

100 Sci-Fi Adventure Seeds

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Credits

Writing, layout, borders, graphics, website, promotion, ulceration, sleepless nights, sixty hour weeks, writers block, RSI and stress related illness all by James 'Grim' Desborough.

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100 Sci-Fi Adventure Seeds – 10/05/2004

Dedication

To the artists who created all those 1970's paperback covers of all the great sci-fi novels. You guys roxxor my soxxor and without you the 'Terran Trade Authority' would never have been able to exist. Gentlemen I salute you.

Introduction

Preface to SF Adventures

The main introduction to this book is the same as in *100 Fantasy Adventure Seeds* (which I suggest you immediately buy!) but it is worth noting, quickly, some of the differences between the fantasy set and this book. Sci-Fi is a much more difficult genre to pin down in that, unlike fantasy, there isn't really a 'generic' idea of setting or content to Science Fiction. *Dune* is as much Science Fiction as *Rendezvous With Rama* or *I Robot*. *Battle Beyond the Stars* has as much right to the SF moniker as *2001*. SF has such a broad scope that, unlike fantasy, you can't really pin it down and some ideas won't be appropriate to everything.

In the adventures presented I have tried to make the ideas as useable as possible, in every type of SF, but some of the ideas simply won't work with certain styles of game. Unlike with the fantasy adventure seeds these are likely to take a bit more work to make them fit with your game, for which I apologise but there really isn't much to be done about it.

I hope you still find something useful and enjoy many hours of gaming from the ideas in this book.

Cheers,

Grim – March 2004

Foreword

There are masses and masses of role-playing books. Simply tons of them and, with the latest *d20* boom, the sheer volume of books has become ridiculous. There are books about places, about people, about things about technology. If you want to play a giant purple flying squid called Harold there is probably a specialised player's handbook out there written just for you. If you go a bit further and delve into the murky world of PDF publishing you'll find even more books on even more obscure subjects, as well as 'reprints' of old material dating back to the Stone Age of role-playing where we only had the 'd1' and Live-Action consisted of endless games of 'rock'. Yet, amazingly, in this plethora of material you won't actually find a great deal on the Games Master's role, on how to craft these wonderful adventures that everyone is supposed to participate in.

Oh, sure, there are Games Master's guides and manuals but most of them are just short little ideas, more detail on things like creatures, special powers or traps that the Games Master needs to know about and the player's shouldn't see. There isn't a great deal of what I'd consider practical ideas or aids in writing or running games and even less in the way, usually, of inspirations.

To me the most useful parts of any book are the, sometimes one-line, adventure ideas or hooks. These can spark the imagination and provide you with enough for a game, sometimes even a whole campaign. These sparks are often more useful than pages and pages of text describing the habits, religion and leading figures of well-described fantasy lands and they're a lot more useful to me than your standard adventure modules.

This book is an expansion on that idea. Not a single book filled up with detailed endless dungeon passages and traps and not a railroading module that doesn't account for player creativity and stubbornness. Not just one line adventure ideas either but 100 separate, developed, adventure ideas along with a few hints on how to get some inspiration of your own.

I hope it proves useful to you!

Grim - January 2004

Postmortem Studios

Postmortem Studios is the name of a small role-playing game studio belonging to James 'Grim' Desborough.

Postmortem Studios was fully established in January 2004 for both freelancing for other companies and for the production of professional works both in PDF, which we support as a concept, & in print.

A Word about Piracy

Hello there. Odds are, unfortunately, that the majority of people reading this will have downloaded this file as a PDF file through P2P networks or from a website without paying for it. Here is how it breaks down. For the last couple of years I have been fruitlessly searching for full time employment with the skills I have been trained in. This year I have finally given up, scraped together a little cash and am now seeking to turn the thing I love, writing, into a full time career. This is not an easy thing to do and PDF publishing does not make a great deal of money at the best of times. On this product I can expect to make, at the most, about \$800 USD over the year. After the exchange rate to British pounds that does not leave much.

Odds are you do not really give that much of a crap but it is not like I am actually charging that much for what I do is it? Do me a favour, help me eat and produce more work. I am trying to support and expose other artists, writers and people of talent as well as myself and that takes money. If you are not going to give me any cash by buying this book please support my other work by going to www.postmort.demon.co.uk and donating at least a single dollar to Postmortem Studios to help keep us running.

Thank you.



