Instant GM II:
On Your Mark, Get Set, GM!



Ramsey "Tome Wyrm" Lundock

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Ramsey "Tome Wyrm" Lundock
Playtesters: Margaret S. Lundock

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Foreword

They say sometimes you are the worst judge of your own work. That has certainly been the case with Instant GM. I used to be involved in some of the Coordinated Play Role Playing Campaigns, where you can bring your own character and play at various conventions throughout the year. I won't tell you which campaigns, but when I started, there were only two. For a change of pace, I ran light-hearted action adventure games with little to no fore planning. As I moved away from Coordinated Campaigns, I continued running my "Pot Luck" games to earn free admission to the local conventions.

I knew that I didn't run games the same way as most GMs, but I just assumed that I had a quirky style. I never would have written the Instant GM: A Bag of Tricks if my friends at SunQuest Games hadn't pestered me over a couple of years.

Even then, when Comstar Media put out the call for, "short game products," and I sent in Instant GM, I didn't think that it was much more than a novelty to supplement the main line. I certainly didn't realize it was going to be my first best seller!

It is only now as I write this, that I realize what I had over looked. I have a unique style of GMing, but every GM I have ever gamed under had a unique style of GMing. And I learned from everyone of them. Even the ones who's styles I disliked, I learned to consider the players' point of view when running a game.

So no matter what your style: if you are a hard core Strategy Gamer, who has memorized the entire Weapons Table; a World Builder who has a notebook full of interesting locations you hope to share with your players some day; a Competitive GM out to prove that you can run a published adventure better than anyone else; or a First Time GM who is more worried about not embarrassing yourself, than about discovering your style; I hope you can learn from the Instant GM. That's only fair, I learned from you.

Introduction

This book contains four sections. The first section is Adventure Hooks. The Instant GM: A Bag of Tricks, dealt with Plot Seeds. In this book we deal with Adventure Hooks to help you bring the characters into the plot. The second section is Stock Characters, Continued. It picks up where the first Instant GM left off. Detailing new characters to use when improvising, including some more exotic ones. The third section is three more Rakugo Props for use in your game. Again this section is too short, the only consolation I can give is that every adventure is different, and Rakugo Props are always improvised. Once you start to use Rakugo Props, you'll see new ways of using them in every game. The forth section is a collection of Tips & Tricks and Rants, which don't fit well into any of the other sections. There is an appendix of quick reference tables at the back of the book.



Adventure Hooks

The first Instant GM book detailed how to use Plot Seeds to help you improvise when the party wanders away from the written scenario. But unless you can motivate the players and their characters to become involved in the adventure in the first place, nothing interesting is going to happen. An otherwise good adventure can be ruined if you have to contrive an unrealistic way to force the party into the scenario.

Adventure hooks are ways to "bait" the characters so that you can drag them into the plot. Adventure hooks are useful when planning ahead, but they are also useful for the Instant GM. If the players don't bite on the first adventure hook, dangle another in front of them, until you find one that they can't resist.

The first adventure is particularly difficult, because you must not only justify the group getting involved in the adventure, you have to give each member a reason to work with the other characters. Both uses of Adventure Hooks are discussed below. Some Adventure Hooks work better for first adventures than others.

Anything for a Lady: One or more of the characters has a weakness for attractive members of the opposite sex. He is willing to promise almost anything to impress them, no matter how impossible. And he has a habit of dragging his adventuring companions along when he tries to back up his big talk.

This is a realistic adventure hook in any setting, men have always and will always push themselves beyond their limits to show off in front of women. (This doesn't have to be men impressing women, adolescent girls have shocking determination when trying to attract a boy's attention.) However, this adventure hook can run into some difficulty in role playing games. The basis of 'Anything for a Lady' is that some ideas only make sense when your brain is soaked in hormones. Since the players haven't had their brain chemistry manipulated, they are still fully alert and will realize when their characters are being asked to do something dangerous in exchange for an implied promise, which probably isn't true. Some players will enjoy this plot hook specifically for the irony.

This adventure hook can be freely overused, because unlike "Help Wanted" and "You're Sitting in a Tavern When...", this one is actually funny. In fact the more times one of the characters drags the group off on a hair-brained adventure on behalf of a pretty woman who turns out to already have a boyfriend, the funnier it is the next time he falls it. ("I'm telling you, this time its true love.")

Arrested/Kidnapped: The adventure starts after each of the characters has been arrested (hopefully on a misunderstanding) or kidnapped. The first thing the player hear is that their characters are being dragged along in chains, or they wake up in the examination room of an alien space craft. This opening brings the group together quickly and gives them a common goal. This way of starting an adventure annoys the players because you tell them about something bad happening to their characters but don't let them a chance to do anything about it. It is best used sparingly.

A slight variant is to put the characters in situation where their only options are to go quietly or get beaten into going. This can be even more frustrating to the players than starting after the fact.

Blackmail: Rather than offering the characters a reward for undertaking an adventure, you can threaten to punish them if they don't succeed. Blackmail can take many different forms: taking their families hostage, threatening to send compromising letters written by the character to the newspapers, or 'accidentally' deleting their bank accounts.

Truly heavy handed forms of Blackmail include implanted bombs, electro-shock collars and reoccurring nightmares. If the party turned a deaf ear to the poor peasants begging them to retrieve water from the Healing Well to save them from the plague, infect the characters.

Curses which can not be lifted without exotic materials and extensive travel are another example. How many adventures spawned from the Knights of the Round table search for the Holy Grail to cure Author?

Remember there is always the possibility that the characters will fail. Don't blackmail them with something that will disrupt the rest of the campaign if they screw up.

Players and Characters hate having their strings jerked, so Blackmail should not be overused. But occasionally it can make a nice change of pace.

(Especially if they get a chance to give the blackmailer payback. See the Revenge adventure hook.)

Blackmail Variant: The Prophecy: The Prophecy is a variant of Blackmail that doesn't make the character's feel as powerless. In this adventure hook a gypsy, priest, oracle, etc. makes a dire prediction about the characters, or the characters loved ones. But the future is always uncertain. If the characters are willing to undertake a mission that challenges destiny itself, they might be able to avert the tragedy.

If the adventures fail to accomplish their goals, the fallout of a Prophecy is easier for the players to accept than the outcome of Blackmail. Sometimes you can't cheat fate.

Help Wanted: Starting the adventure with a job offer is a very successful way of drawing the characters into a plot. It draws the party together without putting them under any duress. Players will usually talk themselves into taking the job, even it if is a stretch to think that character would actually do that kind of work.

Hiring the characters means that they are in the adventure for the money. If this approach is overused the mercenary mentality will creep into the entire campaign. This is fine if it is part of your plan for the campaign. If it is not part of the plan, it can turn an honorable party into money grubbing scumbags.

Missed the Left turn at Albuquerque: Each character fell down a pit trap, had a detour force them off the high way, stepped on the wrong teleporter pad, woke up in an unfamiliar place after a night on the town, or got on a mysterious carnival ride. One way or the other, characters don't have a clue where they are or how to get back. This opening easily brings vastly difference characters together. They might not even be from the same reality.

This is less linear than the Shipwreck (see below) because it gives the characters a chance to explore, rather than just go where the boat takes them. Giving the players more freedom is always appreciated, but you run into the problem of what to do if the characters decide not to work together or follow the plot you've laid out. In these situations, you have to improvise, try either introducing a helpful non-player character to spell out what they have to do in order to go home or unleashing some kind of "Beast from between worlds" to encourage them to move on.

Organizational Ties: The PCs are all members of the same organization, be it a government intelligence agency, a rebel alliance, or a high school class. They will be inclined to set off on the adventure because it is in the best interest of the group to do so. If stubborn characters/players refuse to put themselves on the line for the common good, you can have an authority figure in the organization order them to go with the rest of the party.

A cross between Organizational Ties and Arrested is to have the characters drafted. This explains why such a diverse lot joined the same organization: they didn't have a choice and the organization wasn't being very picky at the time. It doesn't put the characters under quite as much distress as the Arrested hook.

Organizational Ties Variant: Favor for a Friend: The Organization doesn't have to be a formal group. The characters are asked to do the job by a non-player character whom they know. He may offer payment, but it will be minimal. Basically they are taking the job, either to repay the NPC, or put him in their debt. This works best when you can contrive a way that all of the characters know the same royal court official, FBI agent or space-freighter captain.

Revenge: This time, its personal. Revenge is a useful technique to if you know the characters well enough to know the friends and enemies that they have made over the years.

Given the amount of tragedy that most groups witness over the course of a campaign, it shouldn't be hard to think of someone that they'd like to kill off. Normally the group eliminates people who anger them, but if a previous villain's right hand man escaped, you can use him as the leader of the next group you intend the characters to fight.

Keep track of the incidental non-player characters that the group liked dealing with. Hurting or killing them gives the party personal reason to become involved in the adventure. If the party hears on the evening news that the truck driver who honestly thinks he's Elvis (living incognito to avoid his fans) from a couple adventures ago has been beaten and had his truck stolen, the characters won't rest until the carjackers and their entire smuggling ring are doing the Jailhouse Rock.

In addition to characters from previous adventures, you can use characters from the player character back stories. This is harder to pull off because the player always knows those "pre-game" characters better than you do. If you do use a friend or enemy out of the character's past, you can expect an intense reaction from the character. Make it clear to the player that you are doing your best, and you expect the player to compromise with you on the character's quirks and personality.

Revenge Variant: A Ghost from the Past: The player characters aren't the only ones interested in revenge. Most groups leave a trail of bodies where ever they go. It is possible that friends, students, siblings, or lovers of one of the people the party has killed will seak vengeance. In this case, the party doesn't find the adventure, it comes to them.

A Ghost from the Past puts the characters in the awkward position that someone they don't even know is trying to kill them. The pursuer might even be a fundamentally likeable character, trying to avenge what the party did to his less likeable friend. How the group deals with this situation is good role playing.

