

Four-Point Scenario Construction

Gregor Hutton

Contact: gregor@gregorhutton.com, Edinburgh, UK.

Published: 27 August 2005

INTRODUCTION

I have found this four-point method useful in preparing short scenarios for both publication and gaming. Preparation is key in presenting a coherent, well-paced scenario to help foster a better gaming experience.

This method won't guarantee a good session or even a good scenario but by using a plan you should be more able to craft your scenarios and evaluate them critically.

STYLE AND FORMAT

This scenario style is suited for either one long sitting (say, at a convention) or two or three shorter game sessions. It is ideal for creating 'filler' encounters between story arcs, or individual elements in an episodic campaign. The four-part scenario has the following format.

- (i) *The opening scene*
- (ii) *The choices*
- (iii) *The end game*
- (iv) *The aftermath*

I now explain these sections and how they are used.

THE OPENING SCENE

This is the 'set-up' where the premise for the scenario is established and the characters are introduced to the situation. Typically these have an open entry point and the characters can be brought into the scenario in several ways.

The important thing is that they are actually brought into the scenario in a deliberate way, rather than just wandering into the midst of events in a haphazard, unfocused manner.

THE CHOICES

Once the characters have entered the scenario a set of choices are available. I don't like the idea of there being a 'right' or 'wrong' path through a scenario. I like to have an open mind and allow for various likely ways that the situation will evolve.

Each 'choice' is presented in a sharply framed manner, with defined boundaries, relevant information and a focus.

NPCs are sketched out and possible reactions, events and progressions are listed for each choice. This allows some

SUMMARY

An essay about planning short scenarios with four defined parts: (i) the opening scene, (ii) the choices, (iii) the end game, and (iv) the aftermath. This approach is intended to aid the planning of scenarios. Benefits that I hope to gain are (a) better and sharper openings, (b) increased focus on the choices at the heart of the story, (c) clearer and stronger endings, and (d) a coherent step into future scenarios.

preparation without forcing the characters down any path.

In fact characters need not follow any of the paths listed in the choices, but the information allows the GM some related and relevant background material that they can draw upon.

THE END GAME

Then there is resolution. The scenario should have a definitive end point. Perhaps the characters have achieved something remarkable, or conversely have sputtered their way through a messy set of encounters with dire results.

However, the events all reach an end once the choices have been made and fully explored.

THE AFTERMATH

Finally, with all endings there are consequences. These are possible outcomes and effects that the ending will have on the characters, the game world and NPCs.

What have the characters achieved and how does this affect life around them? What new conflicts arise from the scenario and what conflicts can be solved? These are the questions you want to be thinking about when the scenario has ended.

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

This essay is an expanded and clarified version of the opening notes to the scenario 'Cheesed Off' (Hutton 2005).

Cheesed Off was one of nine scenario ideas that I had sketched out in Dublin Airport on the way home from Gael-Con 2003, each following the same four-part format. It was the first that was written up fully and published and is a good example of this method.

An earlier published scenario (Hutton & Worthey 1995) followed a similar style without explicitly stating this design.

Hutton, G. & Worthey, W.E., 1995. The House That Jack Built, *Valkyrie*, Partizan, **9** (Jul./Aug. 1995), also available online at <http://gregorhutton.com/roleplaying/>.

Hutton, G., 2005. Cheesed Off, *Independent Roleplaying Magazine*, StealthBrothers, **2** (Feb. 2005), 7–9, also available online at <http://gregorhutton.com/roleplaying/>.