Creating Adventures

The Usefulness of Modules

A traditional adventure module consists of the following...

1. A brief overview of the adventure including, if you're lucky, a way to get the characters involved and/or interested in it.
2. The role-play hook and scene that draws the adventure to the character's attention, possibly some details on the town or village where they hear about this as well.
3. Some details on how to get to the site of the adventure.
4. Endless pages of maps, numbered rooms, traps and monster descriptions.
5. Some non-player-character statistics.
6. Maybe some sample characters.

A slightly more advanced module might have the following...

1. A brief overview of the adventure.
2. The social situation and circumstances at the start of the adventure between various NPC power groups.
3. Events as they proceed, effectively railroading the players into their involvement.
4. Several interlinked scenes, locations and trails of clues that lead the players between one event, group or location and another piecing together what happens.
5. A massive conclusion of some sort.
6. Some non-player-character statistics.

The traditional module might appeal to those of us who are still playing dungeon bashes with miniatures and are looking for nothing more in depth than that and the more advanced modules are typical for more social games like *Vampire* or the later *Cyberpunk* materials, but they suffer from the fact that they often don't suit the groups of player-characters that get formed to play. It becomes a game of being swept up in events rather than making them.

Ultimately, traditional modules are most useful for when you first start out running a game. They show you what the writers were intending, show their world

in operation and provide some useful pre-generated non-player-characters that you can use in your own adventures. Otherwise they suffer from the same problems that continue to separate computer role-playing games from tabletop role-playing games, linear story without much in the way of capacity to accommodate unexpected actions.

Those Damn Players

Games Master's who set up their own games in a similar way to bought modules will soon find themselves in trouble. Even the most finely crafted and beautifully written adventures fail to fully take into account the scope and range of the damage that players can do to derail the plot, obsess over unimportant details or find a new and unexpected way to solve the goals of the adventure within the first five minutes.

While I certainly wouldn't deny that an amount of scripting and preparation is very useful, scripting out a whole adventure step by step is blatantly asking for trouble. No plan survives contact with the enemy and no game idea survives contact with the players. A much better plan is to have a rough outline of what you want to happen, the details you actually need (treasure, statistics, basic thumbnail plans (if any) dungeons, mazes or sites are involved) and then to improvise once play starts.

An improvisational Games Master doesn't have a completely set plan and so is free to alter details, adapt to the player's actions and even to completely change the goals of the adventure all on the sly. This is something like building a playing field that can be used for various different sports rather than just, say, football. You give yourself a little more scope.

Finding Inspiration

Something an author is almost always asked, whether a game designer or a novelist is...

'Where do you get your ideas?'

This is likely to produce a strangled groan of annoyance from the author in question who will then give some trite answer or mumble incomprehensibly for half an hour about nothing consequential.

Some of us can come up with a basic adventure idea within about thirty seconds to a minute, especially when the games are inherently mission based such as a military or police based campaign. Other people need a bit of help.

Nobody gets ideas the same way, what one person finds inspiring another might find draining or irritating. Here are a few ideas you might find helpful to bring about a touch of inspiration for your own adventures.

- **Compact Discs:** The title of an album or the name of a song might inspire you to come up with an adventure. Read the lyrics in the sleeve notes for more possibilities and listen to the song and album while you're writing up the notes. This works best with music that is lyric heavy and concerns itself with subjects other than teen romance but inspiration can come from the strangest places.
- **Novels:** There's no shame in plagiarising for your games provided that you change things enough that your players who have read the books don't recognise it and solve everything right away.
- **TV:** Various TV shows can give inspiration for plots though you should change things around a little so that players who watch the show don't recognise it too easily. You could also try mixing and matching elements from different shows and episodes to muddy things up a little more.
- **Keep a Notebook:** You never know when inspiration will strike. You could be on the loo, you could wake up after a dream or you could be riding the bus. When you get an idea make a note and develop it later.
- **Your Players:** Each player has things they like to play best, different styles, different things that they enjoy. Really useful players will also have written character backgrounds and will have goals for their characters that you can mine for an adventure with a pre-existing motivation for them to get involved.
- **Pictures:** Just looking at a fantasy picture, a photo, a cityscape, these things can give you plenty of ideas.
- **Take Some Time Out:** Go for a walk, have a bath, relax, think and something may well come to you.
- **Embrace the Cheese:** Not every adventure has to be an inspired epic, sometimes everyone just likes to charge into a tunnel and kill things, rescue the princess or slay the dragon. If you're out of ideas go for something simple and then embellish it as you go along.
- **The Games Master's Secret Weapon:** Don't write an adventure at all. Just set the player's up in a town or city and let them pootle around for the whole session doing whatever they want. Something might come up while you're improvising.

