



WRITING FOR TOURNAMENTS AND CONVENTIONS

Compilation Thread

This is a compilation of a series of posts made to the aus.games.roleplay newsgroup on methods for writing a role playing scenario for convention play.

Author: Jason Stokes
Email: j.stokes@bogus-address.anu.edu.au
Date: 1997/06/17
Forums: aus.games.roleplay

I was wondering -- how **do** you learn the trade of writing tournament adventures? I'm especially interested in systemful games, which seem to something of a lost art with all these systemless, freeform, multiform and chloroform games. Like, the first step is **playing** tournament games, I know, but beyond that?

And if you see an adventure module for your favorite system from another convention miles away, is there any chance at all you can convince the designers to send you a copy? Is there any established way of doing this?

Jason Stokes: [j%stokes bohm%anu%edu%au](mailto:j%stokes%bohm%anu%edu%au) exchange with @ and % with . to discover my email address.



Author: Shaun Owen Hatley
Email: 075466@bud.cc.swin.edu.au
Date: 1997/06/17
Forums: aus.games.roleplay

On Tue, 17 Jun 1997, Jason Stokes wrote:

*I was wondering -- how *do* you learn the trade of writing tournament adventures? I'm especially interested in systemful games, which seem to something of a lost art with all these systemless, freeform, multiform and chloroform games. Like, the first step is *playing* tournament games, I know, but beyond that?*

I'm certainly no expert, but I have recently written and run my first Con game (for AD&D) and I do have a few observations.

The thing I found the hardest was time. I had 5-6 hours in which to run the scenario, and I found it quite difficult to write a scenario which would A) fill enough of the time so as the players didn't feel ripped off, and B) not run over, so the scenario could be finished.

The only thing I had to base this on, was my own players, my own regular gaming groups. I decided to make an assumption that players at a con are also aware of the time constraints and will keep the 'fanning-about' to a minimum. In a campaign, players may go off on a tangent. Unless you are willing to wing it, I don't think this is really practical to allow at a con game.

I worked out that I wanted each section of the scenario to take half an hour approximately, and that I wanted 8 of these which needed to be completed, with a couple of added ones which were unnecessary to the successful completion of the scenario, but would fit in and could be used to fill in time if players were quicker than I had anticipated. It also gave me a bit of leeway if players took longer than I expected.

I also decided to make it a 'bottle module'. I kept the things the PCs could do to a minimum. I didn't want to limit them, so there was no coercion involved. There was simply always an obvious thing to do. For example when the PCs said they wanted to explore the city, I gave them a map of the city with several buildings marked on it (a temple, the docks, a few taverns, the castle) IIRC. The PCs could go anywhere they liked, but in practice they went to the places I had marked, and I



had worked out in advance what they could do in each place and what information they could gather there. Again this served to keep the PCs on track, without too much prompting, and allowed me to keep control of what was going on.

So that was half of the scenario - what would actually happen, and where it would happen. The other half were the characters both PCs and NPCs.

The blurb for the scenario that appeared in the Con book gave the suggestion that the PCs were going to be involved in treason - either participating in it, or attempting to stop it. Therefore I intended there to be a great deal of suspicion. I set up one person to be the obvious traitor - the Kings Steward. Almost everyone who played the scenario assumed he was a power hungry maniac attempting to sieze the throne. In actual fact, he was the only totally loyal person in the entire scenario. The actual traitors were someone that the PCs did not expect (although a couple of people worked it out - in retrospect it should have been less obvious). All the problems in the scenario were caused by misunderstandings, and so I wanted the PCs to be involved in these misunderstandings. Every NPC had a 'quirk' - totally loyal, faceless and unidentifiable, enthusiastic and pathetic. This quirk was unique to that NPC and allowed the players to keep them straight, easily. I didn't want a case where every time the PCs met someone, they were asking me whether or not they'd met him yet.

Finally I designed the PCs. I'd had basic ideas about them from the start but now they were structured to make sure they'd fit the scenario. There were four of them, and I sought to create conflict between them, as well as a measure of coherence. None of the PCs had ever met before, (and I couldn't assume players had met either) so I needed relationships quickly if there was to be decent roleplay.

