

MAKING AN ADVENTURE, PART I

by

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Making an Adventure. A few notes for DMs.

These are some thoughts put to paper and may/may not be original. They should in all cases be taken as IMHO. The theme I am addressing is "How do I make up an adventure":

The basic plot for an closed-system adventure can be reduced to: Problem, Piecing together a solution, Solution. The basic plot for an open-system adventure can be reduced to: Introduction, Sequence of Events, Resolution, Progression to next Sequence. Most campaigns probably run an open-system composed of many closed-system adventures, each of which is considered as a discrete event.

CLOSED-SYSTEM ADVENTURES

The best starting points from which an adventure can be derived are People, Place and Time:

- (a) Key Character(s)
- (b) Key Environment(s)
- (c) Key Event(s)

(a) So, you might think of a character, such as an old dwarf. Visualise the appearance first, and you may find the character will emerge from that, as well as their history (why, they got that scar on their ear from falling off a Pony when they were young, thus making them scared of heights). From that history may come the tag for the plot-line. For example, our ancient dwarf needs a certain stone that can only be mined from a huge sheer cliff-face. The characters are hired to do this, or perhaps tricked into it, as he is also poor (when I visualised him, he was wearing dreadlocks and a tattered cloak).

(b) The environment can be standard, standard with a twist, or downright unusual. The standard (from Tolkeins mines of Moria), is the dungeon crawl or wilderness adventure. Try taking a standard environment and turning it on its head. For example, a Water-based adventure on a series of lakes, but the lakes have been frozen. Therefore lots of opportunities for sliding mages, ice- skating thieves, snowball-throwing goblins and even ogres hidden in snowmen?! The above example could be an adventure entirely conducted on a cliff-face (watch those birdies...). A more unusual environment might be a strange root system under a giant tree, in which various occupants live, or one of the alternate planes (watch out for Star Trek themes here).

(c) Key events can take place before, during, or are being led up to during the adventure. A key event might be the change of Mayor in a town, which occurs a month before the party arrive. This simple event might lead to all sorts of speculations for designing an adventure (does the mayor raise the taxes? Why? Oh, it's to pay the ransom for his son, kidnapped by ...). A key event during the adventure might be "half-way through this adventure, the Centaur the party have met will be killed by a poisoned arrow". The adventure can be then developed both ways from that (before the event and after). Events that are building up promise the most adventure, but tend to be harder for the DM to run. If the characters take Plan 1 instead of Plan 2, can the event still happen. If taking this course, try to allow flexibility into the design for any alternate sequence of events. Having lots of separate plots helps, as you can

always allow the party to move from one to another if they prematurely foil a certain event from taking place (as they should!)

MAKING AN ADVENTURE, PART II

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As previous post, all opinions and ideas are IMHO, and I welcome comments/additions/revisions.

OPEN SYSTEM ADVENTURES

Open System Adventures are in the widest sense the whole campaign, and in a lesser sense, a set of distinct adventures which have overlaps, whether they be because the same characters are involved, the same theme, or the same NPC's from one adventure to another. They can be divided for convenience into the following cyclic stages:

- (a) Introduction
- (b) Sequence of Events
- (c) Resolution
- (d) Progression to next sequence of events

The introduction to an open adventure should contain a few anchors into the DM's projected future for the campaign. That is to say, if you want Dragons at a later point, why not introduce some object now that will have no use until later when they meet such things? This will eventually increase the players' perception of the consistency of your world, even if you have to wing it sometimes! Have an NPC mention something in passing, or have the characters see an event, that will have no import until three adventures down the line. It isn't as hard to do as it sounds, and you can always "retro-fit" meanings to prior events.

The sequence of events can be quickly sketched out as a time-line or simple list. What you need to know at this stage is **why** the characters will be at particular points at particular times doing whatever (to whom)! If the rest of your closed system adventures flow from that, you will find that they flesh out the overall picture and provide feedback to it as well.

Resolution comes about when a particular adventure has been closed. It should be obvious to the players what to do next, and they should be breathless to get it accomplished. If necessary, use the Hercule Poirot device of having a Sage NPC provide a summary of the characters' adventure, and prompting questions. This is also a useful device for getting feedback from the players in character.

The progression to the next sequence of events (usually another closed adventure) can be facilitated by commencing the adventure "some days later...", as in "Some days later, after your successful raid on the Temple of Entriopia, you reflect on the words of the Sage, who spoke of the Astral Linkage between the Temple Bell and the mountain known as the Howling Hag, in the barrens of the North. Could this be where the Gladiok Harj you seek was located, after all?" (heavy hint from the DM here if necessary).

MAKING AN ADVENTURE, PART III

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As previous posts, this is all IMHO :-)

An example of making up an adventure, with Green's DM Design Tip Number One included absolutely free of charge:

(a) First, let's decide on an event. How about (as its in the news at the moment; and the world of current affairs is a source of more fantastic stories than sometimes grace the insides of fantasy novels) a Temple that is allowing female initiates to join for the first time. Right. That immediately leads to a NPC, being a female initiate who wants to join that Temple. Right. That only leaves the environment. How about (a quick look around my office reveals a poster of a beach and a picture of a Samurai Warrior, which leads to ...) a coastal area, which is used by various monsters as a (holiday resort? Too silly, perhaps) combat area. The Temple is up on a pinnacle of rock surrounded by sea (drawing on my memory of a nearby beach).

This quick example demonstrates where ideas may be found; the news, one's environment, and one's own memories. It also leads to further research, as in what creatures inhabit coastal areas, what myths relate to mermaids, and so forth. Lots of "outward pointing" learning, as an antidote to too much inhabiting an inner-world.

Now for Green's DM Design Tip Number One : If suffering from DM's block, open a dictionary and choose a few words. As well as all that valuable learning, many of my best adventures originally sprang out of this wonderfully handy list of words! Here's a real example from today, whilst I was looking up the word "adventure" to see where it come's from (and it means 'chance' amongst other things, which is what the players should feel; that they have a chance of winning against the odds, but only that). Two words on the same page caught my eye, and became:

The Adytum of the Aeons. A sacred temple complex dedicated to a deity whose prime concept is eternity and the division of time. Thus, lots of clockwork designs, timed traps, and a sense of going back through time as the temple is penetrated, with more ancient weapons, creatures, artefacts to be found the closer to the centre the party delve. The central treasure might be a sacred timekeeping instrument with relevant magical powers.