

# How to generate ideas out of thin air

This is about opening your mind to the possibilities all around you. Ideas are generated by the oddest comments, the weirdest news, and the bizarre behavior of people in real life.

When stuck, work through these ideas:

**Story ideas:** This group of activities will train your muse to look for ideas in the ordinary.

- News Articles – even the hoaxes can generate ideas for stories.
  - Take an article out of today's headlines and list three possible outcomes that might happen
- Story lines of TV shows
  - Look at the situation on an episode of your favorite show and list 3 different choices the writers could have taken
- Observing action around you
  - In a coffee shop, look at the way people are interacting. Pick a group and write three points that might tell the story of how they arrived at this point in life, and three points about what is going to happen next
  - Watch an interaction and ask what will happen if one of those people is the villain

**Character ideas:** Often the story will arise from a great character. These activities will train your muse to build characters from everywhere.

- Online communities – the best place to find odd characters. The reality that people can be anonymous has made them become outrageous.
  - Look for the trolls. We don't feed them, but a great flame war can generate ideas for characters.
- Listen to people talk around you. Yes, it's not polite to eavesdrop, but you are a writer, it's all in the service of your art!
- Take two people you know really well and mix up their character attributes. Know someone who will always put other people first? Try adding a need for attention to that attribute (Hmmm interesting)
- Look inside you. Your character is as complex as any fictional one. Is there something you are ashamed of? Try putting that into the character profile of your next hero.

Everywhere! I know that's not helpful right now, but if you start looking for ideas, you'll be surprised at how many there are out there waiting for the right author to pick them up and run.



## Quiz to identify your style

Circle the answer that most reflects you.

1. I enjoy the journey and don't worry much about where I'm headed
  - a. This is me completely
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. Not me at all
2. I like to understand my next step in any process
  - a. Not me at all
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. This is me completely
3. When I am going in to an unfamiliar situation, I like to do some research up front.
  - a. Not me at all
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. This is me completely
4. I am a perfectionist. I like to know exactly what is going to happen every step of the way, so I can get it all right.
  - a. Not me at all
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. This is me completely
5. I'm happy when I stumble into exciting ideas
  - a. This is me completely
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. Not me at all
6. I get bored when I know what's coming next
  - a. This is me completely
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. Not me at all
7. I like to experience events
  - a. This is me completely
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. Not me at all
8. I like to manage events
  - a. Not me at all
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. This is me completely
9. I love surprises
  - a. This is me completely
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. Not me at all
10. I worry that things won't work out if I don't have a plan
  - a. Not me at all
  - b. This is a bit like me
  - c. This is me completely

## Scoring

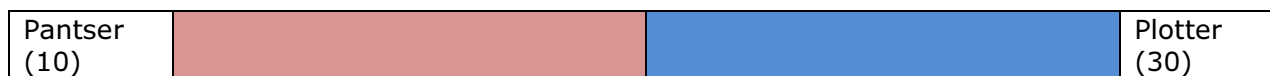
Take your answers and score them.

A = 1 point

B = 2 points

C = 3 points

Now take your total score and mark where you fall on the scale.



Few people will find themselves at the far end of the scale, either pure pantser or pure plotters. Where you placed yourself may change over time, but knowing your style will go a long way toward setting yourself up for success.

<b>Act 1</b>	<b>Act 2</b>	<b>Act 3</b>
<p>In this act, we establish action, characters, and the stakes.</p> <p>The hero decides to accept the challenge. We set up the story and establish the real world where our character exists. Here we see the external and internal conflicts.</p> <p>A mentor can catalyze the decision to engage.</p> <p>The act ends with the decision and possibly the first conflict.</p>	<p>In this act, the action heats up and there is a series of tests. Here we confirm allies and enemies. The hero learns rules of special world and the level of confusion for hero and reader increases.</p> <p>During the act, the hero gains treasure – possibly quite early. The hero learns something important about self or others. Before the act ends, subplots are either resolved or set up for a quick resolution.</p> <p>It ends with a false sense of resolution.</p>	<p>In this act, we start usually start with a chase and the action speeds up again. The road back to the real world contains more tests, challenges and an unexpected twist.</p> <p>We learn that the resolution in act 2 was false. We face the final threat where the hero reaps the benefit of what was learned in act 2 as the final threat is raised.</p> <p>To overcome the final threat the hero becomes more than expected. At the end, the hero must still have the treasure, but it is possible they no longer want it because the cost is too high.</p> <p>At this point, the hero is often reunited with a person, idea, or belief system from the beginning.</p>



## **Departure**

### **The Call to Adventure**

This is where your hero is faced with a threat to the status quo. The threat means they have to change, but it's not clear what to do. This can be a threat to their emotional or physical status quo.

