continues this line of thought (2014). She cites the need for new possibilities in gaming, new kinds of stories, and kinds of practices that would fight back against a world that divides power unevenly.⁴ This is almost five years to the day before the crowdfunding campaign of her and Rosenbaum’s “No Dice No Masters” game system in *Dream Askew/Dream Apart*.

Her speech calls for new modes for understanding the world. It points at gameplay as an avenue by which we may transform ourselves, foregrounding a world currently unavailable to us. She views games as “training for becoming a better human” (ibid). Embodying the impossible is at the heart of role-playing for Alder. By creating games that do away with traditional relationships in which one player voices the majority of characters or has unequal control over narrative outcomes (the GM), new ways to play emerge and with them the foundations of new ways to transcend and redefine our own lives.

Many GMless games in the wake of present-day social justice movements approach toppling the “Game Master”. It is resonant with the tendency of current social justice movements to cast a critical lens on figures of unequal power in all forms. The very word “master” in “game master” echoes the historical

and figurative “slave master” that, in the eyes of these movements, still persists today through racial disparities. For example, in the gaming hobby, there are still problems with representation. In 2016 Julia Bond Ellingboe, a woman of color who designed *Steal Away Jordan* (2008), a game about survival and heroism amid enslavement during a period of American history in which it was legal, said the following, highlighting the dearth of representation in gaming.

Although I can find other women game designers in the scene, I see a scant few Black designers. It’s hard to be the unicorn. In my day-to-day life I’m one of the only African Americans in my workplace. (Ellingboe in Castiello Jones 2016, para. 32)

These words are spoken during the same year in which just the first half of July alone featured 112 protests in 88 American cities (Lee et al. 2016). After the march of white nationalists in Charlottesville two years later, the mood was ripe, this essay argues, for designers to attempt the seeming “impossible” (borrowing Alder’s language), to create games that pursued the work of ‘justice’, not just in the game worlds, but through the way they structured play. This justice allows for more narrative control by all players at a table and invites non-linear, modes of story-telling that do not aim to be cinematic in their effects, as under the purview of a director. These games instead focus on affect and immersion in the milieu.

As with many prior GMless game models, “No Dice, No Masters” games self-consciously involve “exploration, and an experiment. It starts with a lot of discussion and curiosity, and evolves from there” (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019, 8). These games are not merely a collection of verbs where players enact a series of individual character reactions in exchanges with a GM, as one may expect from a more conventional game. Famously, the immediate inspiration for Alder’s *Dream Askew*,⁵ Vincent and Meguey Baker’s (2016) *Apocalypse World* guides a GM to ask the players “what do you do” after every dramatic action taken by the GM. It is very action-oriented. By contrast, these games’ emphasize reflection – in the form of “conversation,” “exploration,” and “experiment” – is not at the

³ This faculty of cognition, to see perspectives that are not our own, may be one of the elementary principles that enable us to become well-adjusted members of the public; it is in part based on it that we can be political animals at all. One of the most well-known politically inclined philosophers of the 20th century, Hannah Arendt, writes late in her career that the enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant’s account of human’s ability to make judgments, defined as the ability ‘to think from the position of every other person’ may be the “truest” expression of his political philosophy (Arendt 2007, 168). This account holds that good judgment is based on “the greatest possible overview of all the possible standpoints and viewpoints from which an issue can be seen and judged” (Kant [1790] 1980,

153). For Arendt, being well-versed in seeing other people’s perspectives is inherently political. Judgment “may be one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm” (Arendt 1961, 219, 221).

⁴ This occurred three months after actions by the New York City Police Department killed Eric Gardner, a spark which led to the march of 25,000 people in New York that December (Mueller and Southall 2014).

⁵ “*Dream Askew* is powered by the *apocalypse*, meaning it takes inspiration from the pages of *Apocalypse World*. *Dream Apart* does too, even if it’s a little less direct” (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019, 172).

periphery, as may be the case in action-based play cultures and games,⁶ but are central to the experience.

Avery Alder and Benjamin Rosenbaum's games both contain the word "Dream" in their titles because, as has been noted, that is what players are, in fact, encouraged to do in play. The authors permit players to play out "dreams" (hence the games' titles) in which players can imagine what the game-world can possibly be like. They ask players to make space for "idle dreaming as a group" and "follow[ing] your curiosity" (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019, 174). These games do not dwell on task resolution but rather on resolving inner conflicts and exploring implications both internally and within communities. Role-playing games have the daunting task of melding the minds of players to create a shared consensus of scene work in a group's mind's eye. These games ask players to approach this challenge by wondering aloud about new directions and then choosing the best way forward in with the goings-on of the game world, with the choice to backtrack left open. Rather than deepening immersion into narratively coherent storylines, players are given leeway to immerse into the "environment," rendering "realistic" the different aspects of an alternate world" (Bowman 2017).

Rae Nedjadi, a prominent indie designer active in both GMless and GMed games, describes his navigation between the two kinds of games as a shift in mindset. He explains how he entered the TRPG hobby through GM-led games like *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax and Arneson 1974) and has not always been "satisfied" with the idle dreaming aspect of play. He has often felt he needed to take the initiative and help move in play. However, in a recent session of his GMless game *Our Haunt* (Nedjadi 2022a), run on the "No Dice, No Masters" system, in which players play as ghosts to find community in the afterlife, he was very impressed with how his group found joy in simply developing side characters, creating whole family units, using images aggregated from the website Pinterest and creating a wall of vibrant side-characters on a Google sheet Character Keeper (cf. Hermann and Reininghaus 2021). Just imagining who they are and enjoying figuring out what "their pronouns are" was central to the fun of their play session.