Maybe in one of their previous adventures, the characters didn't finish the job. Adventure movies and books are full of villains who suffered 'moral' wounds, and clawed their way back from the brink; kept alive by their burning hatred of the heroes who did this to them. These adversaries are always more dangerous than the last time the characters defeated them. The enemy survived 'death' once, so he has no fear of it.

Reward: The characters hear of a Reward being offered for completion of a specific task. The contest is similar to Help Wanted, but there is no upfront money and no negotiation.

The most famous example of a Reward adventure hook is when a king offer's the hand of the princess to whoever slays a dragon. (This is not just a cliché. There are legitimate legends which begin this way.) For an adventuring group, it is probably better to stick to a cash bounty. But there is more to life than monetary rewards, the Reward could be knighthoods, letters of mark, guild or league memberships, etc.

Another interesting facet of the Reward adventure hook, is that the party might not be the only ones after the prize. Third party interference can range from annoying comic relief to deadly.

A Sad Story: The Sad Story is similar to `Anything for a Lady' in that the characters undertake a mission for no tangible rewards. Someone has a problem that they can't solve, but the party might be able to correct. However, the Sad Story works on characters who are immune to feminine wiles.

It idea is that the characters will take on the adventure because it is 'the right thing to do.' This sometimes runs into trouble with hardcore strategy gamers who realize that putting yourself on the line for someone else's problems is a good way to get killed.

In order for the sad story to work, the other character must be effectively powerless. A knight who returns home after the crusades to find his family holding have been seized certainly has a sad story. But the players will be quick to realize that if they get the knight reinstated, he will be in a position to (and probably should) reward the party handsomely. Women and children are the most defensible types of characters, followed closely by the blind, crippled, and peasant or slaves.

Shipwrecked: If the characters won't go to the adventure, bring the adventure to the characters. Tell the players that the adventure starts on a ship, and let each one come up with their own reasons for being on board. Then tell them that the ship is going down. The characters just happen to end up in the same lifeboat or escape pod. From there, they will have to work together to survive.

Alternatively you can have the character's ship, plane, bus, etc. hijacked while they are on it. This is kinder to the characters because they start the adventure with their normal gear, not just what the managed to grab as the ship was going down. On the other hand, you have to get the party together out of the crowd of Non Player Characters traveling with them. If you have the kind of players who insist on doing things 'officially' you need to make sure to get rid of all authority figures, such as captains and officers, during the hijacking.

Some Strings Attached: The party receives something valuable, or something that they have personally wanted. But the gift isn't as free and clear as it seems at first. If the party wants to keep their new acquisition, they are going to have to fight for it.

The most common example it the party receives a magical item with a curse attached. The only way to lift the curse is to confront the villain of your planned adventure (possibly because the item was stolen from him.)

I've always wanted to run a campaign which starts with the party inheriting a castle. When they arrive at the castle, the characters discover that the above ground floors are infested with poisonous vermin and rats the size of a dog; the basement has a tribe of boogiemen living in it; the crypt on the castle grounds in haunted; the peasants under the protection of the castle are being terrorized by a werewolf...

In technological setting, you can give the party a wonderful weapon, vehicle, or other hardware that is completely useless until they acquire the proper software, be it a password, operating system or navigational database. Of course this item happens to be in someone else's hands, and if the party doesn't go looking for him, he'll come looking for them. In post-apocalyptic campaigns, you can bury the vital components in danger filled ruins.

In a setting where the characters are expected to face pirates on a regular basis, rather than having a trading company hire the party, give the characters a small share in the company's profits and see how long it takes them to start hunting down pirates on their own.

In this adventure hook you have to give the party something valuable/ useful at the start. This shouldn't be too much of a problem since rewarding the party is written into most adventures, but you have to be careful not to give them something which can upset the balance of the game.

Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark: No one likes being left out on a secret. In this adventure hook, you make it clear to the characters that something is going on that they don't know about. This is a standard adventure hook in the espionage and horror genres. It also works well in the Superhero genera, where it always pays to look into unexplained events.

This works best when the characters know something that isn't common knowledge. Otherwise they spend most of the adventure wondering why the world hasn't figured this out yet. This information can come from direct experience, ghosts, witnesses who turn up dead the next day, secret diaries, etc.

There are two ways to use this adventure hook. One is to keep the players guessing, and force them to work through the entire adventure to get to the bottom of things. The second way is to let the characters figure out what is going on early in the plot, but they can't do anything about it without evidence. They may know that the Planetary Ranger is corrupt. But unless they can prove that he has been raiding merchant vessels, and then pinning the crimes on political rivals, there is nothing they can do to stop him.

Sometimes it is enough to let the players know that a 'natural death' was actually a skilled assassination, but it is not fool proof. On the other hand, if you present the players with directly contradictory "facts" few characters can resist trying to get to the bottom of it. For example, when the character's finds a body, they call the local law enforcement and that is the end of their involvement...until they see the same guy they found dead, walking around town and the law enforcement denies having ever received the party's call.

The party may decide that chasing dark secrets is not conductive to longevity. You can still drag them into the plot. Even if they don't investigate further, they already know too much, and some one will try to silence them.

This plot hook has to be handled with skill because by design it is very frustrating. The trick is to make it so that the characters are frustrated, but the players aren't.

Treasure Map: Each of the PCs receives a mysterious letter with a map or instructions and cryptic promises of a reward if the instructions are followed. If at all possible, the letters should be personalized to each character. No one likes getting, "Dear Occupant" letters. You can even go so far as to include different cryptic clues in each letter.

Alternatively, you can include the map, or captain's log, as part of a treasure hoard, hooking the characters into the next adventure at the end of the last adventure.

The potential problem with this opening is that it doesn't give the characters any reason to trust each other. They might even be competitors. In a pirate,

every-man-for-himself, style campaign, this is a bonus, not a drawback

The Wager: There is something magical about the power of a bet. Offer to pay a man $100 dollars to go into the abandoned mine on Spook Hill and his response will be something like, "No, that place must be full of poisonous snakes and rotted support struts." Bet a man $100 dollars that he won't spend the night in the same mine, and he'll be halfway to Spook Hill before he starts to wonder if he still has a flashlight in the glove box.

This gives you a way to monetarily reward the party without the cliché being hired for a job. Virtually any adventure can start this way, provided the party is cocky enough to keep betting on their own success. The characters might even start sharking bets on their exploits, for a "Smoky & the Bandit" style campaign.

The wager requires the characters and their players to be somewhat volatile. This normally shouldn't be a problem. If used judiciously, the Wager can goad the party into things that neither lover nor money could motivate them to do. For example, a pious priest would never, under any circumstances, think of trespassing in a saint's tomb...except to prove wrong an atheist who insists that the only reason the tomb is sealed is to hide the fact that the saint is just a myth.

Another example: Have a caravan driver complaining long and loud that it takes 3 weeks to get across the badlands. Have the most wilderness savvy player character make the appropriate skill check to realize it only takes 2 weeks. This should spark an argument that ends in the caravan driver telling the player character to put his money where their mouth is. The wilderness character will probably have to bum a loan from the other player characters to cover the collateral for his side of the bet and the entire party will get involved to protect their investment.

You're sitting in a Tavern when...: The party doesn't have to be traveling to come across adventure. You can start the adventure by something going terribly wrong in any public area. Examples include, village fairs, grocery stores, bazaars, and space station bars. Each of the characters happens to be present during the opening scene. The first scene can either directly involve the characters such as the establishment being raided or the local dictator's troops advancing into the city. Or it can be indirect, witnessing a fight, finding a murder victim's body, etc.

This opening trusts the party to stick their noses into what's going on. As such it can fail to launch for a variety of reasons. The character-actor role players don't feel any motivation. The money role players don't see any profit. The rule lawyers worry that their characters aren't legally authorized to deal with the situation. Knowing your players and planning accordingly can reduce but not eliminate this risk.

Advanced Adventure Hooks

The above adventure hooks are basic ways to insert "Party A" into "Adventure B." Once you are comfortable with them, you can start using more advanced techniques to make the party want to join in the adventure.

Multi-Adventure Plot Hooks: A single Plot Hook can be used to start a series of adventures. One of the classic fantasy adventures is based around the party finding the parts of a magical item which had been broken into 8 pieces.

Another possibility is to give the party only part of a treasure map, and force them to track down the missing pieces. The pieces might be in treasure hoards and crypts. If the other pieces are in the hands of collectors, the characters will have to fulfill whatever strange mission the collector sends them on to earn the next piece.

If you use published adventures from unrelated sources, create a shadowy sinister organization for you world. Then when you are struggling for an adventure hook, feed the party rumor that the goblin raids, plague, ghost sightings, etc. are actually being arranged by the 'Shadow Syndicate.' The players should take the hint that if the Shadow Syndicate is involved it is worth the party's time to get to the bottom of things. The rumors about the Syndicate's involvement should be right 90% of the time, so you might have to modify the background of the final villain a little to make him a member.

Multi-adventure plot hooks provide a sense of continuity to a campaign. The down side is that eventually you are going to have to let the party reach the goal. At which point they will expect a huge payoff. Not only in terms or rewards, but in terms of climax.

Personalized Plot Hooks: I must confess that I am fan of the martial-arts genera of arcade games. In those games every character has a different reason for entering fighting the contest: some want revenge, some want to take over the company for themselves, and some are just trying to get a date with one of the other fighters. You can use the same trick in table top role playing games. It requires a little more work on you part as GM. You have to talk to each player individually and determine what would move his character to action. The adventure will have a subplot for each character. You should make sure each subplot gets a decent amount of game time. While challenging, these are the games the players remember the longest.

Turn the Tables on the Players: Finding a way to bring the group together for the first adventure is a difficult task. It also comes into play when you need to introduce a new player character into the group. (Or if you run games at conventions where even if the characters know each other, the players don't have any particular reason to trust each other.) One method of dealing with this difficulty is to shift the work to the players.