First of all, coherence. The PCs all had similar upbringings and were all cast together with no choice. They were forced to get to know each other, and they had a lot in common. Then conflict. I had a Female character who was rebelling against the male dominated society in which the game took place. So I had one of the other characters be a chauvinist - not a completely sexist stereotype, but someone who had been taught that women were weak and needed to be protected. I had one character who believed in loyalty and duty above all else and another who believed that duty was something to be avoided and shirked wherever possible. Very basic, quick to read off the character sheet, and easy for even neophytes to play (remember this was AD&D, so I had to assume I'd get some people who had veyr little roleplaying experience).

This is a pretty simplistic approach, I realise. But it was a first attempt and I didn't want to be too ambitious. I'm sure more experienced Con GMs and designers will have far more detailed advice, but I believe in KISS - keep it simple, stupid - at least at first. I'd much rather write a basic scenario and have it work, than get too complex and risk a failure.

And if you see an adventure module for your favorite system from another convention miles away, is there any chance at all you can convince the designers to send you a copy? Is there any established way of doing this?

I'd say you just contact them and ask. Offer to pay any costs. Some people sell their scenarios anyway, so that's easy. Mine's available on the web to anyone who wants it. I think there are a lot of people who would be quite willing to let other people use their work.

Author: Antti Roppola

Email: xixax*chokespame*@spirit.net.au

Date: 1997/06/17

Forums: aus.games.roleplay

*I was wondering -- how *do* you learn the trade of writing tournament adventures? I'm especially interested in systemful games, which seem to something of a lost art with all these systemless, freeform, multiform and chloroform games. Like, the first step is *playing* tournament games, I know, but beyond that?*

The second step is to write it. Don't worry too much about it being a tournament game. Think of it as something you're knocking up because most of the people at your regular game are going to be away. If you give people a good set of characters to play with and something interesting to achieve in a couple of hours, you're set.

When you've got that, there are a couple of things you can/should do:

1. Talk to someone who's written for cons before and run your ideas by them. I still do this, just to get things clear in my own head. Remember to bring a note pad and pen along.
2. Get together a bunch of people one afternoon/evening and try it out. Take notes on what does/doesn't work. Talk to everyone afterwards (or during if you feel you need to). I was in the fortunate (?) [1] position of having Wes

play test my first con game, lotsa advice there . It's useful to have relative strangers playtesting since they won;t have as many pre-conceptions.

3. Try again once you've worked out what you need to do to get poeple from A to B in the allotted time. Repest step 1 whenever you feel it might be useful.

Because you'll only have your players for a couple of hours, you need to be pretty careful in setting things up so that people are up and running in as little time as possible. Unlike a campaign, you don't have a few weeks to settle into things.

I have a very good article on game design by John Hughes from the Ariel archives. While concentrating on multi-form type games, there's a lot of good oil on what to watch out for. I'll run you off a copy and drop it off when I return your Dark Skies tape (rememebr that?, yes I still have it)

Antti

[1] Just kidding Wes, it was **very** useful and has proven to be again and again.

Author: Mr Damien Moore
Email: eccles@silas.cc.monash.edu.au
Date: 1997/06/17
Forums: aus.games.roleplay

Hrm. Dunno why I didn't get the original article. This seems to be happening a lot recently. :(

*I was wondering -- how **do** you learn the trade of writing tournament adventures? I'm especially interested in systemful games, which seem to something of a lost art with all these systemless, freeform, multiform and chloroform games. Like, the first step is **playing** tournament games, I know, but beyond that?*

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Sorry, i just wanted to make that clear. So many Con flops could be avoided if people would playtest. And not the night before the Con either. And treating the 1st session as a playtest will get you killed.

Of course, you've got to get to the playtest :)

I'm certainly no expert, but I have recently written and run my first Con game (for AD&D) and I do have a few observations.

I've read most of your observations, and most of it is ok. I'd do things differently, but thats just me. And I've done a number of Cons now (played, organised, gmed)..... kill me. In the name of mercy :)

The thing I found the hardest was time. I had 5-6 hours in which to run the scenario, and I found it quite difficult to write a scenario which would A) fill enough of ths time so as the players didn't feel ripped off, and B) not run over, so the scenario could be finished.

