



WORLDBUILDERS & STORYTELLERS: AN IN-DEPTH REPORT ON THE TTRPG COMMUNITY

*Based on 75 GM interviews and 25 player surveys over the fall of 2024

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1. QUOTES & GM RESPONSES

WHY DO YOU GM?



To tell stories

“Watching my players go silent during a big reveal or seeing them piece together a mystery—those are the moments I live for,” shared one GM.



To connect people

“I started running games for friends who didn’t know each other. By the end of the campaign, they were best friends.”



To create & co-create

“GMing is a creative outlet. It’s like painting with words. You sketch out the world, but the players add color.”



To help others grow

“One of my players, who barely spoke during their first few sessions, ended up delivering a monologue in character that had the whole table silent. Watching their confidence grow over time made me realize how impactful this can be.”

HOW DO YOU START A CAMPAIGN?

Long Live the Session Zero

One key insight from our interviews is that many GMs actively engage players in **co-creating the game's world**, beginning with Session Zero. It's not just about character creation—it's about giving players ownership of the story.

"In our Session Zero, I asked each player to describe a rumor about the city their characters live in. By the end, we had a living, breathing place full of history and mystery—and the players felt invested,".

Character creation is more than rolling stats: "When players contribute details about their backstories, those become narrative hooks—a brother they lost, a city they fled, a personal quest—it all becomes part of the **story we tell together.**"

“

“THE WORLD
FEELS LIKE
THEIRS, NOT
JUST MINE.”

”

By inviting players to help build the setting, lore, and tone of the game, GMs **create stronger engagement and richer narratives.**

WHAT ARE YOUR STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING PLAYERS?



INTERACTIVE TECHNIQUES

GMs frequently involve players directly in the narrative, giving them opportunities to shape the story.

“I make sure to pass parts of the narrative back to the player and give them control to speak about their character’s backstory.”



IMMERSION TOOLS

Tools like VTTs with maps, music, and sound effects are used to match the scene's atmosphere and keep players immersed.

“I have music in the background, which I change depending on the narrative moment.”



SESSION ZERO & COMMUNICATION

GMs stress the importance of open dialogue with players to set expectations and address concerns.

“Session Zero is key for establishing the baseline, but it’s important to maintain open conversations with players throughout.”

CHALLENGES

The role is not easy and for many of the GMs, having 4 or more active tables per week was not uncommon. It demands time, focus, and energy. Our interviews highlighted these obstacles:

PREPARATION



“Sometimes I spend six hours prepping for a game that runs three,” one GM admitted. Another shared, “I once spent an entire weekend designing a city only for my players to skip it entirely. You learn to let go.”

BALANCING THE TABLE



“You want every player to shine, but it’s hard to make that happen when the table has six people,” one GM observed.

BURNOUT



“I love it, but sometimes I need a break—just a few weeks to recharge,”.

SELF-DOUBT



“I always worry if my stories are engaging enough, or if people are just being polite,”.

WHAT DO GMS WORRY ABOUT?

INCLUSIVITY AND COMFORT

Many GMs emphasize creating inclusive and welcoming environments, being mindful of players' boundaries and preferences.

OVERWHELMING FRAGMENTATION OF TOOLS

There's a clear demand for tools that integrate functionalities to reduce the burden on GMs.

"The tools are fragmented, and there is often the complaint surrounding 'too many open windows.'"

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

GMs are deeply concerned about how their choices affect players emotionally, aiming to avoid discomfort or negative experiences.

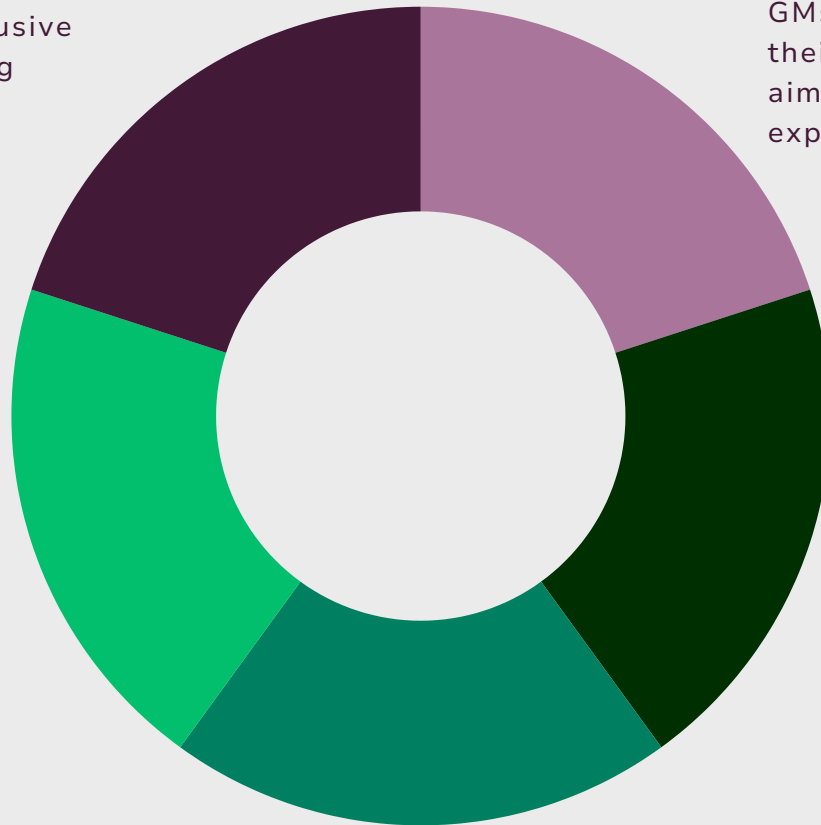
TIME

Many GMs express a desire for tools that can reduce preparation time while still allowing for creativity and immersion.