### **Refusal of the Call**

The hero will not want to answer the call at first and this is where we find out what they fear.

### **Supernatural Aid**

This is also known as the mentor appearing. This mentor helps the hero to understand they can't avoid the call.

### **The Crossing of the First Threshold**

This is where your hero will agree to go on the journey of the story and they start acting on the threat.

### **The Belly of the Whale**

This is where your hero realizes they can't go back to what their life was. They are fully committed to the journey of the story.

## **Initiation**

### **The Road of Trials**

This is the part where the hero faces all kinds of challenges. They need to face that fear they expressed earlier and fail before they succeed. The challenges need to build on each other and each failure needs to teach the hero something about their real motives and drives.

### **The Meeting with the Goddess**

This is where your hero will find a new aspect to their being. This stage is often when the hero finds true love, but can also be where they find a higher purpose that helps them to finish the journey.

### **Woman as the Temptress**

This challenge is to the hero's commitment. They learn something about themselves that they don't like. They may feel shame or revulsion about a past event or a lie. This should tempt the hero away from the journey.

### **Atonement with the Father**

This is the turning point of the story. From here out, the hero is making progress toward the final goal. This is also the low point for the hero. The temptation away from their goal is still present and there needs to be 'death' to move away. This death can be spiritual, emotional, or physical. The idea is that your hero has hit bottom and now will start to rise.

### **Apotheosis**

This is the rest before the hero can reach the goal and end the story. They are recovering from the 'death' and building resources for the final push.

### **The Ultimate Boon**

This is the goal of the story. Often called the treasure, it's what we've been hoping the hero will achieve through all the trials to this point.

## **Return**

### **Refusal of the Return**

When the hero has the treasure, it's time to go back to the real world. The threat to the status quo is gone, but there still may be changes they don't want to face. The hero may want to stay in this imaginary world of the story and avoid going home to the mundane.

### **The Magic Flight**

If the hero needs to return with the treasure, they may have challenges and adventures as they return.

### **Rescue from Without**

This may be where the mentor returns to lead the hero back to their real life.

### **The Crossing of the Return Threshold**

The hero comes back to the real world with the treasure and has to find a way to integrate the treasure to the mundane.

### **Master of the Two Worlds**

This is where the hero is successful in integrating the treasure into the mundane world.

### **Freedom to Live**

The final end of the story where we see the hero living a new life that is somehow different because of the journey taken.



<b>External conflict:</b> Propels the plot - this is the story		
	<b>Protagonist</b>	<b>Antagonist</b>
<b>Goal:</b> What does your character need – what is the ‘treasure’? Remember, your hero and your villain must want the same thing to propel the plot.		
<b>Motivation:</b> Why is the character doing this? If your villain and your hero have the same goal, they probably have different motivations.		
<b>Conflict:</b> what gets in your protagonist’s way? The antagonist’s job is to get in the way of the protagonist.		

<b>Internal conflict:</b> this drives to the core of the characters		
	<b>Protagonist</b>	<b>Antagonist</b>
What is the character’s basic value that is being threatened?		
What caused the character to feel this way – something in the past		
Why is the character blocked from getting what they want?		
How is the character trying to get the need met?		
Why isn’t this working?		



Profile for your protagonist/hero

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Gender/Species</b>	
What they look like?	
How do they speak?	
What sets them apart?	
What is their talent?	
What is their weakness/flaw?	
What do they like to do?	
What do they do for a living?	
What is their temperament?	
How do they dress at work and at play?	
How do they play?	
What do they hate to do?	



Profile for your antagonist/villain

**Name**

**Gender/Species**

What they look like?

How do they speak?

What sets them apart?

What is their talent?

What is their weakness?

What do they like to do?

