

YOU ARE YOUR OWN GM

This is the one page summary document of the You are Your own GM (YaYoG) system. YaYoG empowers players to make decisions and ruling without needing to find a GM or interrupt the flow of the game. However, you are still beholden to the rules of the game, to the rules of drama, and to being fair. It becomes your job to make the game more enjoyable for everyone; luckily, you are empowered to do just that.

A NOTE ON GM THEORY

In a LARP, GMs are called upon to make rules decisions, to clarify information, and to act as “the rest of the world.” Essentially, they are called upon as independent moderators when the players cannot resolve the issue themselves.

YaYoG endows that ability to the players. You are the judge of whether your character may or may not do something. You are allowed to expand the game world as needed, as long as it is reasonable. The trick here is knowing what is reasonable. If you aren’t sure, find someone who is uninvolved in your situation. We call that person the O3P, the **Objective Third Party**.

The O3P acts as a GM for your situation. The O3P must be agreed upon by all parties and the ruling of the O3P is final. If you cannot find an O3P from among the player base, all GMs can act as O3Ps in all situations.

LET’S GET SPECIFIC: GAME MECHANICS

Every Skill (basic thing you could do) has five levels: *Horrible*, *Below Average*, *Average*, *Above Average*, and *Excellent*. If you are trying to do something, say pick a lock, you compare your level to the target level (which will either be explicitly stated or decided by an O3P). If you are better, then you do it. If you are worse, you fail. If you tie, you need to find an O3P and have them make a decision. We’ll get into how to make a good decision as an O3P in a bit.

There may come a time when you want to try something for which you don’t have a skill. At that point, you must decide if it is reasonable that you could do it (see Making Decisions) based on your character

history and your abilities. If you cannot decide, find an O3P to decide for you.

If you are attempting to do something to someone else, like say, defeat them in combat, you first have an announcement phase, something to the effect of, “I’m a-gonna whump you because I’m above average in combat.” “Oh yeah? I may only be average in combat, but I’ll get my licks in.” Try to keep it in character, but get the idea across.

In this particular example, the character who is above average will win. But the character who is average is saying that the other won’t leave the fight unscathed. That’s fine and follows the rules; see below.

Once all parties know how they will do, then you act out the resolution safely and dramatically. Afterwards, resolve the combat. You may end up Healthy, Slightly Wounded, Severely Wounded, and Dead (see Damage below). The winner gets to decide how the loser is. If the loser is the same or one rank lower, they can “*get their licks in*” and leave the winner Slightly Wounded.

If both parties have the same skill level and they cannot come up with a mutually satisfying resolution, then they must find an O3P to decide. The decision of the O3P is final and could result in any resolution, up to and including all participants being killed.

Teaming Up

Two or more people may team up to defeat someone who has one higher skill level. For example, two people who are Below Average in combat, may work together to beat up someone who is Average in combat. The person who is higher may get his licks in to up to two others in the combat of his or her choice.

For combats more complex than that, find an O3P agreeable to all involved and have that person decide the results.

The O3P decides the results but does *not* describe the action of the combat. After hearing or deciding on the

Skill Levels

Excellent

Above Average

Average

Below Average

Horrible

Damage Levels

Healthy

Slightly Wounded

Severely Wounded

Dead

results, you must act out the combat or actions, roleplay them in slow motion.

Damage

There are four levels of damage. If you are *Healthy*, you have no damage and there is no game effect.

If you are *Slightly Wounded*, all of the levels of what you can do are one less. You need to announce this in the declarative phase, “I wish to win the dance competition, and am normally an excellent dancer, but due to this leg wound, I am only above average today.” You may be *Slightly Wounded* for as long as you want, but not less than 15 minutes. After that, you go back to Healthy.

If you are *Severely Wounded*, you need immediate medical attention. Until you receive medical attention, you may not use any of your skills, nor may you move faster than a slow limp.

Dead is dead.

Two additional notes. First, note that damage does not stack. If you are Slightly Wounded and become Slightly Wounded again, you do not gain more wounds. It just resets the 15 minute wound clock.

Also, it is possible that you may want to knock someone out but leave them unharmed. If you win a combat, you may choose to declare that your opponent is *Unconscious*. They stay unconscious for as long as is dramatically appropriate. The combat winner gets to decide how long is dramatically appropriate, although an appeal may be made to an O3P if it seems excessive.