"I'm a serial over-prepper, spending all day setting up maps, audio, and NPC motivations. It's hard not to get consumed by it."

INCOME

For the pro GM's, who rely on this as a side hustle or as their principal income, many expressed that it is difficult to live off the trade. Scaling beyond 5 sessions per week can be a recipe for burnout.



WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT LEADING TTRPGs

Moments of Connection

“The look on a player’s face when they pull off something incredible—it makes all the prep worth it,” said one GM.

The Shared Story

“I set up the pieces, and the players surprise me every time.”

The Bonds Formed

“My group has been playing together for five years. We’ve celebrated weddings, new jobs, and life milestones together. It all started at the table,” one GM reflected.

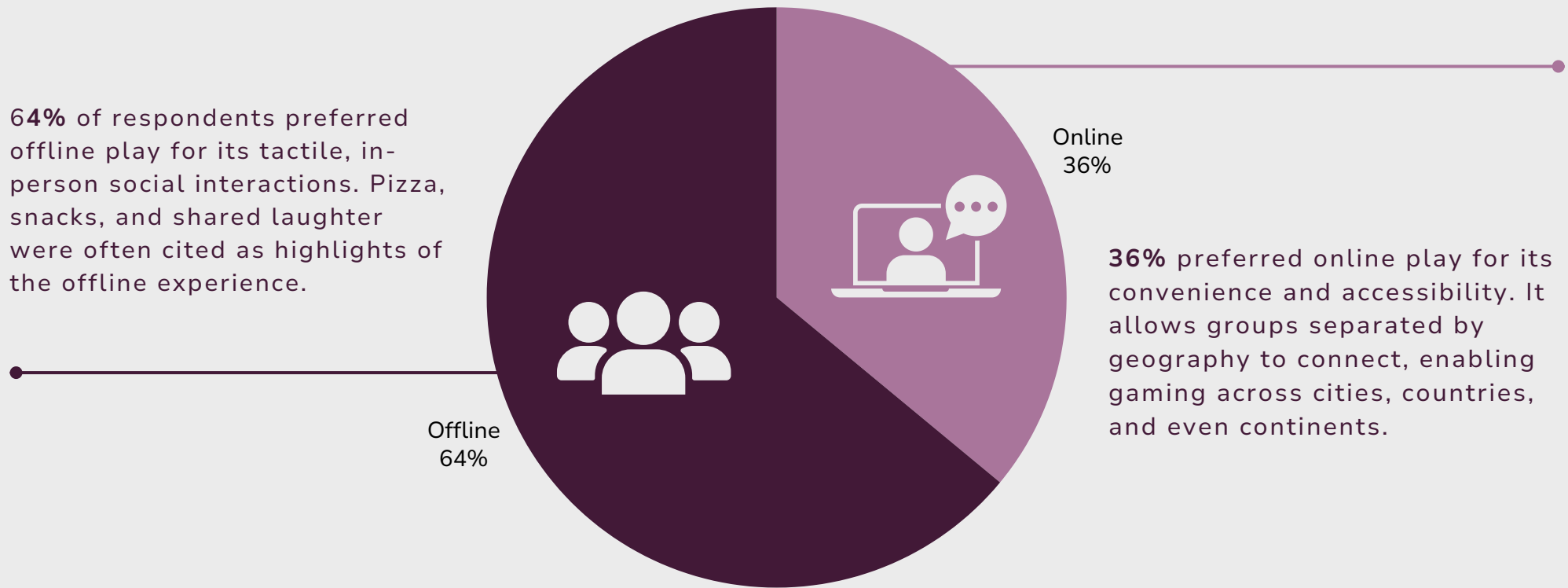
Gratitude

“I had a player tell me a session helped them through a rough time—I’ll never forget that,” a DM shared.

2.THE NUMBERS

DO YOU HAVE OFFLINE VS. ONLINE PREFERENCES?

The shift between offline and online TTRPG play ignited strong opinions, revealing a balance of pros and cons for both formats.



Interesting Statistic: **Over 83%** of respondents currently GM at least one group online.

Insight: The debate reflected a shared appreciation for how each format adapts to different player needs. While offline gaming offers immersion and camaraderie, online play has expanded the accessibility of TTRPGs to a global scale.

GETTING INTO THE MOOD FOR STORYTELLING

GMs shared their personal techniques for preparing themselves mentally and emotionally for storytelling:



Music

62% use music to establish the right atmosphere.