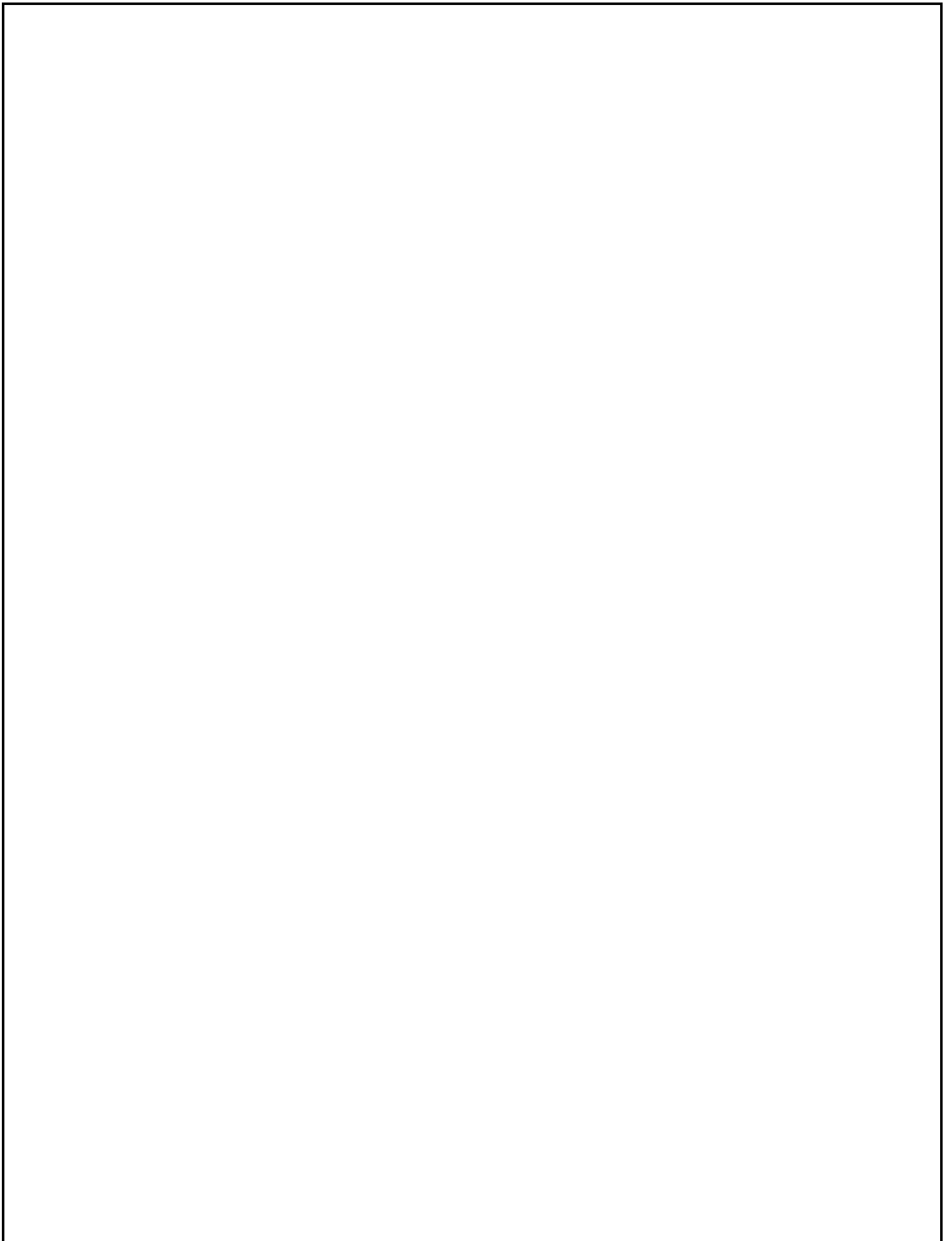
What do they do for a living?

How do they dress at work and at play?

How do they play?

What do they hate to do?

Why are they the best one to challenge your hero?



Profile for hero helper

**Name**

**Gender/Species**

Special skills/knowledge & how they acquired them

How they can best help the Hero resolve their problem?

