

Let's Build A Campaign Setting: The Home Base

by Chris - Friday, October 06, 2017

<http://loottheroom.uk/lets-build-a-campaign-setting-the-home-base/>

One of the features I've always known I wanted this campaign to have is base building. When the party arrive on the island, the only evidence of civilisation will be the small colony settlement - hastily constructed palisade walls, a few buildings storing supplies and workers/settlers, probably a tavern and maybe a general store. Other than that, the island is wild and untamed (as far as the settlers know).

I'm really keen to have the expansion of this base of operations play a part in the campaign, and for the players to have a hand in its development. I've mentioned a few of my recent inspirations for this before - Caed Nua from *Pillars of Eternity*, Janek Sielicki's [Homeward Bound](#) - but this is an idea I've had knocking around for a long time.

This is going to be another one of those posts where I don't seem to actually achieve anything or make much progress, but if you've been following these posts you'll know that this is just how I work when I'm designing things.

Unlike Chult, my island - which I *still* need to find a name for - isn't dotted with hubs of civilisation like Port Nyanzaru. The only safe space in the wilds of the island will be that one hub settlement, and the idea is that that will only be as safe as the players make it. If they don't spend time building and fortifying, then that safety may not be as reliable.

I'm thinking of the base building as a sort of mini-game, something that will run alongside the main thrust of the campaign that the party can choose to engage with as much or as little as they want to. It will be a source of side quests and resources, and a source of tension and conflict in the later game - especially once the turtlekin declare war on the colonists. I really want the players to become invested in the growth and continued success of this place, so that they will feel compelled to defend it. I want it to feel like home for them.

I think it's important to think carefully about how this is going to work mechanically. Anything extra that you place into an adventure beyond the base mechanics of D&D is something extra that the GM is going to have to keep track of. GMing can feel like having a full-time admin job at the best of times, and I don't want to overwhelm GMs with too many balls to juggle. It's important to remember that the GM is a player too, and that if she isn't having fun then the game can't possibly succeed.

My initial thought for this system is that the settlement would probably benefit from having something like its own character sheet, a permanent record of what it looks like, what buildings it has, what resources the players can expect to find there, the kinds of people they can meet there and the relationships they've developed over the course of the campaign. I don't want to get too heavily into the economic side of things - otherwise I'd design a board game, not an RPG module - but I think I need to give some consideration to that aspect of the game as well.

The 'settlement sheet' will be a living document over the course of the campaign, and I'm wondering if I can even go as far as to provide a partial map and have the players fill it out as they develop the settlement. I'm already planning to do this with the island itself, providing a mostly blank hex map of the island that the party can fill out as they explore, but in that case everything that they can possibly discover is already placed on the GM's map. In the case of this settlement, I think there's an opportunity to do things a little differently.

This is one of those things where I have a 'big picture' view of the system in my mind without knowing any of the specifics yet. In my mind I'm picturing a map of the settlement that shows the external walls - presumably a permanent structure - and whatever few buildings exist when the party arrives. After that it will sort of work like a game of Battleship as far as new structures go - that is, the GM will have information about the kinds of buildings that can be developed and how much space they take up, what shape they are, etc. If I *were* designing a board game I'd probably produce these as stickers that can be physically placed onto the map (and if this ends up being something I produce for physical - rather than digital - publication, that might not be a terrible idea).

Again, this is all big picture stuff. I still don't know exactly how this system might interact with the actual campaign. And if it doesn't interact with the core gameplay in any meaningful way, there's no point including it.

One thing thinking about this raises is the issue of the passage of time. In lots of campaigns it often feels like the party go from adventure to adventure without time ever really passing out in the real world. But building things takes time. That's fairly self-evident. I like the idea of the party venturing out into the jungle, having a few adventures, and then returning to base to find it transformed - bigger, better, stronger, more secure. Or on fire, once the turtlekin arrive.

However it changes, I think that will provide a really tangible sense of progress, and of the time the party have spent out in the jungle. Or I hope it will, at least.

I'm interested to hear from those of you who have done things like this yourself. Do you have any tips for things that worked well? Or - more importantly, arguably - things that didn't work well, that I should avoid? Let me know.



The unholy is about to be awakened.

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