

People are Interested in People

Encounters

Location

- Danger
 - High
 - Fast
 - Sharp
 - Traps
 - Ambush
- Awkward
- Beauty
- Don't damage the foliage

Weather

- Temperature
- Wind
- Precipitation / fog
- Weird – ball lightning

Lighting

- Dark / dull / bright / too bright
- Colour
- Strobing / varying / disappearing

Footing

- Helpful
- Hindering
- Levels
- Vehicles / moving

Time Limit

- Success required before a certain time
- Failure occurs after a certain time
- Things change after a certain time

Second challenge

- Cut off escape
- Multiple foes / riot
- Mental + physical challenge

Props / Extras / Scenery

Carrot on a stick – reward out of reach

Encounters and the Plot

- Plot development – players *feel* the encounter develops the plot
- World development – reveals something about the world
- Character development – reveals something about the PCs
- NPC development – reveals something about an NPC
 - Tactics
 - Motives
 - Foibles
 - Tea with the evil wizards Mum
- Break the mood
 - “if they yawn, roll initiative”
 - Combat
 - Romance
 - Conversation
 - Humour
- Give an encounter more than one purpose

Features of the game

- PC skills
- PC classes
- Type, goals and plans of villain or enemy
- Campaign setting terrain
- The victims, employer, or story catalyst
- PC equipment
- Rewards, treasure, magic items
- NPCs, relationships
- Nature of missions, jobs, or adventures
- Technology

Descriptions

Show don't tell

- Don't state an attitude – show it with word and deed
- Setting: props, scenery, extras: how can these demonstrate attitude

Visualise before you speak

- Take 10 seconds
- Think of Movie / Game / Fly through view

Player specific descriptions based on PC interests

Delay with details in the beginning and middle

Save the best for last

6 senses

- 3 details for a glance
- 5 details for a look
- 7 details for inspection

Speech: tone, pauses, pacing

Unrelated campaign details

- Current events
- Random goings on
- Not so random goings on
- Weather
- Flora and fauna
- Props, scenery, extras

The Art of Providing Evasive Answers

Use appropriately

- NPCs
- Divination and prophecy
- Not rules, or PC's eyes and ears

Metaphors and similes

- Direct – the king is a plague on the land
- Indirect – my sword shall dog my foes
- Obscure – secrecy locks the gate to friendship

+ follow it up with a question / greeting / challenge

Answer with a question

- The answer to this question answers the PC's question
- Question is deliberately challenging or evasive

Answer a few steps ahead

- Where is this line of questions going
- Answer the question a few steps forward

Half answer

Don't answer – run

Body language (if the NPC would use it)

Improvisation - Art

Know the finale

Let them go off on tangents

- Return to main plot when and if able to
- Be flexible with time scale. Nick of time is when they arrive
- Replant the plot to the new location “illusion of freewill”
- Plant clues in the new tangent

Let the heroes lose

Steal player ideas if they discuss what could be next

If you're stuck

- Take time out
- Admit you haven't planned for this
- Ask the players what they think you should do from here

It's OUR plot not MY plot

Encourage and describe feelings don't state them “chill runs down your spine” not “you're afraid”

Never force a player action (and if they're being mind controlled, allow them to role play it.)

Rewards

Non monetary

- Lands / House
- Services / training
- Titles, Status, Epithets, Nick names
- Reputation, name, ego rub
- Promises, fealty, love or respect
- Relationships, servants, marriage offers, fans and groupies, enemies, patrons, DNPCs
- Duties

Exotic foods

- Meats
- Herbs and spices
- Drinks
- Treats and sweets
- Nuts and berries

Beasts / Monsters / Trophies

- Fur / hides / scales
- Claws and teeth
- Skulls and horns

Strange materials

- Normal things with cosmetic differences
- Silk not cloth
- Teak not wood
- Bronze not iron

Art

Named items

Other monies

- Gems
- Poker chips
- IOUs / bond certificates / gift certificates
- Cancelled debts

Spells or info

- Sheet metal (Make sure to vary the metals)
- Tattoos
- Clay tablets
- Burned into wood
- On the backs of paintings
- Rawhide
- Soft leather
- Book covers
- Engraved onto armour
- Glass tablets
- Metal tablets/bars
- Directly on walls