Annoying habits

How they became friends with the Hero

Their favorite things

What things they like to do most

The things they dislike the most

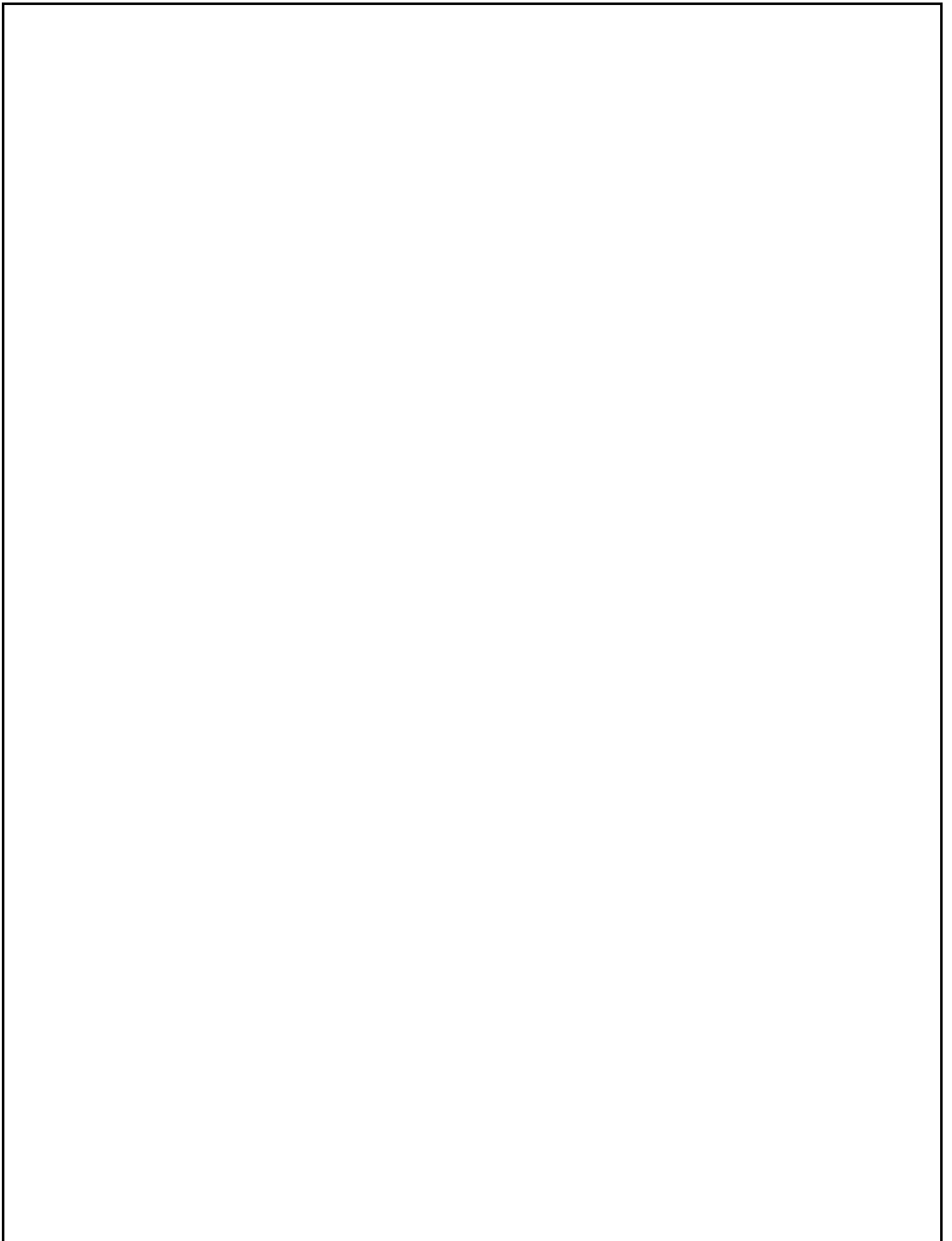
What do they look like?

Unusual mannerisms

How do they speak?

