

Character Foundry

INTRODUCTION

Whether it's writer's block or lack of time, game masters need help coming up with ideas for characters (especially the NPCs). More to the point, they need help coming up with the spark of an idea. Most game masters (GMs) can generate character stats with little trouble, but it is the spark or the starting point that can be tough.

This supplement is intended to do just that, supply you with enough sparks to keep you going indefinitely. Sounds impossible? Just wait, we've got a whole section on how ideas serve as the spark for other ideas. It's a really cool snowball effect especially if you use it with **Forge of Imagination**.

As with the other **Simple and Sane** supplements, we'll take a lighter, less professional tone. While you might not think all the little jokes are funny, they should help keep you awake and reading.

Unlike other **Simple and Sane** supplements, this one is a lot more lists. That's just the way it has to be, but we'll still help guide you to how it all works.

The Basics

OK - So we assume you are the game master and in desperate need of more ideas. (Desperate might be a little strong, but play along.) We assume you have a world and some ideas for adventures. (If you don't, please check out **Forge of Imagination**, our adventures and campaign idea sparker.) The question now is, "Who's there?"

One of the most common issues in any campaign world is when you as GM have a great idea for the huge important stuff and are having a lot of trouble with some of the more in between stuff. This happens all the time when you are trying to create a city or village. That's a ton of buildings and people to make up and your brain runs out of ideas much faster than you'd hoped. The other major time is when you have the major enemy designed, but are having trouble making henchmen for it that are more than cardboard cut-outs.

This supplement is intended to be generic enough to cover just about every game system. Most of the ideas and sparks in the book should be generic. Of those that aren't generic, most will probably be geared more for fantasy games, but these are just people. They will fit into whatever world you need them to.

HOW TO COME UP WITH YOUR OWN IDEAS

The truth of the matter is that we discussed a lot of the following material in **Forge of Imagination**. Now we don't want to force you to buy the other book if you don't want to, so we'd rather be a little more on the repetitive side. If you own our other imagination firing books, skim the following section. There is new stuff there, but skimming should get you where you need to go.

Great Material

The best way to get new ideas is to be surrounded by great material. Great material usually comes in the form of exciting stories that put you in the mood to be creative. The question is, where are you going to get your best "bang for your buck" from the various forms of great material?

We've always thought that comic books were one of the best places to find good idea material. Being able to read them quickly and read several of them at one time, ideas can pop right out of them. Old movies can also be good; any kind of action flick, whether it be a western, sci-fi, fantasy, or spies. Obviously, novels can be good, but short stories are better in the same way that comics are. The more different stories you read, the more ideas can be gained. But you could have thought of these ideas yourself.

Right now, we're just talking about setting up the characters, either you have an idea or you hope they will spark one. The best bet is to use something not related to your game, and switch genres. For example, you take the German/Norse gods and turn them into a corporation for a cyber-punk game. With one-eyed Wotan as CEO and the Valkyries as a female cycle gang, the players will never catch on, but you didn't need to make up personalities nor non-player character interactions. Of course the Greek gods will soon come along as a rival corp, but that's going to be pretty easy too. We're not suggesting that you need to make up characters that mirror the gods' powers and strengths; you are only borrowing their personalities and maybe their looks for when you describe the character to your players. Sure,

the original characters can spark some really cool ideas about the game characters' powers or abilities, but they don't have to properly represent them.

Let's push this idea around a little more. Why not have a comic book superhero team as sorcerers in a fantasy campaign, soap opera stars as an intergalactic trading cartel, or even the professional wrestlers as a mercenary unit for the past or future. Personalities can be fit into any bodies, saving you the time of developing them on your own.

This idea can be spun for making up large amounts of non-player characters too. When making up folks for cities or other large NPC groups, just pick people you know, or better yet knew. It's best to use people that your players don't know, so maybe you'll want to use your extended family. It is much easier to write "Uncle Joe" in the personality section than "sedentary, likes beer, complains about everything modern, wears mismatched colors, ...". The best part of this is that if you know the person even just a bit, you will have a better concept of how they would react to situations than you might for a totally fictitious character.

You have to be careful here though. First off, you don't want the players to catch on. If the players catch on, then they can manipulate your process. Worse, if they catch on, they might have a different opinion about some of the people or characters you are mirroring and change their actions depending on their real-life opinions. You also want to leave room open for your characters to grow. If something happens in the game that would change the character, let it change the character. Don't feel you have to remain true to who the character might have been at one point. This is supposed to be a method of easing your work and speeding your job as game master. Don't let it take control of you; it's supposed to be the other way around.

Another thing you have to remember is that no matter what you plan for a character, your players are going to mess it up. Maybe something you say is misheard and they have a bad opinion about the character when you were hoping they would see this character as the coolest ever. In the worst situation, the players wind up killing the NPCs you send in to help them. It happens. If there is a legitimate consequence (like the king being pissed that these yahoos just off-ed his son), let it play out, otherwise, just move on. Anything you do to try and reverse something that went wrong is just going to make it worse. Hey - everybody doesn't always like everybody else. That's just personalities. It will play out in your game just like in life.

Borrowing Ideas vs. Plagiarism

Don't think for a second that we're condoning plagiarism! It happens in every industry and it is morally and ethically wrong. Having said that, if what you are working on is only going to be shared with your friends across your tabletop, you are a little freer. The real risk is what we just said - if the players catch on. OK, so they can catch on a little, but even that kind of makes you look a bit lazy.

As long as you are moving the personalities into a completely different environment and not grouping them in exactly the same fashion they are normally grouped, then you should be in good shape. Plucking the annoying friend from a sitcom and "marrying" him to the ditzy real-estate broker from the movie you saw last night should be different enough. Oh, and change their names. You're supposed to be borrowing ideas to make them your own, not being entirely lazy.

Enemy Characters

Not that it might not be cool, because it can be, but...Making up individualistic bad guys simply does not give the bang for your creative buck that it should. "Individualistic bad guys" is any time each of the enemies has different stats. Even Batman had to fight Thug 1 and Thug 2; there was no reason for them to be different. If your main enemy character is believable, one assistant and a large group of soldiers should be fine. It saves your time, your creativity, and your sanity when trying to run 15 different underlings.

Imagine you have a large fortress and you need to fill it with bad guys to protect it against the good guys (the player characters). Making up individual characters for each bad guy is a poor use of your time. Making up a patrol that is exactly the same everywhere gets incredibly boring for the players, and they will come up with a plan for beating them. Here's how to make it work:

Make a series of characters, maybe three, four, five or six. Then mix and match the series of characters into different patrols or sentry posts. For example, make a soldier, an archer, a sergeant, a defensive mage (maybe a healer), and an offensive mage. This is easier than it seems because the soldier and archer should be relatively the same, except they have different weapons of expertise. Then the sergeant should be a soldier slightly beefed up. Depending on the game system, the mages can also be the same, but with different spell compliments.

Now to place them - The first sentry post can be one soldier, one archer, and one sergeant. The next post could be two archers, a soldier, and a defensive mage.