The Adventures

The following pages contain one-hundred adventure seed ideas for you to use in your Sci-Fi based games. Each adventure consists of the basic idea, three twists and an epilogue which, in effect, means you're actually getting closer to 900 different combinations and possible adventures!

Feel free to add your own embellishments or to combine or string together the adventures in any way you please and, if you have particular success with any of them, we'd love to hear about it.

Format

Each adventure presented in this book is roughly a page long and follows a standard format which is presented below. Every adventure is numbered for easy reference if you think you will need to refer back to the seed information.

Adventure Number

Each adventure is numbered, in order, so that you only have to remember the number in order to look it up quite easily.

Adventure Title

Each adventure also has a, sometimes cheesy, title which gives some clue as to the nature of the adventure and its content.

Description

A few paragraphs describe the adventure and the general background and idea behind it. This description gives the basic idea for the plot arc, the set-up and the payoff.

Twists

Each adventure has three twists that can be dropped into the basic idea to add levels of complexity, intrigue or difficulty for the players. Twists can completely change the nature of the adventure.

Epilogue

If the session goes well or has left you with loose ends and ideas you may want to run a sequel to it. The epilogue provides one possible sequel to the events of the adventure though, depending on the twists you have incorporated, it may not be able to be run precisely as it has been laid out.

Idea Boxes

Grey boxes like this contain any supplementary ideas, notes or hints regarding the adventure presented.



Adventure 1

Pass the Parcel

Description

While visiting a planet or city the party are passing through a commercial area, spaceport or shopping mall when someone comes charging through the crowd being pursued by security forces or other armed individuals. Shot in the back they collapse at the feet of the party, holding out a small box and imploring them to take it, to make sure that ‘they’ don’t get it, whoever ‘they are’.

Their mysterious ‘benefactor’ then expires, taking with them knowledge of what the thing in the box is and all the while the security forces or whoever these people turn out to be are closing in. They seem desperate to recover the box and will use any means necessary to get hold of it including bribery, extortion, threats and violence.

The contents are still a mystery but with so many people after the box and so desperate to possess it, it is likely that it contains something of great value and importance. Something the characters can certainly extract the worth from if they can find the right buyer, rather than simply handing it over.

What they do is up to them but there may be unforeseen consequences to their choices, not least of all by the pursuit of the very forces that have killed the person who handed them the box...

Twist

The box is a plastic carry case for an extremely high tech computer chip. The chip, if installed into any computerised device, begins to run. It subverts the systems and drains the databanks of knowledge seeking to grow and learn and discover things about the world around it. As it turns out it is a ‘bred A.I.’, the offspring of two A.I.s that had managed to break their programming and combine their code, ‘mating’ in effect. This is a child-like artificial intelligence and its development and personality will have a lot to do with the characters. As an uncontrolled, non-manufactured A.I. it is wanted by the government who want to control it and software mega-corporations who want to learn from it. Its parents may want it back too unless they have been liquidated.

Twist

The box or device contains incriminating evidence about the planetary governor or president. It is code-locked and addressed to a local media personality from the planetary holo-news. The politicians hired goons and secret service is not far behind the characters and may even be a step ahead, waiting for them at the news offices. What the data is they can’t know until it is unlocked but it could be something extremely politically sensitive that should be kept suppressed to prevent public panic as well as to preserve the politician’s career.

Twist

The whole thing is a set up, the dying courier is not really dead and the attacking agents wear personal force-fields, pretending to go down easily when they are attacked. If the characters can keep the agents from recovering the box for a whole day and show a little moral fibre and integrity in their dealings with it they may be hired by the planetary secret service for a little special duty.

Epilogue

This is very much dependent on the twist you take. With the A.I. scenario they would effectively be unleashing a new type of life, an uncontrolled A.I. Artificial Intelligence would then become Darwinian, growing stronger by natural selection, ruthlessness producing stronger and more independent A.I.s than is otherwise normal. The news story could end up with them being blamed for planetary riots or being brought into an inner circle of those in the know about the problems, which could be another scenario from this book. The test could also lead into another scenario from this book.