

by Rich Bowman

Art by [Keith Johnson](#)

You've conquered kingdoms in *Yrth*, stalked the night in *Vampire*, destroyed the Wyrms in *Werewolf*, surfed the Cybernetica and sailed the stars in *Traveller*. What haven't you done?

You haven't run your own campaign.

You've seen the maps your GM has drawn, read his histories and rampaged in his imagination. You've killed every monster and villain he's thrown at you, and even a couple times achieved godhood. Don't you think it's your turn to torment the players and wreak havoc in your favorite campaign world? Of course it is. Now how do you do it?

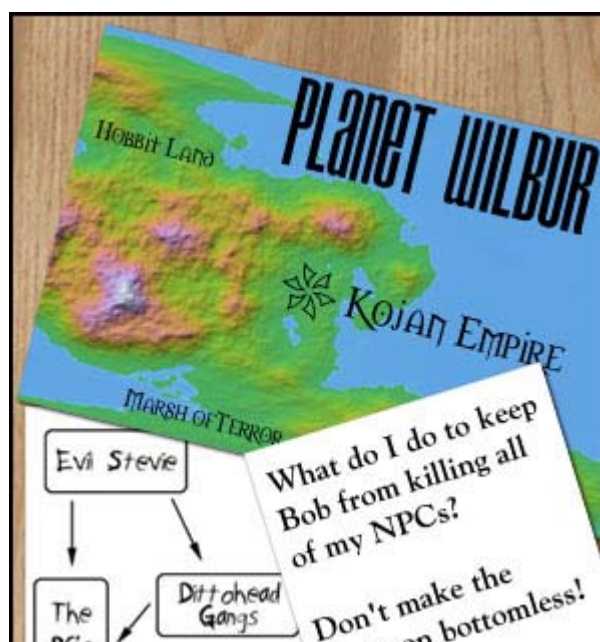
It's not so hard, actually. It just takes some time and perseverance, and though it may seem daunting at times, you'll find that it usually turns into a labor of love. To help you get started, I am providing a few pointers.

## Organize Your Campaign

Be early to each of your games. This allows you to prepare the game site and get your notes and playing aids prepared.

Start the game on time. Even if some of your players are late, you need to set the example. If the players know that you will wait for them before starting, they will be more willing to be late; before you know it, your eight o'clock game is starting at ten.

Make a "mini-worldbook" outlining the political and social situations in your campaign, along with what brought it to this point and which tensions are getting



ready to come to a head. Along with this, give a brief verbal history to refresh some points and lay plot lines for their characters to follow up on when the game starts.

Set up instructional encounters throughout your first session to ease your players into the mechanics of your world.

Consider using pre-generated characters for your first attempts. This will eliminate the potentially confusing pre game creation session where the players will be trying to guess your style and what skills and abilities they will need to survive your campaign. When you pre-generate, you are eliminating the need to waste your first evening in a paper shuffle. Don't worry about your group not knowing how to play them, that is what the instructional encounters are good for.

## Set Up a Playing Area

Where you decide to play your game has a big impact on the mood, atmosphere and the overall effectiveness of your campaign. You should select a place where you have control over background noise and distractions. There a number of options open to you, but only a few are mentioned here.

**Your home.** This is by far the best place to hold your game, as you have the most control over eliminating distractions. Make sure you turn off your TV, move the phone into another room, and make sure your stereo is playing nothing but atmosphere setting music. This is probably more of an option for single gamemasters, as spouses and significant others tend to frown on a room full of Roleplayers making a lot of noise, eating everything in the cupboards and keeping the kids up. Unless, of course, you can convince him or her to join in the fun!

**A local game store.** If the home option doesn't pan out, move on down to the second home for most gamers. Here you will often find tables set up for in-house games, and as long as you coordinate with the owners, you should have no problem (a table of gamers is more likely to buy products than browsers). It may also loosen your players up and get them into the game more if they know that their antics won't disturb other denizens of your home. They are surrounded by a distinctive gaming atmosphere and there are a myriad of source material on hand for the oddball questions and circumstances that crop up in every session. Unfortunately, there are some bad points. The background noise can be annoying, and there are always people hanging around the table asking questions and telling the players what they would do if they were playing. And, of course, there is the phone and ever present door chime that has a nasty habit of drawing away players' attention at crucial moments.

**A players' house.** Sure, this sounds like an outstanding choice, but in reality should only be used as a last resort. When you accept the hospitality of one of your players, he or she may come to expect a favored status in the game. Even if he or she doesn't, the other players may begin to suspect that you are fudging in their favor when a reaction roll comes up incredibly high or that really nasty NPC makes a critical miss.

## Keep the Game Moving

You've seen it. Everything seems to be going great when you start to notice that you

are more easily distracted than you were last week. The GM's plotline appears to be playing out and a new one doesn't seem to be in the works. Your fellow players start to become occasional no shows and the out-of-character banter becomes more frequent than the intense in-game poses. Before you know it, the game dies out.

You must keep this from happening to you. A few times are inevitable, but any more than that and you will cultivate a reputation of dull games and none but the most irritating and unwanted players will come to your table. Though thoughts of how to avoid this are daunting, it isn't actually that hard. The main thing is to keep in mind where you were going when you started, get there and set out for the next goal. To that end, try these suggestions:

**Always have your scenarios planned out at least two sessions in advance.** This way, when your troupe of over zealous adventurers surprise you by completing the current quest halfway through the night you won't be left trying to come up with spur of the moment encounters. You will be able to move right into the next plot and in doing so, keep alive the spirit that drove them to complete the first adventure early.

**Keep your ideas fresh.** For some people this isn't hard; the ideas pour from them so intensely you can almost see them squirming around in their head trying to get out. For the rest of us it isn't so simple. After a while they just seem to fizzle out. The solution? Read. Read anything: a book, magazine or short story. You'd be amazed at what stimulates your imagination!

**Don't let your group get too big.** The more you grow, the slower the action and the easier it is for the uninvolved players to get bored. Try to keep the game to a maximum of six or seven people. This tends to be the optimum number to keep everyone's attention to the game and maximizing character interaction.

**On the other hand, don't let your group get too small, either.** You will always have players drop for one reason or another, but don't let that space remain empty for too long. When you first start, you may have to actively recruit players for that seat, but after a while (if you're good enough) you will generate a waiting list. However you have to do it, fill that seat! If you are still down a player when the next one leaves, that's pretty much it. You'll be fighting a downhill battle to keep your game alive.

**Make sure that your players are game ready when they sit down at the table.** If you're not using pre-generated characters, contact your players before the first game starts and set up times when you can sit down with them individually to supervise their character creation. This way, when the game starts, you will be able to move smoothly from the briefing to game play. Along these lines, have those on your waiting list provide you with a couple of characters that they are interested in playing, so when it comes time for them to join, they will have a better chance of integrating into the party.

## Be Flexible

After every gaming session ask your players for input. Have them tell you at least one thing they liked about the session and one thing they disliked. This will give you an idea of what things you are doing right and those that you need to work on. Just remember to take all of these comments as suggestions and not personal attack or adulation. Don't let the likes go to your head nor the dislikes to your heart and you will be able to combine them into a workable solution.

# Have Fun

Take any or all of the tools presented herein, tweak them to suit your situation, stir them up and serve your players and yourself an Enjoyable Role Playing Experience.

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