

PC PEARLS VOLUME 2: A COLLECTION OF CHARACTER INSPIRATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction by Greg Oppedisano..... 2

CHAPTER ONE: CREATING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

Character Questionnaire by Liz Courts 3

What's In a Name? by Hal Maclean 5

Fifty Family Units by Russel Brown, Adam Daigle, Tom Ganz, Stefan Happ, Tim Hitchcock, Phil Larwood, and Willie Walsh..... 6

Go, Team Theme, Go! by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, Tom Ganz, Phillip Larwood, James MacKenzie, Greg Oppedisano, and Craig Shackleton..... 8

Colorful Places of Origin by Clinton J. Boomer, Russell Brown, Elizabeth Courts, Scott Gable, Tom Ganz, Stefan Happ, Phillip Larwood, Greg Oppedisano, Ted Reed, and David Schwartz..... 10

Ties That Bind by Stefan Happ..... 12

Backstories by Stefan Happ, Rob Manning, and Adam Daigle..... 13

Life Without Letters by Russell Brown 15

Huh?! 13 Ways to Role-play Illiteracy by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, Russell Brown, Tim Hitchcock, and David Schwartz..... 16

Fifty Personality Quirks by Elizabeth Courts, Adam Daigle, Scott Gable, Stephen S. Greer, Tim Hitchcock, John E. Ling, Jr., David Schwartz, Craig Shackleton, and Willie Walsh 16

Faiths for the Faithless by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, Ashavan Doyan, Phillip Larwood, and David Schwartz..... 18

Every Character is a Biography by Hal Maclean..... 19

Out for Revenge! by Rone Barton, Clinton J. Boomer, Scott Gable, Tom Ganz, Stefan Happ, Ed Healy, Phillip Larwood, James MacKenzie, Greg Oppedisano, and Ted Reed..... 20

CHAPTER TWO: THE EARLY LEVELS

Twenty Questions for the Captured by Stefan Happ, Tim Hitchcock, and Hal Maclean..... 22

Organizations by Archetype: Thieves by Adam Daigle, Stefan Happ, John E. Ling, Jr., Scott Gable, and Rob Manning..... 23

Organizations by Archetype: Warriors by John E. Ling, Jr., Stefan Happ, Rob Manning, and Craig Shackleton..... 24

Organizations by Archetype: Spell Casters by Stefan Happ, Ed Healy, John E. Ling, Jr., and Greg Oppedisano 25

I'll Ask Around... by Clinton Boomer, Scott Gable, Tim Hitchcock, and James MacKenzie..... 27

Never Leave Home Without Them by Hal Maclean 28

Luxuries in the Wild by Stefan Happ..... 29

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep by Stefan Happ, Michael Kortez, and Craig Shackleton..... 30

Twenty Distinct Voices by Louis Agresta, Adam Daigle, Stephen S. Greer, Stefan Happ, Ed Healy, and Rob Manning..... 31

CHAPTER THREE: THE MIDDLE LEVELS

Lord Bedlam Havok's Rules of Survival by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, and Greg Oppedisano 33

Ten Unique Mounts by Louis Agresta, Adam Daigle, Phillip Larwood, and Rob Manning..... 37

Mommy? by Adam Daigle, Stefan Happ, Craig Shackleton, and Clinton J. Boomer 37

Seriously... What Do We Do about Humanoid Babies? by Rone Barton, Steve Greer, Stefan Happ, and Liz Courts..... 38

Questioning the Gods by Hal Maclean and John E. Ling, Jr..... 39

Know Your Role: Multitasking by Hal Maclean..... 39

How to Stage a Successful Ambush by Jonathan Drain, Stefan Happ, Michael Kortez, Hal Maclean, James McKenzie, and David Schwartz 40

Paint Me Righteous: Twenty Tattoos to Die For by Clinton Boomer, Elizabeth Courts, Adam Daigle, Stephen S. Greer, Phillip Larwood, Rob Manning, and Craig Shackleton 41

