

DESIGN NOTES

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for Anno Daemonum Alpha version 0.25

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THANK YOU for your interest in Anno Daemonum. This document will give you a hint of what the game is all about, my vision with it, and its main mechanics. I want to stress that the game play should speak for itself, however if you're curious about the thought behind it all - this is a good place to look!

THE GAME'S PURPOSE

Anno Daemonum is a game about what happens when desperate people get dangerous tools to get what they want.

The general purpose of the game is to explore - the story as well as the fiction: To see *how things turn out*, and *how things turn out to be*.

NO GAME MASTER

This game has no designated game master. Instead everyone at the table takes turns being the GM. When it's your turn you are the GM and your character is the main character of that scene. This requires everyone at the table to be somewhat comfortable with the mechanics and the structure of the game. I recommend you to supply each player with a set of rules, for them to be able to find their way in the beginning and then to be used as reference once they get the hang of it.

CAMPAIGN PLAY

This is a campaign game where game play preferably stretches over several play sessions. I recognize that remembering the state of the players' desperation trays, experience decks, abilities and experience piles between sessions is an issue (to be solved).

I think it is necessary to let the story build slowly and in an explorative manor. There

needs to be time for initiating scenes without a clear fictional purpose, just for the players to see what a relationship is like or how a character has changed due to recent events. Just make sure the player has some kind of explorative purpose with the scene.

THE SETTING

The setting for the game is decided by the game group during the first session. Reading the back-cover of the rules book and the character creation part should give you a good hint of what type of fiction you'll be creating. Chronologically, aim for 20th or 21st century.

IT'S ALL ABOUT SOCIAL INTERACTION

The most important thing to realize is that this game relies on *social interaction between characters*. The mechanics revolve around establishing social power structures, and the choices a main character has during their scene all aim to involve other characters in that character's story.

So, remember that a conflict is never with an inanimate object - The main characters always aim to affect someone when they do something. E.g. stealing jewellery from someone's house is not a good scene. Stealing jewellery in someone's house when the owner unexpectedly returns might be a good scene - if they find the burglar. But if they don't - then that's not a good scene either. Jump past everything that is not social interaction. Get to the point where the actions make a difference to someone. Aim for confrontation and dramatic suspense - there's no need to play out mere practical events. Those things happen between the scenes and can be easily woven into the framing and ending of the scenes.

CONVERSATIONS FACE-TO-FACE

Have scenes where the characters are talking face-to-face. Avoid conversations over the phone or via letters or messages. You can use that kind of proxy communication to set up meetings or to share information, but leave the scene play to when the characters are at the same location.

SCENES AND SEQUELS

Jim Butcher once wrote two great articles called [Scenes](#) and [Sequels](#). And this scene-sequel shuffle has stuck with me as an interesting concept for driving a narrative. It turned out that the conflict-mechanic in Anno Daemonum creates a similar structure.

As the players reroll their dice pools during conflicts they will gradually have a harder time succeeding with their upcoming conflicts - and the only way to recover from desperation is by showing vulnerability to another character (or having sex with them). Thus all characters will have to have a scene without conflict every now and then where they share something personal with another character, giving space for emotional reaction, reflection and finding new meaning.

THE DEMONS

Anno Daemonum - "in the year of the demons". But what are these demons? Good question, but answering that is actually *the narrator's job!* Players can have various takes on the demon concept, none being more correct than the other. The demons might be described as physical and real, but they might also be an invisible force that merely nudges the characters towards chaos and destruction.

What you're working with is *making sense for your character*. Up until the point where the illusion tears and they realize that there are no demons, they consistently blame the events on the demons. After the illusion is torn down however, the characters are free to blame themselves as the rightful cause of the events. It is the narrator for each scene that describes how the events are perceived by the characters present - What the narrator describes is what those characters experience.

HORROR BY INVOLUNTARY NARRATION

This game experiments with a concept that I call *horror by involuntary narration*. Now, what do I mean by that? Well, there has been times in my life where I've been reluctant to say something out loud, reluctance on the border to fear.