If your first adventure is set in ancient ruins, describe a campsite next to a major road, which is within walking distance of the ruins, but far enough away and heavily used enough to be safe. Recite some of the legends about the ruins, then look at the players and ask, "Why are you here?"

Letting the players provide their own motives can be a fun. It can also be maddening. Some players have been so conditioned to follow where the GM leads that their characters have no real motives or personality. Although frustrating it is rewarding when you finally shake up the players enough that they develop their characters in more detail.

The other way turning the tables on the players can be frustrating is when one (or more, or all) of the players refuses to cooperate. Following the above example, it would not be uncommon for a player to insists that his character would never go to the camp grounds and is hiding in the woods watching everyone else. My advice is: first point out that the characters around the fire are warm and are eating freshly cooked food, while the spy is crouching in the cold, dank woods, gnawing on trail rations. If this isn't enough to motivate him to show himself, make him roll dice to see if he can stay awake all night. If he fails, one of the other characters who gets up in the middle of the night to answer Nature's call stumbles upon him in the woods. Finally, if the player stubbornly insists that his character won't join the group, let him go mano-y-mano with some of the monsters. He'll have to go running to the group for help or die. Either way, you don't have to worry about the loner character anymore.

Build the Group in Steps: It is rather improbable that four to six strangers would join together just after meeting. When pulling the group together, it is much more believable during the first adventure to build the group in steps. After you get a pair of characters working together, switch you attention to the remaining characters and figure out how to bring them together. Then over the first couple of hours of game time, pull various the groups together.

This technique violates the first rule of running a game: Never split up the party. That rule is soundly based. You have to divide your time between two groups. The best way to handle it is to switch you attention after each scene, so that no one has enough time to get bored. This is an advanced technique, but you players will appreciate the believability if you pull it off.

Its about Who you Know: Another way to build the group in steps is to require that the Player Characters know at least one other PC at the start of the campaign. If the players resist, point out that no one reaches the age of adventurers without meeting people along the way.

Players have been conditioned to assume their hometown is "Far away" from the area where the adventure takes place, and that their former lives are irrelevant the plot. So it might take some work to get the players to consider the possibility of previous acquaintances. But if you can get them to think outside the traditional framework, the role playing possibilities are almost endless.

These relations are also useful for introducing a new member into the group. Meeting a new guy in tavern, and inviting him to travel with the group certainly can happen, but even some of the Magnificent

Seven had had previous dealings before they started their adventure. At first this sounds contrived and unbelievable, but in practice it happens all the time. Everyone has had a "small world encounter" where they meet an old acquaintance by chance. This also give the new player a place to start as he struggles to establish his role in the group.

Most of the time the players will come up with unimaginative connections such as being blood relatives (usually cousins) or former neighbors. Here is a list of other possibilities to get the players thinking in new directions. You can force the players to build pre-story relationships with other characters, but you should let the players choose which relationships to use. These relationships are very personal thing, and none of them should be forced on any character.

Arrested/Arrester: It is simple to explain how the scum-bag in the group knows the member of the Town Watch (or the private Security Contractor). While there is no love lost between these two characters, in real life, there is surprisingly little bad blood between them either.

Card Buddies: Even adventures need a hobby. Many hobbies are social activities such as darts, billiards, softball, chess, poker, and RPGs. Players can say their characters met though a mutual hobby. Perhaps the entire party is the Tuesday Night Poker gang from O'Malley's Bar. Even solo hobbies such as painting, model building, or raising pets require supplies. The characters could have met at the relevant store.

Childhood Friends: In childhood the only criteria for making friends is to be roughly the same age, and to have some spare time. As people grow older they become more selective. Childhood friends take on very different lives, and drift away apart. By the time they reach adulthood, they are completely different people. For the purposes of this relationship, childhood should be considered to last until adolescence.

Former Romantic Interest: If you have female characters in the group, perhaps they have dated one of the other members. The players need to agree on how far the relationship went and why it ended. This emotional baggage can lead to all manner of tension and outbursts, leaving the rest of the group wondering what exactly is going on.

Though both characters firmly deny it, there is always the chance that the relationship will rekindle. If the players agree, rather than previous relationship, the characters can currently be an item. Or maybe it's a one sided crush.

If this relationship is a little too personal for the group, it can be widened to apply to immediate family members. If the minstrel in the group once wooed the knight's younger sister, the knight will recognize him, but won't be thrilled to see him again.

Friend of the Family: In most fantasy settings, it is common for children to inherit their parents' profession. It would be perfectly reasonable for the parents of two of the characters to be old adventuring buddies.

The parents might even insist on the characters traveling together to watch each other's back.

Immediate Family: If you want a relationship with potential complications, look no further than the nuclear family. Between the opposing forces of sibling rivalry and tribalism, the siblings will love each other, even if they can't stand each other.

This is a difficult connection to justify since the characters usually come from vastly different backgrounds and genetic stock. Fortunately, fairytales are full of examples of step-children, adopted children, abandoned children, half siblings, and bastards.

If there is a significant age difference in the party, the players might decide on a parent/child relationship. This has even more potential for interesting role playing than siblings. (What happens when the elf finds that the wild-oats he sewed with a human woman in his youth, has grown up into a half-elf who is now the same biological age as he is?)

Warning: If two of your players are Japanese-anime-Otaku with a sense of humor, you might end up with one of those innuendo laden relations between bother and sister or (shutter) between two brothers.

Professional Acquaintances: Company employment is certainly one way to meet people. You meet not only people in the same company but people in companies that your firm does business with. If the characters worked for a small company they will know each other well. If it was a mid to large sized company, they might be friends, or they might just

recognize the name and the face.

Given the number of characters who hale from a mercenary background, it is entirely possible that some members of the group have worked together in the past.

Professional Acquaintances do not need to be members of a literal company. Students in a modern educations system are more like coworkers than the "Same Teacher" relationship described below. Tutors are one-on-one or small group lessons, where as Modern education is impersonal. Army buddies are another example. If two or more of the characters are diplomatic archetypes, then they can have met at the Royal Court or at state dinners.

For a real twist, rather than former co-workers one of the characters one of the characters was the supervisor/ employer.

Rivals: In the past both characters wanted the same thing. Be it a girl, a racing trophy, or admission to an academy of magic. The players will have to decide which, if either of them, won. Or maybe it was a long time rivalry, with many individual contests won and lost in equal numbers.

The rivalry doesn't have to be personal. The characters might have been in opposing gangs or on opposite sides of a war, and had the conflict bring them into direct contact.

Same Teacher: Characters who studied under the same teacher are at the same time rivals and comrades. They struggled constantly against each other for the master's attention and praise. At the same time, they had to rely on one another physically and emotionally to get through the training. Brothers in Arms are much like real siblings, but are usually on better terms.

It is tempting to set up a master/student relationship between characters. But since the beginning characters will be roughly the same skill level, this relationship doesn't work. (In a modern Education system, you can get away with a Teacher-Student connection. Anyone who's been though high school will believe a teacher character is no more competent than her students, especially if played for comic value.)

Vision: In a fantasy setting, visions are often consulted for important decisions. Perhaps one of the characters had a vision induced in a coming of age ceremony, as part of his training, or before setting out to start his adventuring career. A reoccurring dream also works. It the jumbled, dreamlike vision the character saw an unfamiliar face. He had more or less forgotten it until comes into the local roadhouse and sees that face sitting the bar.

What does the character do at that point? Has the other character had a similar vision?

A vision should let the character recognize one, maybe two of the other characters. Having the entire party recognize each other at the beginning feels contrived.



Stock Characters, Continued

The original Instant GM provided a list of stock characters to use on the fly when you are forced to improvise. The stock characters listed here cover a few more of the basics, and look at more exotic character types, such as self aware computers and horses.

Angel: Lets face it, sometimes a party bungles things so badly that they need divine intervention to get out of it. Or if you're not the forgiving type of GM, perhaps it is time for a little divine retribution.

A properly played angel should make the most pious member of the group fall to his knees and beg forgiveness. Meanwhile, everyone else should be running away as fast as they can, and not looking back for fear of being turned into a pillar of salt. Angels don't get taken as seriously as they should because of the misconception that 'Good' is inherently non-judgmental. This is true of fallible mortals, but angels literally have the God Given Right to pass judgment, and they don't make mistakes.

Everyone knows that Evil is cunning, but that doesn't mean Good has to be stupid. A scoundrel who tries to lie to or manipulate an angel should be struck dead on the spot. If the angel is in a forgiving mood perhaps just struck dumb, or blinded so that he has a chance to learn his lessen and repent.

While angels are inherently terrifying, what is even worse is than an angle doesn't get involved unless major events are in motion. Every time an angel appears before mortals, it is on a specific mission. Angles have very little patience for mortals who interfere with or delay their mission, and have an appallingly tolerance for collateral damage.

Finally, if an insolent character managed to get cursed by an angel, the normal methods for lifting curses won't work. There is only one court of appeals for a divine curse. If an angel wasn't enough to put the fear of God into the characters, maybe the Big Man himself will do the job.

Businessman: For the Businessman, it is all about the bottom line. He views everyone and everything as a potential investment, or a potential problem. Be it alien spacecraft, giant monsters or magical swords; if his business group doesn't have a use for it, he puts it on the auction block. If his group discovers an ancient crypt of cursed artifacts, he sells them 'as is, no express or implied warranty.'

The Businessman won't always be offering to player characters a job. Why pay them, if he can manipulate them into doing what he wants for free? If the party is working for the businessman, they always loose some of the agreed payment to the fine-print of the deal.

Despite these drawback, the PCs will probably enjoy dealing with the Businessman. He acts calm and professional, no matter how weird the group is (aliens, demons, elves, Japanese school girl martial artists; it's all just another day at the office). Because all he cares about is money, he could care less what the player characters do or how they do it; provided it doesn't cost him anything. The Businessman doesn't get upset when the party does things like break into his office rather than making an appointment, draw a gun on him, or interrupt his round of golf to bring him a mummified head. He will even put up with parties which cost him money in the form of damage claims or bail bonds for the party, provided they make him significantly more money.