There's this noticeable shift...going from a GMed game to a GMless game and it's pretty smooth for the most part, but I still

feel like there is a part of me that facilitates and co-GMs a little bit just to get the ball rolling... There is a part of me that used to not really enjoy the idle dreaming aspect of *Belonging Outside Belonging*...I like pushing towards story or character growth or plot development of some kind...but this is the first time... that it has been really fruitful and...feels like it really brings a lot to the game (Nedjadi 2022b).

The statement "No Dice, No Masters" is a spin on an old revolutionary declaration, a self-conscious inheritance carrying forward of revolutionary spirit,⁷ one that rejects limits and the "no you can't"s of masters of all forms.⁸ These games are emblematic of many GMless games in that they insist, "yes, you can." In this manner, these games attempt to live up to the core promise inherent in any game set in the theater of the mind; in these types of games, unburdened by the physical limitations of bodies and living conditions, players are invited to be free, to use their imagination to explore new worlds and be anything they can imagine.⁹ As Alder says, role-playing promises to "practice being the impossible" (Alder 2014, 9 minutes 5 seconds). GMless play, at its best, by highlighting the degree of personal agency a player wields at the table makes the practice of roleplaying more accessible.

3. Deconstructing the Role of the Game Master

GMless design frameworks, even apolitical games and those created before the rise of present-day activist movements, have reinterpreted the conventional roles the GM has played in ingenious ways. Let us first characterize the roles a Game Master is expected to perform when facilitating play. By doing so, we may come to a common understanding of what games without a GM do that is unusual.

This is true in both tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), games in which players act as characters in the theater of the mind, and in live-action role-playing games (larps), games in which players embody their characters in play. The figure of a GM has conventionally been asymmetrically responsible for making sure their players are having

⁶ To read more about play cultures, I recommend Johanna Koljonen's article on "Larp Safety Design Fundamentals" (Koljonen 2020).

⁷ "No Gods, No Masters" is a historical anarchist and labor rights slogan, a movement that emphasized the destruction of power structures and equality for all. The phrase itself finds its English origin in a pamphlet handed out by the Industrial Workers of the World during the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike. However, originally this expression derives from the French slogan "Ni dieu ni maître!" (literally 'Neither God nor master'), a neologism that in 1880 was coined by the socialist, and one time president

of the Paris Commune, Louis Auguste Blanqui (Jahsonic 2020; Sangdeboeuf, Czar, et al. 2022).

⁸ "[T]he first lesson the master teaches is always how to say the words 'I can't.'" Eric Stein (2021, 7) writes quoting Jacque Ranciere (1991).

⁹ William J. White, a scholar on early RPG forums, especially the Forge community, describes how "Deprotagonization" and "Railroading," practices that deprive players of their agency, were often seen to create "a number of problems... cutting [a] game's ability to facilitate imaginative exploration of any sort" (White 2020, 150). Agency is important to the joy of role-playing.

a good time. At the least, this is one historical view.¹⁰ In a traditional mode of thought, this figure has more narrative control in exchange for the burden of providing an impactful narrative experience to their gaming group. The facilitating figure takes on the mental load of thinking about narrative reactions to character actions so that players have more energy to focus on thinking “in character” and are better able to immerse themselves in the scenes they play out. Games with a game master, “GMed” games, do not tend to drift or rewind. GMs engage in reacting to players in give-and-take dynamics. In these games, players are in charge of making choices about how their individual characters may act. Both at a table in the case of TRPGs and embodied, in the case of LARP, GMed games often enable high-resolution, even cinematic experiences. These experiences may produce in a player an enjoyable sensation of “flow,” the feeling that they are truly in-character. This has been described as role-playing at its “best” (Hopeametsä 2008).

“Flow gives a deep sense of enjoyment through the feeling that we are in control of our actions. According to Csikszentmihalyi, the best moments occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is an end in itself: the act of doing is a reward in itself. This is an accurate description of larp experience at its best” (Hopeametsä 2008, 190).

To provide this immersive effect, GMs have often taken on the following responsibilities so that players do not need to take a significant cognitive load. Players do not need to think about context. They are free to focus whole-heartedly on how their characters should act. The following is a non-exhaustive list of conventional roles GMs take on, which GMless games often reconsider. Each will be addressed and illustrated with GMless and GMless-adjacent game examples below.

1. Keeping pacing.
2. Setting and maintaining tone.
3. Teaching the rules of play.
4. Providing consequences in response to character actions.
5. Passing on an oral tradition of what role-playing means.

6. Delivering story beats and narrative outcomes.
7. Hosting the play space and creating a comfortable environment.
8. Voicing a variety of side-characters that may exist in a setting.
9. Painting a vivid idea of the setting and giving a sense of place.

A skilled GM presents situations that fit the moment, reacts to player choices, and follows narrative threads where they logically may go. Because of this, GMed games encourage a narrative give and take between players and GMs, much like players on a tennis court; players perform an action, and the GM, “serves” up an appropriate and interesting response. This provides a heightened verisimilitude, an experience of reality, because the world players inhabit is responsive. Players impact the world around them and their choices matter.

Now, the comprehensive line up of duties that have generally made running a game as that role something of a burden. Lowell Francis, a GM of hundreds of play sessions per year and community manager of the Gauntlet gaming community, describes at least five “faces” that the GM has, facets of play a GM must grapple with. While a player character may just choose how their character acts and reacts, the GM manages a whole range of narrative, dramatic, and educational faculties (Francis 2022). It is a high-bandwidth position and, therefore, can be more asymmetrically tiring. To combat this problem of fatigue, many games have been designed with a great deal of GM support, including expansive setting material and advice. GMless games take this a step further. They break apart a GM’s responsibilities and distribute them. In accordance with the list of GM responsibilities above, the following sections illustrate how a variety of GMless games tackle them. This may be of interest and even use to designers and game runners.

