



Treasure Tables

GMing advice, tips, ideas and resources • Dedicated to helping GMs

Ten Ways to Find Players & What to Do Next

Welcome to Ten Ways to Find Players & What to Do Next, the seventh free PDF from Treasure Tables, and the first PDF produced by our Wiki-to-PDF Project. This article was created on TT's GMing Wiki over the course of two weeks in 2007, with all six authors contributing material, as well as collaborating on editing and formatting.

Whether you've just moved to a new area or you've lost a group member or two to college, work or other real-life concerns, needing to find a new player or two is something that every GM will have to do at some point. This guide is here to help.

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WAYS TO FIND PLAYERS

Depending on where you live and what options are open to you, you'll probably want to employ more than one of these approaches.

INTERNET

Advertise on forums specific to your system or genre. It's not difficult to poach players from "corporate campaigns" (RPGA, Living City, etc.) with the promise of a regular group. Launch a Yahoo! or Google group, and politely announce it on every forum or mailing list that you think appropriate. Also consider social networking sites like Meetup or even sites like Craig's List.

PLAYER FINDING TOOLS

Beyond forums and mailing lists, there are sites set up specifically to help you find a group. While many are game-specific, Findplay works for all RPGs. Older player databases include Access Denied, while John Kim maintains a list of player finding tools that offers links to a wide variety of sites.

FLGS

Show up on game day at your Friendly Local Gaming Store to ask about interested players. Often, people who are involved in a game want to be in another one that is slightly different. People who play dungeon crawls might also want the social elements that can be found in other games, but would prefer to keep those elements separate from their dungeon crawling fun. Post an ad describing exactly what you're looking for; if you're just after for warm bodies, that's exactly what you'll get.

FLGS CLUBS/GAMING CLUBS

Some gaming and comic stores have "players wanted" lists or contact info for gamers in the area. Many high schools, colleges and universities have gaming clubs where you can go to game with others, or to find potential players. Cold situations like this ("cold" as in first meeting, with no prior contact) are often best handled by getting to know the people there first.

ANIME/SCI-FI CLUBS

Crossovers among gamers and people interested in anime and sci-fi are not at all uncommon. Many people who are into these two genres also enjoy gaming. They may not have been introduced to gaming yet, but they already have a built-in concept of how it will work thanks to the many parallels between these areas.

PUBLIC BULLETIN BOARDS

Many places, such as libraries, bookstores, coffee shops and colleges, have bulletin boards. These bulletin boards have a multitude of flyers up advertising many things. Why not post a notice for "Gaming group wanted" or "Players wanted"? If you're looking to run a specific game, or looking for gamers with a specific style then be sure to mention it in your flyer.

YOUTH/CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

Many eager players who are interested in gaming may be found through youth organizations or church organizations.

ASK AROUND

The “friend of a friend” approach is a great way to find players who are likely to share your interests — after all, if your friend likes them, there’s a good chance that you’ll like them as well. And while not all of your gaming buddies might have been able to join your current group, they may know someone who could.

GAMING OR FANDOM CONVENTIONS

There are more small local gaming or fandom conventions than most people realize. If you can’t find a local convention consider traveling if there is one a reasonable distance away. Get involved in games or panels at the con and talk to the people at the table — you never know who you might run across as a potential player.

BEING AN OPEN GAMER

Sometimes players will find you, if they’re aware that you’re a gamer. If you have a gaming book on your desk at work or wear RPG T-shirts from time to time, that gives potential new players an icebreaker to start a conversation with you about gaming. Lots of people gamed earlier in their lives and then drifted away from the hobby — you might be surprised at who is interested in giving it another try.

BACKGROUND CHECKS & RESEARCH

Once you find a new player, it’s time to make sure that they’re a good fit for your group, and that your group is a good fit for them.

Your prospective player may have played in other games, and met other gamers in the process. If you can, find out from your other gaming buddies if they know anything about this person. Get as much information as you can; “I heard he’s a jerk,” says far less than, “I gamed with him once. He demands the spotlight, and throws tantrums when he doesn’t get it.” If something doesn’t fit with your perceptions, don’t hesitate to ask about it.

If you get a weird vibe from a prospective player (whether over email or when you first meet them) *and* you don’t know anyone who can tell you a bit about them, it’s worth Googling the player. If they’re not active online, you may not get much information — but if they are, you might be surprised what you find. If they have a creepy website, can’t get

involved in a messageboard thread without turning it into a flamewar or otherwise raise any red flags, consider passing on them at that point.

