

Winging it! Whether you love it or hate it, every GM needs to do it at some point. Indeed, to some degree, you are expected to wing it. It might be some casual conversation with an NPC that goes in a completely different direction, or it could be your PCs abandoning all of your plans for the current session and striking out in a new direction. At some point though, you will need to make up some stuff on the fly. So how do you not only survive those times but excel at them?

### **Preparation**

Yes, I know this is about winging it and that seems completely counterintuitive to preparation. But if you want to be successful while winging a session, you need to be prepared.

First of all, you want to create a GM's notebook. The full fledged contents of a GM's Notebook would be a great idea for a new thread (hint, hint) and we won't get into it here. Right here, we will focus on the important aspects of winging it that need to belong in your GM's notebook.

- When you have time, drop in a couple of generic maps into your notebook. You will want a generic dungeon, maze, tower, keep, home, bar/tavern/inn and possibly an outdoor location. If you have time and resources, add more locations like ships, mines, etc. The point is that you want to have one generic location that you can whip out of your notebook and populate on the fly if you need to. If you ever need to use one of these, be sure to reload your generic location before the next session.
- Generic NPCs. Always have a couple of generic NPCs. If you like PDFs, I would suggest *Everybody Else* as a good PDF to pick up. (Note to self, add relevant links so people can click to find some of these things.) You will also want some names. A good name list so you can just pick one from the top, associate with your NPC and \*bam\* you have an NPC to work with.
- Generic location names. If you don't already have a rich depth of place names to call on, at least have some generic names. Heck, maybe the GMF should start another thread to come up with a three column location name generator. (Another hint - run with it!)

You can obviously add more to prepare even further. But these basics should carry you pretty far with your notebook.

Second of all you want to have good notes on the current plans of a few major NPCs. Keep in mind that your PCs do not need to be aware of who the NPCs are. These are the people that will be movers and shakers in the game. You need to know their plans and motivations so you can quickly and easily pick up any story and insert the PCs if you need to.

It doesn't matter how you keep your notes. But you do need to keep them! This is the type of thing that causes many GMs the most heartburn. When the PCs derail the story and go in an unexpected direction, the GM might not know how to react. Without your notes, your winging it becomes haphazard and pointless. Then your game starts to get mired in mud.

Know where your NPCs plans are moving, and have some basic prep materials in your GM notebook and you can carry a game for quite a while when the PCs do the unexpected.

### **Consistency**

It is important to be consistent as a GM. Rule judgments are the obvious area to be consistent, but it is vitally important to be consistent when you start winging it. If the PCs head down a road, come to a crossroads where thieves have been hung from the towering oak, you had better be sure the Oak is

there the next time the PCs walk by. Oh, and you need to be sure the remains of the thieves are there as well.

If you don't maintain this consistency, the game will suffer. In a best case scenario, the players will be a little disappointed that they remember these details better than you do. In a worst case scenario, they will detect inconsistency as a clue to something. This is where your game will take an unexpected turn once again and you will end up winging it once again.

When you wing something new into the game, take a few minutes after the game to add to your notes so you remember it next time.

### **PC Integration**

OK, in theory every PC has some sort of background. I certainly encourage my players to write backgrounds. One thing that is an interesting improvisation experience is to pull something out of a PC's background. Look through the PC backgrounds and look for features that you can use. Make some notes on these. NPCs, events, locations and items are all key features. Heroic fiction has many examples of unlikely background events coming back to help/haunt the characters. When you are floundering for something to run, PC backgrounds are fair game for inspiration on what to wing.

It is important to remember that pulling stuff out of a background will almost assuredly pique the players' interest. This means you should not do this too lightly because your players will be looking for the importance of the encounter. So if you do this, make it important somehow. The fun thing about this is that your players will probably become very engaged in whatever diversion you are improvising.

OK, this is true whether you are winging it or have a fully planned out story that uses PC background elements. My point is that PC backgrounds are a valid place to look for improvisational inspiration.