4. Keeping Pacing

GMs ensure that a game session runs smoothly and that events continue at pace fit for the actual time frame players expect to be engaged in play.¹¹ GMs not only advance a narrative but also are responsible for understanding when it is narratively appropriate or physically a good time to take breaks. For example, in a LARP about far future religious conversion, *2999nen fukyō no tabi* (2999: Missionary Journey) by Tamura Mitsunobu (2021), the role of the GM is to

¹⁰ “The GM’s job is to make sure everyone finds something they like” (Robitaille 2002).

¹¹ “They keep the pace going at a clip which is not too fast and not too slow. The former is about spotting if people seem to have lost the map of

the discussion. The latter is about demonstrating that the GM respects the players’ time. When a leg of a journey—a scene or point of discussion—has been completed they move this along” (Francis 2022).

cut scenes at logical points. They are also tasked with introducing play material and hosting the play, acting as a resource. However, interestingly in this game, the GM does not directly interject into the action itself; rather, they encourage conversation if players are ever at a loss about what to do next. They merely lightly facilitate the action. This is notably different from the more active roles GMs are expected to play in other games. While in fact, Mitsunobu's design is not "GMless"; it demonstrates that both GM-like features and those more associated with GMless games are available to us to use in our designs. In Mitsunobu's game, the GM still facilitates play but does not have asymmetrical influence over the story.

GMless games have used timers of various shapes to help achieve pacing. *For the Queen*, a card-based story-building game for up to six players by Alex Roberts (2019), develops a tale of love and loyalty (or lack thereof) in which players eventually answer a final question at the end of play. *For the Queen* uses a deck of cards as a timer; these cards are narrative prompts drawn in a round. When a special card is revealed, play ends. Another game that powerfully uses time, one that highlights its tone well, is a game called *Alice is Missing* by Spenser Starke (2020). It is a silent role-playing game about the disappearance of a high school junior named Alice Briarwood and the community that tries to find her. During play, participants may only communicate via text messaging. They text along to a soundtrack that provides progressively suspenseful background music: When the soundtrack is over, so is the game. This dramatic technique drives home the poignant and, at times, tense moments of play.

5. Setting and Maintaining Tone

A second feature of role-playing that GMs are traditionally responsible for is ensuring that all participants are on the same page on what kind of play to expect. Games should deliver these expectations. There are many ways games, both GMed and GMless, handle setting expectations. First of all, game text, imagery, and layout go a long way to communicate what a game is about. *Wanderhome*, a pastoral fantasy role-playing game about traveling animal-folk by Jay Dragon (2021), was designed as an art book, with many full-page and even two-page spreads featuring sentient animal folk going about their daily lives. This draws out the storybook nature of its setting, in which violence is explicitly no longer present, and people are fundamentally good.

Two games that use optional settings to help a table choose a shared tone are *Dialect* by Hakan Seyahioğlu and Kathryn Hymes (2018) and *Fiasco* by

Jason Morningstar (2009). *Dialect* is a game in which players experience the development of a language they make together at the table and witness its eventual in-fiction death. *Fiasco* is a game where players enjoy cinematic tales of small-time capers gone disastrously wrong, emulating movies like *Fargo* (1996). Both *Dialect* and *Fiasco* use optional scene settings called backdrops. Backdrops focus on highly specific themes and motifs. These optional settings, therefore, allow a playgroup to select a scenario that will appeal to their specific interests. By having an entire group of players find a consensus on which setting to experience, the games ensure a heightened level of engagement with the material. Often, people are often more interested in engaging with what they themselves have agreed to lean into. This is true in the context of education (Parker, Novak, and Bartell 2017) but also true in a role-playing context, in the author's own experience.

While not games themselves, there are a few effective tools for adjusting tone in any setting. One safety tool this author finds useful is the X-Card, created by John Stavropoulos (2013), which empowers anyone at a game table to edit any narrative content from a play session if a player finds something objectionable.¹² This not only works with potential traumatic topics but also adjusts a game's tone itself; for example, if a player brings an alien into a realistic setting, I might use the X card to adjust the tone of play and resist the mood shift just introduced.

Another way to handle tone is to explicitly announce it at the beginning of a game, writing it in the text. In *Fiasco*, Jason Morningstar writes the following to emphasize the edgy tone of the game: "One Last Fucking Thing I tried to write these rules in a conversational style that suits the subject matter and the films it references. You can expect some foul language and salacious depictions of reprehensible behavior, which will likely be par for the course in play as well. If that sort of thing bothers you, this is probably not a game you will enjoy" (Morningstar 2009, 11).

6. Teaching the Rules of Play

Traditionally, GMs would teach rules steadily over the course of play, introducing the core rules at the beginning and explaining others when relevant situations presented themselves. This piecemeal approach to teaching a game is great for lowering the mental load players are weighted with when engaging in a new system. GMless games sometimes designate one player or a group of players to read the rules and teach them. Alternatively, some GMless games employ a "slide show" style, where the most crucial

¹² See also The Gauntlet (2017) and for practical cards to be used, see Karen Twelves' *Safety and Calibration Cards* (2018; 2020)

information is taught point by point, one rule at a time. Some of these rules deal with explicit mechanics, and some have tonal implications. An example of how a game teaches players without relying on a GM is *The Deep Forest* by Mark Diaz Truman and Avery Alder (2014). It is a map-making game about “post-colonial weird fantasy” in which players are in charge of embodying the perspectives of entire groups of monsters. The text asks whoever is reading aloud to point to different objects and places on a gaming table and narrate from a script what they are. The game text itself provides a highly orchestrated explanation of play.