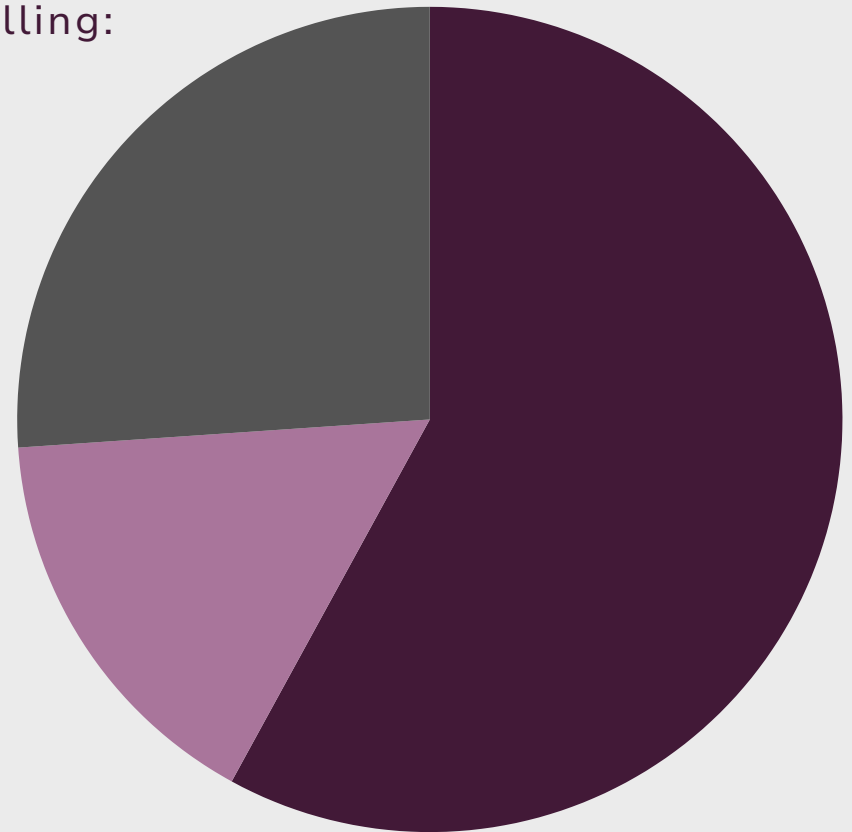
Journaling

22% write character notes or NPC dialogue in advance.



Visualization

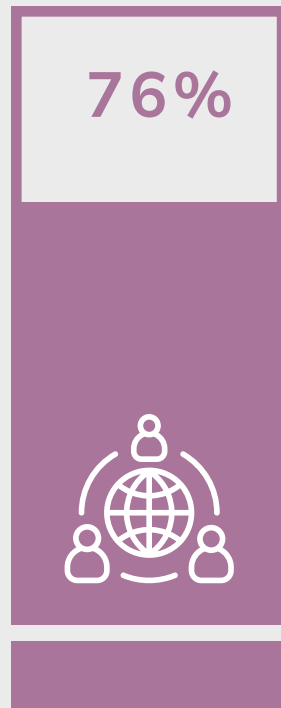
36% imagine key scenes or meditate before sessions.



Insight: GMs often described these techniques as grounding rituals, helping them transition into the role of storyteller.

WHY DO YOU THINK TTRPGS ARE GROWING SO FAST?

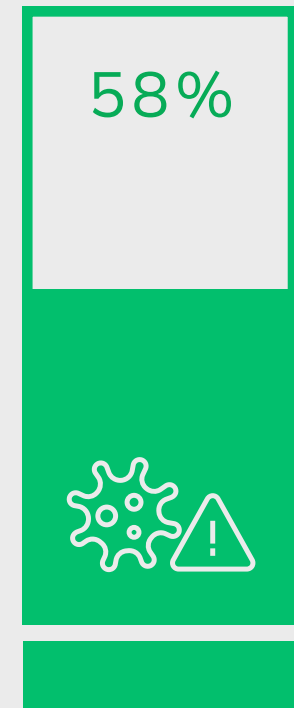
Participants largely credited the explosion in TTRPG popularity to three key factors: **accessible media**, **inclusivity**, and **the pandemic-driven** shift to online play.



Accessible Media:
76% credited actual-play content like Twitch, YouTube, and podcasts for exposing new audiences to TTRPGs.



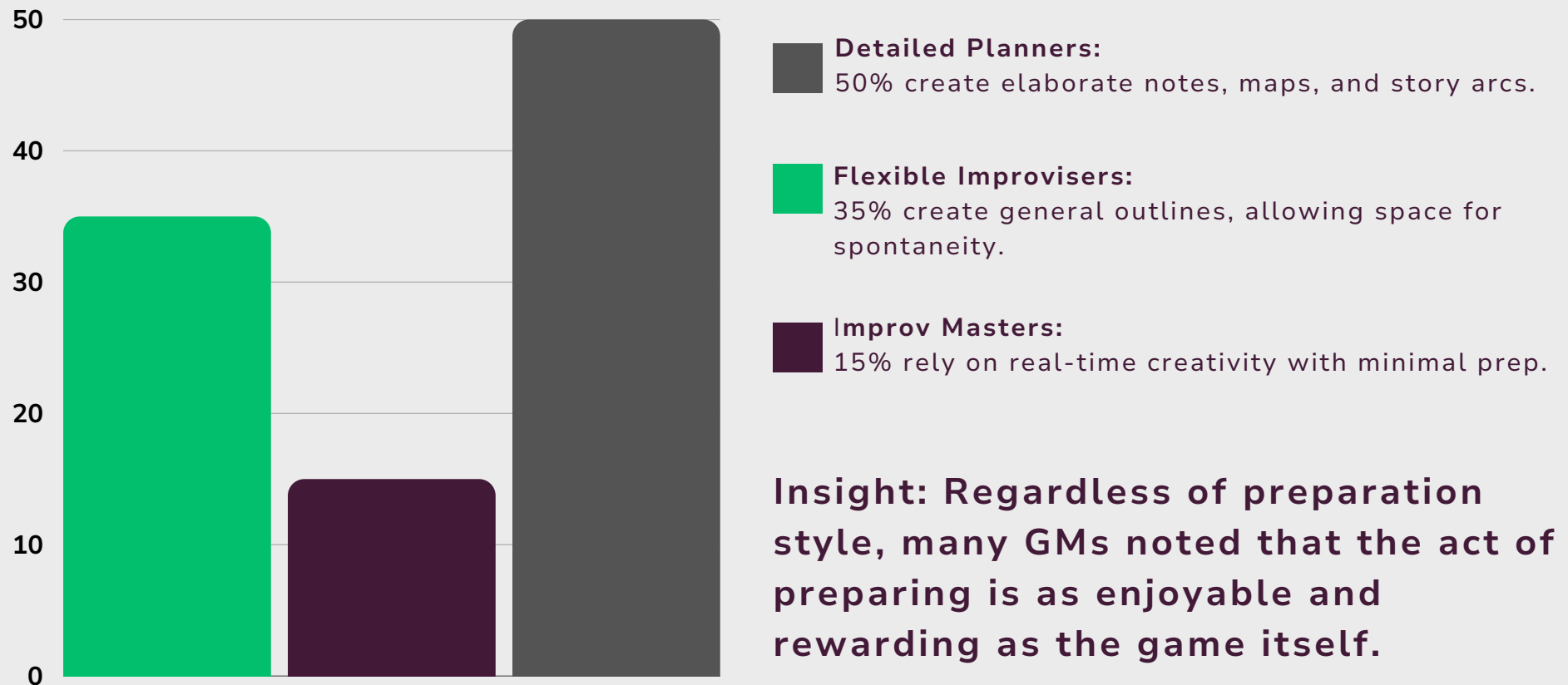
Community Inclusivity and Identity:
63% felt that role-playing games provide a way to explore identity and creativity, drawing in a diverse range of voices and perspectives.



