

the 9Qs
solo rpg engine
2013 edition

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Welcome to the 9Qs!

Derived from screenwriting techniques, the 9Qs are nine questions that guide a solo player through spontaneous role-playing game adventures by directing and inspiring the creation of exciting encounters. Those encounters will become the building blocks of a complete story, from the intriguing opening sequences to the climactic final confrontation between the heroes and their greatest threats!

To make this happen, the 9Qs exploits the unique rhythm that is the interplay between the Game Master and the Player Characters. During a game, you are *both* the GM and the PCs. So, as you play, you'll be presented with the challenge of creating a cohesive narrative out of disparate inspirations and the heroic actions of PCs.

Step 1: Choose your RPG

Any role-playing game that does not have a plot structure imposed upon its mechanics may be used with the 9Qs. Since the 9Qs engine only guides narrative action between GM and PCs, none of the RPG's rules will be altered.

When selecting the setting for the adventure, it is recommended that you choose a world that is somewhat familiar to you. With only a vague notion of place, it is more likely that you will get "stuck" interpreting the results of the random idea generator. Furthermore, in this new edition, there are opportunities for random place selection that could produce surprising encounters. So, your efforts will be well served if associations to the setting can be made without too much of a struggle.

Step 3: Create your PC(s)

Since most RPGs are designed to be played with a group, it is perfectly appropriate to use the 9Qs to run multiple Player Characters. If you prefer to run a single PC, no adjustments need to be made to the 9Qs. However, the RPG system you have chosen may contain threats too difficult for a single hero to handle. If that's the case, your lone champion might not make it through all of the Qs!

No matter how many PCs you run, your heroes will need a way to be bound together so that the 9Qs engine can run smoothly. Although PCs will have individual goals, they should also all share a single **heroic motivation**, an explicit purpose or philosophy that clearly articulates why they put themselves in mortal danger on a regular basis, e.g., defending the kingdom, defeating a great evil, completing an epic task, and so on. The heroic motivation will often become the "target" of the 9Qs.

Step 3: Select a Random Idea Generator

During the adventure, the 9Qs will prompt a player to use a "random idea generator" to inspire the creation of various narrative elements. This is any product or application that produces non-specific yet evocative words or images that will trigger new ideas when combined with the contextual elements of a particular situation.

Many random idea generators exist that would work well with the 9Qs. There are published products, freely-accessible websites, and clever techniques for homemade inspiration. Here are a few suggestions.

- **Rory's Story Cubes by The Creativity Hub.** These different sets of nine six-sided dice feature clever images that allow a player to roll inspiration instantly. Use one cube for each of the 9Qs and interpret the results literally, figuratively, or tangentially. Currently, I have combined the original set, the *Actions* set, and the *Voyages* set into a single dice bag, and I draw my inspiration literally from there!
- **Mythic Game Master Emulator by Word Mill Games.** This classic in GM-less roleplaying by Tom Pigeon includes Action and Subject charts that can be used with the 9Qs to endlessly generate combinations of generic words usable in any genre.
- **The Idea Generator by CreativityGames.net.** It's a web-based app that can generate a random word or generic image with the click of a mouse. Click more than once to receive any number of the two. Find it at ideagenerator.creativitygames.net.
- **Idea Generator by The Directors Bureau.** An application available on many devices, this tool will generate a combination of three words from default lists that can be easily edited to become a bank of customized, world-specific terms. A very useful product in the right hands!
- **Seventh Sanctum.** Steven Savage's website is all about lists of cool, randomized concepts in many different genres. It's as endlessly fun as it is endlessly useful. Check it out at www.seventhsanctum.com.

Step 4: Begin the game!

If you want the adventure to begin with the PC(s) reacting to a sudden threat that emerges from within the setting, start your game with Q1a. If you want the PC(s) to be proactive and boldly march themselves into danger, start your game with Q1b. Either way, proceed to Q2 afterwards and follow all subsequent Qs in order.

And that's it! I hope the 9Qs provides an entertaining and creative challenge that leaves you with a memorable tale to tell when the final Q is answered!

Q1a.

What looming hostility inherent within the setting unexpectedly comes into conflict with the heroic motivation, threatening to worsen over time?

Be the GM first:

- Use the random idea generator to inspire the selection of a threat from the setting.
- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d6 twice for an encounter in which (1-2) an enemy pursues new goals, (3-4) an enemy takes aggressive action against unsuspecting victims, and/or (5-6) an enemy takes aggressive action against the heroes.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur.

Be the PCs next:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the threat as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Be the GM once more:

Close the encounter by resolving NPC reactions to the heroes.

Q1b.

What actions consistent with the heroic motivation do the heroes take that bring them into conflict with a looming hostility inherent within the setting?

Be the PCs first:

- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d4 twice to declare an act of (1) defiance, (2) infiltration, (3) pursuit, and/or (4) combat that will bring the heroes into conflict with one of the known threats that already exists within the setting.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur.

Be the GM next:

Use the random idea generator to inspire an encounter that reacts with appropriate resistance to the heroes' declared act.

Be the PCs once more:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the threat as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Q2.

What unusual event occurs soon afterwards?

Be the GM first:

- Use the random idea generator to inspire a strange or troubling event that defies immediate explanation and does not necessarily appear to be related to what happened during Q1a or b.
- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d6 twice to express the unusual event in an encounter featuring (1-2) intrigue, (3-4) pursuit, and/or (5-6) combat.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur. The place and time do not have to be the same as in Q1a or b.