Mode of dress

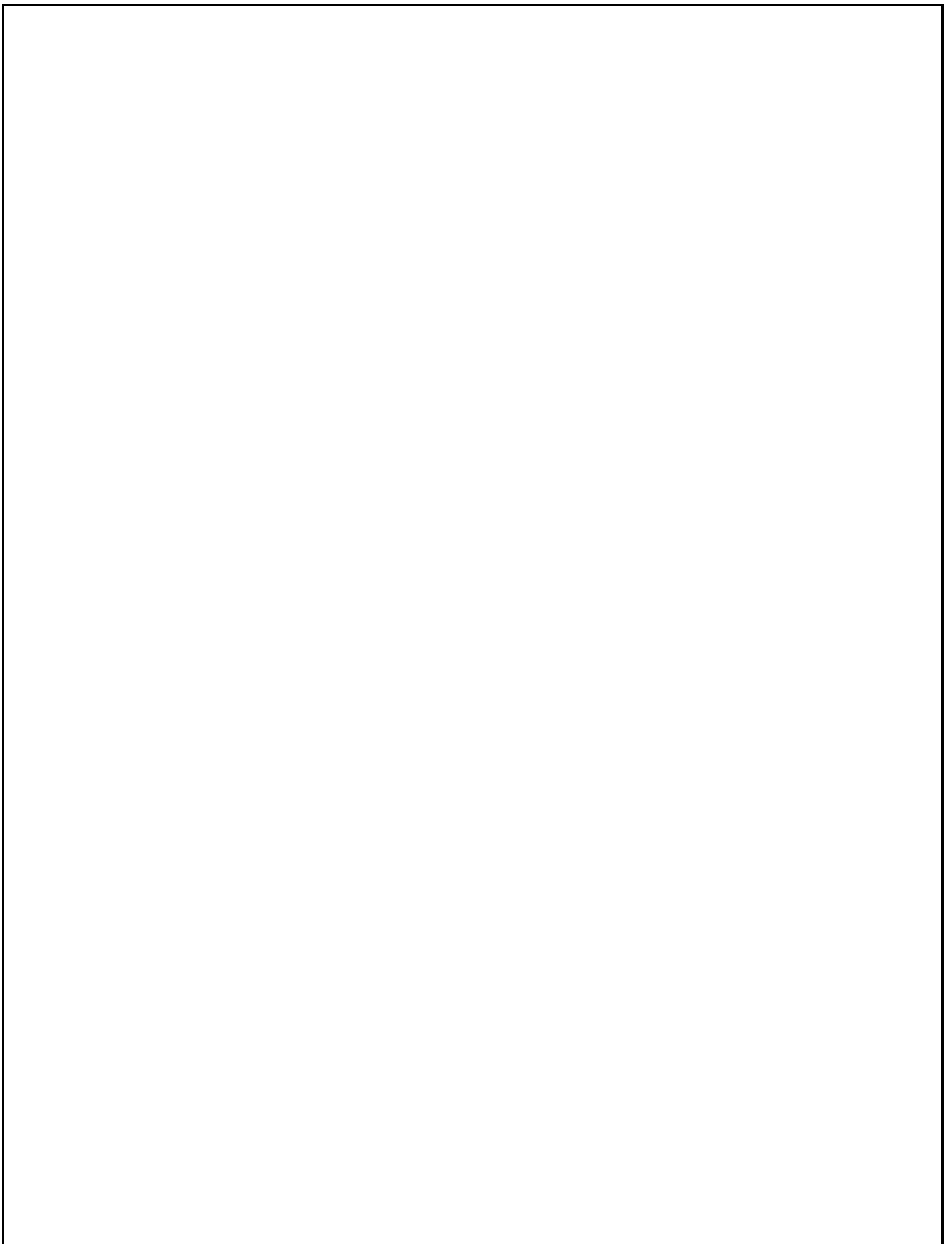
Their work





Profile for your villain helper

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Gender/Species</b>	
Special skills/knowledge & how they acquired them	
How they can best help the villain block the hero	
Annoying habits	
How they became friends with the villain	
Their favorite things	
What things they like to do most	
The things they dislike the most	
What they look like	
Unusual mannerisms	
How do they speak?	
Mode of dress	
Their work	



World Building

Physical – is this a real place? Is it like a real place? What is the geography? Climate?	
Political – how is the economy managed, who polices the world?	
Religious – is there a strong influential religion?	
Social – how do people generally socialize?	
Other systems – if there is magic, what are the rules? Does science work the same as we understand it?	