This is true. Getting the timing right, or deciding what sort of timing you want to run is tricky. For a starting GM, I would recommend only trying to run a one session game. You should write about 2.5hrs worth of stuff - believe it or not, this is one idea.

Don't try and cram all your good ideas into the 1 scenario. Pick and choose. Be discerning. Keep the plot elegant - not necessarily simple, but sufficiently easy to pick up and digest in about 2 hours (if you want the pcs to realise what is going on).

Once again - playtest. What you might think is a full session worth of time might turn out to be only 28 minutes worth (has happened) or up to 6 hours, depending on what the players do. And the players will often think of things that you haven't - in a chronicle/campaign, you can recover from this, but in a Con scenario, it might pop the bubble.

The only thing I had to base this on, was my own players, my own regular gaming groups. I decided to make an assumption that players at a con are also aware of the time constraints and will keep the 'fanning-about' to a minimum.

Um. No. Not in my experience, anyway.

In a campaign, players may go off on a tangent. Unless you are willing to wing it, I don't think this is really practical to allow at a con game.

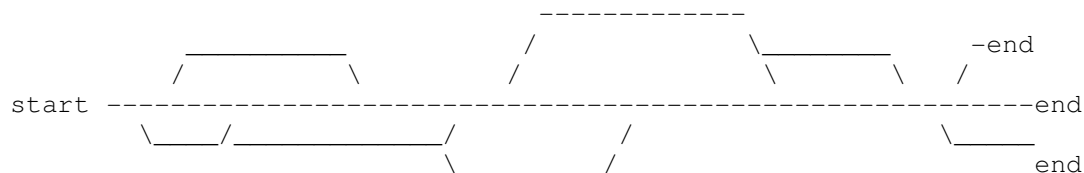
You have to be confident enough to be able to toss the scenario as is written. At that point, you can either try to tell the story still (get them back on track) or let them make up their own story (give up on the plot). Often the decision is based on how much fun everyone is having. At conquest, we gave prizes for greatest perversion of the plot, because the people who did it were great roleplayers, and both GMs had a ball. But that's another issue :)

Before you get to the stage of actually writing, work out exactly what you want to do. What are you telling a story about? What genre? What tone (comedy, horror, action, mystery)? What sort of characters do you want to have go through your plot?

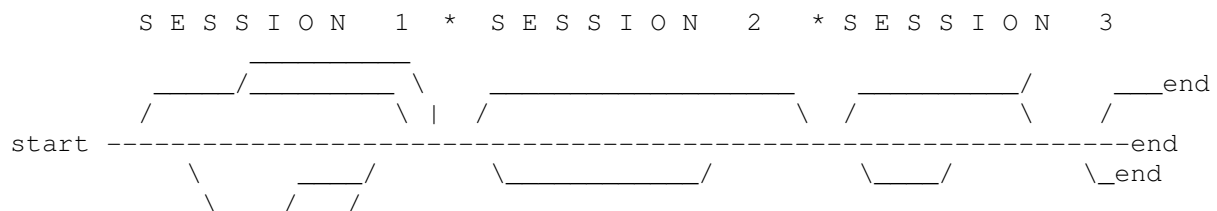
I worked out that I wanted each section of the scenario to take half an hour approximately, and that I wanted 8 of these which needed to be completed, with a couple of added ones which were unnecessary to the successful completion of the scenario, but would fit in and could be used to fill in time if players were quicker than I had anticipated. It also gave me a bit of leeway if players took longer than I expected.

This is a good way to think about it. Comic book writers storyboard their ideas into sections (each page and then each panel) to try and get some structure to their story.

You need a start scene, and you need a conclusion, if you are writing things this way (actually, multiple conclusions). In between, I try and make scenes as modular as possible, so that the characters can do the scenario in any order (I've found this stops the players getting frustrated - they really have some control over the way the story goes). This tends to end up something like this:



Where the choices the pcs made allow them to take multiple paths to an end. Multiple session games tend to be a bit more like:



...and the plot threads come together in between sessions (or the GMs go insane). At the end of each session, the pcs are at point X (or nearby).