In *For the Queen* by Alex Roberts (2019), the tragic game of loyalty and betrayal described above, players take turns reading aloud the rules of play, one sentence at a time; each rule is written on a separate card, numbered 1 to 19 on the top of the game deck. This mode of explanation has a dual function: It not only teaches the setting and mechanical rules, but it also prepares players to take turns in a round, drawing one card at a time, so that the transition from introduction to play flows much smoother. In *Ma Nishtana: Why is this Night Different?* (Rabinowitz and Bisogno 2022), a game about revolutionary struggle, players first take turns collectively reading a version of the foundational tale of Exodus that inspired the game. The collective reading provides an impression of the original story players will reimagine – a story about ritual, escape from persecution and tested family ties. The reading ends with the following: “Consider the relevance of ritual, the terror of asymmetrical power structures, the search for a home of one’s own. These themes will hold true in our story as they have for every telling of the tale.” This emphasis on the limits of tone and demand for the inclusion of certain core themes serves to teach the essential narrative components of the game, framing a player’s headspace.

7. Provides Consequences in Response to Character Actions

GMs *react* to the choices characters make. They provide consequences. Lowell Francis simply suggests that a good GM “provide[s] a forward direction for play at the start and when players aren’t sure of the next action” (Francis 2022). If a character takes a reckless and foolish action, the GM is there to respond appropriately and satisfactorily (for the player, if not the character). In the GMless game *Ironsworn* (Tomkin 2018) players act as heroes sworn to undertake perilous quests and chart their paths through a dark fantasy world. Shawn Tomkin, the designer of the game, encourages players to use a set of “oracles” to help determine the result of something if, in fact, the result of an action is unclear. An “oracle” is a randomizer, like a tarot deck or a pick list from which a dice roll determines an outcome. The

Ironsworn rulebook includes a series of tables that provide inspirational material and narrative prompts. They help open up a range of possible eventualities players may not imagine on their own.

Consequences need not just be fictional. One GMless game that famously uses an apparatus to enact physical consequences in response to player actions, not just in-game ones, is *StarCrossed* by Alex Roberts (2019). It is a game about forbidden love in which characters “really want” to get together but “really can’t.” In it, players touch a precarious tower of tumbling blocks – think *Jenga*. In play, whenever attraction builds between characters through physical touch or sharing something personal with the other (Roberts 2019, 8), a player pulls a block, risking the tower’s collapse. When the tower falls due to one of these actions, the story ends, and players transition to the epilogue portion of the game. *Ironsworn* asks players to roll dice to discover narrative outcomes. *StarCrossed* also provides a tactile action that determines consequences; players touch a block tower which may fall at any time, changing the shape of the narrative. This makes play come alive through the introduction of an element of uncertainty. They demonstrate that fate can still be included in a game, even when a GM is not present.

8. Passing on an Oral Tradition of What Role-Playing Means

There are many stated rules in games; “When you want to do something risky, roll,” “When you get tagged, you become the one”, “Seekers will find players that hide.” However, most rules in games are implicit or often unspoken; for example, “look to the player who has not spoken in a while to check in and hear from them.” GMless games, by contrast, often aim to empower players by providing an equal playing field, and this includes in the realm of knowledge. These games often explicate exactly what kinds of play and attitudes are expected in the gaming space, so everyone is on the same page. *Yazeba’s Bed and Breakfast* is a game by various designers at Possum Creek Games (Acosta, Dragon, and Veselak 2022), written in the form of chapters, with unique rules for each chapter. Players play as residents and guests of a magical bed and breakfast. The game text is written in the voice of a casted character in the book, a devil child who suggests that cheating is okay and not to take the rules too seriously: “All rules are the same. Even the rules in this book are just like bedtimes or calendars. You can just ignore them if it makes you happy” (Acosta, Dragon, and Veselak 2022, 10). This game makes implicit rules explicit and yearns for all players should have an equally firm grasp of how to play. If they don’t understand a rule, they can cheat!

Even entire play philosophies may be taught in a game’s text. *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart*, the

games that popularized the “No Dice, No Masters” format of GMless play, by Avery Alder and Benjamin Rosenbaum, devote an entire section of their duet volume to “Troubleshooting the Transition” to GMless play. The games ask a host of a game to unlearn some “instincts and techniques” used in more tactile or old-school dice-rolling games in favor of “cultivating others” (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019, 174). The authors say that participants may need to “delegate to other players” to “take it slow” and not expect the game to immediately dive into conflict and adventure with a definitive narrative arc, the way a “prepared story might.” These games are very self-conscious about what kind of atmosphere they want at the tables they are played at and aim to teach players how to interact with them. This is not always true in conventional GM-oriented games. Traditionally GMs learn how to handle their position through play culture, accreting a collected sense of what it means to roleplay over the course of playing many game sessions. In GMless games texts, by contrast, no player has secret knowledge and therefore holds no position of privilege. They attempt to empower every player, no matter if they are new to the role-playing hobby or are weathered veterans.

