

100 Sci-Fi Adventure Seeds



Edward Weedy

by James 'Grim' Desborough

**CHRONICLE
CITY**

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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.

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write material that's as broad as possible or which can be easily modified to fit different sub-genre conventions. You can also provide a lot of variety so that, scattershot, one idea or another may be more directly applicable. It's a combination of these two approaches that I have taken with this book.

The adventures as presented have been selected to be as usable as possible in as many Science Fiction backgrounds as possible. While you won't find a huge amount that's applicable to a near-future dystopian background, such as the cyberpunk sub-genre, if your game takes your players into space then you're in luck. Even if something isn't quite a direct fit you should be able to adjust the outlined scenario to fit your specific games.

I hope you find something useful for your game within these pages and have many days of happy gaming because of it.

Preface to SF Adventures

Science Fiction is a tricky genre to pin down. It seems to cover everything from Star Wars – which many would consider fantasy – to the ponderous but fascinating works of Arthur C Clarke, which to many seem as dry as a science textbook. Frank Herbert's Dune is as much a science fiction novel as the Deathstalker books and both 2001 and Battle Beyond the Stars are considered Science Fiction despite being worlds apart.

That said, there are some common threads, apart from being set 'in space'. The role of technology, past or present and the change – or lack thereof – in humanity. Science Fiction is, essentially, 'what if?' taken a little further and a little more consistently but that presents problems in designing material for Science Fiction role-playing games. With such a broad brush how do you make something that's applicable across the genre?

Well, you can't, but you can try to

Foreword

There are masses of role-playing books presenting an enormous diversity of rules systems, game worlds, equipment, character options, classes, races and everything else in a gamers toolbox. When it comes to adventures however, there's a bit of a gap. Sure you can buy pre-set adventures but these tend to run on rails and, once you've played them through once there's not a huge amount of replay value there unless you get a new group and, even then, if it's a popular module then the players are likely to have run into it before.

Sure, there are Games Masters' guides and manuals but these are still largely toolkits. It's all very well giving you statistics for half a dozen different laser-snare traps and starships but if you haven't got a context to put them into they're not a huge amount of use. Campaign sourcebooks are a little better, especially if they include some adventure seed sections but these are often one or two line comments inserted into the flow of the text in some box-out to one side. I've always found these more useful than your normal adventure books but being limited to little side-comments, not as useful as they could otherwise have been.

This book, then, is an expansion upon the idea of

the 'adventure seed'. Providing a more fleshed out idea – or set of ideas - for an adventure more than a single line, but not going fully the other way into a completely set adventure. These are meant to be sparks to your imagination, one-hundred individual ideas, each with different potential plot-twists, to get your own creative juices flowing enough to come up with an adventure or kick off a campaign.

Let the adventures begin!

Creating Adventures

The Usefulness of Modules

A traditional adventure module consists of:

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:

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 roleplaying games from tabletop roleplaying 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 fly. 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.

• 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.

• Pictures

Just looking at a fantasy picture, a photo, a cityscape, these things can give you plenty of ideas.

• 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.

• 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.