Breaking the Rules

In general, you cannot break the rules, such as they are, of YaYoG. But you may have a certain number of Special Abilities that let you break the rules. An example might be, “Always Excellent” which allows you to be Excellent in a skill even though you are wounded. Another special ability might raise your level in a skill in certain situations.

Special abilities are just that, special. You will only have a certain number of uses of each ability per game. Once it's used, it's gone.

Also, some special abilities can be used while you are wounded, unconscious or dead. The ability will say if it can be used at those times.

MAKING DECISIONS

When deciding if you should be able to do something, or if you are an O3P, you should decide based on the following factors:

- **Is it reasonable?** Does it follow the rules? Could the character do it based on his or her abilities and character history? For example, if someone is playing a super spy but doesn't explicitly have an ability to pick locks, can they try to pick the lock? You might say that they have an Average ability to pick locks. They then want to perform brain surgery. You would probably say that there is nothing in their background to support such an activity, so you would rule they cannot do it.
- **Is it fair?** When making a decision, you need to decide not only if it is fair to the player, but to the game as a whole. Would allowing the player to do this keep someone else from joining in on the fun? Would not allowing the player to do this damage his or her fun? Which would be better for the game as a whole?
- **Are there extenuating circumstances?** A couple of players might come to you to decide on a combat, for example, and one player might say, "hey, I know he would normally win, but I'm attacking him from behind, and I have a bazooka, and he's tied to a chair. Can I get a bonus?" It is fine to give a bonus to one side for extenuating circumstances, but be careful that this doesn't lead to an arms race.
- **Is it dramatically appropriate?** This is a touchy, gut-feeling, sort of thing. John is playing an expert detective. Five minutes into the game, he thinks he knows whodunit. Allowing him to unmask the culprit so soon is not only unfair to the other player, it is not very dramatically appropriate. Ask

John to get some more proof, or interview more people. Likewise, having the villain leave the game as soon as he hears that you declined John's request isn't fair or appropriate either. Instead encourage the villain to have a dramatic denouement when it is appropriate for the game. Think of the handcuffs scene in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. He could only escape the cuffs when it was funny. In the best of all possible worlds, things should happen in the LARP when dramatically appropriate.

Respect Decisions

As an O3P, you should feel comfortable making decisions. As a player, you should understand that different O3Ps will make different decisions in similar circumstance. Because of this, you need to respect the decisions made by previous O3Ps even if you don't agree with them. Please do not *retcon*, or change history. This way lies madness. If you really disagree with a previous decision, please recuse yourself instead.

Recusing Yourself

There may come a time when you are called to be an O3P and you cannot decide. Maybe you are too close to the situation and cannot be an arbitrator. Maybe you simply cannot decide what is fair, reasonable, or dramatically appropriate. Maybe you have no interest in acting like a GM. In any case, you may simply recuse yourself.

Explain to the people involved that you cannot make a decision. You don't have to say why. Simply bow out, but if you can, please make some suggestions for a different O3P so the players aren't left completely hanging.

Some players have agreed to be O3Ps for nearly any situation and can be found by looking for the O3P symbol on their badge.

PLAYER VS. CHARACTER GOALS

One final note: your goal as a player is to create a fun, dramatic, entertaining event for yourself and the people around you. This may come into conflict with your character's goals, which might be "win at any cost." You are all mature roleplayers who know how to take a

character loss well, but it still helps if you know ahead of time which loss will make the game more interesting. That way you can plan to lose big, or get just to the edge of winning and then lose and be praised for your sense of drama.

Therefore, when you get your character sheet, you will note that it not only has your character's goals for the weekend, but some goals may also have GM suggestions and notes. These suggestions will help you pace the game, and make it more fun for everyone. Treat them as things your character would do, when deciding what your character would and would not do.

AN EXAMPLE: JOHN THE GANGSTER

John the Gangster's goals might include:

Win the Heart of Bonnie. Bonnie is a fine doll and you are competing with Big Bill for her heart. [Go for it; let her vacillate between the two of you. Win or lose as drama decides during play].

Take Over The Underworld of the Big City. The Big City is in flux and an out of townner like you could stand to make a mint over it. [Push this to the content of your heart.]

CREDITS

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