

CAPE'S LITE

Capes is a radical departure from many roleplaying games. For many groups, it provides the tools to create better stories and enjoy the process more. But it's genuinely not right for every group. This document should help you get some idea of what it's about, and run your group through a quick session of the game.

This document assumes that you're familiar with more traditional forms of roleplaying already. If you've somehow happened upon this document without ever having played another game then what follows may sound a bit nonsensical.

WHERE'S THE GM?

In Capes there is no Game-Master. There are players, and they each take on different characters for each different scene. They pursue two agendas (at least) at the same time: They want to advance the plans and hopes of their own characters, and they also want to be good antagonists for the characters of other players. It's natural for a Capes player to choose to play a super-villain, in order to go oppose the heroes with cruelty and malice, and hopefully be thwarted in the end. This is just the same sort of thing your GM has been doing all along. Capes just recognizes that everyone can and should contribute to the adversity and conflict that makes a story great.

The absence of the Game Master highlights a simple fact: Stories in roleplaying games are not told by one person alone. The common misconception that "the Game Master tells the story, and the players play roles in that story" takes a big smack on the nose in Capes. Everyone contributes to telling the story. That means that you'll always be involved but never be in control. If you've got a great idea then maybe people will get excited and help you tell it. Or maybe they'll like some other idea, by someone else, better... and suddenly your preparation will be twisted in order to feed into the more popular story.

I HIT HIM... WHAT DO YOU MEAN "WHY DO YOU HIT HIM?"

The final major departure is what the rules define in the imagined world. Many roleplaying games have rules that govern what a character can do: How high they can jump, how much they can lift, whether they can fly to the moon or not. Each player uses those answers as tools to negotiate achieving what they want: If a hero wants to impress his girlfriend, maybe he flies her to the moon. And then the GM decides (often without any rules to assist him) whether that succeeds in impressing her, or whether it freaks her out, or something else.

Capes starts with the question of "What do you want to achieve?", and the rules deal explicitly with that. In the example above, the player would declare a Goal of "Impress Girlfriend". He could then use his "Fly" power to help roll dice on that, by flying to the moon or by flying to Africa to pick fresh lilies or just by hovering in the air. The dice will never tell whether he can fly that fast, or that far. They will only tell whether he impresses his girlfriend. What he does is just his excuse for rolling dice to get closer to that goal.

The natural consequence of this is that you need to know what you're trying to achieve. If you don't know that then you need to take a few moments and figure it out, because there's no room in the system for just doing something, then having somebody else tell you what it achieves.

WHY WOULD I USE DICE TO JUST TALK?

It's not all about cooperation, though. In fact, there's rarely any selfless cooperation at all. Instead there is a structure of rules that gives each player free rein to compete cold-heartedly within the game system, without having that competition undermine the group's common purpose of telling an evocative story.

In order for such competition to work well, the rules are referenced constantly. This is another departure from many styles of roleplaying, in which the rules are avoided wherever possible for fear that they will ruin the cooperative goodness of freeform roleplay.

Capes is a roleplaying **game**. You don't stop playing the game when you decide to roleplay. You do them both at the same time.