Pandemic Effects:
58% noted the rise in online gaming during the pandemic, which opened doors for remote play and introduced TTRPGs to new players.

SESSION PREPARATION

The interviews revealed a spectrum of preparation styles, ranging from meticulously planned arcs to on-the-fly improvisation. Preparation methods often reflected the personality and storytelling philosophy of each GM.



"I'll spend hours building a city that might only appear in one session. It's the act of creation that keeps me coming back."

SOUND & ART

Adding layers of sensory immersion, soundtracks and visuals were a common feature of many games. Participants described how music, sound effects, and custom art brought their stories to life.

60% use music or sound effects to enhance immersion.



18% use voice modulation for NPCs (though some mentioned struggling to incorporate it effectively).



48% incorporate custom maps or character visuals, often GM- or player-created.



12% commission professional artwork (including AI-generated visuals).

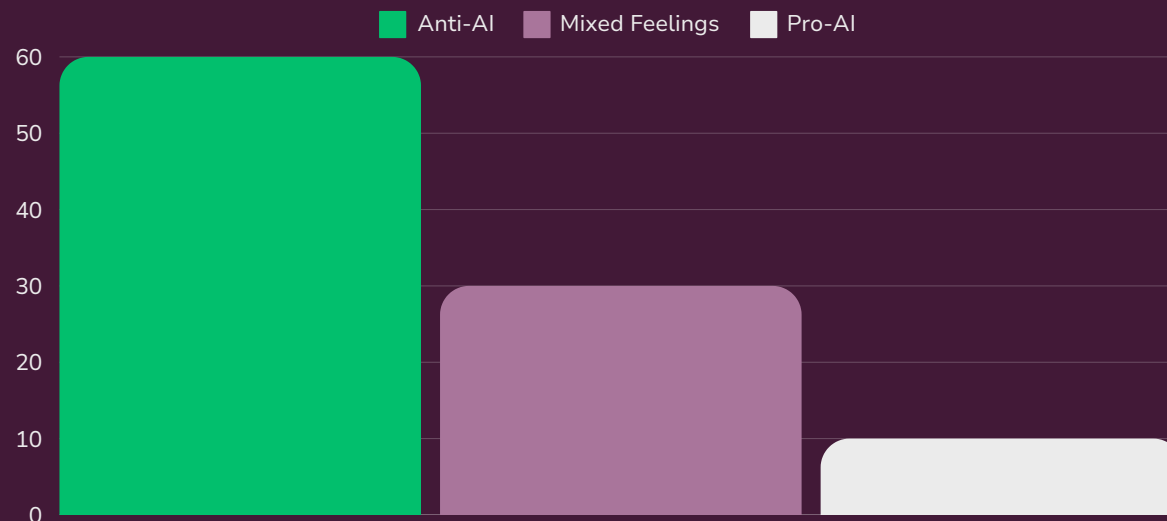


60% frequently use Google or online-sourced art.



THE ROLE OF GENERATIVE AI IN ART:

"I'd never use AI for something public-facing—it feels wrong. But for my home campaign? It's a quick and easy way to make tokens or maps."