9. Delivering Story Beats and Narrative Outcomes

GMs are often in charge of scene framing and delivering satisfying story endings. GMless games take on this challenge in stride. *Red Carnations on a Black Grave* by Catherine Ramen (Ramen and Ochoa 2018) is a game about the lives and tragedies of working-class people caught up in the ultimately doomed events of the Paris Commune. In the game, the designer uses a pre-made deck of cards with questions that both define relationships and provide scene prompts called “inspiration cards”; these cards are “90% based on actual posters” produced by the historical commune the game is based on (Jágr Sheldon 2019). Whenever the action lulls, the “inspiration cards” detail a historical situation and some sense impressions as a way to spur on play. They function to create narrative beats for the story.

Paranormal Inc. is a game by Alicia Furness (2021) that emulates the movie *Ghostbusters* (1984).

It is about solving mysteries and confronting personal hauntings. In it, there is no determined outcome to a mystery. Depending on how players role-play, a story’s outcome changes. In the game, players theorize their own answer to a mystery based on revealable information. There is no canon answer. In this manner, the game naturally feels like players are actually solving a mystery. They must logically connect interesting data points they have gleaned throughout play; depending on the amount of data they incorporate into their explanation the more likely they are “correct”. The system is indebted to a GMed game called *Brindlewood Bay* (Cordova 2020). In both games, narrative outcomes are not predetermined but are rather discovered through play. Though a mystery game, endings in *Paranormal Inc.* are not scripted and deliver emotionally rewarding narrative outcomes no one could expect at the start of play.

Some games get original with how they deliver story beats. In the GMless LARP *Still Life* by Wendy Gorman, David Hertz, and Heather Silsbee (2014), players act as rocks pondering the inherent instability of existence and being altered by forces outside their individual control. At the beginning of the game, most players assume rock-like positions: They curl into balls, lie on the ground, lean on one another. Another player, the GM representing the “Elemental Forces” of the world, moves players, the “rocks,” who at any time may voluntarily switch to the role of facilitator.¹³ Interestingly, there is no central GM, but rather a rotation of facilitating and conventional player roles. Whenever a temporary GM moves a character, the GM alters the way characters view their world, and the rock’s philosophical outlook changes to reflect their new embodied position. This is a physically enacted narrative beat.

10. Hosting the Play Space and Creating a Comfortable Environment

There are many ways to provide a warm and welcoming game environment. While GMs often develop these skills naturally, GMless games do not usually leave these matters to chance. The use of safety tools is often recommended in these games. Safety tools are designed to help a table moderate

¹³ An aside: Some designers and players make a distinction between the terms “GM” and a “facilitator.” Lowell Francis of the Gauntlet online role-playing community suggests that while the GM historically has occupied a place of “absolute or dominant authority,” in recent years the GM has “become a collaborator, partner, [and] *facilitator*” (my italics, Francis 2022). This is opposed to a more traditional view that holds that the GM is “like a playwright, an author, and a movie director rolled into one...” creating a “plot” for players to react to. For Francis the role of a facilitator-style GM is to “establish and model the order of conversation” to keep the pace of the game, and to “do this gently.” For him, the “good GM communicates engagement and responds positively to answers. And follows up where necessary.” Importantly they should “works hard to establish trust.” Facilitator and GM for Francis overlap in their meanings in many ways, but some members of the English-speaking role-playing

game communities have embraced the term facilitator because 1) it is not imbued with the same hierarchical connotations of the traditional word “master,” and also 2) because it may be used in the context of a great variety of games, games that might not need the presence of an active directorial role beyond the players themselves. An even more hands-off term is the word “host;” *Dreams Askew/Dreams Apart* asks the person “hosting” the game to “consider cooking a meal” and to ask people “what they can contribute,” making sure players know what the game will involve and make sure they are “fed and comfortable,” and giving them an “opportunity to name any accessibility needs they might have” (Alder and Rosenbaum 2019, 10). Although this description of a host is written for a GMless game, the approach of readying a room and making participants feel heard is to this reader a lesson about how one should guide play in general as well, with an open ear and heart.

tone and navigate game content live during play. “Lines and Veils,” developed by Ron Edwards for *Sorcerer* (Edwards 2001), and “Script Change” designed by Brie Beau Sheldon (Jágr Sheldon [2013] 2021), are a set of safety tools that can be used in nearly any game. “Lines and Veils” is a procedure in which players, prior to play and possibly during play, mark off a list of potentially sensitive subjects that may arise in play. Players can mark a subject with a Line – say in a horror game “sexual horror” – meaning that that theme will not appear in the story created at the table, not even in reference; or, players may mark a subject with a Veil, meaning that they just will not roleplay that theme, but it may exist in the game world. “Script Change,” on the other hand, is a way of managing the narrative flow. Just like how a television remote has a fast forward, rewind, and even content ratings, this set of tools give explicit permission to players to rewind a narrative that has been roleplayed and alter the lore that has been created if they are not satisfied with it; “content warnings” are more of a vague way of establishing expectations for the tone of a play session. Explicitly stating that a game is rated for adults establishes a different an expectation that is altogether different than one rated for children.

Occasionally, games aim to strike a specific mood at a table by providing recipes players may make a meal from and share. *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart* include recipes. Another game that uses food to establish a sense of comfort is *Cozy Town* by Rae Nedjadi (2021). This is a game about playing through the seasons of a small town in which sentient animal citizens live pleasant, pastoral lives. In the game, players are given the opportunity to explore what makes “people, and the communities they’re in, feel safe and cozy.” To do so, the game states that the author “highly recommend[s] setting out tea and sweets! Or whatever will make you feel soft, warm, and happy.” By actually serving up pastries, the game hopes to inspire players to “create a lovely community and their sweet inhabitants” and “and make sure everyone is having a good time” (Nedjadi 2021, 2–3).

