



Introduction

You can write adventures. This book will show you how.

This book is the culmination of thirty years of gaming experience, both as player and as a GM. I GMed my first game two weeks after playing my very first RPG session. That was in 1980. Since then, I've run many, many different game systems, from 1st edition *Basic and Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*, to *Castle Falkenstein*, *Amber Diceless*, *World of Darkness*, and *Cyberpunk* (to name a few). I loved creating new game settings, interesting NPCs, rich and complex game backgrounds, but one thing always stumped me—how to write adventures that my players would enjoy.

In my earliest years, I stuck to printed adventure modules. Most of these needed extensive rewriting to make them fit my campaigns: usually the rewards were too large, the mix of encounter types were wrong for the party, or the modules contained elements that simply didn't make sense. Still, it was better than not having anything for my players to do when they arrived on Tuesday nights.

I'd think 'Surely I can do better.' But when I'd try

to write something, I'd find myself staring at a blank page for hours on end. I could come up with a basic idea, several interesting NPCs, and sense of what was going on in game world. What I couldn't do was come up with a sequence of encounters and events for my PCs to run through. In desperation, I'd turn to lists of "Adventure Seeds". I'd find an idea I found

interesting and intriguing and think "Okay—but what happens next?"

Rewritten modules worked well for several years until I began running both the *Amber Diceless*

Roleplaying Game and *White Wolf's World of Darkness*. Suddenly I found myself in a situation where the few printed adventures for these games simply didn't suit my players at all. I had to come up with something original. But my adventure-writing skills didn't get any better.

What I *did* get was a group of players I could simply throw an idea to and they'd take off running. All I had to do was keep up. Running those games really taught me how to GM on the fly. But while I got very good at improvising NPCs and determining the outcomes of PCs' actions off-the-cuff, I didn't improve

Terminology

- ▶ Adventure seed: a basic idea for a GM to build an adventure from.

my ability to plot adventures. My players created the adventures, I just tagged along for the ride.

I must have been doing something right during those times, since my games always attracted enough players to overflow onto a waiting list. Trouble came when a job situation forced me to move to a new area away from my wonderful players. I joined a new game group, but when I tried to run games the way I had for the last several years, my games fell completely flat.

My new group of players needed more guidance. They wanted the GM to provide them with a sequence of planned encounters, something, frankly,

I was terrible at. Around the same time, I began running games at conventions. Convention games need to be planned from beginning to end, especially if they're introducing people to a new game system.

In desperation, I started looking at how adventures were built. I took notes and analyzed games I particularly enjoyed. I started reading books on plotting fiction and screenplays. I broke movies and TV shows down into their sequences of events.

Slowly, piece-by-piece, I put together a method for writing adventures that worked. The total method finally came together when I stumbled across a beginning writing book that stressed the 6 "W's": who, what, where, when, why, and how. I realized that if I applied those questions to an adventure idea, the answers would give me everything I need to write an original, custom-designed adventure.

And the method worked. It worked when creating convention adventures; it worked when creating adventures for on-going campaigns. It worked when I wrote for experienced groups and groups of brand-new players. Best of all, each adventure I created with it was different from the previous one.

This wasn't a system for churning out formulaic "cookie-cutter" adventures, but something that produced scenarios my players found intriguing and engaging. Time and time again, I return to this method and it's never failed me yet. This book is that method.

There are many ways to write adventures. The method (I call it the "6 W's" method) in this book is just one of them. It maps out a path that guides you through the process of creating a customized adventure for any genre, any game system. It takes you through the entire adventure creation process, from generating an idea, to outlining the adven-

ture itself. The method described here is a set of tools only: change, modify, delete, fold, spindle, mutilate to make them work for you. You have my blessing—and encouragement—to adapt these tools in any way to make them work for you.

And if you find yourself stuck along the way, rpgGM.com offers three ways to help:

1. **A webpage** on the rpgGM.com website dedicated to this book. There you can leave comments and share ideas. I stop by the page periodically, so if you have any questions about this book or its methods and ideas, you can post them there and I'll try to answer them. And if I can't give you answer, it's possible someone else can. The page is [Adventure Creation Handbook](http://www.rpggm.com/products/adventure-creation-handbook/) (<http://www.rpggm.com/products/adventure-creation-handbook/>).

2. **Free updates** whenever this material is rewritten. This is covered in detail in this book's [Appendix C](#), starting on page 35.

3. A downloadable example of the process. When you purchased this book, you should have received a link to download a step-by-step example of an adventure made using this process. If not, please email

"...with a pinch of practice and a dash of inspiration, you can cook up an adventure your players will talk about long after it's over."

support@rpggm.com and I'll be happy to send one to you.

Why Create Custom Adventures?

There are hundreds of adventures available, with more being created every day. You can find adventures in print at your local game store, in gaming magazines, and in the thousands of gaming websites. So why go to the trouble of creating one from scratch? Often, pre-made adventures don't fit your game world or your gaming group. Or the existing adventures for the game system you're running are poorly written, if you can find any at all.

Even if adventures do exist for your system, they may rely on monsters, NPCs, or treasure that you've decided don't exist in your game world. Or maybe your players would have no interest in the adventure's contents. Sometimes, published adventures can require so much reworking to fit into your game that it takes almost as much — if not more — effort to adapt them than it does to write something from scratch.

When you write your own adventure, you can customize it for your group. You can tailor rewards to things your PCs will find meaningful (read “motivating”). You can dangle specially-created incentives for each PC, incentives that will make their mouths water and make them say “What are we waiting for? Let's get going!” even before you've finished setting the scene. You can include the details of your game world, NPCs created by you or your players, items of special interest to your group.

If that's not enough to convince you, the process of writing an adventure from scratch means that you know the adventure inside and out, making it easier to actually run.

Whatever your reason, with a pinch of practice and a dash of inspiration, you can cook up an adventure your players will talk about long after it's over.

The Adventure Writing Process

There are five basic steps to writing an adventure:

1. Generate an adventure idea.
2. Ask questions about that idea.
3. Answer those questions.
4. Look for events.
5. Write adventure outline.

Each step has its own chapter, walking you through the steps of creating your adventure. To help you, there are two worksheets at the back of the book (beginning pg. [ws-1](#)). One is a checklist of the adventure creation steps, the other is a worksheet with the list of questions (who, what, when, where, why, and how) that form the core of the 6 W's method.





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