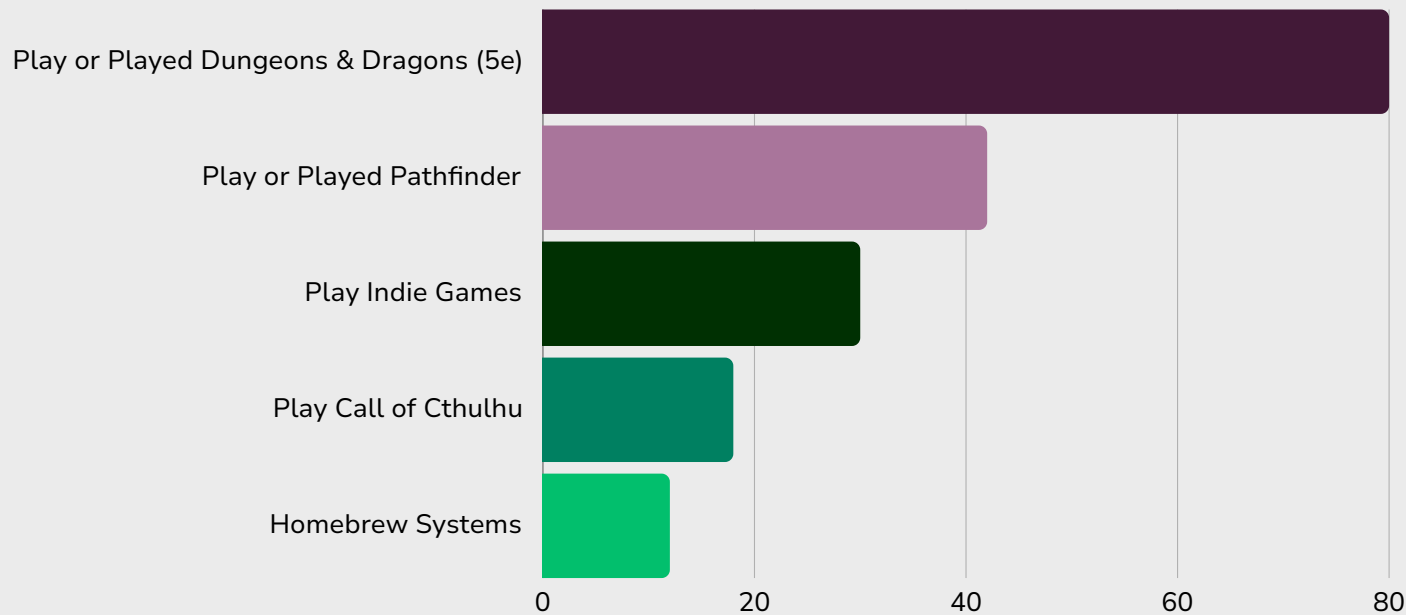


The discussion of AI-generated art drew passionate opinions:

- 60% expressed concerns regarding copyright, artist compensation, and ethical training.
- 30% accept AI art in informal or low-stakes contexts (e.g., personal campaigns).
- 10% actively embrace AI tools for practical purposes, such as character design or tokens.

GAME SYSTEMS USED

The diversity of game systems reflected the community's creativity and adaptability. Popular systems included:



Insight: Many GMs play multiple systems and expressed enthusiasm for experimenting.

While only **12%** reported using fully homebrewed systems, **~85%** of respondents said they incorporate homebrew elements into existing modules.



80% widely favored for its player familiarity.



42% Celebrated for its complexity and depth as a D&D alternative.



30% played Indie games and mentioned games - Blades in the Dark or Monster of the Week.



18% Play Call of Cthulhu



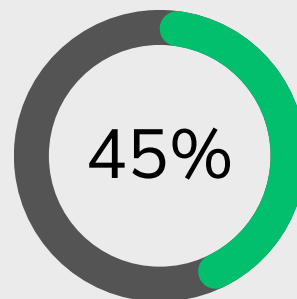
12% reported using entirely custom-built worlds that are then tailored for unique player groups.

DO YOU VISUALIZE YOUR CHARACTERS AS AN EXTENSION OF YOURSELF?

This question was directed at the player in you. Most of the GMs interviewed also played, and some player interviews were included in the mix. Responses revealed a wide spectrum of perspectives:

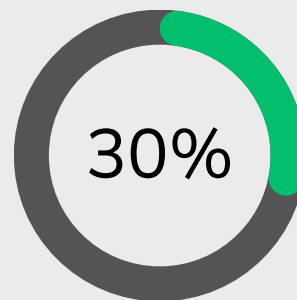
Insight: Many players use their characters as tools for self-exploration or escapism. Conversations frequently touched on how emotional connections are formed with these characters.

“My characters are a way to explore parts of myself I don’t show in real life. But they’re not me—they’re who I could be in a different world.”



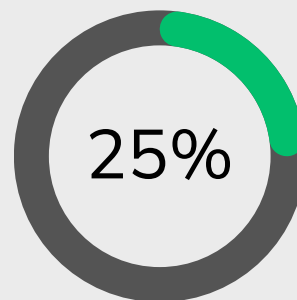
Yes:

45% said they often relate their characters to their own personality or experiences.



Sort of:

30% mix personal traits with completely fictional elements.



No:

25% intentionally create characters entirely different from themselves.

IMPORTANCE OF CO-WRITING A STORY WITH PLAYERS

Collaboration was consistently cited as the heart of TTRPGs.

85%

Collaborative Storytelling

of GMs emphasized that the game isn't about the DM's story—it's the story the group tells together.

“

It's not about the DM's story—it's the story we tell together.

”

MOST GRATIFYING GMINING EXPERIENCES

Player Engagement



described moments where players were deeply moved, such as laughing, crying, or cheering.

Character Development



loved watching characters grow over time.

Epic Campaign Moments



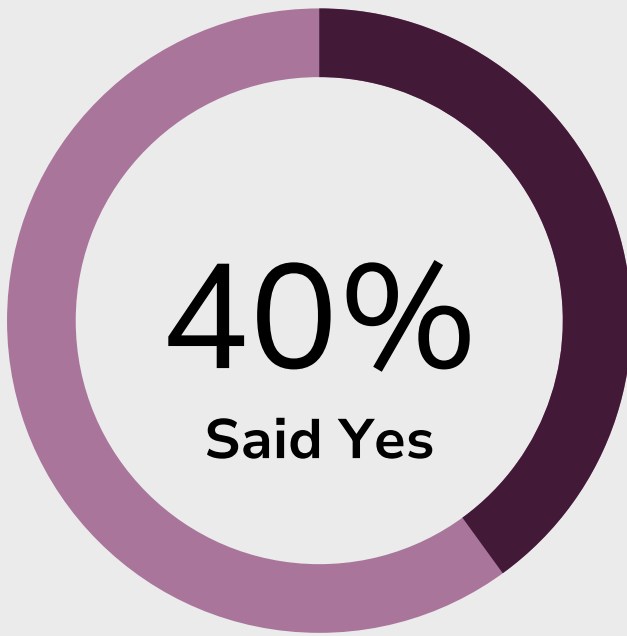
celebrated when a long-running story arc reached a satisfying climax.