When writing, I try and give multiple threads towards the end - either they don't need to do all the "things(tm)", or there are multiple ways to do each "thing(tm)" (collect evidence, interact with NPCs, diable^H^H never mind :)

I also decided to make it a 'bottle module'. I kept the things the PCs could do to a minimum. I didn't want to limit them, so there was no coercion involved. There was simply always an obvious thing to do. For example when the PCs said they wanted to explore the city, I gave them a map of the city with several buildings marked on it (a temple, the docks, a few taverns, the castle) IIRC. The PCs could go anywhere they liked, but in practice they went to the places I had marked, and I had worked out in advance what they could do in each place and what information they could gather there. Again this served to keep the PCs on track, without too much prompting, and allowed me to keep control of what was going on.

Hrm. I'm not sure I would do it this way. You always walk a fine line between completely linear and 'obvious thing to do'. Of course, trying to cover every thing the players might do will drive you nuts.

A couple of options to keep players from going to madagascar:

- They are trapped in a remote location (lighthouse, oil rig, small town with no transport, space station with no transport). This stops the characters from wandering too far away from the plot. When worked in nicely (ie: its integral to the plot), this can be a really neat device. When done badly the players will feel that they are being railroaded into the story.
- The Wedlock option. :) For reason X, the players cannot stray from point Y too far. The reasons may include fear and promises of pain if they stray, or positive reasons - loyalty for instance. Often this type of tie is written into the characters rather than the plot.

So that was half of the scenario - what would actually happen, and where it would happen. The other half were the characters both PCs and NPCs.

The blurb for the scenario that appeared in the Con book gave the suggestion that the PCs were going to be involved in treason - either participating in it, or attempting to stop it.

Makes it sound like you wrote the blurb before the scenario. We all know this would never happen. No no no. Never. Eek.

Every NPC had a 'quirk' - totally loyal, faceless and unidentifiable, enthusiastic and pathetic. This quirk was unique to that NPC and allowed the players to keep them straight, easily. I didn't want a case where every time the PCs met someone, they were asking me whether or not they'd met him yet.

Good plan. Voices, if you can do them, work well. So do unusual sights, sounds, smells - try and pick a ... well, quirk I guess (:-) so that the characters remember the npc. Yelling at the players (you know you want to), or being coldly distant is a good way of making an NPC stick in their minds. KNOW your important npcs. Nothing worse than having a GM be in the middle of an important discussion only to have them stop and read through a character desperately trying to find one bit of information.

When choosing names for the NPCs, don't make them (a) unpronounceable or (b) the same - eg: don't have a Michael and a Michelle. But this applies to normal games too.

Finally I designed the PCs. I'd had basic ideas about them from the start but now they were structured to make sure they'd fit the scenario. There were four of them, and I sought to create conflict between them, as well as a measure of coherence. None of the PCs had ever met before, (and I couldn't assume players had met either) so I needed relationships quickly if there was to be decent roleplay.

I would suggest having a basic idea about each of your characters from the start - even if its just a single concept. Characters are essential to the working of a good scenario - drab characters make for a drab game. I usually have a basic idea of some characters that would work out before I start writing - probably a line or two, or even just a characteristic or stereotype that they fall into.

As an example: The pirates game we ran at Conquest had half a page of notes on the characters in about January.. they looked something like:

- Pirate King. Ex-navy? Errol Flynn. Bit pooncy (or at least the option to play him like that).
- Lady pirate. Cruel, lots of leather..... "Bella Donna" Something like Black Sheba from Pyrates.
- Cabin boy.. Tom, or Dick or something.
- Defrocked priest. Not fallen. Sauntered vaguely downwards.

- Typical Brian blessed pirate. Fireworks. Long beard. Enormous laugh. Yellowbeard.
- Belgian noble. Rob suggests Hercule Poirot as a template.

Other hints on characters:

- Try to avoid making unnecessary characters - 4 characters are good, but if you really can't think of another character, go with 3.
- There's nothing worse than playing a detector on a stick. If one character has a eeriemystickpower(tm), make sure there is more to that character than that one power.
- If you are playing... well, pendragon makes a good example... in a world where one type of person is unable to do very many active things, and your game involves doing active things, DON'T make one of the pcs that type of person. The Pendragon example involves making one of the characters a female noble in a game that is mostly about chivalrous deeds - don't. Just don't. Its really really dull for the person slung with that character. Don't fuss about being politically correct - make it fun.
- If you have a four player game, and a possible 6 characters to choose from (which can be a Goodthing(tm) - it really bites to be stuck with the last character and hating it) where was I... oh yes, make sure that any character that is essential to the plot is taken. In the recent Pirates game we had a choice of 6 characters, 2 of which had to be taken.

