
Effective adventure planning for Merc:2000

by Roger Stenning

All too often, referees (like you and me) are asked to run a game at little or no notice... other times, we plan and plan and plan, write loads, and find the players wreck our carefully crafted adventures in about five minutes at.

So why do we do this? Why do we spend loads of time, in writing these adventures, when about half the time, the work we put in is hardly ever appreciated, except for a "Good game, mate" at the end of the gaming session?

Because we enjoy it. Simple as that.

But.

Surely there's some way in which we can make our adventure writing better; make it more memorable; get those dozy players to actually be enthusiastic about saying "thanks"?

There is, I feel, a way. You may have to change the way you write your adventures, maybe put a little more work in every so often, and do a bit more research, but yeah, I think there is...

Why do I need to read this, then?

Actually, you don't. You probably already know how, but in this article, I hope to set out the methods in a rather more organised format.

OK. Out with the theory: in with the practical.

Adventure writing is similar to writing a book, in many ways. There's an introduction, beginning, middle, and end, as in all good novels, of whatever genre you read.

In RPG adventure writing, the introduction is what's happened, to cause the client to hire the mercenary characters. The beginning is the players investigating the situation, doing their intelligence gathering, and equipment procurement. The middle is normally getting to the scene of the job in question, including any action or adventure in getting there, and the end involves the climax of the action, and the rounding off and end of the mission, including recovery and payoff.

To effectively get these scenes - because that's really what they are - down on paper doesn't require much. Initially, you should write down in note form (so you can understand it later), in single-sentence sections. For instance:

Client wants characters to rescue hostages.

Hostages are held in large shack in the middle of nowhere, Nebraska.

Hostages are held by a terrorist cell, armed to the teeth.

And so on. You get the general idea.

Next, you flesh out the plot. For instance:

Client is the president of a large Merchant bank. The hostages are his family. The ransom demanded is \$10,000,000. Client contacted characters through their usual contact.

The terrorists are after funding for their latest planned atrocity, a nerve gas attack on the New York metro-rail system.

Terrorists are eight-strong, armed with military weaponry, and have access to communications scanners. They monitor all police frequencies in the area, including FBI nets. They've set booby-traps (Claymore mines) about the perimeter of the shack.

And so on. Next, you look for props. Props are items for the PLAYERS to see, to add a little realism to the

game, and make them more involved in the plot. It never ceases to amaze me that a single prop can sometimes make the difference from a mediocre adventure becoming the best thing since sliced bread. Props come in many forms. A toy or replica firearm (Never bring a real gun to a gaming session, and for crying out loud, NEVER, EVER, point even a toy gun at someone. It's REALLY bad form), a briefcase containing a few clues, or even money (use monopoly money - it's cheaper is a player 'accidentally' borrows it!) A wallet with a few IDs inside (fake 'em!). A few spent cartridge cases - military surplus stores, your local firearms range, you can get 'em all over the place. Satellite photographs of the site where the shack is located - there's a site noted on the links page here you can use - I use it myself. Plans of the shack - for your own use, of course - can be made using even the cheapest of computer software, or even by hand. The value of properly selected and used props will become apparent, the first time you use 'em. Try it!

Lastly, the writing of the adventure itself. Do NOT write reams of paper - you only have to read it again. An example of a reasonable length is on this site, "Belizian Bust Up"; Enough to get the general idea of the situation, with a few player aids (props), and not too much information to bog down the referee at tense moments in the game.

And there, pretty much, you have it. I hope the above was useful to you.