

Anyway, there were a number of storytelling challenges we tackled in The Gryphon Tapestry. Here are just a couple of them off the top of my head that people question me about.

One was the overcrowding factor. Where is the suspense, and how is the suspension of disbelief so necessary to hook someone into a story, possible in a spooky graveyard where the place is neck deep in adventurers, and the mobs die like cattle in a slaughterhouse?

In TGT we addressed the problem by creating three types of unique geography within the world map: private spaces (your home - not REALLY on the map at all even though it looked that way - to prevent ghetto-izing the countryside); public places (one view of the rest of the map); and story places (another iteration of the same map). Basically you could enter the graveyard whenever you wanted. But, IF you were involved in the story I called The Lady in Grey for example, you would enter the graveyard to find yourself alone (or with only your own party members). Since stories could be left and re-entered pretty much at will, the illusion was that there was no difference between the two iterations EXCEPT the involvement in a story.

One other challenge (and then I'll stop for now) was facing PCs sharing of knowledge about a particular story with other PCs. Stories, particularly genre stories, rely so heavily on surprise after all. We couldn't very well do what directors like Hitchcock and William Castle did in the 60s and warn audiences not to reveal the ending. But with modular storytelling we at least had a few factors working in our favor. In the really complex stories the permutations of the possible order in which the modules could be stacked were huge. Since we weren't dealing with paths and branching, the ONLY limits on how many modules we could add were time and imagination. So there were tons of ways of experiencing any given story.

Now everybody knows that sharing war stories is one of the ways our communities love to interact. The many ways of experiencing a story guaranteed lively discussion the same way finding the best tactics for killing or playing your character do in most games. We didn't try to hide the outcome of the stories. There would be enough surprise generated by the sequence of story moves, and the occasional unique scenes that might be accessed.

And the third thing we did was that the climaxes to the stories usually involved one or more of three key ingredients: several solutions to the final problem or conflict, a free-wheeling battle that could play itself out in any number of ways as in any other MMORPG, and final "Twilight Zone" like twists that hinted at stories yet to come and/or offered views of the over-arching story of the world. Finally, in GOOD stories we are drawn to read/watch them again even knowing the ending. Does anyone really expect

Ingrid Bergman NOT to get on the plane at the end of Casablanca? The same phenomenon can apply in a rich storytelling environment. Many should be driven to play through a story, even if they already know the ending, simply because it sounded so much fun when it was told to them by another PC.

This almost led me into other topics like "let em wander, but don't let em get too lost" and PCs affecting the game world (both for themselves alone and for everyone else). But I promised I'd stop. So I did.

Lee