As an adversary, the Businessman will pay maddeningly little attention to the party. No matter how much damage they inflict on his property, he doesn't seek revenge; there is no money in revenge. If the party repeatedly attacks the businessman's holdings, he will attempt to neutralize them to protect his remaining assets. 'Neutralize' means either killing them or buying them off, which ever is cheaper.

Carnivore: A carnivore has a split personality depending on whether or not it is hungry.

If slated, the carnivore is perfectly happy to sleep in a comfortable place or play with its young, and will let the party pass safely unless they try to disturb it. If the party does pick a fight with a carnivore, its first thought is to chase them off, and get back to its nap. However if it successfully hooks one of intruders and spills blood, all bets are off. Once blood lust sets in, the carnivore is going to kill the target, but may play with it for a while first.

When hunting, the carnivore will be aware of the party well before they notice it. It may track them for hours by scent and watching from afar, waiting for a chance to pick off a straggler. Unless the party has skilled bushman among their number, the first time

they'll see the carnivore is when it pounces.

Carnivores do not like food that fights back. For a wild hunter, any significant wound is fatal, either from infection, or because it hinders its ability to hunt. If the party puts up a good fight for a couple of combat rounds, the carnivore will likely break off to find easier prey. But the fact that it attacked a band as formidable as the player characters, probably means its desperate. A starving animal fights to the death, because if it doesn't eat, it will die anyways.

Computer/ Android: Self-aware computers and human-shaped android computers, are stock characters of science fiction, but many fantasy setting have characters or entire races so stoic and logic bound, that they might as well be androids.

The hallmark of the computer is logic. Even in settings were androids are capable of emotions, they are expected to be more reserved and logical than humans. This makes for cold and calculating enemies who build up obscene body counts to achieve their goals. This same logic makes allied androids prone to lay down their 'lives' to protect the PCs. After all, it is only logical to sacrifice a lifeless tool, if it can save a single human life.

Computers are the ultimate straight-men for comedy relief. No matter how bizarre a request the PCs make, or what kind of chaos the situation deteriorates into, the computer will treat it with complete seriousness. For example, if a food fight breaks out in the mess hall, the ships' computer will stubbornly refuse to fulfill an order for 10 pies until the requesting character specifies the flavor.

Drifter: The drifter is willing to go absolutely anywhere, provided he hasn't already been there. It should be easy for the party to find a Drifter if they go looking. Drifters hang out as the same kind of bars as adventures. Two important differences separate Drifters from actual adventures. First, Drifters are much more apathetic than adventures. Second, they aren't nearly as unlucky as real adventures.

Drifters are relaxed but not stoic. Their favorite response to unexpected developments, good or bad, is an impressed whistle. They are not suicidal, but are quick to resign themselves to inaction in `hopeless' straits. Things always have a way of working out. But if there isn't a lucky break this time, well at least it wasn't boring. Many Drifters play a musical instrument or sing (badly) to pass the time.

Drifters turn up as wandering gunslingers, space freighter captains, and troubadours. Drifters tend to travel light. Life is about what you see, not the trinkets you pick up along the way. They don't make good guides since they never visit the same place twice. But if the party is looking for passage to exotic planets, or looking to hire some one to tend to their horses while they explore a labyrinth, a drifter might fit the bill. On the other hand, if the party needs directions to an exotic location, maybe the Drifter can give them directions. He might even tag along, if the party promises to get him farther than he went last time.

Ghost: You might have to improvise a ghost if the players decide to try to talk to an attacking specter rather than simply banishing it. Protective ghosts merely want to be left alone, and if the PCs make the proper reparations to apologize for their trespassing, it will go back to its slumber.

Restless ghosts are a different story. The thing about being dead, is that it is really boring. A restless ghost obsesses on its previous life, partially because it is cursed to do so, but mostly because nothing new has happened since then. To relieve its boredom, a restless ghost keeps reciting its own sad story over and over to anyone it can force to listen. The restless ghost will be surprised and listen intently if the party can provide new developments in the story since the ghost passed on.

Given the combat statistics of a ghost in most game systems. The PCs would be fully justified in asking why the ghost doesn't go wreak its revenge, rather than hanging around a graveyard moaning about it. Be prepared to answer this question.

Herbivore: Designed ecosystems are almost always 'top heavy,' meaning that they don't have enough herbivores. You will most likely need to adlib herbivores when the characters ask what all of the predators eat when they run out of adventurers. Every carnivore should have at least 50 times (probably hundreds of times) its own body mass in herbivores within its territory. This is particularly a problem in fantasy dungeons, where wild carnivores are cut off from food and water by locked doors.

Designed ecosystems are top heavy is because of the misconception that carnivores are more dangerous and likely to hurt the player characters than herbivores. Every year in Egypt, hippopotamuses cause more deaths than crocodiles. Statically, the water buffalo is one of the deadliest animals on the planet.

The first response of most herbivores when startled or threatened is to run. Large herbivores, like the aforementioned water buffalo, respond by flattening whatever it is they don't like. Herbivores are even less interested in fighting to the death than carnivores, except when defending their young (or the herd's young). While herbivores are fiercely protective of their young, once a mother looses track of her offspring she has very little interest in tracking them down. She will search for a while, then go back to her normal life.

Designing herbivores does not have to be a time consuming task. If you described Earth's primary protein source as "four legged mammals with split hooves and horns" someone would be hard pressed to prove you wrong. This definition covers cows, sheep, goats, yak, bison, elk, deer, antelope, and giraffes. Likewise, for your alien planets, underground ecologies, or alternate planes, a preparing short definition with room for many variants should be enough to convince the players that their characters are living in a plausible world. (Okay, Earth's primary protein source is actually plankton. But if you caught this flagrant abuse of dramatic license, you're are probably the kind of person who maps out your created ecologies in exacting detail for the fun of it.)

Horses: Horses are given a separate entry from other herbivores because in most historical/ fantasy settings, they will be the primary mode of transportation and because horses are smart enough to cause real trouble. Horses come in four varieties based on their temperament, and training: Draft, Racing, War, and Wild. Like all of the archetypes in this product, these personalities do not hold true in all cases. Riding horses are intentionally left off of the list because their personalities will fall somewhere between these examples, and each individual will favor one kind or another from the list.

Draft: Draft and pack animals are rock solid. They do not spook at strange noises or sudden motion. If they are unsure about a situation, they will stop until a human assures them it is safe. If wounded or confronted with an immediate danger such as wolves, fire or a rock slide, even stoic draft horse will bolt and run. But the draft animal is bred to carry heavy loads all day long, not to sprint. Unless the danger pursues the draft animal, it will quickly tire out, and the player characters will have no problem finding it after the fight.

Racing: A race horse combines the speed of a wild horse with an aggressive winning spirit. Race horses are smart enough to have individual personalities; some are sweet or playful, others are jerks or just plain stupid. Race horses will pick fights with each other to establish a hierarchy with in the remuda. If one of the player characters is a less than competent horseman, he will get dragged into these disputes. Once a race horse learns that a certain human is scared of it, it will be completely unmanageable. If attacked, a race horse is roughly half as likely to fight back as to run (which is remarkable since draft and wild horses almost never fight back.)

War: A warhorse is a fearless behemoth. If ordered to, it will charge into packs of dogs, fire or even strait through wooden barriers. A war horse requires an equally well trained rider. It is going to go where the rider points it, from there it is up to the rider to hang on. A war horse is trained to respond to exact commands. If the rider doesn't handle the reigns and stirrups correctly, the war horse won't respond. If the character continues to flail around on the horse, the war horse will come to a stop, not so much out confusion, but annoyance; and wait for the human to get his act together or dismount.

War horses can attack with their hooves, but will only do so on the riders command. (Liaisons, a breed of light warhorses, are more high strung than the heavy war horses considered here. This is merely an impromptu archetype.)

Wild: A wild horse's first response to anything new is to run, and it's usually not particular about which direction. If there is an obvious threat, it will head away from it, but if startled by a noise, unexpected scent, or even meeting an unfamiliar horse, the wild horse will take off sprinting in a random direction.

Insider: The Insider is a mysterious friend on the

inside of an organization the Player Characters do not have access to. At least the characters assume he is on the inside. And they assume he is a friend. All they really know about him is that the brief messages he slips under their door or delivers over the phone prove useful.

The party needs to be careful when following the leads given to them by the Insider. The Insider has his own motives. Rarely do they want to bring down the entire organization, but the party is a untraceable way for the insider to leek information, cause trouble for a rival, or even eliminate a superior.

The Insider can provide a way to beat the players over the head with clues they missed. In the most famous case of a real world insider, Deep Throat, usually explained where to find records and evidence, rather than telling people what they would find. When you need to improvise an Insider, don't create a new character. Instead, look at the NPCs already in the adventure and ask, which of them has the most to gain by helping the party to 'almost' succeed.

From the Players point of view, it is easiest when the Insider sets the PCs up for a fall. Then their is no question that they eliminate him along with the rest of the organization. If the Insider thanks the PCs for their help, or simply disappears without revealing his identity, the characters will have to make the tough decision of finishing the job they started, or turning a blind eye to the Insider. If the PCs goal was to take down a member of the organization, rather than the whole organization, they have to swallow the bitter idea that they helped a man who was willing to sell out one of his own.

Man Friday: The Man Friday is the perfect secretary and personal assistant for royalty, generals, politicians and businessmen. He is always hovering silently near by, seeing and hearing everything. If given an order his response is either a simple, "Yes Sir," or more often, "It has already been taken care of, Sir."

While the main character is responsible for weighing the facts and making the decisions, Friday is responsible for making sure the orders are carried out with minimal difficulties. It is not the Man Friday's job to bring facts to the main character's attention, but if the character requests a specific piece of information, Friday provides it with all haste.

The player characters will probably try to use the Man Friday as a back door approach to the character who Friday supports. Occasionally, a Friday may take a bribe to push the party to the top of the appointment list, or to recommend their services, but for the most part, the Man Friday serve faithfully and flawlessly.

