

SEAN

Here is where I think constraints help a lot. Where do the characters go? What information do they now possess that they did not before? What materials / resources do they have to move towards the next scene? The most obvious subject to look at is a dungeon, the ur-example of constraints in action. Where to next is the next room in the dungeon, unless information is available that could circumvent that. This latter case might be, now we know where Prince Dude is being help captive by the medusa, so we go there. Corridors are the literal strings that lead to potential scenes. Resources available determine if we go right there in earnest OR we “rest” and wait a bit. On the GM side, I need to know if they noise the party made or actions did they take that might trigger a wandering monster. So my next is determined by time spent in the fiction and procedures provided by the text that we have accepted as rules.

Staying in fantasy, I can talk a little about Forge out of Chaos. Much of the decision making did involve resource management, but at the same time it reflected our ever-increasing knowledge of the situation. A necromancer had kidnapped the ruler’s son is where it began. But at each step, our knowledge grew so what happened next was largely dependent on the things we learned. So, it was less, what is in the next room (there was some of that), and more okay now what do we do with the knowledge we now possess.

In a Coriolis adventure I am putting together for an online convention this fall will create a situation of a ghost city in space. And I do think that making the backdrop and situation compelling will intrigue the players enough to want to solve the mystery. But they might just want to repair and refuel their ship and get out of there before they become ghosts themselves. Again, we have constraints, time, space, but not as linear or confined as a dungeon or Lost City might be.

But some games have a more open space, which is where constraints put in place help. Time for instance, is a wonderful constraint. In a modern game or setting, you have defined or semi-defined times depending on locations. A gas station might be 24/7 but the boutique cigar shop won’t be. Modes of behavior help as well. In a fantasy setting maybe I can break open the door to the inn and intimidate the bar tender. In a modern or future backdrop, I won’t be able to. That would cause a bad reaction.

To wrap it all up, for the players it is the information and resources available, guided by known constraints and procedures. For the GM it would be player’s choices, what parts of the situation / backdrop they are close to, and again the procedures of play that might require interaction with the system. Forbidden Lands is a great example of the this, where the hex crawl portion of the game requires several rolls and procedures to determine if the characters even make it where they are going, irrespective of if they have an encounter or not.