

Fleshing Out Your Nemesis

Bad guys for your Inquisitor games

By David Laithwaite

For me a credible villain is a large part of a successful campaign. A suitable force of evil to oppose your band of do-gooders adds greatly to the enjoyment of your roleplaying experience. Where would Luke Skywalker be without Darth Vader? Or Austin Powers without Dr. Evil? In this article I hope to give some ways of building from a simple initial idea into the representation of evil to your characters.

WHAT MAKES A NEMESIS?

Not all enemies that your players will face need necessarily be on a grand scale. Indeed constantly struggling against the machinations of supremely powerful beings is tiring in character and for you as a GM. However a good nemesis will ensure that your warbands return to foil their plans again and again. They provide a recurrent plot hook that will hopefully grow with your players own motivation and experiences, and allow for you to introduce those other devious plans you were keeping for a rainy day. To ensure that your bad guy is more than a simple obstacle in the way of your players, they need to possess certain qualities. They will have conflicting interests to your main characters, but also possess the power and resources to be able to be a threat to them. The concept of a "Boss monster" fits well with that of a villain, as they are powerful enough to be a memorable conquest (until they return again!). A nemesis should be despised by your players, and so should have no redeeming motivation or emotion. They are ruthless, unsympathetic and constantly working against everything that your players wish to achieve. Variations on this theme are explored below.

DEFINING YOUR NEMESIS.

With your initial idea about the basic concept of your nemesis in mind, you can then set about further detailing this until you have what you want. One way of going about this is to run through a set of questions, interviewing your character to get a better idea of their background and motivations. A clear picture of their motivation and objectives makes this much easier. Do they have something personal against your PC's? Or are they simply obstacles in the way of a greater plan that bears no relation to them directly? Their background should be sufficiently detailed to allow for an explanation of how they can account for the power that they wield. This is relatively straightforward in the case of a daemon or another inquisitor, but the cult leader will need some powerful contacts if he is going to be a memorable foe for your group. Once you have arrived at what you believe is enough definition for your nemesis, stop. Too much detail is as limiting as too little and it can lead to an inflexible character that cannot respond to unexpected changes in your storyline. Not every nemesis need necessarily be evil, there is certainly scope for a well intentioned NPC acting in these ways, for example the unwaveringly zealous puritan dooming the planet through his refusal to accept the aid of other less "faithful" imperial servants. However it can be difficult to provide this sort of nemesis with a continuing motivation for acting against the players. Here is where your gamesmaster talents can be exploited, or if lucky the players may take his actions personally and seek to oppose him for pride's sake.

Example: *Burke Mason had long been an administrator on the planet Lethys. His rise to power had been almost meteoric, and some had hinted at dark powers sponsoring his progress. But the governor trusted him, and their families were old friends. No-one dared act directly against him. His power and reach spread almost across the whole system as tales of foul ceremonies and sacrifice ran rife. The Inquisition was sent for when the governor and his family began hiding their features in public, and talk of mutation becoming commonplace.*



TAKING THINGS FURTHER

With your initial basics sorted, and your players starting to immerse themselves in combating the actions of your lead NPC you may wish to introduce some slightly different ideas. The first thing to think about is what might happen if your players finally defeat their nemesis. This is likely to be towards the end of a campaign where the various plot-lines have been resolved and all that is left is to ensure that they are brought to justice. If this is to be a contained, one-off series of games then this may be a suitable reward for the players and their characters. However, should you wish to keep all your hard work for use again another day, feel free to indulge your god-like powers to ensure their survival. A spectacular death, such as falling into a chasm or being buried under an avalanche of debris allows for the possibility of a return. After all if there is no body, who can say that their work is finished? With the return of a powerful nemesis, now full of revenge, it allows for the increase in ability that may now be required for them to remain a threat to your players. With increased power it may be prudent to introduce weaknesses to further define the character of your NPC. After all being forced into a chasm or under a mountain of debris is going to leave its mark on you! Allowing a nemesis to resurface can also allow you to introduce them in a different light. The puritan zealot from the previous example might have been honoured despite their actions, and now can act from a position of relative authority, continuing their misguided actions and agenda further. The players may now have to work with a NPC whose actions they regard to be in direct opposition to their own. Rival player's warbands may be instructed by the NPC to help or hinder other groups lending further depth to the campaign.

Example: Inquisitor Lyon had finally trapped Mason on the balcony of the governor's palace. The last dredges of the hideously transformed guards were being mopped up by the members of the platoon he had brought with him. He levelled his pistol at the heretics head. "Your master cannot help you now" said the Inquisitor, as he squeezed the trigger. The impact of the bullet forced Mason over the balcony, hundreds of feet into the forest below. A squad was dispatched to find his corpse, but nothing could be found amidst the heavy foliage. No man could have survived that fall, surely.

AND EVEN FURTHER...

Interesting conflict can be introduced by the actions of an unusual nemesis, as will be described below. Whilst this may be difficult to prolong throughout a campaign something a little different gives the opportunity to avoid stagnation and therefore

boredom for your players. A nemesis that the players warbands never meet (in part similar to Inquisitor Scarn of the Conspiracies supplements) acting namelessly to thwart them from the shadows introduces a method through which different flavour can be introduced. The final showdown and revealing of the central characters identity and plans gives drama and meaning to the actual final scenario. When they then escape from the brink of capture it will leave your players eager to return and thwart them again. Another option is to introduce the power of the mob as an enemy. The manifestation of psychic powers, or simply being from off-world might spark a reaction from the gathered civilians that acts against the plans of the player in question. Their characters might be betrayed during their attempt to sneak their way into the governor's palace by the one civilian they trusted to guide them in. Or lynched by loyal imperial citizens after witnessing the use of forbidden artefacts or powers during a struggle with another warband. The bureaucracy of the Adeptus Administratum allows for a nemesis to arise out of mediocrity as an investigator seeks out the proscribed method for investigation in the face of what may be "right". With the backing of a massive Imperial organisation behind them to support their behaviour, this neutrality can stand in the way of principled characters.

Example: Inquisitor Lyon had been stuck in the hive city for days, and all this time he knew that the coven were gaining power just outside the city limits. All his requests for aid had been rejected, and he was unable to carry his weapons without a permit even with the authority of his seal. The guards that followed him were ever present, meaning that any infiltration or information gathering was impossible. Whenever he asked about the authority behind these things he met with a single name, Solomon, the governor's aide. A data-file picture of the man revealed a shocking truth. He was Burke Mason. How his old foe had achieved another position of authority within the Administratum he would never know. But for now, his life was going to be difficult.

FINALLY

Hopefully the above will spark some interest in the further development of your own bad guys for inclusion in your Inquisitor campaigns. As much or as little can be done to flesh out the bare bones of an idea that you have been toying with, or provide a cunning twist to surprise your players. But as with everything else in Inquisitor, the way you run your games is entirely up to you. Have fun above all else.