Spot light time

- Not necessarily in the character's speciality
- Always roleplaying / developing background / character / NPC

Cinematic points to be traded in for cinematic stunts

Their turn to GM / serendipity / wish list

Improvisation - Science

Start at the ending

Face down the demon

Work backwards

Magery backfire

Investigate mage collecting X

Need to get X themselves

Hired by demon flunky so PCs will cause the backfire

Add a twist

Plant clues to the twist

Give NPCs personalities

Use averages for stats (max's for bosses)

Continuity

- Write stuff down
- Go for constant cinematic realism

Balance

- Start small then re-enforce
- Overkill and have the PCs work out how to back out
- Fudge dice rolls
- Let the PCs lose

How Can I Funk With Their Minds Today

How to fix botched encounters

Take a break

- Regroup your thoughts
- Talk to players about options

Dream up ideas

- Stream of consciousness
- Write
- Talk to players about options

Give the encounter something new

- Hook
 - Give the encounter a purpose
 - Give the PCs something to fight for
 - See table of player wants
- See encounters table
- Re-enforcement / new dangers

Give the NPCS a new feature

- Tactic
- Go cinematic

Re describe scenery / props / extras
lights / camera / action

Re introduce

- State you're going to try to make it more interesting
- Sudden turn for worse or better
- Explainable change of features

Things that make a campaign better

- Recurring NPCs
- Hierarchy of Evil™ interacting with PCs
- Foreshadowing and symbolism
- PC / NPC / Plot / World development
- Relationships
- An overall goal

Plot Features

NPC

- Background
- How did they get from there to here
- Good at
- Bad at
- Blind spots
- Evil aren't all evil
- Good aren't all good
- Mundane aren't all mundane
- Looks / Mannerisms

Scenes and speeches

- Boxed text (player passive)
- Points you must get across
- Good turns of phrase
- Ideas of how to vary plot for predictable PC induced alterations

Background

- People. Make it about the people
- Who's involved
- Motivations
- Interactions – with NPCs and PCs
- How to and what if they fail or succeed

Clues, Leads, Plot hooks

- Flexibility
- Duplication and repetition
- Where When Why What Who How

Improvised Encounters

When an improvised encounter is needed –the players are bored, or have done something unexpected, imagine

- Most Obvious
- Most Surprising (mess with their goals)
- Most Challenging (/identity/worldview)
- Most Pleasing

And choose the one that will best please those involved

Plot Twists - types

Cosmetic changes only

- Prince kidnapped by evil warlord

Complete reversal

- Evil princess keeps wizard locked in tower

How many ?!

- 10 wizards trying to kidnap 1 princess
- 1 wizard trying to kidnap 10 princesses
- 10 wizards trying to kidnap 10 princesses – but only 1 counts

Bait and Switch

- Someone or ones are not who they appear to be (or think they are)

Amateurs, Damn Amateurs

- Because of incompetence something's gone wrong

Humour – weird or funny side effect of plot

- Princess wants to marry rescuer.

Clues

Use of clues

- Any kind of mystery or secret
- Reveal the powers of magic / technology
- Reveal special abilities of monsters/ foes
- Foreshadowing / Use as warnings
- Use them as plot hooks
- Turn a plotline into a character-driven story: rather than having a bunch of scheduled events which lead the PCs through the adventure, plant clues to generate player interest and desire to proceed

Define the secrets to be revealed

- Plot
- NPC
- Hierarchy of Evil
- Relationships
- PC secrets

Write down every clue you can think of

- People Places Things
- Who What Why Where When How
- 6 senses

Repeat for each sub clue

Work out which are:

- Helpful
- Essential
- Distracting

Divide into:

- Clear and easy placement
- Easy to improvise placement
- Don't know

Highlight any essential don't know clues so you remember to look for how to get them in

Choices

Don't render PC choices meaningless

- If offered, make it matter
- If it won't matter, skim over it
- Point out there is a choice

Change the nature of the choices

- ⬆/⬇ Cost
- ⬆/⬇ Reward
- ⬆/⬇ Available choices
- Link to another encounter/NPC/PC
- De-link to another encounter/...
- Change how the choice affects the party
- Change who in the party the choice affects
- Choice directly vs indirectly affects the party

