Forge of Imagination
Spark of an Idea

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Whether it's writer's block or lack of time, game masters need help coming up with ideas, or more to the point, they need help coming up with the spark of an idea. Most game masters (GMs) can turn a spark into a mission 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.

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

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, or at least part of one that you intend to use - enough space that you know where the characters are going to be and they can have adventures. The question is, "What adventures?"

Though there will be some ideas on how to start a campaign or a world, we are assuming that you had some good ideas and now need more. We assume that because that's how it normally works. We just want to get your juices flowing.

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 that shouldn't slow you down. Most of what works in a fantasy game can be spun to work in a sci-fi, cyberpunk, or other genre game. As we'll be discussing in length, switching genres is one of the best ways to revitalize old ideas.

HOW TO COME UP WITH YOUR OWN IDEAS

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.

A lot of times you just need to set 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 don't need to make up personalities or the 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 then "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.

Remember - This isn't intended to create a fully developed gaming world for you - just spark you through periods where ideas are coming more like molasses in winter than a rushing river.

Jumping genres - an extended example

There are several TV shows and other story lines in which a group of teen-agers encounter and typically defeat magical creatures. Sometimes the teen-agers have powers and sometimes they don't, but typically no one believes them when they try to explain how some magical demon thing is going to take over the world, so they are stuck handling the crisis on their own.

Because these teens need to be able to handle this menace on their own for the show to have any hope at maintaining that willful suspension of disbelief, they frequently encounter the problem in the beginning and "nip it in the bud" so to speak. But what if they didn't? What if one of those plot lines was allowed to progress? What if they all died trying to save their town or simply failed? Then the evil menace would have some time to gain strength. Once it had gained strength, it might be a more suitable adventure for a team of professional adventurers. Clearly, this is using the idea of a spark. You watch the show, which gives you the idea. You

ponder what would happen "if", and then you write your adventure (or more likely a couple of notes about the adventure and the actual writing happens months later when you really need something).

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. What you need to do is borrow the ideas and make them yours. How? Like this:

Once you find a good idea, think about how it would fit into your campaign and world. Often, the changes necessary to make it fit will be enough to make it yours.

One example: There is a fairly well know Western where two famous actors go out to rob a wagon made of metal with a Gatlin gun. OK, to turn this into a fantasy game we need to figure out what would be valuable enough to protect with a metal wagon. The gold dust from the movie seemed too easy, so let's make it magic stuff. OK, so do we want the party to rob a caravan carrying magical stuff? Let's assume the player characters are mainly good guys and this won't fly, so we turn to the other side - either they need to protect the wagon or recover it. (Sure, the guys in the movie had all sorts of good reasons to rob it, but it's too tough to make that work for most adventuring groups.) While either protecting or recovering would probably make a good adventure, we're going to go with recover it. We need a substitute for the Indians - goblins, easy enough. (Not meant as a comment on any Native Americans, but when you go to generic bad guys in the two different genres, the comparisons seem to work, you know, generically.) There was a lot of action in the movie and one big fight just doesn't seem like it will work out. To match that feel, let's have stages of battle. First the good guys will encounter some of the goblin bandits looting a small town. Then they will come upon the wagon, stuck in the mud of a river ford. (In the movie the bridge was important, and the ford seemed a good transition.) This will probably be one of the bigger fights. Not to make things too easy, after they win that fight, they will find that most of the best magical stuff is missing from the wagon, so they will have to track the leader bad guys to where they are selling their ill-gotten gains, of course factoring in the bad guys' fence and his muscle too. Three great fights, some wilderness tracking and clue gathering, negotiations or questioning of prisoners; this