

DARK MAGENTA

Telling Tall Tales...

Or: Running a Campaign

By Ruaridh Dall

The running of an Inquisitor campaign can be a very daunting prospect for new players of the game, and there are probably more than a few people out there who have bought models, played a game or two, and then put them back on the shelf because they felt unable to come up with a bunch of exciting scenarios with which they could test the mettle of their characters, and the characters of their gaming group. I would of course recommend that novice players and GMs take part in a few stand-alone games with simple objectives to learn the rules, but once players have a good grasp of the game mechanics, it's so much more rewarding to have one's characters thrown into a campaign with many obstacles to overcome before their final victory (or indeed defeat). A campaign simply has more gravitas than a single game, and allows characters room to grow, alliances to form and bitter enemies to come to hate each other all the more. A well-run campaign has the potential to raise what is simply a game of toy soldiers into a finely woven tale of heroism, treachery and grandstand action that can be told for years to come. A badly run campaign however can last only a couple of games before players get bored, drop out and begin to think twice about ever playing Inquisitor again. This piece, while not a list of do's and don'ts, should hopefully give an insight into how to run a campaign that will enthral players and keep them champing at the bit for more thrills as the campaign reaches its exciting (and usually bloody!) conclusion.

Campaigns

There are essentially two kinds of campaign: the narrative, story-driven campaign, and the linked, or ladder campaign, where the outcome of each game leads directly onto the next. A narrative campaign typically is one where there is a goal to complete, but the paths to that goal are open to interpretation. Usually, the Games Master (GM) will have come up with a scheme that the players ultimately must put an end to (or facilitate depending on their desires), and then gives the players a number of leads to follow, or throws them into a fight, from which leads may appear (who were the mysterious attackers, what are the symbols on their robes, etc.). The players can then choose where to go, and the GM can come up with the next scenarios in the chain, tailoring them to the parties involved. As the players complete scenarios they may gather information which they can choose to follow up as and when they like. Events may occur in games that force them to do other things, such as negotiate the release of a captured comrade, or forming alliances. Narrative campaigns have the potential to ramble on for a long time with players getting no nearer to their initial goal, instead they can find themselves exploring particular facets of the world the campaign is set on, getting into all kinds of peril that nevertheless keeps the players happy. Some campaigns can indeed end essentially "uncompleted" but with the characters involved in some new adventure which can spawn another great campaign. As every Inquisitor player should know, the story is more important than the outcome of any individual games, and that is why the near infinite possible outcomes of narrative campaigns can bring such joy to those who partake in them.

A linked campaign is a series of scenarios that naturally follow on from each other to guide players to their goal (which often needs a flashy, super-violent final scenario to achieve). The objectives of each scenario are usually clear, but players who do not achieve them are usually allowed to progress to the next game, albeit with some disadvantage that makes completion of the campaign harder. Some GMs go to the length of making a secondary



"path" to the final goal for players that fail to complete a scenario that may be longer or again result in some disadvantage for the final showdown. As the players are effectively on a conveyor belt towards the final outcome, it is up to the GM to pander to their needs, such as allowing recovery from injuries to replenishing ammunition between games. Of course, some campaigns are written so that the scenarios are literally happening one after another and therefore there's no need for this. A campaign with a time span of a few hours "in character" also has the effect of corralling the players so that they can't send their characters off on side-missions, and this is one of the main differences between linked and narrative campaigns. A linked campaign provides the GM with much more power over the proceedings, but with such power comes a great responsibility to his players to make the campaign an exciting affair that is not simply five purges of mutie hovels in a row, but a variety of scenarios that each give a sense of reward and desire to see what happens next.

DARK MAGENTA

To Be Narrative or Not?

On paper, the narrative campaign seems the more attractive as there is potential for anything to happen – any particular belief of any character could be explored, and any in-game occurrence could change the direction of the campaign. If a group of players has experience with the game and more importantly there isn't a limit on the time the campaign can run for, narrative campaigns can be very rewarding for players and GM alike. In a narrative campaign, the very depths of the background can be explored, and every minor detail uncovered by the characters can be exploited – perfect for those veterans of decades in the hobby. However the GM should be under no illusions that they will be in for an easy time. The running of a narrative campaign requires the GM to be able to come up with solutions to each and every players' desires, often on the wing. It can be difficult at times to accommodate every player, and bending over backwards to let a Genestealer cult go about their business while the Witch Hunters decide they want to team up and purge a nest of psykers, while allowing the Recongregators to acquire explosives and so on can prove a real headache. Some players may inevitably go a few sessions without a game, and that can lead to some of them dropping out. Narrative campaigns can be great, but require a lot of effort to make worthwhile and continually exciting.