[chomp chomp on design examples]

something to be avoided and shirked wherever possible. Very basic, quick to read off the character sheet, and easy for even neophytes to play (remember this was AD&D, so I had to assume I'd get some people who had veyr little roleplaying experience).

Something that Sean implied, but didn't say - make sure each character has something to do. I don't mean that each character must have a Quest Which They Must Complete - but don't let the players get bored. They need to feel that they got something out of the story too. Minor amounts of character clashing is ok - just don't give them a reason to hate each other and then complain that the party never stays together.

Character motivations are a great way to give each character something to do - they don't always have to be deep dark secrets either. Not everyone has a maiden aunt buried in the backyard/desire to take over the world/leather fetish hidden away in

their psyche. While character secrets can make for a neat game, they can be overused too.

This is a pretty simplistic approach, I realise. But it was a first attempt and I didn't want to be too ambitious. I'm sure more experienced Con GMs and designers will have far more detailed advice, but I believe in KISS - keep it simple, stupid - at least at first. I'd much rather write a basic scenario and have it work, than get too complex and risk a failure.

KISS is almost always the best way to write scenarios. Its not bad advice at all. We all know from experience that turning up in panicked state, with only half a page of notes, to a regular gaming sessions can rapidly become enough information to game for two sessions :) So don't overestimate how much plot you will need.

Some other bits and pieces of advice:

- start with a small Con, if you want to write. Capricon for instance. Or Dwarfcon (assuming you are in Melbourne). This limits the scope for total-embarrassment-they-all-hated-it-I-want-to-die.
- Playtest
- Find someone to bounce ideas off. Let them sanity check your ideas. This doesn't mean you have to discard them if they don't like them, but they may find the really big hole in your scenario.
- Playtest.
- Try writing a 'session' and running your friends through it. See what they say. This isn't a PLAYTEST, but a sort of alpha test.
- Have sufficient background material to be confident about winging it for a while.
- Playtest.
- If you have extra GMs (even if you are only running a few session, it can be nice to have a break), make sure they know their stuff - it hurts to have people slag your scenario when its not your fault they didn't enjoy it.
- Pick your extra GMs carefully. Even more carefully than you would your weekly players.
- Playtest
- If you find yourself unable to finish the scenario in time for the Con, please tell the organisers. Beforehand if you can. Be apologetic.
- Playtest
- Co-writing might be something you want to think about.
- Sometimes Con GMs want extra GMs for their modules. When you get your con book, have a look through. If you find something someone is asking for

GMs for, maybe think about it. Get the Con experience. It might even be possible to ring people who are running games and explain your situation to them - they might be interested in helping out.

- Playtest.
- Never. Ever. Ever. Ever say "That's not in the module" to your Con players.

And if you see an adventure module for your favorite system from another convention miles away, is there any chance at all you can convince the designers to send you a copy? Is there any established way of doing this?

I'd say you just contact them and ask. Offer to pay any costs. Some people sell their scenarios anyway, so that's easy. Mine's available on the web to anyone who wants it. I think there are a lot of people who would be quite willing to let other people use their work.

I've noticed a tendency that most writers are flattered that someone wants to use their stuff - but they really get annoyed when it is stolen. I guess now's a good time to plug the Capricon scenario booklets - chock full of good scenarios written by lots of various people. Cheap at half the price. (\$20 btw). Mail me if you're interested :)

I've also got some of the tournament scenarios tht I've written kicking around the place, if you want to see how I write them in the end.

Damien

Author: Sara Hanson
Email: elindal@netspace.net.au
Date: 1997/06/18
Forums: aus.games.roleplay

Mr Damien Moore wrote:

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don't. Its really really dull for the person slung with that character. Don't fuss about being politically correct - make it fun.

Erm.. while I wouldn't suggest you ignore this one first up, it it a good example of where if you know the rules, you can break them. I played in a Pendragon module last year by Greg Rickards. The main characters were Mordred, Guinevere, Lancelot, Bors [?] and one other, the name escapes me at present. The whole module was steeped in chivalry. Guinevere in most sessions that it ran, got the option to be as chivalrous, if not more, than any of the male characters. It was an exceptional game, and Greg consistently produces excellent modules.