11. Voicing a Variety of Side-Characters that May Exist in a Setting

In conventional games, players only voice their personal “player” characters. In GMless systems, however, players often voice many roles, whether in spoken or written form. In *The Deep Forest*, previously mentioned, players take on a bird’s eye view of the changes a community experiences over the course of an entire in-game year. Players take turns drawing standard playing cards, each corresponding to a pair of prompts. The game “ask[s] [players] to speak as various monsters in the community, and take actions on their behalf...

indicat[ing] which monster we are speaking or acting as. For the purposes of this text, ‘monster’ can be either a single monster or a clutch of smaller monsters who live together” (Truman and Alder 2014, 6). Players are not expected to feel that any single viewpoint belongs to any individual; rather, players are invited to speak for different monsters throughout the course of the game.

In some GMless games, side characters are managed by jettisoning them from the experience altogether. In these GMless games, only characters chosen by players at the start of a game are featured at all. The game *Pictures in an Exhibition* by Halden Ingwersen and Miles Lizak (2020) largely does this. It is an online LARP in which players portray art that comes alive at night, much like the classic novel *Night at the Museum*. The only characters present are the artworks players create at the beginning of the game. No other pieces of art come alive and side characters are not prominent if present at all. This produces a tight, intimate setting and avoids the logistical problem of how to voice side characters.

There are some journaling games in which the game text itself serves as a formal guide to a game, as opposed to an embodied GM. In these games, a player will both write from their own character’s perspective and detail the actions of side characters. One such game is *1000 Year Old Vampire* by Tim Hutchings (2019), a game about memory loss and near eternal vampiric existence. Another example is *Kurayami Box* by Nomachi Inemuri (2021), in which a player’s character helps a spirit travel to the next world. In these games, a player receives prompts to react to and write about. The players voice all characters through the written word – lyrics, poetry, letters, and dialogue. In a twist, while a GM has conventionally been expected to voice all side characters, in these text-based journaling games, one player voices all characters, that of their player character and all side characters as well.

12. Painting a Vivid Idea of the Setting and Giving a Sense of Place

Traditionally, GMs have the job of providing a sense of fictional space. Games played in the theater of the mind do not have an immediate physical context to orient players. *The Between*, a game of monster hunters in Victorian England by Jason Cordova (2021), elegantly addresses this challenge. While not a GMless game, the scenario-based *The Between* does delegate many narrative responsibilities to all players, beyond just the actions of their characters. One way it addressed the challenge of illustrating the setting, is a GM technique written into all settings called “Paint the Scene.” The technique goes like this: If a player arrives in a new area important to the narrative, the player is asked to answer a question that explores an

idea about the place they are in. Depending on their answer, the game environment changes. For example, in one scenario, there is a scene in which players enter an opium den. The following prompt is then presented to all the players to answer: “Paint the Scene: *People from all walks of life patronize Jenny Johnston’s. What do you see that indicates this?*” (The Limehouse Lurker scenario, Cordova 2021) Players respond to the prompt with their own mental pictures. By providing questions that explore an idea about the scene, not simply asking a flat description of the background like the scenario, both emphasize an idea about the setting, in this case, the fact that in this setting social classes mix, while also giving players the freedom to make it what they will. This has two other benefits: One is that players are more interested in a scene they help design; the second is that players more easily “mind meld,” more closely approximating a shared image of the in-game reality. Another way *The Between* has players demonstrate setting is by having them answer prompts that show vignettes of life in London unrelated to the player characters. These off-screen vignettes are called, fittingly, *Unscenes*. Players may receive prompts that explore the deterioration of a marriage, life inside a prison, or the trysts between maids in a lord’s home, and they all come prewritten. These prompts help paint a picture of a Victorian London dripping in gothic sensibilities.

Another game that lends a strong sense of setting is the afore-mentioned *Wanderhome*, which emulates children’s literature like *Watership Down* (Adams 1972) and *Redwall* (Jacques 2006). It depicts characters traveling to new places and settings. The game is described by the author as GM “agnostic,” meaning that the role of GM, referred to as a “guide” to emphasize its hand-off “light touch” narrative handling is optional. *Wanderhome* approaches setting differently than *The Between* does. In *Wanderhome*, picklists provide evocative imagery that players as a group choose from. Each time characters arrive at a new area, they create a new place by taking bits and pieces from 3 “Natures.” Players may combine an aesthetic element of a farm like “Rapsallions and Merrymakers” with another aesthetic element from a tower like “Shining Light Warning of Danger,” and one from a labyrinth like “Tangled Paths” to develop an entirely unique setting that player characters may explore together. The game encourages discussion about what this mix of aesthetic elements might mean and whether they are literal or metaphorical, helping players come to a shared understanding of where they are acting. By providing picklists or evocative questions, GMless and GMless-adjacent games delegate the scene-setting GMs conventionally provide to lend a shared sense of a vivid in-game reality.

13. Conclusion

This essay presents some context from which GMless games could be viewed to have emerged from in the second half of the 2010s. Most GMless games in this essay have been multiplayer TRPGs. However, GMless play is possible and flowering in all areas of the role-playing medium, whether in LARP, tabletop, or journal-style games.

As occasionally noted throughout this essay, however, features of GMless play are not existentially antithetical to GMed games. Several games mentioned in this essay blend elements of each. To name a few, *Wanderhome* is GM agnostic, *Still Life* involves a rotating GM, and *The Between* explicitly asks the GM to delegate some responsibilities to participants. What GMless games have done is to prove new narrative frameworks that challenge us to consider what games can and even should be.

