

Adventure Design 101

(How to design adventures)

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TIPS ON ADVENTURE DESIGN FOR BEGINNERS

The Basics

- EVERYONE IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE FUN, INCLUDING THE GAME MASTER.
- ROLE PLAYING GAMES ARE COOPERATIVE STORYTELLING. THE ADVENTURE DESIGN IS THE PLOT. THE STORY UNFOLDS AS THE PLAYERS PLAY.
- THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO DESIGN AN ADVENTURE.
- YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING LISTED HERE. USING SOME OF THESE TECHNIQUES WILL MAKE YOUR ADVENTURES MORE FUN, THOUGH.

Vocabulary

NPC: NON-PLAYER CHARACTER.

ENCOUNTER: MEETING NPCs (NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS). THIS USUALLY MEANS EITHER A CONVERSATION OR A FIGHT.

Multi-path: THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY THE CHARACTERS CAN GO THROUGH THE ADVENTURE. THIS MAKES THE DESIGN A LITTLE MORE COMPLICATED, BUT CAN MAKE LARGE ADVENTURES MORE FLEXIBLE.

GATE-POINT: THERE ARE CERTAIN PLACES CHARACTERS MUST GO, THINGS THEY MUST DO, INFO THEY MUST LEARN, FIGHTS THEY MUST HAVE, AND PUZZLES THEY MUST SOLVE TO PROCEED. THEY ARE IMPORTANT FOR SYNCHRONIZING AND SIMPLIFYING MULTI-PATH ADVENTURES.

Sitting: PEOPLE GETTING TOGETHER TO PLAY A GAME. MOST ADVENTURES REQUIRE MORE THAN ONE SITTING.

ADVENTURE: A COMPLETE EPISODE WITH A BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END. IT MAY TAKE MORE THAN ONE SITTING.

Campaign: A SET OF RELATED ADVENTURES.

POV: POINT OF VIEW. THE CHARACTERS SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY FROM THE PLAYERS. PART OF ROLE PLAYING IS SEEING THINGS FROM THE CHARACTERS POV.

GM: GAME MASTER

The example adventure

THE EXAMPLE ADVENTURE IS NAMED MUCK AFTER THE PLANET IT TAKES PLACE ON. IT IS PART OF THE ROARING ROCKETS DELIVERABLE AS A STARTER ADVENTURE. IT IS PRINTED HERE IN ITALICS WHEN APPLICABLE.

SPOILER ALERT: IF YOU HAVE NOT PLAYED THE ADVENTURE ON PLANET MUCK WITH THE BUG-EYED MONSTERS, *do NOT read this yet.*



Start with a concept and develop it (this example is for Muck)

1. **WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HAPPEN?** (MONSTER HUNT AS STARTER ADVENTURE THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE CHARACTERS JOB OF SELFLESSLY PROTECTING OTHERS)
2. **WHAT IS THE BAD GUYS PLAN?** (GRAB ALL THE WOMEN AND LAY EGGS ON THEM)
3. **WHAT CAN THE CHARACTERS DO TO STOP IT?** (LEARN THE MONSTERS BIOLOGY AND KEEP PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE WATER DURING MATING SEASON)
4. **WHAT RESOURCES DOES THE BAD GUY HAVE?** (LOTS AND LOTS OF MONSTERS AND A HUGE SWAMP FOR THEM TO HIDE IN)
5. **HOW DO THE CHARACTERS GET INVOLVED?** (THE COLONISTS CALL FOR HELP AND THE CHARACTERS GET THE ASSIGNMENT)
6. **WHAT ARE THE GATE-POINTS?** IT IS USUALLY EASIER TO DESIGN AN ADVENTURE IN STAGES TO GET THE CHARACTERS FROM ONE GATE-POINT TO ANOTHER THAN TO DESIGN IT ALL AT ONCE. (MUCK HAS TWO GATE-POINTS: ARRIVAL ON MUCK AND FIGURING OUT HOW TO FIND MONSTER DENS)
7. **FILL IN THE DETAILS TO MAKE AN OUTLINE THAT TAKES CHARACTERS TO THE FIRST GATE-POINT. THEN GET THEM TO THE SECOND. AND SO ON.**
8. **WRITE THE ADVENTURE.** (SEE THE MUCK ADVENTURE FOR AN EXAMPLE: RRADV_Muck)

Fill in the details (this example is the outline for Muck)