“—
| “I had a player
tell me at the
end of a
campaign,
‘This game
gave me
something to
look forward
to every week
when nothing
else did.’ That
moment stuck
with me.” —|

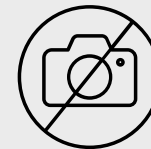
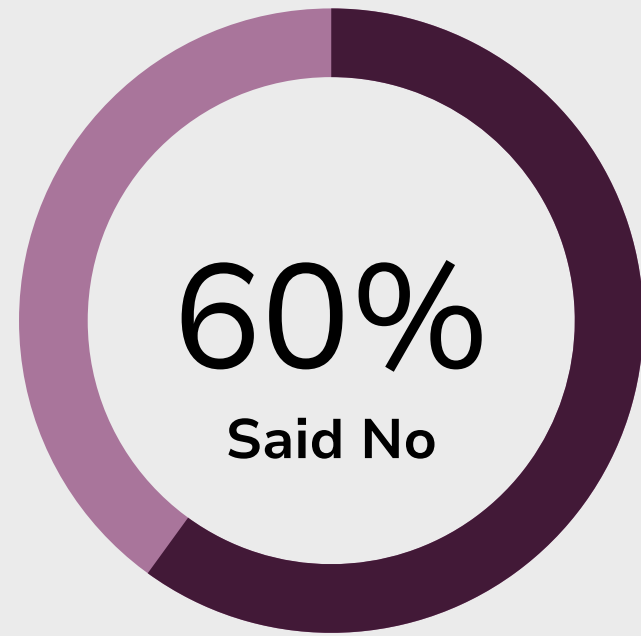
3. PLAYER FEEDBACK ON VIDEO CAM PARTICIPATION

DO YOU PLAY WITH YOUR CAMERA ON?

Players expressed whether they have their camera on or off during online TTRPG sessions.



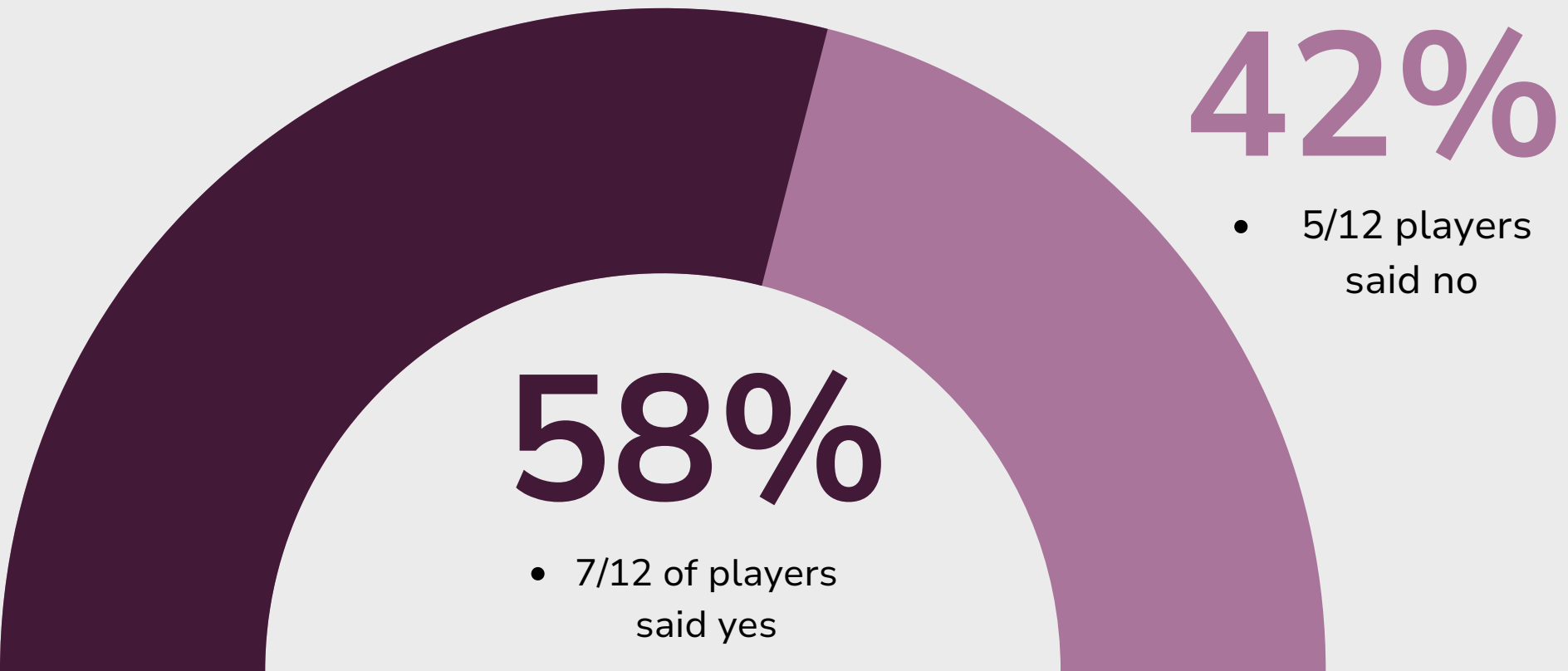
Players mentioned that having their camera on allows them to make real connections with people, face-to-face.