This author, in fact does not believe that these games are somehow “better” or are in any way more morally righteous than GMed experiences. Often in fact, this author hacks games that use the No Dice, No Masters system by aggressively facilitating, effectively GMing what are intended to be GMless games. At the same time however, this author appreciates the impressive range of play possibilities and the different kinds of immersive play GMless games promise. GMless does not spell the end of the GM. On the contrary, aspects of GMless games hold the potential to empower GMs with a range of new tools and tactics, mentioned throughout part three of this essay, that can enrich many moments of play and, perhaps, may expand the scope of those who will come to enjoy them.

References

- Acosta, Mercedes, Jay Dragon, and M Veselak. 2022. Yazeba’s Bed & Breakfast (Ashcan Preview). *Possum Creek Games*. <https://possumcreekgames.itch.io/yazeba-ashcan> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Alder, Avery. 2009. Imaginary Funerals. *Buried Without Ceremony*. November 18. <https://buriedwithoutceremony.com/imaginary-funerals> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- . 2014. We’ve Been Stranger Things. Keynote Presented at *Possibilities*, Calgary, October 10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KQdOsH_1TU&t=1009s (accessed 2022/8/13).
- . Instant message. 2019. Twitter, October 5. <https://twitter.com/lackingceremony/status/1180240856277610496> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Arendt, Hannah. 1961. *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Viking Press.
- . 2007. *The Promise of Politics*. New York: Schocken Books.

- Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2017. Immersion into Larp: Theories of Embodied Narrative Experience. *First Person Scholar*. <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/immersion-into-larp/> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Castiello Jones, Katherine. 2016. "A Lonely Place": An Interview with Julia Bond Ellingboe | Analog Game Studies. *Analog Game Studies*. <https://analoggamestudies.org/2016/01/a-lonely-place-an-interview-with-julia-bond-ellingboe/> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Francis, Lowell. 2022. Five Faces of the GM: Age of Ravens. *The Gauntlet Blog*. <http://www.gauntlet-rpg.com/14/post/2022/06/five-faces-of-the-gm-age-of-ravens.html> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Hermann, Adrian, and Gerrit Reininghaus. 2021. Beyond the Character Sheet: "Character Keepers" as Digital Play Aids in the Contemporary Indie TRPG Community. *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies*, no. 2: 31–50. <https://jarps.net/journal/article/view/26> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Hopeametsä, Heidi. 2008. 24 Hours in a Bomb Shelter: Player, Character and Immersion in Ground Zero. In *Playground Worlds*, edited by Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros, 187–198. Helsinki: Ropecon ry.
- Jágr Sheldon, Beau. 2019. Five or So Questions on Red Carnations on a Black Grave. *Thoughty*. <https://briebeau.com/thoughty/five-or-so-questions-on-red-carnations-on-a-black-grave/> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- . (2013) 2021. Script Change RPG Toolbox. *Thoughty*. <https://briebeau.com/thoughty/script-change/> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Jahsonic. 2020. No gods, no masters. *The Art and Popular Culture Encyclopedia*. http://www.artandpopularculture.com/No_gods%2C_no_masters (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Kant, Immanuel. (1790) 1980. *Critique of judgement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Koljonen, Johanna. 2020. Larp Safety Design Fundamentals. *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies*, no. 1: 3e–19e. <https://jarps.net/journal/article/view/16> (accessed 2021/3/24).
- Lee, Jasmine C., Iaryna Mykhyalyshyn, Rudy Omri, and Anjali Singhvi. 2016. At Least 88 Cities Have Had Protests in the Past 13 Days Over Police Killings of Blacks. *The New York Times*, July 16. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/16/us/protesting-police-shootings-of-blacks.html> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Mueller, Benjamin, and Ashley Southall. 2014. 25,000 March in New York to Protest Police Violence. *The New York Times*, December 14. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/nyregion/in-new-york-thousands-march-in-continuing-protests-over-garner-case.html> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Nedjadi, Rae. 2022b. General Update and Idle Dreaming [Quoted with permission]. *Sword Queen Games' Patreon*. May 4. <https://www.patreon.com/swordqueengames> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Parker, Frieda, Jodie Novak, and Tonya Bartell. 2017. To Engage Students, Give Them Meaningful Choices in the Classroom. *Phi Delta Kappan* 99 (2): 37–41. doi:10.1177/0031721717734188.
- Rancière, Jacques. 1991. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Translated by Kristin Ross. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Robitaille, Jocelyn. 2002. Out of Dreamland - A critique of the GNS model from a transactional perspective of roleplaying games. *Lone Rogue Des Nuees*. https://web.archive.org/web/20021009004548/http://www.geocities.com/lonerogue_des_nuees/TransactionalGaming.html (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Sangdeboeuf, Czar, et al. 2022. Anarchist symbolism. *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anarchist_symbolism&oldid=1098401488 (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Stavropoulos, John. 2013. X-Card: Safety Tools for Simulations, Role-Playing, and Games. <http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg> (accessed 2020/8/21).
- Stein, Eric. 2021. No Dice, No Masters: Procedures for Emancipation in Dream Askew / Dream Apart. *ENeration Analog: The Tabletop Games and Education Virtual Conference*. doi:10.5281/zenodo.5156494.
- The Gauntlet. 2017. Tools of the Table. *THE GAUNTLET*. <https://www.gauntlet-rpg.com/tools-of-the-table.html> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Twelves, Karen. 2018. Safety and Calibration Cards. *dTwelves*. <https://dtwelves.com/gaming/safety-calibration-cards/> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- . 2020. Safety & Calibration Cards (Japanese). Translated by Sayuri Katō. *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies*, no. 1. <https://jarps.net/journal/article/view/18> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- White, William J. 2020. *Tabletop RPG Design in Theory and Practice at the Forge, 2001–2012: Designs and Discussions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Audio-Visual and Literary Sources

- Adams, Richard. 1972. *Watership Down*. London: Rex Collings Ltd.
- Coen, Joel, dir. 1996. *Fargo*. Thriller. Gramercy Pictures. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116282/> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Jacques, Brian. 2006. *Redwall: A tale of Redwall*. London: Red Fox.
- Reitman, Ivan, dir. 1984. *Ghostbusters*. Action, Comedy, Fantasy. Columbia Pictures.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087332/> (accessed 2022/8/13).