The idea of a linked campaign often doesn't appeal to players. The fact that they will be unable to explore each and every corner of the world that the campaign is set on often puts off the adventurous player who likes to send his characters off on missions that aren't immediately obvious to the GM. The main aim for a GM when crafting a linked campaign is to think about the characters that will be involved and try to tailor it to them so that they player does not feel that he is being pushed down an unnatural route. Sometimes of course, especially when lots of players are participating, it may be that some will still feel like they are being shoehorned into something, but if the GM can make the affair exciting, then there should be little dissent. If a campaign fits the characters that are involved, and there is a clear goal, players are less inclined to go off on a tangent and the campaign will run smoothly, letting the GM concentrate on the games and not about trying to accommodate one player's desire to find special rounds for his boltgun. Linked campaigns therefore are much easier

entities for a GM to keep under control as there is very rarely the need for the kind of improvisation required to keep a narrative campaign going. By having the scenarios presented to them with clear objectives players are much more likely to stay focussed and interested in what awaits them in the next scenario. Also, no player is likely to go a few sessions without a game while another branch of the campaign is resolved, and finally, linked campaigns also have the distinct advantage of being quick, punchy affairs that can fit into a day of gaming or a few gaming sessions at the local club.

As you can probably now tell, I'm in favour of linked campaigns for the kind of Inquisitor I play – time and space was often at a premium in my local GW's gaming room so short campaigns fitted in better. Also, with my university course weighing me down, I ran out of free time to devote to writing scenarios for long-winded narrative campaigns and I usually found I had to artificially curtail them when exam season struck, which was always a pain for myself and the players. With the advent of gaming days at Warhammer World organised by members of The Conclave, it became obvious that having a pre-written campaign allowed for more time with our characters on the table instead of working out what the next step should be. I'm sure we all much prefer playing the game than standing around working out what the next scenario should involve. All that said though, narrative campaigns can be fantastic fun if pulled off correctly, but the note taking, player juggling and scenario writing can be a lot of work. Some people though thrive with that kind of pressure, and some players really don't like the artificialness that a linked campaign can sometimes project, and to them I say go forth and enjoy your narrative campaigns, but to everyone else, especially the newcomers to the game, let me share with you the secrets of writing a linked campaign.

Writing a Linked Campaign

Before any potential GM writes a campaign it is important to know how many players will be involved, and what sort of warband they will be bringing to the table. If there is only going to be one player then the campaign can revolve around an objective that his characters would be interested in achieving – a staunch Puritan of the Ordo Malleus would want to give his all in ridding a world of a daemon-worshipping cult, while a Ordo Xenos inquisitor with a slightly more open philosophy could be interested in meeting with a Tau ambassador. If however there are more players, then a slightly less specific objective should be considered. Perhaps a political movement is threatening the stability of a world – this allows for supporters and detractors of the change to take part, more than likely facing off against one another at some stage. Perhaps a rumour abounds that a dangerous Xanthite has been spotted in the depths of a mining world – many inquisitors will want to put an end to him and his dastardly schemes, but some will be interested in observing or stealing his works. If however, you are putting on a campaign for any number of unknown warbands (as happened to myself at a recent Warhammer World meet up), then it necessary to come up with a campaign that just about any group could partake in. This is no easy task, but with all the various shades of grey that exist in the 41st millennium, it is by no means impossible. A schism within the ranks of the Inquisition in a particular sector can

DARK MAGENTA

instantly involve all players who have an inquisitorial warband, and xenos, Rogue Trader or Adeptus Mechanicus warbands can be supposed to have some link to a particular inquisitor that has pitched them into the mess. Once you have a rough idea of how many participants there will be and their characters' desires you can get onto the writing stage.