1. THIS IS A STARTER ADVENTURE, TRY HARD TO NOT GET ANYONE KILLED.
2. PLAYERS MUST HAVE 3 CHARACTERS, INCLUDING A MEDIC, 2 PILOTS, & A NAVIGATOR FOR THIS. THEY WILL FAIL UNLESS THEY HAVE AT LEAST ONE WOMAN.
3. THE PLAYERS MAY WORRY ABOUT TAKING RISKS TO PROTECT OTHERS. PROVIDE GENRE-SPECIFIC REASONS FOR DOING SO. THE CHARACTERS ARE WALKING SCRIPTURE-RECITERS, SO PROVIDE SCRIPTURE (JOHN 15:13).
4. THE SETUP: THE CHARACTERS ARE SPACE CADETS WHO ALL KNOW EACH OTHER, AND THEY ARE ON A SPACE RANGER BASE AWAITING ASSIGNMENT.
5. BACKGROUND DETAILS FOR THE SPACE RANGER BASE AND THE PLANET IT IS ON. NOT TOO MUCH, BECAUSE THE CHARACTERS ONLY START AND END THERE.
6. BACKGROUND DETAILS ON THE PLANET MUCK WHERE THE CHARACTERS MUST GO, AND ON THE MINERS THEY WILL HELP.
7. DETAILS ON THE SHIP. MAKE THIS ONE A SPACE MARINE SUPPLY VESSEL SO THE CHARACTERS WILL LACK NOTHING. AS A PLOT COMPLICATION, IT WILL CONTAIN A HUGE AMOUNT OF MARGINALLY USEFUL STUFF.
8. STUFF THE CHARACTERS WILL NEED TO SUCCEED MUST BE ON THE SHIP: RADIOS (ONLY 2 TO KEEP THE CHARACTERS TOGETHER), A MEANS TO EASILY KILL MONSTERS (DDT GRENADES), MEANS TO REVIVE PARALYZED COLONISTS (COFFEE MAKER & FIRST-AID KITS), AND A MEANS TO FIND MISSING WOMEN (HOMING DEVICES).
9. **GATE-POINT: ARRIVAL ON MUCK**
10. THE CHARACTERS ARRIVE ON MUCK. WHAT DO THEY SEE AND WHAT HAPPENS?
11. LIST THE INFORMATION THEY CAN GAIN IF THEY ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.
12. WHAT ARE THE STATS FOR A BUG EYED MONSTER? WHAT IS THEIR BIOLOGY? HOW DO THEY FIND ONE? (STAND BY THE WATER) WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CHARACTERS SHOOT AT ONE? (IT TAKES A LOT OF SHOOTING) WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BEM GRABS A WOMAN? (PROVIDE DETAILS)
13. IS THERE ANYTHING IN THIS ADVENTURE THAT COULD CAUSE WOMEN TO FAINT (SUDDEN UNEXPECTED BEM ATTACK)
14. THE COLONISTS HAVE RESCUED PARALYZED WOMEN. HOW CAN THE CHARACTERS REVIVE THEM? (COFFEE) DO THEY KNOW ANYTHING USEFUL? (NO)
15. LIST DETAILS OF THE RESCUE FOR THE CHARACTERS TO SPRINGBOARD OFF OF.
16. PLOT COMPLICATION: THE COLONISTS FOUND A BEM DEN BY BLIND LUCK. THE CHARACTERS DO NOT HAVE MUCH TIME TO FIND THE REST OF THE WOMEN.
17. **GATE-POINT: HOW TO FIND MONSTER DENS**

18. *THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO SUCCEED: THE CHARACTERS MUST SELF-SACRIFICINGLY USE THEMSELVES AS BAIT WITH A HOMING DEVICE TO FIND THE REST OF THE WOMEN.*
19. *THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO PREVENT MORE MONSTER ATTACKS: TELL THE COLONISTS TO STAY AWAY FROM THE WATER DURING BEM MATING SEASON.*
20. *COVER THE WRAP-UP. WHAT DO THE CHARACTERS GET REWARDED OR REPRIMANDED FOR?*

An alternate design method

1. COME UP WITH A GOOD ADVENTURE CONCEPT.
2. DEVELOP A FANTASTIC LOCATION.
3. LIST THE SCENES & ENCOUNTERS.
4. DEFINE THE PUZZLES AND CLUES.
5. OUTLINE IMPORTANT NPCs.
6. CHOOSE BAD GUYS (TYPE AND NUMBER).
7. DECIDE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CHARACTERS WIN OR LOSE.
8. PUT IT ALL TOGETHER.

