

From the Desk of The Angry GM



ANGRY GAMES

To: The Players

Re: Taking Action

Here you are. You're playing a table-top role-playing game. The Game Master's yammering on about dark dungeon rooms and the pungent stench of mildew when, crap, what did he just say? "What do you do?" Everyone's looking at you. It's time to act.

That's how TTRPGs like D&D play out. The GM describes the situation, you tell the GM what your character does, and the GM determines the outcome. Usually by asking you to roll some dice. The GM tells you what happened and around you go again.

But how do you pick the best action? How do you tell your GM what you do?

Listen First, Think Second

Good actions start with good listening. Seriously. Lots of players stop listening as soon as they hear words like 'treasure chest' or 'ogre' or 'jewel-studded idol.' They think, "well, I've definitely got to grab and/or kill that" and get so focused on their next action that they miss whatever important details come next. Don't do that. Listen. It makes it less likely you'll blunder into some stupid hazard. Or piss your GM off by making him repeat himself.

Once you know what's going on, think about your character's goal. Don't look down at the character sheet. Don't try to decide what to do. Ask yourself, "what am I actually trying to accomplish here and now?"

Next, think about how to make that happen. How can you kill the ogre? Open the locked chest? Grab the idol before your allies do? Convince the city watchman to let you go with a warning? What action will get you there?

Finally, think about what tools and resources you've got to make that happen. Tools and equipment help. Training and talent help. But don't ignore the world around you. Is the ogre on the edge of a chasm? Is there a discarded metal bar near the chest? Is the guardsmen young and nervous?

Talk Third, Fourth, and Fifth

Now, tell the GM what you want to accomplish, how you want to accomplish it, and what tools and information you're using to accomplish it.

"I want to kill the ogre by stabbing him with my longsword."

"I want to open the chest by breaking the lock with that iron prybar."

"I want to scare the guard away by threatening him; we outnumber him four to one."

Practice that. "I want to X by Y using Z." It'll never fail you.

And that's how you Take Action. Next time, I'll tell you how to Portray Characters.

Don't Make Your GM Guess. The more your GM knows about what you're trying to do and how, the better off you are. If you're searching because you think there's a trap, tell the GM so. If you think the books hide some vital clue, tell the GM what you suspect. If you're ready for a fight, let the GM know you've got your weapons ready.

One Thing at a Time. Don't spout out a long string of actions and conditions. Stick to one action with one outcome at a time. See how one action plays out, then take the next one. RPGs are a conversation, not a bunch of speeches. Unless you're the GM, of course. GMs do a lot of speeches.

Don't Sweat the Character Sheet. It's good to know what your character's good at, but that's not all your character can do. Look at the character sheet as a bunch of bonuses, not a list of possible actions. Most actions in RPGs don't, by themselves, lead to disaster. Be willing to risk failure. Usually, if you pick the right action for the situation, you're more likely to succeed than if you picked the thing your character is best at.

Don't Sweat the Rules Either. TTRPGs are open-ended. You can try almost anything you can imagine. Your GM can handle any brilliant thing you can think of. Don't worry about whether there's a rule for it. Just tell the GM what you want to do and how you want to do it. The rules are his problem.

Don't Ham it Up. Are you a famous actor doing a D&D performance for millions of people on YouTube? No? Then don't try to put on a show. You don't have to be super descriptive. You don't even have to talk as your character. Be clear. Speak naturally. Tell the GM what you want to do, how you want to do it, and what you're using.

GMs Love When You Pay Attention. Seriously. If you use the information your GM provided — either in the scene or earlier — it'll usually make the GM so happy that they'll give you some kind of bonus. Show the GM you're paying attention and they'll pay you back.

When All Else Fails, Ask. Know what you want to do but can't figure out how to do it? Ask. Need more information before you decide what to do? Ask. Have an idea but you're not sure if it's a good one? Ask. Ask your GM. He'll help. And don't ask the GM about what the rules say. If you ask about the rules, your GM will quote the rules. If you tell the GM what you're trying to accomplish, your GM will help you make it happen.

THE ANGRY GM