Finding a Goal

There is one key part of every campaign, the Goal. This is what the players must hope to achieve to complete the campaign, and it can be literally anything. A cooked breakfast makes for a dull objective, but the head of an apostate Cardinal or the secrets of a forbidden tome do not. Once your goal is decided the best thing to do is to come up with the scenario that lets the players achieve it. This is usually the final scenario of the campaign, but needn't always be. For example, the last scenario may be the escape to the spaceport with the forbidden tome liberated from the Chaos Sorcerer in the showdown beforehand. Wherever in the chain it occurs, the scenario will often involve outfighting and outmanoeuvring the opposing characters and seizing the objective, either by locating it, decoding a mysterious sealed box, or in the case of that pesky Cardinal, beheading him!

This scenario should typically be the biggest and most exciting one, and therefore a liberal dose of special effects and gnarly NPCs should be thrown in. However it is important to remember that the players will probably have fought long and hard to get there and should be rewarded for their efforts with some generous GMing, such as fudging the dice to get a more exciting outcome to a combat, or having the big bad guy pause before delivering the coup de grace to one of the principle characters, allowing a lucky shot to pitch him into a vat of mutagenic acid. Once the dust has settled on this one (unless there's an escape to come of course) it's important to have a wee passage to read out to sum up the day's events, and to give an inkling of what happens next; i.e.

"With the death of Cardinal Rex, order was restored to the Varonian Diocese. However, rumour persists that it was not Rex that perished in the Cathedral of Salvation, but a mere body double, and he is already plotting his return..."

If after completing the Goal scenario there is to be an Escape scenario then the main choice you will have to make is how will the protagonists be escaping, on foot, or by vehicle? Both can be a scintillating end to a campaign, and can be made into something more than a simple race to the edge of the table by placing un-leap-able chasms on the table, or road blocks on the main thoroughfares. A rooftop chase that forces characters to either take a winding route across gantries or risk leaping the gaps in the buildings poses a nice dilemma on the players, and a vehicle chase can be prolonged by having the terrain on the table move instead of the vehicles to represent a rapid chase (the rules for a "Rolling Road" like this can be adapted from those presented in the GorkaMorka scenario "Da Chase", in "Da Uvver Book" available for download from the Games Workshop website). One final way to spice things up is to have a time limit to get off the table before the shuttle leaves/orbital bombardment begins. If you imagine that each turn is about 10 seconds of time for the characters, and that on average a speed four character

will sprint 20 yards a turn, you should be able to work out a reasonable length of time for the characters to get off the table to safety.



How to Reach Your Goals

So, with the Goal and any potential Escape worked out, I find it best to then go and think about how the characters would have reached the Goal scenario – would they have just fought through a horde of cultists, or did they have to sneak into an Administratum facility and access a cogitator to get the last piece of evidence? Perhaps there are a few ways that seem logical, and that's often perfect if there are two or more players as it lets you keep them apart before the final showdown, and being shoe-horned into a team can seem unnatural and may even be entirely illogical – a Monodominant inquisitor wouldn't team up with an eldar ranger except in the most unusual of circumstances. Once you have settled on this Final Step, the scenario should come easily as it should just be a case of taking the idea and making a game out of it.

A fight against a horde of cultists is a simple case of lining up the Player Characters (PCs) on one side of the table and the cultists on the other and having them duke it out. This kind of scenario can be made far more interesting with a little effort. A pair of belt fed heavy stubbers on 360° traversing mounts in the centre of the table or the controls to open a giant water pipe onto the cultists' stronghold hidden amongst the detritus take the mundane gunfight and turn it into something much more exciting. A covert break-in to an Administratum building allows use of the oft-ignored Awareness rules, exploiting infra-sights and auspexes, and making players rely on brains and not bullets for once. Having a few guards that must be evaded on the way to a keypad locked cogitator chapel can be a very tense and fun game, quite different from the norm.