Tips: Overall design

- ADVENTURES SHOULD ALWAYS PRESENT THE CHARACTERS WITH BOTH RISK AND REWARD. REWARDS CAN INCLUDE MONEY, EQUIPMENT, EXPERIENCE, AND DECORATIONS.
- PLAYERS LIKE EXOTIC LOCATIONS (ICE MOONS WITH CRYSTAL FAUNA) AND FAMILIAR PLACES (THE BASE WHERE THEY KNOW THE COOK AND THE SUPERVISOR).
- MAINTAIN A SENSE OF WONDER. EVERY SITTING, ADVENTURE, AND CAMPAIGN SHOULD HAVE SURPRISE, EXCITEMENT, AND SOMETHING SPECIAL THAT MAKES IT UNIQUE.
- SEE THE SEVEN POINTS OF **STARTING WITH A CONCEPT AND DEVELOPING IT** (ABOVE). THE 8-POINT **ALTERNATE DESIGN METHOD** MAY WORK BETTER FOR YOU.
- GOOD ADVENTURE DESIGN CREATES AND FOCUSES ON SITUATIONS AND ENCOUNTERS. PLOTS AND STORY-LINES ARE THE STARTING PLACE AND CREATE THE BACKDROP, BUT THEY ARE LESS IMPORTANT. THE CHARACTERS WILL GO FROM SITUATION TO SITUATION AND PROBABLY NOT FOLLOW THE PLOT.
- STAY TRUE TO THE GENRE.
- ROLE-PLAYING IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE TEACHING TECHNIQUE KNOWN. PLAYERS SLOWLY BECOME A BIT LIKE WHATEVER THEY ROLE-PLAY. DO NOT MAKE ADVENTURES THAT CAUSE PEOPLE TO DO THINGS THAT ARE MORALLY WRONG. DESIGN ADVENTURES THAT LET THEM BE THE GOOD GUYS. IN THIS GENRE THE PROTAGONISTS/CHARACTERS ARE ALWAYS THE GOOD GUYS.

Tips: Preparing for playing the adventure

- HAVE THE NUMBERS FOR ALL NPCs AHEAD OF TIME. INCLUDING ALL 3 STATS AND THE HIT ROLL. IF THERE ARE FRIENDLY NPCs, ALL NPCs NEED THEIR NPC-ON-NPC ROLL. SAY WHAT WEAPONS OR EQUIPMENT NPCs HAVE, AND HOW MUCH DAMAGE THE WEAPONS DO. GIVE EACH NPC OR GROUP OF NPCs A GOAL.
- DUPLICATE MINOR NPCs WHENEVER POSSIBLE. MAKING A PLATOON OF 30 BAD GUYS AND DECIDING WHERE TO PUT EACH ONE IS HARD. SO MAKE A LOW LEVEL GOON, A SERGEANT, AND THE LEADER. THERE IS ONE LEADER, 3 SERGEANTS, AND 8 GOONS PER SERGEANT. PICK THE 3 LOCATIONS OF THE SERGEANTS AND THEIR MEN.
- MAKE DIAGRAMS OF ALL LOCATIONS WHERE FIGHTS MAY OCCUR. DESIGN THEM FOR THE EASIEST POSSIBLE TRANSFER TO A BATTLE MAT.

Tips: Describing things

- KEEP THE DESCRIPTIONS DOWN TO A COUPLE SENTENCES.
- USE SOME DETAIL WHEN YOU DESCRIBE THINGS, BUT DO NOT GO OVERBOARD BY DESCRIBING TOO MUCH DETAIL. DESCRIBE USING TWO OR MORE SENSES IF YOU CAN.
- USE THE GENRES POV (POINT OF VIEW). THIS IS SOMETIMES DIFFERENT FROM YOURS, PARTICULARLY WITH THE TRADITIONAL VALUES THE CHARACTERS HAVE.
- NAME ALMOST ALL PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO NEED, AND DO NOT GIVE IT AWAY BY ONLY NAMING IMPORTANT THINGS.
- DO NOT MAKE THE MISTAKE OF MINIMAL DESCRIPTIONS FOR TRIVIAL THINGS AND LOTS OF DESCRIPTION FOR IMPORTANT THINGS. MAKE THE PLAYERS FIGURE OUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT.
- MAKE HANDOUTS THAT DESCRIBE THINGS. INCLUDE PICTURES WHEN POSSIBLE.