INTERVIEWING NEW PLAYERS

Everyone has horror stories about bad GMs and bad players. We all know of someone who hasn’t wanted to make the effort to play nice with others, or who ruined a game, whether intentionally or just by ignoring how their actions affected others. Bad players are the exception and not the rule, but it’s not a bad idea to get to know a player before allowing them into your game.

An interview with a player does not have to be anything formal (they’re not interviewing for a job, after all), and it should be a fairly laid back process. Meet someplace for lunch, or hang out at your FLGS — anywhere public, as it’s generally a good idea not to invite prospective players over to your house right off the bat. Talk about favorite games or books. What you are looking to see is how this person will work with your current group, and how well you get along with them. If a person does not mesh with your personality that does not say anything bad about you or them. Sometimes people just don’t get along.

It’s hard to distill down to a single question or type of question, but one important maxim for interviewing players is “Don’t just talk about gaming.” It’s important to make sure that your gaming interests overlap, but it’s even more important to be compatible on a social level — and that’s almost impossible to figure out if you don’t bring up other topics.

Once you’ve gotten past the basics and are getting a good feeling that the candidate might fit your gaming group, consider talking about any existing social contract that is in place. As with other subjects, this doesn’t have to be a formal, bulleted-list Q&A session, but covering things like play style (humorous, serious, strategic, etc.), how you handle scheduling and missing players and whether or not the GM fudges die rolls can sometimes uncover potential sources of friction.

For more tips on conducting player interviews, see the Treasure Tables post [Interviewing Prospective Players](#). If you’d like to learn more about social contracts, check out [Social Contracts for RPG Groups](#) and the Social Contract section of our GMing Wiki.

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & TOPICS

You should definitely cover the following areas:

- What your group is playing right now, and what you tend to play, as well as RPGs you avoid like the plague.
- RPGs the prospective player prefers, and why.
- What do they want out of a game?
- Availability and scheduling.
- Friends, family, work, other interests (topics not related to gaming).

And you may also want to cover these topics:

- Character types or archetypes they like to play, and why.
- Why do they enjoy gaming?
- What were their best/worst gaming experiences?
- Ask them to give examples of gaming stereotypes: metagaming, twinkling, powergaming, drama jock, etc.

Your group will probably have specific concerns based on your past experiences with recruiting new players, too. There's no set formula for what kinds of questions you should ask in your gamer interview — this list is just a good place to start.

PASSING ON A PLAYER

If the interview (or the trial period, if you take that approach) doesn't go well, trust your instincts and pass on the prospective player. In this situation, your gut reaction is usually going to be accurate — and if you have any doubts, discussing the interview with your group or playing a trial session with the new player should eliminate any uncertainty one way or the other. Trust your gut.

If you decide to pass on a player, do it politely, directly and as soon as possible. Don't leave them hanging, or go the passive-aggressive route and just never contact them again. And don't make it personal, even if you're passing for personal reasons — there's no need for anyone's feelings to be hurt, after all: it's gaming, not a first date.

TRIAL PERIOD

Okay, so you've found a potential player, and you think he or she will be a nice addition to your table. Since

the rest of the group is going to have to deal with this person as an equal, they should have final approval of the potential player.

Inviting the potential player to a session on a trial basis is a good way to see how things will work out. Some GMs like to have them watch a session; some like to have them play an NPC or other character. Regardless, make sure the potential player knows in advance that they are there on a trial basis, and that he or she knows the point at which their membership becomes official. It may be after one session, or it may be after a few, but let them know in advance.

The goal here is to make the new player feel welcome while presenting an accurate picture of your group. In other words, be friendly, be yourselves and don't walk on eggshells -- if you're going to get along in the long term, they need to see how you actually game (and vice versa).

This trial period is a two-way street. Sometimes a player will love your group, but your group won't love them. Other times you may meet a player you really enjoy gaming with, but find that their style just doesn't mesh with your group. If you're going to recruit a new player on a trial basis, it's a good idea to mention this aspect of things — that the trial gives them a chance to see if they like gaming with you, and vice versa — up front.

SUCCESS

If all goes well, you'll have found a new player who you enjoy gaming with (and who enjoys gaming with you) — and probably made a new friend in the process. That may sound cheesy, but it really is one of the best aspects of gaming, and taking the time to establish compatibility up front makes it a lot more likely to happen.

FAILURE

If the interview doesn't work out, there's a scheduling conflict, the prospective player turns out to be creepy, someone in your group can't stand them or their gaming style doesn't sound like it'll fit well with yours, don't worry. It might take some time, but chances are you'll find a new player eventually — just keep at it.



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