Adventure Design

Villains

- Start with a good motivation.
- Good villains believe that what they are doing is right.
- Expect your villain to die.
- Make them memorable—what would make players do a double-take?
- A villain's progress should be visible in the world.
- A villain should respond to character interference in their plans.
- Good villains interact with characters directly and indirectly.

Locations

- Emphasize a defining trait to make it memorable.
- Good locations are functional.
- Good locations are familiar.
- Good locations are fantastic.
- Locations should move the story forward.
- Give locations personality.
- Envision locations in three dimensions.

Story

- Start with a clear idea of what the villain wants to accomplish.
- Make interesting parts of the story obvious to the players.
- Actively build towards the reveal.
- Gain inspiration from D&D tropes but avoid clichés.
- Rarely challenge player expectations.
- Only give false information through NPC dialogue.

Antagonists

- They contribute to the villain's agenda.
- Often interface with the party instead of the villain.
- Use a variety of antagonists that represent the villain and their themes.
- Provide clear antagonist motivations.
- Antagonists should react to the story.

Encounters

- Good encounters serve a story purpose—avoid roadblocks.
- Use a variety of encounters—combat, social interaction, physical or intellectual challenges, and puzzles.
- Leave room for creative solutions.
- Vary the difficulty of encounters to aid in story pacing.
- Make encounters easy to run.
- Design encounters to BE PLAYED!

Allies

- Understand what each NPC knows.
- No one NPC knows everything.
- NPCs should act in accordance with their motivations.
- Allies should act and respond to the villains, too.
- Allies should provide clear benefits—items, information, and labor.
- Make them memorable.

Rewards

- Give magic items interesting stories.
- Generously give out potions.
- Give items that are useful only in a certain time or place.
- Grant social rewards that make players feel important—status, property, and titles.