Tips: Things to do

- COME UP WITH A GOOD NAME FOR THE ADVENTURE. YOU WILL NEED TO REFER TO IT OR RETRIEVE DETAILS FROM IT LATER, AND THIS IS HOW YOU WILL REMEMBER WHICH ONE IT WAS. IF YOU REALIZE YOUR NAME WAS NOT GOOD ENOUGH AND YOU HAVE A BETTER ONE, RENAME IT, EVEN LONG AFTER THE GAME.
- PLAN FOR THE UNEXPECTED. PLAYERS MAY BE ABLE TO PREVENT A PLOT ELEMENT THAT MUST HAPPEN. PLAN ACCORDINGLY.
- PUT THE MOST EFFORT AND DETAILS INTO THE BEGINNING AND THE END. ALSO PAY ATTENTION TO THE GATE POINTS. THE BEGINNING IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE THIS SETS EVERYTHING UP AND DRAWS THE PLAYERS IN. THE FINAL SHOWDOWN AT THE END IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE, WELL, IT IS THE FINAL SHOWDOWN. THE GATE POINTS ARE ALSO IMPORTANT BECAUSE YOU KNOW THE CHARACTERS WILL BE THERE. THE PLAYERS WILL PROBABLY DO MOST OF THE OTHER STUFF, BUT MAY NOT.
- PLAYERS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO FIGURE OUT YOUR PUZZLES. SPECIFY THE OUTCOME FOR FAILURE. WHEN POSSIBLE, MAKE IT A REASONABLY SATISFYING ENDING. IT MAY SHORT-CIRCUIT HALF THE ADVENTURE, BUT IT HAPPENS. A BETTER APPROACH IS TO BUILD IN A WAY TO GET THE CHARACTERS BACK ON TRACK, BUT THIS IS NOT ALWAYS FEASIBLE.
- BREAK IT INTO SECTIONS WITH EASY-TO-FIND HEADERS. GO OUT OF YOUR WAY TO MAKE THE ADVENTURE EASY TO GAME-MASTER.
- DESIGN SO THE GAME MASTER WILL NOT BE TELLING THE PLAYERS WHAT HAPPENED FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME. SET UP THE SITUATION, LET THE PLAYERS DECIDE WHAT THEY WILL DO, RESOLVE WHAT HAPPENS, THEN SET UP THE NEXT SITUATION.



Tips: Balancing fights

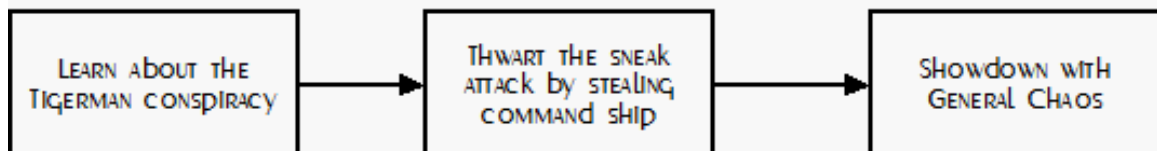
- DESIGN FIGHTS THE CHARACTERS CAN WIN. THEY SHOULD NOT BE EASY, BUT YOU DO NOT WANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR AN UNWINNABLE FIGHT AND REFIGHT IT. IF THE CHARACTERS ARE SUPPOSED TO LOSE, DESIGN TO ENSURE THEY SURVIVE WITH MINIMAL INJURY.
- A GOOD WAY TO BALANCE FIGHTS IS TO RATE BAD GUYS BY THE NUMBER OF CHARACTERS THEY MATCH. PICK THE NUMBER OF BAD GUYS WHEN THE FIGHT BEGINS. *EXAMPLE: A SALAMANDER SOLDIER WITH RAY RIFLE IS A MATCH FOR ONE CHARACTER AND A SPACE APE WITH A SPLAT GUN IS A MATCH FOR THREE. THERE ARE 5 CHARACTERS. SO ONE SPACE APE AND TWO SALAMANDERS MAKE AN EVEN FIGHT.*
- IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO DIAL BACK THE NUMBER OF BAD GUYS TO GIVE THE PLAYERS THE EDGE IN MOST FIGHTS.
- TAKE THE TACTICAL SITUATION INTO ACCOUNT. IF THE BAD GUYS ARE AMBUSHING, USE LESS OF THEM. BUT DO NOT PENALIZE PLAYERS FOR BEING TACTICALLY CLEVER, REWARD THEM WITH THE EASY FIGHT THEY EARNED.
- IF THE ADVENTURE HAS MORE THAN ONE FIGHT, PLAN FOR THE CHARACTERS TO BE INJURED. DIAL BACK THE NUMBER OF BAD GUYS SOME MORE TO ACCOUNT FOR THE CHARACTERS REDUCED CAPACITY.
- TAKE PLAYERS, CHARACTERS, AND EQUIPMENT INTO ACCOUNT. EXPERIENCED CHARACTERS HAVE MORE SKILLS AND BETTER EQUIPMENT. THEY OFTEN COUNT AS TWO OR MORE CHARACTERS WHEN BALANCING A FIGHT. SOME PLAYERS JUST WANT TO GOOF AROUND AND HAVE FUN, SO COUNT THEIR CHARACTERS AS HALF. KEEP NOTES OF HOW YOU RATE EACH CHARACTER FOR WHEN FIGHTS BREAK OUT.
- SPACE BATTLES ARE DANGEROUS. A SINGLE DIE ROLL CAN KILL A CHARACTER OUTRIGHT. THE CHARACTERS COULD ALL DIE AT ONCE. KEEP IT TO A MINIMUM AND ONLY DO DANGEROUS SPACE BATTLES THAT ADVANCE THE PLOT.