Plot Twists – how to

Divide into steps and twist each step

- Encounter – make more interesting
- Plot – change nature of plot
- Campaign – change campaign features or PC motives

Change nature of props / scenery / extras

- Appearance / Illusion
- Misdirection / misinformation / sabotage
- Systems failure
- Wrong target

Combine two stories

- Create story line A
- Create story line B
- Work out why for each
- Swap the why's and see what emerges

Don't twist too often

Twist in PCs favour sometimes

Plot Hooks

Grab their attention

- Dramatic
- Threatening
- Confrontational
- Serendipitous

Point out there's something in it for them

- Healing
- Information
- Revenge
- Favours from friends, leverage over enemies
- A present for a birthday
- Equipment
- A new skill, spell or tech
- Family
- Job/income
- New mystery to explore
- Opportunity to roleplay

Call to arms

- Direct action towards them
- Thrill of the chase
- Time limit on taking action
- Sixth sense fudge

Give the players options

- Or at least let them work out what's happening as their options dry up
- Adapt your hook so it happens anyway "illusion of free will"

Hook can happen to a PC – will provoke an action

Hook can happen around a PC – provoke a reaction

- Riot
- Rumour
- Background event
- Foreground event
- Props / Scenery / Extras
- Grey areas of morality

Recycle existing game elements

Conflict – Narrow Focus Lens

- Fight – direct confrontation / traps / capture
- Hide – avoid / divert attention / infiltrate
- Run – escape / buy time / chase
- Deal – negotiate / bluff / intimidate (blackmail)

Conflict – Wide Focus Lens

- Mislead – activities / goals / other interactions
- Investigate – dig up dirt / discover plot
- Competition for influence with third party
- Taking Hostages – people / things / information
- Call in the cavalry

A Story is Made or Broken by its Villain

Villains

Goal
Motivation
Background to motivation
Method
Look the part
Resources
Ending

Writing Effective Villains

Don't hold back
Don't overdo it

- As evil as needed for the story
- True to type, plots and ideas
- Don't steal the limelight
- Not all bad – still human foibles
- Blind spots
- Fatal flaws
- Likeable characteristics

Have a line of reasoning behind methods
Plan the villains demise

Quick and Dirty Villains

Give the a % chance of success
Strengths and weaknesses

- Behavioural (intimidating stare, flinches easily)
- Physical (incredible strength, poor vision)
- Mental (always cool, genius, fear of snakes)
- Political (Emperor is ally, merchants are enemies)
- Economic (healthy bank account, poor credit)
- Social (people never suspect, shy around ladies)
- Military (large, well-trained army, poor general)
- Family (mother is Queen, must protect his sons)
- Special (spells, the force, delusions of intuition)

Point form plan

- Start at goal
- Work back to achievable
- Now you have a plot

Create a number of the above
Mesh the plots together

Hierarchy of Evil

Decide on goal

- Has to be something to interest the PCs
- Doesn't have to be all bad or all selfish
- Can choose a good goal that will twist later

Arch villain

- No single PC should be able to defeat them
- PCs don't have to know / recognise them

Chief Lieutenants

- Personal goal / motivation
- Link to Arch Villain
- Can be tougher to deal with than the Villain
- Arch Villain's last line of defence
- Complex relationship with Arch Villain

Cannon Fodder

- Eyes / Ears
- Mouth / Hands
- Lead PCs to the Lieutenants
- If they become a recurring NPC, make them a Lieutenant

Relationships

- Cannon fodder want to become Lieutenants
- Lieutenants want to further own goals / become a power in their own right
- Arch villain have complex relations with Lts
- Can be weaknesses the PCs can exploit

Evil flunkies make their masters look bad

- PCs may hate the villains because of their flunkies' evil behaviour

Villain Tactics

Answering questions

- Answer a question with a question
- Villains can lie
- (and then follow up with a question)

Ask a question then be silent.

