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Evil Overlords: Faction Players in Your Game

Welcome to **Evil Overlords: Faction Players in Your Game**, the sixth free PDF from Treasure Tables! Everything you need to give the evil overlord concept a try in your own campaign is right here.

This PDF collects two TT posts, Martin Ralya's *World Powers and Big-Picture Plotlines* and Tom Bisbee's *The Care and Feeding of Evil Overlords*, and provides a complete overview of a new way to handle the power groups, secret societies and other behind-the-scenes forces in your campaign (including a form for faction turns).

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WORLD POWERS AND BIG-PICTURE PLOTLINES

I haven't thought about this idea in years, but it popped into my head a little while ago and demanded to be written down. I've never tried it, and it's a bit rough around the edges, but I think it has merit.

If your campaign features power groups and events in the background, and those elements have an impact on the PCs (the foreground), why not recruit a few gamers to play the various factions and world powers via email?

This will make the most sense with an example. Say you're running a fantasy RPG, and your campaign setting features five major power groups: an evil secret society, a power-hungry nation, a dominant country, a rebel group within the dominant country and a mysterious threat from another dimension.

For the purposes of our example, the PCs aren't major players in any of those groups (though they might be, later on in the game). The power plays, backstabbing, double-dealing, skirmishes and open warfare between the different groups have a definite effect on the game, though — and that's where your friends come in.

To run this campaign, you'd choose five friends and invite them to each run one power group. They'd have some background on the group's goals and major personalities, and on the world in general. They wouldn't need to be gamers, although it would probably help. (And just to be clear, none of them could be players in this campaign.)

Every month or so, you'd ask these five friends what their power groups were up to. What did the secret society do about the mole that the PCs planted within their ranks? The power-hungry nation won a series of border skirmishes with their neighbor — did they move in to claim territory? The PCs found about the mysterious threat in the last adventure. Does that make them a target?

You'd then incorporate their answers into the campaign framework, which sounds like it would offer a major benefit: unpredictability. Even you, the GM, wouldn't know exactly what these big-picture players were planning to do next. (And you'd retain veto power, just in case it was too off-the-wall.)

The same would go for your players, who might be more likely to be surprised by what five different people decided to do than they would if you were making all the decisions.

And if one of the power groups moved into the spotlight, perhaps because the PCs became movers and shakers within that group, you could take over control of that group. The other four groups would continue to be run by different people.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF EVIL OVERLORDS

Like any right-minded person, I read Treasure Tables daily. So it was that about a month ago, I came upon Martin's post entitled World Powers and Big-Picture Plotlines.

This article really struck a chord with me. I have lived all over the US and met gamers from all over the world. I know a lot of really brilliant players and GMs who live too far away to make it to my house every other Friday night. But I'd love to collaborate with these guys. And so I began the recruitment process for my Evil Overlords.

My first recruit was Paul, a former player in my Steampunk game who unfortunately had to move back to England from the States. Paul was an excellent and entertaining player but I knew that he was also a talented GM in his own right. He signed on as the first faction to operate behind the scenes, the inscrutable and theoretically defunct Golem Empire.

Martin himself showed far too much curiosity in my progress and became my next victim. I know Martin from some emails and of course his work on TT and I am always impressed with his sharp RPG ideas. Why shouldn't those ideas be used for my benefit and that off my players? No reason we could think of, and Martin signed on as the Bakhiri, or Coal Goblins. The Coal Goblins are a serious political and economic power in my world (steam devices burn coal). This ought to be interesting.

My third candidate, Cardell, lives only two towns away but cannot play regularly due to his incredibly demanding work schedule. He signed on as the City Council (most of every game takes place in The City). He also helped me develop quite a bit of the campaign world years ago via IM conversations (when we should have been doing real work).

RULES FOR EVIL OVERLORDS

For about a week, I consulted with friends and weighed all my options for giving my Evil Overlords "turns" and "actions." One thing I was sure of was that if there were going to be rules, there weren't going to be many of them.

I am about as Rules Lite™ as you can get and still actually use dice. I wanted a system that was simple and elegant. I am already going to GM a live face-to-face group. Work needed to oversee and coordinate my Evil Overlords needed to be kept to a bare minimum.

Finally, I settled on the system you're about to see. Just below, I have reproduced the majority of an email I sent to my Evil Overlords. Parts that are personal or anecdotal (as well as some of the bad jokes) have been removed for ease of reading.

INTRODUCTION TO MY CAMPAIGN

Dear Evil Overlords,

A date has been set. My new Steampunk campaign, The Age of Reason, will kick off on December 8th. Here is the background blurb that the players got:

For ages untold, war has plagued mankind. War with goblins, war with the Golem, war with each other. This war threatened to plunge mankind into a Dark Age that he might never recover from.

Fortunately for residents of The City, the threat of war is a thing of the past. Relations with Ash City are better than ever. The Golem Empire has been crushed. COGs, Hybrids and even the lesser races have all integrated into a perfect society.