When All Else Fails by Hal Maclean..... 42

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HIGHER LEVELS

Splinter Religions by Lou Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, Dave Hall, Stefan Happ, and Rob Manning 44

Because a Little Meta-Gaming Never Hurt Anyone by Lou Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, and Greg Oppedisano 46

Off Into the Sunset: Retiring Productively by Rone Barton, Clinton J. Boomer, Elizabeth Courts, Ashavan Doyon, Stefan Happ, and John E. Ling, Jr. 46

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INTRODUCTION

The job of the role-player seems simple at first glance: you roll dice, make characters, shop, defeat evil, loot, and level up. Have fun and repeat. If you ask gamers what makes for a great game, their replies return as varied as snowflakes. Everyone has an individual style of play and personal preferences, but in general, no one tops his or her list with rolling dice, shopping, or looting. The ingredients of a great game lay beyond the basics of game design. Take the advice of Lord Bedlam Havok himself...

Chapter One: Creating Memorable Characters

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"When creating your character, choose an ethical system that can justify nearly any fit of temper, greed, cowardice, or vindictiveness, for example, Chaotic Violent..." — The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #10

Chapter Two: The Early Levels (Starting a Campaign)

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"You've more to fear from your comrades, especially incompetent comrades, than from any dungeon — unless you're in charge. Thus, sow the seeds of fear early..." — The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #11

Chapter Three: The Middle Levels (Playing the Campaign)

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"Sit next to the players running evil characters — they will be more likely to scheme with you and not against you..." — The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #12

Chapter Four: The Higher Levels (Wrapping Up the Campaign)

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"My Golden Rule — they say there is no way to 'win' a role-playing game. While this may technically be true, there is most certainly a way to lose: dying a chump's death. If you've got to go, go out with a bang — and try to take the rest of the party with you, because there's no glory in showing up to Valhalla without your buddies..."

— The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #13

The best games have invested players who bring good ideas to the table. This is where *PC Pearls* might handily assist you — by inspiring players to make the best characters, to assert their creativity, to make their mark on the game world and tell the best stories. Talented players help the Game Master create the best games by constantly providing input, adding color, taking risks, and actively playing in the communal sandbox that is the group constructed, shared narrative world of role-playing games. *PC Pearls* will inspire players to immerse themselves in the game, making for the most engaging, most enjoyable, most exciting time. ◆

PC PEARLS

If you enjoy the contents of *GM Gems* or *PC Pearls*, please tell us on the Goodman Games forums at www.goodmangames.com, or drop the authors a message at www.werecabbages.com.

Happy gaming!

This is a systems-neutral sourcebook. It is designed to be used with any role playing game you choose, in any edition. Most role playing games share certain conventions, such as attack rolls, saving throws (or their equivalent), and magical spells. We make reference to these generic terms where it helps to clarify a point, but you should feel free to apply them to the game of your choice.



CHAPTER ONE: CREATING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

CHARACTER QUESTIONNAIRE

For both new and jaded role-players, coming up with a character's background can sometimes be a tedious process, often short-changed for the sake of brevity and getting to the dice rolling quickly. These questions will quickly spark your imagination, and help to make your character much more than just a sheet of paper.

LIFE, DEATH, AND BEYOND

1. Who were your parents?
 - a. Are they still alive? If not, why?
 - b. What is your relationship with your parents?
2. Do you have any reviled or celebrated ancestors?
 - a. Who were they?
 - b. How do most others feel about them?
 - c. Do others treat you differently once they find out?
3. Do you have any siblings?
 - a. Are they still alive? If not, why?
 - b. Are you still friendly with your siblings?
 - c. Do they still live with your parents?
4. What was your childhood like?
 - a. Did you have a best friend? Are you still in touch?
 - b. Did you have a rival? Are you still rivals?
 - c. Did you have a role model? Describe him or her.
 - d. Did you witness or remember an event that was historically important? What was it?
5. Were you wealthy or poor growing up?
 - a. Did your family's fortunes change? If so, why?
6. Can you read and write? If not, why?
7. Have you ever been married or coupled with a significant other?
 - a. Are you still together? If not, why?
 - b. Do you have any children together? Have you adopted any children?
 - c. How do you feel about your significant other's family?
8. Did you practice any trades before becoming an adventurer?
 - a. Why did you change careers?
9. Who trained you in your current skills?
 - a. How do you feel about this person or the organization he or she represents?
10. Do you have any close friends?
 - a. Why are they your friends?
 - b. What would you do for your friends?
11. Do you have any bitter enemies?
 - a. What caused this person or persons to become your enemy?
 - b. Would you kill your enemy?
12. What are your goals and dreams in life?
 - a. Why do you have these goals?
 - b. How do you plan to attain these dreams?
 - c. How does adventuring fit into those goals and dreams?
13. Do you have any retirement plans?
 - a. Do you have a will? If not, why?
 - b. Who would your possessions and wealth go to if you should meet an untimely end?