"He who speaks first loses"

Be on the PCs side... but

- Don't tell them everything
- Lie about objectives or outcomes
- My enemy's enemy is my enemy

Give the PCs (bad) choices not ultimatums

+ assume the thing you want to be done will be done, and give choices about how to do it

Manipulate the PCs

- Family
- Occupation
- Relationships
- Money

Followers are expendable

Treasure

- If the NPC has cool stuff, use it
- Especially if it has shots

Thinking

- Monsters can use clever tactics
- May figure out PCs tactics
- Can Bluff

Home field advantage / tactics

- Entrances
 - Escape routes
 - Alarm systems
 - Barricades
 - And traps on the barricades
 - Traps
 - Deliberately misleading trails
 - Ambushes
 - Guerrilla tactics
 - Split the PCs up
 - Secret passages allow the PCs to be surrounded
 - If winning push on
- Run away, revenge later
- If the PCs retreat, make them pay

Goals

- Power and conquest
- Safety / Self Defence
- Greed and money
- Achievement and prestige
- Seeking (forbidden) knowledge
- Food (+ little effort)
- Revenge
- Cuts
- Sympathy / love
- Compassion and conversation
- Survival
- Get the job done no matter what
- Religious Mania
- Twisted code of honour
- Sheer Malevolence

This will define what the monsters are willing to sacrifice, and how they act.

Goals may change mid encounter

Antagonists

- Noble
- Likeable
- Friends
- Can help heroes
- Can save heroes
- Goals differ from heroes

Interesting Villains

- The villain has a different view of good and evil
- Things the party does wrong, the villain does right
- Makes allies
- Sides with the law when the party don't
- Fixes the problems the players create => popular
- Gathers intelligence
- Gets there first
- Weakens PC / NPC relationships
- Strengthens their own
- Romantic attachment to party
- Villain is the source of
 - Services the players need
 - Info
 - Items
 - Plot

Order of villainy

- Seducer
- Corrupter
- Merchant
- Torturer
- Murderer
- Maybe be nice to the players for a change
- Reputation for being wonderful
- Be a thorn in PCs side just to be malicious

NPC Goals

- Army (or avoid it)
- Avoid attracting attention
- Avoid becoming scapegoat
- Attract Attention
- Be as passive aggressive as possible
- Build a better mousetrap
- Defend against political enemies
- Dig up dirt on enemies
- Family man
- Fix specific family problem
- Get a better job
- Gossip – either do or avoid
- Impress people
- Impress superiors
- Impress the Joneses
- Keep my job
- Make a little extra cash
- Marriage
- Marry off children
- Marry up
- Money / Land
- Obsession with hobby / job / person / goal
- Pass on my wisdom
- Political standing
- Power
- Reputation
- Social Climb
- Social standing
- Use job to get time for hobbies
- Wishing was in an alternate career

Improvising NPC personas

- Give any NPC a characteristic line or two. Even if you never use this piece of prepared dialogue, it will help flesh out the character, and give you a framework for their dialogue.
- Give NPCs a (single) personality trait (list below)
- Cast an Actor or book character to play the NPC
- Don't use a persona you'll regret when they (inevitably) become a recurring character.

Props - Scenery - Extras

City numbers

Town of 10,000

- 90 people per acre
- ½ mile diameter
- 3d mins to cross
- 3 deaths, 3 births per week

Town types

- College town
- Agriculture / Fishing / Mining
- Market / Trading / On a trade route
- Defence / Military / Tactical
- Secondary industry
- Religion / Politics
- Tourist / Historical by-product

Town features and Buildings

- College, School, Academy, University
- Library, Museum, Art Gallery, Historic Site
- Church, Monastery, Temple, Graveyard, Shrine
- Prison, Stocks, Cages, Police station, Law Courts
- Palace, Mansion, Residence, Stately Home
- Ancient relic (known or unknown), Ruins
- Monument to Monarch, Conqueror, God, Hero
- Aqueduct, Viaduct, Sewers, Storm drains
- Bridge (long, tall, pylons), Arches, Tunnels
- Subterranean Labyrinth (natural?)
- Spring, Fountain, River, Lake, Dam
- Gardens, Fields, Arenas, Playgrounds, Parks
- Inn, Tavern, Cafe, Saloon, Way house
- Whorehouse, Gambling Dens, Seedy sections
- Crossroads, Town square, Town Hall
- Warehouses, Docks, Ports, Quays, Factories
- Shops, Merchants, Markets, Bazaars
- Cafés, Restaurants, Food Halls, Roadside Vendors
- Guilds, Meeting halls, Council Chambers
- City walls, Gates, other Defence structures
- Watchtowers, Lighthouse, Beacons
- Entertainment, Play houses, Theatres, Buskers