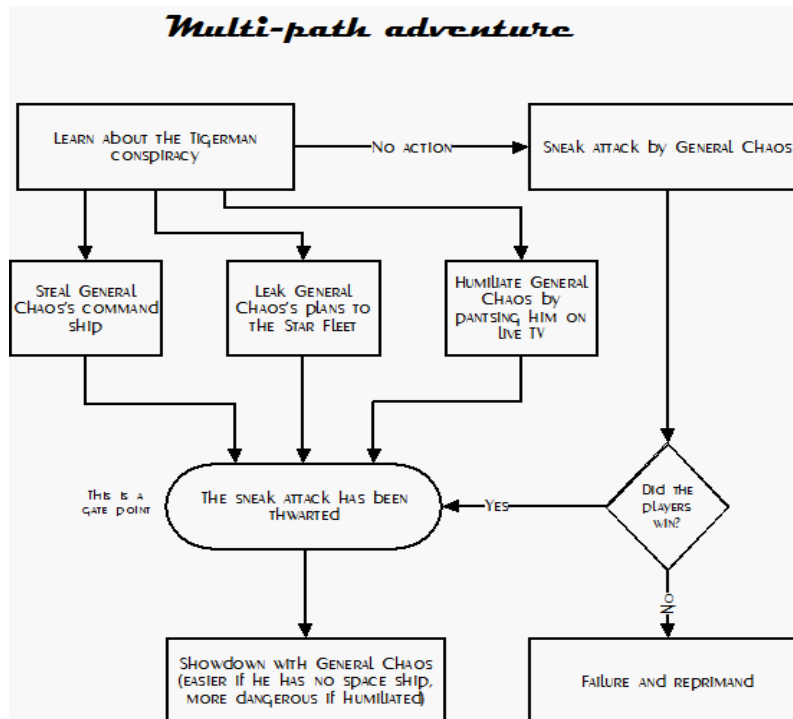


Tips: Things to avoid

- AVOID A SLOW START. START THE ADVENTURE AFTER STUFF HAS ALREADY HAPPENED AND THE CHARACTERS MUST GET INVOLVED TO DEAL WITH IT.
- AVOID UNTOUCHABLE ADVERSARIES IN MOST SITUATIONS.
- AVOID DEADLY FIGHTS THAT THE CHARACTERS CANNOT WIN BY FINDING A WAY TO TELEGRAPH THAT THEY SHOULD NOT FIGHT IT. PLAYERS OFTEN FIGHT TO THE BITTER END, SO THE FIGHT SETUP SHOULD MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THEY SHOULD RUN, NEGOTIATE, OR OTHERWISE NOT FIGHT. SUGGESTIONS FROM NPCs ARE A STANDBY SOLUTION, AND SUGGESTIONS FROM THE GM ARE A LAST RESORT.
- DO NOT PUT IN USELESS FIGHTS OR NPC CONVERSATIONS.
- DO NOT GIVE IT AWAY BY LISTING ONLY THE CHOICES THAT WILL WORK, ONLY THE EQUIPMENT THEY WILL NEED, OR ONLY THE VALUABLE CLUES. SUPPLY ENOUGH RED HERRINGS TO MAKE THE PLAYERS THINK.
- DO NOT TELL THE PLAYERS INFORMATION THAT GOES ON FOR MORE THAN A FEW SENTENCES. HANDOUTS ARE A GOOD WAY AROUND THIS. YOU CAN GIVE THE LEADER A PRINTED DESCRIPTION OF HIS SHIP AND THE EQUIPMENT HE WAS ISSUED. YOU CAN GIVE THE TRAVEL AGENT A PRINTED DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANET. THEY CAN CONSULT IT WHENEVER THEY WANT. MAKE HANDOUTS CONCISE, NOT INFORMATION DUMPS.
- DO NOT DESIGN ANYTHING THAT DEPENDS ON THE PLAYERS MAKING OR FAILING A SINGLE DIE ROLL.
- DO NOT PENALIZE PLAYERS FOR BEING GOOD OR FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE. PLAYERS WILL STOP RESCUING THE INNOCENT THE SECOND TIME THEIR RESCUE IS A DISGUISED ASSASSIN. THEY WILL STOP TAKING ON CARGO OR PASSENGERS THE SECOND TIME THEY GET THE TROJAN HORSE.
- THE SETUP FOR THE ADVENTURE OFTEN HAS YOU READING SOMETHING. DO NOT LET IT GET PAST 100 WORDS.

Single-threaded adventure





Tips for multi-path adventures

- A single-thread adventure is linear. First the characters have to learn about the TigerMan conspiracy. Then they have to thwart the sneak attack. And finally, the showdown with the bad guy.