14. How do you feel about killing?
 - a. What would drive your character to kill, and why?
15. How do you feel about death?
 - a. Do you believe in the afterlife? Describe your beliefs.

RELIGION

1. What are your moral or religious beliefs?
 - a. How far would you go to defend these beliefs?
 - b. Who or what taught you these beliefs?
2. If opposing religions exist, how do you feel about them?
 3. Do you get along with other members of your church or belief system?
 - a. Do you practice a form of religion that is considered heretical?

FOR THE GM

These many questions might be too much for some new players, especially children, to fill out. Instead, you might ask them to answer just ten or as few as five. The answers to even a few of these questions can really help flesh out a character.

Freely expand these questions to suit your campaign setting. If there was a recent historical event, such as a large-scale war, you might ask your players how their characters feel about the event, if they were involved, or if they lost a loved one because of it.

PERSONALITY

1. What are your personality traits and personal habits?
 - a. How do others react to them?
2. Do you have any distinctive physical traits?
 - a. Scars or tattoos? How did you acquire them?
 - b. How do people react to them?
3. Do you get along with other people?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. Do others consider you trustworthy?
4. How do you treat other people?
 - a. How do you handle their quirks and personalities?
 - b. What personalities irritate you the most?
5. Do you have a daily routine? How do you react to its interruption?
6. Do you have any mental quirks or illnesses, such as phobias or obsessions?
 - a. How do others react to them?
 - b. Where do they stem from? ◆



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Names matter. Whether they are for a child, a business, or even an adventuring party. Many cultures believe names possess their own special kind of magic, shrouding them in taboos and elaborate rituals to safeguard their use. In their own enigmatic ways, the shamans and tribal chiefs who lead these societies understand that a name is part of a person, perhaps as integral as a hand or foot. They set a tone, sending a message to the rest of the world.

Throughout history, folklore, and fiction, the most celebrated and infamous groups have taken on a separate reality. With their own names, their own identities, these organizations evolved and took shape. Sports teams already recognize this very primal aspect of human nature. Names give groups life.

NAMING NAMES

Potential sources for names abound, filling our imaginations like stars in the night sky. Yet, even in the firmament above, some stars shine brighter than others. Outlined below are six of the most common sources of inspiration drawn upon when naming adventuring parties.

Remember, a party's name ought to reflect its members' highest aspirations and most fundamental values. When choosing a name, give some thought to the sorts of themes you hope to explore in the campaign, and to the types of adventures in which you are most interested. Do you want to get rich? Then perhaps a name like the Gluehands — implying that valuables shall never leave your grasp without a struggle — might fit. Are you intent upon defending the weak from a hostile world? Maybe a name like the Bladewalls sends the right message.

Affiliation: You use your party's name to demonstrate or at least suggest a connection to a more powerful and well-known organization, such as a church, a merchant league, an order of wizards, or a similarly influential group. Since powerful groups tend to have powerful enemies, this approach puts you at risk, especially at lower levels. However, if you actually do manage to strike up some kind of relationship with the group, perhaps becoming one of its strike forces, you gain the ability to draw upon its formidable resources for your own purposes.