The archetype is male, but Woman Friday works just as well. No matter how attractive she is, she treats all advances with an icy glare and a comment along the lines of, "This is neither the time nor the place."

Nutcase: The Nutcase is a wild eyed, hyperactive, verbally abusive jerk. They act as if they are perpetually hyped up on stimulants. The Nutcase obsesses about death frequently; threatening to kill the characters in creative ways, or musing about taking his own life.

Nutcases are drawn to dangerous professions such as war zone pilot, spelunker, or demolitionist. In fantasy settings they enjoy using the most dangerous and hard to control magic. The party will most frequently encounter a Nutcase when they hire him for a job that no one else is willing to take. He will be especially rude to the player characters, because he knows that they have to put up with him.

He may not realize it himself, but the Nutcase is only pretending to be crazy. If confronted with the possibility of dying, he either becomes very quiet or breaks down into hysterical tears. Some Nutcases really are killers, but most will start making excuses if ordered to kill someone.

Shade Tree Mechanic: The Shade Tree Mechanic is a repairman of limited intelligence. He fixes machines, not because he is smart enough to understand how they work, but because he isn't bright enough to get a job that doesn't involve barking his knuckles and spilling hot fluids on himself.

Because of his limited intellect, the Shade Tree Mechanic is remarkable good at his job. He doesn't over think the situation. Once he learns how an engine is supposed to work, he keeps working until he makes the engine conform to that expectation. If someone specifically shows the Shade Tree Mechanic a jury-rigg trick, there is a possibility that he will remember it, but he would never think of improvising on his own. No matter how many time you tell him you want a non-standard modification, he won't remember. For

example if an engine has the idle set high for racing, he will tune it back to normal.

Only settings were a Shade Tree Mechanic realistically belongs is roughly 1900 to the mid-twentieth century. Before that, machines were too rare and expensive to trust to anything but a trained expert. After that, the technology became too complex to be self taught. But in that brief time Shade Tree Mechanic became an icon of hard work, honesty and reliability. Whether he is changing the oil in their dragster, stitching up their magic carpet, or turning the crystalline harmonic drive of their space fighters, the PCs will rest easier, knowing that the Shade Tree Mechanic is handling things.

Shop Keep: The Shop Keep is a frequently encountered character, as such, you will probably want more than one archetype handy.

Standard Shop Keep: The most common stock Shop Keep is a slightly overweight middle aged man in an apron. He threats the characters courteously. If it looks like the characters won't/can't by his goods, he will make it clear that they need to move on, without explicitly throwing them out. He has eyes in the back of his head specifically for shop lifters. He spends all day everyday in his shop, so he knows exactly where everything is, and has it arranged so that the easiest pieces to slip in to your pocket are where he can keep an eye on them. If the characters are friendly, and seem to have money to spend, the Shop Keep will bring out special items from behind the counter or from the back room.

Old Woman Shop Keep: Another archetype Shop Keep is an older woman who more interested in talking to the customers than selling them something. This kind of Shop Keep is friendly and honestly interested in the Player Characters. But she finds violence distasteful, so rather than asking about their latest exploit, she asks what they feed their horses, or if they've taken the town's sightseeing tour. Thanks to her bad eyesight, she won't notice a larcenous PC palming items, but the PC should have serious angst about ripping off an old woman who offered him a cup of tea.

Used Car Salesman: It doesn't have to be cars, it could be any expensive item, such as armor, magical components, or starships. From the instant the PCs step into his shop, the salesman is right next to them. He starts by asking if the characters are looking for anything in particular, then proceeds with questions about what they intend to use the equipment for. Eventually he shows them an item that is either marginally related to what they're asking for, or an expensive overkill, designed to do every job possible, including the one the PCs need. The car-salesman talks incessantly. Once he runs out of praise for the merchandise, he goes on about the weather, or anything else to keep the PCs from concentrating. When showing the characters an item, he moves it constantly and pointing out various features to keep the characters from getting a good look at it.

Skid Row: While there is an occasional diamond in the rough, archetypical vagrants are either too crazy, drunk or stupid to plan one month's rent in advance. They stagger along in a semiconscious state. Their motions are over exaggerated. When drunk, their speech is slurred. When semi-sober, they speak loudly, and slowly. Their over enunciation is unmistakable. In either case they tend to repeat themselves, and the things they repeat have no baring on the conversation at hand.

You'll need an impromptu Skid Row bum when the players decide to look for witnesses behind the scene of a crime instead of in front of it. At first, a gentleman of Skid Row will claim not to have seen anything. He doesn't want to get hauled down to the police station to fill out a statement or eliminated by the original perpetrator. The PCs will have to offer payment for the information. Beer, money and food are usually the most effective motivators, in that order. Any information the party gathers from Skid Row should be treated with caution. Skid Row bums have a terrible sense of time, and after a couple of days, all of the memories start to fade together.

If the PCs routinely go looking for clues in ally ways, occasionally have one of the Skid Row vagrants attack them with a knife or improvised weapon. This shouldn't be a threat to a combat competent party. The attack usually won't be an attempted mugging. The assailant honestly believes something along the lines that the PCs were coming to implant insects under his skin, or that they are disguised aliens, or both.

Slave: Slaves do not dream of freedom. Such

thoughts only make bondage that much harder to bare. Slaves don't think beyond the task at hand and their next meal. A slave who is trying to escape or lash out is a heroic character and should not be treated as a stock characters.

If slaves who were born freemen, when they are once again granted their freedom, it will take at least several minutes for the idea to sink in. If the PCs are trying to start a slave revote, they will have to personally attack the captors and look strong enough to win the fight single handedly before hope will once again stir in the breasts of the slaves. Multigenerational slaves are even harder to move to action. They have nothing to fight for and no where to go.

This description is intended for manual labor slaves, but the mentality can be equally well applied to concubines. Is freedom really worth the risk of being caught trying to escape? The PCs will have a maddeningly hard time trying to save these women from their sad plight.

Temptress: The temptress trades on her feminine whiles. She is a firm believer that the best way to succeed in life is to attract a successful man. Most Temptresses will be simple gold-diggers, who long for jewelry, fine living, and (in spite of themselves) love. The Temptresses who work behind the scenes to masterminds entire kingdoms, financial empires. or war fleets, should be fully developed characters.

Adventures often state that one of the powerful male non-player characters has a female companion but fail to develop her in proper detail. But from the man she is keeping company with, you can quickly deduce her priorities. A Temptress working with a villain realize exactly how evil he is, but she doesn't care as long as he keeps giving her gifts. The villain may think he has the Temptress fooled, but she understands men too well to fall for his lies.

Each Temptress will have a favorite type of gift. Normal preferences include cosmetics, cloths, and a palace lifestyle. More exotic preferences will be tailored to the man in question (the Temptress chose him because he could satisfy her particular tastes.) If the main NPC is a genetic engineering genius, it is a good bet that the Temptress likes animals and has at least one engineered pet. A Mage's companion will have flashy but useless magical items. A star-trader's arm-candy will dine of the finest delicacies from across the galaxy. And a dragon's companion will be decked out from tiara to toe-rings with jewelry from the dragons hoard.

The Temptress with flirt with men other than the main man she is using. These lesser men might prove useful if properly manipulated, and it never hurts to keep the primary man jealous.

The Temptress is always looking to trade up. She becomes very accommodating if it looks like the party will be more useful than her current man. Those with exotic tastes are slightly more loyal. Slightly. If the one or more of the characters plays along with the Temptress's advances, she can be useful for sneaking around the Main Character's jungle fortress or getting into the staff only area's of his casino. The Temptress is just as quick to sell the party out if the winds change.

If one of the characters actually falls for the Temptress's act, she will take him for everything he's worth and then move on.

Old Man: The party will seek out the wise Old Man because they need advice. Player characters rarely go in search of spiritual counseling (though most could probably use it). Instead they will want to ask the Old Man to ask about events that happened 20 to 50 years ago. Either there aren't any written records, the party failed to find the records, or they want to know if things really happened the way history remembers them. In fantasy settings, life spans can reach a century or better, expanding the window of time that the Old Man remembers.

The Old Man has seen it all, most of it twice. He is honestly unimpressed or intimidated by party. He is old enough that death and pain hold no fear for him, he has nothing worth stealing but enough to get by; and he while he is still attracted to beautiful women, he knows he has no chance of winning them. In short, the party has nothing to offer him, and there is nothing they can do to hurt him.

The Old Man is fully aware that he is now immune to threats, bribery and social control. And he pushes his luck to the limit and beyond. He mocks proud characters mercilessly, especially if they start to get upset ("Threatening a defenseless old man? My, you are the brave adventurer.") He flirts with any half attractive young woman (unless his wife is still alive.

She is the one person on the face of the planet who still has the power to coerce him).

The Old Man expects a small reward for his story telling. It might be a mug of warm beer on a cold night, or simply the pleasure of tormenting a group of proud warriors. He doesn't have all of the facts about past events, but he tells the truth as he remembers it. Most of the people involved are dead, so their is no point in lies and secrets. If fact if the history books do lie, the old man sees the player characters as a way to unburden himself of the secret before he dies.

The Old Man constantly laments his failing eyesight, hearing, and strength. But all three are still better than he will admit to. If the characters insult the old man while "out of earshot" he will insult them back verbatim. If the party somehow manages to goad the Old Man into attacking, he is surprisingly strong, and fights to the death. The Old Man would never fight to protect himself, but will attack the party if they threaten his descendants (actual or adopted) or the local holy sites.



Three more Rakugo Props

Rakugo props were first introduced in the first Instant GM . Rakugo (落語)* is a form of Japanese stand up comedy which has remained popular since feudal times. The hallmark of Rakugo is that the comedian acts out an amazing variety of actions while seated and using only three props: a handkerchief, a folding fan, and the kimono on his back.