- A multi-path adventure still has gate-points, but has more than one way to get there. There could be three ways to thwart the sneak attack. Any of them will do.
- Which way the characters thwart the sneak attack may affect the showdown with the bad guy. The adventure design becomes slightly more complex, but the storytelling experience becomes richer when the players realize the bad guy would be easier to beat if they had spent the effort to steal his space ship.
- Use gate-points to re-synchronize multi-path adventures. If the adventure goes multi-path after they find the conspiracy, make sure there is no way to advance until they thwart the sneak attack.
- Multi-path adventures are not hard to make, but your first adventure should probably be single-threaded.
- Most of the example adventures are single-threaded, but *Contraire* becomes multi-path at the Federal Department of Snooping. Furthermore, the consequences of being side-tracked by the bureaucrats will haunt them for the rest of the adventure.

Tips for one-shot adventures

- ONE-SHOT ADVENTURES DO NOT CONNECT WITH, DEPEND ON, OR SET UP ANY OTHER ADVENTURES. THEY CAN STAND ALONE.
- IT IS OK IF ONE-SHOTS ARE A LITTLE BIT RAILROADY. HERE IS A BIG PROBLEM GUYS, YOU GOTTA SOLVE IT.
- MOST OF THE EXAMPLE ADVENTURES ARE ONE-SHOTS.

Tips for campaigns

- A CAMPAIGN IS A SET OF RELATED ADVENTURES.
- GIVE THE PLAYERS MORE CHOICES AND OPTIONS IN A CAMPAIGN. THEY MAY NOT WANT TO TAKE ON GENERAL CHAOS AND HIS ARMY OF DEATH. THEY PROBABLY WILL NOT TRY UNTIL SEVERAL ADVENTURES INTO THE CAMPAIGN WHEN THEY REALIZE THEY MUST TO SAVE THE GALAXY.
- A SINGLE-THREAD CAMPAIGN IS A CHAIN OF ADVENTURES WHERE EACH ONE SETS UP THE ONE TO COME AFTER. THERE ARE A COUPLE OF THESE IN THE EXAMPLE ADVENTURES.
- A MULTI-PATH CAMPAIGN HAS SEVERAL COURSES OF ACTION OPEN TO THE CHARACTERS. EACH LEADS TO A DIFFERENT ADVENTURE. THE ADVENTURES DO NOT HAVE TO BE DONE IN ANY PARTICULAR ORDER.
- A CAMPAIGN OFTEN HAS BOTH SINGLE-THREAD AND MULTI-PATH ELEMENTS.

