Twitter Thread by Rodney Thompson



Rodney Thompson
@AntarianRanger

Just finished running what was probably my best session of Star Trek Adventures yet. Definitely learning some interesting lessons about the game, its systems, and perhaps more importantly, the challenges of running a game in the Star Trek setting. Short thread.

Tonight's episode revolved around the ship's Klingon doctor & Trill ensign being recruited to fly a cloaked Bird of Prey deep into Cardassian territory to retrieve a defector. There was deception, cultural conflict, and a moral dilemma that saw the doctor go against his beliefs.

I did two things differently in crafting tonight's episode than I've done previously. First, I made it clear to my players that there was an A-plot (the Klingon story) and a B-plot (involving an away team that got left behind on a planet), & that the A-plot would get more scenes.

I also made it clear that I was going to expect the B-plot players drive a lot of the scene creation and setup, and that they should see the goal of those scenes as fleshing out their Focuses, Values, and character histories.

Second, I crafted the plot using something similar to the new edition of Legend of the 5 Rings' brilliant-but-woefully-under-discussed Discord mechanic, where you create complications that put two players' beliefs in conflict with one another.

For this one, I built a plot revolving around the Klingon doctor (who does not strongly identify with Klingon culture) being forced to "act like a Klingon," and the Trill (who has a deep love of Klingon culture) being confronted with dismissal and disgust by actual Klingons.

Sort of a "I want to be you, you want to be me" situation, but where the necessity of the mission pushed them away from their values, creating not only tension involving the relationship between the characters but also challenging their beliefs.

This structure seemed to work well. The players in the B-plot group knew going into it what kind of screen time they would get and that they would be exploring their characters' histories and personalities, while I could focus more energy on driving the A-plot.

That's all really more about the nature of running any Star Trek RPG, though, not the actual game itself. The core mechanics serve us well enough, but there are layers of complexity (combat, extended challenges) that I honestly try to avoid while running the game.

Not because they are necessarily too hard to understand, but because they are time consuming, and I'm already struggling to fit satisfying episodes into a 3-hour session with 5 players, even with an A-plot/B-plot split. I just lean on the faster core scenes/resolution system.

The other thing I'm feeling is missing is any sort of long-term goals or progress for the characters. The bulk of the advancement system is actually just lateral moves, and actual advancement seems pretty rare. And that's OK; I don't need Star Trek characters to "level up."

But what I do miss is a way for me and my players to easily answer "What does your character want?" In L5R, I can always fall back on things like "furthering the goals of my clan" or "gaining honor and/or glory." In Shadowrun I want money; in Vampire, I want to amass power.

Star Trek doesn't lend itself well to individual goals, as a setting. But I feel like a tabletop RPG where I'm coming back week over week needs to give players something to feel like they are progressing toward. It's a tricky conundrum, and I don't know how to solve it.

In a setting without money where the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the individual, what does an individual player strive for? What can they make incremental progress on? Rank is an obvious answer, but I don't think I want to have all Commanders at the end of the season.

I almost want something like a mechanic to help players develop and pursue personal goals. Something with like a progress meter/clock, or clear steps that a player has the agency to introduce into the game.

Like, Worf wants to restore his family's honor. In order to do so, there's a clear path that gets laid out for him: Discover the truth about Khitomer, reveal the conspirators, convince the High Council to accept the truth, support Gowron for Chancellor, etc.

As a GM, there's no way I can reasonably juggle that x 5 players in a way that makes reasonable progress in bi-weekly, self-contained, 3-hour sessions. Maybe other folks can, but I have my hands full just keeping the game pace at a brisk clip and keeping the players involved.

This thread got longer than I thought it would. Anywho: Star Trek Adventures continues to be a lot of fun, and I'm skilling up as a Gamemaster each session.