For a role playing game, `Rakugo props' refers to using things you have on hand to act as props during the game. They are an excellent way to add illustration to a game without having to remember anything extra. Since you use props that you have on hand anyways, you're ready if you suddenly see the need or opportunity for a Rakugo prop during the game.

The original Instant GM introduced three Rakugo props: windbreaker, baseball cap and pen. Here are ideas for three more impromptu props: Books, cards and glasses.

The ideas here are not all inclusive. Every adventure will offer new opportunities to use props and act out actions not covered here.

(* A point of clarification. The original Instant GM says that Rakugo translates as "Relaxed Talk." The literal meaning of the two characters is "to fall" and "speak/word" but since the Japanese expression meaning "to calm down" :ochitsuku: 落ち着く is literally "falling arrival" Rakugo is translated as Relaxed Talk.)

Book:

Even if you are using one of the new PDF games system, it is a good bet that someone at the table has a physical copy, or some other book on hand. These tricks work best with a hard cover book, but you can also use a paperback.

Barriers: When someone is hiding behind a boulder, trashcan, or garden wall hold the book horizontally over you're head and in front of you with both hands on the side of the book nearest you. Then to peak over the top of the barrier, lower the book to just below eye level while extending your neck. If you hold the spine away from you and let the back cover of the book hang down, it really will conceal your face.

The same idea applied to peaking around a corner. Open the book ninety degrees. Hold the front and

back covers with each and with the spine towards you, then peak around the corner.

When a farmer is leaning on a fence while talking to the characters, put the spine of the book on the table, hold it vertical and rest your arms on the top of the book.

Book: The most obvious way to use a book as a prop is as a book. The wizard holding a book in one hand and casting a spell with the other is a fantasy icon. If an NPC says he needs to check his records to answer the characters' question, flip through the book before giving the answer. When the characters arrive at a high class hotel, ask them to sign the guess register (then grab the book back quickly before a smart-Aleck player writes in your book).

Cabinet: You can hold the book up with one and open the cover with the other hand to represent a cabinet. By shifting the book slightly, you can make sure that the 'cabinet doesn't close on you hand while your hand is in it. Likewise tilting the book back slightly will keep it from opening on its own.

Car hood: If the players slam a criminal suspect against the hood of the patrol car to question him, hold the book horizontally in front of you with both hands and drop the side of your face on to the book as hard as you can without hurting yourself.

Cliff: When hanging from a cliff by your finger tips, hold the book over your head with both hands (or one hand if the situation is desperate) and both hands on the side of the book nearest you. As the character pulls himself up, grunt and pant while slowly lower the book. When the book gets to about head level, let go with one hand and make a desperate grab from the far side of the book. Then pull the near edge of the book into you chest and slide it down your torso to the waist.

Doors: You can use the book to represent an entire door. When someone is listening at the door, hold the book up and put your ear against it. When peaking though a key hole look just to the side of the book.

When there is a knock at the door, tap it out. The positioning of your hand affects the sound and says a lot about the character. A normal nock is delivered with the palm facing forward. Polite, or subservient characters turn their hand around so the palm faces backwards and rap crisply with two knuckles. Abrasive characters pound on the door with the base of their fist.

In paranoid societies, doors have small windows which can be opened without opening the entire door. Hold the book in front of your face (not too close in case one of the players decides to knock on the `door') and slide it sideways when the window opens. If instead of a window, the character opens the door only a crack, peak around the side of the book.

Items with Lids: Don't forget that you can open the book. Dungeons are full of chests, boxes, and trap doors which have lids which flip open. When the party delivers a briefcase, or crate, the recipient should open the top and inspect the goods. Hold the book with one hand, and lift the cover with the other.

With hinged items there is always the comedic potential of someone getting fingers closed in the opening.

Note Pad: In modern, setting a closed book makes an excellent stand in for a clip board. All kinds of characters use clip boards: scientists, safety inspectors, work crew foremen, and pollsters. In future setting, the closed book becomes a data-slate, data-pad, or whatever you game system calls the portable computers. In addition to "reading" the pad, the character can work buttons or a stylus to call up new information.

Card

The heart and soul of Rokugo props is that these are items you already have with you. If you aren't carrying cards, using them as props is no reason to start. But given then nature of the role playing industry, you probably have some cards mixed in with your gaming supplies. Either a deck of a card game that when out of business, promotional cards out of magazines, the key card from your last convention hotel room, or those fake cards credit card companies send in the mail.

In modern and futuristic setting there are too many types of cards to count: I.D. cards, business cards, key cards, etc. When the research scientist leads the characters into a lab, make the motions to swipe the card. If the characters steal a pass card to break into a secure compound, wait until the group has split up

and then ask "Who has the card?" Unless the player of the character who has made it to the vault is the one who has the card in his hands, that character suddenly realizes he forgot to ask for the card.

In futuristic settings someone has probably invented a celphone the size of a business card to carry in your wallet. In Victorian England, anyone of note carried "calling cards" for servants to present to the family of the house to determine if the character should be granted admittance.

Other possible uses for a card are as a handheld signaling mirror or compact, CB radio handset, a picture of a missing person (or incriminating still frames from the security camera the party failed to spot). If you're wearing glasses (see below) you can use your glasses to hold an "eye patch" in place.

Cards also make a good stand in for throwing knives and shuriken. Before your actually throw something at your players, remember two things: someone is going to have to pick the card up at the end of the game, and if you start throwing things at the players, they will likely start throwing back. Of course if the player has it coming, let him have it.

Finally cards make great book marks when you have to compare different passages to resolve an issue while GMing.

Glasses

An above average percent of gamers wear glasses. I don't know why. With the availability of cheap contact lenses we can no longer use the excuse that we wear out our eyes reading books and staring at computer screens. For those of you who do wear glasses, regardless of why, they make a useful Rakugo prop.

Eyeglasses are a unique shape, and have difficulty passing for other objects. Fortunately glasses and goggles turn up in a variety of places: Welding goggles, diving goggles, early 21st century driving goggles, Virtual-reality computer glasses, skiing goggles, night vision gear, leaded glasses to dim the burst from that flash grenade the bounty hunter just threw at the party...

Glasses are versatile because they are context dependent. The simple act of looking over the top of the rims has a vastly different meaning when performed by an elderly woman librarian, nightclub womanizer, or a police detective.

Consider how a character who wears glasses handles them. Scholarly characters are depicted adjusting their glasses by the edge. Nerd characters have the classic index-finger-push to the middle of their glasses. Does the character wear the glasses all of the time. If not, when he takes them off does he push them up onto his forehead, hang them by his shirt collar, hold them in his hand? Does the character have a nervous habit of chewing on the ends of her glasses?

I keep a pair of sunglasses with me at all times. When gaming, I wear them while portraying rock stars or bodyguard/ plain cloths security. Since I don't use them for other types of characters, my players quickly learn that when I grab the dark glasses they've just run afoul of security. Other possible uses dark glasses are portraying blind men, highway patrol men and street thugs (particularly from the 1980's).

The one drawback to using your glasses as props is it tends to spoil the atmosphere when you have to take off your sunglasses and/or put on your reading glasses to find the character's next line.

Tips Tricks & Rants

Improvise Ahead of Time

The best way to prepare for the unexpected is to know what to expect. This only works with regular games with the same group. It doesn't when running games for strangers at conventions. Chances are that your gaming group is some of the people you know best. Not only at the table, but you know something of their real world lives as well.

When writing an adventure, or reading a professional module, keep in mind the types of details your group is likely to sidetrack on. If one of your players prides himself on being irreverent, you know that the alter in the ruined temple is going to get desecrated. Decide ahead of time how hard it is to break. If your group can't pass up any treasure light enough carry, decide ahead of time what it takes to cut the tapestries down without damaging them. You know the first thing your group is going to do when they make planet-fall is find a Spacers bar. If the adventure doesn't include one, plan one out on your

own.

And regardless of the setting, if there is a library in the adventure, have a list of the titles of at least one dozen of the books. If there is a book on the table, decide what is written on the open page and if there is a bookmark on any of the other pages.

Dramatic Pace

Role Playing Games are the direct descendent of table top strategy games. Specifically, the first role playing game, started out as a variant of Gary Gygax's Chainmail system. Dave Arneson ran the first RPG in his basement in1971. He communicated his variant rules to Gary Gygax, who expanded and published them. Gary Gygax named the new game Dungeons and Dragons.

With this linage, it is understandable that many games are run like military campaigns. The group plays through the adventure at a cautious pace. If there are any rules questions, everything stops until they can be resolved. And when it is time to end the evenings session, you write down where you were in the adventure, and pick up from the same place next week.

In recent years there has been a shift away from this sentiment. The change has been driven by the number of one-shot games run at conventions where the GM has a set amount of time to present the plot. Another driving factor has been the number of episodic fantasy/adventure TV shows, where each weeks plot is independent.

The Armchair Generals of the strategy games have been replaced by a new breed of Armchair Action Heroes. These players are less concerned with tracking the weight of their gear down to the 1/10th of a pound, and more concerned about if the gear is cool enough to fit their heroic image. These players want their games to rise to a climax, and then reach a resolution. Then, pick up a new plot next game session. Even in a continuous plot they expect a "mini climax" in each session.

The half-hour fantasy adventure show follows a fairly predictable pattern: The first 18 minutes of an episode are spent on plot, character development and character interactions. Then in the last four minutes, the characters let their actions speak louder than words. (That is for the United States format. If you are watching unedited Japanese anime it breaks down to 20 minutes build up and 5 minutes violence.)

An action-adventure gaming session should follow the same pattern: Figure about seventy-five to eighty percent should be filled with sneaking around, finding clues, talking to people, and generally letting the party role-playing their way into trouble. Combat during this part should be non-existent or handled quickly as the characters easily do away with minions.

Towards the end of the gaming session the players will want their characters to confront the major villains. If the players/characters have ignored or bungled the plot and have no idea what's going on, the villain will probably either corner or capture the characters. At which point he can explain his evil scheme to the characters before ordering his flunkies to kill them. Another possibility is the villain of the adventure will become proactive against the player characters, and try to deter them by violence against them, or the threat of violence against innocents. In short if the characters don't find the final fight, it will find them.

