

## How to start a campaign

Tim - started a few campaigns and even finished some. Will talk mostly about fantasy and DnD but it should work for different systems.

- What is a campaign?
- Two types of campaigns: Sandbox or story-arc
  - Story-arc natches the players in a direction. Very active role for the GM (ex. most adventures from Wizards of the Coast)
  - Sandbox gives an active role to the players
  - *Inputs: There are also Dungeon crawl as a third option. Several campaigns can also be a mixture of both or could evolve over time.*
  - *Inputs: It is a disservice for the GM to define it. Question is, if it seems sandboxy or not. But there is a difference in how you prepare for these campaigns.*
- Preparation
  - Do you want a specific ending or not? Plan this ahead. Easier with story arc, maybe set a limit for how long your sandbox runs (level or session count) so it doesn't fizzle out
  - Tip: Don't run WotC campaigns as a new GM - they are huge
  - *Inputs: Dragons of Stormwreck Isle (free on Beyond) and Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden are great for beginners*
  - String adventures together. Plan on plot points and work with different small story arcs that are connected
  - *Inputs: Don't plan everything ahead. Players won't do what you plan anyways (TRUTH ALERT)*
  - Set up main factions and their motivations and goals - from there you can start playing which is why sandbox can be a bit faster for you as a GM
  - Make yourself excited about the game and the world - it helps to just talk to somebody about it!
- Logistics
  - *Inputs: Let players help with planning a schedule. Stress the importance of time/commitment to players. When you decide on a date it's given!*
  - *Inputs: Players want to help - so let them. Maybe express that you would like help. You should set the expectations though.*
- The pitch
  - Make it exciting and only give them info with relevance for now (background is not yet important)
  - Limit player options so it fits to your setting. You are allowed to say no
  - How long will a campaign go so they now what they are getting into
  - Do a Session 0
  - Send necessary information to the players before they make characters
  - *Inputs: You can have a monologue at the beginning but prepare your players for it - and practice yourself. Use the whole session to lore dump. It helps to have a familiar world.*
- First session
  - Already set up the first adventure in session 0
  - Plan for one encounter and not 3
  - *Inputs: But maybe have different starting points/character quests that lead to the same point -> Illusion of choice*
  - Include your big bad in the first session
  - After the session ask your players what they want to do next
- After first session
  - Write down new facts you discovered in the session
  - Plan the next session right after - and not a day before the next (everybody feels attacked)

More details in Tim's notes

## Atmosphere at the table

Tinu GMs a lot and also does paid sessions at his home.

- Atmosphere: What does it feel like to sit at the table? How do I remember it? I want to remember the grief, the fun, the story. Shared delusion.
  - RPGs can't be played wrong as long as everybody is happy. Our focus today: storydriven sessions.
  - Illusion lives from shared experience. Actor is nothing without a scene and vice versa.
  - The GM is also a player at the table and should also have fun. Keep the magic alive, play yourself and stuff. Look after yourself! Talk about adventures and plans with other people to keep yourself excited.
  - Conversations with players in between sessions makes them feel heard. The more we know the better we can integrate it. What did they like, what sucked.
  - Rituals before session: Set and setting. Set your mind to the play you will go to.
  - Lights, sounds and decor: Do not underestimate the power of these. Small things can set the mood. Ex. Candles next to the GM screen. Smells are also an option.
- Preparation: Understand how players see their character and where they want to go. Characters should matter! Praise players for giving input.
  - *Input: Their actions should have an impact on the world. Also small stuff and ripples of what they did. Possibly make notes about small things ex. a Character who walks barefoot. Have NPCs ask them about it.*
  - Characters need time to shine. Ex. Bard can play in a tavern. Give everybody something. If it's not possible for a while, maybe talk to players about what could be done. Ex. Introvert arc for bard.
  - Give prewritten stuff a chance, read it like a book and see if you can get into it. You can also adapt those and use them for your own world.
  - *Input: Dark secrets for characters and playing with them. Characters need something. Ex. Even good characters could have a situation where they should have been bad but didn't and it backfired.*
  - *Input: How can you get into a position where you have agency over the story for their characters? Individual for all players, depends on group. Conversations in between sessions are helpful. Talk about things.*
  - *Input: Same soundtrack on starting session like an intro.*
- Preparing a NPC: Huge topic so just a few points. Don't be afraid of stupid shit. Ask players to also try to act/play. Encouraging helps – make an ass out of yourself first.
  - Acting lessons, improv class and so on help.
  - Bodywork and positions. Ex. Cover in chair, sit upright.
  - Little speaking things like accents, jaw forward/backward, tongue on top and so on. Write down and reuse.
  - *Input: Record the voice just before or after the session to remember them in the future. It can also help to remember the mindset/goals for your NPCs. Be aware of their situation and surroundings.*
- Session begins
  - Something to start it like music, school bell. Fitting music to the tone of the session.
  - Recap:
    - 1. Most important facts of last time.
    - 2. Sound of the scene, try to attach what happened last time and connect it to today. «Close your eyes and try to feel the scene».
    - 3. Description of the last scene – inputs for the characters. Then take them back, describe it and ask the characters for a description (something special after the last scene?).
  - How do you get them to roleplay: Be enthusiastic about how they fuck up your stuff. Also helps against the player vs. GM mentality. Try standing up for more energy or sit down for something heavier.

- Flow above rules. Do know them so you know how to ignore/break them. Get mechanics out of the way first and then do the story/roleplay. Let them describe their actions (even the help action).
- Input: Rolls need to matter! Don't let them roll if it's not necessary.
- Take breaks, be aware of how much you are doing. Also ask players to help and look after you. If necessary take a GM break.
- End of session
  - Stop before it hurts. There does not need to be a cliffhanger every time.