Names of this type rely heavily upon the cooperation of your GM and his willingness to shape the campaign around the relationship. Since affiliation usually ends up as a two way street, often requiring you to go on missions or deal with problems arising from your connection to the organization, most GMs readily see the appeal. A campaign set in a city modeled upon early Constantinople, where political factions organized around support of various chariot teams, might spawn a group calling itself the Thunder of the Red Banner, a hit squad for the red team. On the other hand, a group working as troubleshooters for a merchant league called the Iron Throne might take to calling themselves the Ironclads.

Animals and Things: In this, perhaps the most common approach, you associate your name with a living creature, a natural phenomenon, or an object. Usually you hope to imply a link with one of the virtues of the namesake, a shared quality such as lethality or resilience. Unless someone in the campaign world reveres, or loathes, the namesake

of your group and tries to punish you for your blasphemy, this approach seldom incurs much of a penalty. However, it also rarely draws many advantages to your group either. The key to using this approach revolves around deciding what sort of image you wish to convey, and then finding a suitable candidate to make the link. For instance, boars have a reputation for their ferocity; so if you wanted your group identified by aggressiveness and combativeness, take a moniker like the Band of the Boar. On the other hand, if you wanted to send a message of deadly grace, a name like the Silk Sabers or the Diamond Dragonflies might seem more appropriate.

Location: You use your party's name to show support and affection for a particular place or time. Groups adopting this approach often base names upon their hometowns or the area in which they devote much of their adventuring time. This approach gives you the advantage of creating a sense of kinship with others who share your attachment to the area you have chosen. Conversely, taking a name of this type makes you a dangerous obstacle for those who hate the area, and it presents your enemies with a wonderful target when looking for a way to hurt you.

Since, as mentioned above, this approach gives GMs many opportunities for plot development, most welcome these sorts of names. With your GMs consent, it also gives you an opportunity to take on a role as a campaign designer by creating interesting game elements focused on the area for which you feel such regard. This includes things like cherished NPCs (relatives, childhood friends), community events (the annual monster parade) and special places (the old fishing hole, lookout rock). A group spending most of its time probing into a dangerous wetland might dub themselves the Exiles of Everswamp. On the other hand, a group intent upon protecting their hometown from all threats might take a name like the Guardians of Graydale.

Goal: You associate your name with a noteworthy objective you hope to achieve. This includes things like political change, the discovery of a lost treasure, the eradication of a particularly feared monster, or just about anything else that comes to mind. Names of this type tend to throw you into the maelstrom of your campaign world's politics right from the beginning. By taking such a public stand on an important issue, you immediately discover both enemies and allies.

This approach relies heavily upon the cooperation of your GM. However, since it rapidly brings the campaign into focus and makes it very easy to create and link adventures together, most welcome names of this type. A group intent upon overthrowing a cabal of tyrannous undead might call themselves the Gravediggers. While a group devoted to restoring an exiled royal family might call themselves the Crown Guard.

Patron: This approach incorporates the name of person into that of your group, either usually to show support or to indicate that you enjoy some sort of relationship with a powerful backer. A well-known example from popular culture is *Charlie's Angels*, a team of beautiful women working for a mysterious and hidden figure of mystery.



This approach only requires the cooperation of your GM if you hope to derive some benefit from it. Simply calling yourselves the True Blades of Princess Althea in no way requires that she actually use her influence on your behalf. Often, your GM might demand that you earn the trust of your patron, requiring you to prove your worth over a number of adventures. Sometimes, you might take a name purely as a tribute, not expecting any sort of benefit from it. For instance, you could call yourselves the Fist of the Prophet, even though you enjoy no actual relationship with the faith or church the prophet founded.

Signature: Recognizing that the members of your party enjoy some sort of identifying trait, you take a name that celebrates this shared connection. Names of this type often note a common race, gender, national origin, and similar things. Alternately, it could represent some distinguishing characteristic such as a tattoo, badge, or item of clothing.

