Factions, Friends & Foes
by scott virtes

a.k.a "Almost Instant Motivation"

Random encounters are easy to generate. But the tables in most game books focus on what you've encountered, and give no hints on why you've encountered it, or how it will react. Sometimes the books suggest that you should make a reaction roll, where high numbers are good and low numbers are bad. But this still leads to a lot of encounters that come out feeling pointless. I want to provide some other options for adding color to campaign encounters.

Note that the numbers given for the selections on each table are not meant for you to roll. Just pick the items you feel are most suitable or interesting. I prefer to choose options from simple lists, instead of rolling dice and looking things up in a book.

Faction Fever

At the campaign level, you should consider setting up a variety of conflicting factions. By "faction" I mean any grouping of people with a common goal. People naturally come together and form groups with common goals. Whether we call these groups factions, gangs, clubs, guilds, political parties, or some other name does not matter. The established government is a faction, and any group of people with similar objectives can be a faction, even if they never get together and make things happen.

You can assign factions to players, let players choose their faction secretly, or, best of all, let the player characters discover the groups in the towns they visit. There are a lot of different types of factions, such as:

> **Table 1. Faction types**
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> 1. keepers of knowledge (general or specific)
> 2. social group
> 3. political party
> 4. religious party
> 5. guild or trade group
> 6. militia
> 7. extremist group
> 8. social class
> 9. rights organization (animal rights, right to vote, etc)
> 10. informal

Some of my favorite published campaigns have started with well-designed factions, such as Rolemaster's Ardor, AD&D's Planescape series, and the whole game of Paranoia. Just knowing the

type of faction, and giving it an appropriately cool or obscure name isn't all we can do. Note that some people may be members of multiple factions, but other faction combinations should be forbidden. For example, if your character is a member of Kazan's Church of Flaming Death, he might not be welcome in the Brothers of Peace.

An informal faction is an unorganized group who might come together in a crisis, or who may simply have a hatred for some other group. Example: "the oppressed farmers," who may be plentiful, but haven't gotten together to form a mob or union yet.

Table 2. Faction Status
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1. rapidly growing
2. slowly growing
3. stagnant
4. slowly shrinking
5. rapidly dying off
6. only a few extreme members left
7. at a moment of truth
8. at a moment of crisis

Table 3. Faction Activity
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1. meetings are primarily social, no actions ever taken
2. meetings are low-key, individuals are given secret missions
3. meetings are average, occasional actions taken
4. meetings are lively, the group regularly takes action
5. meetings are a frenzy, fanatic, group takes extreme action
6. no actual meetings

We already have enough ideas to build some interesting groups: from a dwindling social group with secret missions to a rapidly growing extremist militia.

Table 4. Level of Secrecy
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1. extreme secrecy: no identifying symbols or garb, members will never admit to
        being in the group
2. moderate secrecy: identifying symbol is hidden or no larger than a ring,
        members may admit to being members, but will not give away the location
        of any meetings
3. average secrecy: identifying symbols or outfits are optional, members are fairly
        free to do what they want

4. no secrecy: meeting may be held in very public places, well advertised or
     promoted
5. in-your-face: these groups want everyone to know about them, and members
     actively try to recruit nonmembers

These are some of the factors involved in making interesting factions. The most important is the actual goal of the faction. There are so many possibilities here that I hesitate to make a list, but here goes ...

Table 5. Faction Goal
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1. seek wealth, power, glory
2. elect, control, or overthrow the government
3. control the population
4. destroy another faction
5. promote goods or services
6. seek religious enlightenment
7. destroy society
8. spread good, evil, law or chaos
9. research & education
10. hoard all magic items, relics, or rarities
11. crime, thieving, and mayhem
12. find the secrets of the universe
(feel free to add your own ideas here)

An alternate way to define or flesh out a faction is to choose several things the group focuses on. Table 5a and 5b describe some focus objects and the strength of the feelings that a group might have for them. A group that worships it's founding members, for example, would be a cult. Another group might have a mild disregard for human life and an appreciation of fine weapons. This table could go on forever, but here are some ideas to get you started:

Table 5a. Faction Focus
----
1. ancestors
2. founding members
3. weapons, combat or violence
4. wealth
5. political power
6. other faction
7. life
8. human life
9. animal life (or a specific animal)
10. law & order
11. chaos & destruction
12. music & the arts

(for high-tech games, add:)
13. education & knowledge
14. machines
15. vehicles
16. computers

(add your own objects of desire here)

Table 5b. Focus Feelings

Negative:
1. vow to destroy
2. burning hatred
3. normal hatred
4. mild dislike or disregard

Positive:
5. mild liking
6. normal love or fascination
7. crazed obsessive love
8. worship

We can't set any hard rules for how many focus objects a faction should have. I think one positive and one negative focus makes a concise, understandable group, although some combinations can be downright funny. Maybe even a group that loves old cars but kills bears on sight. You're free to go overboard if you'd like. Sometimes, the funny or bizarre options can really liven up a gaming session -- after all, there are rogues out there who have completely lost their marbles.

Friends and Foes

Now that we have a fairly good framework for describing factions, we can start looking at individual motivations. Assigning non-player characters to factions has one nice benefit -- players get to try and find out what factions are in the game and how they operate, plus the factions provide recurring themes which can help hold a story together.

Not everyone is looking for a fight, either. Compare a blind encounter where you roll dice, pick a critter, and have it attack immediately with an encounter where you roll a human, and find out he's from the same faction as half your party. Here's someone who can help out, or raise suspicions about the other half of your party. Here are some possibilities:

Table 6. Faction Member Status
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1. fanatically loyal
2. loyal
3. neutral

4. disenchanted
5. renegade (former member with a serious grudge)
6. former member with no grudge
7. double agent for some other faction
8. infiltrated law officer

Not everyone will get a faction. You can use the Table 3 to Table 6 to describe any individual's secret goals and behavior. For example, you might encounter a woman who is lively and likely to take action (from table 3), fairly secretive about her goals (table 4), with a goal of destroying the Blue Biker faction (table 5), who is currently disenchanted (table 6). Here's a character who's fairly unpredictable, but probably a lot of fun to roleplay. If some of your party are Blue Bikers, the encounter might be very different than if you were on a crusade to wipe them out.

True, even the old AD&D rules had an appendix of tables where you could roll up an NPC's "personality". But you could get some wacky combinations, like depressed optimistic pacifists. I prefer to work with basic motivations and figure out the personality from there.

One more feature normally left out of encounters is: why is the NPC at the spot where the encounter happens? Here are some possible reasons:

Table 7. Why is NPC here?
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1. just passing through on his way to _____
2. visiting family or friends in nearby town
3. out on an adventure
4. on a quest
5. had a faction meeting nearby
6. just visiting (tourist)
7. works nearby
8. goes to school nearby
9. on patrol
10. scouting out the area for faction
11. going to market nearby
12. looking for victims
13. going to sports event or game nearby
14. is lost

Some of these options may directly affect the encounter. If the NPC's family is nearby, they should actually be with him half the time. If the NPC is on patrol, there are probably other patrolling NPCs nearby. If the NPC goes to a school or training hall nearby, he might recommend it to party members -- that's an encounter that can be much more valuable than knocking off another nobody for 20 experience points. A good trainer is hard to find.

So far, we've seen a lot of factors that can make encounters more colorful. Knowing something about where an NPC comes from and how he fits into the game world is a good thing. Having some pre-designed factions makes it easier to generate complex characters. Once you know the

faction, you need only roll on Table 6 to find out how the NPC feels about his faction, and Table 7 will tell you how the NPC got to the area where the encounter happens. That gives you a lot of background information with only two rolls.

Once you have created some colorful characters, you might try harder to keep them alive. Most intelligent beings will flee or plead for their lives if threatened, and few things in a long campaign are as entertaining as some well-established friends and foes who escape certain death and come back with a vengeance a few days later. And you can make entire sessions out of trying to identify, infiltrate and break up the foul secret societies which are tearing your kingdoms apart.

Somewhere in the multiverse, there really is a cult called Kazan's Church of Flaming Death. They're up to no good, and only your scruffy gang of heroes can stop them.