But a new era of prosperity can hide threats of a different kind. Armies that do not march across the plains now gather in secret. Governments grown bloated on the bloody spoils of war blacken with corruption. This is an age of oppression and civil bloodshed. This is an age of poison and plots. Strange truths move beneath the streets the City.

Welcome to the Age of Reason.

FACTION INFO

As a volunteer to control the faction of your choice, I am counting on you to be those secret threats, at least behind the scenes. I've committed to 15 bi-weekly games, which means that you will be able to "take a turn" about twice a month. How do you take a turn? I'll outline that below with the caveat that it may change at some point, if we devise a better way.

TAKING A TURN

Every two weeks, either just before or just after the game, I will prod you to fill out your Faction Form (below). Please humor me and fill out the whole form as I want to keep them as records. Thanks.

Here's the faction form — just cut and paste it into your document editor of choice, and you're all set.

FACTION FORM FOR EVIL OVERLORDS

1. Your Name:
2. Your Faction:
3. Faction Leader NPC (if any):
4. Today's Date (real world):
5. Below, rank the following activities for your faction from 0 to 3. An activity with 3 in it is very important to you this turn and will most likely make progress if not succeed. An activity ranked at 0 will be more or less ignored by your faction for this turn.

__ Recruitment
__ Propaganda
__ Financial/Political Maneuvers
__ Open aggression (raids, sabotage, etc...)
6. Notes. Please put any notes on your underhanded doings here. Requests, threats, etc. all go here.
7. NPC. Feel free to introduce an NPC important to your faction (note that he does not need to belong to your faction). I cannot guarantee that I will use him, at least not right away...but I will try. You can, of course, submit an NPC any time you feel like it, but I like to include these sorts of things on the form.

So, I think that's it. Or at least, all that I've been able to devise. I have a few logistics questions for you:

Q1. Do you three want to know who each other are? I think two of you have met in person.

Q2. Do you three want to see the results of each Faction Turn?

Q3. Do you three want feedback on how the actual games go?

Q4. Do you want me to have my Webmistress set up a special section of the the forums where only the four of us can go? You could all log in as your faction (or an appropriate NPC) and post there apart from your bi-weekly form. This sounds the most fun to me, but

to work, it would have to sound fun to you as well.

OK, the first face-to-face game is December 8th. Please submit your first Faction Form to me before then. And if you can answer my other questions, so much the better.

Thank you, my Evil Overlords. This world is slowly changing from Mine to Ours and that is awesome!

WELL, WHAT HAPPENED THEN?

Then...my Evil Overlords started responding! I got my first response within hours of posting. And an incredible thing happened. Someone else took this world that I'd created myself, for my own use, and introduced new ideas into it!

And not just new ideas, cool new ideas! This is stuff I never saw coming! This is the sort of thing that I'd love to see in a game, as a player or a GM...and I didn't have to develop it!

I get to spend all my time prepping for and running the face-to-face game and this campaign world is starting to run itself.

Within seconds of reading my first Evil Overlord submission, I was taking down notes for future plot threads. Even if no one else answered, this was going well.

TWO OUT OF THREE AIN'T BAD

Yesterday, I got my second of three Evil Overlord submissions for Turn 1. Wow! Just as good as the first one!

If you'd asked me, before seeing the submissions, what each faction would do, I would have been able to very easily describe just what each faction would do. I created the world, I created the factions, I had to know all about this, right?

Wrong. Dead wrong. Incredibly, wonderfully wrong! In the second submission, just as in the first, the faction did some things that I never saw coming. One idea submitted by the second Evil Overlord is so cool, it is going to form the basis for my Worldwide Adventure Writing Month submission (after I get permission from my friend, of course).

My third Evil Overlord has been completely unresponsive since the start of the project, but that's OK. Life happens. We have almost a week left and even without all three active factions weighing in, the world is taking on a life of its own.

I've begun to incorporate signs of what the factions are up to into the planned games. If my players ever take the game "off the tracks" and in an unexpected direction, I've got plots and subplots all over the place that they can blunder into. As long as my Evil Overlords keep sending in their turns twice a month, it will be impossible to "wing it" in this setting. There is just always something cool going on that they will run into.

THE VERDICT?

Obviously I'm going to have to withhold final judgment until I've actually run a few games! But so far, I have a bunch of cool plot ideas that I can easily plug into my game, a new NPC and best of all, totally re-charged enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm is contagious (that's why I GM standing up, usually). I plan on giving my players a terminal case of RPG-awesome-itis!

Thank you, Evil Overlords!

EVIL OVERLORD RECRUITMENT BUREAU

In addition to this PDF, Treasure Tables offers another resource to help you implement this concept in your own campaign: the [Evil Overlord Recruitment Bureau](#).

The EORB forum is the place to go if you're interested in giving this a shot yourself. You can recruit players, get feedback on your ideas and discuss the concept with fellow GMs.



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