Names of this type seldom need much GM involvement since they largely depend upon your own conception of your character. A party of albinos might sweep across the land gaining fame as the Frostguard. An early encounter with lycanthropes, and a hastily improvised modification of a helm, could lead to a party famed as the Silverspikes. ◆

FIFTY FAMILY UNITS

Characters are not just products of where they were born. Perhaps more important is who raised you, and how. Below is a selection of parents and families for your next fifty characters. Simply find one you like, and change the name.

1. Callisto's talent for mapmaking and calligraphy won him a prestigious apprenticeship with a master cartographer. However, after his mother's death, he had to give up his apprenticeship to care for his six younger siblings and drunkard father.
2. Cleaning the ferret cages every morning was always a chore for Dimmon, but with the help of his brother he used the ferrets to torment his boorish stepsister and stepbrother.
3. Breren worked in the sawmill for four years without knowing the foreman was his father.
4. Calluna would defend her siblings to the death, even though they were sired by a different father. Her own father — a dangerous man — was seldom unmentioned in the home.
5. Gerwin spent little time with his diplomat father and socialite mother. Instead, he took after his halfling nannies.
6. Holissa frequently came home scraped and bruised from fighting the neighborhood bullies in defense of her father (and his unusual penchant for necromancy).
7. Markel's orc mother tutored him in the skills of the woodsfolk, while his well-connected human father introduced him to metropolitan high society.
8. Urson's father runs a shabby burlesque theater in the docks district. His sister tends bar, serving reeking platters of questionable meat to drunks and rogues.
9. Pinare's aunt never realized the beauty her niece would become. At fourteen, Pinare ran away from the farm, but her aunt forgave her when Pinare charmed the Guilder boys into bringing in the harvest that fall.
10. Sharnor's fanatical parents never tolerated any deviance from scripture. Predictably, he rebelled and ran away at an early age. Always the charismatic scoundrel, he left the village with half its teenagers in tow.
11. Ilissa's beloved Aunt Jolea sewed the gown for her wedding, but when Uncle Bori got drunk and propositioned her at the reception, Ilissa fled the village, leaving scandal in her wake.
12. Linbert's schoolmaster was a firm believer in harsh discipline, but it was nowhere near as cruel as the treatment Linbert received at home.
13. Marnar's family apprenticed him to an undertaker, a distant cousin by marriage. Marnar spent the nights of his first year watching over corpses, forced to use caskets as makeshift beds.
14. Pino's father abused his family without remorse. Mother could never stand up to him, so Pino staked her father to his bed with a pitchfork and fled the village forever.
15. Master Kroff was hard to look at. His burnt visage was terrible to behold, but he was the kindest of all attendants at the Black Rock Orphanage.
16. The son of a local priest who always faltered during his sermons, Lomgrin grew up fighting the bullies that mocked his father's stuttering.
17. Hawstings' father was a gifted storyteller whose tales of heroes and monsters entertained the local children. His father's heart was broken, though, when Hawsting set off to live those same tales.
18. Abech, an aging shaman, gave his grandson Uboge of the clan Heresti a sacred task: spare the life of every tenth enemy, so that their people's prophecy might come true.
19. Grz'lk'ah's hive is deep in a volcanically active pit. Though he misses the warmth of home, the telepathic soothing of his thousand siblings comforts him.
20. Horbal's father, Bekk, had three wives: Majmar, Loralle and Gerta. Bekk also had three co-husbands, Olan, Rabban and Cann. His mother was Loralle, but he loved Majmar more. Bekk was a fine father, while Olan and Rabban were more like brothers. Cann, he does not know all that well. He often wonders how it is possible that he is an only child.
21. When Wislaw hears the sweet tune of a hammer working iron upon an anvil, he drifts back to Kopina Village and Uncle Tobiasz's workshop ... and how it was before the bandits came and changed everything.
22. Aristides never suspected that his father, Oulixeus, lied about winning the city lottery. Sent to pick up the winnings, he fell into the hands of slavers who knew his father by name.

