

passed on by the computer, should the referee so desire.

Another worthwhile NPC to keep on hand is the villain. This individual can turn up in many situations, but one excellent way to work one in is to make the character a hidden saboteur planted on the party. Some kind of convenient excuse should be manufactured to get the character involved: expertise in some skill no one else has, or ownership of some vital piece of equipment, such as a ship, that requires the villain's presence. As long as the NPC is present, unforeseen accidents can be brought to bear to plague the party, according to what the referee needs to keep the adventure going. Of course, it is wise to keep the villain's identity a secret during the main body of the adventure, which means that the various disasters can't be too blatant, until the climax is at hand.

Another thing to keep in mind is the need for adventurers to have a chance to vent their frustrations on the villainous character towards the end of the adventure. Revenge of this sort can relieve a lot of built-up anger and provide a pretty nifty ending to the game.

If you do use the hidden villain travelling with the party idea, a wise idea is to have two or three other NPCs along who can be used as blind alleys. One could be an incompetent, who can cause trouble by accident, which will drive players crazy trying to puzzle out who is really responsible for their latest string of misfortunes. Is it the obvious chap who keeps making outright mistakes, or a more sinister villain who strikes referee should remember to use moderation in using these techniques. Don't repeat situations from one adventure in another; use some variety and keep your players guessing.

Patrons, of course, are NPCs, but it is important that the referee try to keep

the patron from participating too actively in the adventure. The reason? Having an NPC as the employer of the group, and on the spot, leads to a reduction in player initiative. They tend to stop in the middle of a crisis situation, turn towards the referee, and ask "What does the boss want us to do?" Hardly an inventive way of getting out of trouble.

Patrons should either be unwilling to participate actively or they should be removed from the scene early on, through death, incapacitation, abduction, or some other means. This leaves the characters neck-deep in trouble, on their own, and forced to make crucial decisions without guidance. If the removal was permanent, it may also remove their source of income, a bonus for nasty referees, but a pitfall if you're trying to reward them for their actions. Non-player characters should never be mishandled by making them respond to

