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Characters with Character: Random Personality Generator

By
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I don't know about you but when I sit down for a one-shot game with a pregen character, I can't always come up with a unique and interesting personality on the fly. Sometimes the class, race and skill combo strikes a chord, but usually it's just numbers. To help get me started, I created this quick little Random Personality Generator to come up with the foundations of a character's persona in three rolls and a minute or so of thought. This is by no means extensive (though the system can in fact be expanded quite significantly), but is intended to jump start your mind about how to turn a flat, pregenerated statblock into a more living and dynamic character.

Using the Generator is a snap. Grab 3d12 and roll away. The first die is your Motivation, the second your Instinct and the third your Approach. Then pick a descriptor (or make up one that seems similar) and write it down somewhere on the sheet. When you get into a roleplaying scenario which you don't quite know how to play out, reference the Traits you've chosen to help guide your decisions.

Motivation: What is it that really gets your character's motor running?

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 – Glory, Victory, Dominance | 7 – Equality, Beauty, Justice |
| 2 – Security, Stability, Sensual Pleasure | 8 – Secrets, Power, Intense Experience |
| 3 – Information, Debate, Cleverness | 9 – Exploration, Cultural Exchange, Idealism |
| 4 – Protection, Nurturing, Family Values | 10 – Authority, Discipline, Wisdom |
| 5 – Fame, Influence, Enlightenment | 11 – Individuality, Invention, Eccentricity |
| 6 – Service, Fiddly Details, Loyalty | 12 – Unity, Interpersonal Connections, Faith |

Instinct: What is your character's first reaction to a threat (physical or otherwise)?

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 – Hostility, Aggression, Attack | 7 – Diplomacy, Negotiation, Invoke Law |
| 2 – Stand Ground, Dig In, Establish Defenses | 8 – Ambush, Fight Dirty, Seduce |
| 3 – Misdirection, Debate, Speed | 9 – Dismiss, Defuse Anger, Seek Commonality |
| 4 – Protect Others, Claim Territory, Spread Out | 10 – Form Up, Invoke Tradition, Organize Allies |
| 5 – Call Aid, Posture, Intimidation | 11 – Confound, Taunt, Fire Needlessly Big Gun |
| 6 – Observe, Exploit Weakness, Maneuver | 12 – Stall, Give In, Fall Back |

Approach: What archetype is your character best known for being?

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 – Brave Warrior | 7 – Fair Judge |
|-------------------|----------------|

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- 2 – Stalwart Defender 8 – Intense Loner
- 3 – Speedy Trickster 9 – Thoughtful Explorer
- 4 – Nurturing Healer 10 – Disciplined Commander
- 5 – Proud Noble 11 – Brilliant Rebel
- 6 – Devoted Craftsman 12 – Ethereal Mystic

Now just because every character in D&D is combat-capable does not necessarily make them all warrior-type personalities. By the same token, your characters don't need to have Traits that match their class or race. For example, it would make sense for a Tactical Warlord to have Instinct 10 (Form Up) or Approach 10 (Disciplined Commander). However, a TacLord with an Instinct 5 (Claim Territory) could be thought to prefer a 'zone' defense over a 'man-to-man' defense. That same TacLord could have the Approach 11 (Brilliant Rebel) because his tactics are so unorthodox to his time and culture. Don't dismiss any roll as "bad" or "nonsensical;" the best characters are the ones that have the most dimension – and maybe even contradictions – within their persona. The following characters were generated completely randomly in the Character Builder plus the Personality Generator.

Carrion, Tiefling Earth Warden

Motivation 3 (Information); Instinct 4 (Protect Others); Approach 10 (Disciplined Commander)

Though the city of Bael Turath stands in ruins, much of the Tiefling heritage lies buried ignobly around the Known World. Carrion has decided that in order to best regain the lost knowledge and culture of her ancestors, she must become one with the earth that she might one day command it to yield its claim. She makes her living protecting scholars and archaeologists on their dig sites, warning them of danger and leading a small cohort against the monsters that make their lairs in forgotten places.

Raven, Revenant Tempest Fighter

Motivation 8 (Intense Experience); Instinct 10 (Invoke Tradition); Approach 12 (Ethereal Mystic)

Most living beings fear death. Most living beings haven't also come back from beyond death. For the one who now calls himself Raven, death was the greatest rush ever. The adrenaline, the momentarily heightened senses, the utter unimportance of everything that isn't happening RIGHT NOW – no worldly pleasure was ever so strong. Raven wants it again. Raven NEEDS it. Those who have met Raven swear he worships the last moments of a being's life as though they were more sacred than all else. Thus he is easier than many to hire for nearly suicidal missions – so long as your quest is more harrowing than the last he was on. Some are confused by his almost chivalric code of combat, but the men and women who have fought beside him know better. There is no honor, no nobility in those eyes. There is only need – the need to prolong the thrill as long as possible and surrender to it.

Gennal, Elf Telepathic Psion

Motivation 2 (Security); Instinct 6 (Exploit Weakness); Approach 7 (Fair Judge)

The inside of the mind is much less structured than one would expect. It is malleable, pliable, almost...stretchy. No one knows this better than a telepath – particularly one whose powers were forced upon him against his will. Gennal was not born, but made a telepath by the constant psychic intrusion of a far more powerful Unseelie Fey lord who had kidnapped and enslaved him at a young age. He escaped only by luck. In a flash of psionic frenzy, Gennal convinced his captor that the structure they were in had caught fire – the bane of the winter fey. Since then, Gennal has used his mind-reading and mind-affecting abilities to bring foes much larger and more powerful than himself to their knees, if only long enough for someone else to finish the job. Gennal's companions value his ability to know an enemy's weakness and discern quickly whether a particular foe must be dispatched or still has redeeming qualities. Only when the fey lord who kidnapped Gennal is deposed and Gennal has built up his mental defenses to the point where he feels truly safe will he retire from the adventuring life.

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About the Author



Ryven Cedrylle was introduced to 2nd edition D&D by his father at age 8 and has been hooked ever since. When not out somewhere with his nerd-loving wife, he spends an inordinate amount of time staring at small objects – primarily beakers, stars, books about religion and virtual gaming miniatures. Ryven and his wife are also trying to adopt a baby after being diagnosed with unexplained infertility. Please help improve their agency's publicity by Liking Everlasting Adoptions on [Facebook!](#)

4 Comments

1. [EgoPoisoning](#)
Posted November 8, 2010 at 2:31 PM

Bookmarked. Couldn't come at a better time with my sandbox campaign starting up!

2. [Alphastream](#)
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There was a great old setting-independent book a friend of mine had that walked you through lots of tables to generate a PC. It was pretty useful, even when you already had a rough idea. I'll post if I can find the name of it.

3.  [MAK](#)

Posted November 9, 2010 at 2:44 AM

Very useful! Where did you find the motivations & instincts? They do remind me of some personality analysis models that I've seen...

4.  [Alphastream](#)

Posted November 9, 2010 at 3:31 AM

I found it, though it is long out of print and sells for about \$50. It is called Central Casting: Heroes of Legend. I've provided a few links to similar sites on my blog.

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