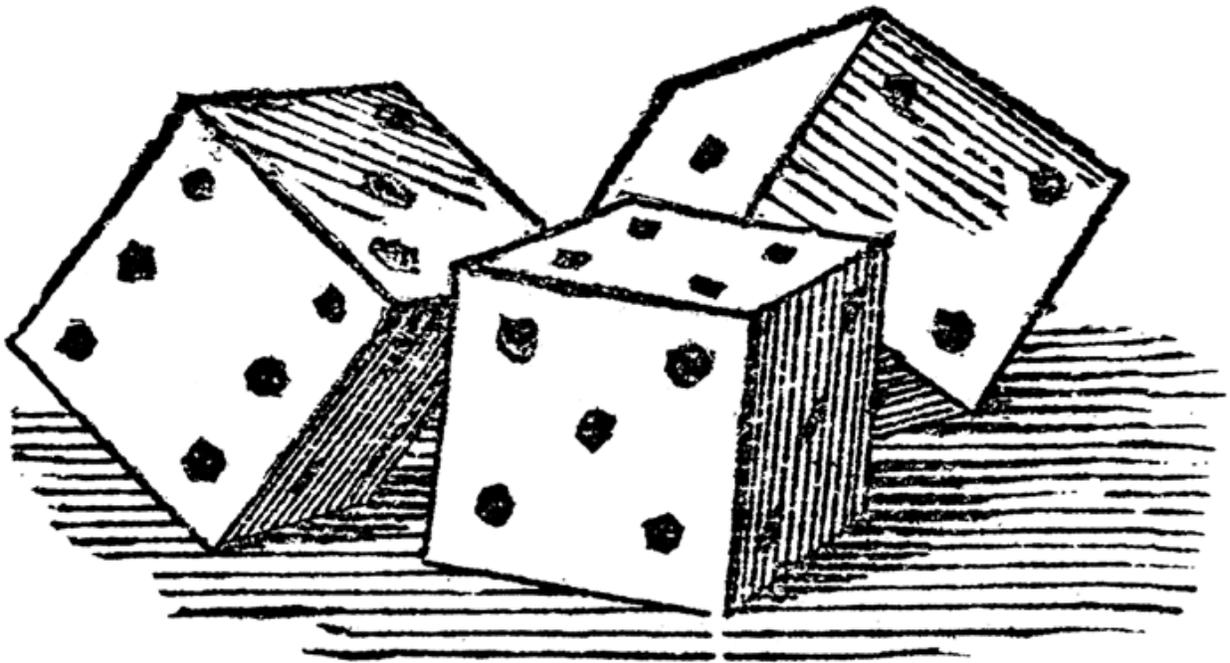# Play Unsafe

How Improv Can Improve Your Role-play!

General Habits

Pay Attention

Roleplaying Games are games of the mind, and that means you have to listen to the GM as she describes things around you. You're not watching television or looking at pictures, so you cannot see those things being described, you can only imagine them. And you cannot picture in your mind those things you don't hear. Paying attention means staying focused on the game, the GM and the other players. If you don't, and you miss something important, that's your tough luck; the GM is perfectly within his rights to refuse to repeat himself at any time. In one game I ran, one of my players would sit and draw while the game went on around him. This guy was only in the game because he had nothing better to do and that was where most of his friends were, but he really wasn't interested. At least until combat-time came around and he would happily roll dice and tell me what his character was doing. So the party encounters a group of robots who explode when destroyed, but Captain Boredom wasn't paying attention until it was his turn. He immediately jumped up and told me his character was going to do a flying tackle on one of the mechanoids and slam it into a wall with his shoulder. BOOM! I thought that episode would cure him, but it didn't and eventually I just stopped inviting him to my games. – *Uncle Figgy, Uncle Figgy's Guide to Good Roleplaying*

Energy

Your job as a player is to play with energy. If you're not enthusiastic about playing, you can't play your best. Energy is about alertness, listening, reacting, focusing, being on the ball. – *Graham Walmsey, Play Unsafe*

Work Less - Play Harder!

Don't Plan Ahead
- By spending the entire game pursuing your personal agenda for your character. Don't do this! It doesn't work – you spend the session trying to railroad your agenda no fun for the other players. It frustrates you when the plot goes a different direction and your plans don't come to fruition.
- It's boring. It's predictable to you. If you don't plan, you'll get to discover what happens next and be surprised.
- The ideas and actions you come up with by the seat of your pants are better! You have to react quickly and get caught up in the moment. You're not thinking ahead, you're thinking about what your character is doing now. The response from your character will be much better.