Ludography

- Alder, Avery, and Benjamin Rosenbaum. 2019. *Dream Askew/Dream Apart*. TRPG. Rulebook. Buried Without Ceremony. <https://buriedwithoutceremony.com/dream-askew> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Baker, D. Vincent, and Meguey Baker. 2016. *Apocalypse World*. 2nd ed. TRPG. Rulebook. Lumpley Games. <http://apocalypse-world.com> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Cordova, Jason. 2020. *Brindlewood Bay*. TRPG. Rulebook. Gauntlet Publishing. <https://www.gauntlet-rpg.com/brindlewood-bay.html> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- . 2021. *The Between*. TRPG. Rulebook. Gauntlet Publishing. <https://www.gauntlet-rpg.com/the-between.html> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Dragon, Jay. 2021. *Wanderhome*. TRPG. Rulebook. Oakledge Park: Possum Creek Games.
- Edwards, Ron. 2001. *Sorcerer: An Intense Role-Playing Game*. TRPG. Rulebook. Chicago: Adept Press.
- Ellingboe, Julia Bond. 2008. *Steal Away Jordan: Stories from American's Peculiar Institution*. TRPG. Rulebook. Greenfield: Stone Baby Games.
- Furness, Alicia. 2021. *Paranormal Inc*. TRPG. Rulebook. Ottawa: Alicia Furness Productions.
- Gorman, Wendy, David Hertz, and Heather Silsbee. 2014. *Still Life*. Larp (Golden Cobra). <http://www.goldencobra.org/pdf/Still%20Life.pdf> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Gygax, Gary, and Dave Arneson. 1974. *Dungeons & Dragons*. TRPG. Rulebook. Lake Geneva: TSR.
- Hutchings, Tim. 2019. *Thousand Year Old Vampire*. TRPG. Rulebook. Oregon: Petit Guignol.
- Ingwersen, Halden, and Miles Lizak. 2020. *Pictures in an Exhibition*. Larp (Golden Cobra). http://www.goldencobra.org/pdf/2020/IngwersenLizak_Pictures-In-An-Exhibition.pdf (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Mazza, Ralph, and Mike Holmes. 2002. *Universalis: The Game of Unlimited Stories*. TRPG. Rulebook. Ramshead Publishing.
- Morningstar, Jason. 2009. *Fiasco*. Chapel Hill: Bully Pulpit Games.
- Nedjadi, Rae. 2021. *Cozy Town*. TRPG. Rulebook. Sword Queen Games. <https://temporalhiccup.itch.io/cozy-town> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- . 2022a. *Our Haunt*. TRPG. Rulebook. Oakledge Park: Possum Creek Games.
- Nomachi, Inemuri. 2021. *Kurayami Box*. Larp (Golden Cobra). <https://www.goldencobra.org/pdf/2021/Inamuri--KurayamiBox.pdf> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Rabinowitz, Gabrielle, and Ben Bisogno. 2022. *Ma Nishtana: Why Is This Night Different? By Manishtana, GabrielleRab, KyotoBen*. TRPG. Rulebook. <https://manishtana.itch.io/ma-nishtana-rpg> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Ramen, Catherine, and Juan Ochoa. 2018. *Red Carnations on a Black Grave*. TRPG. Rulebook. Aviatrix Games.
- Roberts, Alex. 2019. *For the Queen*. TRPG. Rulebook. Chapel Hill: Bully Pulpit Games.
- . 2019. *StarCrossed*. TRPG. Rulebook. Chapel Hill: Bully Pulpit Games.
- Seyalioğlu, Hakan, and Kathryn Hymes. 2018. *Dialect: A Game about Language and How It Dies*. TRPG. Rulebook. Washington DC: Thorny Games.
- Starke, Spenser. 2020. *Alice Is Missing*. Larp. Hunters Entertainment. <https://www.huntersentertainment.com/alice-is-missing> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Tamura, Mitsunobu. 2021. *2999nen Fukyō No Tabi* [2999: Missionary Journey]. Larp (Golden Cobra). [https://www.goldencobra.org/pdf/2021/%e6%9c%a8%e5%a0%b4\(kiba\)-2999MJ.pdf](https://www.goldencobra.org/pdf/2021/%e6%9c%a8%e5%a0%b4(kiba)-2999MJ.pdf) (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Tomkin, Shawn. 2018. *Ironsworn*. TRPG. Rulebook. <https://www.ironswornrpg.com/> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Truman, Mark Diaz, and Avery Alder. 2014. *The Deep Forest*. TRPG. Rulebook. Buried Without Ceremony. <https://buriedwithoutceremony.com/the-quiet-year/the-deep-forest> (accessed 2022/8/13).
- Wallis, James. 1998. *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*. TRPG. Rulebook. London: Hogshead-Publishing.