Roles of NPC

Every Non Player Character serves a function in the over all plot. When improvising it is important to remember each character's function, so that you can use them to that end. If you find you need an impromptu Ally (or Antagonist or Contagonist), before you create a new one, consider the NPCs included in the adventure and see if one of them will work. Remembering the character's role in the adventure is as vital to staying "in character" while improvising as remembering the NPC's personality quirks.

Allies: These are people who are on the same side as the Player Characters. They may or may not also be heroic characters. They include girlfriends, friendly police detectives, mechanics, trainers, butlers, etc. These characters require game statistics almost as detailed as the player characters. Most Allies are less powerful than the PCs. Allies should rarely, if ever save the day, but they'll come into the middle of things to help the player characters save the day.

Antagonists: Anyone who tries to stop the Player Characters is an Antagonist. An Antagonist will always have reasons for wanting to stop the PCs. He could be protecting his master, carrying out a vendetta against one of the PC, or trying to win the attention of a love interest. Antagonists are logical and can be reasoned with. For example, a FBI agent hunting down superhero vigilantes would be an antagonist who's just doing his job. Sometimes antagonists can be talked out of committing misguided evil deeds, or deals can be struck. An antagonist may even change sides if the PCs befriend him or offer him a better deal.

Antagonists require full character statistics. They will be the same power level or more slightly more powerful than the PCs.

Contagonists: A contagonist is someone who works at cross purposes to the player characters. The contagonists motives might be selfish (seize control of a corporation), noble (rob the player character to give the to the poor), or questionable (wreak vengeance). Some may even be trying achieve the same goal as the PCs, but want to do it with their own hands. Each will have to be dealt with on a case by case basis, and after the conflict, the PCs and the contagonists could walk away friends or bitter enemies.

Contagonists require full character statistics. They will be close to the same power level as the PCs.

Flunkies: Opponents who are far less powerful than the PC are Flunkies. Flunkies are not mindless combat machines. Each has a reason for fighting with the PCs, even if it's just a simple mugging. You don't have to spend too much time developing the personality or motivations of a Flunky, because a party with even limited combat ability is going to put him on his back with little difficulty.

While the character of the Flunky will live their entire life in the campaign world, he will only cross paths with the characters for one scene. You only need to know what he wants right now, and why he wants it.

Flunkies can be represented with simplified character statistics. They do not need skills unless one is relevant to the roll they will play (example: Drive for someone chasing the PCs in a car). All they need are combat statistics. Most of the time all thugs in a gang can be given the same combat statistics, and no one will notice.

Normals: A Normal is a Non Player Character in the game who has no connection to the over all plot. The innkeepers, the cab drivers, the innocent by-standers, and possibly even the heroes' fans. Most of the time, Normals are part of the background, but you never know who the Player Characters will want to talk to.

Normals require nothing in the way of combat statistics, because the first time they're hit, they go down. It's the GM's choice as to if they are dead, unconscious, hysterical, or running for their lives.

Patrons: These are powerful Non Player Characters who work on the same side as the Player Characters. Patrons often hire heroes to do their work for them. The heroes may be freelance doing occasional jobs, or they could be full time members or an organization where they report to the Patron. Another class patron is the venerable old master whom the character's visit when they can't overcome their obstacles.

Patrons are a powerful tool for the GM, and easy to mishandle. In theory they are much more powerful than the PCs in terms of knowledge and worldly power. However, they never actually do anything for themselves, always acting through intermediaries such as the PC. Patrons never have the ability to help the PCs with their problems, but they have a remarkable talent for helping the PCs get into trouble.

You should never create a Patron as an improvisation. By if there is a Patron in the campaign, you can improvise freely with him. Patrons have unexplained access to all kinds of restricted equipment. If there is something needed for the plot that the PCs can't get for themselves (treasure maps, starships, invitations to parties, CIA intelligence reports) the Patron can get it for them. Using Patrons in the game is a delicate balance. They help the PCs, in exchange for the PCs' help. Before the Patron does anything to help the PCs, stop and think, "What does he get in exchange for his trouble?" If the PCs ask for something that would eliminate the difficulty and danger of the mission, then if the Patron could provide that, he'd just do it himself rather than sending the PCs. If the PCs want something that will get them to the difficult and dangerous parts faster, the Patron can probably provide it.

Patrons can turn up literally anywhere. If the characters are eavesdropping on a conversation at an exclusive golf club, the Patron walks up (undetected) behind them and asks if he can play through. If the party is eating at the dingiest noodle bar in Hong Kong, the Patron is sitting two stools down because "Ken Gu here makes the best ramen in Asia." You can also use the Patron for a Quick End. After the heroes have paddled up the Amazon River to a forgotten temple to face the Jaguar God and stopped him from taking over the world, the Patron might show up with a helicopter to airlift them to civilization, rather than making the PCs go through the long and anticlimactic trek back. If the PCs capture the bad guy and his lieutenants, the Patron can be trusted to round up the rest of the gang. Don't over use the Quick End. The Patron never wins the final fight. He may show up on his yacht when PCs have just redlined reactor on the Soviet submarine and need to escape, but without the heroes there doing the work, he wouldn't have done anything.

A Patron should have a list of attributes and skills to define what type of person he is. They should have detailed histories, motivations and worldly connections, even if the Player character do not know the true goals of the Patron. Patrons really only need one game stat: They can do that because the GM say so.

Not all campaigns will have a Patron character in it.

Villains: Villains are like Antagonists, in the fact that they have reasons for opposing the Player Characters. Unlike Antagonists, a Villain's reasons are all evil. Villains can not be reasoned with. They know what they want, and don't care how many people get hurt or killed because of it. Some enjoy making others suffer for no reason. They are arrogant, treating their minions with open disdain, and holding no regard for life. Often they have a twisted since of beauty, and surround themselves with disturbing items. Villains are without redeeming qualities and the PC should be able to kill them, guilt free. However killing them is harder than it sounds.

Villains require full character Statistics. They will be significantly more powerful than the PCs. Villains also have worldly power. They protect themselves with castles, modern security systems, or underground bunkers. They hire guards and may be powerful enough coerce a national army into their service. Their power doesn't have to be physical. Villains with economical or legal power could make the characters' lives very difficult, without having to see them face to face. Magical abilities might be available to the villain.

When the PCs foil a Villains plan too early in the game session, forcing you to improvise, remember that a good Villain will always have a plan "B." Plan B will achieve the same goal as the original plot, but with a higher body count. Improvise a scene along the lines that: the villain orders a missile strike on the fortress the PCs saved, uses a voudoun doll (usually misspelled voodoo doll) to kill the nun while the characters are guarding her, or just bribes the Chief of Police to get his drug shipment back. If the question comes up whether the Villain has that kind of power: like the Patron, he can do that because the GM says he can. This will frustrate the players to no end having the villain 'cheat.' And they will love it all the more when they get to cave his skull in.

Not all campaigns will have a villain. Cyber punk games in particular avoid villains. Megacorporations may do evil things, but really they are just doing what they have to in order to survive. There members are calloused and calculating, but they don't enjoy it enough to be evil.

The Importance of Research

When forced to improvise during a game, it helps if you have some background knowledge to help you fill in the gaps. You don't have to be an expert, but take the time to do some research. Role playing games are actually some of the most accurate, concise and detailed resources available for firearms. But they tend to be weaker on other subjects. From time to time, fantasy GMs should read a book about real world myths or historical campaigns rather than a new game supplement. Science Fiction GMs need to subscribe to a periodical about new science and technology.

Many people like to do their research via the internet. There is an astounding amount of information on the web, and a little of it is actually correct. I prefer the look and feel of a good old fashioned book. And its a lot easier to read a book 5 or 10 minutes at a time

between classes or while waiting on the next train.

The other drawback to internet research is that it is too each to skim for keywords. The most useful part of research is not the facts you look up, it the trivia you come across while reading. While reading about a historical military campaign, you'll find odd references to the local foods (great for when the players ask what is on the tavern menu), how the army dealt with things like chariot repairs, washed-out roads, or snowstorms, and dozens of problems and complications a modern person would not think to consider. A good reference will explain what the weapons of choice were, and why. Take as many notes as you can stand (highlight the book if you own it).

In Science Fiction, it is a sure bet than any source book 5 years or older is outdated. Sometimes even books hot off the presses have "futuristic" technology that lags behind current capabilities. If you read science/tech periodical, you will encounter great ideas for obstacles to throw at the characters, new toys to reward them with, perhaps even ideas for an entire adventure. If you don't have the background to understand the principles behind the gizmos, keep a list of techno-babble you can throw at the players when they ask how something works.

Are there any particular topics you should look into? Yes, any that hold your interest enough to make you want to do more research. Avoid over specialization, a little knowledge about a wide base goes farther than detailed knowledge of a specific, person, era, or technology. There are however a couple of areas that Game Masters and game writers screw-up on a regular basis:

Death & Decomposition: The 'instant death' is largely a myth propagated by murder mysteries. There are ways to kill a person so that he will be dead before he hits the ground, but these require large amounts of either training or luck. King Arthur was mortally wounded in the evening and lasted until the following dawn. This is not unreasonable, given the weapons available. With firearms it is possible to line up a shot through the vital sections of the brain, but this would be virtually impossible if the target was putting up any kind of resistance, including running away.

Even when death is quick, it is virtually impossible to mistake a dead body for sleeping. Postmortem twitching moves the body into an unnatural position that the person/animal would never be lying in if it was still alive. This is one of the most disturbing aspects of finding a body.

The only time you find a find a complete body is if it has been locked in a coffin where animals can't get at it. Over the course of three days to two weeks dogs, birds, rats, and anything strong enough to drag a bone, will rip off a piece and carry it away to eat at their leisure. At the end, your not even left with a pile of bones, the remains are strewn over a 5 foot radius. So, if you've been wondering why the party stops to pour holy water over every skeleton they find lying in the hallway, it is because one of your players realizes that the only way to have an intact skeleton is if someone has specifically prepared it.

