One Page System

Sure, you can summon your award-winning 'Citizen Kane' of a D&D session that breaks boundaries and is a true masterpiece but perhaps runs the risk of being too high concept for most to really enjoy. Much easier than that though, is planning a game that perhaps repeats the same formula but reliable, enjoyable, fun and gives most people a great time, the 'Brooklyn Nine-Nine' or the 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' of the D&D world. It's hard to get tired of a reliably good time.

—DM Hook

How To Use This System

The core idea to this sheet is filling out the details so that you as a new Dungeon Master have the majority of the story and structure figured out. With the core points mapped out, you can spend most of your mental energy improving other skills that are harder to systemize, like your off-the-cuff creativity.

Problem

Core to every story is the conflict. There are many types, but some simple problems include an object, device, or person is stolen, needs to be stopped, or must be defended.

Beginning

Starting Location.

This is the starting environment. Part of a great adventure is the change of locale, the simpler the starting location the better. The contrast between the locations allows you to build the drama with each.

NPC's.

These are your main players and each has a role. They can be met in any order, at any time. Some might not be encountered at all.

NPC 1

This is the well-meaning buddy to the party; they give the low-down on the area and the people within it. This is the town gossip, the squire, the princesses' handmaiden, etc. The problem (if it's not already apparent) can be delivered by this character.

NPC 2

This character means well but is the prickly sort. Hard to get along with but potentially the most helpful. For instance, the Sheriff (who believes they don't need the party's help).

NPC 3

This is the character that may be working with the antagonist. They may have something to gain or just may have an interest in things not changing. They are a wonderful opportunity to insert conflicting information that forces the party to think. This doesn't have to be a complex as it sounds. While it could be a person on the antagonist's payroll, it could just be someone trying to do right themselves. Either way, this can make for a fun twist. The Scooby-Doo ending where it was the amusement park owner the whole time!

Middle

Adventure Location.

This is the environment that challenges the party. The blockers flesh out this location and make it feel alive. The players must conquer these to reach their final destination.

Blockers.

The goal is to challenge players and make characters look cool. If you are aiming for a shorter adventure, do not make these overly complex.

- Allow for a creative solution to bypass the challenge.
- Include a clue to foreshadow the challenge, so players feel a

sense of fairness. Walking into a trap with no warning feels the same as the DM just subtracting hit points.

- If someone fails a check, build a bit of drama.
- If they pass, describe how skillful they are.

Functionally these are great for having the characters use some resources before the big finale. It builds more tension if they are down a few health points or have used a few spells and aren't at their best.

Obstacle.

This should be something passive that is barring their path, but it's important to make it passable in more ways than one. For instance, a locked door could be opened with a key, or it could be broken on morphed into an archway. Write what it is, skills needed to solve, the difficulty, and what happens if they fail?

Trap.

This is best used as a passive, non-living surprise to the party that they activate. The feeling of being responsible for their own surprise is much more fun for the players, with the caution that it must be possible for them to avoid it for the best effect.

Creature.

The wandering monster. Your world is alive, and therefore there are vermin, monsters, guards, or minions living in it and they are difficult to predict. They have senses, they hunt, they eat and sleep. Because of this they are much harder to deal with but should still be possible to avoid in a number of ways.

End

This is where the finale takes place, the conclusion of the story and where the drama should be at its peak, even if your story exists on a small scale.

Showdown Location.

Make this atmospheric and grande, like the location of a cool movie fight. Include details that can be usable like chandeliers, shadows, or moving terrain. But be careful to ramp it up only so much. You don't want players fighting on the rim of an active volcano within the first session. It'll be hard to top that next time.

Peaceful.

You don't want to train your party to think there is only one way to solve a problem, that's why the world is full of murder hobos. So planning a peaceful outcome is important, what would make the antagonist stop their evil ways? If the party thinks this is disagreeable, rest assured they will try a violent path...

Violent.

When fighting erupts. baddies change tactics, they have things they are good at. Check out their stats and consider their highest numbers. This is what they would prioritize, when that fails, they will always have a second option. A dynamic fight will have the environment change, maybe a pipe bursts, the temple might crumble. And finally, at some point, the villain will attempt to retreat. What is that condition? Half health? When their magic mirror is smashed? At this moment, the antagonist is down and near death, the party may give them a chance to attempt peaceful resolution, good thing you have plans for peace...

Loot.

This really need not be too complicated. A piece of armor or a weapon one or two of the party members could use. A lesser item, something that could be sold or could be interesting to a character, like artwork or a fancy looking but not mechanically significant saddle. Lastly some sweet, sweet coin.

Resolution.

What has to be done to set things right? Who needs to see what outcome to live happily ever after? Maybe some desired outcomes conflict with each other?

Problem

What problem are the adventurers here to solve in the first place? This can be as simple as "the king needs an elixir found" or "the town's children have all disappeared".

Starting Location

It could be in a grand snowy northern kingdom or as simple as a tavern.

BEGINNING

NPC 1

This character is helpful but never totally correct.

NPC 2

This character is less helpful but wants to see good done.

NPC 3

This character is misleading and they may be in on it.

MIDDLE

Middle Location

It could be in a terrifying forest or a subterranean tunnel system.

Blocker 1

An obstacle like a dangerous ledge on a mountainside or a blocked door.

Blocker 2

This trap could be a rock slide or a pressure plate that triggers a poison

Blocker 3

This creature could be a mountain troll or a vicious guard dog.

END

Showdown Location

It could be a dripping cave lair on a mountaintop or a hidden gambling den.

Antagonist

The force responsible in some way for the problem, directly or not.

Peaceful Approach

If the party takes a peaceful approach but it could turn violent.

Violent Approach

If the party takes a violent approach, but it could turn peaceful.

Loot 1

The most valued of items the "boss" owns. Likely hidden.

Loot 2

Lesser loot, perhaps unique but not immediately valuable.

Loot 3

Coinage, what would the boss keep on hand?

Resolution

Who will reward the party for a job well done? Different NPC's might reward for different conditions.