Many players mentioned a discomfort of showing their face and didn't want to put pressure on other players to do so.

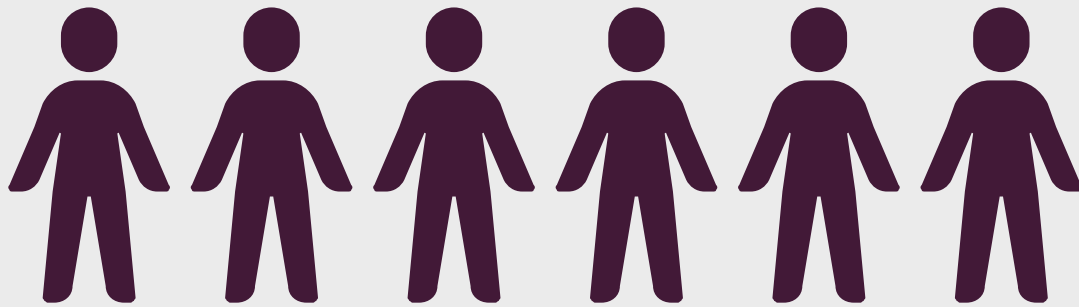
WOULD FACE MASKING OPTIONS INCREASE YOUR COMFORT AND VIDEO PARTICIPATION?

Players shared if their comfortability turning their camera on during TTRPG sessions which would increase by having a masking option.



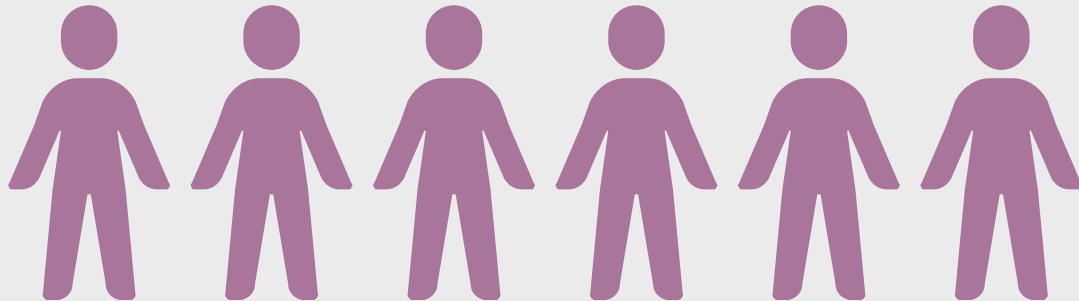
WOULD BEING ABLE TO LOOK LIKE YOUR CHARACTER INCREASE YOUR COMFORTABILITY IN TURNING ON YOUR CAMERA?

Players who mentioned they do not turn on their camera.



50%

Of players said yes

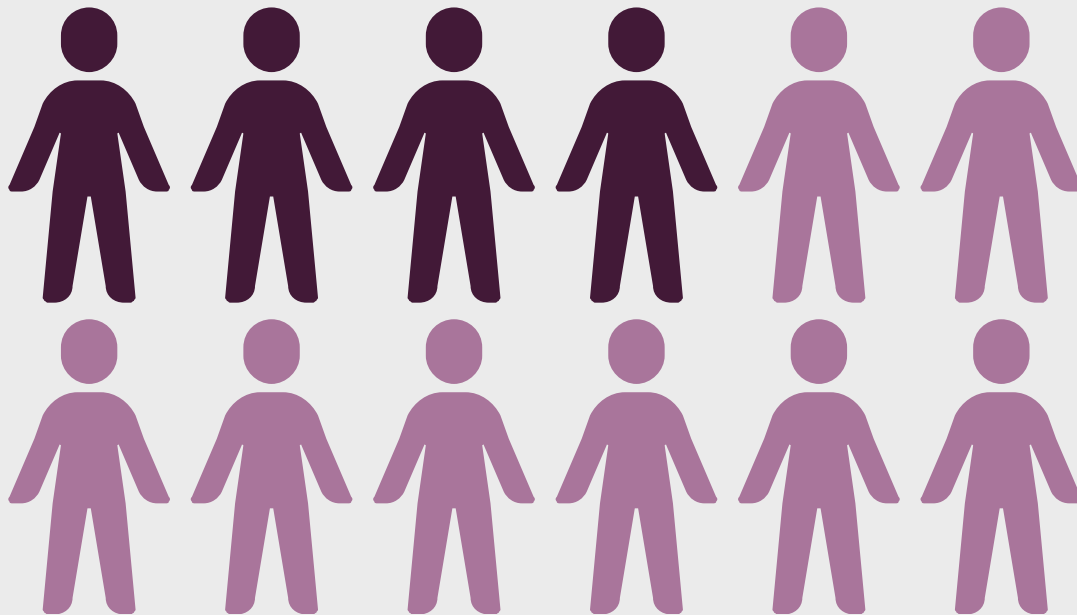


50%

Of players said No

WOULD BEING ABLE TO LOOK LIKE YOUR CHARACTER INCREASE YOUR COMFORTABILITY IN TURNING ON YOUR CAMERA?

All players mentioned.



40%

Of players said yes

60%

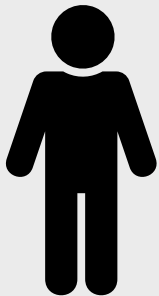
Of players said No

WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT USE OF A TOOL LIKE FAES AR?



TO LOOK COOL

26% of players mentioned it would be a cool feature.