23. Braezel, the son of a prosperous baron, never wondered where his next meal was coming from. After falling in love with the daughter of a servant, he forsook his life of luxury for one of asceticism.
24. Neena took over the operations of her father's copper mine after he lost his leg and left hand, but she was not jaded enough to keep it from slipping into her uncle's insidious hands.
25. Raised by a single mother in a house with six sisters, Garendell learned what type of songs and stories interested the ladies, and used that to further his career as a minstrel.
26. Never knowing his father, Cleston ranged from town to town on the Bleak Peninsula searching for the man who abandoned his mother to a life of poverty and crime.
27. Minda's parents never understood her bizarre powers and scolded her ceaselessly. Leaving that puritanical town was the best thing a sorcerer could do.
28. A youth spent hauling in the seine nets gave Kian muscles of iron. When he was abducted by the Jagtooth pirates they sold him to an arena, but it was those same muscles, and his skill with a net, that won his freedom.
29. Bored with being the third son in a dying noble house, Nellus left the big city, forsook his legacy and struck out to win his own name in the world.
30. To win the respect of his father and the village elders, Vikrym left his people to become a skald in the lands of the unclean. One day he will return to unite his people under one banner and lead cleanse the lands of the wicked.
31. When people think she is sleeping, Imani's spirit joins those of her people in her distant homeland. She meets nightly with her parents, Ayanna and Ashur, entwining their love with her own.
32. Phyzar's parents are famous retired adventurers who have saved every kingdom from certain doom at least twice. For years, Phyzar tried to escape the shadow of their greatness. Now he is not shy about using their names to hustle free drinks and woo a tavern wench or two.
33. Temra's bloodline carries the curse of insanity, and most of her family members are confined to asylums or worse. She escaped their fate but searches the world for a cure, sending back gold in the hopes of improving their conditions.
34. Peasants on a poor lord's manor, Joaram was born into his family's grinding poverty. Embarrassed by his uncouth brothers and toothless parents, he seldom sends home gold, for fear that they might come to join him.
35. A drunken slattern raised poor Qur, leaving him tied up with the dogs while she serviced her johns or binged on wine and opium. One day, he chewed through his ropes and ran off. His short stint as a street tough, and subsequent arrest, led to a pardon when he agreed to join the city guard. Though he remains illiterate, the guard gave him solid military training.
36. The townsfolk of Kronisboro expected the Baron's firstborn son, Sterim, to one day inherit his father's throne. This all changed when his father took a younger mistress as his queen. Sterim, unable to suppress his affection for his new stepmother, fled the city, forever scorned. Now that his father has died and his stepmother is queen, who will rule the barony?
37. The daughter of the royal washerwoman, Yvella grew up longing for more from life. One night, she found a key to the prince's bedroom in the wash and stole it. Later that day, she entered his chamber and made off with the prince's jeweled crown. When the royal guards found the key hidden in a laundry basket, they accused her mother of the theft and had her executed.
38. On the long journey out of Agaros, a harsh winter storm stranded the caravan carrying Wynton's family. The family survived by cannibalism, and when the storm broke there was one fewer pack wagon headed east. Their family, and others members of the caravan, do their best to keep this secret well hidden.
39. The son of a pig keeper, Bokao used to find strange things ground into the feed. Unbeknownst to him, his father was paid by a local crime lord to dispose of victims' bodies by mixing them with the slop. Later he would come to learn that it was this same grisly practice that put him through an expensive and prestigious academy.
40. Brought to the Priory of Saint Ganang as a very young boy, Yuzang knows no family but the monks who raised him and taught him to read, write, and perform his daily duties. Their memory is an inspiration, but it is hard to live up to their pious example outside the monastery walls.
41. Phenairis' father died at war. His mother took up with the next warlord, abandoning her son to the mob of beggars and orphans that followed the troop from one battle to the next.
42. Jalli carries five candles representing members of his family: two white for the deceased, and three red for the living. He lights them for a few minutes every night, and speaks to his family while the candles burn.
43. Raised by her aunt, a wretched harridan with breath and a visage to match, Olana knew only hard work, misery, and pain. No matter how high she climbs in life, she will never forget the lessons learned at the end of her aunt's barbed whip.