If you give the plot enough of a twist, anything is possible. The most important point is "Is it plausible?" If you give the characters a reasonable reason for doing something, in most cases they will. It's when you expect them do perform outside the character YOU defined, that things fall apart at the seams.

Sara Hanson

Designer and MacOS Specialist.

Author: Richard Canning

Email: rcanning@melbourne.microhelp.com.au

Date: 1997/06/18

Forums: aus.games.roleplay

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Guinevere, Lancelot, Mordred, Kay, and Gawaine.

One of the best modules I have ever played.

Sorry, this isn't relevant, but Greg deserves the praise.

Author: Ric Colsey
Email: Ricreko@tne.net.au
Date: 1997/06/18
Forums: aus.games.roleplay

My advice (having written fo Cons in the eighties) Playtest it, edit hone it, Playtest it, Playtest it, Playtest it.

And finally when you think it is working well....Playtest it!!!!

Haveing the resource of players ready and ABle to GM is important as are players who WON'T play at Cons.

Good luck

Author: Sara Hanson
Email: elindal@netspace.net.au
Date: 1997/06/17
Forums: aus.games.roleplay

*I was wondering -- how *do* you learn the trade of writing tournament adventures? I'm especially interested in systemful games, which seem to something of a lost art with all these systemless, freeform, multiform and chloroform games. Like, the first step is *playing* tournament games, I know, but beyond that?*

First things first, know the rules, and be clear in your own mind where your are ignoring one. If you advertise that a game is written for a particular system, be prepared that you will have players who will rules-lawyer you, and also players who will characterise all session, the rules only a background guideline. It helps if you have access to experienced GM's who can cope with either style. This is probably why you get people adding "-ish" to the system description, it gives them a bit of leeway.

If writing a genre-based game this is doubly important. Particulary if the genre is very well known [e.g. Terry Prachett's Discworld, Lord of the Rings, Star Trek, B5,

etc...]. Expect to have players who know that universe inside out, and other players who really only know the name. If you have changed the boundaries of that universe, make sure you let the players know. Don't forget to outline the basics for any newbies [e.g. according to common knowledge, a telepath can...]

This is a pretty simplistic approach, I realise. But it was a first attempt and I didn't want to be too ambitious. I'm sure more experienced Con GMs and designers will have far more detailed advice, but I believe in KISS - keep it simple, stupid - at least at first. I'd much rather write a basic scenario and have it work, than get too complex and risk a failure.

Re; conflict and cohesion. Make sure the cohesion more than outweighs the conflict. Many a time I have played in a tournament module where my character is only there because that's what it said at the start of the game, and to leave the party would trash the module. They don't actually have any real reason for the character staying, only the player. There have been some quite good discussions recently on who to get a party together and to keep it together. Look up one of the Aus.games.roleplay archives.

And if you see an adventure module for your favorite system from another convention miles away, is there any chance at all you can convince the designers to send you a copy? Is there any established way of doing this?

I'd say you just contact them and ask. Offer to pay any costs. Some people sell their scenarios anyway, so that's easy. Mine's available on the web to anyone who wants it. I think there are a lot of people who would be quite willing to let other people use their work.

It will depend on the person who wrote the module, and their plans for it. Along the eastern seaboard, it is not uncommon for the same module to run at several different conventions, author's may not wish release the game until it has played at all the conventions it's planned to run at. You should also tell the author why you want it. They may be happy for you read it, but may not wish other people to run it, or not charge when run, or whatever other conditions they lay down. Don't forget, it is their work, and as such they have intellectual property rights over its distribution and presentation. I know a number of people who have been ripped off, and as a result, no longer make their modules available. On the other hand, it is quite common for some modules to be available for sale at the end of a convention.

Whatever you try, good luck. It's lots of work, but the satisfaction of hearing your game positively anecdoted [?spelling] about in the pub later is worth all the sleepless nights.