DO Hold Ideas Lightly
- When do you character or setting research and interesting ideas come to mind, keep them on the back burner. Don't plan for them to happen.
- Drop an idea if it doesn't work.
- General ideas or concepts are better than complex or highly specific one (they're more likely to happen!).

Don't Be Clever
- Struggling to be "on" the entire session doesn't work. If you're trying to be entertaining, you end up just being a ham.
- Trying to be funny or shocking doesn't work well. When you're trying to hard, it just doesn't work. You'll end up taking your group out of the right frame of mind by your "act".

DO Be Average
- Amazing things happen spontaneously out of someone playing normally.
- You are naturally creative, why force it?

DO Be Obvious

- Do the obvious thing, the thing that obviously happens next in the story.
- You believe everyone expects this to happen next, but it may seem original and brilliant to everyone else! They may have been thinking something totally different or struggling to come up with an idea.
- Not everyone "obvious" thing you say will be brilliant, but you will be moving the story along and that's good too.

An Obvious Experiment

Stop Killing Ideas!

- We naturally try to avoid conflict, but in a story conflict in necessary.
- Fight the urge to be safe. When an idea that will make trouble comes along, build on it.
- Planning ahead causes you to kill ideas. If the idea doesn't fit your plan you kill it, so don't plan ahead!
- We don't want to look bad. If an idea makes your character look un-cool you may kill it. This creates a boring world full of "super cool" characters that never have anything bad happen to them. Boring!

DO Build on Ideas

- Accept the idea and take the action forward.
- You can conflict with an idea, as long as you carry the action forward.
- Build on an idea, but feel free to take it in an unexpected direction.
- Building on ideas is an easy technique to learn, but using it consistently will change the way you play. That's difficult. Removing the mental blocks preventing you from building ideas is also hard. Once you get the hang of it, you end up with a much better role-playing experience.

Yes And…. Activity

A Boring Experiment

Tell a boring story – just a couple of paragraphs.

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An Obvious Experiment

A thief moves across the rooftops, keeping to the shadows. He creeps to a window, reaches through and opens it. He sees a woman and, behind her, something shining on a desk.

1. What do you naturally expect will happen next in the story

2. What would you like to happen next

3. What is the coolest, cleverest thing you can think up to happen next.

"Yes, And…" Activity

Try saying "Yes, And…", in response to other people's ideas before you've decided how to respond to them. You may find that, as you say it, you'll realize how to respond.

GM Advice

Hold Ideas Lightly

Gm's often hold onto their ideas very tightly and try to force their players to make their ideas happen. This is railroading. Take the player's section about not planning ahead to heart. Of course you have to create the world and situations that your characters will find themselves in – you need to do prep-work still. Hold your ideas lightly and abandon them when the story goes elsewhere. When the time comes that the players diverge off your path, let them take the helm.

Build on Your Players' Ideas

With little planning, you can build on your player's ideas to construct a story. Don't kill all of your player's ideas, stopping them from doing anything until they pick the one "magic" solution that you've pre-planned. When a player comes up with something brilliant, go with it!

Throw in a Twist

When things get a little too predictable, throw in a twist!

When we start a session of play for Mouse Guard, no one knows exactly how it's going to end, neither the players nor the GM. We know we'll be using our characters and that the GM will give us a mission. That's the beginning. From there, the story will twist and turn… – Luke Crane & David Petersen, Mouse Guard Role-playing Game

Deliver on Your Promises

Reincorporate ideas from earlier in the game or earlier in the campaign. It'll come out looking like you planned for the story to have foreshadowing! If you give the players some nice "background" information or details about your setting as the game goes on, they will pick up on your ideas. That is great! It's not that they went for a red herring. It's that your players are paying attention.

Trust That You'll Justify It Later

If your players have thrown you for a loop and you have to come up with an idea, NPC, object or location on the fly – go with it! You can figure it out between sessions and work it into your game. Don't stop the flow of the game for little details.

Stop Stalling – Get to the Action!

If the players are progressing through your adventure too quickly, you may be tempted to toss extra obstacles in the way. The players can see the end of a conflict in sight. Tossing in a meaningless obstacle for the sake of stalling wastes time and bores the players. Instead, let them get to their goal and continue the story from there.