Be the PCs next:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the strange event as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Be the GM once more:

Close the encounter by resolving NPC reactions to the heroes.

Q3.

What elements of the results of Q1a or b and Q2 suddenly get twisted together in a surprising manner, increasing the danger to the heroic motivation?

Be the GM first:

- Use the random idea generator to inspire a shocking plot twist that wholly or partially expresses a relationship between the threat encountered in Q1a or b and the unusual event experienced in Q2, alluding to greater dangers ahead.
- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d6 twice to express that twist in an encounter of (1-2) betrayal, (3-4) revelation, and/or (5-6) combat.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur. The place and time do not have to be the same as in Q2.

Be the PCs next:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the twist as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Be the GM once more:

Close the encounter by resolving NPC reactions to the heroes.

Q4.

How can the fight be brought to the enemy, gaining ground for the heroic motivation?

Be the PCs first:

- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d4 twice to declare an act of (1) defiance, (2) infiltration, (3) pursuit, and/or (4) combat.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur. The place and time do not have to be the same as in Q3.

Be the GM next:

Use the random idea generator to inspire an encounter that reacts with appropriate resistance to the heroes' declared act.

Be the PCs once more:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the threats as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Q5.

How can any heroic gains from the results of Q4 suddenly be undermined as new information about the true face/scheme/power of the enemy becomes known?

Be the GM first:

- Use the random idea generator to inspire an *evolution* of the threats by more clearly defining the source of the danger and developing its hostility to the heroes and/or the setting.
- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d6 twice for an encounter featuring (1-2) betrayal, (3-4) revelation, and/or (5-6) combat.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur. The place and time do not have to be the same as in Q4.

Be the PCs next:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the threats as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Be the GM once more:

Close the encounter by resolving NPC reactions to the heroes.

Q6.

How can the adverse results from Q4 and Q5 be further intensified, forcing the heroes to commit to a do-or-die course of action in accordance with the heroic motivation?

Be the GM first:

- Use the random idea generator to inspire a worsening of the threats *beyond anything that had been conceived before*, making it clear that if action is not taken against the threats, the consequences will be disastrous.
- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d6 twice for an encounter featuring (1-2) intrigue, (3-4) pursuit, and/or (5-6) combat.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur. The place and time do not have to be the same as in Q5.

Be the PCs next:

Use the heroes' abilities to most effectively respond to the severity of the situation as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Be the GM once more:

Close the encounter by resolving NPC reactions to the heroes.

Q7.

Where can the heroic motivation be most effectively redeemed?

Be the PCs first:

- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d4 twice to declare an act of (1) defiance, (2) infiltration, (3) pursuit, and/or (4) combat that aims to bring an end to the threats.
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur. The place and time do not have to be the same as in Q6.

Be the GM next:

Use the random idea generator to inspire an encounter with relevant threats committed to preventing the heroes' success.

Be the PCs once more:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the threats' resistance as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Q8.

Where does the final showdown between the heroes and the enemy take place in relation to the results of Q7?

Be the GM first:

- Use the random idea generator to inspire a dramatic finish that brings the heroes, their enemy, and any other relevant participants into an ultimate confrontation.
- Choose one or two of the following or roll a d6 twice for an encounter in which (1-2) the enemy nears completion of its goals, (3-4) the enemy takes aggressive action against unsuspecting victims, and/or (5-6) the enemy takes aggressive action against the heroes, *all within the context of the encounters in Questions 1-7.*
- Choose or use the random idea generator to inspire the place where and when the encounter will occur. The place and time do not have to be the same as in Q7.

Be the PCs next:

Use the heroes' abilities to respond to the threats as per their heroic motivation and the RPG's rules.

Be the GM once more:

Close the encounter by resolving NPC reactions to the heroes.

Q9.

Where does the world stand after the results of Q7 and Q8?

Be the GM first:

Use the random idea generator to inspire the way the world responds to the final resolution of the conflict between the heroes and the threats. Clearly or cryptically articulate any change in the status quo of the lives of the heroes or the world itself from the way things had been before the adventure had begun.

Be the PCs next:

Advance the surviving heroes as per the RPG's rules. Acknowledge any gains or losses in their lives.

The NPC 9Qs

When you want the PCs to encounter a Non-Player Character, invent one that suits the moment or answer the following "NPC 9Qs" with your random idea generator.

NPC 9Qs

OBVIOUS TRAITS: discerned by clothes, demeanor, and casual conversation.

1. What is the NPC's role in the world?
2. Where is the NPC's current home or home-base?
3. What is the NPC's signature/unique talent?

PERSONAL TRAITS: gained after establishing trust or sharing a similar world view.

4. What is the NPC's special knowledge about others?
5. What is the NPC's special item/tool/useful possession?
6. What is the NPC's true relationship to an ally or organization?

INTIMATE TRAITS: learned only when the NPC is really won over.

7. What past experience has shaped the NPC's current self?
8. In what present situation is the NPC embroiled?
9. What future goal does the NPC hope to attain?

If you prefer NOT to know everything upfront about the NPC - perhaps preferring to have your PCs win a few social rolls to see if a conversation can lead to acquiring the information - you can answer three questions at a time, addressing the NPC 9Qs in order from the obvious to the intimate.

Let the context of the encounter and the PCs' skills guide how much they - and you - get to learn about the NPC.

Solo Nexus

For more on the 9Qs, including session reports, tips for playing, and discussions on using the engine with a variety of RPGs, head over to my blog, Solo Nexus.

www.solonexus.blogspot.com