Sara Hanson

Author: surturz[DELETETHISBIT]

Email: surturz[DELETETHISBIT]@ozemail.com[DELETETHISBITTOO].au

Date: 1997/06/18

Forums: aus.games.roleplay

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I might be revealing a Boys from R.U.S.E. secret, but make sure your characters are fairly stereotypical. 3 hours is not enough time to play an overly complex character.

Also, in freeforms, don't have ANY quiet characters. Make them all extroverts.

David

Author: Sara Hanson

Email: elindal@netspace.net.au

Date: 1997/06/19

Forums: aus.games.roleplay

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Be really careful with this one, have you ever spent three hours in the company of over a dozen people whole all psychologically NEED to be the centre of attention

[and I don't mean post con drinks for designers]. A freeform has to be balanced, or there will be bloodshed. Normally it is a nicety of convention freeforms, that no PC gets killed before the last 15 minutes. I would say it is more important that all characters have more than enough to do, and are manipulative, rather than all extroverted. silent but deadly can be more fun and cause more havoc, because no-one sees them coming.

Sara Hanson

Author: Benjamin Kemp

Email: bkemp@hardy.ocs.mq.edu.au

Date: 1997/06/19

Forums: aus.games.roleplay more headers

I might be revealing a Boys from R.U.S.E. secret, but make sure your characters are fairly stereotypical. 3 hours is not enough time to play an overly complex character. Also, in freeforms, don't have ANY quiet characters. Make them all extroverts.

Be really careful with this one, have you ever spent three hours in the company of over a dozen people whole all psychologically NEED to be the centre of attention [and I don't mean post con drinks for designers]. A freeform has to be balanced, or there will be bloodshed. Normally it is a nicety of convention freeforms, that no PC gets killed before the last 15 minutes. I would say it is more important that all characters have more than enough to do, and are manipulative, rather than all extroverted. silent but deadly can be more fun and cause more havoc, because no-one sees them coming.

You played our SOAP OPERA Freeform. You should know how they go ... painfully loud is the least disturbing description

Extroverts is difficult, but in a freeform not impossible. However, i believe the original poster wanted Module advice. As a point of advice, try not to start on a freeform. It's done many times, but unless you have some substantial experience with freeforms, they are hell to write. Not 5 characters, 30. Not one plot, 8 plots, all tied in. It's harder (though often more fun), and also harder to get accepted (most cons are full up with freeforms before they fill with modules).

I believe Dave also mentioned Steryotypes in his post, later ... cautioned by Jason. Steryotypes are just another kind of hook to hang your roleplaying hook. Admittedly they are large, plastic, garishly coloured and often out of place in anything but a playroom, but they are difficult to miss when roleplaying (it's been done, though ...). A steryotype can work when the plot's the thing, but where Characterisation is important, go for the hand-crafted characters. sure they are more prone to accident, but when used well they can add a lot to a module.

Ben the DEFINATELY NOT PART OF DAVE'S WRITING GROUP EVEN IF I'M THE ONE WHO DOES ALL THE WORK

PS. He's not kidding about the Bagpipe Music.

Author: Hugh Fisher
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Date: 1997/06/18
Forums: aus.games.roleplay

*I was wondering -- how *do* you learn the trade of writing tournament adventures? I'm especially interested in systemful games, which seem to something of a lost art with all these systemless, freeform, multiform and chloroform games. Like, the first step is *playing* tournament games, I know, but beyond that?*

I started by GMing for other designers at conventions, and would recommend it to you.

GMing a group of strangers with just three hours to play is different to running a campaign for your friends - not too different, but something you should try first for one or two sessions just in case you decide you don't like it. Convention GMing is also IMHO a *great* way to improve your overall skills by exposing you to different styles of play.

You also get to look at other peoples material, and see how they've designed the characters and settings. Again, this is all good background info for when you decide to design your own.

Having decided that you're ready to write a module, pick a convention and contact an organiser. Some good advice given to me by the Most Revered Wes was to start with a one session module. Most convention goers, and hence the organisers,



prefer one session games these days. And if you're a new designer, people are less likely to take the chance of wasting several hours instead of just three.

You need to contact several months in advance. Cancon 98 is advertising for designers now, and Phenomenon 98 will (I assume) start recruiting in a month or two. You'll need these months for procrastinating, writing, changing your mind, rewriting, and playtesting.

