

Aidan's guide to Comedy Evening games

What are Comedy Evening games?

All the roleplaying games in this series are designed explicitly to play out over 2-3 hours, and to prompt players to make each other (and themselves) laugh at the absurd capers of our protagonists. Lots of random elements keep the games highly replayable.

Improvisation prompts

At a basic level, the games are story prompts, that is, phrases that inspire ideas. However, by focussing on a particular range of stories and custom mechanics I help you set the tone of the game. For instance, in the first game in the line "Spaceship Horizon", the protagonists are incapable of achieving anything themselves and thus forced to rely on the murderer.

Easy to learn

I aim to keep the actual text of the game to no more than eight A5 pages, including title page and one piece of art, with most of that being tables for generating characters and story. The games are very simple, and so are suitable for roleplayers of all experiences. I would recommend the Story Guide has a little more experience, however, to help them provide the grease that develops the story.

In most cases, the Story Guide and players shouldn't need to spend more than a few minutes digesting the game at the beginning of the session.

Narrative games

The main note of narrative games is the mechanics exist only to give context to your actions. What you can and choose to do is down to what seems right in the moment. The main goal is to tell a story that is fun, and hopefully memorable, for all the players.

Terminology

- Player Character (PC): the characters played by the players, the focus of the game.
- Player: all the players apart from the Story Guide (if there is one)
- Story Guide (SG): the person nominally in charge of the game, responsible for enabling the players to have fun, keeping the story somewhat on track and being the final word on the rules.

Most Comedy Evening games use a SG, and it will be noted where it's not required.

What do I need to play?

Players: Yourself, your imagination and normally some dice.

Story Guide: A willingness to balance giving up control and herding cats. I recommend the Story Guide has experience of running other roleplaying games or participating in live roleplaying.

Safety tools

If you are playing these games with strangers, you may want to use the safety tools found at the link below. They allow you roleplay freely knowing that you are avoiding areas painful to anyone present.

<http://bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit>

Role of the Story Guide

Role 1: Own the rules

Primarily, this means that you remember to bring the rules in when required. The rules are light so this should not be onerous. You also have the power to adapt rules to create more drama. I would suggest only doing this for the occasional specific occasion else you might confuse the players.

Role 2: Ask questions

In most roleplaying games, the impact of player actions is narrated by the Story Guide (or equivalent). You cross the mountains, the storyteller gives you obstacles; you shout at the barmaid, the storyteller explains how she pours ale all over you; they walk into the room, you describe it.

In these games, it is suggested that you ask the players to do all that for you, to share the burden and make them more invested in the game. Here are some questions which help you to do that:

- What do you see?
- What are you trying to achieve?
- What do you want to find?
- What might go wrong?

Role 2a: Clarify what is happening

If you have four players all putting forward half-formed ideas, then someone has to create a clear narrative from them – you.

Role 3: Play extras

Whether they are main antagonists or flavourful bystanders, your stories will likely contain other people and somebody needs to play them. Remember, the extras (or NPCs) are there to spotlight the PCs not themselves, regardless of their relationship to the PCs.

Role 4: Keep the game flowing

There will be moments when the game slows down. The current topic of conversation may reach a natural end, the players may run out of ideas or they may lose the plot because they are laughing too hard. If none of the players take the lead, you may need to remind them of their situation; or alternatively point them in a new direction (using an extra or a dramatic event).

You also should have the overview to see when rules aren't working or when you need to skip or summarise scenes for time. It's worth listening to your players here: if they really want to do a scene, let them and accept you may not finish the game tidily.

Role 5: Be a fan of the players and characters

- Make sure all players get enough spotlight. There are always loud and quiet players, but make sure the quiet ones can be heard and ask them extra questions if necessary.
- Give the PCs agency: let players dictate what happens to their characters.
- Listen to your players.
 - Use anything they talk about as fuel for later in the game. Bring in extras related to what they say, cause problems for things they forget. Make callbacks to anything and everything.
 - Use player explanations for events, rather than your own.
 - It's great if you have ideas, but let your players suggest theirs as well (and use theirs as much as you can).
- Set up their characters so they face epic challenges, with a chance of success.

Tips

All Comedy Evening games will have tips specific to the game, but there are some general tips that apply to most of these games.

Your goal is not to “win”, but for everybody to tell a memorable (and funny) story about your interactions with the other characters. This means accepting, or even assisting, failure and embarrassing situations (for your character).

No contradictions: don't state something which is contrary to what has been already established. You can say:

- “Would it be better if...?” and allow for some consensus on the change
- “Yes but” (where you create a complication)
- “Yes and” where you amplify the previous fact.

No but: if another player suggests something, don't shut it down without coming up with your own thing instead.

Be a fan. Set up other PCs to have spotlight, whether you are helping them show off or creating extra Drama for them.

Secret information is no good if it's not shared.

Players can know things the characters don't (and vice versa). In particular they should know all of each other's secrets. That's fine. Use secrets to create awkward decisions for the other PCs, and let your own secrets “slip out” so that they can cause you problems.

What you are paying for

- My imagination
- My ability to put that in an easily accessible format
- Platform fees
- My friend's artwork.

You are not paying for a large amount of visual design or world design. But that's ok, you will create the world in game.

Inspirations

I started writing these games after running and enjoying weekly one-shots of Grant Howitt's [One Page Games](#).

My roleplaying design philosophy is massively inspired by John Wick and by Mark Rosewater, who have both written large amounts on the practice of game design.

A lot of the creative structure is derived from Salon (or social) LARPs (live-roleplaying events), mostly the small, local games. These LARP experiences taught me the joys of "playing to fail".

I am serial game designer previously without the focus to publish. I have been designing games since I was ten, and spent ten years designing and developing the fan sets for the Rage CCG.

Huge numbers of fantasy books. A great many discussions on design. A shout out to the members of the RPG Kitchen and Rowan, Rook and Decard discord servers.

My roleplaying group and playtesters.

Final word

Good roleplaying is a safe space: you can explore things without fear of real life repercussions. The Comedy Evening games (and similar) exaggerate that. You can fail, indeed you are encouraged to fail, and it will not only not ruin the game but it will be make everyone enjoy the game more.

You can make bad decisions and you will be applauded. You can make horrific puns without ruining the mood. But more than that, you can play terrible characters (in all manner of ways) and find out just how fun it is.