

ASK THE ALEXANDRIAN #10: SAYING GOODBYE TO A PLAYER

by [Justin Alexander](#) - December 29th, 2022



SPOILERS FOR DRAGON HEIST

A.M. asks:

One of my players is going to be leaving my [Dragon Heist remix](#) campaign soon. It's currently five days before Trollskull Manor's grand opening and two days before the fireball. We have two more sessions with her, and I have another player lined up to replace her when she leaves, but I'm not sure if it'd be better to pad things out a bit so the new player is part of the group when the fireball goes off; or breeze through and have the fireball with the old player still there.

There are three things I would consider here:

1. Is there any way that I can give the departing player a satisfying send-off?
2. How am I going to hook the new player in?
3. Is there any reason the new player can't join before the old player leaves? (Which immediately alleviates any sequencing woes that might interfere with the best answers for #1 and #2.)

For the **send-off**, I'm looking for some kind of conclusion. Some dramatic note that allows this specific player to feel like their experience in the campaign is "complete." This is, of course, good for the player leaving, but I think it's also important for the other players, because it provides a sense of closure.

Generally speaking, this is going to boil down to either a major **milestone** in the campaign or it's going to be about resolving a **personal goal**. In either case, though, you want to focus on what you know about the specific player: What stuff do they seem to care most about in the campaign?

MILESTONES

In terms of a milestone, for example, you're in a somewhat awkward point of the *Dragon Heist* campaign where one set of objectives has been completed, but the next phase of the campaign hasn't really kicked off.

If there's not a natural milestone sitting right there, however, then sometimes you can fast-track a milestone. For example, if you think the nimblewright investigation could get wrapped up in a couple sessions (including the Gralhund raid), then you might fast-track the *fireball* and have it go off immediately. Discovering the culprits (Gralhunds) and recovering the Stone (albeit not its Eyes) might be a nice, satisfying milestone.

Alternatively, maybe this player seems to be really invested in Trollskull Manor. If so, focusing on the grand opening as their big conclusion might be the milestone you need. This might actually mean slowing down the milestone (so it arrives at the right time), possibly by adding an additional complication in the form of a mini-scenario to put extra weight on it. In the case of *Dragon Heist*, the campaign conveniently the machinations of Frewn, a business competitor, to disrupt the opening of Trollskull Manor: Maybe you've already resolved that in your campaign, but if not you can compress that down into the next couple sessions and have Frewn (and his wererats) go in HARD on screwing up the opening. Thwarting Frewn and celebrating a big, glorious opening day might be a great final session for this player.

Random Tip: In my Dragon Heist run, the players actually put together [a menu for Trollskull Manor](#) by having each PC name one food. Then one of the players actually made that menu for dinner one night. You could do something similar, creating a real world feast and celebration to mirror the one in your game.)

PERSONAL GOALS

In terms of personal goals, of course, this depends entirely on the specific PC in question. But it largely boils down to identifying the most important personal goal and wrapping it up.

- Are they seeking revenge on their father's killer? Oh, look! There's the six-fingered man now!
- Are they trying to raise money to raise their dead wife from the dead? Insert a mini-scenario that gives them access to a magic item that lets them do that. (If you want to run hard, simultaneously frame things up so that they're faced with a dilemma: Do they raise their dead wife? Or the orphan killed in the *fireball*?)
- They wanted to become a teacher at the House of Wonder? Renaeer arranges for them to get a position.

You may also be able to combine personal goals and milestones. For example, Renaeer surprises them with the position at the House of Wonder during the grand-opening of Trollskull. Or it turns out Lord Gralhund was their father's killer.

If you're scratching your head over this or uncertain about what you should do, you can always unleash your GMing superpower by turning to the player and asking, "Hey. Is there anything you really want to get done before leaving the campaign?"

HOOKING THE NEW PLAYER

When it comes to hooking the new player, I discuss this in more detail [here](#).

In most cases, even if you screw this up completely, the metagame will paper over the gaping cracks: Everybody knows this is Peter's new character, so they will just kind of "naturally" accept him as part of the group. But it is, in fact, this kind of "go with the flow" tendency which,

for me, makes it even more important to *not* have it be that simple; to have the new addition to the group make sense *in character*.

In terms of the existing player's send-off, this is mostly significant if sequencing is a problem - i.e., the original player needs to leave before the new player can join, but it would be better or easier to bring the new player in before the milestone that would provide a satisfactory conclusion to the original player.

In these cases, I would almost always tip things in favor of the original player. It's much more important, in my opinion, to make sure they get a proper send-off; they'll be plenty of time for the new player to have rewarding experiences in your game.

If possible, though, I'd try to overlap the players. It can, in my experience, make the transition feel much more natural. The only reasons to avoid that would be either interpersonal issues (maybe the original player would be angry playing with the new player for some reason) or if the time dedicated to bringing in the new PC would make it difficult to drive the campaign towards the original player's big send-off.