Fantasy Names: Every Non Player Character will have a name. There are literally entire books of potential names (usually published under titles like "The Big Book of Baby names.") The setting will determine what names are appropriate. If you take the advice at the beginning of this chapter and start reading actual historical accounts, keep a handwritten list of names folded in the back cover of the book. Every time you come across a name that would work in your setting, jot it down on the list.

Created names for medieval fantasy characters usually sound contrived, and spoil the atmosphere. This is because in true medieval England children were always given proper Christian names. This was a limited pool consisting mostly of names drawn from the Bible such as: John, Joseph, Joshua, Henry, Mark, Mathew. For females names like, Mary, Ruth, Sara. To cope with the fact that their might be three people in a village, all named Robert, the English developed extensive nicknames for the most popular names: Margaret (Maggie, Meg, Peg, Marge), Richard (Rich, Rick, Dick), Robert (Rob ,Bob, Bert), William (Will, Bill). If a man's name was Rick, it was a good bet that is father is called either Rich or Dick; and his son was called by the other. Continental European history is not my strong point, but judging from the number of people named Juan, Jose, Jesus, Maria, or Margarita, the same logic can be applied to Spain.

Sailing Ships: Most game products treat tall masted ships as if they are giant cars that drive on water. I've lost count of the number of games I've been in as a player that were scuttled because the 'right' decisions were based on the author's misconceptions about ships. In reality ships are slow and unmaneuverable. It takes 3 minuets to reload a cannon and about that much time to climb the rigging from the deck to the crow's nest. But that doesn't slow things down because after one pass it will take at least 15 minutes to get the ships turned around for a second pass.

What ships are good at is carrying heavy loads (cargo or cannons) for long distances cheaply, and not quickly, but faster than you can transport the same goods over land. Rather than thinking of them as large cars, a better first approximation is to think of ships as movable buildings.

Ships are also effected by winds, other weather conditions and ocean currents. The travel time along a trade route depends on which direction the ship is traveling and the season.

Don't Face the Players on their Home Turf

This is the other side of the coin from research. Your players will know things that you don't. GMing about a subject the players know better than you is a sure disaster. You won't be able to handle it the way the players think you should. Do whatever you can to stay off of the players home turf. This is difficult because the characters will wander off in a direction that interests the players, but if you are aware of this pitfall you can resist.

If one of the players has served in the armed services and you haven't, resist that players attempts to 'call in the cavalry.' When adlibbing, you will inevitable mishandle some aspect of military procedures, etiquette or capabilities. The game will then come to a grinding halt, while the player recounts stories about how he's seen this situation handled.

Likewise if one of your players is a martial arts fanatic, holding at least one black belt, unless you are physically his equal, keep unarmed combat as abstract and by the rules as possible. Let the player describe the various kicks and grapples his character uses, but if you try to give vivid descriptions of the opponent's attacks, the player will find some fault in the technique you're describing and then get mad if you don't let him exploit it.

The Perils of Over Research: A Personal Warning

While it is good to have a wide array of information at your disposal, your players might not know what you think is common knowledge.

For Gen Con 2001, I wrote a scenario Gun Boat Diplomacy: a slightly futuristic police story set in NeoTokyo, where a Japanese Self Defense Force General stages an act of terrorism. His goal is to create a political environment where it will be acceptable for Japan to have a full fledged Army, rather than the Self Defense Force they have been limited to since World War II.

In all the times I have run Gun Boat Diplomacy, not one group has ever figured out the underlying plot; even though the "foreign terrorists" all speak Japanese and the opening text explicitly mentions both the Japanese Self Defense Force and the US troops on Japanese soil. Thankfully the game had enough mindless action that everyone had fun fighting the "terrorists." I am now living in Japan, and the Japanese military came up in a recent conversation. Of the three Japanese people present, only one of them knew that the Japanese armed forces aren't technically an army, and the other two hadn't noticed that Japan's jet fighters all have the English initials "SDF" painted on them.

A Final Word: This is Not the Zen of the Game Master

Originally this product was going to be called "The Zen of the Game Master," but it turns out that Zen does not accept role playing games. Zen is a religion which teaches that anything from martial arts, to landscaping, to motorcycle maintenance can be meditation if done in the proper state of mind. So what does it have against role playing games?

Zen explicitly rejects the meditation practice of Visualization, found in other Buddhist sects. Visualization teaches that to overcome your fear of the literal demons which stand between you and enlightenment, you should form an image of them in

your mind. The goal is to achieve an image so realistic that it actually moves and blinks. Keep concentrating until you can hear it breathing and smell its stench. Once the demon is as real to you as anything else, let it attack and consume you until there is no body left. Repeat this exercise again and again until it stops scarring you. Then, you are ready to confront your demons, literal and figurative.

The next step in Visualization is designed to drive home the Buddhist teaching that the world is actually an illusion. The meditation practitioner envisions a room in such detail that he can move his point of view around the room and not find any anomalies. In advanced stages the practitioner imagines himself picking up and interacting with the objects in the room. He also goes beyond a single room and creates elaborate multi-room complexes to explore. To help with this task there are lengthy scriptures describing sample buildings to explore. (What this has to do with religion is if this make believe world is so real that you know the texture of the walls, what proof is there that the "real" world is real?)



The final step of Visualization is to accept the Buddhist teaching of "Atman," or no self. Which teaches that there is no soul and the individual consciousness is as much an illusion as the rest of the world. To this end you create a new persona for your self. A person with memories, skill sets, and world views different from your own. Then you explore the world created in step two, not as your self, but as the new persona.

So sorry, there is no Zen of Role Playing. But would you rather sit around contemplating the sound of one hand clapping, or create your character, design you dungeon and go face the monsters?

(By the way the answer to "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" is for the student to thrust his hand, palm forwards, up and towards the master. The master then repeats the question and the student replies "From the front it sounds like a crow, from the back it sounds like a cuckoo." to which the master replies, "If you can hear it so clearly, then let me hear it!" At which point the student slaps the master. Now that we've answered that question, lets go kick some Visualized demon tail!)

Appendix: Quick Reference Tables

Table 1 - Plot Seeds	
Plot Seed	Variants
Body Snatcher	
The Chase	Hot Potato
Counter Ops	
Defend the Fort	
Delivery	
Diplomacy	
The Fugitive	Jail Break
Giant Monster Steps on the City	
Kill the Monster	
Ninja Mission	
The Quest	Stranger in a Strange Land
The Race	
Save the Princess	
Scavenger Hunt	
Serial Killer	The Mad Bomber
The Swarm	
Who Did It	
War	

Table 2- Adventure Hooks	
Adventure Hooks	Variants
Arrested/Kidnapped	
Blackmail	The Prophecy
Help Wanted	
Missed the Left Turn at Albuquerque	
Organizational Ties	Favor For a Friend
Revenge	A Ghost from the Past
Reward	
A Sad Story	
Shipwrecked	
Some Strings Attached	
Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark	
Treasure Map	
The Wager	
You're sitting in a Tavern When…	

Table 3 - Stock Character Quick Reference

Stock Character	Plot Purpose	Description/quote
Angel	Divine Intervention, Guidance or Wrath	Helps the worthy. Passes judgment on the wicked.
Businessman	Stoic Ally or Enemy	"Nothing personal, just business."
Carnivore	Random Wilderness Encounter	Hunts to live.
Computer	Self aware Interface for Technology	"That is illogical. Please rephrase your request."
Drifter	Helps, when the group is off of the beaten track	"I'm not headed anywhere in particular."
Ghost	Explain the events surrounding its death	"Thus I am curse to haunt. Not alive. Not Dead."
Herbivore	Fill in the gaps in the ecology	Gets eaten a lot.
Horse	Transportation	Smart enough to cause real problems for character with no horse sense.
Insider	Point out clues the party missed	Mysterious "friend" who never shows himself
Man-Friday	Takes care of the details	"The details have already been taken care of, Sir."
Nutcase	Only guy crazy enough to take the job.	Hyper active jerk
Shade Tree Mechanic	Fixes technology	Mentally slow, but does good work
Shopkeep	Sells equipment	"I'm trying to run a business here."
Skid Row	Dumpster diving for witnesses	Isn't playing with a full deck
Slave	Labor	Fears change
Temptress	Backdoor to the Mastermind's organization	Always looks out for herself
Old Man	First hand account of historical events	Too old to care

Table 4 - Stock Character From Instant GM 1

Stock Character	Plot Purpose	Description/quote
Anime Girl	Comic Relief, Tender Loving Care	Sickeningly perky
Barkeep	Serves drinks and information	When he gives out information, he's looking for tips, not trouble.
Bureaucrat/Middle Management	Facilitates or Impeded access to the System	Does not like change or surprises
Corporate Service Personnel	Works at the front counter	Hides her personality behind a uniform
Daredevil	Takes difficult jobs for the challenge	He's the best there is. And he is the first to tell you that.
Domsetic Servant	Tidies up after heroes or villains	Knows more about the household than anyone
Dwarf	It's a Dwarf!	Works hard. Parties harder.
Elf	It's an Elf!	Elitist
Employeer	Hires the party.	Never trust a helpful Employer.
Knight	A powerful rival or enemy	Honorable, not stupid
Law Enforcement	Maintain civil order	Would like to lock up the party, to be on the safe side
Mad Scientist	Creates monsters	"It's Alive!"
Peasant	Agricultural labor to support Feudalism	Prefers the devil he knows to the devil he doesn't.
Professional	Provides skills the party needs	"Those are my terms. Do we have a deal or not?"
Savage	Local Guide	Coldhearted
Sidekick	Helps a heroic character	Always second best, behind his leader
Shady Dealer	Buys and sells anything	"Everyone has a price."
Swashbuckler	A flashy rival or enemy	A pirate
Thug	Gets beaten up by the party	Likes beating people up

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