BE COHESIVE

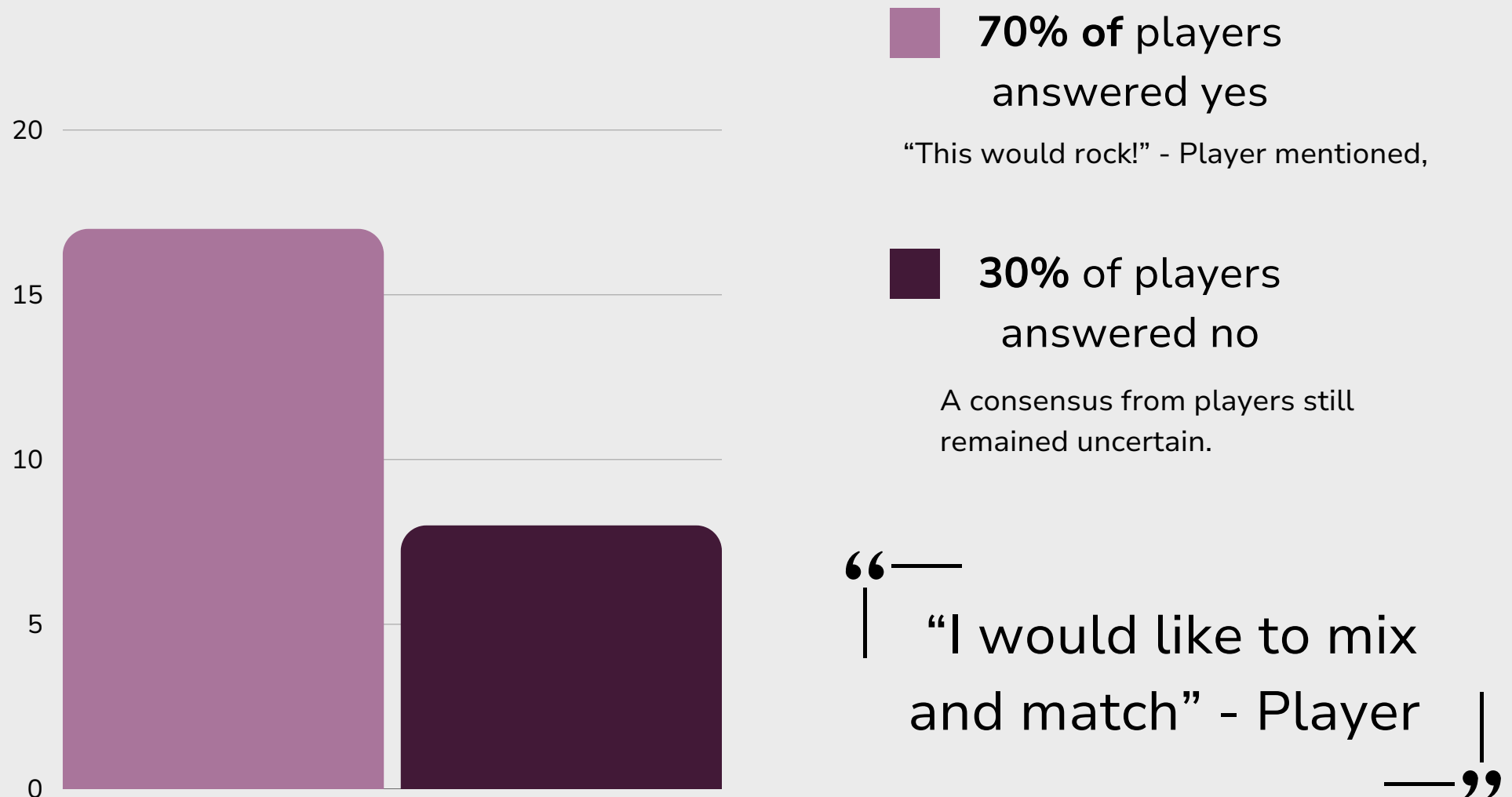
15% of players mentioned that they want their entire group to look cohesive for their campaigns.

BE YOUR CHARACTER



48% of players mentioned they would use it to create their own character.

WOULD VISUAL NPC REPRESENTATION BY DM'S ENHANCE YOUR GAMING EXPERIENCE?



WOULD YOU PURCHASE SKINS WITH CHARACTER CREATION TOOLS FOR YOUR ONLINE DND SESSIONS?

50% of players said they would purchase the skins.

50% of players said they would not.



Key Insight:

Cost is a big factor in willingness to pay.

THANK YOU!

To those of you who shared their time and thoughts in our interviews—thank you. Your generous offer of insights and time has helped us understand how we can fit into your world. Our first and strongest takeaway is that you are a caring, thoughtful, and impressive group of people. So smart and so generous.

SUMMARY

What stood out most in the GM interviews was your **adaptability**. You navigated the challenges of design, storytelling, and community-building with remarkable resourcefulness. Many of you spoke about finding ways to create meaning and connection through your games, often working within constraints of time, resources, or tools. That drive to make something worthwhile, no matter the circumstances, is inspiring.

Another recurring theme was a **shared desire to co-create**. Whether exploring new mechanics, emphasizing collaboration over conflict, or rethinking traditional systems, it's clear that you aren't content to simply follow established paths. Your work reflects a deep care for stories we tell and how we tell them together.

In the Player's Survey, we learned that in the realm of online play, the use of video cameras is a point of contention. Players were split between embracing visual connection and preferring voice-only anonymity. Despite the differences, DMs collectively underscored the importance of community and supporting their players whatever their preference.

This process has been humbling and informative. Listening to your thoughts and experiences has reinforced just how important this work actually is—not just in the games we play but in the communities we build. Thank you for sharing your stories. We are better for it and feel much better prepared to pivot the direction our product and better serve you.