Facilitation

With the end of the campaign out of the way, it's time to turn your attention to the beginning. I'd suggest that another two scenarios are needed, and that four is about the limit for keeping the pace of the campaign. These early scenarios should be considered to represent the beginning of the PCs' investigation, the evidence gathering or Facilitating scenarios that introduce the players to the plot. These games should be short and snappy with clear objectives, and ideally shouldn't be too testing for the

DARK MAGENTA

players (that comes later!). The point of these games is to reward successful players with evidence that paves the way to the later games. This can either be provided by simply telling the players that they have come across a paper trail/trail of bodies and advance them to the next game, or can be made slightly more involved by providing an encoded message they must crack, or the piece of a puzzle. On completion of the Facilitating scenarios the players will ideally have all the information required to solve the puzzle/crack the code/come up with a suspect and with a bit of brain power work out the answer. However, it's sometimes best to assume that not everyone will successfully complete all the games and bodge the puzzle a little to allow simple luck or a bit more thinking on the player's part to solve it. It would be fairly dull if they had to give up at this point before the real fun begins! You could of course slam some penalty on them for the final game, such as more enemies to take down, or in the case of a multiplayer campaign have them arrive late on the Goal table.

Suggestions for these scenarios include meeting a contact in crowded squares and using Willpower to convince them to come with the PCs; capturing a local crime lord for interrogation; planting or defusing explosives – the aim is to keep them simple, but still dramatic enough to enthrall the players before the real excitement of the later games. If you have a few players in the campaign feel free to rotate them through the scenarios or even design some of them to allow two or more players to take part at the same time. Try to give them separate objectives though to keep things more interesting – instead of a fight over the same piece of evidence how about having one side aiming to locate the evidence while the other is attempting to blow up the whole area? There is such a huge variety of objectives for these games that with a little thought it should be easy to accommodate two separate objectives into one gaming space. Also, by informing the players of their objectives covertly, the ante can be upped as neither player will know what the other's characters are up to and can immediately make things tenser.

Once the Facilitating scenarios are written the only thing left to do is link them to the Final Step scenario, by telling them they have the location of the cult in their hands/code to hack the cogitator chapel door/whatever it is they need to progress. The campaign is now essentially complete. All that remains is fleshing out the story and some housekeeping to make sure things run smoothly.

Penning a Hook

Every story needs a beginning, middle and ending. The latter two are covered by the campaign itself, so you only need come up with the beginning. This introduction should revolve around the eventual Goal, and why the players should care to achieve it. Perhaps the Goal is threatening the lives of billions, or holds the key to turning Chaos against itself. Perhaps a mysterious transmission from the Holy Ordos has summoned them, or perhaps the PCs

have simply found themselves in the middle of an unspeakable set of events only they have the power to end. Whatever it is, the introduction should not be overly long, but give just enough information to whet the appetites of the players. Typing this introduction and delivering it to the players in a sealed brown envelope is a nice touch. You could even go to the length of reading the introduction aloud, taking on the persona of an Inquisitor Lord perhaps, but a hard copy for each player is always a good idea to help them remember the finer points of your no doubt Shakespearean performance!

Housekeeping

The housekeeping mentioned earlier involves a couple of things. If the campaign is for a lot of players and is to be squeezed into a frantic day of gaming, then having a couple of co-GMs onboard will mean that a number of scenarios will be able to be played side-by-side, cutting down on the total playing time, meaning more games can be ran, which is always good. Giving these co-GMs the scenarios beforehand is a good idea as it allows them to ask any questions they may have and will make the games run smoother.

If the campaign has a puzzle element to it, or if the players are to receive written clues from the Facilitating scenarios, taking time to make them as professional-looking as possible is well worth it.

Finally, as I alluded to earlier, you will need to make a decision as to how long there is between scenarios for the characters – hours, days, years even – as this will have an effect on the likelihood of whether or not characters are going to be able to recover from wounds or replenish their ammunition. If there are a couple of months between games then it would be likely that the characters would have sought out supplies and medical care in the intervening period. If they have minutes before the next swarm of plague zombies hits, it's unlikely they're even going to have time to pray.

Fare Ye Well, Inquisitors...

That's about all the wisdom I have to impart. Hopefully it has made sense and is of some use to you all. I hope I've inspired some of you to get on and come up with a campaign of your own; I'd like to think that there are plenty of ideas nestled in these last few pages and the many Games Workshop publications out there that have got your imagination running wild. No one is asking for a twisting plot of Machiavellian intricacy to baffle your gaming group, but simply an exciting story that draws them in and games that excite. Happy gaming!

About the Author

Ruaridh Dall is a newly qualified dentist working in Elgin in the north of Scotland. While not filling teeth he can be found working on far too many modelling projects at once and thinking about grown up stuff like buying a house. He goes by the online moniker Van Helser.