I'd recommend starting with either a smaller convention like Phenomenon or a fairly obscure game system. This is so the number of sessions will be low enough for you to run them all yourself, which means you can just rely on scribbled notes and your imagination to run it. Anyone heavily involved in the design could also help, and of course you still have to put just as much work into the design and characters. But it's much easier than writing up your module sufficiently clearly for other GMs to be comfortable running it.

Playtesting - you **MUST**, repeat **MUST**, playtest. I do two playtests myself or one and one run by another GM. Since Cancon is after the Christmas/New Year holiday break, and Phenomenon at university exam time, playtesting for these should be arranged well beforehand

That's all I can think of for the moment. Hope it helps.

Hugh "the Paranoia guy"

Author: Sara Hanson
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Forums: aus.games.roleplay

Eh. If you give a player a quiet character, you're killing their chances of getting the player's choice block of wood - substitute. Most GMs wouldn't have a problem with that - I do, I guess.

As a writing team, Richard Canning and myself value the GM's choice over the Player's Choice. It is up to the writers to give every character a reason for being where they are, they should never run out of things to do, assuming that all characters are present, and no-one is deliberately sabotaging the game. We have seen a number of games ruined by players who are going all out for the player's



choice award, and as such are not playing the character they were given. I can think of one example in particular from Cancon, where one player being out of character severely interfered with the other players, including their need to monopolise the GM's. In the GM's choice award, we reward people who have done an exceptional job in portraying the character they were given, and who gave back the most to the game. I can think of at least one freeform in the last few years where both player's choice trophies went to the mute character, and where a battered wife character came a close second and got the special mention trophy, she refused to speak to the other characters, but did it so convincingly the other players appreciated it.

I will step back from my "make them all extroverts" statement. Just don't make any of them introverts. Playing an introvert in a freeform is just not fun.

We have found that if you make the characters BELIEVABLE, people can relate to them easier. It is easier to play for novice gamers than requiring them to be a constant "Jim Carey" style motor mouth.

Here's a little secret of Ben's -

BEN IS A POWER GAMER! HE USES DICE! HE PLAYS CHAMPIONS!!

OH no! I'm shattered! How can I look him in the eye again! [Not that I ever could at 5'2", ;)]

Sara Hanson

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Forums: aus.games.roleplay

David Streeter
(surturz[DELETETHISBIT]@ozemail.com[DELETETHISBITTOO].au) wrote:

Observation - we started the freeform with about twenty potatoes. We ended the freeform with zero. THEY WERE RAW.

Hmm. Did you realise that potatoes contain a natural compound of arsenic, said compound being toxic (in decent quantities) and broken down to relatively harmless substances by cooking? I believe the compound evolved as a defense against the various bugs which are inclined to eat plant roots.

I do hope the potatoes were shared around sufficiently ... :)

Author: Eccles
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Forums: aus.games.roleplay

rwvb@ozemail.com.au (melinka) writes:

My advice is try finding a writing partner. someone who you can work with and who u wont hate at the end of the process. this will not only give you a different perspective on what your writing but will also mean u have at least to GMs cons will love u. i know that this does not work for everyone but it has worked for me.

I'd have to agree - for games longer than a single session it is almost mandatory for myself. I've written... er, a lot.. of con games, and I've been lucky to have co-writers whom I could get on with an who were conscientious (or at least as so as I am :)

I haven't yet hated any of them, although by the time of the Con I ususally hate the game I am running. One of my major considerations for awarding prizes is "did the people make me enjoy this game that I hate the very sight of?"

Dont be affraide to try somthing new,

Keep in mind though that it may not be new - the same concept might have occured to people before. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, keep in mind that your game must be able to support itself if the people who are playing it don't think the concept you are playing with is new - well written, etc etc.

but just remember who will play the game get play testers who will tell u what they realy think of your and dont be offended when they do.

Also get playtesters who might not fit your ideal of the perfect player - your ideal playtester bends the game to breaking point.

be the most important thing i feel above all else with all other consideration considered is to enjoy it, if u dont enjoy it then the players probably wont either

Definitely. One of my major problems writing serious games is trying to make it enjoyable without getting silly - not that I've ever succeeded running a whole session without bursting out into giggles at some point or another ("Oxfoooooorrrrd...")

Damien