Plain

Crops
Down
Field
Grassland
Heath
Meadow
Moor
Pasture
Prairie
Savannah
Steppe
Tundra

Swamp

Bayou
Bog
Delta
Estuary
Fen
Mangrove
Marsh
Morass
Mudflat
(Quag)Mire
Quicksand
Slough
Wash
Wetland

Forest

Brush
Copse
Glade
Grove
Jungle
Rainforest
Scrub
Taiga
Thicket
Wood(land)

Mountain

Alp
Bluff
Cliff
Crag
Divide
Escarpment
(Foot)Hill
Height
Highland
Peak
Pinnacle
Range
Ridge
Slope
Table Land

Valley

Basin
Canyon
Chasm
Cleft
Crevasse
Dale
Dell
Fissure
Glen
Gorge
Gully
Hollow
Pass
Precipice
Ravine
Rift
Vale

Desert

Badlands
Desolation
Waste(land)
Wilderness
Dunes

Cave

Catacomb
Cavern
Chamber
Grotto
Labyr(inth)
Maze
Network

River

Aqueduct
Arroyo
Brook
Canal
Channel
Creek
Fjord
Flow
Rill
Runnel
Sound
Torrent
Tributary
Wadi
Wash
Watercourse
(Well)Spring
(Water)Fall
Cascade

Lake

(Mill)Pond
Dam
Lough
Lock
Mere
Overflow
Pool
Lagoon
Reservoir
Tarn
Waterhole

Ocean

Sea(side)
Depths
Main
Shallows
Strait
Surf
Bay
Coast(line)
Beach
(Fore)Shore
Waterfront

City

Burg
Hamlet
Metropolis
Parish
Port
Settlement
Shire
Suburb
Town(ship)
Village

Castle

Barracks
Bastion
Citadel
Estate
Fastness
Fort(ress)
Fortification
Garrison
Keep
Lodge
Manor
Motte and Bailey
Outpost
Palace
(Strong)Hold
(Watch)Tower

Personality Traits

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| • absent-minded | • defiant | • gullible | • paranoid | • slothful |
| • accommodating | • dependent | • happy-go-lucky | • perky | • smug |
| • ambitious | • diplomatic | • histrionic | • petulant | • soft-spoken |
| • angry | • dissolute | • honest | • pious | • stammering |
| • argumentative | • distrustful | • icy | • plain-spoken | • stoic |
| • authoritative | • dithering | • ideological | • pretentious | • stubborn |
| • awkward | • down-to-earth | • ignorant | • puritanical | • submissive |
| • bad tempered | • dull | • incapable | • quiet | • superstitious |
| • bland | • eager | • intimidating | • rational | • surly |
| • blithe | • easy-going | • inventive | • rebellious | • swaggering |
| • blunt | • eloquent | • irresponsible | • reckless | • taciturn |
| • broad-minded | • emotional | • joyous | • resourceful | • uncouth |
| • bureaucratic | • energetic | • kind | • respectable | • unfazeable |
| • cautious | • enigmatic | • licentious | • responsible | • unfriendly |
| • charming | • excited | • loud | • retiring | • unkempt |
| • childish | • fearful | • lustful | • rugged | • unpredictable |
| • cold | • flamboyant | • malicious | • rustic | • vacuous |
| • conceited | • foolish | • mean | • sacrificing | • violent |
| • confident | • forgiving | • meek | • sarcastic | • vivacious |
| • conservative | • friendly | • menacing | • seductive | • voracious |
| • contrary | • generous | • miserly | • seething | • wary |
| • controlling | • gossipy | • mournful | • self-effacing | • weird |
| • corrupt | • graceful | • narcissistic | • selfish | • whiny |
| • courageous | • greedy | • officious | • self-righteous | • wily |
| • curious | • gregarious | • overbearing | • sleepy | • wise |
| • deceitful | • gruff | • overconfident | • slick | • witty |