Things that I've been ashamed of, things that I've been embarrassed to talk about, things that I've feared to say because of the consequences they may bring. This feeling is the kind of horror that this game might end up creating.

It's a similar feeling to watching movies like *No Country for Old Men* or *American Psycho*: The viewers all know that the main character is a psychopath and that they can do almost anything to get what they want. We see the monster out there in the open, and we don't fear looking at it - it's no silly jump scare. The horror lies in watching what the monster does to the other characters and how they come to find out what we as viewers/players know all along.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CARDS

The main mechanic in Anno Daemonum that aims for involuntary narration is during a conflict when you *establish a card*. When a conflict is resolved, the experience card needs to influence the narrative in a prominent way. The conflict's outcome is always decided by that which the card says, and it is up to you to describe *how*. The cards are full of nasty things - sooner or later you will have to establish a card that you don't really feel like. N.b. this kind of feeling might not appear if the game group don't play the characters as real people. Playing the characters as caricatures is bound to get you emotionally distanced - which is fine if that's the kind of game play you're aiming at. However, if you want this game to contain an element of horror you will have to:

- *Play close to home*. Start with yourself and the aspects of life that you can relate to the most. Then play with sincerity and honesty. Dare to expose yourself. Put your heart and mind on the table (figuratively speaking) and trust your fellow players not to stomp on them.
- *Make the story feel real and believable*. Play the characters as if they were real people complete with emotions, flaws, hopes and dreams.

- *Invest emotionally in the characters.* Put an effort into establishing details about them, their lives and their relationships. The more fleshed out a character is, the more real they will seem, and the more you will be able to care about them. It's magic!

My hope is that the show-vulnerability mechanic will push players into playing this way, but it really comes down to your group and the tone you choose for your game.

SEX AND CONSENT

Another subject that is somewhat related to the involuntary-narration concept is sexual interaction between characters. In *Anno Daemonum* characters recover faster when they have sex with each other. "What, a sex mechanic?" Yes, that's right. "Is it just because *Apocalypse World* had one?" Well, I guess that has something to do with it, as it was the first game where I encountered one. But here's the deal: Sex is arguably the most central part of human life. And it happens *all - the - time*. Why doesn't it in roleplaying games? Well, either A) because it doesn't interest us (yeah, right...), or B) because we're a bit uncomfortable talking about it with others.

This is my comment on statement A: Sex is related to love (not always but most often enough), and love is one of the most powerful dramatic elements that a story can be driven by. It is narrative dynamite - so *it should interest us!*

My comment on statement B is: That is precisely why we need sex mechanics! First of all, being able to use sex as a theme in roleplaying games is a strong roleplaying tool - embrace it! Secondly, it's good to practise *consent*. Both within the fiction, as well as around the table.

CONSENT INSIDE THE FICTION

It is important to notice that this game only incentivizes *consensual sex* (as the mechanical effects don't trigger if there is conflict in the same scene). Thus, rape should never occur as a result of the game's rules. But if it still does, there's always the possibility to practise consent at a player level.

CONSENT AT THE TABLE

For the sake of this example, let's say that rape is about to occur in the fiction. If your game group can approach this in a respectful and problematizing way - then go ahead. If everybody is in on it, who am I to say what topics you can and can't explore in your game? But first let me ask you: How can you be sure that this doesn't cause discomfort for any player? How do you know that everyone's actually in on it? One method (not entirely flawless) is to create a safe-word.

A well known tool for creating safe game environments is the [x-card](#). This concept has been integrated into this game's rules to make sure that it is seen as a real and equally important part of the game as all other components.

The card can be used in several ways, but its most valuable function is to just abort whatever is happening and without further questions erase the scene that was, then move on. In a game with explicit themes, this function is paramount. I recommend having an exercise with your fellow players, practising the different uses of the card during the first session.

CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT

Follow the game's progress at the [Anno Daemonum Facebook page](#). The game is currently in alpha and can be downloaded for free (print-and-play) from the links below! Just make sure to share your experiences with the rest of us in the [English Facebook group!](#)



www.annodaemonum.com
www.apmproduktioner.se