



#### DRAGON EXERCISES 05

## Meeting Your Characters

### 1 REMEMBER YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTERS

Write down your five favorite video game characters. What is their backstory? What is their goal? What do you like about them? (Be specific. Answers like “she’s cool” or “he’s bad-ass” don’t help you at all.) What traits do they have? Write down a one-line description of each character.

Now, maybe even more importantly, in the same game, who is their antagonist? Who or what are the main obstacles holding the hero at bay? The pigs in *Angry Birds*. The Reapers of *Mass Effect*. Write down a one-line description of the protagonist’s antagonist.

### 2 MAKE CHARACTER CREATION CARDS

On ten index cards, list *ten ordinary professions*. Something we all might have the ability to become: teacher, policeman, fireman, waiter, trucker, professor, scientist. Not super hero or galactic bounty hunter. Now you might say, “I want my character to be a bad-ass fireman!” First of all, we told you not to use “bad-ass,” because it’s not specific (and a cliché). *Give them a flaw*. An “arrogant fireman with something to prove,” is inherently more interesting than a “bad-ass” because we recognize (and empathize with) insecurity. Commander Shepherd in *Mass Effect* is arrogant and is also the first human to join the Spectres. Insecure? Oh, yes!

On ten more index cards, list *ten character archetypes*. There are many different archetypes you can use, but we want to avoid such over-used tropes as “man out for revenge,” or “bad-ass space marine,” or

“amnesiac loner.” (Wait, characters from *God of War* those stories spin the tropes of our solar system a sun or the moon to get to associated with each planet and love and warmth. Mercury is cool. Mercury is quick use those impressions a per card.

Take a final set of ten hero time travels to an alien race. He goes into the middle of a sub-Saharan

Shuffle the cards of three. Keep them in three separate stacks. What combination that really

Finally, write in the will force your main character end of the story? Does y



“amnesiac loner.” (Wait a second, you might say: you just described the characters from *God of War*, *Halo*, and *Silent Hill*. Yes, but the writers of those stories spin the tropes on their heads.) Let’s instead use the planets of our solar system as our archetypes. (Include Pluto and either the sun or the moon to get to an even ten.) Think about what traits might be associated with each planet. For example, to us, Venus conjures up mist and love and warmth. Mars evokes feelings of battle and rage. Neptune is cool. Mercury is quick. You may have very different associations. But use those impressions as the basis of your character’s archetypes, one per card.

Take a final set of ten cards and list *ten extraordinary situations*. Your hero time travels to an ancient Rome where humans are enslaved by an alien race. He goes into hell to try to kill Satan. She crash-lands in the middle of a sub-Saharan civil war and has to choose sides.

Shuffle the cards of each type: profession, archetype, and situation. Keep them in three separate stacks. Then mix and match cards from each of the stacks. What did you come up with? Keep at it until you have a combination that really excites you.

Finally, write in three sentences how the extraordinary situation will force your main character to change. Who will they become by the end of the story? Does your bossy Jupiter learn to play nice with others?